SOCIAL EQUITY DECISION MAKING:

NARRATIVE EXPLORATIONS WITH

ELEMENTARY TEACHERS

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I have my students only when they are young, for a year or two at most. I believe in starting
where you are. -Cowhey, 2006, p. 157

Mary Cowhey's (2006) description of her work with students doing social justice work,

influenced by Freire's (1970/2000) notion of critical pedagogy, includes voting drives, letters

advocating for inclusive language regarding sexual identity and family structures, activism to

support homeless members of the community and to avoid an oversimplification/essentialization

of what it means to live with poverty. She and her students explore morality through various

religious and philosophical lenses and take a complex look at the history of colonialism and its

legacies of slavery and oppression. Take a moment, if you are unfamiliar with Cowhey's work,

to guess the age of her students. Now reread the above list after I have told you that she works

with first and second grade children in a public school setting. Certainly she conducts her work

in an age-appropriate manner; in fact, in reading her work I was struck by just how many of the

topics she addresses emerged from her students' needs, wants, concerns, and wounds. It is clear

in reading her work that Cowhey does certainly encourage her students to *explore* social issues,

but she does not impose her conclusions; rather, she invites her students to explore and inquire

with her. I wish to explore the decisions that teachers make around this idea of looking at social

equity issues together…this starting where we are…to explore multiple perspectives together. I

do not believe it is ever too early or too late to begin where you are. There is limited time,

however, so how do we as teachers decide what social equity issues we will explore and in what

way/s? This decision making will be the subject of my work.

Before proceeding, however, I must define social equity. For the purpose of this study, social equity will be defined as a state of being, not in which everyone is treated "equally," but in which privilege is actively interrupted in order to lessen oppression. Social equity education, then, must seek to bring into focus issues of power and privilege so that students and teachers can work together to interrupt the inequitable status quo. Social equity education, then, will not claim neutrality. As Leland and Harste (2000) note, from a Freirian standpoint, "When teachers argue that they are 'neutral' and don't want to bring up any ethical or moral issues in their classrooms, what they're really doing is *supporting* the status quo" (p. 5, emphasis added). We as teachers are always making a choice as to whether to interrupt or support the status quo; middle ground in this scenario is a comfortable fiction that must be actively deconstructed. In taking up social equity education, then, a teacher makes a commitment to work alongside his or her students to simultaneously seek growth in awareness of the phenomena of power and privilege--even and especially one's own--and actively work to interrupt oppressive power structures. Though this task will never be complete, we can and must work toward greater social equity.

Surfacing in a recent currere (Pinar, 1975) exercise, one of the most important moments for me as a young person was an otherwise ordinary day in eighth grade. My class had read the book *Sounder* (Armstrong, 1969), which I had enjoyed and felt I gained from on its own, but *then*, we discussed it. We didn't just talk about it though; we wrestled with it. We explored ideas of race and class as we discussed what it meant for a black sharecropper in extreme poverty to have potentially stolen a ham to feed has family, including one child with a life-threatening illness. I remember being fully involved in the discussion and at once thinking about the conversation in what Slattery (2006) might call a "proleptic experience" (p. 296), Huebner's (1967) "moment of vision" (p. 141)—I was in the moment, but I was also thinking of my previous naivety, and my future desire to teach. I was in dialogue not only with my teacher, my class, and the text, but also my past and my future selves.

Huebner (1963) states, "Both the speaker and the listener must be disposed to speak, to listen, and to accept the responsibility and opportunity for change" (p. 78). We must respond to the call of knowing that "the transcendent dwells in the human being" (Huebner, 1993, p. 404) to enter into what Freire (1970/2000) would call "the point of encounter" (p. 90) in dialogue. "Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people. The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 89). Through genuine dialogue, we can practice Tutu's (1999) notion of *ubuntu* to learn with one another that, "My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours" (p. 31).

 "*This* is what school is about," I thought. My classmates and I passionately argued about not only that particular potential dilemma, but, moreover, the contextual (or de-contextualized, depending on one's view) nature of morality. And in our own ways, we were each taking a look, a first close look for many of us, at issues of race and class within this story. We had looked at the family's status as sharecroppers, the legacy of Reconstruction's failure to provide genuine mobility for many African Americans in the U.S., the grocer's refusal of further credit for the family. This one dialogue, some twenty years ago, continues to influence not only my views on morality, race, and class, but also my pedagogical goals. My teacher presented us an opportunity to enter into a "third space" (Wang, 2004) together in order to explore within and beyond the text together. Wang (2004) describes this space as follows:

> A truly loving classroom is where "conflicts and anger, tears and pain, [and] unpredictable directions" (Kohli, 1991, p. 45) can be endured and shared, along with ideas. A third space must be beyond the middle in confronting suffering, in order to move on. (p. 161)

While I do not believe we can ever simply *create* such a space, it is only through genuine dialogue that we may reach an opportunity to deal with the site/s of transgression. Through such opportunities, we may enter a moment for healing; our collective work may allow for the

forgiveness of others and of the self. In describing *ubuntu*, Tutu (1999) also notes the vitality of

such healing:

> [T]he central concern is the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the
>
> restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and the
>
> perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community
>
> he has injured by his offense. (pp. 54-55)

 Huebner (1966) reminds us that it is the very possibility of forgiveness that brings the

trust and hope necessary for students to participate in such a dialogue. He states, "With the

possibility of forgiveness the student dares to express himself [sic], to leap into the unknown, and

to respond with the totality of his [sic] being" (p. 114). It is indeed a risk for all involved to enter

into dialogue, certainly teachers included. Yet many teachers decide to do so.

What I wish to examine, then, is the decision-making behind a curriculum for a teacher

who seeks to create such opportunities to examine and work toward social equity. S/he must

decide not only what to teach, where to foster such dialogue, but also what *not* to teach. Every

decision we make to include something is to the exclusion of something else. We have such

limited time with our students, and the way we spend that time is a multifaceted decision-making

process involved in what we plan, the intended curriculum; what actually occurs, the lived

curriculum (and how we respond therein); what we teach intentionally and unintentionally

without saying so, the hidden curriculum; and that which we omit, the null curriculum (Pinar,

Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2004).

We know that as teachers so much of our decision making is invisible to others or quite

possibly, at times, to the self. Still, Castle (2006) reminds us that, "Autonomous teachers know

why they do what they do and can communicate that understanding to others" (p. 1096). I will

explore with my participants, teachers who embrace autonomy (Brown, 1995; Kamii, 1991), the

ways in which these decisions are made--specifically around the teaching of social equity issues.

Why do we do what we do? Just as importantly, what issues do we see as important on which we remain silent?

<div align="center">Decisions</div>

> [I]n the context of systemic silencing, there is no vacuum. Instead, the persistent and uninterrupted echoes of damaging voices of privilege populate the halls and the classrooms. Silence is not simply the absence of exported marginalized voices; it is the simultaneous and parasitic invitation to voices that dominate and "other." -Fine & Weis, 2003, p. 7

> Many [teachers in the school site studied] would probably have not considered conversation about social class, gender, or race politics relevant to their courses or easily integrated into their curricula. Some would argue that inclusion of these topics would be 'political'—whereas exclusion was not. One could have assumed they benignly neglected these topics….But evidence of educators' *fear,* rather than *neglect*, grew apparent when students (activated by curiosity and rebellion) initiated conversations of critique which were rapidly dismissed. A systematic expulsion of dangerous topics permeated the classroom….Still other educators actively engaged their students in lively critical discourse about the complexities and inequities of prevailing economic and social relations…These offices and classrooms were permeated with the openness of naming, free of the musty tension that derives from conversations-not-had. -Fine, 2003, p. 21

Will our classrooms be places that silence, or places free of this "musty tension"? I believe that teachers' decisions are like a photographic negative. What we include is exposed, visible, but that which we do not select or we actively avoid remains in shadow. It is only I who knows what I think about including and do not; it is only I who knows why. I remember, for example, the way my index finger hesitated on the click of the mouse as I purchased a biography on Harvey Milk for the library media center. I remember the nagging feeling in the back of my mind that whispered that parents would have me at the school board meeting to defend my job when I began talking with my students in a rural school in a largely conservative rural community about sexual identity. I never had to carry out this imagined defense.

No one knows which ideas surface as important in our minds that we do *not* decide to teach. We are all making decisions, both ahead of time and in the moment, that may or may not reflect our values as educators. I should add that one of my own values is that I do not believe one should "pass on" his or her own values, but instead provide opportunities for dialogue in which students may thoughtfully re/shape their own values. These are the moments (or lack

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thereof) that I wish to explore related to social equity. What do teachers decide to do when faced with opportunities to include social equity education in the planned curriculum of a course? What do teachers decide to do when faced with opportunities to include social equity education in unexpected ways, in the *un*planned curriculum? How does each teacher decide upon those actions? Britton Gildersleeve, the director of the OSU Writing Project in which I am a Teacher Consultant, says that one's syllabus, or course plan, should be a reflection of one's values as an educator (personal communication, June 20, 2007). Ultimately, then, are we actively auditing our own curriculum decisions, and if so, how? I will ask my participants to discuss their decision making in order to learn more about these processes.

Certainly pressures on teachers have increased since No Child Left Behind and have certainly have not softened under the current administration, but autonomous teachers are still the parties responsible for their roles in the curriculum, both in its larger sense related to everything that student and teacher experience in a classroom (Pinar, 1975; Pinar & Grumet, 1976; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2004) and in the more narrow sense, that which is overtly taught. This study will deal with both of these as I ask my participants to examine the ways they decide whether to pursue a particular social equity issue or to avoid it. Indeed, we have limited time in our classrooms with students, so how do we decide what is of most importance. I have often heard teachers complain that, with it not being required, per se, they'd "love to" incorporate more social equity education, but they "just don't have time" after they teach all the required materials. Do we sometimes use time as an excuse to exclude that which we fear to teach? Do we fear student responses? Loss of control? Parent/community reaction? School administrations' reaction? The topic itself on a personal level, i.e., could our own unexamined ideas be the source of discomfort?

Some of these decisions would be made ahead of time. A few examples follow:

- A teacher must decide whether to include more "controversial" figures when teaching a Civil Rights unit, such as Malcolm X, feminists, or gay rights activists.

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- A teacher might plan to include various Native American perspectives or the writings of Bartolomé de Las Casas, a Spanish priest and one-time slave owner who became a passionate critic of the Spanish treatment of the Taíno people, to discuss in contrast to the European perspective that is traditionally taught.

- Another teacher might omit a unit on Islam when studying world religions, perhaps out of ignorance on the topic him/herself, or for fear of a negative community reaction.

- A ninth grade teacher would have to decide whether to include Cynthia Rylant's (1993) novelette *I Had Seen Castles*, which powerfully disrupts the narrative of the glories of war but, of course, contains some violence in doing so.

Other decisions would be made "in the moment" because of conversation threads that arise organically, within or outside class time. Here are some possible scenarios:

- A parent may complain that, by having students study the Tulsa Race Riot, the teacher is "just trying to stir up trouble"; does the teacher continue the unit?

- A teacher has two students begin to debate over whether the U.S. should have entered the Vietnam War; does she silence them, or discuss it in some way?

- When reading *Little Women* (Alcott, 2005), students begin to draw comparisons between the characters' lives and their own. A couple of students note, in so many words, the ways patriarchy affects people today. Does the teacher foster this dialogue?

- A fourth grade boy's mother is a lesbian, and he is being bullied outside the classroom by several of his classmates. Should the teacher address sexual identity with her students? If so, in what way?

With each of these possible scenarios, indeed with *every* possible scenario, a teacher's decision to include or exclude an issue teaches his/her students something. A teacher's response or nonresponse to the unplanned teaches his/her students something. Every action and inaction on the part of a teacher is part of the hidden curriculum (Brown, 2005; Giroux & Purpel, 1983; Horn,

2003; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 2004; Slattery, 2006; Sleeter, 2005). What, then, are we teaching our students?

<center>The Paradox of Pushing Boundaries Within the Solid Walls of Schools</center>

In her work on border-crossing, Jill Voorhies Martin (2010) states,

> I hope that the current and future teachers...realize that every battle does not have to be fought, that every border does not have to be crossed but—instead—that every day in the classroom presents an experiment, an opportunity, a possibility to do their important work within, between, and beyond the borders of their profession. (p. 246)

Further, she reminds us that, "Yes, we need teachers who are vocal resistors and obvious border crossers. But we also need teachers…who show up every day and quietly and creatively work within and beyond the constraints of their chosen profession" (p. 244). However, Lisa Cary (2006) pointedly notes that "we can do a better job of interrupting exclusionary practices" (p. 4). Might our traveling of "paths of least resistance" (Johnson, 2005, p. 32) be driven by fear rather than by the autonomy we claim? I know, in re-examining my own curriculum history in doing currere (Pinar, 1975), that this was the case for me in only very quietly gathering resources that addressed sexual identity for my students, at one point earlier in my career, rather than openly seeking to educate students about this issue. Decisions of whether or not to trouble the status quo of inequity often, I suspect, go unexamined. We must bring a greater level of consciousness to them. What (and whom) do we ignore in making our decisions, and what (and whom) do we choose to respond to at different moments and why? I am troubled by these seemingly paradoxical forces in the lives of autonomous teachers: the need to do more to open up spaces for new ways of being and the need, real or perceived, to remain within the boundaries at times. How do we decide? Do we remain in the boundaries too often? Are we hiding within the walls of the institutions we are complicit in building? Are we, individually and collectively, radical enough to make schools the more inclusive environment many of us claim we desire? In order to

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take a look at this, I will explore the process of decision making around social equity education with my participants.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this critical postmodern narrative study is to look more closely and intently at elementary teachers' decision making processes around social equity issues in their teaching. How do teachers decide what topics to include, exclude, or silence? Why is this inclusion, exclusion, or silencing so for each participant in his/her narratives of curriculum decision making?

Research Question

How do participants describe their decision making when faced with opportunities to foster, exclude, or silence social equity issues in their pedagogy, planned and unplanned?

Research Problem

It seems that which is most dangerous in any curriculum is the unexamined. We as teachers must be highly cognizant of our decision making processes in order to improve teaching and learning. Social equity education is easily pushed to the margins, as it is very seldom *required* of teachers overtly by state or national standards; it is even less often a measured/measurable outcome of our teaching and learning. That does not mean, however, that it should be lost; the immeasurable may be one of the most powerful sites of un/learning. When, then, do teachers choose to include it? When do they exclude it? Why? In this particular socio-political climate, it is essential that we who care about social equity education consider teachers' decision making around this issue and what is taught--through the overt, the hidden, and the null curricula (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2004).

Limitations and Significance

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) tell us that "people live stories, and in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones" (p. xxvi). It does not seek generalizability in a traditional sense, but instead seeks to find resonance, "verisimilitude"

(Connelly & Clandinin, 1991, p. 134; Kramp, 2004, p. 108). "Didion (1961) suggested that narrative fills the space between 'what happened' and 'what it means'" (Kramp, 2004, p. 107). While the filling of that space is essential, my study will have significant limitations as well, including the absence of generalizability in narrative research.

Another limitation of the study will be my small sample size. While the sample size will allow me to build with my participants an in-depth understanding of their curriculum decision making process around social equity issues in their teaching, it will limit the ability to draw any kind of broad or general conclusions from the study.

A further limitation stems from the potential for my own experiences and beliefs related to this topic to bias the way in which I carry out this work. It will be an ongoing challenge to remain cognizant of, and transparent with, the ways in which my own preexisting perceptions might affect the way I gather, interpret, and report my data.

I hope one significant aspect of the study will be that it may serve as one source of teachers' voices in an era when teachers' voices are seldom heard in the cacophony of commentaries on how to "fix" public schools. This study will more closely examine these decisions that, in my mind, are at the very heart of teaching and, problematically, are seldom examined. My hope is that the study will inspire its readers, as well as my participants and me, to more closely examine decisions to include or exclude dialogue on social equity. Perhaps those of us who undertake this inquiry together may, as a result of the study, work to more closely align our decisions with our values as teachers. Perhaps we can organize with colleagues to, collectively, commit to looking carefully at our decisions on the ways we work toward disrupting the status quo.

Postmodern Dilemma/s

Awareness of the complexity, contingency, and fragility of the practices we invent to discover the truth about ourselves can be paralyzing. Taking into account Martin Luther King's caution regarding paralysis of analysis, reflexively getting on with doing such work may be the most fruitful action we can take. -Patti Lather, 2004, p. 215

As I began this work, I found myself bogged down in postmodern quandaries. I couched practically every phrase with a note on the postmodern dilemma. This section, then, I will use to tease out those concerns from the rest of my writing as much as possible, so that I may get on with my work.

As with all intimate relationships there is the capacity for harm in the form of misrepresentation, misunderstanding, or outright distortion. While story can lift a fog on that which we have not seen, or not seen clearly, similarly, it can also obscure. Kramp (2004) reminds us, "Narrative privileges the storyteller" (p. 111). I as the researcher will have to resist what Cary (2006) calls the "victory narrative" (p. 27). I must acknowledge the crisis of representation (Cary, 2006; Ellsworth & Miller, 2005; Lather, 2004), and I must also avoid an over-emphasis of fixed boundaries or a dismissal of their reality in our lived experiences in my analysis (Ellsworth & Miller, 2005; Wang, 2004). Boundaries are very real and even important in identity construction; however, they need not be fixed, impenetrable barriers—they should be such that bonds can form across them.

I will attempt to answer Cary's (2006) call toward a postmodernism that lacks the nihilism of which it is often accused: "This is counter hegemonic work. However, this is not an attack on modernism. The 'post' here is more reminiscent of interruptions and revelations rather than oppositional or a call for new regimes of truth" (p. 6). Instead, my postmodern lens will seek to shed light on the difficulties, the contradictions, and the oversimplifications of my work. My postmodern lens will not, however, fail to see the realities of my participants' experiences in making decisions about multicultural education or the very real inequities (not likely the same ones for each of us) that each of us hopes to disrupt. With this view of postmodernism in mind, I can hold the critical theory (Freire, 1970/2000) view in focus.

Attempting "self-reflexivity and shifting [my] own paradigms would be the highest calling of telling the story of the 'Other'" (Johnson-Bailey, 2004, p. 137). We are all always telling the story of the other when we do narrative research. Johnson-Bailey's (2004) asks

researchers to problematize insider-outsider status categories for ourselves as researchers, and Cary (2006) adds that one must go beyond understanding such dichotomies. Few if any researchers are entirely insiders; few if any researchers are *entirely* outsiders. No researcher is an innocent or "objective" participant in the work. Like Woodbrooks (1991), using member checks "to purposefully locate herself in the contradictory borderland between feminist emancipatory and poststructural positions, [I've attempted] to interrupt [my] role as the Great Interpretor" (Lather, 2004, p. 211). I did not wish to essentia*lize*; however, I do believe that, while there is not a singular essence for any human being, I believe that there are multiple, meaningful truths for individuals, however dynamic and fluid they may be. I hope the reader joins me in seeking—and troubling—truths in this inquiry.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Any study of decision making necessarily includes a look at autonomy and the way in which one conceives of his or her power, or lack thereof, to make decisions about one's teaching. Autonomy is an oft demonized term in this era of attempts to tighten systems of control for teachers and children. Recently in a job interview a former student reported back that she was told that "she could take her shovel and get out of the sandbox" if she couldn't "play well with others" when she asked how the school site viewed autonomy. This principal went on to explain her perception of autonomy as a refusal to *cooperate*. While being an autonomous teacher does mean that one is unlikely to blindly *comply*, it is at best an illogical leap to believe an autonomous teacher unlikely to cooperate—and perhaps an attempt to demonize and discredit those who resist complete top down reform efforts (Noddings, 2007) of schools. In Kamii's (1991) framing, autonomy is doing what is necessary on behalf of children, regardless of external forces that claim to "allow" or "disallow" this action. Autonomy, then, is not something that can be *granted*. Rather, it is something that must be claimed of one's own accord. But autonomous teachers do carry out the actions that are needed for students, even if it means making waves, and they "are able to articulate their rationales" (Castle, 2006, p. 1102). Likewise, Brown (1995) found that her participants felt so strongly compelled to act upon their knowledge and morality as teachers that they had left employment positions when they felt at an impasse between employer demands and

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student needs. As in Eisner's (1975) "connoisseurship," (p. 6), autonomy certainly is rooted in knowledge, but there is an important aesthetic element as well; autonomous teachers are in tune with and listen to their inner voices and the voices of students. While attempts at what Hargreaves' (1992) calls intensification certainly take place, it is, in my view, doubtful that an autonomous teacher would continue to attempt to carry out work that became evident as minutia designed to control and preoccupy—at least for long. What is clear is that, given the extremely standardized (Sleeter, 2006) way-of-being expected of many teachers today, s/he would get little done toward social equity were s/he not autonomous. While many administrators still give lip service to autonomy, there are those whose actions indicate a desire for consistency and the appearance of control rather than "response-ability" (Ellsworth & Miller, 2005, p. 183) toward one's students.

The external pressures under which a teacher must embrace autonomy are all too intimidating when listed together; however, many teachers, new and more experienced, continue to resist control. The testing/standards movement is a means of inauthentically labeling and sorting children, often along lines of race, social class, gender, and primary language (Sleeter, 2005). Noddings (2007) critiques, among other things, the top down approach to "reform" that excludes teachers and students from conversations about what they need. Ellsworth and Miller (2005) note the decreasing focus on response-ability (p. 183) in favor of a "logic of modernism" (Fleener, 2002, p. 37), a move toward decreased humanism for the sake of efficiency.

Recent Oklahoma Politics: A Snapshot

The politics of present day Oklahoma, often simply referred to as a "red state," where my study takes place deserves a "thick description," (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 125). While the only state in the nation, aside from Alaska where there is no smaller voting district than the state, in which every county, all seventy-seven, voted Republican in the 2008 election (2008 Election Coverage, 2008). Bill Bishop (2008), author of *The Big Sort*, is quick to add that like most regions of the country, Oklahoma's cities are growing increasingly homogenous instead of more

diverse. As certain areas—and even neighborhoods—draw certain kinds of employment and/or

certain political views--though Bishop complicates this noting these are certainly not

synonymous--the typical U.S. citizen is increasingly isolated geographically from those with

views that vary from his/her own.   And unfortunately, "bird of a feather" have tended to seek one

another's company in media spaces as well (Manjoo, 2008). There is a need to complicate this

too, however; Oklahoma is not homogenous by any means: religion, race, class, gender, sexual

identity, nationality, and even political affiliation…where first no diversity appears to exist, when

one looks more closely (Fleener, 2002), a more dynamic state of being is always re/creating.

Indeed, though all counties voted Republican, about one in three voters, on average, voted

Democrat (2008 Election Coverage, 2008). I do not seek to support any party herein, this simply

illustrates the ways in which a larger system can seem incredibly homogenous from a given

perspective (all seventy-seven counties for McCain), though it is not (thirty-four percent of voters

voting for Obama).

<div align="center">Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy</div>

In my study, I will consider the oppressor/oppressed relationship (Freire, 1970/2000;

Ladson-Billings, 2005; McLaren, 1989), though, being a post-modern study as well, I will keep in

mind that this dichotomy is never a whole truth. I will remember McLaren's vision of critical

pedagogy as not simply a critique of power structures but as "a cultural terrain that promotes

student empowerment" (Slattery, 2006, p. 234). And as in Freire's (1998) "pedagogy of

freedom," I will look at the ways that critical pedagogy is utilized to work with students toward

more equitable power structures. hooks (1994) notion of "teaching to transgress" serves as a

powerful contrast against the stark descriptions with which Kozol (2005) hits his reader, making

one smell the moldy corridors that reek of years of disservice to schools filled primarily with

children of color. The construction to which Bowles' & Gintis' (1976) refer as the "myth of

meritocracy" (p. 9)—that anyone who works hard in the U.S. can be successful--has an ugly

underbelly: the implication that if one is *not* middle or upper class, s/he must be lazy, or worse.

Certainly it is sometimes *possible* that one can "make it" with hard work, but it is often *despite* the structures of American schooling and society rather than *because* of them in spaces such as those Kozol describes. In reading Leland & Harste (2000), and their insistence on "enlarging the space of the possible" through critical literacy, one can again feel hopeful, however.

<div align="center">Multicultural Education and Social Justice</div>

Multicultural education is not something for others. Instead, Banks (2008) points out that multicultural education enriches the lives of all students, allowing students the benefit of a fuller range of human perspectives. He adds that, despite efforts to frame it as divisive, multicultural education seeks to bring together a nation already balkanized. Howard (2006) specifically addresses the role of white educators' responsibility to become informed and to work to form a positive white identity that can allow us to ally with those who are othered in the struggle for equity. Wang's (2004) "third space" can allow us to come together across difference. And finally Todd's (2005) notion of "learning from the other" can play out in classrooms across the nation, in age appropriate ways, if we create for ourselves and our students the opportunity. Within these structures, to come together, however, Huebner (1963) reminds us that a willingness to change is necessary. This is echoed in Freire's dialogue, which he posits requires love of the other, a relational approach (1970/2000). Opportunities to "unlearn and learn," (Wang & Olson, 2009) are needed in such a space.   As Wang (2009) retells the story of the student with the cup that is too full, we too can be too full of certainty to risk change. Souto-Manning (2009) has practiced a Freirian pedagogy in using his culture circles that fosters a breaking down of oppressor/oppressed boundaries, so that "we" can work together to take steps together into a more equitable future. Social equity work will surely require no less.

Social justice, while its numerable and varied definitions (Ayers, 1998; Malarkey, 2006; NCTE, 2011), is certainly not intended to be demonized here through my avoidance of the term. On the contrary, I honor the world of the many scholars who have sought to work for social justice, and indeed I do as well. My only objection to the term itself, is that "justice" has been

used to imply something that must be won, whereas "equity" for me suggests an actively

nonviolent (Nagler, 2004) approach. While I seek to honor the work of social justice scholars,

however, there are certainly those who have sought to demonize it. Applebaum (2009) highlights

the ways in which social justice has been accused of having a "liberal bias" rather than seeking to

critique a systemic bias. In conservative political rhetoric Apple (2009) reminds us of the ways

social justice is used by the far right to attempt to discredit any effort that might threaten existing

power structures. Perhaps most visibly in 2010 Glenn Beck used his blackboard and pointer to

toil away at making the case that social justice is actually "code" for a covert Marxist agenda in

the United States (Media Matters Minute with Ben Fishel, 2010).

Postmodern Troublings

In my work I will attempt to avoid what Cary (2006) calls the "victory narrative" (p. 27)

and carefully examine my positionality. Johnson Bailey (2004) points out that insider/outsider

labels must be considered but are also too neatly drawn. She explains that even those who appear

in every way identical will have differences, ways in which their identities diverge. Foucault

(1969/1982) notes that there is an ongoing circulation of power. There is never total control of

another, however. Eppert (2008) highlights the ways in which "us" and "other" identity

constructions, though a long-standing historic piece of the U.S. narrative, must be set aside if we

are to achieve a less fearful, more peaceful way of being in the world together. O'Reilley (1993)

writes that one of the worst things a teacher can do is not acknowledge that s/he has power;

however, power's existence isn't something that must be hidden, nor is it necessarily always

damaging (Huebner, 1964). The dangers of power stem from its denial and/or its use to oppress.

But, returning to McLaren, teachers can work with students to create more equitable space. Of

course, we cannot simply "do" social equity work. Instead there is a complex, nonlinear process

to "unlearn and learn" (Wang & Olson, 2009) in a "third space" (Wang, 2004).

"Complicated Conversations"

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While in my research interviews, I refer to these phenomena as dialogue on social equity issues, it is the complicated conversation (Pinar, 2004) to which I am referring. It is only in the interruptions, (Cary, 2006) these complications, during which we are able to see glimpses of other possible ways of being…it is in these spaces where we have the chance to imagine a world different from our own…in which we might enter into Slattery's (2006) "proleptic experience" (p. 296). A fostering of Huebner's (1959) "capacity for wonder" can allow students opportunities to move toward such a moment. It is in those spaces where one is so mesmerized by the path s/he follows, so caught in the flow of one's inquiry, that we can suddenly find ourselves transformed. At such moments one would be in a state of what Greene calls (1977) "wide-awakeness," a keen alertness that embraces the essential nature of the aesthetic for the spirit of the learner, as Eisner (1975) calls forth the connoisseur—the artist who dwells within the scientist—both necessary for meaningful learning.

<div align="center">"Teacher as Healer"</div>

hooks, like Banks (2008) invoking the notion of bringing together a divided nation, talks of the "teacher as healer" (p. 14). I am reminded of Tutu's (1999) concern for "the healing of breaches" (p. 54). Or, as O'Reilley (1993) references Odysseus, such a classroom would be a space "where there are tears for things" (p. 84). Social equity education, in this view, can heal the self. We all carry the wounds of oppression, for in the concept of *ubuntu,* our humanities are "caught up" (p. 31) together, entangled like a grafted tree. In recognizing this, Wang (2004) points to a way that we might deal with the emotions, positive and negative, of our pain, without "getting stuck." Many teachers worry that emotions will surface in doing social equity work, but in this way of seeing, emotion is needed to bring the whole self into the experience. If emotions remain below the surface, they will fester like an old wound and continue to plague us. For real healing, we must help one another manage the possible pains of change and, thereby, by able to celebrate the joys of less restricted lives together with one another and less fractured selves. One

cannot be transformed solely on an intellectual level; such learning is shallow. We must allow change that can mingle in our spirits and in our bones.

Curriculum Present and Not Present

Curriculum as a "lived experience" (Van Manen, 1990; Pinar, 1975; hooks, 1994) is a far broader view of curriculum than the notion of curriculum that comes to mind for many—content areas such as reading and math, science and social studies, and perhaps even art and music. Curriculum in this sense is truly the full experience of being one who is part of a class's community, be s/he student or teacher. Certainly the hidden curriculum (Brown, 2005; Horn, 2003; Slattery, 2006; Sleeter, 2005), that which is taught without overtly being stated, is sufficiently powerful to significantly affect the experiences of students and teachers in schools. Giroux and Purpel (1983), Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman (2004), and Flinders, Noddings & Thornton (1986) all highlight the powerful messages sent in the null curriculum as well: that which teachers either choose not to prioritize over other matters--or actively seek to silence through omission. While in the hidden curriculum the underlying values often come through with the message itself, the null curriculum is even more mysterious, though no less important. No one, however, but the teacher him or herself knows why s/he did *not* include something, unless that party decides to share this information. This study will certainly seek to have participants explicate this invisible decision making process.

Eisner (2002), reminds us that curriculum requires not only our thoughtfulness, but also our imaginations. This brings me back to Greene's (1977) "wide-awakeness" and Huebner's (1959) "capacity to wonder." While these authors have highlighted so many critical aspects of this work, I seek to know how does my participants, each committed to multicultural education, whatever his/her vision for that, seek to create it? How does s/he decide when and how? What does a teacher potentially omit and why? Along with exploring the decisions teachers of what they will address, I will attempt to spelunk the empty spaces left by the by the "presence," of the

null curricula's absence, whether or not consciously felt. Dolls (2002) "ghosts in the curriculum" (p. 24) will be called forth in a séance of the curriculum that is not.

Following will be my methodology, where I detail how I explored with my participants this notion of curriculum decisions related to social equity dialogues with their students.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Why Narrative Research?

This place of nonacceptance for women's histories has a basis in the prejudice against the
ordinary ways in which diaries, journals, and letters tell the lives of women. This bias is
motivated by the importance that Western society places on definite scripts or truths, told
objectively and with distance, that do not vary from previous accounts. Therefore, any new
information, which is collected using a different lens and presented in a different voice claiming
multiple realities, is suspect. -Johnson-Bailey, 2004, p. 125

[V]erisimilitude – the appearance or likelihood that something is or could be true or real – is a
more appropriate criterion for narrative knowing than verification or proof of truth. What the
storyteller 'tells' is what is significant for the researcher, who desires to understand the meaning
of a particular phenomenon rather than to gather information about it. -Kramp, 2004, p. 108

In her discussion above of the acceptance of a variety of lenses, Johnson-Bailey is

discussing life history research, but the same most certainly applies to narrative research as well.

Kramp (2004) declares, "Essential to utilizing narrative inquiry as a method of research is the

understanding that narrative is a way of knowing" (p. 106). Like systems of schooling at the P-12

level, however, the research community can privilege certain ways of knowing, and, along with

that, certain ways of teaching and learning. I chose to do narrative research because of its

contextualized, collaborative nature (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In the current discourse

around school reform, teachers' voices are seldom honored. In doing this research, then, I hope

this will be one small space in which teachers' voices are heard.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) tell us that "Stories lived and told educate the self and

others" (p. xxvi). Story and the interpretation thereof is a powerful way of knowing. It does not

seek generalizability in a traditional sense, but instead seeks to find resonance, "verisimilitude" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991, p. 134; Kramp, 2004, p. 108). Perhaps most importantly, story has the power to help us see more clearly.

Research Question

My research question for this work was, "How do participants describe their decision making around social equity issues in their teaching, planned and unplanned?"

> As Deborah Britzman (1998) and Ayers (2001) point out in different ways, in presenting to our children a rosy picture of "everything is going to be all right," we miss the educative function of memory, its psychic richness and capacity for teaching, and we fail to respond to social injustice. (Wang, 2004, p. 169)

How then, do teachers decide how and when to create spaces to "unlearn and learn" (Wang & Olson, 2009) what is needed to think and act with "response-ability" (Ellsworth & Miller, 2005, p. 183) in the face of inequity? While I sought to discover the way each teacher makes his/her decisions on whether to foster dialogue around social equity matters, I avoided the term "social justice." I believe that "justice" can have a vengeful connotation in Western cultures that I wish to avoid. Further, regardless of how peaceful its iteration, "social justice" is quite demonized by pundits in the popular media, such as Glenn Beck (Media Matters Minute with Ben Fishel, 2010), as well as in the academy (Applebaum, 2009) and has come to be a very "loaded" term as a result.

At one point I had considered trying to eliminate "multicultural education" and "diversity" because of the difficulty of reaching a shared definition for these terms; however, I have come to see that these are such central concepts that, not only was it essential to include these terms, but it would also have been extremely difficult to purposively sample teachers who are committed to this work without using these terms.

Participant Selection

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An important premise of the study is that the teachers with whom I worked have a commitment to social equity education. With this in mind, I first defined multicultural education (Banks, 2008; Howard, 2006; Wang, 2004) and in terms of social equity as noted above. I asked who answered my call for participants complete a writing prompt in which they were asked to answer the following question: "What values inform your teaching?" I used this writing prompt to select teachers who indicated that they valued social equity education in some way. In order to identify teachers who embraced autonomy, I asked my potential participants to respond in to the following question: "How might you respond to a situation in which one of these values conflicted with a district or site policy? You may write in general terms or provide a specific example from your teaching experience." I was hesitant to use the term "autonomous" or "autonomy," as I did not believe that my view is the way most people understand this term. Further, few teachers would have been willing to respond in the negative if asked, "Are you autonomous?" With this more situational question, I hoped to gain greater insight than directly asking participants about autonomy.

These prompts were important in purposive sampling, as teachers who did not share the belief that social equity education is essential, or who did not view themselves as capable of doing this work, would not have been able to respond to the interview guide, as they would not likely have attempted social equity education in order to discuss the decision-making processes around it.

I sought to purposively sample four to eight in-service or recent (taught in an elementary setting within the last four years) elementary teachers who…

1. taught in Oklahoma
2. taught or lived within two hours of driving from the main campus of the university where the research is being conducted so that I can readily travel to my participants for interviews and member checks

3. valued social equity education (based on writing prompt response and expert referral, when applicable)

4. embraced autonomy, as it seemed essential, when discussing decision making, to speak with those who believe they can and should make decisions that align with their professional values, whether or not the conventions of the school community "allow" this (Brown, 1995)

5. believed they were able to commit the necessary time to participate in two face to face interviews of approximately one hour to ninety minutes each, as well as respond to member checks in writing (likely by email correspondence) over the course of five to eight months

6. if possible, were collectively representative of diverse race, gender, and social class identities

7. if possible, I sought at least one participant who taught in each classification of setting: rural, suburban, exurban, and urban

8. were willing to openly discuss teaching decisions related to the inclusion and exclusion of social equity issues in teaching and learning with me

9. were willing for me to visit, outside school day hours, and document my own description of their respective classrooms and schools

I made the observation of the classroom optional, and only one teacher allowed me to do this. With only one participant having done so, I chose not to include that in the data. I did not require a certain number of years experience, but only that the teacher was in-service in a full-time elementary teaching position in recent years. In my experiences working in and with schools both new and experienced teachers varied in their levels of autonomy and commitments to social equity education; I saw these two dispositions as much more significant to my sampling. I intended to work with elementary school teachers because I believed that elementary school teachers have seen much greater pressure to teach content prescribed outside the classroom, much

tighter "standardization" (Sleeter, 2005, p. 4), than have secondary teachers.   Such scripted, carefully and externally controlled, planned content seems to emerge from those who *seek* to leave less and less room for teacher decision-making (Hargreaves, 1992). This attempt to control may extend from outside the school or within and can extend to every aspect of the classroom from content to pacing. Indeed, I once heard a principal, immediately after she gave lip-service to autonomy, say that she, "wouldn't want anyone to get too far off schedule."

"Whose schedule?" I wondered, though not aloud. She went on to explain that a few years ago, teachers in her district had created a master plan for when each subject should be taught. Even teacher-created materials I was reminded, used oppressively, can serve as attempts to control.

Autonomous teachers, however, do as they believe they need to in order to teach effectively (Brown, 1995; Castle, 2006). This increased pressure and tightened control, sometimes referred to as "intensification" (Hargreaves, 1992, p. 87), leads to teachers who prefer to pursue other forms of pedagogy being faced with a critical decisions on whether to stick to the script or not. Perhaps, I wonder as I write this, beyond scripted teacher resource materials, if there is also an unwritten script about what teachers should and shouldn't discuss with children related to social equity. That said, I believe few teachers always either go with the flow or always swim against the tide; instead, I wonder if, as Martin (2010) found with her participants, teachers may act as "border-crossers" (p. 7) at some times and not at others. Put differently, might each of us sometimes follow the script and sometimes ad lib? I sought to find how teachers approach their decisions on whether and when to foster dialogues that disrupt the inequitable status quo— that interrupt the oppressive script of our lives in schools.

Purposive sampling does not call for large numbers in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Instead, I kept my numbers between four and eight, in order to be able to take an in-depth look at my research question with each participant and build the necessary trust to do so.

Data Collection: Interviews

My main source of data collection was two semi-structured interviews, which Wengraf (2001) warns are more difficult than a structured interview. I had to be ready to adjust and respond to my participants' stories. One way I compensated for this was to not only adjust the interview within the session, but also to tweak the second interview so that I could follow up on important themes that I may have missed in the first. I asked participants to describe relevant context for their decisions in my interviews as well, seeking a description of the school and school community, their class/es about/with whom the teaching decision was made, the time spent in the setting, and any additional information they felt was important about the setting. My focus remained on the decisions themselves, however.

The first interview began with a chance to look together at how the teacher views social equity education and which social equity issues s/he sees as important for his/her students, for him/herself. This revealed important data on what the participant sees as valuable as well as served as a starting point for the latter portion of this interview related to specifics around this notion of a dialogue related to social equity issues. The second interview dug deeply into experiences in participants' own educational backgrounds as students--or other prior experiences outside their teaching--related to social equity and social equity education. During this interview, each participant considered the ways in which his or her background might influence pedagogical decisions on social equity issues.

While I used a critical theory lens, troubled with postmodernism, I found that the description of a phenomenological interview by deMarrais (2004) generated the kinds of data I needed for my analysis. In each interview, for example, I asked my participants to "tell me about a time" (p. 58) when they made a decision related to including or excluding a social equity education topic—I asked about a time when they chose to encourage such a dialogue and a time when they did not, using a loose interview guide. I hoped this would provide the participant with the opportunity to begin exploring the decision in-depth. I saved the discussion of a time when they chose not to encourage dialogue for last, both because it is the most difficult topic and

because it required the most research-participant trust, which took time to build. Follow up questions throughout the interviews were used to encourage the participant to richly describe the situation, to provide "thick description" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in order to make visible potential transferability.   Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that an inquirer should, "provide sufficient information about the context in which an inquiry is carried out so that anyone else interested in transferability has a base of information" (p. 124) from which to determine the transferability of a given inquiry. Within narrative inquiry, I as the researcher, then, needed to encourage the participants of my study to provide such a rich description within each of their stories, so that both I and any future readers of my analysis of data can consider transferability for themselves.

<center>Data Collection: Classroom Visits and Related Artifacts</center>

In addition to the interviews, I hoped to observe each teacher's classroom outside of school hours. What I learned was that few teachers elected to meet at school. I wonder if, in part, people were uncomfortable talking about these issues in their own buildings. The only participant whose classroom I was able to observe was Keith, and as the reader will see, Keith's work has been highly visible to his administration and colleagues. I also have my participants' responses to the questionnaire about their values as educators used in sampling.

<center>Data Analysis</center>

As noted in Chapter One above, in this resistance of the "victory narrative" (Cary, 2006, p. 27) or "Hollywood plot" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991, p. 142) I used member checks (Lather, 2004) as well as commitment to an awareness of my positionality (Cary, 2006; Johnson-Bailey, 2004). I followed a modification of Woodbrooks' (1991) analysis method of telling a "realist tale" (p. 138), a "critical tale" (p. 139), and a complicating tale, though these last two needed to be written together, as they couldn't be teased out independent of one another—attempts at such rendered the data meaningless. I had initially planned to do an open coded theme analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) as I presented the realist tale, but I found as I began to put these pieces

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together that I needed a coherent (albeit complex and impossible to complete) narrative for each participant. Certainly the story-telling act was this first phase is a form of analysis—that which I included and how was certainly be a creative act on my part, though my efforts centered around providing as clear a view of each participant as possible, so that reader has a picture in mind, so to speak, as s/he proceeds alongside me to the other levels of analysis.

Following the realist tale, Chapter Four, I conducted a more typical open coded theme analysis to look first through a critical theory lens, then a postmodern lens in my critical and complicating tales respectively, though they are not written separately. I conducted the member check following the completion of all stages of analysis and verified or modified the data and its analysis as needed.

In my theme analysis at each stage, when possible, I will use the words of my participants to increase the transparency of my interpretations (Kramp, 2004). In the realist tale, I discussed each participants' data, his or her narrative in this case, as it appears on the surface. In the critical tale, I looked carefully at issues of power, privilege, and oppression. Finally, in the complicating tale, I worked to unravel the simplicities of the preceding two, looking at the ways in which power circulates (Foucault, 1969/1982) and identities are multiple and overlapping (Cary, 2006; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Wang, 2004). In the complicating tale, I carefully examined each aspect of the two earlier analyses to check my conclusions and complicate the neatness of my stories, to enter a playful, third space (Wang, 2004) of my own as I worked to see the data yet again.

Kramp (2004) notes the liberatory potential of narrative research; narrative research can help to address the power imbalance between researcher and researched by allowing the two parties to work together to assure that the story is told fully and fairly. While I do not hold to the clear delineation of the oppressor/oppressed dichotomy (Freire, 1970/2000), I do believe it is important to,

> foreground the tensions involved in speaking *with* rather than *to/for* marginalized
>
> groups… the goal is to proceed in a mutually educative way that works against the

central danger to praxis oriented empirical work: 'emancipating' people in a way that

imposes a researcher's agenda. (Lather, 2004, p. 209)

I return to Freire (1970/2000), who earlier posited the notion of working with rather than for. As revolutionaries, my participants and I will work together toward more potential ways of being in education, both in our inquiry together here and in our pedagogical work that extends beyond the scope of this project. All teaching, after all, is political work (Freire, 1970/2000; Huebner, 1964). While I was in the throes of this work, I viscerally felt the political nature of this work. My participants selected the meeting locations, and I was surprised to find that some selected rather public spaces. At the coffee shop, I myself felt slightly self-conscious of those nearby and wondered if they were listening. I tried to gauge the comfort level of my participants, and, in most cases, the participant didn't seemed to feel much worry. Once, however, my participant and I did relocate within the restaurant at my request because I noticed others actively listening (with no effort to conceal their doing so). In the same café the next week, the same participant suggested we relocate after walking in and finding it more crowded than the week before, and we immediately traveled to a more private space nearby. Another participant, either consciously or unconsciously, frequently lowered her voice to a near whisper when she spoke certain words in the café where we met. It was a striking reminder to me how very different it is to be in a university setting where academic freedom and social equity are openly valued and sought. I am, as Johnson-Bailey (2004) might note, in more ways than I had realized, an outsider in these terms, despite my seeming insider status as a white former elementary teacher.

Permissions

Before beginning my study, I first needed to obtain permission from my institutions Internal Review Board (IRB). My IRB approval appears in the Appendix. Of course, I gained informed consent from each of my participants, and I have taken the appropriate measures to maintain their confidentiality, including keeping the list of participants and their pseudonyms,

along with signed consent forms, in a separate locked file cabinet than the data and any

anlaysis/reporting thereof.

<center>Trustworthiness</center>

Lincoln and Guba (1985) detail the trustworthiness elements of "credibility,

transferability, dependability, and confirmability" (p. 300). In order to increase credibility in my

study, I used both "member checks" and "prolonged engagement" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.

301). In a member check, I shared the participant's realist tale in order to be sure I was

representing him/her in a way that was as accurate and fair as possible. All member checks came

back, and I was able to work with participants to be sure their representations were as accurate as

possible while protecting their confidentiality. Some minor and insignificant details were

changed in order to ensure confidentiality. And while the nature of this study did not allow for an

incredibly prolonged interaction with the participant, data collection, member checks included,

lasted over the course of five months. Because of this, the participants and I were both able to

return to the analysis with fresh eyes in order to be sure my framing of events as they told them

remained clear, accurate, and relevant. Because of my own extended experience as an

elementary teacher, I have had to be cautious of my own biases, however.

To show transferability, I have attempted to let the reader know a great deal about the

participant through the realist tale, as well as through the more participant oriented analysis in

theme five of chapter five. I have also provided some information on what Oklahoma's socio-

political landscape is like, so that participants can consider how places they know might compare,

so the reader can make "transferability judgments possible on the part of potential" (Lincoln &

Guba, 1985, p. 316) readers. To increase credibility and dependability, I laid out the steps of my

analysis and have a clear data trail threaded throughout the study, and transcripts, along with my

interview protocols, can be accessed in full if a an interested colleague were to seek them. Most

importantly, perhaps, for credibility, however, I have tried to remain reflexive in this process, and

I have provided examples of where my own thinking was revised in the course of the study on

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multiple occasions. I was also careful to immediately clarify with a participant when they used a term, rather than assuming I knew what they meant being a supposed "insider." Conversely, I attempted to make clear both for my participants and for the reader what I meant by terms often taken for granted, particularly among education professionals. Through these efforts, I hope a clearer picture emerges for us all.

CHAPTER IV

REALIST TALES

As Woodbrooks (1991) presents a "realist tale" (p. 138), I aim to present a snapshot of each of my participants herein. I will attempt to explicate a sense of who each participant is and the kind of curriculum s/he creates.

> Doll suggests a curriculum matrix, web-like and complex, to characterize and reflect the complexity of organization and emergence of pattern envisioned in a postmodern curriculum. A matrix, like a web, has no beginning or end, and while it is bounded and structured, these features of its organization emerge through construction and expand through use. (Fleener, 2002, p. 165)

The curriculum, then, is always in the making. I will seek to follow and illustrate some threads of the web, but were I to attempt to isolate or remove a single thread, I would become impossibly caught up in it. With this in mind, I will honor the wholeness of the curriculum and seek to provide an image that begins to show the reader the beauty, the ruptures, the strength in flexibility, the immense capacity for repair, and the many ways in which a classroom curriculum extends its threads fear beyond the reach of the given time and space in which it is constructed for each participant.

Lynn: Second Year Powerhouse

Just in her second year of teaching, Lynn is a white fifth grade teacher at a high SES

suburban school site, though a segment of her students have a more rural background. In her teaching, Lynn seeks open mindedness, cooperation, and what she calls "global thinking"— "you're not only a citizen of your school and your community and your state and your country, but of the world, and it ties in really well to all the stuff that we're teaching in science right now." Lynn is highly animated as she talks of her work, quickly laying out the ways in which she and her students are looking at the interconnectedness of resources, trade of goods and services, and the global economy. Lynn being a science/math teacher whose grade level partner teaches language arts/social studies, these teachers are *officially* responsible for only a couple of content areas. They are not a traditionally departmentalized team, however. Far from different content areas being separated, the teachers plan together to have more time to explore the possible resources and guiding questions for a given unit of study, though these are not used as a script to follow once created. Often students are charged with coming up with their own questions through reading source materials that Lynn and/or the students have created. Sticky notes are often used to lay out and organize clusters of idea, concerns, and/or wondering. These guiding questions are a way for the teachers to redirect students back toward the area of study if things go off course. But, Lynn is quick to add, students don't need reminding too often to stay the course, as there is room to wander and wonder (Huebner, 1959).   Actively fostering a sense of "wide-awakeness" (Greene, 1977) in her students, Lynn makes certain that her students are asking important questions of their own and taking steps to seek answers.   Many of the questions they explore do not have clear and definitive answers, and Lynn revels in this complexity, encouraging students to respectfully challenge one another's thinking. Lynn leans forward in her chair (a difficult task at several months pregnant) as she is telling me about what her students have been doing. She notes that she and her students did a *lot* of team building and work on the classroom community, devoting significant time to encourage strong relationships between students, encouraging and modeling ways to disagree respectfully. For Lynn, if her entire class views something in the same way, they have a topic that is too simple. She listens carefully to her

students as they work, and like a maestro making sure things go smoothly, she is focused on every piece, every instrument, as well as the music as a whole.

She describes a recent unit of study that she and her partner teacher call hunger and obesity. She and her students explore a number of source materials together, and they formed a question with which to begin: How can some parts of the world, or some parts of our own country, have nothing to eat while other regions have so much that they struggle with obesity? Rather than oversimplifying this seemingly simple question, however, they work to break down the stereotypes held about both hunger and obesity and their causes. Lynn rolls her eyes as she quotes a student saying, "Well, if people would just exercise…" Rather than allowing students to comfortably succumb to the temptation of believing that obesity is necessarily the result of excess, they return to the data. Examining health-related causes as well as financial and proximity/transportation issues for grocery store access in lower income areas, students deeply explore this matter that many of them believed very simple the preceding week. Both locally and globally, they also considered how resources, systems of government, institutions, and individuals can contribute to or detract from the problems of hunger and poverty. They did not seek to reach consensus, but they did have to carefully consider and be able to support their rationales with evidence from their inquiry. Making sure to not simply note problems elsewhere, students also explored how the United States with all its wealth has so much hunger. They contribute to food banks and touch on how assistance programs work and whom they help and how; opportunities for both unlearning and learning (Wang & Olson, 2009) abound.

In a demonstration of "response-ability" (Ellsworth & Miller, 2005, p. 183), when students reached a seeming impasse, rather than quickly moving away from the topic, Lynn made sure to "let the students have that moment" without getting bogged down there. When discussing famine abroad, students began to examine the ways that war can contribute to hunger. One student, feeling concern over war, said that all war is bad and anybody who fights in a war is horrible.

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Another student responded, "My uncle's in Afghanistan right now. Do you think he's horrible?"

"Well, no."

"But you just said that people who fight in wars were horrible, so why is my uncle different to you?"

"Whoa…Okay so wait maybe wars…I need to rethink…"

Rethinking doesn't mean that these students will necessarily change their minds about things, but seeing a new perspective cannot help but alter our perceptions in some fashion, particularly when one is actively listening to another with whom there is a positive relationship. In actively listening, students have an opportunity to hear one another's truths—they do not seek to erase difference, but in this third space (Wang, 2004), there is the potential for reconciliation (Tutu, 1999) across differences.

While the conversation moved on after a moment of letting the students grapple with what they really felt, what they wanted to say, it is likely that this moment will live on for the students well after school ended that day. We can't know how or if students will change, but we must present opportunities for students to "be disposed to speak, to listen, and to accept the responsibility and opportunity for change" (Huebner, 1963, p. 78). We must believe that positive change is possible and work to create such spaces. Lynn does just that in fostering opportunities to increase, "our capacity for human(e) witnessing" (Eppert, 2008, p. 60).

Lynn and her colleagues work to create a rich curriculum in order to help students "think beyond [themselves] and what [they] know in life." She helps to bring students to recognize that, "You grew up with these ideals partially because of where you live. How do you think someone in another place would view this?"

Often using news articles or trade books as a way to begin exploring issues, Lynn also relies on such resources for things that arise unexpectedly in the classroom—or as a preventative measure when she anticipates any kind of tension between students. Even bullying can become

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an area for inquiry, "And do you see yourself in this? How do you think the other person [in this story] felt?" Literature is a common site from which she builds connections, which she tries to help students learn to tease out of all they study. A creative thinker, or as she would put it, someone with an "overactive brain," Lynn hopes to foster the same zest for learning in her students. She feels if a student asks, "Why do we have to learn this?" she hasn't done her job in helping them find enough information for the connections to start to click for them. This year, for example, from studying food chemistry and environment studies, her class segued into colonization, the distribution of resources (food included), and industrialization's environmental impact. The students didn't notice that they'd begun what would have traditionally been "a new unit, because everything's related." Lynn actively avoids the falsehood of rigidly segmented content areas.

When asked to discuss what social equity education means in her teaching, Lynn takes a moment to frame her thoughts and begins, speaking very quickly and exuberantly, not caring that at times others in the coffee shop stop what they are doing now and then to look over to see what on earth we are talking about. "I think it's almost more social *in*equity, that we teach [laughs]. Um, why there are people who have different things than you do" and vice versa. Some of Lynn's students haven't yet considered that some are not born with the same resources as others, and others of her students are in that very position of having fewer resources. "They're very eager to point the finger. Or listen to their parents." Careful not to directly refute parents, Lynn challenges students' thinking, "Maybe your dad said that everybody that's on welfare is lazy and taking all of [his] tax money, but what about the people who *are* working those forty hour weeks and still cannot provide for their family?" Lynn would make sure they read an article preceding such a conversation that provides statistics on who benefits from various kinds of public assistance and how, as well as rates of fraud in such systems. She knows what is likely to come up in the conversation. Inevitably another student will return to the articles and the data presented, "Should we take the program away because of this [percentage of abuse in the system]

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then?" She actively seeks to move students beyond what some have been actively taught—that they are right, and "**everyone else is wrong** [she says in a booming voice, laughing]." She talks with students about their own rights and the rights of children globally. "It's one of those concepts we have to be veeeery *caaaareful* in how we phrase 'cause parents get very upset if their kid's taught something different, especially when it's almost an election year [chuckles]."

To navigate conversations around the varied beliefs that students bring to school, whether from parents or elsewhere, Lynn again often relies on literature. "And I feel like that's how I can get away with being impartial in my teaching." Lynn says she presents both sides, so "By not having it be, 'Well, I think this,' and by having it be, 'Here are articles with two [or more] different ideas.'" Careful not to pressure her students to conform to her own thinking, Lynn works not to reveal her own personal perspectives. She wants all of her students to feel comfortable in her classroom.

But there are other reasons Lynn mentions certain topics with which she is less comfortable. Very open in some way, Lynn's students know her family from their attending school functions and seeing them around the community, but there are other areas of her life about which she feels the need to be guarded. Lynn is a little self-conscious of her age, in part because she is the youngest of her team and doesn't wish to exacerbate that difference—perhaps she wouldn't be taken as seriously. Lynn is much more careful about her political views and her religion, both of which place her in a minority in Oklahoma, and the latter of which is particularly demonized and othered. Here Lynn expresses an intense awareness of this. "I am [pause] not an a…I'm a humanist. I don't prescribe to a particular religion or a belief in god, and I am pretty sure that if my students or families knew that, that would be a very big deal. So that's something that I have to be very *careful* with." Lynn is careful to not discredit students' points of view, but she is also careful to actively hide her own "because almost all [my students' beliefs] are *very* different from mine." She reiterates that she feels parents base a great deal of their trust in a teacher based on an assumed shared worldview—and particularly an assumed shared religion. "If

they have a feeling that you are not of the same belief as they are, that could be a **big issue;** even with my colleagues **it's a big deal** [talking really quickly with nervous energy, eyebrows raised]." So, very few of Lynn's colleagues are aware of her views because she feels that even their knowing would have a "big impact." If she had to teach about religion, Lynn adds,

> When pulling articles, I'd be I think I'd be very tempted to avoid anything that was my own view so that it wouldn't be as likely to come up. Most ancient cultures were polytheistic, so it would be easier to avoid things that were non-god theistic or unsure-theistic [laughs lightly at her labels]…If the state curriculum required it, I'd be like, "Okay, I'm gonna pull one article and make sure the information presented there is stuff I'm okay with students discussing."

And risky it certainly is in Oklahoma; however, carefully censoring the presence of her own point of view in discussions of religion would risk denying a culturally relevant curriculum (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2001) to any students who feel similarly silenced. Further, according to Banks (2008), "When individuals are able to participate in a variety of cultures, they are more able to benefit from the total human experience" (p. 1). Children of any religious faith or lack thereof could certainly benefit from knowing more about this perspective. Finally, Tutu (1999) powerfully details the ways in which participating in the oppression of others is not only dehumanizing to the oppressed, but in upholding and maintaining such a system, "inexorably the perpetrator was being dehumanized as well" (p. 103). Freeing powerful groups of their "unearned privilege" (McIntosh, 1986), then, can bring greater peace to all.

During this discussion about religion, Lynn chose her words carefully; she paused to think several times. Her tone in discussing the other major area she tries not to discuss, politics, was so much lighter. Her body language less tense, more often than not she just laughed at being in the minority politically in Oklahoma. But it seems being a humanist is a much more stressful piece of her identity as a teacher…a part of herself she feels she must silence fully or "risk exposing" herself.

By and large, however, what I recall most from my time with Lynn is her pattern of staccato speech and animated expression. When explaining her students' inquiry blogs, for example, Lynn couldn't get the words out quickly enough to tell me about a student, sometimes more withdrawn in class, who had become the star of the class for a few weeks when she researched and blogged about the strange parasites humans can contract when eating improperly cooked meats. "Everyone wanted to know what she would research next!"

Slightly self-effacing, Lynn downplays her unique teaching. "I'm brand new, so pretty much everything is new to me; I'm not having to change anything." But she has been a significant force for change in her school. Lynn was the first to volunteer to work with her principal to design lessons, demonstrate them for colleagues, and help develop a pool of research articles to share with parents to support this kind of teaching "just in case" concerns arise. But the feedback "so far" Lynn notes, has been nothing but positive for her. She says that either the kids are comfortable enough that they're not feeling compelled to tell their parents about it, or they're letting their parents know that "'I made someone think today'…And that's going to make a parent *proud* as opposed to anything negative. So no negativity yet." That sliver of worry lingers. "No negativity *yet* [emphasis added]." But she has her stack of article to support her work, "just in case."

Mark: Working Against Words as Weapons

Mark has been teaching for over fifteen years and is currently teaching second grade in an exurban community. A first generation college student, Mark always wanted to teach; he didn't know *what* he'd teach, but he always knew he would teach. "I'm big on treating each other fair." For Mark, that means treating each other with kindness and respect. "We spend a lot of time at the beginning of the year talking about what it feels like to be different, treating each other kindly." Part of the way Mark builds community is through laughter. "I value humor. The kids think I'm hilarious…they need to have fun, not dread coming to school every day." He goes on, "We do community building activities every day. They see each other more as the same and less

as different when we they get to know each other well." Quick to point out that his approach isn't as much about rules as it is growing a strong community, instead it's more "These are the things we need to work on, and if you've built that community the learning will come." His students play games, read books, and sing songs to spark thinking and conversation about respect and kindness.

> Social equity means to me that we're treating, no matter what color, race, economic background, um, gender identity--which I don't deal with as much--no matter what small differences we have, we're all treated the same. When we're treated the same, the kids are treated the same, they learn to respect each other. And the teachers, I think it goes to the teachers too…It includes everybody working to treat everybody the same.

While Mark often invokes the rhetoric of sameness, it later will become clear that by "treated the same" Mark means that everyone is respected for who they are. Mark recalls a time when some teachers didn't always do their part toward this end. Several years ago at his school, there was a girl who had an African American father and a white father. Mark overheard a teacher say, "Well, I don't know what to call them." He remembers other teachers laughing about her and expecting her to do poorly in school—and perhaps in life--because she had two dads, "like she's not from a normal life, normal family." In the five years since, Mark says that things have gotten much better for children in GLBT families. This child, however, had a difficult time making friends "because people didn't want [their kids] to go to her house or hang out with her." Similarly, in reference to a child whom Mark describes as "a more effeminate boy," he overheard a teacher say, "We need to fix him, save him so he doesn't turn gay." This comment or something very akin to it was made several times by a few different teachers during that year as well.

"That wasn't a time when I felt comfortable saying anything where I probably would now. Ten, eleven, years later, I'm more comfortable saying things than I would have been then…it's ignorance." I ask Mark why he doesn't deal with gender/sexual issues very often,

Mark explains that kids don't notice those things in second grade much. More often, he notes, he is dealing with things that parents and occasionally teachers say. Immediately, though, a memory comes to mind of a child whom the other kids were calling gay on the playground. Mark reported this to the principal and it was addressed, "So I say I don't deal with that stuff but I guess I do…I mean, kids are gonna say things. I mean, kids have called me things as well."

Mark does happen to be gay, and he recounted a story in which a colleague was really there for him after one such incident when a couple of students used an epithet toward him, most importantly by really listening, but also by providing him with a resource on bullying that he could use with students. Mark is careful in selecting a number of resources to generate dialogue on the need for respect with his students. "The kids really get this message that—I think social equity has to do with bullying—and this message that it takes one person to say, 'Don't do this.'….A lot of kids get it, but you're not gonna get every kid." Mark recognizes that not every student will have a transformative moment, as there are certainly influences outside the classroom, but he also knows what he does helps because he sees improvement in the ways his students treat one another.

That said, hard issues will certainly arise. During Red Ribbon Week, a little girl asked, "Mr. __, are you talking about beer?"

"No, the book is about doing drugs that are illegal."

"Oh, you mean the stuff that Mexicans sell."

In a bit of shock, Mark asked, "What did you say?"

"You know, Mexicans all sell drugs, and that's why it's not safe to go to Mexico because they all kill each other and sell drugs."

Unfortunately, now certain of what he's heard, Mark immediately refuted this, "That is not okay; where did you hear this?"

"My dad told me."

Unwilling to continue this in front of the class and realizing it would take much further dialogue, Mark asks her to stay after class, hoping to spare the Mexican American child behind her any more such blurting of stereotypes. "Did you notice Raul sitting behind you? Do you think he sells drugs?"

"No."

"Do you know how he feels?"

After slowly leading her down a path that could help her into her classmate's shoes, Mark hopes at least, she writes an apology note to her classmate. Mark adds,

You know how to deal with the day to day stuff, but when you have a kid say something so wildly inappropriate, you just don't know how to deal with it. It's shocking, so that was my hardest issue this year…I guess what comes to mind is trying to make sure they know what they've done. I think I want to, when something happens where it's treating someone inappropriately because of whatever they are, whatever distinguishing thing, I want them to understand that they're not different than you--and that's what I want to get across…You're always afraid you didn't do the right thing or you didn't do enough. I mean, I'm still struggling. My one little moment…The sad thing is that my one little time that we're with these kids is not enough to change what's engrained in them. Maybe I made a difference; maybe she realized it.

Certainly Mark sees the difficulty of dramatic change, particularly as a result of one conversation, but he does convey a sense of hope. I suspect his understandings of the limits of the power of one encounter are, in part, what brings him to be as proactive a teacher as he is around social equity.

As the researcher, I am wishing there were a way to ascertain how many potential incidences of bullying/bigotry Mark and my other participants have prevented from their work with students; alas, we haven't figured out how to do that study. Thus their work must remain, in part, an act of faith—in their students and in themselves.

Recognizing that diversity is needed, Mark bemoans,

We have something like twenty percent [of students eligible for] free/reduced lunch [at our school]; for the most part, we're all WASPs with stay at home moms. We're all the same almost, hardly any difference. We have teachers who say, "Please if we have someone who isn't white or blonde haired and blue eyed, please put them in my class."….I won't forget this, I did a "Namaste" [greeting one morning]; all my little Hindi kids were *so* excited, and I never thought of that.

Clearly proud to have made his students, so often excluded, feel included, Mark recognizes how seemingly small decisions to make his teaching more inclusive can have great significance for the children in our classrooms, perhaps even more so when there is little apparent diversity in a school. That said, little *apparent* diversity on the surface certainly does not mean that there is no diversity, nor does it mean that those who claim the same identity categories will share the same points of view. "*Identity is multiple, changing, overlapping, and contextual, rather than fixed and static"* (Banks, 2008, p. 27, emphasis original). Certainly a number of perspectives exist amongst white Protestants. And in this case, while some of the stay at home mothers were perhaps there out of worry, others may simply have wanted to be present for their children as a starting point for dialogue. Certainly there is likely a variety of family structures and religious backgrounds; often such differences are not brought to the fore. With these things in mind, the WASP/stay-at-home mother notion of families in the community may need further complication.

Mark attended a very small, rural school that he describes as quite homogenous in elementary school. He did attend church in a larger community, so he did get to know more diverse children as well, however. While he didn't really realize it as a little boy, Mark says, "I know everybody says we were so poor, but *we were poor*." He attended a private, parochial school with mostly boys in middle school. Then in eighth grade, he transferred to a much larger exurban public school.

Eighth grade was a rough year. "Those boys persecuted me *every-- frickin'--*day." A very sheltered child up to that point, Mark says, "I can remember people picking on me because I hadn't kissed a girl or I hadn't been, you know…It was eeeevery day in choir." The teacher said nothing—did nothing. Once the teacher did at least tell Mark he was proud of his work. "I remember that making a difference because it was such a hard, *hard* year."

When asked what the teacher might have done, Mark was quick to note that while the teacher said nothing to the other students, he took music lessons in his home and did feel like the teacher was an ally, though he was outwardly silent on the matter. Mark admits it's not an excuse, but tries to emphasize that at that time, bullying was not considered an issue for the most part.   A student might get in trouble for skipping a class physically assaulting another.

> You could say whatever you wanted—that whole thing you grow up with, that "sticks
> and stones will break your bones but words won't hurt you." Well, that's bullshit. Of
> course they will, but that's something that we were taught.

Recognizing the violence that words held for him at this time in his life, Mark actively seeks to prevent/disrupt patterns of violence in his own classroom.

At one point in college, Mark notes realizing that "There were all kinds of people, and it was okay." He notes the significance of a teacher being a lesbian and others perceiving it as a nonissue. "It was like a whole new world." The chance to be in a space where difference is not constructed as problematic was refreshing for Mark. He was also remembers a history teacher discussing history from a Native American perspective. The idea of history from someone else's perspective struck Mark. It was the first time he had considered that there were multiple histories. "I guess that was one of those times when someone was trying to get you to see that people are different [and that's okay]."

In graduate school, Mark "just gravitated toward [faculty] who opened [him] up to more of that viewpoint," taking classes and seeking to work with particular faculty who pushed his thinking. "I think the only way we can learn to get along is to understand our differences." He

goes on to point out that most of our wars/conflicts throughout history are "that we don't understand people's differences. We want everybody to be like us. And that's not possible." If we can educate children about difference then "maybe there's some hope or way of saying, of getting that change to happen…getting [students] to see."

Recognizing that teachers have an important role but that we are certainly not the only influence in a child's life, he hopes to help students accept difference and has seen improvement in children's viewpoints over the years, he believes in part because his school works very hard to foster respect of difference.

> If we can teach kids social skills and how to treat each other kindly and fairly and with compassion and understand that we're different, then everything else falls into place better. Kids knit pick because they're different; kids bully because they're different; kids fight because they're different. Some kids are so used to it, they have a chip on their shoulder because they know—because they're different, and then they do the fighting. [Shudders] It's my pet peeve. It's a good one to have."

Judy: Noticing the Tacit Bigotry of What's Left Unsaid

Judy is a fourth year, white Pre-Kindergarten teacher in an urban school. She grew up in a large, affluent Oklahoma suburb. Judy went to New York as an undergraduate and majored in theater. When a family emergency required her swift return to Oklahoma, she finished school as quickly as she could, and returned to Oklahoma where there were a bit fewer employment options for a recent graduate with a theater degree. A friend told Judy about an opening for a teacher's assistant, and Judy was hooked. She soon decided to alternatively certify to be a teacher herself; once in her own classroom, Judy quickly entered a master's program in education to further her learning. Her speech is deliberate and confident, despite the fact that she seemed slightly nervous upon arriving at the interview. I quickly learn that she wants to get her words just right because the subject of my work is so important to her. She confides that she is considering a doctoral program herself. Very passionate about her work and hungry to know more, I believe she will

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pursue another degree sooner than later. As she talks about her students Judy's eyes widen with excitement.

Judy cites mutual respect as a value that comes through in her teaching. When asked what that looks like, Judy said she tries to make sure to provide "logical consequences." If a child makes a mess, they have to clean it up. If they hurt someone's feelings, they try to make amends. "And when they see that I'm like that, they respect me in return." Careful to teach her students about avoiding violence, Judy discusses other ways to address problems besides yelling. And she models this in her own behavior and demands it of her colleagues as well when working with her students. "[My room is a] tranquil place where they feel safe to learn and have fun."

Virtually all of Judy's students are in poverty, but some even more so than others she notes. She wants all of her students to think about social equity. With an increasingly large English Language Learner (ELL) population and about the same amount of white and African American children, Judy's class is very racially diverse. In her family unit, Judy makes certain to address all kinds of families in terms of race, family structure, religion, dis/ability and more. She slightly lowers her voice as she says, "homosexual families, transgendered families…I use a high, high variety of literature that portrays all different types of people." Judy adds that even with her fairy tales she makes sure to disrupt stereotypes, making sure to include female dragon slayers and the like. "I try to keep everything as much as possible multicultural and diverse…I tell them, 'It would be boring if we were all like Ms. ___." Judy's students pay attention to difference, graphing eye and hair color. Perhaps the richest part of this unit is the unplanned. Judy makes certain to create the space for all children and all families to be included. One child with two mommies felt a strong desire to share about her family, and for Judy the family unit was the perfect opportunity to allow the child the chance to share about her moms. "Isn't that great? I'd love to have two mommies," Judy sets the celebratory tone around difference.

> Like I have one girl right now who's Egyptian and she loves to talk about it. She's
>
> Muslim, and she's Egyptian and she'll say, "We don't eat pork because I'm [Muslim]."

And so my kids are interested in that. And I encourage her family. I told her mom if you

ever want to bring anything or share something about that during our all about me week,

feel free.

While this child's mother wasn't comfortable speaking with the class, she didn't mind her

daughter sharing. As Judy notes, it's understandable that the mother is a little hesitant to share of

her faith in our post 9/11 climate, and she respected that. She was also pleased that the child was

eager to share, as her students learned a great deal, and the child felt more included as a result.

Judy works very hard to make sure her ELL students are included in everything she does

as well. Ignoring what she views as a deeply flawed district assessment she is required to conduct

each year that she feels grossly mislabels students, Judy instead assesses her children over the

first few weeks of school. Carefully documenting their needs and their abilities, she builds from

there. She begins the year by teaching a lot of songs in Spanish [as well as English]. "So not

only are they feeling more comfortable and linking the two [languages], but my non-Spanish

speaking students are learning a lot from it too."

In any such effort, Judy says, "I try to keep that innocence there as long as I can before

they start feeling negative thoughts about those things. Or I at least try to idealistically plant that

seed of tolerance in their brains…" She adds her hope that we go beyond tolerance for an

"accepting and love," genuinely respectful interaction.

While Judy feels most of her students don't come to her Pre-K class with any

preconceived notions about race or sexuality, she is quick to note that "One thing they do

understand is gender. Oh my gosh, it's amazing how fast that catches on. They come in, that's

not a boy color, that's not a girl color." The battles over the pink crayon or who can dress up in

"girl" clothes in the center area are so frequently arising, and some parents have such strong and

vocal opinions about it that Judy fears some children would be spanked for behaving in ways that

differed from parent expectations at home. Because of this, she has come to encourage students

to do as they please, but, she doesn't go any further than saying, "in my classroom, it's okay."

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She hopes these broken stereotypes stick with the children, but she also doesn't want to see one of her boys punished at home for wanting to put on a tiara.

Religion comes up often in Judy's teaching setting. "Meditation and stuff, I know it sounds crazy…" Earlier Judy had shared that sometimes even strangers get viscerally angry at her and her boyfriend about being vegan. "People at work call me crunchy. 'Cause they say I'm a granola head [pauses—it seems her voice is a little shaky here]. And um, it doesn't bother me." Immediately Judy adds that her colleagues recognize that she is a good teacher; in fact, Judy was awarded Teacher of the Year for her school site not long ago. She stammers a little still, though, "So if they want to call me granola or crunchy that's fine. It really--I know where I live." Judy refers to her own life as not really normal. "I've, it doesn't, it hurts my feels sometimes but I don't – I don't-- It doesn't, I don't hold a grudge, or, it doesn't bother me." It seems clear Judy does not hold a grudge, but it's less clear that she's not bothered. Normally very comfortable, she obviously struggled to speak of this and keep her emotions in check.

And Judy talked about this just after noting how difficult it was to be the only person in a graduate class who practiced nonviolence and who vocally supported gay rights. She seemed tired while speaking of this, but full of passion too. "I'm so adamant. It's one of the things I'm really adamant about. I have so many friends that are like family, and I can't *not* defend them."

Judy said her own upbringing as fairly typical. She did begin to feel difference in herself in high school, however. While Judy was raised Catholic, after her mother's religious beliefs, she didn't know it at that time, but her father was atheist. She describes her mom as a hippy. "She had the van and everything. Very liberal." As for Judy's religion as she got older, she says she got to choose her own religion. I learned to be open-minded."

Judy was raised Catholic, after her mother's religious beliefs; while she didn't know it at that time, but her father is atheist. She describes her mom as a hippy. "She had the van and everything. Very liberal." As for Judy's religion, as she got older, she says she got to choose her own religion--"I learned to be open-minded." Describing her childhood as rather typical, Judy

says she didn't really notice a lot of social equity issues until high school when she formed her own religious beliefs. Then, "YES, all the time." While she notes that school-endorsed religion wasn't technically allowed in school, there was See You at The Pole, and kids would actually yell at those around who didn't attend, herself included. "Come and pray with us; why aren't you praying with us?!" She shakes her head saying that was now how it was supposed to be, remembering signs some kids had made: "He who does not believe is going to hell."

"Mmmm. I don't think that's okay." she wryly smiles these years later. While Judy is all for an after school program, she has difficulty seeing the harassment of other children as ethical. She adds that when some students tried to set up a GLBTQ support group, it was "shot down; not allowed." The district said it was against the handbook, though Judy listed a number of other organizations that had formed clubs. "And so as a teenager I was like, this is a hard place to live."

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, Judy is very aware of boundaries around religion in school and the hidden curriculum (Giroux & Purpel, 1983). "I guess you could say I'm agnostic, probably a little more on the atheist side." She adds that she is very spiritual. "That's such a cliché thing to say, so many people say, 'I'm not religious but I'm spiritual [in a funny voice].'" She explains her yoga practice and her appreciation for, if not belief in, a number of Hindu principles. While vegan and against animal cruelty, she declares, "I would NEVER tell my kids 'You can't eat meat!'" She does practice yoga and meditation with her students, but she focuses on being calm and peaceful, rather than bringing in any overtly spiritual aspects. Instead she'll have students just pretend to be an animal for a given pose. "Maybe I am stepping over a boundary." But it seems clear that Judy is hyper-aware of the boundary. "But if I were a practicing Christian, I would *never* think it's okay to put a crucifix up in the classroom." She recounts the story of a student who, when discussing royalty, shouts, "Jesus is king." While Judy just went on, she says several of her colleagues might have said that was correct. "If I said, 'Yes,

he is! That's correct.' That would be a travesty. I think a lot of teachers do that….but that's alright [sarcastically]."

Beyond what is said, Judy is aware of the problem of what often goes unsaid. She remembers a very dominant worldview at her high school, "So it was normal for them to speak and be like, 'That's against the Bible and I don't believe in that. And that's bad,' and for people like me to just kind of be quiet."   Judy knows from her own youth the phenomenon that Fine and Weis (2003) describe, that a silence can invite a cacophony of voices that exclude.   "I think it's just as devastating...I know teachers aren't going around saying 'I'm against homosexuality.' But kids aren't stupid." When a child is allowed to say things are gay in a derogatory way, for example, a strong message is sent that being gay is bad. "When a student sees that, they think, 'Well what I am is wrong and different. And if I'm different and wrong, then I'm the outcast and I'm not normal.'"

Judy also noted her frustration with the null curriculum and its often equally problematic nature. "You're sending this horrible message of restriction, and everything besides what we're teaching you doesn't matter." From sexually active high school students in an "abstinence only" policy school to children of color in schools where race riots are "swept under the rug," Judy notes the ways in which omission can act as a form of oppression against those students directly affected as well as the rest of the students.   Judy passionately speaks of her own anger at not being taught about the Tulsa Race Riot as a P-12 student, even though it happened in her home state and was such a significant historical event. She too felt cheated by this.

A lot of my decision making is based on my own personal beliefs but not in a religious

way. Not pressing my beliefs on others. But I truly believe in celebrating – not just

tolerating but *celebrating*--diversity and culture and differences.

She points that many teachers, "just sweep it under the rug." Though someone may not overtly condemn a group of people, to deny the telling of their story is "just as bad."   Judy believed we should celebrate difference.

[Celebrate's] a really important word—to look at it positively and talk about it….It's there. It exists. Let's make it a good thing and talk about it and be okay with it and move on. I think when it comes to multicultural diversity and social equity, that's my stance.

Nancy: Reading Between the Lines

Nancy, recently retired from public school teaching, taught fourth grade children in recent years though she began teaching in high school English. A writer, Nancy began by substituting at her children's school, and when a life change necessitated a more steady income, Nancy knew exactly what she wanted to do. She went back to school to become a teacher.

Nancy believes her gift as a teacher is helping children, especially marginalized children, "come into their own." In a fairly solemn tone that tells me this is something important to her, Nancy adds "I really believe that there's a bit of genius in everybody and also a bit at the other end of the spectrum in everyone." She views her job as a teacher as working with students in finding those strengths "to bolster their weaknesses." She goes on to emphasize that this extends beyond the classroom. "We all have something to offer."

Nancy pores over student records and works hard to get to know her students, both to have a positive relationship and to find those strengths. She tells me the story of a boy whose mother had previously been in prison for making and selling methamphetamines—an increasingly common story in lower income areas of Oklahoma. In fourth grade, this child had already been typecast as a kid who wasn't going to make it by many. Before school began, Nancy had carefully examined his test scores and academic records. She discerned from his patterns of success that while his overall math scores were almost as low as the rest of his scores, when there wasn't reading to be done, he was successful. Of course she knew that he would need help in reading, but she also immediately planned to make it clear that she knew his strength. As they walked in and he introduced himself, her greeting was, "I bet you're good at math!"

Surprised, he hesitated a moment, stood taller, and boldly declared, "Yes, I am!"

One afternoon after school, Nancy learned she had brought him to see his strength as well. His little sister entered the classroom with him and asked, "Is he really your problem solver?"

"He sure is!"

"See! Told ya."

At the end of this school year, Nancy had decided that all of her students should get an award that they had genuinely earned. She says his was an easy one to determine. "He got my problem solver award." Nancy makes sure she helps students find their strengths.

Eager to avoid demonizing this boy's mother, Nancy adds that his mother had done very poorly in school, and, Nancy believes, "was trying to make a living and probably didn't have the education or the skills to do so." This mother attended parent-teacher conferences, actively participated in Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings, and in general "tried really hard" to help. Nancy, visibly saddened, added, however, that the mother clearly struggled to read, "So poverty, poverty is the big issue but there are a lot of underlying issues for poverty." Nancy sighs heavily in frustration, noting that Oklahoma imprisons the most women per capita in the United States. Adding, "which means we incarcerate more women *than anyplace **in the world.**" Keeping her voice down in the sparsely populated diner where we sit, Nancy growls this through her teeth and slaps the table with each of those last three words to punctuate this fact.

Nancy notes that she kept crackers and peanut butter in her desk because so many children where she taught needed more food than they got at school. She would pretend to the other students that these children were in a fantastic growth spurt and were hungry again by the time they got to school to try to save them from the stigma of poverty. "You're a growing boy," she'd often say. Nancy goes on to list a number of ways in which children might be stigmatized, from things as superficial—though still quite painful for children--as being considered unattractive to learning differences/disabilities to poverty and hunger. Certainly kids do not arrive at school on an equal playing ground. "But if you have a good public education you can

ensure that every kid at least has an opportunity to make the rest of the world better for themselves or maybe their children, and to me education is really the key to social equity." It becomes clear that Nancy feels part of having a fair shake is being treated with respect not only by one's teacher but by one's peers. To be sure students really got to know one another, she would move desks around periodically, making sure students all sat together at some point. Nancy also credits writing together and sharing that writing with helping build classroom community. She began her school year with telling her students, "we're gonna call this the fair class, and being fair is going to be at the center of everything we do." She went on to note that didn't mean that each student was treated exactly the same way because they would all have different needs.

Nancy also bears a strong counter-example in mind. Observing in another school as she was preparing to teach, she observed the following. "There were three little boys; I would say one was probably Muslim. All three of them were dark skinned, and they all had 'trouble-maker' positions around the edge of the classroom." She goes on to describe how these three children-- along with one little blonde girl whom the teacher didn't seem to like, though she wasn't conspicuously along the perimeter of the room--were openly ridiculed for their supposedly bad behavior in front of the other children. Nancy, however, observed nothing that seemed out of the ordinary from these children. "I was horrified by that, and I was determined that was not going to be repeated in my classroom." Nancy was appalled at the clear visibility of these children's status in the teacher's eyes, both in the teacher's responses to the children and in their physical placement in the room.

While Nancy tried carefully to avoid stigmatizing students, she realizes that sometimes students were labeled before the school year began. "Kids shake themselves out pretty early into social strata." She tried to model and discuss ways to be respectful toward one another and of course disallowing statements like "that's so gay." Deeply troubled these few years later, Nancy also talks of the difficulty of trying to maintain another child's confidentiality and simultaneously

making sure children didn't exacerbate his embarrassment when he would soil himself as a result of abuse. The first time someone said, "Eeeew, what stinks?" all Nancy could do was explain that exacerbating an embarrassing situation is a form of cruelty. And they seemed to understand this; they would for the most part pretend not to notice thereafter. She shakes her head in sadness as she tells me that this child "disappeared" when the parents learned of the report of suspected abuse. Nancy had worked very hard to help the class welcome him into the fold. Seeming very weary, Nancy sighs, laces her fingers together over her mouth, then and slumps onto her forearms at the table; she stops speaking for a moment and finally in what seems more like a long exhalation than a statement, she concludes with finality, "he didn't stay that long."

No stranger to students who had experienced difficulty, Nancy had some difficulty of her own professionally, though she does note, "the principal had my back," because her children had been Nancy's students. "She knew my teaching." Nancy had previously worked at an alternative high school, then this rural high school. But she was moved to the elementary because, "The superintendent who moved me did so because I was always bucking him on the whole academic/athletic thing. They hired a new basketball coach and gave him my English classes." Nancy had indeed challenged this superintendent on his valuing athletics over academics. But she is clearly sincere when she professes that she absolutely values athletics--just not at the expense of academics. The superintendent justified this move by saying his own child had done very poorly in English in high school in another district and "did great," according to her father, in college. Nancy points out that while his daughter, the child of a superintendent and counselor, both well educated, was perhaps what Ladson-Billings (2007) might call "school independent," most children do need to do well in high school English to be successful. If simply to justify his actions, however, the superintendent claimed to disagree. The basketball team goes to state most years, but the English scores are, as Nancy put it, "in the toilet."

Having noted that the district wasn't terribly concerned about teaching and the ways in which this was problematic when someone wasn't teaching well, Nancy did cite this when she

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was able to honestly say there was little she worried about in her decision making. "Once again there was a lot of freedom in knowing they really didn't care what went on in your classroom." Nancy says one of the few things she might have done differently was being so vocal against this superintendent's actions around athletics and academics. But when she was moved to fourth grade, she decided she would retire at year's end. "I decided I was gonna teach the way I knew was best for the kids and not worry about the fallout." And this she did, scrapping the science textbook, which she quickly discerned was far above most of the children's reading level, except to occasionally use it teach expository text structure. Nancy did hands on science instead. She focused her reading time on giving kids great choices and making sure her students would enjoy and discuss what they read when it was required. She also adds, "And I did learn elementary is the toughest thing there is to teach," from the way the school day was structured to the poor meals available. "You get no time alone…you only had twenty minutes and so you can't go anywhere for lunch." She adds that the food is unhealthy at that; "I gained twenty pounds." She points out that it was difficult for children to be healthy too; beyond meal issues, the students' recesses had been taken away for increased instruction time in hopes of higher test scores, save one very short one at lunch time. "Fourth graders need recess…And I think the way they've got elementary set up, it's impossible for the teachers to be healthy."

So while Nancy had many successes, that last year was a difficult one. The other teachers had hand selected the students who had been more successful. Nancy had six children who'd scored unsatisfactory in both reading and math. Four children in her class were labeled emotionally disturbed. One child had recently arrived at the school from an area mental health facility, where she had lived since being rescued from a noncustodial parent who had kidnapped her. Nancy's seems to sit a little higher in her seat as she tells me that despite these immense challenges, "The six who scored unsatisfactory in both reading and math all scored satisfactory in something, and all the rest of the class scored satisfactory in everything. That was my vindication."

But when Nancy was in a classroom of any kind, she wanted to be sure her students thought critically about their texts and the world.

I want students to think for themselves. I want them to read between the lines. I want them to come up with their own opinions about things so long as they can back up their opinions with lines and things from what they're reading…I think the big thing was I want students to read for themselves and think for themselves. And I think that's probably behind every lesson plan.

Cara: Pushing Back

Cara is a white second grade teacher, but she also taught fourth grade for many years. She has been in her exurban Oklahoma school for over twenty years. We meet at her home, and she gives me a brief tour of her recent remodeling before we begin, making sure I feel welcome and comfortable, though she is helping me. She says that the values that come through in her teaching are the love of learning, life-long learning, and a strong sense of community. Part of community for her is a "sense of taking care." She does a morning meeting (Kriete, 2002) each day. She makes sure she and her students learn each others' names right away, and they talk about how to respond to people in ways that are respectful. "That social curriculum is just as important as the academic; if there's a problem, pausing to take care [is important], not just rolling on through and saying 'get your worksheets out again.'" Cara invokes the worksheet as a demonstration of the traditional, something she stays away from. "With teaching kids to write, I can still teach them about nouns and verbs without doing the little worksheet; I can teach them something bigger than that they can use with their life." We met on the weekend, and the preceding Friday, a child had lent her a book. Though the book is not her interest area, she shrugs and says, "Of course, I'm gonna read it; I started it." She feels that is important to encourage "that love of sharing—[knowing] that we both have things to share with each other."

Eager to foster a sense of wonder in her students, Cara says, "Talking about the test, that is something to push against." Earlier Cara had shared about testing, "That's kind of a moral

issue to me." As a parent, Cara had refused to have her child participate in standardized tests. But as a teacher, Cara says she tells the truth to students about what the tests mean—and what they don't mean. She lets her students know that she doesn't believe that the test is a full measure of what they know. But, she adds, she does follow through in preparing her students "because I'm not gonna let students fail at that either."

Cara went to elementary school in a private Catholic school, and the small community feeling stayed with her. She fondly remembers teachers who went "beyond just teaching." She laughs as she remembers how cool she thought it was, "swimming with Sister Mary Elizabeth." She laughs now at how strange she thought it was at first to see her teacher, also a nun, in a swim suit, but she feels strongly that teachers need to be connected to the community, that children should get to see teachers as human beings outside of school as well as in school.

Cara reveled in the fact that things were relatively self-paced in her elementary school. "It wasn't about the grade," but rather the joy of learning. In fact, they didn't have grades, so when she began public school and students would do just enough to get an A, it bothered Cara a great deal. "That was a shock to me." Another painful surprise was that a classmate of hers, whom she knew learned differently but who had certainly participated well enough at her school, "just disappeared." He was labeled as special education, and for as often as Cara saw him, he may as well have been taken to another planet. He was placed in another building in the basement all day. At school, she *never* saw him again. This still troubles her a great deal these many years later.

When asked how social equity looks in her teachings, Cara says that equality or fairness would be perhaps too simple a way to put it. She instead lists a series of questions she tries to answer with her students each time they study something. "How do you make sure everybody's voice is heard? How do you make sure everybody's story is told?" She continues, "Who else could have [been included]?" She emphasizes the importance of getting multiple viewpoints, that teachers need "to be willing to find out all the stories…all the pieces of the puzzle, not just parts

of it." She returns to the notion of community, emphasizing the present *and* the future, "At eight you're still my neighbor." And, she continues, at eighteen her students will vote for their leadership. She knows they can't suddenly become critically literate (Leland & Harste, 2000) citizens on that day.

She views understanding her students well as a piece of social equity as well. She and her colleagues have done a great deal of research on boys' literacy, and they learned that many boys are interested in "guns and body parts." While they were careful not to stereotype boys into these kinds of books, they saw an increase in their literacy when they made these more available. They also respond differently to boys as a result. When a child wrote a book pattered after Margaret Wise Brown's (1949) *The Important Book* about a gun, Cara says that in a post-Columbine world there was a time they might have sent him to the office. In her case, having done this research, however, it was clear the child had been hunting and had some supervised experience with a gun. "So I think that…all of us taking a breath and responding differently to boys was interesting." Considered a "safe" teacher, a little girl with two moms was placed in her class deliberately, because "whatever, it's okay." Cara shrugs and indicates her clear lack of discomfort around this, something that wasn't necessarily so among her colleagues. While she didn't overtly teach about this, her welcoming responses to the family and the child taught the children in the classroom something to be sure. While she wanted to avoid for the sake of the child a, "This girl has two mommies, da da da da" ["big reveal" tones in a kind of sing song] kind of moment." Cara says she "would have gone there," if there had been any kind of mistreatment of the child by her peers. The lack thereof surely goes back to that sense of community Cara works so hard to create.

Beyond test preparation, Cara is compelled to resist programmatic changes that are not good for children. She says that while there are a handful of teachers who still do math from an inquiry standpoint, she was vocal in resisting a change toward an algorithm based instructional approach for the "official" district math program. "For me, that is a matter of equity because I feel very strongly that inquiry really allows each child to really hold a concept, whereas if you

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teach the algorithms, you are cheating them. You are *stealing* their learning." She goes on the say that the school district had sent out a survey, "and I think the survey was all fixed. Many of us asked for the results of the survey and were never given the survey [results]." She goes on, "And I was one of several people who went to the board saying why inquiry was important." She says their efforts were to no avail on the district level. "It's a political move to teach algorithms; I know, however bizarre that sounds…"

Teacher voices, in particular, are not being listened to right now. She points to a more recent significant change, and the district sent information out to parents about it before even asking teachers at all. She goes on to reiterate, "People have spoken up, and the choice is not to listen, so people are leaving." Cara expresses her concern over developmentally inappropriate assessments given at times that do not even align with the teacher-created calendar; some items are tested before they are taught and then children are labeled as result. Most of the time those mislabeled children are being made to miss art or music for this "remediation" for content they, in many cases, have yet to be taught. When one teacher explained this to her students' parents to set their minds at ease about their children's progress, "she got a slap on the wrist" from her principal. With a wry laugh, Cara says her advice for parents in the district might be, "homeschool your child." Referring to her superintendent, Cara says he's heard from teachers that this method of testing is ineffective, and he doesn't have a research base to support it, "But he'll pretend." After a pause, she growls, "Aaaaaaggggh. I never prayed for the death of someone…" Cara lets out a slightly maniacal laugh, needing the release of such a silly statement in her anger. "For the *leaving* of someone," she does assert.

Recognizing that this superintendent is someone who is a good politician of sorts, "I think that he has a good appearance. But once you really dig deep--and who has time to do that in our lives or go further? Nobody. And so it's that kind of attitude that is very prevalent." She also recognizes that a significant piece of the issue is that only a certain group of teachers have spoken out. She cites the eagerness to please, this lack of outward questioning on the part of most

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teachers, as a strong source of power for the district administration. And it would be easy to discount this as anything but a gendered issue since many of the principals who work to enforce this status quo are women, but that would oversimplify the fact that often in an oppressive system, women who do achieve power often feel compelled to do so *through* existing power structures rather than working against them. And as Grumet (1988) reminds us, women teachers, being socialized to please, are often complicit in the support of existing power structures that work to other both themselves and their students.

Cara has not lost hope, however. She believes that once the effects of these efforts on the part of the superintendent have time to take root, he will be ousted. Ironically, Cara believes it will be because test scores will fall as a result of his focus on testing, this "back to the basics" approach. While we certainly see signs of what Hargreaves (1992) calls intensification here, we also see a teacher who is maintaining hope even through many thwarted efforts to make a difference. She asks "who has time?" but clearly she and a number of her colleagues have raised concerns. For those like Cara who do remain, right now her district is, as she put it, "a sad place."

Keith: Stumbling Sometimes While Interrupting Stereotypes

Keith is a white middle school teacher and has been teaching in his rural setting for over five years. Our first interview is conducted court side, as he'd had a hard time finding an evening totally free, he asked if we could interview in the gym while he supervised some students after school. While he has the look of a coach, the stereotype stops there. Active in professional development and eager to continue learning about his practice, Keith is a teacher who takes his teaching very seriously.

> I grew up in a rural town just outside [a major Southern city metro area]…I mean it was all white. Pretty much ninety percent white...My father, very interesting character. Um, I mean, I grew up with jokes about the "n" word constantly; it was just part of my regular slang…But I remember, one particular evening—dad was my baseball coach. The

telephone rang, and I could hear his side of the conversation. He was like, "What?!

What do you mean you won't let him play? Well he can plan on my team!"…Dad took a

very bold stand there and said, "That's not right; you don't treat people like that."…Of

course, [there's] the dichotomy there, "Okay Dad, what is this about?" I still remember

that very bold statement.

This story had a significant impact on the way Keith would come to see others. He notes

that while it was not an overnight transformation, this significant event, about which he never

overtly spoke to his father, sparked the cognitive dissonance that would begin to open Keith up to

seek multiple perspectives—and to work to make sure his students were given opportunities to

consider multiple perspectives as well. Keith and Jerry played baseball together every single year

of his youth; his dad made sure of it.

In high school at a basketball game, Keith tells me, "I told an adult sitting next to me,

'Did you see what that 'n' did? That's so funny. He just walked into the girls' restroom.'" He

did not get the response he expected. The party next to him, who happened to be the city's chief

of police, stood and very sternly told Keith, "You listen to me. You understand here that word is

not appropriate. We don't talk about people like that. That's not appropriate in this town."

Initially Keith says he was confused. No one had ever directly challenged that kind of speech

from him, much less an authority figure. "It was almost a life shattering point there…From that

point on I started paying attention and listening. It opened me up, just that little spear [to my]

ignorance that pricks, so from that point on I noticed." While Keith admits, "Not that I all the

sudden was…Mr. Social Equity from that point on, but for the rest of my life I noticed and paid

attention."

I ask Keith to discuss what "life shattering," means for him here. "That moment

separated me. It separated me from my peers." Noting he could not be two different people in

front of adults and in front of his peers, Keith was slower to laugh at inappropriate jokes and

eventually, "It started growing to where I was able to stand up and say 'Hey that's not the right way to act.'"

While in nearly every way Keith fits the mold, so to speak, his teaching is dramatically different than the kind of traditional worksheet based approach some parents expect from the coach/teacher, though more have come to appreciate his students' high interest and academic success. Particularly as Common Core requirements approach, both Keith's principal (who was not always as supportive) and his peers are beginning to see the value of the way he teaches—in a more content integrated, inquiry-based approach. In fact, Keith was surprised to hear his principal ask him to assist the faculty in preparing for Common Core; she noted, "This is exactly how Mr. __ teaches; he's really going to be an asset in this transition."

But sometimes parents raise concerns that he must confront in some way. Particularly his first few years at this school, he says he had to fight the parent perception that "education is teaching the facts and filling out a worksheet." One parent accused Keith of giving her daughter a poor discussion grade because she was conservative. The parent told Keith, "Well I see what you're doing; you just don't like her viewpoint and you're gonna give her an F on that." The child actually got a poor grade because she had not been participating at all, though perhaps the child did believe she'd be graded poorly for her beliefs.

> I'm the farthest from a liberal viewpoint. But because I'm willing to talk about these things they think I'm a flaming liberal trying to get their kids to believe something…I just want 'em to talk. I want 'em to think and share their ideas. [In this parent's view] that's not what education is; you're supposed to circle nouns.

A number of forces are at work here; the parent--and potentially the child as well--assuming that Keith is liberal because he is having kids discuss social issues is a fascinating one, though Keith is careful not to share his personal opinions with students overtly. Then we have Keith noting that he is "farthest from a liberal view"; it is almost as though he feels the need for me to know this. It's not surprising, given the fact that it is Oklahoma, and calling one's

opponent liberal is the best way to win an election. This is the reddest of the red states (aside

from Alaska, which is all one voting unit, no separate counties), where not one county was won

by President Obama in 2008 (2008 Election Coverage, 2008). While Keith is rather conservative

personally, then, he must shed some of the privilege of being a white, Protestant male in this

community in order to do this work—and yet he does persevere in doing so.

Keith says one primary value that comes through in his teaching is respect. "I'm always

showing respect for the students, even when they've done something wrong." One way in which

Keith illustrates this is by refusing to believe that there are lazy students. He asserts,

> There's kind of this hidden agenda of laziness; the student is considered lazy, and the
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> whole system is set up to punish this lazy child. For me, let's go beyond [that
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> assumption]. Let's get down and figure out what's going on with this child. Does he not
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> get enough sleep at night? Does he not have a home? Does he not have a bed? Let's
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> work with him…I don't believe in lazy children. Children want to please.

Keith credits his mentor when he was student teaching for a lot of his beliefs about

teaching and learning. "Every child can learn. And if a child's not learning the way I'm

teaching, it's not the child's fault. We need to listen. [My mentor teacher] listens to students, and

I think that opened my eyes more than anything."

And listen Keith does. From addressing small scale bullying to working with colleagues

to make sure the growing number of students to whom their school send home brown bag dinners

get to do so without being singled out on the bus, Keith is aware of what is going on for his

students. Typically, Keith says, when his middle schoolers read a particular book about the

Holocaust, students empathize with the Jewish character. One year, however, a student said,

"Those Jews, they killed Jesus, and they need to all die." Of course, taken aback, Keith interrupts

this anti-Semitic rant, as one hopes any teacher would. However, Keith doesn't simply leave it at

that, but rather begins a dialogue with students about the origins of anti-Semitism and its dangers.

Keith knows there is little religious diversity at his school (students all identifying as Protestant Christians as far as he knows), and he actively works to foster acceptance.

Looking at all kinds of historical and current issues together, from the Tulsa Race Riot to the media messages about gender embedded in popular music (hip hop and country were their two most commonly discussed genres of music), Keith tries to be sure students think critical as they approach their work. After he noted the risk of straying from the textbook in his teaching, I asked Keith if he saw any risk in staying with the textbook solely.

Well, what I would see as a risk is ignorant kids. It's me coming out of high school being "educated" but not knowing anything. You know Paul in the Bible says, "Why are you still drinking milk? You should be chewing on meat." At this point in [a student's] life, [s/he] should be chewing on meat…Well, I got to college not knowing how to chew on meat. And the risk is they leave here and they're not able to chew on meat—they're not even able to tell when someone's pulling the wool over their eyes. And they don't even know—so that's the risk, we're turning loose ignorant children. Or children who are too weak to stand up, too afraid to stand up and say, "Wait a minute; that's not the way I believe."

Keith is careful to create situations in which students must examine their own beliefs and think critically about various points of view. He'd been holding debates in his classes and one student insisted he make sure she get the anti-abortion side (they typically draw for sides) because she wanted to argue by saying, simply, "It's wrong." His response was, "I'm not gonna do that…this is why we're debating, so you can open up. I'm not trying to convince you it's right. It doesn't matter to me at the end of it whether you change your belief or not. But I want you to be able to consider all sides of it." Keith recognizes that they are kids and, for the most part, bring the beliefs of their parents to school; the issue with this lies in the fact that such inherited beliefs are seldom very carefully considered. "So my goal is…I want them to actually have their own beliefs and to know their own beliefs."

Realist Tales: Anchor Points for the Web in the Making

Each of my participants laid bare the story of their own backgrounds and the thinking behind their decision making on social equity. In the realist tale, however, I largely look at how each participant views his/her teaching, honing in on social equity issues and how each participant defines these. Having gained a better understanding of who each participant is as a teacher and the directions of their thinking on these matters, my hope is that the theme analysis that follows in Chapter Five will resonate more strongly for the reader. Certainly, as Lather (2004) notes, writing such a tale is a form of analysis as well, in that I made decisions about what to include, what to omit, and how to frame what is included. As the sun passes through the sky, different pieces of a spider's web catch the light, but seldom if ever is the full web in view. My main hope in telling the realist tales is to render visible a more complete, albeit changing, view of each participant and the dynamic curricula they make with their students.

Interrupting Truth Tales

These following two examples are meant to highlight the complexity of social equity education, but certainly not to imply that a "victory narrative" (Cary, 2006, p. 27) exists for any participant, or that these narratives were notably more complex than others. Rather, they are meant to highlight the ways in which each of us who works toward social equity is complicit in remaking inequity in some ways as well. Still, there is always the simultaneous potential for "enlarging the space of the possible" (Leland & Harste, 2000) when one attempts to disrupt the status quo. Following are narratives that highlight the contradictions and complexity of social equity work.

Keith, An Interruption

Abortion and sexual identity are both topics about which Keith says he is less comfortable teaching "because of where we are and the political viewpoints." He does have students debate abortion, yet sexual identity isn't something he plans to address in given year, at least directly. Fostering some limited conversation on sexual identity related to representations of

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gender roles in media, Keith does attempt to foster tolerance among students. His discomfort, however, comes through when he talks with students about this. Students were discussing the "demeaning," as one female student put it, objectification of women in music lyrics. This led to inquiry into gender roles.

> So I just naturally brought up about the fact that, I asked [the student], could it be that boys that find that they believe that they're homosexual…could it be the media pushes them that way because they're *not* big bold and strong, you know because they move more feminine, they act more feminine? [I] just bring it up in a question style to get 'em to-- to get em to thinking about, because the homosexual question is not going to naturally come into their mind. So I try to bring it in to insert that into the conversation enough to where they're "Oh wait a minute; I hadn't thought about that."

While on one hand Keith does seek to interrupt stereotypes, he is reinforcing a number of others in the process. His goal in the above dialogue with students is to increase tolerance toward the GLBTQ community; however, first we see the implication that one might be "convinced" by media that s/he is perhaps GLBT. We also have the reinforcement of the false dual assumptions that gay boys or men are less stereotypically masculine--and that less stereotypically masculine boys or men are likely to be gay. Finally, we again have the assumptions that no children in the school A) identify as GLBTQ , B) would have met someone who identifies as such, or C) would have even had sexual identity even come to mind as a result of this inquiry into gender roles. Keith's stated intent is to prepare them to be kinder for sometime *later* when they might "come across somebody." As Keith continues to describe his students, however, it seems unlikely they would have immense discomfort about this topic.

> Especially this year, there's been times I thought I was gonna shock 'em. They're just not. I guess they see and they hear and they understand so much. They laugh at me 'cause I'm kind of prudish. When I first started coaching basketball just being around girls and their talk, I had to get 'em together and say, "I grew up with just my dad and

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brother, and my mom raised me. And the girls are princesses, you know, and *they don't*

pee [laughs]." So I don't want to know about [girls' talk of sex or sexuality]. So it's

funny…they laugh at me. But rarely are they shocked.

Further, this framing of girls and women as fictional—even lacking the need to urinate--

"princesses," others girls and women and implies a man's need to protect these strange beings.

Keith reinforces this notion once again when some girls, carrying a basketball under their shirts as

if they were pregnant said for his benefit, "Bet Mr.___ disapproves."

"No I don't disapprove of pregnant people," he assured them. "I disapprove of teenage

girls and how they get that way." No mention is made of boys, however. Johnson (2005)

reminds us, "Teenage *pregnancy* [original emphasis]—a state that describes women, not men—is

a hot topic in the United States, but not male insemination of teenage girls" (p. 156). The fault

lies solely with a pregnant girl, and not, for example, a protectionist patriarchal ideology that

denies young people access to comprehensive sex education. Further, existing systems of power

are perpetuated by this "normal" construction of the teenage girl as deviant and her male

counterpart as either passive or, worse, a victim of her wiles (Cary, 2006; Foucault, 1988;

Johnson, 2005). On a lighter but no less problematic note, earlier in our conversation, in

addressing the need for students to treat one another with respect and "express themselves in a

healthier way," he refers to the spreading of rumors and gossiping as, "the normal girl drama."

When asked if there was anything he needed to add, he tells me, "It's tough." Puffing his

cheeks and slowly exhaling, he continues,

I think the university professors make it sound very easy. Um, and, and I think to a

certain degree they don't know just how incredibly tough it is to, to balance. You know

that we want to bring it these social equities these social issues, these social agendas, you

want to bring it in because it's vital. But it's tough. I honestly, and it may sound

arrogant, but if I wasn't a forty-three year old six foot tall male, I may not have survived

it…And it sounds, nothing against you [I laugh uncomfortably and try my best to

maintain a neutral demeanor]. Maybe you could have survived it in your own way. But

because I was in the army and I played football and I did all those things, I have my own

confidence. I have my own self-esteem. I know who I am. I know what's right. And

you know Dr. ___ talks about research, research, research. I know that the research is

backing me up. These types of things that I'm able to go through and **survive** in an

atmosphere like this. I don't know, you send a twenty-four year old college *girl*

[emphasis mine] straight out of college and you tell her "Okay, here's all the right things

to do; go jump in there at that school and go do it." Gosh, I don't know if we're

preparing them well enough on just what they're gonna have to go through.

First, the stereotype of the disconnected, misinformed university professor is called forth: "they

don't know…" Even more strongly emphasized, however, is the implication that strength is

drawn from masculinity: football, military service, and even physical stature are featured as the

ways Keith could "survive." Infantalizing this imagined young, female teacher by calling her a

"girl," he says he isn't sure she's prepared. Given the hyper-masculine resources listed for

survival, however, it seems few women would possess such resources, whatever she were taught.

Further, I have told Keith a little about myself, and he knows I am a teacher who is deeply

interested in and, however imperfectly, worked to engage my own P-12 students in learning about

social equity issues, but that experience is stripped of me here as a woman and perhaps in part

because I am younger as well. "Maybe you could have survived it in your own way." While

Keith does note that research, emphasized by a female professor, is important, it sits against a

backdrop of rigidly cast notions of strength and gender.

Keith, however, as he asks of his students, remains open to change. His students' debate

on whether media affect body image was canceled as a result of his students' feedback—they

asked to do research instead. And he began to listen to country music with the same critical ear he

had listened to other forms of music as a result of conversations with students this year. In the

corner of Keith's classroom with the flag he has an "In God We Trust" sign with pictures of a few

soldiers; these look like amateur images, and I wonder if the soldiers are relatives of Keith's or some of his students.' In another corner, there is a richly diverse classroom library. One full wall is covered with beautiful photography taken by a family member of Keith's, and he has painted the walls a calming earth tone. His students' work is on display, one student having carved an impressively intricate sculpture from cardboard in lieu of a book report. Keith shows me the wide variety of students' work around the room, saying he believes it important that they get to choose how they show what they know. He has a large collection of professional books, poetry, student resource materials, and little gifts here and there from students over the years.

And again, it is worthy of note that despite being immersed in the "n" word and a great deal of overt racism as a child, Keith has actively shed his inheritance of these perceptions like the molting of a cicada that has grown too large for its exoskeleton. As a teacher Keith works with his students against both systemic and individual instances of racism. Like his classroom, Keith's teaching does reflect the mores of his community to some degree, but his simultaneous desire to work to be inclusive is apparent as well.

<div align="center">Judy, An Interruption</div>

Judy shares with a story of something that occurred between interviews that she felt certain was relevant to my study, and she was right. She was openly and rudely chided by a colleague whose intent Judy believes was to make her feel naïve. The reason? Judy was collecting resources for a student's family whose home had burned down. Judy's colleague asked, "You're not asking people for *money* are you?" Judy simply told her she was encouraging resources the family needed but she was accepting money from those who preferred to do that. "Well, don't get offended if I don't donate," the teacher snapped at Judy. "You *know* how that family is." The teacher had implied, not so subtly, that she believed the fire was begun because the mother was making methamphetamines. Judy shared with me that this was a common problem in her neighborhood, but with this teacher she said, "Well either way even if it turns out to be a meth fire, there's a five year old and a one year old child [who] don't deserve this." While

standing up to her colleague, Judy also reinforced the likelihood, despite a lack of evidence either way, that the fire may have been the result of the manufacture of illegal drugs. Judy describes her student's family to following her colleague's accusation.

> The family does have a reputation of not crazy but just out of control but lots of cousins and aunts and kids, and they're just really full and wild and sometimes they're not dressed properly, and they're obviously in poverty. And some of the kids are not behaved, which isn't the case with mine.

Judy offers this description as a pseudo-supportive rationale for her colleague's theory about the fire, though she disagrees with the colleague's actions based on this theory. In effect, while Judy implies her colleague is jumping to conclusions, so to speak, she also does not refute the grounds on which her colleague's conclusion is based. Many people being under one roof, and perhaps a lack of proper clothing are potential direct results of poverty, rather than any way of being on the part of a parent. Further, extended families living together is more common among some cultures than others, and this may be a decision rooted in culture and/or practicality--so that an adult relative may be present with children while another adult is working. While Judy notes that her own student is well-behaved, her framing of the children's behavior seems to be connected to the family structure in her view—"really full and wild." Again, however, sometimes cultural mores make it more likely for extended family to live together. Some family's religions prohibit birth control. Still others simply cannot afford to pay for birth control. Perhaps one or more of these factors affect this family and perhaps not. But these are socio-cultural influences that may need to be considered.

I am reminded of my own traditional Catholic grandparents who had eighteen children; because the oil boom allowed them to remain middle class, and in part because of their race and religious privilege, however, no one referred to the family as wild even when my mother and her siblings were young, save perhaps those within the family doing so fondly—however wild I'm sure things were at times with eighteen children. In sharp contrast, in fact, my grandparents are

viewed very positively in their community to this day, my grandfather having been elected to the school board for a lengthy period of time until health problems in his later years finally required that he decline to enter the election. But this student's family has no such class or race privilege (the family's religious background is not known), thus outside perceptions of their lives are dramatically different. In much the same way that President Obama is asked to "prove" his citizenship whereas it is taken for granted for his white counterparts, this family is on some level expected to "prove" that their fire was not caused by the manufacture of illegal drugs. This would not likely be the case for a white middle class family, however large. Judy's defense of the family to some degree reinforces her colleague's perception of things and reveals Judy's ambivalence on the fire's origins. She adds, "And she left and I was just, just almost wanted to be like, what if it was a wealthy family that didn't do drugs?!" Judy is clearly frustrated by the woman's reaction; in this statement she certainly disrupts status quo perceptions of class on the one hand, and reinforced them as well--social class and drug abuse being falsely, though not consciously, correlated. As Gloria Ladson-Billings (2007) notes, often the *exact* same behavior is viewed very differently for middle class families and for those in poverty.

This leads me to another statement from Judy's narrative. After discussing some professional development on cultures based on the work of Ruby K. Payne (2003), Judy described a number of various cultural mores and carefully pointed out that one can't generalize lest these understandings become stereotypes. She then, however, declared that "Poverty is a culture!" and went on to discuss that one must work with families in poverty differently. While Judy was very aware of the potential for stereotype around race and ethnicity, she embraced the notion of poverty as a cultural group with unique ways of being. In her Urban Sites Conference address to the National Writing Project in 2007, Gloria Ladson-Billings powerfully disputes this perception.

> Poverty is not a culture. If it is, then more than half the world is from that culture. It is a condition produced by the economic, social, and political arrangements of a society.

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Poverty is linked to the *values* of a society. When we think it's acceptable for people to work and not make a living wage, we contribute to the *creation* of poverty. When we demand low prices for goods and services, cheap and plentiful food, clothing, clerical and domestic services, we are participating in the *creation* of poverty. (emphasis original)

Ladson-Billings (2007) goes on to point out that not only does the myth of a culture of poverty remove any responsibility from those of us who participate in the creation thereof, it also places the blame on those put most at peril by these practices. After all, this myth would have us believe, the reason one enters and/or remains in poverty is the deviance of those who find themselves in poverty rather than the collective practices of the society. This allows those of us complicit therein to make all too easy assumptions about families in poverty without calling into question the ways in which our own in/actions create those very conditions. Further, it often leads to means of interaction with children in schools that are more focused on the control, rather than meaningful education, of children. While Judy's pedagogy is rich and meaningful, her use of this *language* contributes to a discourse that is used to further marginalize families in poverty--constructed as wild, out of control--other. The family's event (by all accounts a tragedy) is the same no matter the social class/race/family structure—a home burning down; the interpretation of this event, however, is dramatically different for those lacking the unearned protection that privilege affords (McIntosh, 1986).

For Need of a Narrative-Interrupted

Beyond providing an opportunity to consider our own complicity as we work to disrupt the status quo, it is my hope that in looking at these complexities, I also highlight for the participants, myself, and the reader the importance of the ways we story ourselves as teachers. "…Teacher knowledge is narratively composed, embodied in a person, and expressed in practice" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124). Our own stories of our respective pedagogies matter a great deal, both in the ways we interact with students and families in our teaching lives and in the discourses we create around and through those interactions. As Fox and Short (2003) might put

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it, "stories matter." Moving through my analysis in Chapter Five, I will try to illustrate the important intersections across participants that illustrate something significant about social equity teaching decision making for my participants. Finally, in Chapter Six, I will share with the reader my tentative conclusions.

CHAPTER V

THEME ANALYSIS: TRACING THE THREADS

Having introduced each participant to the reader in Chapter Four, in this chapter I will

detail my open coded theme analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). To conduct my analysis, I first

listened to each participant's interviews at least twice, taking notes on the social equity decision

related matters that stood out and from which participant(s) the theme had emerged. Any idea

that emerged across at least four participants I considered an emergent theme. I then transcribed

each interview and coded line by line every relevant sentence or idea into my tentative categories.

I grouped each set of ideas, sorting and making sure each fit in the theme where I had placed it

initially. Some themes were combined and others omitted, as I realized they were part of another

theme. For example, Nancy's insistence on not repeating what had upset her in a classroom she'd

observed was actually an example of her awareness of the hidden curriculum rather than a theme

in its own right. Further, I initially had coded, "what I can get away with" and using one's own

resources as "an unsafe place to be" as separate themes. Upon revisiting the data and the original

contexts, however, I realized that in both cases participants were speaking of the risk of teaching

against the grain, of going off script, and of responding to student needs rather than following an

arbitrary plan or "map." In this chapter I attempt to show the reader the ways in which I wove

together the themes that have emerged from my work with my participants.

Theme I: The Un/Taught: "Kids Know…"

"Critical theorists contend that the hidden curriculum and the null curriculum have a much more profound impact on students that the overt curriculum does" (Slattery, 2006, p. 234). Each of my participants discussed the hidden curricula, what is taught implicitly by what is said and done in the classroom. They also spoke of the null curricula, that which is taught when we leave things unsaid or omitted, and these became an increasingly visible piece of the teaching and learning of my participants. Slattery's words remind me how critical what we do—and do not do--is for students' experiences in our classrooms. A teacher might say, for example, that s/he values diversity. But if every book s/he has in the classroom is about white middle class characters and the history narrative is Eurocentric and patriarchal, students will learn that only one point of view *really* counts.

Nancy puts it this way. "Kids know if you're racist. They know if you're sexist. They know if you're homophobic. They know if you dismiss certain students. So you wear your politics on your sleeve." Nancy feels so strongly about this that in the entire time she taught in a P-12 setting, she never put a political bumper sticker on her car. Keith believes it essential for students to consider the hidden curriculum in the media they interact with on a daily basis. And indeed his students have taken a close look at subtle and not so subtle ways media teach (Cortés, 2005) about gender. Keith's realist tale tells of students' strong belief that this was so; they insisted that media negatively affects people's body images. The students spoke of song lyrics, digitally altered magazine covers, and scantily clad images of models that teach them that women's bodies must be very thin and are for the purpose of male pleasure, for example. Judy says that she has to be inclusive of who here students are.

> If I ignore those [identities], what kind of message am I sending to those little babies? Cause I know they're only four, but this is the foundation I'm laying. I do my best to teach them to be respectful and celebrate one another. And I think that's important no matter where I taught.

Many of my participants' discussions of the hidden curricula centered around religion, sexual identity, and gender. Lynn recalls as a child wondering why a Jewish girl didn't participate in the winter program at her school. There was little to no talk of religion, but the "winter" program—"wink, wink," was really all about Christmas. The clear privileging of Christianity isn't lost on Lynn now as an adult. Cara expressed concern for a Jewish colleague who felt he had to hide his faith. As a kind of protest to people saying teachers couldn't be people of faith, she would "put on a bunch of [her] medals to wear to school." Slattery (2006) describes a time when he was asked to lead a prayer at a university event. Recognizing that it was uncomfortable for those who were not Christian, he agreed and used what he calls "public pedagogy" (p. 79) to pray to Mary to first set the largely Protestant audience ill at ease in order to show them that what they were doing was not fair to others. By publicly breaching the law on religion in a slightly different fashion, he hoped—and apparently succeeded, being that no further prayers were said at that gathering—to disrupt the act of religious intolerance. While I am not sure I am comfortable with Slattery's form of "public pedagogy" in this case, Cara's approach stays within the law and challenges others to consider what being inclusive must mean for all. Mark recalls that one teacher he had made students swear on the Bible. "We had a Bible in every classroom, but there are still [public] schools who do," and he shares about a visit to a nearby public school where many teachers had Bibles on their desks. Nancy says a colleague of hers had Bible verses taped to her bulletin board; this was also the teacher who sent a student to the principal for not speaking on a day of silence in support of GLBTQ students. Another teacher at the same school told students they were going to hell. "So this was the environment at that school."

Judy directly addresses the null curricula, "All these gaps, these absences in the curriculum… are sending this horrible message by being quiet, sweeping it under the rug." They are telling students that they don't matter. She says that silence on a way of being, "makes it more taboo, more negative." On GLBTQ history, she lists a number of figures who were gay

about whom that goes conspicuously unmentioned in many classrooms. But, she asserts, this was an important part of their identity. "It's like talking about Martin Luther King, Jr. and not mentioning that he was black… 'No, that's not important.'" Based on the many ways in which my participants listed the ways the hidden and null curriculum mattered for them as children and matters for their students, the importance of these kinds of messages couldn't be more underscored. The messages of the null curricula and the hidden curricula emerged around religion, race, social class, gender, and sexual identity. Students certainly learn a great deal from these un/said elements of schooling.

<div align="center">Theme II: Un/Learning: "Yes, I Do Have That Privilege"</div>

My participants discussed the ways in which they at times had to recognize their own privilege in some respect in order to truly be open to learning about themselves and others. In recounting his use of the "n" word as a child, Keith says, "It was just part of the ignorance we carried around with us." But beyond his encounter with the chief of police, he also points to an important moment when he learned about the Tulsa Race Riot from an African American woman. "She very kindly and lovingly shattered a lot of my ignorance in one of those moments I thought I knew everything." Such moments when our ignorance is shattered or we are made to see the privilege that surrounds us are opportunities to unlearn (Wang & Olson, 2009) our misperceptions so that we create spaces that allow a clearer view of our respective worlds. Lynn says that reading the McIntosh (1986) article had her saying, "Yes, I have this privilege; yes, I have that privilege. And she also learned that sometimes people are resistant to learning about privilege. She recalls a classmate saying, "Well we don't need to help these people because I've had to work hard too," and even going so far as to claim that they "doubted" a Latina peer's story of being followed in a store. Lynn describes how the angry student went on to essentially declare the article a case of "reverse racism." Slattery (2006), however, says that in a systemic racism, such accusations are "a linguistic smokescreen and manipulation that is a logical fallacy" (p. 165). Lynn saw this for what it was as well, saying she was "blown away" by the other pre-

service teachers' statements. Feeling so passionate after reading the article, she supported her classmate whose experiences were being denied and shortly thereafter shared the article with another teacher when something in that party's class reminded her of the McIntosh piece. Mark says that there were a number of things he didn't understand "how paternalistic everything is" until he took a class on gender. Judy talks about what a powerful moment it was for her when a professor pointed out that, "It's usually through nonviolence that things get solved, especially when it's a social problem." Judy was already interested in nonviolence, but this was a poweful revelation for her about its power. "She kind of just presented it in a way [that suggested], 'just think about it.'" The nonviolence of that approach to multicultural education, too, struck Judy.

The teachers attempt to create opportunities for students to recognize the ways in which power and oppression affect their own lives. Lynn says it upset her when her students made unkind remarks about homeless people whom they saw while traveling across town by bus. She tries to teach students that, "you can't always control what you're given." With this in mind, she teaches a lesson that she hopes will help students see privilege in action. The children are asked in teams to build the tallest tower they can. But they don't get the same supplies. When students inevitably complain, she points of the discrepancy of resources. The students must do their best with what they have. It's a powerful unlearning opportunity about any number of inequities. Keith, too, is aware of the labels placed on those with less—or even those who do not do as well in school. Keith sees it as his job to determine what may be acting as a barrier for success. "Does he not get enough sleep? Does he not have a home? Does he not have a bed?" rather than writing a child off as lazy. For Mark, he looks at power and privilege with students through literature. "I think I'm hoping for some kind of realization," a seeing of one's self, whether a child understands that he is being bullied and can stand up for himself, or a child begins to see that she is making someone feel othered and needs to change her own behavior. Mark plans for students to learn about themselves and others in order to increase the level of peace in his classroom. Judy too uses literature to interrupt the status quo. She begins her family unit, for

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example, by asking students what a family is, typically getting rather simple, exclusive kinds of responses. After reading books that truly address all kinds of families, she asks again, celebrating when students have come to see that family is a much broader concept than they first believed. Keith uses *Shiloh,* for example, to begin to discuss poverty with students, "because literature is such a great tool for social change."

From Cara's inclusive unit of study on American Indian cultures, to Mark's interruption of the student's misinformed beliefs about Mexican people, my participants seek to trouble the comfortable perceptions students have in order to shed light on issues of privilege and oppression. As Nancy points out, "It's very disingenuous to say, 'Well, you know [poor people] are that way because they're lazy. Or because they're stupid.'" Instead, she makes clear, often not everyone has the same opportunities. Lynn too directly addresses a desire for students to let go of misperceptions. "I feel like they almost have to feel like they're no longer entitled to the opinions they have first before they start to build information and come back to feel entitled to their opinions." For each of my participants, they hoped students would come to their own conclusions—and truly listened to--as Cara puts it, "everyone's voice" who is part of the story. Rethinking their own perceptions continually, however, on the survey they gave students at the beginning of the media literacy segment about American Indians, they'd initially had a question asking students "who's the bad guy in this situation?" They decided that dichotomy was a false one. There isn't always a "bad guy."

Theme III: Community: "A Support System I Can Rely On"

For every participant in my study, the strength drawn from close colleagues, professional organizations, and/or family members emerged as important. Participants relied on these allies, both for encouragement and for dealing with the difficult in their teaching. As I looked at this community, this network of caring individuals, the ways my participants built community for their students came forth as well—my participants knew that just as they need to feel safe and supported in their work, so do their students. Of course, this sense of community was useful in

my participants' work, but I also came to see that a sense of community could affect the well-being of my participants as well.

Cara's district clearly is not terribly supportive of her work, so she draws support from outside school. Speaking of a professional development (PD) network that is a vital source of research on reading and writing and more, she cites the community as an important aspect of that connection as well. "I think that's my lifeline! I think that's why I stay involved [in the organization]," she continues, "because it doesn't happen in the system that I'm in." Mark too discusses the importance of his partner and some others in his family, friends, and a professional development group of which he is part. "I see that group as a support system for those social issues; that's where I plug in." Pointing out another important element of any strong community, Mark says that while he and his PD colleagues may not always agree, "That's a support system I can rely on." Judy too has some support at school from her principal and a close colleague, and "so far the district's pretty supportive." This support features more important against the backdrop of many other colleagues who call her "granola" and "crunchy" another colleague who tried to make Judy feel naïve for helping a family whose house had burned down. "Well you *know* how that family is," this colleague scolded Judy. Judy quickly adds, though, that many colleagues were very helpful.

So while Judy's commitment to social equity may be in spite of some of her colleagues, Lynn has immense support. She invited her principal into her classroom to model the kind of social equity teaching they wanted to move toward; then the principal sat in, again at Lynn's invitation, to "jump in if I'm drowning" the first time she tried this kind of teaching, though she admits it's "not that different than what I was already doing." Now Lynn is modeling this approach for colleagues in their classrooms. For Nancy, she had not only a principal who "had [her] back" but what she and a few close colleagues referred to as the "older than Shakespeare club"—because they were all older than Shakespeare when he died—from whom she drew support. This group all worked long hours and "really did have the students' best interests at

heart" which Nancy describes as doing what was best for students' learning. "If something else was better than the textbook, we weren't afraid to use that instead." After facing difficulty at different points about his nontraditional style, Keith has been pleased to gain not only the support of most parents in his community, but that of the principal finally as well. Keith also fondly remembers how another teacher, when his students had performed a play of their own, "took that extra step" to make him and his students feel valued by asking that they sign autographs for their class of younger children. Keith notes that his strategy for building a good relationship with parents is "communicate, communicate, communicate."

As noted earlier, Cara feels it important that students have a sense of taking care and making sure everyone feels included. Even for class parties, she helps children who couldn't otherwise be part of things find ways to do so. For one child who couldn't afford decorations, Cara had her go get some fall leaves, so the students was able to be proud of her beautiful decorations. And for Judy, this also means that she not put her students in a difficult position at home, and she insists that her classroom be "a tranquil place where they feel safe to learn and have fun." But Judy, "would never tell [boys] to go home and use the pink crayon because I wouldn't want them to get spanked or something." She works hard to build trust with students' families, many of whom are wary of the school as some are undocumented or worry about being labeled as such. Lynn's class creates their own agreements/rules and does a lot of "empathy work" where they focus on seeing others' points of view. They focus heavily on this early in the year and continue to take thirty minutes every Friday for team building. "They see themselves as friends, so in conversations they're more forgiving." For Nancy "you have to make sure everyone feels included." Contemplating how she builds community, she points out the fact that she has students' seating groups change fairly often so they all work together, and after a moment of thought she adds that writing together and sharing that writing was likely a major factor as well. "You can take care of a lot of the social equity problems if you create community." Or, as Mark puts it, if you've built that community, the learning will come." Conversely, my

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participants make clear, when students actively learn together, the community is strengthened. As Lynn says, through shared experience, "they feel like they've grown together."

<p style="text-align:center">Theme IV: Teaching as a Subversive Act: "What I Can Get Away With"</p>

In their classic work, Postman and Weingartner (1969) look at the ways teaching can be an act of subversion. When my participants talk about ways they go "off-script" in their teaching, they do so in order to interrupt the status quo. Lynn laughs as she talks about how she feels safer when she can refer students to materials purchased by the school like something from the library media center. Keith too says, "The textbook is a safety net." Nancy reminds me that the "older than Shakespeare club" was comfortable moving away from the textbook, implying their collective confidence but also their safety in numbers. And my participants cite their worries about the quality of the textbook. Keith and Lynn don't believe a textbook provides students with enough material of interest that they begin to think critically. Cara and Judy both point out the inaccuracy of the texts. As Loewen (1995) would remind us, heroification and obfuscation abound in textbooks. But Lynn admits abandoning the text was "a little scary." She says that the connections students made and the level of engagement proved that "it's worth it." The underlying assumption that the textbook prevents controversy is one I'm not sure I'm convinced of, but these participants certainly feel it is safer. As Lynn emphasizes that the *students* come up with the discussions as she walks herself through a potential concern from a parent, which they have not yet had, I'm left wondering what would be wrong with the teacher having come up with a discussion topic. And to Lynn's credit, teaching off-script isn't always without consequences, when meeting a new colleague, Nancy tells me that he blurted, "Ah the infamous third floor." She continues, "He'd been warned about us" by the superintendent. This is the same superintendent who would later move her to the elementary school without any input from her, something Nancy feels was likely a form of punishment for her vocal opposition to his affinity for sports over academics.

Judy creates spaces that open up possibilities, while asserting "*I didn't* teach about Judaism, my Jewish student did." She admits she would teach the same way if she were somewhere less diverse, but she would have to seek more external resources. Respecting individual needs, Judy encouraged an Islamic student to share if she desired and offered the same to the mother. The mother didn't mind the girl sharing, but—Judy suspects because of post-9/11 worries—she did not want others outside the classroom to know, so Judy respected their desire for discretion while still allowing the girl to teach the class about her faith. Judy describes herself as "not too radical." Judy and Lynn both directly talk about "what I can get away with." And Keith says, "that's an unsafe place to be," when he mentions creating and/or gathering his own teaching materials, rather than following the textbook. While Keith practically always dwells in this "unsafe" space, he is acutely aware of the fact that it makes him more susceptible for critique and historically less apt to be supported in his district. Mark makes sure to declare, "I don't usually go too far," and Nancy says, when even offering a gay student a book that dealt with sexuality, "I didn't promote it." Indeed she didn't, but the fact that she was compelled to assert this reveals a worry that others would believe she was "promoting" GLBTQ ways of being, which she later acknowledged. Simply by listening to his worries, having the book in the first place, and/or actively supporting students in their day of silence, Nancy knew she was putting herself at risk. She told them anything they needed to communicate, they could write down for her. Nancy issues a call toward a much great political involvement for teachers in general: "Teachers need to get involved. We need to march in the streets. We need to speak up." She is also the only teacher in my study who is no longer in a P-12 setting. While Cara has been very vocal about her concerns in her district as well, she does this increasingly in ways that are forms of quiet resistance. She has said her peace at the board, but now she resists by refusing to take part in surveys, as she doesn't expect they'll be utilized except as a prop to accomplish the superintendent's objectives. She declines research projects for the district, even if they appeal to her. "I will not poke holes in sinking ships, but I'm not throwing out life vests either," she vents.

Mark says one thing he does is to "rock the boat *a little bit* [emphasis added]." Another act of resistance on Mark's part is ignoring district mandates to which he objects "and hope I don't get caught." Cara tells her students, too, in regard to testing, "This is like when you learned to walk. Nobody asks now how many steps you took at 12 months. You're going to learn to walk, and this isn't going to matter." She does her best to prepare students, but she wants them to know that it's not a label they have to wear if for some reason they don't do well. Ladson-Billings (2007) highlights the danger of labels such as "at risk" for children. Ladson-Billings taught a class once about diversity and began by telling students they were "at risk." After a while of telling students how tough the class would be for them, a young man finally spoke up. "You've been 'at risk' for all of ten minutes and already you are pissed off… How can we expect these babies to proudly wear this label for the next thirteen years?" How indeed.

Theme V: The Magnetic Attractions--and Repulsions--of Personal Identity

When I began this project, I expected my participants to feel pulled toward issues that mattered greatly to them. What didn't occur to me was that, in some cases, participants would be repelled by those issues that were important pieces of their personal identities. Still, personal identity is not fixed, nor are our responses to our own perceived identities. Judith Butler (as quoted in Miller, 2005) notes,

> When we ask another for recognition for ourselves, we are not asking for that other to see us as we are, as we have always been, as we were prior to the encounter. Rather, in the asking, we are already becoming something new, since we are avowing a connection with the other, a need and desire for acknowledgment by the other, without which we could not be. This means that recognition does not freeze us in our place, our position, our various locations, but rather compels us to move beyond what we have been and to encounter a new possibility for collective exchange. (p. 9)

My participants' stories, however, do not "freeze" them. They are dynamic and changing, and so am I as I weave together these narratives. Our work will always be unfinished—teachers and

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their curricula will always be in the process of evolution. For this theme, I will give each participant's section its own name and discuss each participant separately. Because this theme was so very autobiographical—and came across most powerfully for every single participant—I feel the way this theme did emerge for each participant needs a significant segment of his or her narrative to make the case for how s/he felt pulled toward or pushed away from particular aspects of personal identity in his/her teaching.

<div align="center">Cara: "Just Always Feeling That Difference"</div>

Cara grew up Roman Catholic "in a very Protestant place." She recalls being out of school on Holy Days and having a police officer stop her friends and her and accuse them of skipping school. "What's that?" he asked when they offered a Holy Day as an explanation. He didn't really quite believe them when they explained why they were playing instead of at school. "So I just always remember [pause] feeling that difference, you know, being different." Cara also discusses in detail her perception of Native Americans in her community. "My dad would always watch football and cowboy and Indian shows, the John Wayne, or the pow pow [shooting sounds], but we would always go to pow wows in [town]." Cara notes feeling dissonance about the imagine that was portrayed on TV of the American Indian: "woo woo woo and all that, was not my image as a kid because I was taken to the pow wows." Instead, she says, "I always thought of them as very spiritual. But then also that conflict that, growing up everyone said they were the drunks that lived on *that* side of town. So there's this whole mixture of feelings or attitudes that you know, growing up."

Cara began to notice, though she couldn't yet name them, these intersections of power around patriarchy as described by Johnson (2005) in his work *The Gender Knot.* Sunday afternoon television was filled with football, a display of male aggression, then depictions "cowboys and Indians" where the white man was surely the hero, often saving the damsel in distress from the "savage" other. These media exposures coupled with the stereotype in town of the American Indians of that moment as the town drunks would be strong messages. Yet Cara

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did feel a dissonance, having had some further education about American Indians (albeit informal) through the pow wow ceremonies, she began to suspect that her earlier learning was inaccurate. I wonder, in part, if the fact that Catholics are often perceived as "drunks" may have also led Cara to question the same assumption about Native Americans—at least that was the stereotype in my own upbringing as a Catholic in a predominantly Protestant community.

Cara was able to make a significant connection to something positive as well. "Going to pow wows always every August," and being raised Catholic, "the incense, the bells, all that kind of thing, is very spiritual to me. And that culture of tradition, holds something spiritual to me." When she went to the pow pow then, "the drums going, just the sounds…'cause I didn't recognize it, the sounds they make, the dances that they do, it's like that same experience of a church experience to me."

The Oklahoma Land Run of 1889 is an historic event during which land in present day Oklahoma that had been promised to Native Americans of that time was divided into 160 acre plots on which settlers could race to stake a claim to land s/he wished to own. While Cara didn't teach about this when she taught second grade, she had a parent come to her and let her know that her child would not participate. She shared they wouldn't be doing it that year, "But I just had that piece in my head." Many years later, when she would be taking a group of students to a one-room historical school house nearby, a child decided not to go, but at first he claimed he had forgotten his permission slip. She suspected it could be something that his family and he didn't feel was a positive representation of history, and she sat down with him and very gently said, "If you don't go because it's not part of your culture, you can say that to me."

"It's not part of my culture," the boy stated, seeming more relaxed.

"Thank you," she said. It was important to her to have that mutual trust. That said, it troubled her that he and his family did not feel included. In future years when teaching Oklahoma history, she decided, she would study American Indian contributions before taking that trip, but she also wanted to consider ways she could make each piece of that unit more inclusive.

She didn't want any child to feel excluded. She also began a conversation with her students about how Native Americans in that period may have felt at that time. "What would you do if you were in that position now?" She asked them. That year, she and her students reshaped that unit significantly. While they did hold the Land Run, many students (Native American students and some white students as well) created protest signs and protested while the Land Run was underway. In following years, this continued and was added to as well. In addition to studying Native American tribes prior to their European encounters as well as during that era, Cara worked with her school Library Media Specialist to create a critical media literacy (Schwarz, 2005) unit on current and historical representations of Native Americans. With her students, Cara was calling into question to very same stereotypical depictions with which she had grown up. They looked at films, artifacts, mascots, and more -- and the *students* would determine which representations were positive or not and why. She and her students together challenged stereotypes.

Nancy: "Set Apart"

"I think I would have liked to have had a normal childhood." A grin spreads wide across Nancy's face as she continues. And she tilts her head back a bit looking at nothing in particular, wistfully getting lost in this imagined childhood.

> In fact, I've written a story about this, about my daydream being that I had a mother who wore slacks and smoked cigarettes. And my father went to work in the morning and came home at night and they had friends visit weekends, you know.

> Shielded from the fact that her family was poor, Nancy says that being ill as a young child presented a lot of difficulty for her. She had lengthy stints out of school with her sickness. When she was in school though, she notes, "My dad would come and drag me out of class to sing on the radio." She enjoyed this as a young child, and her minister father must have been very proud of her singing.

But I felt set apart because of my family's beliefs. Little things, little things they did that set me apart. Okay, I was not allowed to say "gee" or "golly"; that was considered, uh, bad language… And we were singing, "Gosh oh gee how happy I would be." Okay, think about this as a first grader. And I thought "Everybody else can say it, so they must either all be bad or there's something wrong with this [chuckles]." And I would ask questions like, "Dad if God says 'Thou shalt not kill,' why does he always go with the Israelites into battle?'" [Laughs heartily.] You know so, but, social equity is not always just about socioeconomics.

There were a number of other ways Nancy felt set apart as a child. She ran track in a dress; "I think that scarred me for life [laughing]." Not being allowed to wear shorts, she simply wasn't allowed to play basketball. "I grew up with a socially conservative family, and I'm not. And I don't think I was then, but it was--because it affects a first grader when they have to be different from everybody else." She was not allowed to attend music classes on the days her class learned folk dancing. "I wasn't allowed to dance, I wasn't allowed; I wasn't allowed to do any of the things that would have allowed me to--. So, I think maybe that's why I connect with the students who are not part of the social crowd."

As Nancy tells me, "I obeyed my parents edicts until I left home, but then I *left home*," it comes as no surprise that she prefers to give her students information with which to make their own decisions, rather than overtly telling them how to behave or what to think.

I went to my mother's alma mater. My mother was an ordained minister, so I went to [the same college]. One of my roommates was another preacher's daughter from Georgia, and we both got kicked out of school. We got a letter that says, "Please find another fine Christian institution to attend [heartily laughing]."… I'll never forget that. The fact is we didn't do anything bad; we just didn't toe the line. I remember one time we slipped into one of the classroom buildings during night classes and turned the lights off." [I can't help but interject: "Scandalous!" as we giggle about her mayhem before she

continues.] "Yeah it wasn't anything bad but they just didn't know what to do with us. And of course her father blamed me and my father blamed her…And my father never told my mother. My mother never knew because they let me finish the semester.

It's clear that after all these years, Nancy is grateful to her father that he never told her mother this. She did go on to another institution from there, though she wouldn't finish school until later. Nancy was also very quick to emphasize how very supportive both of her parents always were of her education, even as she revealed her frustration in growing up in the way she did.

Once again, I think every teacher brings her own past to it. And my past tells me that a lot of kids don't get the opportunity they deserve. And that social justice is all about ensuring they have the opportunity. Now what they do with it is up to them. But they have to have the opportunity and the education to make that choice. And you know if they don't have the choice, then they don't have the opportunity, and we don't have equal rights.

Nancy knows this first hand. She nearly shouts, "I should have gone to Juilliard!" in one of the few flashes of anger I see throughout her interviews. Quickly following with, "I'm glad I didn't now," and explaining that she has led a good life, Nancy still seems to feel a twinge of the pain of having realized there were opportunities she simply didn't have as a young person. Nancy didn't know Juilliard existed in high school, much less how she might pursue her singing there, had she even known about it. "So I look at those kids who are set apart and try to give them social support. This sounds very self-serving [heavy sigh]." Nancy seems embarrassed at this moment, though I assure her I selected her to learn about her decision making as a teacher committed to social equity work. I have sought her out, yet she seems compelled now to share something she views as negative about herself as a teacher.

I have also found that I am much more patient with kids that have problems than I am with – and this is gonna be very revealing too. If you've got a little girl who's got straight A's, she's pretty, she's a member of the basketball court and football court, you

know she's always had everything, and she acts up – and it's, *it's a flaw*--I'm much less patient or understanding. And the fact is she's got her problems too. You know, I'm thinking of one student in particular. I have to wonder what her, her problem was. She looked like a supermodel, she lived in the biggest house in town, good student, smart, creative, and every day she would stand outside my classroom until the bell rang and then she'd walk in and go, "Oh, am I late?"

She laments, "And I was not very nice about it. And I should have tried…to figure out what was going on with her just like I would have for one of the kids whose problems were obvious." After a quiet moment, Nancy adds, "Every teacher brings her past to the classroom." While Nancy is pulled to help most of her students who are "set apart," in looking back, she is also aware of a bias here.

We move on to other terrain, and Nancy mentions that she is very active politically outside of school, though throughout her career she has avoided even putting a bumper sticker on her car to avoid sharing that with students, even inadvertently. While noting that there had been "a lot of strides" in civil rights, Nancy believes we are reverting. "And part of that is the whole attack on public education. Uh, I think public school teachers are going to have to get political. Now, you know, I tried very hard to keep politics out of my classroom, but it doesn't work." Nancy doesn't seek to support a particular political party as educators. Instead, she calls upon her fellow educators to enter into what Howard (2006) calls "a new politics of engagement" (p. 135). She adds, "Kids are not stupid." While she never shared her views directly, she felt confident her students would not have to guess at her more general political views, "because we are the politics that we believe in."

Keith: "You Don't Treat People Like That!"

Keith is forthcoming about growing up immersed in the "n" word. But what he chose to hang onto, as he grew up, wasn't that at all. Instead, Keith held tightly to a time when his father did something that was actively anti-racist, repeating the story of his father's phone call about

Jerry playing baseball many years later to his students. "You just don't treat people that way!" This carries not only into what Keith teaches, but how as well. "For me, going back to Dad, I'm gonna stand up for these kids who're just as smart, but they have different ways to tell me," he notes about children who are stereotyped as lazy or stupid before they get to his classroom. Keith works hard to make sure that kids are able to both learn and to demonstrate that learning in a number of ways.

Quick to note that his transformation wasn't one that occurred overnight, Keith recalls being asked to take a class from an Eastern perspective. He reluctantly selected Eastern Psychology, thinking, "I remember being frustrated; I don't want to learn that…It was my very traditional, conservative background, so I go 'Oh those crazy liberals; I'm just gonna stand firm in this class and not let them change my beliefs.'" Later, however, "About a quarter of the way through the course, I was like, 'Oh wait; there's something here.'"

And Keith obviously does think there is "something here" in seeking multiple perspectives. He does so at the peril of being called a "flaming liberal," though now that Keith has been teaching in the same community for several years, he can also say now that several families come to him and thanked him for "making my child like school" for the first time in some cases and helping kids be successful where others had written them off. One father, who hadn't been terribly involved in his son's schooling, after working with Keith on a formal assessment to determine his son's strengths to support his learning, told the boy's mother (who told Keith) "If [Keith]'s willing to put that much time into this, I am gonna step up too."

Certainly it is a space of privilege for Keith to be able claim his own conservatism as a means of defending his practice that is viewed as "liberal." I would have no such defense at this point in my life, though I did grow up with rather conservative views, I am no longer "conservative" for the most part. Further, I have to admit that I am frustrated by the sentiment across our state that one should be "conservative"--and a straight white female Christian--in order to be a good teacher of elementary aged children. Never one to drink copious amounts of alcohol

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or behave otherwise irresponsibly, I was irritated by the fact that my principal in my first week at a rural school brought me and two other young new faculty members into his office and warned us that we shouldn't "have a drink within 70 miles of [town]" because it would be viewed as scandalous. I am, if I'm being honest, angered by the narrow constrictions placed on teachers to fit into a certain kind of mold. O'Reilley (1993) calls this the "ruthless behaviorism of professional life" (p. 113) for teachers, though I would argue that it is not a way of being expected of professionals, per se—this kind of impossible scrutiny is reserved *solely* for teachers. Not even most clergy are cautioned against having one drink in public, perhaps except in those cases where their own faith's doctrine declares this immoral. I must admit that the environment in which Keith teaches is not a terribly supportive one, so it should not come as a surprise that he feels a stronger need to fit more closely within the mold even as he continues to try to reshape it with his students.

Martin (2010) wrote that, for her participants, they did not always act as "border crossers" (p. 1). Perhaps for Keith, this is one arena in which he feels he must stay within the lines to "work within and beyond the constraints of [his] chosen profession" (p. 244). I worry, though, that such a "defense" may reinforce the perception that it is only safe for students to discuss important topics in the presence of a teacher who believes as they do. Already it is believed by some that social equity education has an inherent "liberal bias" (Applebaum, 2009). Could such declarations of conservatism reinforce this? And then I must ask myself if, when I declare my own Christianity in political conversations outside of my work—I avoid talking about my own faith with my students--to make the point that social equity education isn't anti-Christian, am I inadvertently making it all the more difficult for an Islamic, or Jewish, or atheist colleague to do the same important work? It occurs to me that in using my own Christianity in my interruptions to the anti-Christian narrative, I am at best aiding the proverbial witch hunt, making those who cannot make such claims all the more conspicuous.

Lynn: Busting the "Myth of Meritocracy" and "Risking Exposure"

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When each year begins and the school distributes the free/reduced lunch forms, Lynn and her colleagues often hear, "Oh we don't fill those out," with the implication (and sometimes overt statement) being, "No one *here* needs that," though indeed around one in four do. While Lynn points out that her "parents didn't make those kinds of value statements" about social class that reinforce what Bowles and Gintis (1976) call the "myth of meritocracy" (p. 9), the attitude was prevalent in her own more privileged suburban school as a child.

> I know that welfare would never have come up when I was at school in town near that in high school. That topic never would have been allowed by the teacher I had. Who was very, very much believed that people [pause] *made* the life they had. And that it was kind of like if you, in America if you work hard, you can take care of your family and whatever, and if you're poor you deserve it because they haven't worked hard in their life. And was very open about those beliefs in class…That made any of us who felt differently a little hesitant to express our opinion because this is the man who was grading your essay and that isn't as objective as math….we had a fear of expressing anything different.

While clearly this teacher was oppressive of students, one girl did speak out in her writing only. He would call her out, saying "And I know Sheila disagrees with me, but…" While Lynn neither said nor wrote anything to challenge this teacher, she was very struck by the bravery of her classmate, who quietly interrupted the teacher's seemingly singular power. While according to Foucault (1977/1995) schools can be spaces that perpetuate existing systems of power, Cary (2006) reminds us that we should not lose sight of the suggestion embedded in Foucault's work that "spaces are negotiated and power is fluid" (p. 9). This student, even in quietly writing against this teacher's views, interrupted his power.

Politics isn't the only area where there was a clear dominant view in Lynn's school. Lynn recalls being part of the Christian privilege (Blumenfeld, 2009) that pervaded her school as a child. Beginning to have her doubts about her own Christianity, Lynn says she

"overcompensated" by starting a Bible study at lunch and feeling compelled to encourage her peers to attend. "*I haven't seen you in a while at Bible study* [mocking her former self in a sing songy voice]," she'd remind them. "If I could convince other people that it was true, that I really did believe it…then I was okay too." She quickly adds, "It's kind of horrible trying to convince people of what I really didn't believe myself, but I don't think I knew that's what I was doing at the time…I'm sure I thought I was helping people—at the time [grinning sheepishly]."

Perhaps this is why later when I ask if there are any topics she avoids, Lynn notes that she is glad her fifth grade curriculum doesn't include much on religion and politics.

So I think the fact that I don't have to cover those two is why I feel comfortable doing this. Should it be something where the discussion might lead that way I'd probably stop them much faster. Because I do want to try to keep my opinion out.

It's worthy of note that Lynn is not speaking of claiming a point of view as her own—rather she is meaning she would want to have her own perspective avoided altogether as a topic in the discussion. She goes on, saying that if she were to need to teach a unit on religion she would "spend weeks and weeks planning that discussion."

I wonder how many of Lynn's student may be "non-god theistic" or "unsure-theistic," as she described herself. Is she perhaps falsely assuming that all her students are of a certain perspective because it is such a pervasive point of view in this region? I can't help but recall a sixth grade student of mine many years ago whose family didn't believe in a god or attend church. A group of her friends (basically all of her friends) had begun a Bible Club. They said she couldn't join, and that was okay with her—it wasn't her thing, and she knew that (which I found quite mature of her). But she began to feel left out when her friends were spending all their recess time in Bible Club. Still she said nothing, taking a book to recess every day I would later learn. But then Bible Club became aggressive, and it was only then that she came to me with her concerns. "They tell me I'm going to hell, and even though I know that's not true, that really hurts." I hurt for her, having been told that myself a number of times in both overt ways and

more subtle but no less clear ways as one of the few Catholic kids in our largely Protestant town growing up. And at the same time I was very proud of her. She respected her friends' way of being, but she only came to me when her peers overtly attacked her, actively made her feel "less than" though she was already being consistently excluded. We had a good conversation, in large part because of the positive, respectful tone this child set with her peers, I believe—it was becoming clear this wasn't likely the first time she'd had to be an apologist for her belief system that didn't include a god. And to be fair, her friends did seem to see the error in their cruelty; I'm sure they were doing what they had been taught to do, what they believed to be the "right" thing…I wonder how many Candaces have been in Lynn's class who do not feel safe expressing their own religious ideas. I find this mutual silencing highly problematic. Certainly Lynn should not say, "I believe…" but I would like to think one could say, "Humanists believe…" or "Atheists believe…" And I am certain she would discuss it if it weren't for one major problem…In Lynn's words, "A teacher is certainly going to feel more comfortable if they don't feel like they're risking exposing themselves."

I put myself back in that hallway conversation with my Bible Club girls and my atheist student, and I wonder if I'd have been too fearful to lead the girls to decide to revise the way Bible Club members approached their peers and encourage them to be careful to include their friends who aren't in Bible Club at recess too. How many days had Candace sat alone before she spoke up? I wonder. In the moment as Lynn was telling me she thought it would be good for students to learn to respect this point of view as well, I vacillated between memories of the Bible Club and a much more recent incident a high school teacher friend told me about. His student kept insisting that, "Atheists worship the devil." And he would explain that atheists do not believe the devil exists, and could not therefore worship a devil. This certainly illustrated just how misinformed students can be on these matters. As Lynn talked about feeling worried about being exposed, I wondered if I would be bold enough to talk about something so potentially dangerous for myself as a teacher in that environment, and I was all the more convinced it was essential for

us as educators to do so. I had to recognize that when I talk about Christian privilege in schools, I do it from a privileged space. If I were pressed in a setting away from my students, in the back of my mind I know I could say, "I am not anti-Christian; I am Christian," but what could Lynn say? More importantly, why should any of us have to claim insider status of any group to be able to critique its privilege?

I conclude that segment of the interview by asking Lynn if there are any other areas (besides her age, religion, and politics) about which she is uncomfortable at school. Returning to her very relaxed demeanor, Lynn quickly responds that while her students are pretty curious about her family, she is pretty open about that aspect of her life. "Because, you know, I'll run into them somewhere with my kid and my husband."

Mark: The Hetero-Normative "Here": "That's a Very Touchy Subject"

Mark says that growing up he happened to have a black best friend, "which I'm sure confused my grandparents a little bit, but you know I just did." He assures me, "I'm not saying, 'Wow I'm different because I had a black best friend or because I'm gay; I'm not trying to say that…must have taken some classes [in college] that taught me more about diversity." Mark recalls being unaware of some of his own privilege as a white man. Then in graduate school he sought out classes that would allow him to pursue this interest. Mark didn't have to worry about seeming a braggart about his social equity teaching, however. He shared with me, "I almost didn't do this [research study]; I wasn't sure I'd have anything to say." But he didn't have to worry about that. In response to my inquiry, Mark could easily recount teaching about race, class, religion, gender, and more. While Mark is a strong advocate for his GLBTQ (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, or questioning) students—and now himself and his GLBTQ colleagues—he seldom addresses this, even indirectly, in his teaching aside from dealing with related instances of bullying. "I think always it's risky when you get into sexuality issues in Oklahoma more than anything else." Mark goes on to express worry over moments that spontaneously arise anytime one works with children in particular. "Kids ask questions."

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Deflecting such inquiries, he always tells the little girls "Are you asking me [to marry you]? I'm too old for you." After noting that one should keep his/her personal life personal, Mark adds, "I keep mine more private than other people. Obviously that's something I don't feel comfortable sharing with children. On the whole I don't feel comfortable." When Mark reads a book that reiterates that it's alright to be different, he say, "I would never talk about the parents in the way that he probably intended it to be, um, because it seems like that's a very touchy subject in Oklahoma--especially here."

Not surprisingly, perhaps, when asked if he ever felt out on limb in his teaching, Mark recounted the story of having read a biography of Tchaikovsky to his fifth graders. "The book talks about that he was homosexual, and it scared the be-Jesus out of me…There was no backlash, there was nothin' happen. But it scared me enough to not do it again [for a time]." Mark describes his emotions in the moment he was reading the books as one of panic.

You know when you get that panic feeling or, uh. Just a little feeling of scared…panicky feeling. What I tell myself is to just read through it without sounding [worried]…and when you do that obviously [children] don't [react]. It's when you make a big deal out of it it's when it becomes a big deal. But I think the feeling was, "Oh no, I'm gonna get in trouble." I'm afraid that something's gonna happen.

I asked if he'd returned to the book, and Mark tells me, "I've read it more than once but it's been quite a while." He quit studying biographies for a time, and then he changed grade levels. He shares, though, "I remember one year reading that part and one year skipping the whole sentence, and there was no--I guess it's just 'cause I didn't know if I should read it. But I think I'm a different teacher now than I was 15 years ago." Now though, Mark is firm, "I would still do it; I would do it just like it says now. 'Cause I would, I guess I don't think you should shy away from anything. It's just part of history."

So while Mark struggled with reading the Tchaikovsky text, he asserts that he would again read it now. He does sometimes frames the *It's Okay…* book differently than he believes it

is intended for his second graders still, and I am reminded of just how not, "okay," some view being a gay man who teaches elementary school. Skvarla (2009) notes that, "Many teachers…are themselves marginalized—relegated to teach in a glass closet" (p. 191). Mark is an out gay man in most aspects of his life, no longer trying to hide his relationship with his partner of about a decade outside of school, but as the reader heard above, Mark deflects students' questions about his personal life with humor, whereas straight teachers are able to answer those questions without a moment's thought. Mark quickly adds that it helped that at a previous school site, the principal made a point to make sure he knew that his partner would be welcome for faculty gatherings and the like, but it is important to remember that heterosexual teachers never have to wonder about such things in the first place.

I can't help but recall the ease with which Lynn shifted to talking about her family and her students' questions about her family—or for that matter the ease with which I have always been able to discuss such matters as a heterosexual woman. I recall a moment when my own privilege became much more apparent when I was visiting with a friend and colleague whose son is gay, and she began talking about "the little things" that are not so little at all…whether he should wear a ring, whether to have a photo on his desk of his partner. I am reminded that Tutu (1999) notes that it was often the smaller things that made the every day in the system of apartheid so unbearable. "You died many times…because you felt so dehumanized, so humiliated, so diminished" (p. 102). I imagine that certainly violence (threats of which not being something to which gay men in Oklahoma are strangers—and acts thereof particularly toward gay youth being relatively common in my experience) is frightening, but the continual reminders that one is considered "other" and inferior must certainly make for a very emotionally painful existence at times. Mark though, is eager to point out that "It's not like it's me against the world." He notes his appreciation for a few close colleagues in and out of school from whom he draws support, particularly in one instance recently when a couple of students used an epithet toward him in class.

I believe Mark does feel an added layer of responsibility around the issue of sexual identity, however; "I mean if it came to, I mean obviously we have bullying policies [though Mark is often the teacher to note concerns when they arise as seen in his narrative in chapter four]—But if it came to any kind of gender or sex issue…then I would be the first one to raise a red flag and say something." Recently Mark's district tried to change the bereavement policy to include anyone the employee considered family; however,

> The board said no. It has to be specifically *these* people and you have to actually prove
> it….And so that's something that I took to the superintendent and talked to him. And
> said, you know, this isn't really fair and talked to him [paused, shrugging to indicate he
> had not made any progress]. You know, I voiced my concern.

For Mark, then, he is pulled toward this issue outside of class as a matter of fairness, yet he worries a great deal about it coming up in class, instead focusing on other issues of social equity and taking a more general, indirect approach here that is anti-bullying. "As early as I can remember that has been my rallying cry. When people are mean to each other, it just hits me."

Judy: Beyond Tolerance: "Let's Talk About It and Celebrate It!"

As Judy's realist tale illustrated, there was little talk of diversity in her school as child. Her classroom is quite the opposite of that, however. Judy wholeheartedly believes that diversity should not only be tolerated, but celebrated. Judy says that in the suburban high school she attended, not only was there silence around race, but children were also quite segregated. "Obviously people hang out with each other based on their [extracurricular] activities, but there was another kind of separation." Judy describes her discomfort with this phenomenon, declaring that she noticed that often interracial friendships, even some of her own, from middle school were quietly severed at the start of high school. "I remember looking around the cafeteria and thinking, 'how did that happen?'" Then she moved to New York for college where "it was so not like that." Certainly attending university is a time for students to get to know all kinds of people, a moment in what Anderson (2004) calls a "cosmopolitan canopy" (p. 14). But Judy's experience

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was even more profound, going to a much larger, more diverse city for her university experience. And in a theater program, one is required to let down one's guard and be vulnerable. Anderson (2004) notes, "As people become intimate through such shared experiences, certain barriers are bound to be broken" (p. 17).

It wasn't long before Judy had sought out graduate work, and in a course she had where she explored diversity, Judy says that the study of nonviolence resonated strongly for her. Fascinated by "how that ties in with social problems…And how do we approach these problems in a nonviolent way?" Judy is frustrated by the violence with which others respond to her at times. Both she and her boyfriend are vegan, and she says when people discover these they are often immediately enraged. In a very deep, mocking voice, Judy bellows, "How can you not eat meat?!" She is always surprised when people get so angry, and this is not uncommon. She wonders if they assume she is judging them. "I would never try to change people's beliefs. I think it's wrong to push your beliefs on others." While being vegan is certainly a choice, Judy seems to view this as part of her spiritual identity.

Judy admits she was also somewhat disappointed in her diversity class when she found that "a lot of people got really defensive when we talked about gay and lesbian [issues]." She says, "I thought that if you're gonna take this class, I would expect people to be open-minded." Exhibiting a somewhat stereotypical view herself here, she adds, "I expected all the guys to be gay. I was expecting New York all over again." This implies that Judy expected that few straight men would be interested in a multicultural education course. Herein we also have the implication that New York, in general, is free of prejudice. While I have not had an opportunity to visit, I am sure there are some in New York who are not open-minded. Finally, it's certainly possible for a teacher to be actively anti-racist, for example, but still be very much homophobic. Open-mindedness is likely a more blurry map than a starkly marked geography. Perhaps most difficultly in the areas where one is most passionate, we must avoid what Eppert (2008) calls a "*this us* not *that other*" (p. 80, emphasis original) separation of groups, even based on such

closely held perspectives. Tutu (1999) reminds us that while it is important to bear in mind that every human being is indeed capable of violence, we must also hold in focus that every human being is capable of being actively nonviolent, of seeking peace.

Judy did develop a more nuanced view of her classmates over the course of the semester, however. She points out at least one peer who felt the same about GLBTQ issues as she, though that woman was less vocal than Judy. Judy attributes her vocal nature to her personality. "I'm a big talker…I'll say it even if I'll get backlash. I do it anyway." Having taken a gay and lesbian history course as an undergraduate and learning so much about the struggles for civil rights of the GLBTQ community, she declares, "I'm so adamant…I have so many friends that are like family to me that I can't—I can't not defend them."

Also in this class, Judy wrote her final paper on how angry she was by what was omitted from her own P-12 schooling. "So many things were left out on purpose. On purpose." Having barely heard of the Tulsa Race Riot as a student, Judy was shocked to learn just how immensely violent an attack on the African American community of Tulsa it was. "And I grew up in Oklahoma!"

Judy recalls, "I didn't know much about culture. And I remember a lot of the female roles and a lot of the books we read were so one-dimensional. White. Girl/boy. Mom/dad." And the older she got, the more Judy had become frustrated. "Even about--we didn't have sex education until we were eighteen. I remember sitting there and them going 'abstinence, abstinence, abstinence.'" A friend of Judy's asked "what if you're sexually active?" In this all girl setting, the nurse asked how many of them were sexually active and more than half the students raised their hands. Visibly remorseful of the abstinence-only climate, the nurse said, "I'm sorry; I can only tell you not to have sex." But the nurse quickly began handing students her card, saying they could contact her another time if they wanted to visit further. Judy feels that the sexually active students were told "you don't matter." For Judy, this is the clear result of a fundamentalist Christian morality being imposed on students.

Judy feels it essential to teach children about religion as well, perhaps in large part because she felt very othered at school as she began to form her own religious views as a young person. Judy is careful not to promote or denigrate any religious group; she attempts to teach *about* them all respectfully. "I guess you could say I'm agnostic, probably a little more on the atheist side." Judy is vegan, very against animal cruelty. She practices yoga and claims to be very spiritual. Judy sighs at how cliché a phrase that is, but she says she is spiritual all the same. "A lot of my decision making is based on my own personal beliefs but not in a religious way or not pressing my beliefs on others." Growing more animated, her eyes getting wider with excitement and speaking more quickly, Judy continues,

> I truly believe in celebrating, not just tolerating, but celebrating…To *celebrate* it—really important word—is to look at [difference] positively and talk about it. Let's talk about it and celebrate it and put it out there. It exists. Let's make it a good thing and be okay with it and move on. I think when it comes to multicultural diversity and social equity, that's my stance and that's how I—that's the kind of background I portray [on] *everything* in my classroom. There's nothing that would make me not do that.

Judy remembers doing a book study on Howard's (2006) *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know*. In the text, the author details three stages educators might go through as the work toward increasingly becoming a teacher who works toward equity. The third stage is called a "transformationist pedagogy" (Howard, 2006, p. 117). With pride, in considering the descriptions presented of such a pedagogue, Judy beams, almost with a hint of surprise at herself, "I am; I truly am!" Perhaps part of her surprise, too, is that she believed more teachers would heartily pursue this kind of work with their students. It was a difficult realization to find that she is somewhat exceptional in her celebration, rather than tolerance of or silence toward, difference.

Strings Attached

None of my participants, nor myself, exist in a vacuum. I suspected we would pursue topics of great personal importance, but I was initially surprised by the need some participants felt to avoid certain matters close to one's identity, which I believe is revelatory of my own privilege. As a white, middle class Christian, heterosexual female there is little I have to fear. And again, working in a university setting where diversity is openly valued and sought, I have a great deal of privilege. My participants work in far "riskier" environments in many ways than I. Still, my participants are often daring in their approaches to decision making around social equity education. About every topic I could list as part of social equity arose. Notably, many issues for which a participant might say students were too young to learn about, another participant who works with younger children might be teaching about. Similarly, one participant might mention the difficulty of a given topic in Oklahoma, while a teacher just down the road is learning about that very issue alongside students. Something critical that springs to mind, then, is that we need to do a much better job of sharing our decision making with one another. In Chapter Six I will take a closer look at the implications for teachers and teacher educators and summarize my overall findings.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS: STEPPING BACK FOR ANOTHER VIEW OF THE WEB

I set out, alongside my participants, to examine teachers' decision making around social equity issues in their teaching. I wanted to look at how participants describe their decision making when faced with opportunities to foster, exclude, or silence social equity issues in their pedagogy, planned and unplanned. The first thing I discovered is that it does not much matter whether a topic of study is planned or unplanned. Whether they resulted from a field of study, something the students spun as a result of a unit of study, or an entirely new thread, my participants noted that their best moments in teaching social equity were relational. Participants described moments of connectedness, both with one another and, as Slattery (2006) might note, with past and future selves. These were moments when students entered what Wang (2004) describes as a third space where they could dialogue across and through difference without erasing or diminishing those differences, moments to un/learn (Wang & Olson, 2009) in order to be transformed.

During our interviews, I watched as my participants quickly answered some questions, while others were much more difficult to answer. Certainly it's not unusual that some questions are more difficult to respond to than others. But there were decision making matters that were, as I might have expected, obscured from the participants themselves without their carefully allowing light to dance on the threads of the web. I could see, for example, Judy talking herself

into the idea of teaching the same way she does in her urban setting were she in a suburban setting. Despite warnings from friends who teach in suburban schools who had flatly told her "you can't" teach that way here, she talked herself through how she would begin and by the end of responding to my question, I could see she genuinely had decided that she would maintain a strong focus on social equity "*no matter where* [she] taught." The danger of this invisibility might be that those "in the moment" decisions in particular would be more difficult to make in keeping with one's core beliefs potentially. And again, whether planned or unplanned areas of study, there are always "in the moment" decisions to be made.

In answering my question of how participants make decisions when faced with opportunities to foster, exclude, or silence social equity issues in their pedagogy, I was not very surprised to find that while participants were drawn to issues tied to their personal identity. however, I was surprised to learn the ways in which less "safe" aspects of participants' identities often left them more inclined to avoid those social equity issues in their teaching. Like a powerful magnet, some pieces of personal identity drew participants in, and they spent significant time exploring those topics with students. Issues participants felt were more dangerous in Oklahoma—being GLBTQ or non-Christian for example—often had participants feeling fearful about approaching that social equity issue. This, for me, is what stands out the most. We cannot allow schools to be an unsafe space for teachers if it is to be a safe space for students.

When participants talked about what they could "get away with" they were speaking of pushing the limits, acting as "border crossers" (Martin, 2010), finding creative ways to "enlarge the space of the possible" (Leland & Harste, 2000) for themselves and their students. While they were autonomous (Kamii, 1991) in doing this, they all spoke of the importance of a strong community, a group of colleagues or friends on whom they relied for support in their decision making, particularly those decisions that were most difficult. While one can and must act on what is best for students as an autonomous teacher (Brown, 1995; Castle, 2006), this does not disavow the comfort of a supportive other. More research should likely be done on whether

autonomous teachers actively seek out others to support their difficult work. This would further counter the stereotype that autonomous teachers don't "play well with others." It is certainly possible that my participants were drawn to graduate school, professional development groups, and/or highly collaborative school site in Lynn's case—the only participant who'd yet to formally seek graduate schooling--out of this desire, though I believe the desire to continue learning is worthy of note as well.

<div align="center">Implications for Theory and Practice</div>

In this case, it seems artificial to tug apart theory and practice, so I will write about them together. There are a number of things that have sprung forth as a result of this work that perhaps need to be considered more fully in our work in teaching and learning.

Time for Reflection and Talk

Teachers at all levels need greater time to examine their own beliefs. Only one of my participants, Lynn, noted that there was time purposefully set aside time to consider social equity issues at all in her undergraduate program. She was also the only participant to note even a few undergraduate opportunities to discuss how one might go about approaching such issues with one's elementary students. Clearly we need greater time for undergraduates to form a strong philosophy for themselves on which they can rely. Then, they need opportunities to discuss their own thinking. For through articulating one's beliefs, at least for my participants and me, those beliefs were strengthened, refined, or revised. While only Lynn noted having had such an opportunity as an undergraduate, Nancy, Mark, Judy, and Cara all mentioned graduate school's influence on their thinking and their teaching. Notably, Keith was just accepted to a graduate program, and Lynn expressed a desire to apply soon. Further, Keith has been heavily involved in a professional development organization with a strong focus on social equity. Some kind of space for careful, focused reflection on social equity seems important. This leads me to believe that undergraduate programs, alongside their graduate teacher education counterparts, should carve out time and space specifically for considering social equity.

Recognitions of Privilege and Oppression

Several of my participants highlighted critical times in their personal lives or in graduate school where they had opportunities—and they did view them as opportunities—to see ways in which they might be privileged or ways in which they had been in a situation or larger structure that was oppressive toward them. These moments of recognition seem critical in shaping participants' thinking about students' needs. These moments also served as reminders, for my participants and me, that practicing "transformationist pedagogy" (Howard, 2006, p. 117) is not an all or nothing state of being. One may, for example, be highly aware of systemic and individual acts of racism---teach in ways that are actively anti-racist—but still behave in ways that reinforce other systems of power. Howard's (2006) title statement "We can't teach what we don't know" rings truthful here as I consider my own teaching and that of my participants. Teachers at all stages of their careers need periodic opportunities to examine their own beliefs in light of the world in that moment. Cary (2006) reminds us of Clifford's words that, "Cultures do not stand still for their portraits—they are dynamic" (p. 11). So, too, are the lives of each participant. With both changing, it is essential that teachers have time to focus on first attempting to discern the ways in which systems of oppression "normalize" those constructed as deviant but also our own positions—our own complicities and interruptions of the status quo.

Focus on That Which Is Not in Focus

In the 1990s, "magic eye" images or patterns which held a hidden image embedded if one looked deliberately at it with one's eyes focused differently. Those who had difficulty seeing would stare for hours trying to get their focus just right to find the sailboat or the dolphin, whatever lay hidden. I suggest we devote at least as much energy to examining the hidden and the null curricula. Fortunately or unfortunately, it is far more obvious than a "magic eye" image what we are teaching through these lenses, but it does take a refocusing. Often, the hidden curricula that is problematic is visible but not clearly problematic to a teacher outside the culture whose history a lesson distorts, e.g. The null curricula, on the other hand, can be even harder to

see. A teacher may not even know a portion of the narrative is missing if they do not know of its existence. Just as Judy has a friend who was shocked that she took a GLBTQ history class, exclaiming "what would you study?" there are often significant pieces of cultural stories that we are missing. Many teachers in Oklahoma, for example, have omitted the Tulsa Race Riot because they did not know it occurred. Actively obscured so well in the days that followed and for years to come, the perpetrators of this act very nearly succeeded in successfully erasing it from history's memory altogether. But, thanks to the work of some very brave witnesses and a few dedicated historians and conscientious politicians, the Tulsa Race Riot will live on in history as a bleak reminder of the ways that racism can spiral into an all out attack, complete with aerial bombings, if the violence of racism is not kept in check by a nonviolent critical pedagogy (Friere, 1970/2000; Nagler, 2004). The overt curriculum, that which we explicitly teach, is certainly important. However, we will need to consider the lived experiences of students and teachers in schools (Van Manen, 1990; Pinar, 1975; hooks, 1994), with fresh eyes in order to see the spaces where omissions and distortions threaten to damage the web.

Strong Support

Each of my participants highlighted the importance of community, both for themselves as teachers and learners, and for their students to do the difficult and dangerous work of examining issues related to social equity. For teachers, I believe this means that mentorship and/or professional development opportunities, both formal and informal, need to be strong, meaningful, and lasting.

Students and teachers must work together to establish mutual trust to move toward collaboratively established goals; based on my participants' narratives, community cannot be created through posting a set of rules. I wonder, then, if a classroom management course might be broken into two parts. One credit hour prior to clinical practice and one or two credit hours during a student's internship semester might allow for students to form a more nuanced view of creating community than "management." Particularly if accompanied by opportunities to

examine and explore the meaning and complexity of curriculum itself, this might be a more productive approach than the current "classroom management" model. Children and teachers both, after all, must feel safe together in order to take the risks necessary for learning about and through social equity issues. This requires a dialogical relationship that disrupts the teacher at the center as the bearer of knowledge.

Teaching to Subvert

In their efforts to subvert the status quo, teachers often constructed themselves as deviant (Cary, 2006) within the system, either speaking in terms of what "I can get away with," or noting that they hoped they didn't "get caught." But Leland and Harste (2000) point out, as does Tutu (1999) in different terms, that one *cannot* be neutral when systems of power are at work. One either supports the status quo—even, and sometimes especially, in doing nothing—or s/he works to disrupt it. Nancy calls her fellow teachers to "get political," a call Huebner (1964) made nearly fifty years ago that my participants' stories all reinforce in unique yet powerful ways. From Keith's resistance of traditional pedagogy, to Cara's assertion that algorithms are a political issue, the politics of power come through in their stories. Judy, Mark, and Nancy all discuss the socio-cultural power issues around GLBTQ matters that make their way into schools, and Lynn works hard to disrupt the very political notion that poverty is deserved.

Personal Identity

A common sense approach might have one believe that teachers would be drawn to teach about issues that are personally important. However, that does not account for the ways in which teachers are often afraid to be outed—whether for one's sexual identity, religion or absence thereof, or—far from simply in Oklahoma—for being, even in small ways, a "liberal." My participants who deviated from what is constructed as "normal" in Oklahoma in significant ways faced some of the pressures to "normalize" (Cary, 2006) and/or be silenced. For Mark, he implies that most adults (and some children through the adults in their lives) in his school community are aware of his sexual identity because he and his partner both live and work there.

While Nancy too identifies as atheist, it may be that she never faced such questions since she played the piano at a church. Many may have assumed she was still Christian. For Judy and Lynn, however, there is no such guise, however unintentional. Both feel intensely concerned, Lynn especially, to avoid being "exposed." This highlights two very significant issues in my mind. First, teachers need to be both safe and free to be who we are; this seems to me an important condition for students to be safe in the school community as well. While we certainly need not and should not violate school law about religion, for example, we can and should feel comfortable teaching *about* religion. Secondly, there is always, as Fleener (2002) details, a more complicated dynamic at work than appears in the surface. While certainly not a generalizable sample, of six participants, all white, all U.S. born, all elementary teachers, there was far greater diversity than most would expect, particularly "in Oklahoma."

<div align="center">Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research</div>

Certainly the voices of teachers of color need to be heard in such a study. I began knowing I would have a small sample size, but I did not know who my participants would be. In my case, I did not have any teachers of color respond to my recruitment efforts, but it will be essential to add their voices to this conversation, sooner rather than later. I anticipate it could certainly change one's positioning when one identity label that "others" is plainly visible, thus removing the choice of whether or not to "mask" this. Finally, it seems that the paradox of social equity education lies in the necessity of taking the risk – facing potential dangers if you will – of addressing difficult social equity issues in order to ultimately make school a safer place for both students and teachers. I would like to further explore this juxtaposition of danger and safety in the classroom as teachers seek to disrupt the status quo.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

Both I and my participants invoke the matter of place often throughout the study. Perhaps, in talking about the "climate" of our state and those similar as if it were static or consistent. Certainly my participants' social equity teaching creates spaces for positive change.

However, in hesitating to address certain topics, a teacher may also have a hand in making a classroom more oppressive instead of less so. Essentially every social equity topic that was addressed that any one of my participants felt was not a feasible area of study here, someone else was, indeed, teaching here. This too warrants the strong need for dialogue about this practice among teachers. Perhaps it is less difficult to teach social equity here than we imagine. Nancy was moved to a different grade level as a punishment of sorts, but as I pore over the data, I can find no further negative result, though in some cases concerns were raised of which nothing negative ultimately resulted. And as Cara pointed out, there is sometimes resistance to *not* teaching social equity as well. As curriculum scholars and pedagogues, we need not be cut off from our home space or our spiritual selves in order to avoid forcing our own power technologies (Foucault, 1977) on students. Quite the opposite, while we need not share our spiritual selves with students, it is vital that we know this of ourselves more vividly. Slattery (2006) consoles those who are stuck in what Cara calls "a sad place," that,

> The discussion of curriculum as theological text has presented insights into the evolving milieu proposed for postmodern schooling today, which is understood as reverent, reflective, inclusive, cooperative, just, holistic, and caring. (p. 111)

In order to move toward—knowing we can never fully achieve—such a way of being, we will have to know our own interior curriculum spaces and begin to take a more intricate survey of the nuanced and forever in-the-making landscape of the spaces where we dwell. Put differently, we must see the spaces in between as well as the web itself.

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APPENDIX: IRB APPROVAL

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Monday, August 08, 2011

IRB Application No   ED11128

Proposal Title: Narrative Explorations of Social Equity Teaching Decisions

Reviewed and   Exempt
Processed as:

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved   Protocol Expires: 8/7/2012

Principal
Investigator(s):

Robin Fuxa   Pamela Brown
2434 Main Hall OSU Tulsa   237 Willard
Tulsa, OK 74106   Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the
rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that
the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45
CFR 46.

The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval
stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol
   must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar
   year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are
   unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the
authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions
about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219
Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Robin Lynn Fuxa

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy/Education

Thesis: SOCIAL EQUITY TEACHING DECISIONS: NARRATIVE EXPLORATIONS WITH ELEMENTARY TEACHERS

Major Field: Education, Curriculum Studies

Biographical: Robin Fuxa has lived in Chandler, Seminole, and Bartlesville, OK. She now works at OSU in Tulsa and lives in Stillwater, OK, with her daughter and husband.

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Education at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2012.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Teaching Learning and Leadership at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 2004.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 2000.

Experience:

Clinical Instructor, Elementary Ed./Literacy, School of Teaching and Curriculum Leadership, College of Education, Oklahoma State University, Tulsa, OK, 2008-present.

Graduate Assistant, Literacy/Elementary Ed., School of Teaching and Curriculum Leadership, College of Education, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK, 2007-2008.

Guest Reviewer, Journal of Curriculum Theorizing, 2010-present

Guest Reviewer, Summer 2011 Issue on Media Literacy Education, Action in Teacher Education

Professional Memberships:
International Reading Association
National Writing Project
National Association for Multicultural Education
OSU Writing Project
Leadership Council Chair (2007-2008)
ListServ Moderator (2004-2006)
Leadership Council Member (2004-2008)
Teacher Consultant (2003-present)

Name: Robin Lynn Fuxa   Date of Degree: May, 2012

Institution: Oklahoma State University   Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: SOCIAL EQUITY DECISION MAKING: NARRATIVE EXPLORATIONS
WITH ELEMENTARY TEACHERS

Pages in Study: 121   Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: Education, Curriculum Studies

Scope and Method of Study: In this critical postmodern narrative study, I explore with my
        participants their decision making process/es around social equity issues (race, class,
        gender, social class, sexual identity, religion, etc.) in their teaching. The purpose of this
        study is to facilitate a closer examination of this important decision making process—
        when and how to address social equity issues in one's teaching. How do teachers
        respond to opportunities, planned and unplanned, to foster, exclude, or silence social
        equity dialogue in their pedagogy? My participants were Oklahoma teachers currently or
        recently in-service in an elementary setting who exhibit strong autonomy as defined by
        Kamii (1991) and commitment to social equity education as determined by a participant
        questionnaire. Participants were recruited through expert referral and ListServ
        recruitment. Then through two semi-structured interviews, I collected my data and
        constructed participants' stories holistically in realist tales (Woodbrooks, 1991) as my
        first stage of analysis. Then I conducted an open-coded theme analysis (Strauss &
        Corbin, 1998) to arrive at my major themes in which the critical and complicating tales
        (Woodbrooks, 1991) are interwoven.

Findings and Conclusions: Participants frequently noted a keen awareness of the un/taught, the
        hidden and null curricula. Un/learning (Wang & Olson, 2009)—both of their own and
        their students—often arose as well in social equity teaching decisions. Further,
        participants discussed the importance of a support system for sustaining them in their
        social equity work. Finally, the magnetism of personal identity seemed to have the
        greatest influence on what social equity issues my participants did—and did not--address.
        Like the different ends of a magnet, participants might be pulled toward or repelled from
        issues closely related to their own personal identities, which seems closely connected to
        the level of risk the identity category was perceived to hold for the participant in his or
        her school community. The notion of place loomed large for all participants—rural,
        urban, suburban, and exurban teachers. It seems essential that we who are committed to
        social equity education talk with one another about these decisions, both to illuminate the
        process for ourselves and to foster an ongoing, generative dialogue about how we can and
        do teach social equity issues here.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Pamela U. Brown