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Navigating the cultural gaps: Whiteness and diversity in two elementary school classrooms

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NAVIGATING THE CULTURAL GAPS:

WHITENESS AND DIVERSITY IN TWO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASSROOMS

BY

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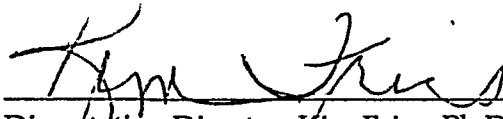
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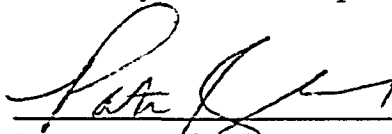
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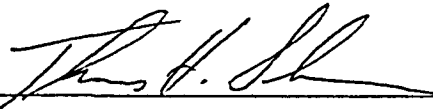
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SIGNATURE PAGE

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the wonderful teachers who have changed my life. In my work as a teacher, they include Judy Sparks, Andrewnette Davis, and Ann Marie Alexander. In my life outside of schools, they include my chickadees, Anna and Emily, who have taught me so very much, and my husband, Joel, with whom I've learned many of life's lessons. Julie Friel shared in lessons that were both personal and professional. Thank you all.

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ABSTRACT

NAVIGATING THE CULTURAL GAPS:

WHITNESS AND DIVERSITY IN TWO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASSROOMS

by

Rachel Parse Johnson

University of New Hampshire, May, 2010

This study asked how two white, in-service elementary school teachers within the context of their classrooms navigated the cultural gaps between themselves and students from whom they differed (e.g. racially, ethnically, socio- economically, and/or linguistically). Three sub-questions examined: 1) what life experiences shaped how the teachers understood difference and diversity within their classrooms; 2) what system(s) of beliefs the teachers learned and constructed through those experiences; and 3) what identities the teachers assumed and/or assigned to themselves and their students. The study employed a sociocultural theoretical framework. Ethnographic data collection strategies included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and material collection. Discourse analysis acted as the analytic framework.

The findings indicate that the participants drew upon their life experiences and the values and beliefs they acquired and constructed through those experiences to make meaning of diversity in their classrooms and to shape the actions and interactions within their classrooms. Their life experiences seem to have influenced how the participants

grappled with the Deficit Thinking and White Knight Discourse models in their explicit

and implicit forms. Understanding the social context in which they taught, the

participants structured their classrooms and their interactions to address their students'

academic needs on the one hand and their social and emotional needs on the other.

Additionally, the participants fostered identities of achievement in their students. To

bridge the cultural gaps, the participants explored and developed a sense of their

students' "experiential diversity," and they formed relationships with others who could

support them in their work. The final finding focused on how interacting throughout

the course of this study providing the participants with the opportunity to examine their

own autobiographies and the impact of those autobiographies on their teaching. The

implications of this study include: 1) the relevance of teachers' life experiences to their

teaching practice, 2) the importance of understanding the social context in which one

teaches, 2) different strategies teachers might employ in working with culturally diverse

students, and 3) future research based on the process of this investigation as a means of

encouraging teachers to critically examine their own autobiographies.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION and LITERATURE REVIEW

Dalton Conley begins his autobiography, *Honky* (2000), with a poignant summary of his growing-up years. "I am not your typical middle-class white male," he writes.

> I am middle-class, despite the fact that my parents had no money; I am
>
> white, but I grew up in an inner-city housing project where most
>
> everyone was black or Hispanic...In fact, my childhood was like a social
>
> science experiment: Find out what being middle class really means by
>
> raising a kid from a so-called good family in a so-called bad
>
> neighborhood. Define whiteness by putting a light-skinned kid in the
>
> midst of a community of color (p. xiii).

Conley uses his autobiography to explore what it means to be white and middle-class. These characteristics, he argues, are not as straightforward as they may seem, and they, and their meanings, vary with the settings in which one finds oneself. They are negotiated through interactions with others as the individual moves through the communities of his life. He continues:

There's an old saying that you never really know your own language

until you study another. It's the same with race and class. In fact, race

and class are nothing more than a set of stories we tell ourselves to get

through the world, to organize our reality (p. xiv).

This ethnographic study investigates the meanings and contexts through which

two white teachers organized their realities as they moved through the routines of daily

life in classrooms populated by students from whom they differed. Specifically, *the*

study asks how two white, in-service elementary school teachers within the context of their

classrooms navigated the cultural gaps between themselves and students who differed from

themselves (e.g. racially, ethnically, socio- economically, and/or linguistically). In order to

understand how these two teachers interpreted and acted on difference, this study asked

three sub-questions.

1. What life experiences shaped how the teachers understood difference and

   diversity within their classrooms?

2. What system(s) of beliefs did the teachers learn and construct through those

   experiences?

3. What identities did the teachers assume and/or assign to themselves and

   their students?

To address the construction and transformation of cultural understandings and

meanings, the study employed a sociocultural theoretical framework based on the work

of Barbara Rogoff (1990, 1993, 1998, 2003) and Peter Murrell (2007). Data collection

strategies included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and material collection. Discourse analysis, as described by Gee (2007), acted as the analytic framework that gave shape to a cultural interpretation of the teachers' actions and interactions.

Whiteness

A careful analytic read of the empirical and conceptual research reveals that the term "white teacher" has been used as a form of shorthand. It refers to a group of individuals who share many common characteristics. The most salient among them is their racial designation as "white," although most "white teachers" are also of middle-class upbringings (Sleeter, 2008; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). The label "white" becomes problematic when used to describe a group of people as if no other perceptions, experiences and understandings impact their lives and work. In this way, "white" serves to gloss over the differences within the group. Furthermore, the term "white" is frequently juxtaposed to diversity; to be "white" is to lack diversity. Consequently, "white" as a label may overlook the rich and varied life experiences and cultural knowledge that individuals learn and construct throughout their lives.

Cameron McCarthy (2003), in his critique of educational studies based on Whiteness theory, argues that "paradoxically, you cannot understand race by studying race alone" (p. 132). He continues:

> You cannot understand the social, cultural, or political behavior of any
> group by looking at their putative racial location to the exclusion of a

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more complex examination of their social biographies and the complex

and changing social context of the modern world in which we live.

This inquiry takes to heart McCarthy's challenge to examine the complexity of

whiteness. I sought to explore what remained hidden by the term "white": the

interwoven and inextricable nature of social biographies influenced by race, ethnicity,

linguistic and socio-economic background as well as the lived experiences of the

individual. It is the interplay among these social factors within the individual's life that

form the basis of cultural knowledge, beliefs, and values. I argue, like McCarthy, that

whiteness should not be conceptualized as "a deposit, a stable cultural and biological

sediment that separates whites from blacks and other minorities" (p. 131). Rather than a

single stable characteristic, whiteness is operationalized differently by various people

depending on their personal biographies as well as the larger social context in which

they function. From this perspective, "white" becomes less of a racial designation and

more of a cultural frame of reference. It operates as "the filter through which

impressions of, experiences with and knowledge of the outside world are ordered and

made meaningful" (Gay, 2000, p. 32). Whiteness is one of many possible filters.

"Whiteness," then, is not a static, stand-alone attribute but an integral part of the

complexity of the individual as he or she navigates through and constructs his or her

world. As Ladson-Billlings notes in her book *Crossing over to Canaan* (2001a), "it would

be a mistake to assume that [anyone's] racial or ethnic label [explain] them fully"(p. 35).

Race is a complex construct. It is inextricably interwoven with other ways of knowing and understanding. While an individual is born into a racial or ethnic category, it is the lived experiences of the individual that impact how the knowledge linked with racial categories carries into his or her daily life. As Conley (2000) notes in the opening quote, understandings and interpretations are rooted in the communities in which they are learned. In this study, I argue that teachers be viewed as individuals functioning from and interacting with varied forms of cultural knowledge learned in diverse communities. Race is one dimension along which cultural knowledge is acquired and constructed, but there are others. Gender, language, religion, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, and geographic region of origin are a few possibilities.

Diversity in the United States Public Schools

Diversity has been the focus of many educational studies. The rationale for this focus is the demographic differences that exist in the United States public schools between students and teachers as well as the disparate educational attainment of white, middle-class students versus their peers who are of color, of low-income homes, and who speak a language other than English.

Demographic Profile of Students

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2008), about 67% of the current school enrollment in elementary and secondary public school is white, non-Hispanic. The remaining 33% of students are Black (12.3%); Hispanic, non-White (14.4%); Asian or Pacific Islander (4.3%); American Indian (0.8%), and students

who are of more than one race (1.3%). Demographic predictors indicate that students who are not white will be the statistical majority in the year 2035 and comprise 57% of the student population by the year 2050 (Green, Tran, & Young, 2005; Hollins & Guzman, 2005). The increasing diversity within the schools is reflected in the number of students enrolled in English Language Learner (ELL) programs (NCES, 2004). 6.7% of the total population of students enrolled in elementary and secondary schools were classified as ELL students (NCES, 2004). This is a 1.6% increase in ELL students over the 1993-1994 school year (NCES, 2004). Overall, the student population within public schools throughout the United States has become increasingly diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, and languages spoken.

Demographic Profile of Teachers

White teachers dominate the teaching profession and will continue to do so into the foreseeable future (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004; Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Sleeter, 2008; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). Although data indicate slightly different percentages of white teachers ranging from 84% to 89.7% (Cochran-Smith et al., 2004; NCES, 2007; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005), Zumwalt & Craig (2005) state that the majority of teachers are white and speak English as their only language. In concluding their synthesis of teacher demographics, Zumwalt & Craig (2005) assert that "whatever the actual trend in the diversity of the teaching staff, the diversity gap between students and teacher is large and widening" (p. 114). It is crucial to note that the demographic differences between student and teacher populations are not inherently problematic. What is problematic is the "persistent and pernicious disparities that exist in the

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educational achievement, resources and life chances between students of color and their white peers" (Hollins & Guzman, 2005, p. 477).

Educational Disparities

Data indicate that public schools in the United States provide different educational outcomes for students depending on their racial and/or ethnic background. As a whole, students who are White[1] or Asian tend to do better on measures of school achievement that range from National Assessment of Educational Process (NAEP) scores to retention rates to rates of referral to special education classes than do their Hispanic, Black, and/or American Indian classmates (NCES, 2004, 2007, 2008). Students of middle- and high-income families tend to do better than students from low-income families regardless of race and ethnicity (NCES, 1995).

The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2007) in reporting findings for the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) noted differences in levels of proficiency achieved by different racial and ethnic groups. Table 1.1 below summarizes how students in 4th and 8th grade performed on the NAEP.

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[1] When discussing racial/ethnic categories in relation to the work of other authors or institutions, the capitalization or lack of capitalization is consistent with how the authors or institutions chose to use capitalization. For the presentation of data and analysis related to the present study, no capitalization is used, since this investigation seeks to move past an emphasis on racial categories.

Table 1.1:

Percentages of 4th and 8th grade students rated proficient on the 2005 NAEP by race and

ethnicity.

Race and ethnicity of students*	Percentage of students scoring proficient on the reading test		Percentage of students scoring proficient on the mathematics Test	
	4th grade	8th grade	4th grade	8th grade
White	41	39	47	39
Black	13	12	13	9
Asian/Pacific Islander	42	40	55	47
American Indian	18	17	21	14
Hispanic	16	15	19	13

* The racial and ethnic categories presented here are exactly as the NCES presents them. The NCES in presenting data collapses the racial categories of Asian and Pacific Islander into a single category.
Source: http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/minoritytrends/ind_3_10.asp.

As Table 1.1 indicates White and Asian/Pacific Islander students consistently outscored

Black, American Indian, and Hispanic peers in 2005 on the reading and math sections of

the NAEP. The College Board in its 2006 report on college-bound seniors documents a

similar trend. The average total Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) score for Asian/Pacific

Islanders was 1600 points. White students scored on average just 18 points lower. The

average total SAT scores of Blacks, Hispanic or Latinos, and American Indians were

lower by 291 points, 214 points, and 127 points respectively (College Board, 2006).

The NCES (2007) presents data on rates of retention, suspension, expulsion and

dropping-out of school as measures of persistence in education. These are compiled by

racial and ethnic group. Table1.2 summarizes the data.

Table 1.2:

Measures of persistence among public school students by race and ethnicity.

Race and ethnicity of students	Percentage of students grades K-12 who were retained in 2003	Percentage of students grades K-12 who were suspended in 2003	Percentage of students grades K-12 who were expelled in 2003	Percentage of students aged 16-24 who were high school drop-outs in 2005
White	8	9	1	6
Black	17	20	5	10.4
Asian/Pacific Islander	5	6	>1	2.9
American Indian	9	11	3	14
Hispanic	11	10	1	22.4

Source: http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/minoritytrends/tables/table_17a.asp?referrer=report.

The data presented in Table 1.2 indicates that students who are Black, American Indian or Hispanic are retained and suspended more than their White and Asian/Pacific Islander peers. Moreover, they are far more likely to drop-out of high school. At 5%, Black students have the highest rate of expulsion, although American Indian students also had a high rate of 3%. Additional data indicates that educational outcomes are similarly affected by socioeconomic status. The NCES (1995) reports that students of low-income homes had a high school drop-out rate of 13.3% as compared to 5.7% of student from middle-income homes and 2% of students from high-income homes.

Summary of Diversity within the U.S. Public School System

Three rather striking trends emerge from the demographic and educational data on the U.S. public school system. First, the student population is becoming increasingly non-white and speaks a language other than English at home (Green et al., 2005; Hollins & Guzman, 2005; NCES, 2004, 2008). Second, the majority of teachers are white, middle-class, and monolingual (AACTE, 1989, 1990; Cochran-Smith et al., 2004; Hollins & Guzman, 2005; NCES, 2007; Sleeter, 2008; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). Third, students of

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lower income and diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds do not perform as well in school as do their white, middle-class, English-speaking peers (Hollins & Guzman, 2005; NCES, 1995, 2004, 2007, 2008; Sleeter, 2008). Although there is no conclusive research indicating how the "imbalanced profile" of teacher-versus-student racial and ethnic characteristics affects student outcomes (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005, p. 143), it seems there is reason to look more closely at how diversity and whiteness are enacted in the classroom.

The Meaning of Diversity for Teachers

Extensive searches of the existing literature uncovered very few studies similar in nature and topic to the study presented here. The very limited number of studies uncovered by these searches confirms what others within the field have asserted (Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Sleeter, 2008; Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996): most of the research on whiteness and diversity focuses on pre-service teachers rather than in-service teachers. This study is in part a response to educators and researchers who call for further research on whiteness and diversity as interpreted and acted upon by in-service teachers within the contexts of their classrooms (Sleeter, 2008). Below I provide a brief synopsis of each of the existing studies. I indicate themes that are recurrent among them and highlight aspects of the research that suggest further investigation.

Research on In-Service Teachers

Johnson (2002) used a series of four interviews to generate life histories for six white, female, in-service teachers. The participants were selected on the basis of their having been identified by colleagues as being "aware of race and racism" (p. 154).

Johnson also conducted a single classroom visit with each participant to observe student-teacher interactions and to examine classroom artifacts that might be relevant to participants' interviews. Interviews focused on the participants' development in relation to race, their racial/ethnic identity, and their views on the role of race in the classroom. Three themes emerged. Several of the participants indicated that they had life experiences in which they felt like outsiders. For these participants, they were "most aware of whiteness when they were in the minority racially, often when they were the only white person in a particular situation" (p. 162). Consistent with other research (Seidl &Friend, 2002a; 2002b), the participants indicated that equal status relationships with others of a different ethnicity or race were also crucial in their development of racial awareness. One participant cited an interracial marriage as a pivotal experience. The final theme emphasized the participants' beliefs in education as a means of addressing equality and social justice issues. As one participant summarized it, "it's not just that the world should be different. It was the belief that I could do something about it" (p. 159). By using an interview format to highlight elements of the participants' pasts, Johnson's research draws attention to the formative experiences that helped shape views and understandings of race and racism and their roles in the classroom. While the teachers addressed how these experiences and understandings impacted their work with students, the research itself was conducted only minimally in the classroom.

Lawrence and Tatum (1997) also investigated racism in the classroom. As part of a semester-long voluntary antiracist professional development program, eighty-four white participants volunteered to allow the researchers to analyze documents like

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reflective journals for antiracist actions they were taking in their classrooms in response to having taken the course. The researchers found that forty-eight participants took action that they deemed antiracist. These actions varied from improving relationships with students, parents, and teachers, altering curriculum to be more inclusive and specifically including racism as a topic of study, and working at an institutional level to challenge racist attitudes and policies. The authors were able to document growth and development in relation to understandings of racism and cite a total of 142 specific actions taken by the participants. They attributed the positive results to the longer duration of this program—a semester versus the more typical single-day format—as well as the supportive community that the participants, along with the researchers, provided for each other as they faced the challenges of confronting racism. These two elements as contributors to a successful outcome are consistent with the findings of other researchers (Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Sleeter 2008). With this study, Lawrence and Tatum addressed classroom and school-based actions with a focus on identifying and countering racism. They worked from the assumption that racism exists within the nation's schools and that antiracist measures are necessary to correct for its negative influence. While their assumption seems to be an accurate one within the context of their study, this study looked to examine understandings and interpretations of cultural difference without the assumption of racism's existence. Additionally, the study presented here focused attention on the work of the teachers in the classroom by observing them within the context of their classrooms rather than relying on the participants' self-reports of their actions.

Also looking at racism in the school setting, Julie Kailin (1999, 2000) used an open-ended questionnaire to address how the 222 white teacher participants perceived the role of racism as it affected their work in a Midwestern suburban school district. The questionnaire respondents cited incidents of racism in their schools. The responses were then coded and sorted into three major themes: attribution of racial problems to blacks, attribution of racial problems to whites, and attribution of racial problems to institutional/cultural factors. The data indicated that the majority of teachers reported racism as a black/white issue rather than as incidents directed against or by Native Americans, Asians, or Latinos. The teachers attributed problems of racism to black students and their parents almost 46% of the time. Behaviors that the teachers perceived to be racist on the part of the black student body and their parents included perceptions that black students get preferential treatment; that black students make racist remarks, that black students come from difficult home environments; that black student are intimidating; and that problematic hallway behaviors are due to black students. Attributing racism problems to white students and their families occurred almost 42% of the time. Teachers reported hearing white teachers and students making racist remarks, white faculty treating black students poorly, and white teachers and students as being intolerant of cultural differences. Only about 13% of the reported incidences related to institutional or cultural factors such as racist graffiti in school, racist curriculum materials, or discrimination in placement in special education classes. While the incident rates were similar between those attributed to blacks and whites, Kailin pointed out that the respondents, who were overwhelmingly white, were able to identify racism

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in the actions of others but not in their own. Kailin's study serves as a reminder that racism continues to exist, although it may take the form of what Kailin dubbed "liberal racism:" racism that is subtle and often hidden behind the liberal statements of tolerance of difference and high expectations for all students. This point was reinforced by the fact that many of the actions by black students that teachers perceived as racist mirrored those described by Marx (2006) and others (Marx & Pennington, 2003; McIntyre, 1997b; Sleeter 1993/2005; Valencia, 1997) as resulting from deficit theories.

Christine Sleeter (1993/2005) conducted an ethnographic study of teachers' responses to a voluntary two-year staff development conducted through nine all-day sessions the first year and five sessions the second year. Of the 30 teachers, 26 were Euroamerican, three were African American, and one was Mexican American. The program, which was conducted by an outside consultant, covered topics relevant to teaching students who were from low-income and/or racial minority families. These included demographic changes in schools, curriculum, culture and learning styles, and working with parents. Sleeter found that, while the teachers were willing to "implement strategies that might reduce failure and make the system of schooling work more smoothly," (p. 164) they were unwilling to critically examine the underlying issues of race, power, and privilege which contributed to the poor academic performance of children of low-income and/or racial minority families. Sleeter argued that the white teachers were often operating from cultural deficit theories and ideologies of color-blindness. Those who operate from a color-blind perspective stated that race made no difference in how they treated a child: "that they see children and do not see race" (p.

161). Those who professed color-blindness, Sleeter argued, hid negative feelings and beliefs about people of color behind statements that it is best to treat all children equally. This belief was linked with the notion that the educational system is a meritocracy— those with the greatest talent, intelligence, and skill will perform at levels that surpass their peers. Sleeter asserted that these belief systems, education as a meritocracy and the ideology of color-blindness, overlooked the repeated patterns of poor performance and failure that continue to plague children who are of color, come from low-income homes, and/or speak a native language other than English. These belief systems were rooted in the life experiences of the teachers. Sleeter found that underlying the teachers' actions in the classroom was the expectation that children of color from low-income homes who speak a native language other than English are not as capable as their white, middle-class, English speaking peers. This is the "liberal racism" to which Kailin (1999, 2000) referred. This study, like Kailin's and Lawrence and Tatum's (1997), serves to highlight the presence of racism in our nation's schools.

The contribution of those educators and researchers devoted to identifying and eliminating racism in the classroom should not be devalued. The goal of this study, however, was to broaden the lens through which teachers' actions and interactions were interpreted. By shifting away from the critical lens that an assumption of racism requires, this study attempted to uncover greater implications of cultural diversity for classroom practices and interactions.

Gloria Ladson-Billings in *The Dreamkeepers* (1994) directed attention to the broader goal of exploring the essential role of cultural relevance in the classroom.

Although the need to counter racism was a crucial element of Ladson-Billings' work, her focus was on developing a pedagogy to support the academic performance of African American students while simultaneously preserving and strengthening their cultural identity. The work of eight "exemplary" teachers, as identified by parents and principals, provided the backbone of Ladson-Billings' culturally relevant pedagogy. Of special interest to the current study is Ladson-Billings' description of the eight teachers. She began by noting that five of the teachers were African American, and three were white. But rather than relying on simplistic descriptions related to skin color, Ladson-Billing went on to describe them by their cultural frame of reference—the lens through which they interpreted and understood the world based on the experiences of their past, their current friendships inside and outside of school, their work and volunteer commitments, and their living arrangements. She noted that all five African American teachers had an African American culture of reference, while of the three white teachers, one had a white culture of reference, one had an African American culture of reference, and one had a mixed culture of reference. By placing emphasis on cultural frames of reference, Ladson-Billings highlighted the cultural learning that each of these teachers acquired through their various life experiences and its relevance to their work with the students. The ability to deliver culturally relevant instruction was not dictated by the color of the teachers' skin, but it was impacted by the learning that teachers brought with them to the classroom.

Ladson-Billing (1994) described culturally relevant teachers as believing that all students are capable of success and that teachers were responsible for creating classroom

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environments to promote that success. The teachers viewed themselves as political agents and their work as political action directed toward bringing greater equality and higher levels of social justice to our nations' schools and institutions. The teachers did not see their actions or intentions as limited to the walls of the school; they believed that their interactions with the students would impact the larger community. They encouraged students to challenge the norms of the school and the wider community when they noticed issues of racism and/or intolerance.

Ladson-Billings' intensive study (1994) was very goal oriented—to create a pedagogy based on the work of outstanding teachers to address both the academic performance and cultural identity of African American students. In order to accomplish her goal, her focus was on the actions of the teachers and their rationale for those actions. She assumed that these teachers, as exemplary teachers of African American students, were capable of bridging any cultural gaps between the home and school, because many of these teachers had navigated those gaps in their own lives. In contrast, this study did not assume that the participants were capable cultural brokers. The goal, in fact, was to look more closely at the cultural gaps to examine how the participants navigated them. In the next few pages, I look at the work of teacher researchers as they sought to uncover what meaning of the cultural gaps they found in their own classrooms.

Teacher researcher, Cynthia Ballenger (1999) described her experiences as the only white person in a school populated by and staffed by Haitians.

Although I speak reasonably good Haitian Creole, I am not an insider to

Haitian culture. I was frequently in situations where, although my words

were understood, my full intentions were not, whichever language I

chose to use. Similarly, I did not always fully understand the intentions

and assumptions of the adults and children around me. As the only non-

Haitian teacher working in this preschool I was in a situation where what

I considered 'natural' or 'correct' ways to teach small children were

evidently not received as such by the children; nor did I understand or

appreciate their ways. I could not make my classroom function, nor

learning take place in the way that—after 15 years of experience as a

preschool teacher—I expected (p. 6).

As an experienced teacher, Ballenger encountered difficulties in areas that surprised her.

She had difficulty disciplining children and getting them to listen at story time. As she

carefully examined her own understandings of how a classroom should look and sound,

she came to see that her expectations for seemingly routine aspects of the classroom

were rooted in assumptions she learned in her own life and in classrooms populated by

white children. Those expectations, along with their hidden assumptions, were not

relevant for Haitian children with different cultural expectations and assumptions.

Having identified the cultural gap between herself and her students, Ballenger took

steps to mitigate difficulties. She described her work with disciplinary problems.

With the overwhelming evidence that these children were used to a kind

of control talk other than what I had been providing, I began to adopt

some of the style of the Haitian teachers. This was not initially easy for

me to do, contradicting as it did my own socialization...As I have

developed a more or less stable mélange of styles, including some of my

old ways with my newly acquired ones, my control in the classroom has

improved significantly (p. 37).

Ballenger's work reveals that teachers, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or income level,

are capable of analyzing and navigating cultural gaps that occur in the classroom. As

Ballenger noted, she created a new style of discipline that was linked in part with her

cultural background and in part with the cultural background of her students. By

integrating the two backgrounds, she created a discipline strategy that was a hybrid of

both home and school expectations. She demonstrated that, under the right

circumstances, white teachers are capable of rethinking their expectations and

assumptions. The question then becomes what are the right circumstances. Ballenger

was an obvious outsider in this setting, but how do teachers who are less obviously

outsiders react when confronted with unmet expectations based on cultural

assumptions?

In *White Teacher* (1979/2000), practitioner researcher Vivian Paley provides a self-

reflective study of the role of race in her kindergarten classroom. Rather than being an

outsider, Paley, as white woman of middle-class background, was a member of a

primarily white faculty teaching a primarily white, middle-class student body. Her

sense that she created an equitable classroom setting for all children was jarred when 6

African American parents charged the white teachers with racism. Although the parents

cited examples, one teacher rejected the charges saying, "You're wrong...There's

absolutely no color line here. All the children are treated the same" (p. xiv). Paley was

hesitant to reject the parents' statements without first observing herself and her students

at work in the classroom. Returning to her classroom, she found that she intentionally

avoided difficult issues like race and religion. She described an exchange between a

white girl Denise who rejected a black classmate Valerie on the basis of her race.

> When Denise became annoyed with Valerie and told her not to sit next to
>
> her because this was not a 'brown' chair, I responded with equal
>
> annoyance. 'Valerie may sit wherever she wishes, Denise. Please don't
>
> tell people where to sit.' I saw I was purposefully avoiding the part about
>
> the *brown* chair... It was clear to me that I was unable to mention color in
>
> the classroom. When I was little we never referred to the color of the
>
> cleaning lady's skin. Of course we would never say colored, black,
>
> brown, skin, hair, maid, or Negro. In other words, we showed respect by
>
> completely ignoring black people as black people. Color blindness was
>
> the essence of the creed (p. 9).

As Sleeter's work (1993/2005) indicated, hidden just below the surface of this vignette,

and in Paley's refusal to discuss the brown chair, were negative connotations toward

people of color. Paley recognized her actions as problematic and used this scene as a springboard for critically examining her own beliefs about race and how those beliefs shaped her practices in the classroom.

Paley recalled feeling like an outsider as a Jewish child enrolled in a Catholic elementary school. She used her remembered sense of otherness to reframe her understanding of the students who were culturally different from her and the majority of the class. Unfortunately, as she settled into this interpretation of difference and its meaning, her conclusions were once again challenged by the children.

> I had been caught up in white-black differences and Jewish-gentile
>
> differences. My own background made these very real for me.
>
> Differences that had no emotional overtones for me, but were real enough
>
> to each child, were being neglected (p. 32).

What was being neglected were the children of Chinese descent or the children whose communication was limited by a native language other than English or whose cultural norms and behaviors at home differed greatly from those of school.

Like the teachers studied by Johnson (2002), Paley drew on personal experiences of otherness. Like Ballenger (1999), Paley was attentive to the gaps between what she knew as a white, middle-class woman of Jewish descent and what her students knew as black or Asian or poor children. To create a classroom that was equitable and stimulating for all her students, she drew on her own life experiences as well as the opportunities created by the children. While Paley offered no surefire ways of dealing

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with diversity in the classroom, she did offer a way of actively engaging with students to take on the challenges inherent in classrooms populated by children of different races, ethnicities, classes, and native languages.

Looking Across the Studies

The most obvious conclusion that can be drawn from these studies is that there is very little research done on white, in-service teachers in relation to whiteness and diversity. This study is intended to contribute to this existing, but limited, empirical research.

Methodologically, the research on in-service white teachers varies. Kailin (1999, 2000) used questionnaires. Lawrence and Tatum (1997) analyzed self-reflective journals. Johnson (1999) used an interview format. Two researchers used ethnographic methods to develop a pedagogical approach (Ladson-Billings (1994, 1999) or to study the effects of a staff development program (Sleeter, 1993/2005). Two researchers presented the results of a self-study of their own practices within their own classrooms (Ballenger, 1999; Paley, 1979/2000). What is lacking in the research is a study designed specifically to investigate the daily happenings in the classroom around issues of whiteness and diversity by someone other than the teacher.

Overall, these studies on in-service, white teachers highlight three themes of particular relevance to the proposed study: the importance of cultural learning and its development in communities in which the participants have lived and/or worked; the system(s) of beliefs that support the participants in their work in the classroom; and the

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roles the teachers create for themselves and their students. Each of these themes will be discussed briefly.

Several researchers found that the communities in which their participants lived and worked (past and present) played pivotal roles in how the participants viewed and interacted around diversity. Johnson (2002) and Paley (1979/2000) noted that experiences as an outsider helped white teachers find a common ground from which to understand difference and diversity. Other researchers found that communities formed around educational classes (Lawrence & Tatum, 1997) or school faculty (Ballenger, 1999) acted as sources of information and support for white teachers as they resolved difficulties related to cultural diversity.

Many of the researchers described the system(s) of beliefs of the participants around cultural diversity and/or students from culturally diverse backgrounds. Sleeter (1993/2005), Kailin (1999, 2000), and Lawrence and Tatum (1997) noted system(s) of beliefs like cultural deficit theories, colorblindness, and "liberal racism." On the other hand, Johnson (1999), Ladson-Billings (1994), Lawrence and Tatum (1997), and Paley (1979/2000) detailed system(s) of beliefs rooted in the notion that education should act as a means of addressing equality and social justice issues.

Several authors discussed the roles their participants construct for themselves and their students. For example, Ladson-Billings (1994) described teachers ascribing to culturally relevant pedagogy as viewing themselves as political agents capable of addressing their students' educational and cultural needs as well as challenging social injustice. Sleeter (1993/2005) related that her participants, working from colorblindness

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and cultural deficit theories, assumed a role similar to what McIntyre (1997a; 1997b) terms the "White Knight"—a teacher who feels that she must act to rescue or save her students from their difficult home lives. Ballenger (1991) and Paley (1979/2000) both examined and constructed anew their identities as white teachers.

Each of the three themes—cultural learning within communities, system(s) of beliefs, and role/identity formation—affect how white teachers navigate the cultural gaps between themselves and their culturally diverse students. With this study, I explore how these elements come into play as teachers work with whiteness and diversity within the daily routines and interactions of their classrooms.

This Study

This study is guided by one central research question: *Within the context of their classrooms, how did two white, elementary school teachers navigate the cultural gaps between themselves and students who differed from themselves (e.g. racially, ethnically, economically, and/or linguistically)?* Three sub-questions supported data collection and analysis related to the central research.

1. What life experiences shaped how the teachers understood difference and diversity within their classrooms?

2. What system(s) of beliefs did the teachers learn and construct through those experiences?

3. What identities did the teachers assume and/or assign to themselves and their students?

The central research question in combination with the sub-questions provides insight into how the how these two teachers defined and understood diversity; how they constructed their identities in relation to their students; how their understandings of cultural diversity affected their work in their classrooms; and what it means to be a "white teacher."

By exploring the many interwoven dimensions around which each of the participants defined and made meaning of herself and her work in the classroom, this study reveals greater possibilities for understanding the meaning of whiteness and diversity in two elementary classrooms. Given the changing demographics of the public schools across the United States, there is a need to explore the ramifications of diversity for the white teachers at the front of the classroom and for the educational programs they offer to their increasingly diverse student body. This study focuses on two white teachers working in a community whose population has historically been white and middle class. Over the last twenty years, however, the population in this community has shifted toward higher percentages of families who are of color, who are of lower socioeconomic status, and/or who speak a language other than English at home. By looking to the experiences of these two white teachers, this study may unravel some of the underlying intricacies of diversity within the larger U.S. public school system.

Overview of the Coming Chapters

Seven chapters follow. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework that supports this study. Chapter 3 describes the methodology and data analysis. Chapter 4, "The Teachers as Cultural Agents and Individuals," introduces the participants as

individuals and cultural agents. Chapter 5, "Understanding and Responding to Teaching within the Social Context of Liberty School" presents findings related to the participants' understandings of how Liberty School and its students were situated in relation to deficit thinking and how they responded to that understanding to meet their students' academic, social, and emotional needs. In Chapter 6, "Bridging the Cultural Gaps," I return to the central research question to discuss strategies employed by the teachers to bridge the cultural gaps between themselves and students from whom they differed. This chapter also includes an analysis of how the teachers viewed their positionality as white teachers and an exploration the bridge and gap metaphors that underlie this study. Chapter 7, "Engaging in and Growing through the Process of the Research," discusses how engaging in this study altered the teachers' understandings of themselves as teachers. Chapter 8 is the study's conclusion. Included in the final chapter are the limitations and implications of the study.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Teachers as Cultural Agents

Two fundamental assertions support the study: all humans are cultural; all

humans are multicultural (Erickson, 2007). Cultural refers to ways of acting, thinking

and interpreting which are rooted in the learning of "personal, familial, communal,

institutional, societal, and global" communities in which an individual participates (p.

33). Since all individuals participate in multiple and varied communities, all persons are

multicultural: learning, acquiring, and constructing the cultural knowledge that is

relevant to participation in those different communities. While there may be a great deal

of overlap in accepted ways of acting, thinking, and interpreting within the various

communities in which an individual participates, it is also possible that there will be

conflict and tension within and between communities and their respective practices.

Spindler (1999) identifies three forms of cultural knowledge as relevant to

intercultural situations: mundane cultural knowledge; self-other knowledge; and

submerged cultural knowledge. Mundane cultural knowledge describes the knowledge

that is used to get through daily life and typical situations within a community. Placing

one's right hand over one's heart while saying the Pledge of Allegiance or going to the

end of the line are examples of mundane cultural knowledge. Mundane cultural

knowledge is usually taught through example and/or direct instruction.

Self-other knowledge is "something we use constantly to place ourselves in relation to others, and it directly affects our self-expression, as well as our feeling about ourselves" (Spindler, 1999, p. 467). Said another way, self-other cultural knowledge relates to our understandings of ourselves and others as well as the identities we shape for ourselves and others in relation to and in relation with others. For example, self-other knowledge describes how a "good" teacher may interact with students, how he/she perceives his/her actions and the responses those actions trigger from his/her students, how this teacher plans lessons and activities, how he/she disciplines, and how he/she interprets the motives and intentions of his/her students.

Submerged cultural knowledge describes the "hidden assumptions" that are a tacit part of life in a community (Spindler, 1999, p. 469). Although it permeates "every dimension of our beliefs and attitudes" (Spindler, 1999, p. 469), this form of knowledge is the most difficult to explain and capture, because it is learned, and acted upon, without conscious recognition of its existence or import in the life of the individual. For example, white teacher researcher Cynthia Ballenger (1999), whose work was discussed earlier, described in detail her failed attempts to discipline her Haitian students. Through discussions and observations of her Haitian co-workers, she learned that her disciplinary strategies were rooted in a different set of cultural expectations and values than were the discipline strategies of her co-workers. While the Haitian teachers based their disciplinary strategies on the students' connections to others within the community, Ballenger based her disciplinary strategies on making a connection with the individual child. The submerged cultural knowledge at work in her disciplinary

intentions and actions became obvious only when juxtaposed with another set of beliefs and actions. As this example demonstrates, submerged cultural knowledge may play a very important role in the classroom.

The intent of this study was not to analyze the different forms of cultural knowledge but to examine how cultural knowledge as a whole was organized to shape patterns of behavior, belief systems and ideologies, and identities. Cultural knowledge forms the backdrop of how an individual functions in and interprets his or her world, and conflicting cultural knowledge may be especially important to classroom instruction.

Erickson (2007) labels classrooms "collection sites" of cultural knowledge (p. 49). Within the walls of the classroom, the cultural knowledge of teachers and students exist side-by-side along with the culturally defined goals of the school and the educational system in general. For this reason, Spindler and Spindler (1994) argue that teachers, as well as students, be viewed as "cultural agents" who "bring to school, and schooling, preoccupations, preconceptions, assumptions, and habits that have been acquired by experience in culturally framed encounters with parents, peers, and the myriad 'others' in contemporary society, including mass media" (p. xiv). As cultural agents, teachers' views will influence how they interact in the world, how they interpret and make meaning of their own and their students' intentions and actions within the classroom, and which roles they assume for themselves and which they ascribe to their students. Additionally, cultural knowledge will influence how and why teachers believe students learn; how teachers structure their classroom practices; how they interact with and set

expectations for their students; how they set goals; how they view the educational

process; and what types of knowledge they view as valuable. In the following sections, I

explore how the sociocultural theories of Barbara Rogoff (1990, 1995, 1998, 2003) and

Peter Murrell (2007) provide a way of looking at how the teachers in this study

navigated the cultural gaps between themselves and the students who differed from

themselves culturally.

The Sociocultural Theories of Barbara Rogoff and Peter Murrell

The works of developmental psychologist Barbara Rogoff (1990, 1995, 1998, 2003)

and urban educator and theorist Peter Murrell (2007) provide the conceptual framework

upon which this study was based. Because Rogoff and Murrell are sociocultural

scholars whose work is derived from the theories of Lev Vygotsky, it is important to

clarify how sociocultural theory defines its unit of analysis. For sociocultural theorists

(e.g., Leontiev, 1979/1981; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991), action is the unit of analysis.

"When action is given analytic priority, human beings are viewed as coming into contact

with, and creating, their surroundings as well as themselves through the actions in

which they engage. Thus action, rather than human beings or the environment

considered in isolation, provides the entry point into the analysis" (Wertsch, 1991, p. 8).

For this study, analytic emphasis was placed on the actions and *inter*actions of the

participants as cultural agents who were both shaping and being shaped by their

environment. The focus was not on the individual teachers per se but on the teachers as

actors who were both constituting and being constituted by their environment. The

environment was conceptualized not just as a physical space but as a physical space

occupied and populated by people, texts, and materials representing the past, present, and future with which the teachers interacted.

Seeking to capture the nuances of the individual's actions and interactions within the environment, Rogoff (1995) describes three "planes of focus in sociocultural activity—community/institutional, interpersonal, and personal"(p.141). These planes are conceptualized "not as separate or as hierarchical, but simply involving different grains of focus with the whole sociocultural activity" (p. 141). As one plane is brought into focus for analytic purposes, the others are, of necessity, shifted to the background, but the holistic nature of the sociocultural activity suggests that analysis of one plane without reference to the others is meaningless. The focus of this investigation was on the personal and interpersonal planes, but analysis would have been incomplete if consideration were not given to the larger institutional context in which the teachers and students functioned.

As a sociocultural theorist, Rogoff's (1990, 1995, 1998, 2003) research and analysis provides a way to examine how, and why, individuals learn, develop, adapt, and function in the communities in which they participate. Supporting the notion of all individuals as cultural agents, Rogoff's work requires that individuals be considered within the context in which their learning and functioning are meaningful and relevant. Rather than solitary persons functioning independently of the social environment in which they find themselves, individuals are both shaping and shaped by the world in which they participate. To understand the workings of an individual, the interpersonal relations and community within which the individual is involved must be considered.

Like Rogoff (1990, 1995, 1998, 2003), Murrell (2007) asserts that classroom practices and knowledge may only be understood by looking at the action and interactions as situated within the sociocultural context of the classroom. Building on Rogoff's work, Murrell explores how systems of beliefs, or meaning systems, are situated within, and specific to, cultural communities. Additionally, Murrell examines how participation in communities shapes the roles and identities that individuals may assume or ascribe to themselves and others.

Murrell's work (2007), unlike Rogoff's (1990, 1995, 1998, 2003), is specific to school settings and urban contexts in particular. Furthermore, his work is directed toward helping teachers create communities that support "identities of achievement" for their students and, presumably, themselves as well. In order to support "identities of achievement," Murrell argues that teachers engage in a process he terms "cultural mapping".

> Cultural mapping is the method by which to uncover the ideologies and meaning systems that play a significant role in shaping cultural practices and how young children position themselves in relation to those practices (p. 21).

By doing a "cultural read" of each student, Murrell asserts that teachers will be better able to understand the cultural behaviors, values, expectations and intentions each student brings to and develops within the classroom and how these may foster or hinder identities of achievement. Cultural mapping involves three phases: "an analysis of the

identity profile of the individual learner, an analysis of the meaning systems and cultural practices in a given school environment, and finally, the positioning that the individual does within a social setting" (p. 21).

With a few alterations, this study extends the notion of "doing a cultural read" to the teacher at the front of the classroom. This study adopts Murrell's (2007) focus on identity and meaning systems. However, positionality is considered, not as a separate entity, but as part of the identity of the participants. This study focuses specifically on the communities in which the teachers have lived, studied, played, and worked. Because the study assumes that the teachers are cultural agents actively employing and constructing cultural knowledge, great attention is given to where the teachers learned and created that cultural knowledge. This study does "a cultural read" of the teacher's cultural communities, their meaning systems, and the identities they assumed. In the following sections, I tease out elements of Rogoff and Murrell's sociocultural theories that provided the foundation for doing a cultural read of the teachers.

Cultural Communities

Sociocultural theorist Barbara Rogoff (1990, 1995, 1998, 2003) provides a way of conceptualizing cultural communities that allows us to understand individual functioning within a community. Rogoff (2003) defines a cultural community.

> A community involves people trying to accomplish some things together,
>
> with some stability of involvement and attention to the ways they relate
>
> to each other. Being a community requires structured communication

that is expected to endure for some time, with a degree of commitment and shared, though often contested, meaning. A community develops cultural practices and traditions that transcend the particular individuals involved, as one generation replaces another...To continue to function, a community also adapts to changing times, experimenting with and resisting new ideas in ways that maintain core values while learning from changes that are desired or required (pp. 80-81).

Using this definition, a church youth group, a Girl Scout troop, and a classroom are all communities. Each is an ongoing group with expectations of continuing into the future. Each shares some history within their group, with generations that proceed them, and with those that will follow them. Each uses cultural practices to ease their daily functioning. These might include how attendance is taken or the use of a raised hand to gain the speaking floor. Adapting to modern times, these practices may, of necessity, shift. The teacher, for example, may still call the role but enter present/absent onto a computer spreadsheet rather than the attendance book used by his predecessors. Through commonly held values, understandings, and organizational systems, participants function and move toward accomplishing a shared goal. Growth and development are directed toward higher levels of participation within the community.

An essential element of Rogoff's (2003) conceptualization of cultural communities is the differentiation between membership and participation. Membership, Rogoff argues, suggests a rigidity or boundary that defines its members.

She labels this the "box" approach; each individual checks a box on a racial classification or income level section of a questionnaire, and this box then categorizes and characterizes the individual (p. 79). Unfortunately, membership in "box" categories does not capture the complex, interwoven nature of an individual's lived experience. In contrast, participation highlights the fluidity of movement individuals experience between different communities, suggesting that an individual may interact, learn, and socialize in many differing cultural communities. For example, an individual may be a participant of a church youth group *and* come from a middle-class background *and* be white.

The use of participation rather than membership as a conceptual tool more fully reflects the increasing diversity of our society and our world. As our society moves toward greater diversity, there are fewer communities that are so insular that their members are not also participants in other communities. As ethnographer Michael Agar (2006) notes:

> Any community is about *cultures* now, *plural*, and everyone in that
> community has a different mix available, and everyone draws on a
> different subset of that mix in different ways. No person, or group, can
> be described, explained, or generalized completely with a single cultural
> label (p. 7).

Conceptualizing individuals as moving through varying, and possibly disparate, cultural communities allows us to explore the unique "constellation of background

experiences" that make up each individual's social biography (Rogoff, 2003, p. 28).

Rather than conceptualizing an individual as "shifting from one cultural system to

another in an either/or fashion" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 354), individuals may be viewed as

cultural agents drawing from and building upon cultural knowledge gleaned from

differing experiences in differing communities. From this perspective, individuals are

not locked into the learning of a single cultural community. Their cultural knowledge

may be as diverse and varied as the communities in which they have participated.

For the purposes of this study, participation as a theoretical concept allows this

investigation to move beyond a categorical interpretation of the teachers as "white" to a

more complex, fluid interpretation of the teachers that encompassed far more than their

racial classification. Participation directs attention to where a teacher has been and what

she may have learned there. By asking questions of the teachers and observing their

movements throughout their school day, this study maps out the cultural communities

in which the teachers participated in during the 2008-2009 academic year and in which

they have participated in their pasts. By mapping out the life histories of the

participants, I seek to uncover the cultural knowledge that the teachers drew on in their

daily work in the classroom. This is not a straightforward process however, since

cultural knowledge acquired and constructed within one cultural community may well

be transformed through participation in another.

Through participation in differing communities, individuals may develop

understandings that are a composite of the differing, and potentially conflicting, value

and beliefs systems they have encountered and constructed through participation in differing communities. Through participation, individuals grow and transform:

> ...a person develops through participation in an activity, *changing* to be
> involved in the situation at hand in ways that contribute both to the
> ongoing event and to the person's preparation for involvement in similar
> events...[The] focus is on the people's active changes of understanding
> and involvement in dynamic activities in which they participate....The
> central questions raised in the transformation of participation view deal
> with how people's roles and understanding change as an activity
> develops, how different activities relate to each other, and how people
> prepare now for what they expect later on the basis of their prior
> participation (Rogoff, 1998, p. 690).

Individuals bring to new situations understandings based on their past experiences as well as expectations for future experiences. These understandings shape how they perceive their current situation—and their identities within those situations—but they do not determine how an individual will adapt and grow. Rogoff's work (1990, 1995, 1998, 2003) indicates that understandings and perceptions are transformable through participation. Within the context of this study, this means that the white teachers did not necessarily think, interpret, and act from a cultural frame of reference that was rooted solely in their "culturally encapsulated" white upbringing (Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996). These understandings, and the identities formed in conjunction with these

understandings, may be transformed through activity and interactions with others. It should not be assumed that Whiteness overshadowed all other understandings and interpretations once the teachers began to work with diverse students in their own classrooms. The act of participating even within their own classrooms with their diverse students had the potential to transform their understandings and perceptions.

Meaning Systems

Underlying the functioning of the individual are the systems of beliefs that the individual both acquires and creates within cultural communities. These systems of beliefs are labeled differently by different theorists. Murrell (2007) calls them "meaning systems," while Rogoff (2003) at varying times refers to them as "cultural regularities," "cultural patterns," or meaning systems. In this chapter, the term "meaning systems" is utilized.

Meaning systems, which Murrell (2007) defines as ideologies that are "enacted in a community's day-to-day conversations, interactions, and practices" (p. 9), are organized groups of ideas and beliefs that support the ideals and goals of the community. Meaning systems are embedded within the daily practices of the community; they underlie the actions and behaviors of daily life. Meaning systems might be considered theories that individuals within a community hold to explain how life is done in that community. Because they are accepted as normal or common sense, they become a part of "unexamined backdrop of everyday living" (Delpit, 1995, p. 92). By virtue of their acceptance as part of the way things are done, the assumptions and values undergirding meaning systems may go unchallenged or even remain hidden

from the participants of the community. They may become problematic, however, because they assign value to some aspects of the community but not to others.

Rogoff (1990, 1998, 2003) argues, for example, that the American educational system favors independence and the merits of solitary achievement over collaboration and the benefits of working with others. These beliefs and values, visible in the sticker charts and perfect test papers displayed on classrooms wall, are in direct opposition to what some suggest are African American beliefs and values like cooperation and interdependence (Haberman, 1996; Irvine, 2003; Nieto, 1999, 2000). When looking at classrooms populated by individuals coming from different cultural communities with different cultural knowledge, it is important to understand the meaning systems at work, the value assigned to the meaning systems, and the role the meaning systems play in classroom interactions and practices.

Scholars have identified many meaning systems assimilated into educational discourse and practice. Whiteness theory and deficit thinking/cultural deprivation ideologies examine how race, power, and privilege may negatively affect the educational experiences of students who are of color, of low-income families, and/or speak a language other than English. These two meaning systems are discussed here in greater detail. Additionally, several meaning systems focusing on educational pedagogy designed to promote educational equality and affirm cultural identity are discussed.

Whiteness Theory. An extensive body of theory, theoretical research, and research examines Whiteness theory. Rooted in the legal work of the civil rights

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movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Ladson-Billings, 1999), Alice McIntyre (1997a) describes Whiteness as "a system and ideology of white dominance that marginalizes and oppresses people of color, ensuring privileges for white people in this country. Whiteness is an ideology that refutes the legacy of race inequalities that exist in our schools and in society" (p. 654). Like other scholars (Brandon, 2003; Cochran-Smith, 1995a; Essed, 2001; Fine, 1997; Howard, 2006; Hytten & Warren, 2003; Kailin, 2002; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2001a; Marx, 2006; Marx & Pennington, 2003; McIntosh, 2004; McIntyre, 1997a, 1997b; Sleeter, 1993/2005), McIntyre (1997a, 1997b) argues that whiteness confers privilege to white individuals and denies privilege to those who are of color or who speak a native language other than English.

Peggy McIntosh (2004) in her highly cited essay, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," explores how she, as a white woman, benefits from her racial classification in a society that privileges whiteness. Using a simple list format, she shares some of the benefits of being white. Below is a partial list of the advantages she believes she incurred from being white.

> I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books...and children's magazines featuring people of my race.

> I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.

> I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.

If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative

episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.

I can choose blemish cover or bandages in 'flesh color' and have them

more or less match my skin (p. 190).

Through her critical examination of "unearned skin privilege," McIntosh (2004) argues

that "whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average,

and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will

allow 'them' to be more like 'us' (p. 189).

Deficit Thinking and the Cultural Deprivation Paradigm. Valencia (1997b)

argues that deficit thinking has long been utilized by educators to explain the school

failure of students outside of the white, mainstream population.

The deficit thinking model, at its core, is an endogenous theory—positing

that the student who fails in school does so because of internal deficits or

deficiencies. Such deficits manifest, it is alleged, in limited intellectual

abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn and immoral

behavior…[Genetics], culture and class, and familial socialization have all

been postulated as the sources of alleged deficit expressed by the

individual student who experiences school failure (p. 2).

Looking at various incarnations of deficit thinking in education, Banks (1993)

traces the historical roots of the cultural deprivation paradigm from the 1960s and notes

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its resurgence during the 1970s and 1980s as cultural deficit theories and at-risk ideologies. In any of its incarnations, the cultural deprivation paradigm suggests that students who are of color, who come from low-income homes, and/or speak a language other than English at home have difficulties achieving in school, because their early socialization experiences at home do not provide them with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that their white, middle-class peers acquire in their early socialization. If these students had the same knowledge, skills, and attitudes as their white, middle-class peers, they would perform at equal levels in school. In essence, cultural deprivation theories blame the students who differ racially, ethnically, linguistically, and/or socioeconomically and their home environments for the inability of the public schools to effectively provide for their education. The sub-text of terms such as "cultural deficit" or "cultural disadvantage" hints at the belief that these students come from cultural communities that are less than ideal. In fact, they are deficient. Because these families and communities are inferior to white middle-class families and communities, they place those who are raised within their boundaries "at-risk" of not achieving their full potential. Working from a cultural deficit perspective, the goal of the public schools becomes overriding the disadvantages inherent in the students racially, ethnically, linguistically, and/or socioeconomically diverse homes.

Banks (1993) argues that this meaning system is "not only a system of explanations, it is also a perspective on reality that reflects the experiences, perceptions, and values of its creators" (p. 15). Its prevalence is visible in the comments of teachers who state that low-income and minority students are unable to perform well in school

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due to the deficits in their home environments (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Kailin, 1999, 2002; Marx, 2006; McIntyre, 1997b; Sleeter, 2001b). Arguably, cultural deprivation and at-risk ideologies underlie such federally-funded programs as Head Start (Bruner, 1996).

Whiteness theory and the cultural deprivation paradigm do not portray white teachers in a flattering light. Despite the need to consider the possibility that these meaning systems impact the work of white teachers, they are not the only options. Because white teachers will have participated in different cultural communities, they may operate from meaning systems very different from those suggested by Whiteness theory and cultural deprivation ideologies. Others (Howard, 2006; Kailin, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2007) have argued that white teachers may draw upon social justice and antiracist belief systems which promote educational equality for all students by actively fighting racism and inequality within the schools and larger society. As Lisa Delpit (1995) notes, white teachers are capable of being very good teachers for students who differ from themselves.

Pedagogies of Educational Equality and Affirmed Cultural Identity. Numerous meaning systems relate to pedagogical stances and practices designed to promote educational equality for all students and to affirm the cultural identity of those students who are outside of the white mainstream. These pedagogies have been labeled culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000), culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2007), and transformationist teaching (Howard, 2006). Some call for teaching with "a cultural eye" (Irvine, 2003); others call for teaching that is "affirmative" of diversity (Nieto, 1999, 2000). While it is beyond the scope of this study to explore the

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many subtle differences between these pedagogies, it is worth discussing the shared meaning they assign to cultural diversity in the classroom and their commitment to education for social justice. Each of these pedagogies asserts that the cultural identity of every student and teacher is of importance and value in the classroom. Understanding the role played by the cultural background and cultural knowledge of both teachers and students is essential to communication and instruction within the classroom. These theorists and educators also recognize that the gap between the cultural knowledge of the home and the school may cause educational difficulties. As a result, a necessary goal of education, from these theorists' perspective, is providing a way to bridge the gap between the cultural knowledge of the home environment and the cultural knowledge of the school environment. Academic achievement begins by building upon the cultural knowledge students bring with them to the schoolroom. It is achieved by believing in the abilities of all students, setting high expectations, and holding students accountable. Moreover, these theorists and educators believe that education must promote dialogue and action within the classroom that critically examines and challenges injustice, inequality, racism and discrimination both within the school and in the larger community.

Educators working from meaning systems like those related to culturally relevant pedagogy will likely differ in their actions and interactions in the classroom from those operating from meaning systems like Whiteness ideologies and cultural deprivation theories. This study explored how two white teachers navigated the cultural gap between themselves and their culturally diverse students. An important

element of that navigating was the meaning systems that shaped their actions and behaviors and provided structure to their thinking and understanding in relation to others. Meaning systems, like other forms of cultural knowledge, are learned and created within cultural communities. In the next section I focus on the notion of identity as created and co-created within cultural communities.

Situated-Mediated Identity

Murrell (2007) proposes a "situated-mediated identity theory" where "the identity of the individual is best understood as located in human activity, and mediated through the human dynamics of the social setting as well as by the social, cultural, and historical contexts of their social setting" (p. 28). The notion of a "situated-mediated" identity brings to the forefront the idea that identity is formed with a sociocultural context. It is useful, Murrell notes, to think of identity as both an entity and a process. As an entity, identity refers to a somewhat stable set of self-images, values, and behaviors. As a process, identity is "a continuous composition that is enacted depending on the social setting and situational context of the individual" (p. 32). It is the situated nature of identity that explains why an individual may seem to be a different person in different situations. Murrell argues that, in fact, the person *is* different. Because identity is responsive to, and mediated by, the context in which the individual presents and re-presents himself, the individual will draw on and create anew different aspects of his identity depending on the context. For example, a "good" teacher in one setting may focus on teaching basic math facts. In a different setting with

a different group of students, this same "good" teacher may focus on mathematical

problem-solving and analytic thinking.

Identity is both ascribed and assumed by the actors within a social context.

Ascribed identity describes the positioning that others attribute to an individual based

on the social scene, while assumed identity describes the positioning the individual

adopts for himself. Ascribed and assumed identities may be accepted or rejected by

others within the social setting based on "recognition (by the individual or by others) of

a particular role identity (or set of role identities) in a given situation" (Murrell, 2007,

p.92). For example, the identity of the "good" teacher described earlier may be

challenged or rejected by the teacher's students, parents, or colleagues who disagree

with what behaviors, attitudes, and values a "good" teacher should exhibit or project.

Similarly, the teacher may challenge or reject the identity that others ascribe to him. In

this way, individuals are positioned according to "the storyline or script or frame of a

particular situation" (p. 92). The storylines and roles available to the individuals are

rooted in the cultural communities in which the individuals are participating (Rogoff,

1998, 2003).

Murrell's (2007) conceptualization of the identity as situated and mediated by the

social context provides a way to examine how the participants in this study created their

identity in relation to the dynamics of their classroom and the wider school setting. Like

Rogoff (1998, 2003) who asserts that learning and development are collaborative

processes, Murrell argues that "identity is not inside the individual but is mediated by

what is going on around the individual" (p. 37). Identity occurs in the space between

the actors within a given context. From this perspective identity is not a formed entity

that teachers bring with them to the classroom regardless of who populates the

classroom. Instead identity is fluid and emergent in response to the students and the

larger school environment. Murrell describes the benefits of conceptualizing identity as

a situated and mediated process:

> My theory is meant to account for the many possible, yet unrecognized,
>
> social identities that can be taken up by the young people at different
>
> times and in different situations. Not only are there a variety of social
>
> identifications young people can take on, but models of "the good
>
> student" are construed differently by students and their teachers (p. 33).

Murrell's work focuses on the identities of the students, but his theory applies to

teachers as well. By conceptualizing the teachers' identities as situated and mediated,

this study opened up possibilities, rather than imposed limitations, for which identities

the teachers assumed for themselves and which they ascribed to their students. Rather

than assuming how white teachers may construct their identity in relation to culturally

diverse students, Murrell's theory allows for the consideration of "many possible, yet

unrecognized" identities.

Conclusion: Doing a Cultural Read

In order to understand how two white, in-service teachers navigated the cultural

gap between themselves and those students who differ from themselves culturally, I did

a "cultural read" of the participants (Murrell, 2007). I examined the cultural

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communities, the meaning systems, and situated identities of each of the teachers. Because this study assumed that the teachers were cultural agents acquiring, constructing and acting on cultural knowledge in and through their interactions with their students, these three elements worked in tandem as the teachers made meaning of cultural differences in the classroom.

Combining Rogoff's (1990, 1995, 1998, 2003) sociocultural work around communities of practice with Murrell's (2007) interpretation of meaning systems and situated-mediated identity theory provided a strong theoretical framework to address how the teachers navigated the cultural gap. First, this combination recognized all learning, acting, and interpreting as cultural. Second, this combination, recognizing the importance of the individual, the interpersonal, and the community planes as mutually constituting each other, suggested the need to look beyond the classroom walls to see how the work of students and teachers was influenced by the larger community. Third, this combination provided an opportunity to situate the teacher's expectations, values, and practices within varying, and possibly conflicting, communities of practice. Fourth, this combination allowed for the exploration of the meaning systems from which the teachers operated as well as the importance of those meaning systems within the classroom in relation to and in relationship with students. Finally, this combination provided opportunities to examine how identities were formed and negotiated within communities and how those identities shaped practices, actions, and beliefs within the classroom.

The goal, ultimately, of this study and others like it was to improve the educational and life experiences of students who are typically underserved by the US educational system. In order to do so, this study shifted focus away from work with pre-service teacher preparation and/or staff development programs to examine specifically what was going on in the classroom. As Murrell (2007) notes, in addressing "the diversity dilemma," we need "to fully recognize what happens to people in the real, day-to-day fabric of their lives and look to change that...[The] dilemma is resolvable as we turn to the social fields of life in school communities" (p. 23). This investigation looks to the world of the classroom. In the next chapter, I provide details of a methodology designed to look at the sociocultural context of the teachers' classrooms and the meaning they made of their work within those classrooms.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I discuss how the study was conducted. I begin by presenting the rationale for using an ethnographic research design. Next, I describe how the data was collected and analyzed and then introduce the setting. At the chapter's conclusion, I consider ethical issues related to the study. This study was reviewed by and received the approval of the University of New Hampshire's Institutional Review Board (IRB); the approval form appears as Appendix A.

Ethnography

In order to understand how two white teachers navigated diversity within the contexts of their classrooms, this study called for a methodology that attended to the daily lives of the teachers in the classroom while simultaneously capturing the larger multi-layered, cultural context which made those daily actions functional and relevant for the teachers. Additionally, this study assumed that teachers, like all other persons, are cultural beings and consequently suggested a methodology designed to provide analysis and interpretation that is cultural in nature. Ethnography provides for both of these needs. Anthropologist and ethnographer Harry Wolcott (1999) explains ethnography's intent.

The underlying purpose of ethnographic research...is to describe what

the people in some particular place or status ordinarily do, and the

meanings they ascribe to what they do, under ordinary or particular

circumstances, presenting that description in a manner that draws

attention to regularities that implicate the cultural process (p. 68).

Broadly speaking, ethnographic studies attend to both the specific and the

circumstantial by seeking to understand and situate problems of meaning in terms of a

specific context.

Wolcott (1999) notes two "critical expectations" of ethnographic studies: "first

and foremost...ethnography is a *field-oriented activity*, and second that ethnography has

traditionally taken *cultural interpretation* as its central purpose" (p. 77). Both of these

attributes are essential components of this investigation.

Ethnographic methods root the researcher in the field. The methods, including

the observations, interviews, and artifact collection strategies utilized in this study,

allow researchers to experience, observe, and note not only the "mundane and the

dramatic" of everyday activities (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. xv) but also to shift

from the role of passive observer to that of active inquirer. For the purposes of this

study, ethnography provides research methods that allow for direct observation of the

actions and interactions of the participants and then opportunities to speak to the

participants about those actions and interactions and their meaning for the participants.

In addition to strategies designed to capture and contextualize the daily lives of the participants, ethnography provides a means of analyzing, building, and depicting cultural patterns. Exploring further how ethnography yields a cultural interpretation, ethnographer Michael Agar (2006) argues that the ethnographer creates a translation that allows outsiders to understand the actions and interactions of insiders. In this study the insiders were the teachers; the outsider was the researcher.

> ...[Something] is going on that enables communication and action among
> certain kinds of persons in certain kinds of situations, and whatever that
> communication and action are about is not understandable to an outsider
> like you...The assumption is, there are shared meanings/contexts
> unknown to you. You have to figure out what they are...Culture names
> the solution you assume you can find. Culture is what you eventually
> show the world to explain meaning problems in terms of
> contexts...[*Culture*] names the *translation* that ethnographers build for
> their audience... (p. 5).

The goal of this investigation was to note and describe in thick, rich detail the daily activities and interactions of the participating classrooms to make it possible to "transform observed *instances* of behavior into inferred *patterns* of behavior" (Wolcott, 1999, p. 93). From these patterns, this study offers a cultural interpretation, a translation, which explains the communication and action of the participants for a particular audience. In this case, the translation of the teachers' communication and actions will be

offered for the larger educational research community. Consistent with sociocultural theory, the cultural interpretation offered through this ethnographic study is not the product of the researcher alone. Rather, it is created in and through the social interaction within the research setting between the participants and researcher.

Data Collection

Consistent with sociocultural theory (Rogoff, 1990, 1995, 1998, 2003; Wertsch, 1981), the unit of analysis was the action and interaction of the participants. In order to capture these elements of the research setting, this study relied on three data sources: participant observation, interviewing, and the collection of artifacts. Table 3.1 summarizes the data collection, and the following sections provide additional details about each data source.

Table 3.1

Summary of data collection by data source

Data Source	Number of times collected	Duration of collection period	Total amount of data collected
Participant Observation Ms. Kate Friel[2]	14 school days (including grade level meeting, Learning Celebration, and African Dance Celebration)	6 hours per observation	84 hours
Mrs. Elsie Sparks	15 school days (including grade level meeting) 1 evening parent workshop about	6 hours per observation 2 hour workshop	92 hours

[2] All names are pseudonyms.

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	homework		
Interviews Ms. Kate Friel	7 interviews	Ranging from 15 – 110 minutes	370 minutes
Mrs. Elsie Sparks	10 interviews	Ranging from 20 – 70 minutes	380 minutes

Artifact collection
   Including lesson plans,
   daily news written by
   the teachers,
   newsletters, teacher
   resource materials,
   handouts for
   workshops, pictures of
   bulletin boards, data
   and statistics collected
   by the principal, etc.
 	
Related texts:
See page 58 for the text
references.
 	
Cultural maps
			
			2 texts per
			participant
			
			2 maps
			(1 map per teacher)

Participant observation

I used participant observation to see, hear, and observe how the participants were making meaning of cultural differences in the classroom. Through participation in the schools with the teachers and their students, I was able to "see first-hand and up close how people grapple with uncertainty and confusion, how meanings emerge through talk and collective action, how understandings and interpretations change over time" (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 4). My goal through participant observation was to capture the daily functioning of the teachers as they moved through the activities typical

of their school days. To address "a wide cross-section of everyday activities" (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 10), I observed the teachers as they engaged in instructional activities as well as non-instructional activities. In addition to noting the activities in which the participants engaged, I focused attention on the interactions that occurred between the teachers and their students, between the participants and the students' families, and between the participants and their co-workers.

Observations from the research setting were recorded as jottings using a notebook. Consistent with the recommendations of Emerson, et al. (1995), the jottings focused on key elements of an observed scene, avoided interpretive language, included sensory descriptions, and provided the details of the actual actions and/or words used by the participants. In addition to the jottings that occurred in the field, I kept a research journal in which I recorded my personal responses to the setting, wrote down any questions I wished to pursue, and/or took note of occurrences which triggered analytic thoughts.

Interviewing

The second major data collection strategy was interviewing. Interviewing shifted my role from "being present as a passive *observer* of what is going on [to] taking an active role in *asking* what is going on" (Wolcott, 1999, p. 47). The teachers were interviewed four times using semi-structured interviews which are described below as well as additional informal interviews to discuss their cultural maps or issues that arose out of our conversations and interactions.

Four semi-structured interviews were included in the study. The life history (Appendix B) and educational history (Appendix C) interviews focused on the life and educational experiences that each teacher brought with her to the classroom. The cultural diversity interview (Appendix D) explored how the teachers viewed cultural diversity in their school setting, how they structured their classroom practices in relation to cultural diversity, and identified issues of importance to the teachers related to cultural diversity. The exit interview (Appendix E) provided an opportunity for the teachers to add any information they felt has been overlooked or to respond to the research experience. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. The audio-tapes were stored in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's home.

All transcriptions were done by the researcher. In most cases all interviews were transcribed within 72 hours of the interview. The transcription process involved listening to each interview twice. The first time I recorded the words of the participant and myself. The second time I listened and made any necessary corrections. Being mindful of Gee's assertion (2007) that language-in-use involves "other stuff" besides the actual words that emerge from an individual's mouth, I attempted to capture the "full flavor of the interview" (Poland, 2002, p. 274) by recording verbalizations other than words. Such verbalizations included laughing and sighing; they appear in the transcripts as they occurred in the interviews. Additionally, non-verbal gestures that were initially noted in fieldnotes were added to the transcripts after the text transcription was complete. These gestures included, for example, eye-rolling, pointing, head shaking, and shrugging.

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Transcription was as close to verbatim as possible. I followed Poland's (2002) suggestion to avoid "tidying up" the interviews to make the participants or myself "sound better" (p. 279). As a result, within the analysis that follows, the comments of the participants contain pauses, grammatical errors, run-on and incomplete sentences. My intent in doing so was to stay as close as possible to the language and thinking of the participants. Altering the transcripts in any way might have altered the intent of the participants and the integrity of the study. While transcribing the interviews I used the notation system described by Poland to address issues like pauses, overlapping speech, interruptions, garbled speech, and emphasis.

In addition to the interviews, the participants and I often engaged in more informal conversations during which we discussed the meaning of an occurrence or interaction that I observed or overheard in the classroom or school. When I was not able to record these conversations, I recorded them as jottings using direct quotations when possible.

Collection of Artifacts

Materials relevant to the topic of this study were collected throughout the course of the investigation. The artifacts added a richness of detail to the fieldnotes and interviews. They frequently supported a claim made by one of the participants about her intentions or goals in relation to the school or a classroom. Additionally, they often triggered discussions between me and the participants about why or how a particular material was created or used.

The artifacts included newsletters written to the parents, copies of lesson plans, data reports generated by the school, and staff development materials. When the nature of the materials made it impossible to collect them, photographs were taken. For example, photos of the flags hanging in the foyer of Liberty School supplanted the collection of the actual flags. Artifacts of particular importance to this study were the texts each of the teachers read during the course of the study and the teachers' cultural maps.

Related Texts. Each participant read two texts related to the topic of diversity. The reading of these texts was not a part of the initial study, but as the teachers and I became engaged in this research, we realized that there was more to explore around the topic of diversity than what occurred in their classrooms each day. As we talked about their biographies and their teaching practice, it seemed like an opportunity to examine what others within the educational field had to say about working with diverse students. After a few brief discussions, we agreed to read and discuss several texts that were relevant to their work as teachers. I selected the texts which Elsie read, while Kate and I each selected one of the texts she and I read. The rationale for the selection of the texts is presented in Chapter 7. Elsie read and discussed with me a chapter from Jim Cummins *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowering a Diverse Society* (1996) and a chapter by Eugene Garcia entitled "Valuing Students' Home Worlds" which appeared in Mica Pollock's edited volume *Everyday Antiracism: Getting Real about Race in School* (2008). Kate read and discussed with me Ruby Payne's *Framework for Understanding*

Poverty (2005) and a critique of Payne's book written by Paul Gorski (2008) entitled

"Peddling Poverty for Profit."

Cultural Maps. For each of the participants I constructed a "cultural map." In

the conceptual framework, I argued that the teachers in this study be viewed as cultural

agents. To better understand who the teachers were as cultural agents, I proposed doing

a "cultural read" of each of the teachers. A cultural read, by Murrell's (2008) definition,

requires consideration of the cultural communities in which an individual has

participated, the values and beliefs she learned and constructed in those communities,

and the identities she assumes for herself and ascribes to others. The maps presented

visually the cultural reads of the teachers, although they did not include either the

assumed or ascribed identities of the teachers. The cultural maps extended Murrell's

(2008) notion of cultural mapping from a philosophical and theoretical exploration of an

individual's life to a pragmatic and doable mapping out of the individual's live and the

beliefs and values learned throughout its duration.

The maps occupied a space in this study that is difficult to define. Since I

initially constructed the maps as a way to organize and synthesize the vast amounts of

biographical information I collected on the teachers, they were in effect a form of

analysis. Interestingly, because each of the maps was shared with the individual

participants, the maps were also artifacts around which the teachers and I interacted. As

we spread them out before us on the table, we talked about the relevance of the

biographical information contained on the maps for each teacher in her work with her

students. The information contained on the maps provided the impetus for discussions

about what it meant for these teachers with their sets of life experiences and subsequent

values and beliefs to be teaching at Liberty School at the time of this research. Chapter

7, "Engaging in and Growing through the Process of the Research," details further how

the participants and I used the maps as artifacts.

Each map was a collection of text boxes in which were quoted poignant snippets

from interviews, field notes, and artifacts that captured a particular element of the

teacher's life. The quotes that appeared in the cultural maps were selected by me for one

of two reasons: 1) they related to the participants' experiences with difference and

diversity, or 2) they illustrated a belief system that the participants carried with them

throughout their lives and applied to their teaching. Along the top margin of each map

were headings related to a particular time period in the teachers' lives. Under each

heading, the information was organized into two basic categories: 1) cultural

communities and 2) beliefs, values, and lessons learned.

As the lives of any two individuals will vary so too did the experiences of these

two women. The maps were formatted to reflect the uniqueness of each of the

participants' lives. While their maps were similar in that they both related the different

cultural communities and the values and beliefs learned and constructed within them,

they differed in that different periods of their lives had different levels of significance.

For example, during Kate's adolescence she learned many lessons about perseverance

and persistence that she carried with her into her present work in her classroom; her

map contained a section devoted to her adolescence. For Elsie, her novice teaching years

working and living in the Alaskan bush were very influential in how she understood

and adapted to cultural diversity; her map had a section devoted to her novice teaching years. The maps also varied by participant in terms of the number of text boxes which appeared. Since Elsie and Kate participated in a different number of communities and learned and constructed different sets of values and beliefs, analysis of their lives yielded a different number of boxes related to those experiences, values and beliefs.

Edited versions of Elsie and Kate's maps appear in the appendix (Appendices F and G). These versions have been edited to fit within the formatting constraints of this publication. Because of space limitations, the number of textboxes that appear on each of the participants' maps have been reduced. While Elsie originally had 29 boxes, her edited version had 22. Kate's original map contained 26 boxes, but the edited version has only 16. In editing for space limitations, I tried to preserve the nature of the original maps while including those text boxes that were most relevant to the overall findings of the study.

Of concern methodologically is the fact that the participants' cultural maps were created by me, the researcher. I weeded through interview transcripts, field notes, and archival materials to find those details that I felt conveyed most clearly what the women had experienced and subsequently valued and believed. As such the maps are theoretical entities, reflecting my interpretations of what was important in each of the teachers' lives. After constructing the maps, I asked the teachers to review them and edit or amend them in any way to ensure that the participants felt the maps depicted their lives honestly and fairly. Kate corrected a date, but Elsie offered no changes. After careful consideration, the teachers both stated that they felt the maps were accurate

depictions of their lives. However, there can be no doubt that the maps would have been different if they had constructed them. Through the maps, I created a story of the women's lives.

The exercise of trying to construct a one-dimensional representation of the teachers' lives was a difficult venture. Although the cultural maps were 11" X 17", the teachers' lives were too complex and messy to capture in a graphic organizer no matter how large the sheet of paper or how many text boxes were created. In the end, the final constructions served as approximations of the teachers' lives.

Data Analysis

In this section I discuss how data analysis occurred. I describe Gee's (2007) discourse analysis and provide the rationale for using his work as the analytic framework for the study. Then I detail the steps taken to code the data, generate themes, and address the issues of validity and ethical concerns.

Gee's Discourse Analysis as Analytic Framework
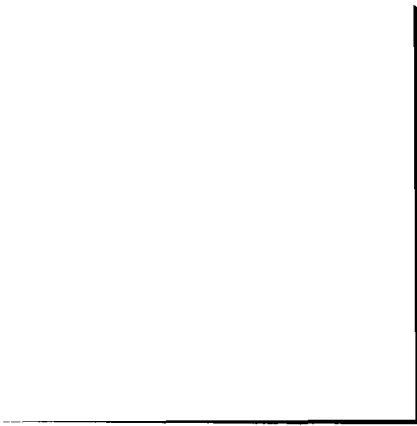
Discourse analysis was used as an analytic framework that was both consistent with, and generative of, ethnographic work. Wolcott (1999) notes that ethnography is "a *field-oriented activity*...that has traditionally taken *cultural interpretation* as its central purpose" (p. 77). Discourse analysis provided a way of moving from the data collected in the field to that cultural interpretation. This study focused on the written and oral language used by the participants in their interactions with others. Language, according to sociocultural scholars (e.g., Leontiev, 1979/1981; Smagorinsky & O'Donnell-Allen, 1998; Wertsch, 1991), is a socially-constructed, psychological tool that not only enables

individuals within a particular context to acquire knowledge and create meaning relevant to participation within that setting; it also shapes the very thinking of which an individual is capable. It is a system shared by members of a society that both shapes and is shaped by the actions and interactions of those members. As such, language mediates between the society that created it and the individual who uses it. Consequently, this investigation utilized discourse analysis as a means of exploring not only the (inter)actions of the participants but also as a way of examining the various contexts in which they have lived, learned, and taught. By focusing on language as both specific to the individual and situated within varying socio-cultural contexts, discourse analysis provides a means of creating an ethnographic cultural interpretation.

In accord with sociocultural theory, Gee (2007) writes that *"language has meaning only in and through social practices"* (p. 8). Language, he writes, functions to "support the performance of social activities and social identities and to support human affiliation within cultures, social groups, and institutions" (p.1). Although Gee (2007) focuses on how language is used for these purposes, he utilizes the term discourse. The word *discourse* is used in two ways. "Little d" discourse refers to language-in-use, i.e. language that is used in an activity or during an interaction, while "big D" Discourse refers to a "way of being in the world" (p. 7) that includes not only language-in-use but also "other stuff—ways of acting, interacting, feeling, believing, valuing, and using various sorts of objects, symbols, tools, and technologies—to recognize yourself and others as meaning and meaningful in certain ways" (p. 7).

Within the context of this study, both participants used discourse in both its "little d" and "big D" forms. However, since this research focused primarily on the two teachers, I will explore further how the teachers, rather than the principal, utilized language in its two forms. The two teachers used language-in-use, in their interactions with students, co-workers, parents, and myself. The teachers' use of language to shape their classroom practices and instructional practices was what Gee (2007) called "little d" discourse. The teachers also used language in a "big D" sense to be recognized at teachers. Gee (2007) explains "when you speak or write anything, you use the resources of English to project yourself as a certain kind of person...you also project yourself as engaged in a certain kind of activity" (p. 22). In the case of the two teachers, they used the language, or Discourse, of education to project an image of themselves as teachers who engaged in the activities of teaching. For example, they used the Discourse of education to discuss how and why they structured their classrooms in certain ways. They wrote and sent home notes and newsletters to parents and family members. Through their use of educational Discourse in both written and spoken language, the teachers revealed who they are and what they do.
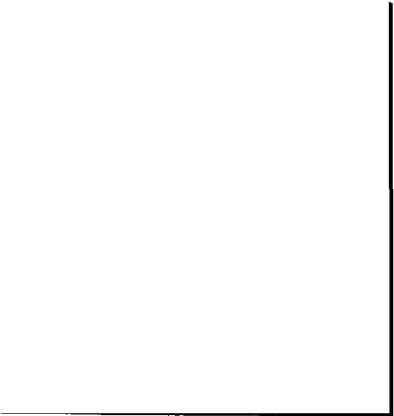
Through their Discourse, the teachers aligned themselves with others in the educational field, yet as Gee (2007) points out, individuals often operate from overlapping or conflicting Discourses. In this study, the two teachers were trained and certified as both elementary educators and special education educators. Their use of language reflected their dual training. They used both the Special Education Discourse and the General Education Discourse. For example, when Elsie and I went through her

class list to discuss the students' racial, linguistic, and economic classifications, Elsie

moved fluidly between the Discourse of special education and general education

(FN.E.1-26)[3]. In describing one of the girls in her class who qualified for English for

Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services, Elsie related her concerns that the little

girl might have a "language processing disorder" which might complicate learning

English. At a different time, she voiced her concern that a little boy's speech difficulties

might extend beyond articulation and be linked with a learning disability. In these

instances, Elsie drew upon the Special Education Discourse, but that Discourse very

obviously overlapped with the General Education Discourse. Consistent with social-

cultural theory, the Discourses an individual uses are linked with the communities in

which she has lived and learned.

From Discourses flow Discourse models. Gee (2007) defines Discourse models as

'theories' (storylines, images, explanatory frameworks) that people hold,

often unconsciously, and use to make sense of the world and their

experiences in it. They are always oversimplified, an attempt to capture

some main element and background subtleties, in order to allow us to act

in the world without having to think overtly about everything (p. 61).

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[3] When citing fieldnotes or interviews, an abbreviation is used. *FN* refers to field notes generated during participant observation. *I* refers to interviews. Following the data source is an initial indicating who was being observed or interviewed. *P*, *E*, and *K* refer to Mr. Parker, Elsie and Kate respectively. After the initial, appears the date excluding the year, since all data was collected in 2009.

Within the Discourses of special education and general education, the teachers had

theories that they shared with others in the field about myriad elements of teaching.

These might relate to what a good teacher says and does or what teaching strategies

constitute "best practice." Discourse models are not idiosyncratic stories that

individuals hold to explain their own life experiences without consideration for the

larger sociocultural values, norms, and expectations. Rather, Discourse models are

shared storylines that individuals negotiate and construct in relationship with others.

They exist more broadly to explain patterns of behavior or thought relevant to

participation within a sociocultural community. Discourse models are the "meaning

systems" discussing in the theoretical framework which describe and define the

ideologies that support an individual's functioning with a group (Murrell, 2007). They

are the theories that underlie the actions and behaviors of daily life within a community.

Within the context of this study, multicultural education, deficit theories, and

culturally relevant pedagogy are all examples of Discourse models. They are "families

of connected images or (informal) 'theories' shared by people belonging to specific social

or cultural groups" (Gee, 2007, p. 95). Working from a particular Discourse model

shapes viewpoints of "what is right or wrong, and what can or cannot be done to solve

problems in the world" (p. 88). An individual operating from a Deficit Thinking

Discourse model would likely hold very different views about how to best educate poor,

black children than would a person operating from a Multicultural Education Discourse

model.

Individuals may hold and operate from many different Discourse models, and different individuals living and working within the same community may hold and operate from conflicting Discourse models. The use of specific Discourse models is dependent upon the sociocultural history of the individual. To delineate the parameters of a Discourse model in use by an individual, it is likely necessary to move beyond the present situation to explore the theories the individual in question developed in other communities. This is consistent with Rogoff's (1990, 1995, 1998, 2003) notion that participation in many different cultural communities will impact how an individual interprets and acts in any given situation.

It was through analysis of the spoken and written language of the participants that Discourses and Discourse models emerged. The spoken language of this study's participants was accessed through interviews and observations within the classroom settings, while their written language was accessed through the artifacts they created during the course of the study.

Gee (2007) states that language is a tool used for "seven building tasks": significance, activities, identities, relationships, politics (the distribution of social goods), connections, and sign systems and knowledge. The building tasks are "carried out all at once and together" (p. 104), although some will emerge as more important within the context of a particular study. Discourse analysis then becomes a process of asking questions of the data about how language was used in relation to these building tasks. Gee lists a total of 26 questions spanning the seven building tasks.

In the next section, I detail how coding and memoing were used to delineate which of the building tasks emerged as most important in this investigation and how analysis moved from asking questions of the data to building an ethnographic interpretation.

Coding and Memoing

As noted earlier, the data existed in three forms: observations, interviews, and artifacts. While in the process of collecting data, I reviewed my field notes from the observations, interview transcripts, and artifact materials daily and used the process of reviewing the documents as a way of familiarizing myself with the data. Although I noted some emerging trends and issues, analysis did not begin in earnest until all of the data was collected. At this point, I moved to reading the data with the intent of "reviewing, re-experiencing, and reexamining everything that [had] been written down, while self-consciously seeking to identify themes, patterns and variations within this record" (Emerson et al., 1995, p.144). I read through the data in its entirety three times with each pass being coded differently and serving different analytic needs.

For the first reading, the data was arranged chronologically by participant. Meaning, I arranged and then coded the field notes, interviews, and artifacts in chronological order for Elsie and then for Kate. During this process, open coding was used. As I read through the data, I recorded in the margins words or phrases that emerged from the data to identify or label events, feelings, or thoughts of importance to the participants as well as those related to my theoretical framework and the existing literature. The intent of this first reading was to open "avenues of inquiry" (Emerson et

al., 1995, p. 151). To give focus to my reading of the data, I mentally asked questions of

the data. Emerson et al. explains this process.

> In asking such questions, the ethnographer draws on a wide variety of
>
> resources, including direct experience of life and events in the setting;
>
> sensitivity toward the concerns and orientations of members; memory of
>
> other specific incidents described elsewhere in one's notes; one's own
>
> prior experience and insights gained in other settings; and concepts and
>
> orientations provided by one's own profession or discipline (p. 146).

While "nothing [was] out of bounds" during this first reading (Emerson et al., p. 146),

the questions I asked of the data were rooted in the seven building tasks and 26

questions described by Gee. Asking how a particular piece of data related to one of the

building tasks allowed me an entry point into the data. To remain open to what might

emerge as essential to the participants' experiences, I asked questions from all seven

building tasks rather than focus on those that seemed to be most relevant from my

perspective. Although, as the above quote indicates, my understandings as well as those

drawn from the literature were crucial to later analysis, my intent during this first

reading of the data was to stay as close to the participant's perspective as possible.

Additionally, I used Charmaz's suggestion (2006) to write codes in gerund form. The

use of gerunds instead of nouns as codes allowed me to "begin analysis from [the]

participants' perspective" (p. 49). In vivo codes drawn directly from the words of the

participants were also used. These codes helped "preserve participants' meaning of

their views and actions" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55). Since in vivo codes "reflect

assumptions, actions and imperatives that frame action" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 56) these

codes, in conjunction with open coding and asking questions of the data, provided an

avenue to begin understanding the participants' experiences and the meanings they

assigned and constructed from them.

After completing the initial reading of the data, I compiled a list of the codes. By

scanning the list, five of Gee's building tasks (2007) emerged as most relevant:

connections, relationships, sign systems and knowledge, politics, and identities. Table

3.2 lists the five building tasks. The table provides a description of how, according to

Gee, language was used to accomplish a building task and a list of codes exemplifying

each task.

Table 3.2

Gee's building tasks and the codes that emerged from the tasks.

Building task	Language was used...	Codes related to the building task
Connections	"to render certain things connected or relevant (or not) to other things (Gee, 2007, p. 12)	• Relating past training to present • Linking special ed. training to present • Reflecting on practices
Relationships	"to signal what sort of relationship we have, want to have, or are trying to have...that is, we use language to build social relationships" (Gee, 2007, p. 12)	• Supporting students • Caring for students • Honoring parents' right
Politics	"to convey a perspective on the nature of the distribution of social goods" (Gee, 2007, p. 12)	• Rejecting deficit theories • Fighting for the underdog • Leveling the playing field
Sign systems and knowledge	"to make certain sign systems and certain forms of knowledge and belief relevant or privileged, or not in given situations" (Gee, 2007, p. 13)	• Experiential diversity • Learning standards • Covering the curriculum • Meeting expectations

Identities	"to get recognized as taking on a certain identity or role" (Gee, 2007, p.11)	• Advocating for students • "Cranky teacher" • Thinking like a reader/writer/mathematician

Each of these building tasks helped me begin exploring and clarifying emerging themes. For example, as I considered how language was used to build relationships, the importance of several types of relationships emerged: teacher-student, teacher-family, and teacher-co-worker. I explored these themes through some initial memo writing and through the subsequent readings of the data.

The initial analytic memos were exploratory in nature, but they sometime led me back to the teachers and their classrooms to seek greater clarity about an emerging theme. In some cases, I selected a code that seemed to be significant to a participant but whose meaning was unclear to me. For example, Elsie frequently referred to "my world" and "their world," yet I was unsure of how she defined these worlds and how their differentiation might serve her and her students. Through a memo, I struggled with these phrases and their meaning for Elsie. I then returned to field to ask Elsie to clarify the two terms for me. Her response helped shape the analysis of "experiential diversity" that appears in chapter 5.

In another memo, I attempted to "identity and explore a general pattern or theme, drawing upon and attempting to link a number of disparate incidents or events" (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 156). This was the case as I considered how the two participants challenged the deficit theories that often surrounded the population of students they served. The coding and analysis that emerged through the initial reading of the data

eventually served to narrow and focus the subsequent readings of the data as themes

began to emerge (Emerson et al., 1995). As links between and across the different

building tasks and themes emerged, I began the second reading of the data.

For the second reading, the data was arranged by data source. Meaning, I sorted

the data into field notes, interview transcripts, and artifacts and then arranged them

chronologically by source.

Focused coding was used during the second reading. Emerson, et al. (1995)

describes focused coding as "building up and elaborating analytically interesting

themes, both by connecting data that initially may not have appeared to go together and

by delineating sub-themes and subtopics that distinguish differences and variations

within the broader topic" (p. 160). Once again, the coding of this second reading was

guided by questions asked of the data. The questions were tied to the five building tasks

already noted. Working from Gee's (2007) suggestions, I formulated questions tied to

the building tasks, the participants' experiences, and my knowledge of the literature. By

asking the questions of the data, sub-themes emerged across the two participants and

across the various field notes, interviews, and artifacts. As I developed the themes and

sub-themes, I explored their analytic significance and nuances through the writing of

integrative memos and the creation of semantic webs delineating the links between and

across data sources and themes.

The integrative memos provided an opportunity to "explicate contextual and

background information that a reader unfamiliar with the setting would need to know

in order to follow the key ideas and claims" (Emerson, et. al., 1995, p. 162). To develop

Elsie's identity as one-caring, for example, I combined details from Nel Noddings' (2002) writings to describe how one-caring behaves and thinks with details from Elsie's interviews and field notes. Working from Noddings' writing and the data from this study, I used the memo to make the case for Elsie as one-caring. This memo served in large part as the foundation for the claim I make in Chapter 4 about Elsie's assumed identity. Other memos explored the meaning of Kate's "conversations with God" and the notion employed by both teachers that their work served to "plant a seed" for the students' futures. While the integrative memos served to clarify and refine the focus of the emerging themes, semantic webs helped to organize the themes and sub-themes and draw attention to "particular theoretical and substantive interests and preferences" (Emerson, et. al., 1995, p. 166).

The semantic webs were formatted to allow me to list a theme with its associated sub-themes on a single sheet of paper. By doing so, I could connect related and supporting details by using lines and arrows. I highlighted areas of seeming importance and created headings to summarize potential relationships between different themes and sub-themes. Through the creation of the webs I could "see" each theme.

After the second reading, the semantic webs served four analytic purposes. First, they allowed me to organize the themes and sub-themes. Since I created a web for each theme, the supporting details for each sub-theme were listed on each web. Second, by looking across the different webs, I was able to explore possible connections between the different themes and sub-themes. Third, the webs provided a way to begin to thinking about how the themes related to the larger educational context in which the participants

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operated. Fourth, because of the lens provided by the semantic webs, I was able to draw upon the existing literature while still holding in mind the participants' experiences and understandings. The webs became an analytic tool that shaped the ongoing analysis. With these analytic thoughts in mind, I re-read the data for the third time.

For the third reading, all three data sources were integrated and arranged chronologically. My purpose in this final reading was to gather further details to support claims and assertions made relative to themes and sub-themes. I read carefully to glean from the three data sources the minute details that would bring to life in full, rich detail the ways in which the participants made meaning of their lives and their work as teachers. As before, I asked questions of the data. While these questions were related to the building tasks described by Gee (2007), at this point the questions were more refined and specific to probe further into the experiences of the teachers in relation to the themes as well as explore further links with the existing literature. Despite the focused nature of this reading, I attempted to remain open to new themes that might emerge and/or connections between and across themes and sub-themes. After the third reading, I re-created the semantic webs. The new webs summarized the themes and sub-themes as well as provided supporting details from the data sources. The three separate readings not only allowed me an opportunity to fully develop emerging themes, they also provided a way of establishing the validity of this study.

<u>Validity</u>

Gee (2007) asserts that the validity of discourse analysis is based on four elements: convergence, agreement, coverage, and linguistic detail. Convergence refers

to whether or not the answers to the 26 questions from the building tasks seem to converge on "compatible and convincing" answers (p. 113). Although the findings in this study are based primarily on five, rather than all seven, of the building tasks, the interpretations do address questions from all seven areas. As noted earlier, there is considerable overlap between the seven tasks and the 26 questions. The repeated readings of the data indicated that the language of the participants did converge to support the interpretations detailed in the findings chapters. There emerged areas of agreement around particular themes between the participants as well as across the data sources. Additionally, the themes and interpretations in many cases were supported by the work of others within the educational field. In several cases, the participants spoke to me of their agreement with a particular interpretation or theme. Through the repeated readings of the data, there emerged linguistic details from the participants and across all three data sources to support the claims made in this study. In the coming chapters I make claims for how the data should be interpreted and provide data to substantiate those claims.

Although the findings of this study address aspects of convergence, agreement, coverage, linguistic detail, the interpretations I offer are only that—interpretations, claims, assertions based on my work with the participants, the data I collected, and my understandings of the related literature on the subject at hand. In the following chapters I offer the interpretations that I believe most fully fit the data, but I keep in mind the idea that validity is social and "'never once and for all.' All analyses are open to further discussion and dispute, and their status can go up or down with time as work goes on in

the field" (Gee, 2007, p. 113). In this study I have attempted to untangle the messiness of whiteness and diversity from the perspective of two white teachers within the contexts of their classrooms. The interpretations I offer are substantiated by the data, but only time will tell what these interpretations might mean to others within the field.

Ethical Consideration

In this section I consider two ethical issues of importance to this study. I examine the role of my own autobiography and the idea of "faking friendships."

Writing Myself into the Study

In any study it is essential to consider the role of the researcher. This is especially true of qualitative work. In this study, since I argue that the teachers be viewed as cultural agents, it seems important to think about myself as a cultural agent and all that I bring to this study as such.

Let me begin by saying that I am white. I speak only English, and my family during my youth would have been classified as upper-middle class. My family is Christian, but we did not attended church or ascribe to any particular religious view.

I grew up in a suburban community outside of New York City. My classmates and friends were a diverse group. My neighbor and closest friend was a girl whose parents were from Trinidad. Her light brown skin hinted at Indian descent, and her home smelled of curries. During the many hours I spent in her household, I heard in her parents' voices the hint of a native language other than English.

Through other friendships, I learned about different religions, languages, races, and economic levels. I remember having potato latkes to celebrate Chanukah with a

Jewish girlfriend and thinking that with eight days of presents she had a much better winter holiday than I had. I remember too the Spanish curse words that two cousins whose parents were from Puerto Rico taught me (but I won't share them here). My days as the only white girl out of 20+ girls that made up the high school color guard bring back memories of laughter and some tension related to racial and economic issues.

I left my hometown to attend college at a state university. While the student body of the university was racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse, the honors dorm in which I resided was not. We were mostly white kids who spoke only English. This was, however, the first time I really considered how important money was in life. Many of the students did not come from homes like mine. On more than one occasion a fellow student asked me if I came "from money." Through all of these interactions, I learned a lot. I learned what it meant to be white and what it meant to come from an upper-middle class background. I learned that I acted and interacted differently depending on who I was with and what we were doing. I knew from my childhood that behaviors and expectations differed depending on context.

After graduating I moved to Baltimore to begin my teaching career. The school was a Title I school-wide school situated in the inner city. When my first day proved difficult, I sought out the wisdom and advice of Ms. Andrewnette Davis. Andy was a veteran teacher of 22 years in the school. She had amazing energy, a laugh that echoed through the halls, and a way with kids that got them working and achieving. There were many reasons to seek her help, but on that first day of school, I went to her because she was from the neighborhood. She had attended this same school as a child. She

knew these kids, and they knew her. I asked Andy what to do. She looked at me and asked, "Do you really want to know?" Her suggestions were not easy to implement. They probably were not in keeping with what is done in suburban, middle-class, predominantly white schools, but they worked. From all of my experiences as I child, I learned that behaviors vary with contexts. As Andy told me, I was south of the Mason Dixon line, and things were different.

After leaving Baltimore, I got married, moved around a lot, taught in several early intervention programs, had my two daughters, and eventually wound up pursuing my doctorate in education. Each of the experiences has shaped who I am as an individual and as a researcher. From these experiences stems my belief that throughout life and all of its myriad experiences, people learn and construct beliefs and values that they apply either consciously or unconsciously to the events of their daily lives. I come to this study as a person who is white, middle-class, and mono-lingual, yet the experiences of my life provide me with understandings of diversity that go beyond simplistic categorization by race, economic level, or native language.

Knowing who I am in relation to this study required that I take steps to be open to the participants' experiences and understandings rather than imposing my own. To ensure that I fully understood the participants' perspectives, thoughts, and actions, I asked many clarifying questions to be sure that I sought their experiences rather than confirming my own assumptions. Over the course of the interviews, I frequently asked the participants to clarify a statement they made in an earlier interview. I also used informal conversations to discuss with the participants actions and interactions I

observed with their classrooms. The collection and analysis of three different forms of

data acted as a safeguard of sorts. In analyzing the data, I used open coding to remain

open to what themes might emerge. Through the three readings of the data, I paid close

attention to how the themes unfolded and how the two participants and three data

sources substantiated any claims I made.

"Faking" Friendships

The relationships I formed with the participants were crucial to the success of

this study. In Chapter 7, I describe in further detail how our relationship developed

over the course of the study and how that relationship supported us as we engaged in

the process of the research. Because these relationships were so important to the

research, I took precautions to remain in the role of researcher and avoid forging a

relationship that either of the teachers might interpret as a friendship. Duncombe and

Jessop (2002) write extensively of the hurt that may follow from a researcher "faking" a

friendship with her participants in order to further her own research goals and

purposes. To avoid such difficulties, I took measures to always be seen as a researcher.

At the outset of the study and as part of informed consent, I informed both participants

of the topic of the study and discussed with them a general statement of the research

question. This served to add transparency to what I was studying as well as acting as a

reminder of my purposes in visiting the school. The visible presences of note-taking and

recording devices also acted as reminders. Furthermore, remaining in my role as a

researcher was important to the teachers as they engaged with me in the process of this

research. In some ways, they assumed roles as researchers as well. Because they

embarked on the research with me, there was never a time during this study that either

of the teachers indicated that they revealed information that they would have "preferred

to keep to themselves or even 'not to know.'" (Duncombe & Jessop, 2002, p. 120). In fact,

as we ended our time together, both teachers described their participation as a valuable

learning experience. Chapter 7 provides the details of what they learned about

themselves and teaching diverse students.

<div align="center">

Participants, the Research Setting, and Researcher Access

</div>

Two teachers acted as the primary participants in this study; I present detailed

biographical information about the teachers in Chapter 4. Mr. Clifford Parker, the

principal of the school in which the two teachers taught, was also interviewed as part of

the study. Interviews with Mr. Parker provided background information about the

demographics of the school as well as the school culture (e.g., goals for the school

community including faculty, students, and parents; the impact of state standards and

No Child Left Behind). After Mr. Parker gave his permission for the research to occur at

this site, I contacted Mrs. Sparks through a mutual acquaintance. Ms. Friel joined the

study after Mrs. Sparks suggested I speak to her. Both participants signed an informed-

consent form prior to the start of the research in accordance with the requirements of

IRB, the form appears as Appendix H. To ensure anonymity, the participants each chose

the pseudonym that was used in all data collection and writings. The teachers

participated voluntarily with no promise of compensation.

The Setting

The principal, Clifford Parker, was interviewed on two occasions. On the second interview, I asked Mr. Parker how he would describe the school. Specifically, I told him I intended to paint a picture of the school and asked him to complete the sentence: "This school is..."[4] Without hesitation, he answered, "A Statue of Liberty school" (I.P.7-08/p.27). "What does that mean?" I wondered aloud. Once again he replied without a moment's pause.

The Statue of Liberty, she stands out there and says 'Give me your...' What's on it? 'Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to be free.' You know. We're [the] golden lamp by the golden door. We'll hold the light... That's who we are to these kids and these families. And we can't forget. We're not just that for the kids; we're that for the families as well. In that we, we take anyone and everyone. We *love* anyone and everyone ... Once you're a part of us, you're a part of us as long as you want to be here...If we really are committed to these kids, then we have to walk the walk. Now, I'll tell you, is it hard? Is it a burden at times? Do you want to pull out your hair?...But you know what? We take them all. That's what we really are, and if you do that, and if you hire the right staff, you're going to have a magical place..."

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[4] When quoting from transcripts, ellipses are used for two reasons: 1) when words are omitted from the quote as when the entire quote was not relevant to the analysis or 2) when the speaker trailed off in his/her speech. Italics are used when the speaker placed emphasis on a particular word or phrase. When the participant paused or gestured while speaking, the pause or gesture is indicated within the body of the quote.

Mr. Parker's reference is to the final five lines of the poem written in 1883 by Emma

Lazarus that is inscribed at the base of the Statue of Liberty.

> Give me your tired, your poor,
>
> Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
>
> The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
>
> Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
>
> I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

Mr. Parker seemed to indicate with his choice of words that he envisioned the school as

a safe haven and a place of opportunity for students and their families. While some may

interpret Mr. Parker's vision for the school as rooted in deficit theories, his beliefs might

more readily be aligned with the intentions of Emma Lazarus and the immigrants who

arrived under the watchful gaze of the Statue of Liberty. Mr. Parker and the

participants welcomed the children and their families with full appreciation and respect

for their backgrounds and with high expectations for their future growth and

development. The findings of this study indicate that the two teachers did not see

themselves as White Knights or Saviors who needed to fix the disadvantaged children

who stumbled through the doors each morning (McIntyre, 1997a, 1997b). Rather, they

were ready each day to help the children realize their potential as learners and people.

Just as the immigrants arriving in the United States in early 1900's faced challenges and

obstacles to their envisioned future so did many of the children entering Liberty School

each day. Mr. Parker and the two teachers recognized those challenges, but this study's

findings indicate that they also believed in the capabilities the children and their families brought to the school.

Introducing Liberty School. Nestled in a suburban neighborhood, the school dates back to 1954 (I.P.4-07). With its design and construction, the city of approximately 30,000 inhabitants created a building that was the largest in the state and second largest in New England. Today, the building has been expanded to include two additional wings off the exterior of the building. At the time of the renovation, the building was completely gutted and rebuilt. As Mr. Parker noted, the school is a "2008 school building encapsulated within a 1954 frame...we have a brand new building on the inside." Outside the school are playing fields that serve both the school and the local community. While the school and park share the same name, Mr. Parker said that the school predates the park. According to Mr. Parker, at the time of the school's construction, the city conceived of the school and the surrounding grounds as being a center of the community. "And it very much is," said Mr. Parker. He related how many of the students come to the school over the weekends to play on the playground, while their parents play basketball nearby.

Approximately 500 students in grades pre-K through 4th grade attend Liberty School. With about 48% of the students qualifying for free or reduced lunch, the school is designated a school-wide Title I school (Leclerc, 2009). The student body is overwhelmingly white (81%). At the time of this study, Black, Asian, and Hispanic students made up 11%, 5%, and 2% respectively of the student population. With an ESOL population (English for Speakers of Other Languages) of 3%, the cultural and

linguist diversity of the school is visible in the seven flags that hang in the school's foyer representing the different countries of origin of the student body. Alongside the school and American flags hang the flags of Russia, India, France, Indonesia, Laos, Jamaica and South Korea (I.P.4-07/p.2-4).

The racial, ethnic, linguistic, and economic diversity of the student body is a change for this small New England city. Over the last twenty years, the percentage of students in the district who are of color has almost doubled (Leclerc, 2009). Leclerc goes on to say, during the school year 1989-1990, 96.2% of students in the district were white; black, Asian, and Hispanic students represented only 1.8%, 1.6%, and 0.5% respectively of the district population. In 2007-2008, 88.7% of the students within the district were white, while the percentages of students who were black, Asian, and Hispanic increased respectively to 3.5%, 5.9%, and 1.7%. In 2000, the first year in which the district maintained records on enrollment in Limited English Proficiency programs, children across the district enrolled in Limited English Proficiency programs was less than 1% as compared with almost 1.5% in 2007. In many ways, this district and this school in a small New England town are facing the demographic challenges the educational research indicates will be occurring with greater and greater frequency in the United States: white middle-class, mono-lingual teachers working with children who differ from them racially, ethnically, linguistically, and economically (Sleeter, 2008; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005).

Within the two participating classrooms, the racial and ethnic diversity was visible. The linguistic diversity was audible. In Mrs. Elsie Sparks' kindergarten class, 12

students were girls; 11 were boys (FN.E.1-26/p.1). 15 students were white. Two students were black. Three had one parent who was white and one parent who was black. One student's father was Portuguese. Three students were born outside of the United States in Laos, Indonesia, or India; spoke a language other than English at home; and qualified for ESOL services. Thirteen of the 23 students qualified for free or reduced lunch. Two children had IEPs. Another girl qualified for special education services, but her mother refused them (I.E.1-26/p.17-24). In Ms. Kate Friel's 2nd grade class, ten students were girls; 12 were boys (FN.K.2-09/p.1). 13 students were white. Four students were black. Two students had one parent who was white and one parent who was black. Two students were Indonesian, but they did not qualify for ESOL services. Fifteen of the 22 students qualified for free or reduced lunch. Three students had IEPs, and an additional student received special one-on-one services from a Title I tutor (I.K.2-09/p.9-13).

The racial, ethnic, linguistic and economic data on the student body of Liberty School helps portray what the student-body looked and sounded like, but one additional statistic provides insight into the dynamics of Liberty School: student mobility (I.P.7-9/p.19-22). The population at the start of the 2008-2009 school year was 487 students. The population reached a peak of 502 students in September and declined to 490 students by April. Again, these numbers are seemingly inconsequential until a visitor speaks to the staff about what student mobility means. In Ms. Friel's class, three students entered after the start of the school year. Their addition made difficult some of the routines and procedures the teacher had in place from August. One of these

students entered her classroom in October after moving from Florida to live with his mother. The child returned to Florida after spring break to live with his father but is expected to re-enroll in the school for the fall of 2009. In Mrs. Sparks' class, four students moved away during the course of the school year and were replaced with new students. While this progression was expected and the new children were welcomed into the classroom, Mrs. Sparks was frustrated to lose a child within the last month of school and have another student enroll. The departing child, who was originally from India, moved back to India where his father was to work for a year. After the year's completion, it was expected that the child will return to the United States and re-enroll at Liberty. Mr. Parker clarified the issue of student mobility.

> You take any day of the calendar year, [and] 30% [of the students] will have changed the following year and not due to graduation. So 30% of your class will change every year in every classroom. So, who you have on September 1, you'll only have 70% of the same kids by the end of the school year (I.P.7-08/p.19).

The disruptions to class routines, student learning, and school friendships caused by student mobility are expected in any school, but at Liberty, according to Mr. Parker, high rates of student mobility affect student achievement. Liberty School is in its second year as a *School In Need of Improvement* (SINI) based on the guidelines of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Data collected and analyzed by the school indicated that student mobility was linked with the school's failure to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The standards of NCLB were topics of much discussion and analysis at Liberty.

A School In Need of Improvement (SINI). As a school-wide Title I school,

Liberty received federal funding to address the academic needs of its population. How

this funding was used to address their status as a SINI was fully detailed in the 13-page

School Improvement Action Plan (SIAP) that the school submitted to the state for

approval. The plan addressed three areas. Increasing parent involvement was one area.

Included within this area was an initiative to increase student attendance and to

"identify transient student populations, gather related data, and identify solutions"

(Powerpoint presentation to parents, Sept. 2008). A second category addressed how the

school inducted new teachers into the school by providing them with mentors and

professional development designed to support them in their work with their students

during the first three years of teaching at Liberty. Although the goal of this initiative

was to support teachers, the underlying intent was to "make progress toward state

performance targets in Reading as evidenced by the New England Common Assessment

Program (NECAP) and local assessments" (SIAP, p. 10). The final category addressed

improving reading and math achievement through teacher trainings and the hiring of

support personnel.

Several features of the SIAP stood out. First and foremost, the initiatives were

data-driven. For each measure created by the school, there was an accompanying data-

collection tool to determine the effectiveness of the measure in accomplishing the goals.

This data collection was connected to the accountability standards established by the

federal government via NCLB. Second, the initiatives were designed to improve the

performance of students so that the school might end its tenure on the list of SINI

schools. These features may seem to indicate that the school's functioning was dictated by NCLB, but Mr. Parker viewed the initiatives differently. The data provided a way of better understanding the students who attended the school and how to target their specific needs. He applauded what the testing related to NCLB has done: forced schools and teachers to look at how individual children were learning and then using the data to shape changes to ensure that learning occurs.

Mr. Parker rejected, however, the notion of focusing solely on those students who score substantially below proficient or partially proficient, although he admitted that doing so might "get NCLB off your back so to speak"(I.P.7-08/p.8). But, for Mr. Parker, teaching that focused on students who were substantially below or partially proficient "just isn't good enough."

> If you think about the name *No Child Left Behind*, it's already skewed toward the substantially and the partially. Just by saying 'no child left behind,' it's automatically assuming that the proficient and proficient with distinction are fine just by the title alone. They're not...They're just as important...Think about it. There are four categories. We have to hit them all....We really gotta be focusing on *every* child (I.P.7-08/p.9).

Mr. Parker believed that all students were entitled to an education that directed them toward meeting their full potential. As the findings chapters will demonstrate, this was a belief held by the two teachers as well.

"Data-Rich but Information-Poor". Mr. Parker and I talked for over an hour and a half about the volumes of data and data analysis that he and his staff generated over the course of the school year. We began with the NCLB Report Card that included not only the school's status as SINI but also information about enrollment and class size. Our discussion included the data collected by the school's behavior specialist as well as a 15+ page report on student mobility. This study was the outcome of careful analysis of the data on failing students as defined by NCLB. It seems that the children who were in the bottom two categories on the NECAPs were the students with the highest rates of mobility. We also examined the "Liberty School Data Reports" which the data team generated each month. These 3-4 page reports outlined issues related to attendance, student mobility, interventions, tests scores, and discipline programs. The reports were prepared by the team, discussed with the faculty, and then sent to the superintendant.

This is just an overview of the data collected and analyzed by the staff of Liberty School. Many of these reports hung on a 3' X 5'bulletin board titled "Gone Fishin' for Data" which hung outside Mr. Parker's office door. The photocopied sheets of various studies told a lot about the school, but the many colorful items that ran along the perimeter of the board told just as much. There was a picture of last year's graduating class. There was a letter to Mr. Parker from a student thanking him for being such a great principal. There was poem written by a class of kindergarteners using each letter of Mr. Parker's name. In the upper right-hand corner of the board was a Good Citizen award presented to Mr. Parker by one of the long-time members of the teaching staff. When I pointed it out to Mr. Parker, he chuckled. "Yeah, isn't that great?" As Mr.

Parker and I moved past the board to make copies of some of the data reports, I thought about the contrast between the numbers on the reports and the humanity depicted in the drawings of the kindergarteners.

As our interview wound down, I asked Mr. Parker about a comment that he had made in an earlier interview. At that time, he told me that the school was "data-rich but information poor." I asked him what he meant by that statement. He replied, "We have tons of data." He paused in his chair. He looked at me. After a further pause of 5 seconds, he leaned forward in his chair and started talking.

All right. You have a kid, okay? And we can tell you everything about that kid—educationally, where they're deficient—in math, in reading, in science, in social studies. You name it. But do we really know that kid? We're data-rich, but we're information-poor about that child. Do we know what their diet is per se? Now, I'm not saying we need to know, but maybe that kid last night didn't have a supper. Or maybe his supper was different than the kid that sits next to him... If we're going to educate the whole child, then we need to understand the whole child. Not correct it...So sometimes, that information, the teacher won't talk about a certain topic that may make them feel like they may not want to be invested or puts them in a bad mood so they get in trouble in the afternoon. Sometimes when you get more information about a child, you get to really know them, you can really reach them in a new way...When an elementary school child looks at a teacher, they look at them as a caring, loving family

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member...but something changes over time. Where in high school, teacher means the enemy, you know? I spent years at the high school, and I'll tell you, I loved connecting with kids. And those kids still come back,...'cause they know you cared, 'cause you really got to know them as a person...So, that's why we're data-rich but information-poor. We know what the kids are doing and producing, but we really don't know the child (I.P.7-08/p.26).

When I pointed out all of the data the school has assembled and the uses to which it is put in the school, he leaned back in his chair. "It's a start." The rest, Mr. Parker believed, was up to the teachers. In the next chapter, I introduce the two participants, Elsie Sparks and Kate Friel, and present finding about their lives and beliefs as cultural agents and individuals.

CHAPTER 4

THE TEACHERS AS CULTURAL AGENTS AND INDIVIDUALS

In this chapter, I introduce the participants as cultural agents and individuals. In the introduction I argued that the term "white teacher" is an overly simplistic catch-all phrase that may serve to hide an array of experiences and beliefs that an individual learns and constructs throughout his or her life (see also Conley, 2000; McCarthy, 2003). In this chapter I move past the simplicity suggested by the label "white teacher" and explore who these two white teachers were as individuals and as cultural agents.

Erickson (2007) writes, "everybody in the world is cultural" (p. 34). "Culture is in us and all around us, just as is the air we breathe. In its scope and distribution it is personal, familial, communal, institutional, societal, and global" (p. 33). By stating that everyone is "cultural" and that culture is "in and around us," Erickson conveys that the ways in which humans live, think, and believe are inseparable from the norms, values, and traditions of the communities in which we participate, grow, and learn. Culture surrounds us; it shapes how and why we interact, think, and believe as we do. In addition to being cultural, Erickson argues that all humans are multicultural beings who operate from beliefs, values, norms and knowledge that is learned within different "familial, communal, institutional, societal, and global" contexts.

It is not possible for individuals to grow up in a complex modern society

without acquiring different subsets of culture...Through the nuclear

family, through early and later schooling, through peer networks, and

through life at work, we encounter, learn, and to some extent help create

differing microcultures and subcultures. Just as everyone learns differing

variants and styles of the various languages we speak, so that everybody

is multilingual (even those of us who only speak English), so, too, is

everybody multicultural. No matter how culturally isolated a person's

life may appear...each member carries a considerable amount of that

society's cultural diversity inside" (p. 35).

As multicultural beings, humans learn and construct values, beliefs, and knowledge in

differing communities. The differences in cultural knowledge may be cause for tension

and conflict or for transformation of the knowledge and the communities involved

(Rogoff, 1990, 1995, 1998, 2003). Within the context of this study, I consider the lived

experiences of the participants in the differing cultural communities of their lives. Like

Erickson, I assume that Elsie and Kate are both cultural and multicultural. As cultural

agents who have experiences in a multitude of cultural settings, Elsie and Kate bring

with them to their classrooms the "preoccupations, assumptions and habits" (Spindler,

1994, p. xiv) that are the result of the cultural knowledge they have acquired and

constructed through participating in different cultural communities (Rogoff, 1990, 1995,

1998, 2003). Since educational research indicates that the beliefs, values, and knowledge

that teachers learn and construct within the cultural communities of their lives is important to their teaching work (Cochran-Smith, 1995b; Erickson, 2007; Florio-Ruane, 2001; Kailin, 2002), this chapter captures elements of the participants' lives that seem relevant to their work with diverse students.

In thinking of the teachers as cultural agents, a conundrum appears. Can all learning, thinking and behaving be attributed to cultural knowledge? It seems possible that some ways of acting and interacting are innate to the individual and not the result of culture or cultural knowledge. For example, analysis of this study's data suggests that persistence appeared frequently throughout Kate's life as both a cultural value and a personal characteristic. When she spoke of persisting in her educational pursuits after her father's death, persistence seemed to be an innate trait, but it might also be viewed as a cultural value related to her family's heritage as second generation Irish immigrants. As immigrants, her family's work ethic might have embraced persistence in the face of adversity. Or, perhaps, at a more macroscopic level, Kate internalized the larger American work ethic/logo that states that "if at first you don't succeed, try, try again." With all of these possibilities, the question becomes: was persistence a form of cultural knowledge for Kate, or was it something that was just part of her nature? This conundrum is "the well-known nature/nurture debate" which "places culture and biology in opposition. Proponents argue that if something is cultural, it is not biological, and if something is biological, it is not cultural" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 63). Rogoff states that the dichotomy is a false one. "The efforts of the individual constitute the cultural practices that further organize individuals' development. Similarly, human

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development works together with the cultural institutions and practices that characterize humanity" (p. 65). What Rogoff's assertions mean within the context of this study is that separating what might seem to be cultural (i.e. nurture) from what might seem to be innate (i.e. nature) does not serve the end-goal of depicting the teachers as both cultural and multicultural beings who have made sense, and will continue to make sense, of their lives based on what they know and who they are.

In the coming pages I introduce Kate and Elsie as both cultural agents and individuals. I weave together the cultural and the personal based on the assumption that each will inform and shape the other. I tease out those values, beliefs, and knowledge sets which seem cultural in character and link them when possible to the cultural communities from which they originated. Based on analysis of the participants' statements, I consider the impact of their cultural knowledge on their work in their classrooms. Additionally, I draw out those personal experiences, characteristics, and traits which seem most relevant to their understandings of diversity and their work as teachers. By viewing the participants as cultural agents and individuals, I access the complexity of their lives and the multitude of experiences, values, beliefs, traits, and knowledge which informed their work with culturally diverse students.

Introducing Kate

Ms. Kate Friel is a veteran teacher with over 28 years of teaching experience. Twenty-five of those years were spent teaching at Liberty School. As a dually certified special education and elementary education teacher, Kate taught in self-contained special education classrooms for nine years before moving on to teaching general

education students. Over the next 20 years, she taught first and third grade. This research was conducted during her first year as a second grade teacher.

Kate's Childhood: Learning about Diversity

For the first ten years of her life, Kate lived in New York City. Living in Queens, Kate split her time between her family's apartment in Elmhurst and her grandmother's apartment in Jackson Heights. During those years, Kate learned a lot about different races, ethnicities, languages, and religions. She recalled teasing, or perhaps tormenting, the workers of a nearby Chinese restaurant by knocking bowls of cooling rice off windowsills to smash on the alley floor below. Running through the interconnected basements of the apartment buildings and coming up further down the block, she and her brother could hear the workers cursing in Chinese. She told of Mrs. Grossman, her grandmother's Jewish neighbor. "She hated it when we visited, 'cause we made so much racket. And you'd hear the boom, boom, boom [of her broom]" as Mrs. Grossman banged on her ceiling, Kate's grandmother's floor, to remind the children that they were being too loud. "...And we knew we had to be quiet, because we knew Mrs. Grossman was being disturbed" (I.3-12/p.10/l.35). She remembered begging her mom to plait her hair into the corn rows her friends at school wore. "And Mom'd just shake her head. 'No, I can't do that with your hair...It would just fall out.' I'd settle on braids" Kate said. "Braids were as close as I was going to get" (I.2-09/p.7/l.17). She remembered the smells of all the different kinds of cooking wafting through the halls of her apartment building. Through these experiences, Kate came to take difference as a given; it was

what she saw, heard, tasted, and smelled. Difference was the norm; diversity "just

wasn't a big deal" (I.2-09/p.6).

Kate recalled the first time she realized that people had different skin color. She

was about six years old. She recounted her family's visit to a neighbor whose dog they

enjoyed.

> And he was a black man, but we never really realized it. You know, it
>
> just didn't click. And then one day, I remember we were walking out of
>
> my grandmother's apartment building, and I looked up to Mom, and I
>
> said, 'Hey, Mom, Mr. So-and-so's skin is different than ours.' And she
>
> said, 'Yeah.' And I said, "I think I like the color better…Could I have skin
>
> like that?…He's been in the sun a lot. Maybe I can do it.' …And then she
>
> explained to me that that's just the way it is.

Kate's experiences in the city helped her to develop "a very broad idea of people…I

mean I saw so many different kinds of people…I think I just grew up expecting that

people were all different. They were different colors…They spoke different languages."

The streets of New York were populated by people of "every kind, every color, every

ethnicity" (I.2-09/p.9-10).

Kate's understanding of diversity from her experiences in New York City

mirrors the learning of others who participated and interacted in settings with diverse

groups of people (e.g. Conley, 2000; Howard, 2006; Johnson, 2002). Holme, Wells, &

Rivilla (2005) conducted a study of 252 high school students of all races and ethnicities

25 years after their graduation from desegregated high schools. The researchers concluded that the lived experience of attending a desegregated high school provided the graduates, regardless of their race or ethnicity, with "rare opportunities to come together with and get to know people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds" (p.14). Although not all of the experiences were positive in nature, the researchers state that "the most powerful finding from the data is the ways in which the graduates' 'hearts and minds'—their deeper understanding of themselves and one another—[were] altered by attending racially diverse public schools" (p.23). The researchers suggest that having learned, worked, and played side-by-side with people who differed from themselves helped to increase the students' comfort levels and decreased their fears about interacting in racially mixed settings.

Rogoff's work (2003) offers an explanation for why the participants of the Holms, et al., (2005) study experienced a "fundamentally altered way of seeing the world" (p. 18) after the prolonged interracial relationships of their high school years. By having a chance to "get to know members of other racial groups and learn how to negotiate racial differences" (p. 18), the participants came to see that their own cultural ways of doing things were not the only ways of doing things. Rogoff argues that thinking which places judgment on the practices of another community based on the norms of one's own community demonstrates ethnocentric thinking.

> *Ethnocentricism* involves making judgments that another cultural
>
> community's ways are immoral, unwise, or inappropriate based on one's

own cultural *without taking into account the meaning and circumstances of*

events in that community...It is a matter of prejudging without

appropriated knowledge" (p. 15).

Because of the extended duration of the interracial relationships created by

desegregation, it seems likely that the high school graduates moved past ethnocentric

thinking. Kate's childhood years in New York City seem to have offered Kate the same

experience. By taking in the many different ways that the people around her lived and

experienced life, she gathered the "appropriate knowledge." As a result, she developed

a "very broad idea of people." The analysis presented in the coming pages indicates

that Kate seemed very much to have learned to respect and honor the differing value

systems and ways of life she learned about through her experiences in New York City.

The findings suggest that she carried the notion of respecting and honoring diversity

into her classroom.

Kate's Teen Years: Learning about Justice, Conversing with God, and Experiencing Homelessness

When Kate was ten, her family moved to New England. Her father's

involvement in an incident during his commute home on the subway precipitated the

move. It seems he physically confronted a man who was dropping his newspaper to the

floor of the train so that he could look up the dress of the woman sitting next to him.

Kate remembered her father being "pretty beat up" when he exited the station that day,

but the incident crystallized her parents' intent to leave the city.

The move to New England proved to be a bit of a shock. "[When] we came *here*, we noticed there was a difference...I remember saying to my parents, 'Where is everybody?...[Everybody] is the same" (I.2-09/p.6). Despite the lack of racial, ethnic, or linguistic diversity, the move was a good one for the family. Kate characterized this period in her life as a time of stability. Unlike the city where they had moved a lot from apartment to apartment, the family built the house in which they would live for the next eight years. Kate attended a local Catholic school where she joined the drama club and the glee club.

It was during this time that Kate first realized that race could be a problem. She recalled family conversations about race and racism during the time of the race riots of the 1960s.

> I didn't have an awareness of it [race] as a *problem* until my father started
>
> talking about some of the awful things that were happening down South.
>
> My parents would talk about Martin Luther King, Jr. and they would talk
>
> about some of the things that were happening to the children and the
>
> people down South...And my parents had to explain to me that there
>
> were people who believed that because people had dark skin, they
>
> weren't as good, or they shouldn't have the same rights. And my
>
> brothers and I were like, "That's nuts" (I.K.3-12/p.9).

These discussions were not abstractions for Kate. She and her brothers still had friends in New York City who were black. The riots and the impact of racism were

"very real" for her. Her family sat together in front of the TV to watch the news coverage of the riots. Her father, a veteran of World War II, was especially incensed. It "just sent him over the edge" (I.K.2-09/p. 8). She recalls him yelling, "We didn't fight for this to happen. This is crazy. They treat our children like this...This is against the law. It ought to be against the law." She remembered that he was going to write to the Kennedys to get something done to protect the freedoms that the United States stood for and believed to be so important that they would send soldiers overseas to defend them. These freedoms belonged first and foremost to all of the citizens of the United States regardless of their race.

Through these interactions it seems possible that Kate learned cultural values that are deeply embedded within the institutions of the United States. Freedom of speech allows citizens to express their displeasure with the government. Civic responsibility includes challenging the practices and policies of the government when they seem unfair and unjust. "Life, liberty, and the pursuit" of happiness are the rights of all citizens. As a cultural agent within her family and within the larger U.S. society, Kate seems to have learned these cultural lessons from her father and then, as later analysis reveals, applied them in other contexts throughout her life.

Interestingly, Catholicism also acted as an avenue for challenging institutional decrees. Having attended Catholic school since kindergarten, Kate spent many hours in mass. Kate used this time "to talk to God" about issues within the Church that she could not reconcile with her own understandings of life (I.K.3-12/p.17). In particular, Kate questioned the church's tenet that Catholics would go to heaven upon dying, but

people of other religions would be turned away. What was especially troublesome for Kate was her father's lack of attendance at church. She also worried for her friends who were Jewish. She relayed one of her "conversations with God" and the conclusions she drew from her analysis of the church's teaching in relation to her beliefs about what was just.

> "God, I know that you're *God*. So you get it—that he [her father] is still a
>
> good guy. You understand that even though he doesn't go to church, he's
>
> still a good guy, so it doesn't make any sense....I know that you love
>
> Jewish children too. And I know that it makes no sense." So there were
>
> certain things that made no sense to me, so I decided early on that there
>
> were just some things that were stupid (I.K.3-12/p.18).

Despite the Church's teachings, Kate felt empowered to critically assess the standards imposed by the institution to judge for herself what was right and wrong. In a manner similar to her father's ranting about racial injustices, Kate questioned and challenged the decrees of an institution.

Linked in Kate's head with the idea of questioning the Church beliefs and practices were her experiences in New York City with children of different races. Kate spoke of her conversations with God several times over two interviews. Each time she interrupted herself to interject comments about the children she played with and learned from in Queens. It seems that those experiences taught her that there are many, varied ways of being and believing. She accepted that there is no one way that is right or better

than the others. To impose sanctions based on how one looks, how one practices religion, or how one speaks was inherently wrong for Kate. Because of her experiences with different cultural values, she rejected ethnocentrism.

Despite her disagreements with some of the Church's teachings, Catholicism was a source of great stability for Kate. This became increasingly important for Kate. During Kate's senior year in high school, her father lost his job. The family sold the house, and Kate's mother, father, and youngest brother moved to Florida. Kate and her oldest brother remained in New England to finish high school. They lived with neighbors and, upon graduation, got on a plane and joined their family in Florida. Financially, her parents were "not in a position" to come to the graduation.

The time in Florida was difficult for the family, so they decided to return to the north east. The move was challenging for the family, however. "We didn't have a house. We didn't have a job...We stayed with my Uncle Larry on Long Island, 'cause we were homeless. We were basically homeless" (I.3-12/p.3). After a brief stay on Long Island, the family returned to their home town in New England when her dad got his job back. Less than two months later, Kate started college. She had missed the fall semester but she was "determined to go to college." Analysis presented in chapters 5 and 7 reveals that this year in Kate's life helped her in subtle ways to understand the lived experiences of some of her students.

Kate struggled with financial difficulties and physical illness during her college years, but it was the loss of her father over the Labor Day weekend leading into student teaching that was most devastating. She persevered. She remembered from her earliest

memories that her father told her she would attend college. College and a stable career

would ensure that she was able to support herself and maintain her independence.

While friends and family members told her to return home to live with her mother, she

rejected their advice.

> I was very determined...I just said, "I can't stop this now. If I stop this
>
> now, it's never going to happen or me." I knew I just had to—one foot in
>
> front of the other. And it was very hard...It was a very difficult time, but
>
> you just put your head down and you go (I.K.4-07/p.3).

This sense of resiliency was something Kate carried with her into the present and into

her classroom. Analysis in chapter 5 details how the identity of achievement that Kate

seemed to foster in her students embraced the idea of persisting in the face of challenges.

Persistence might have been a characteristic innate to Kate, but it became a cultural

value within her classroom community. This is consistent with sociocultural theory

which suggests that "people contribute to the creation of cultural processes and cultural

processes contribute to the creation of people. Thus, individual and cultural processes

are *mutually constituting* rather than defined separately from each other" (Rogoff, 2003,

p. 51). As both a cultural agent and an individual, resilience had value to Kate as a

person and as teacher.

Kate's Novice Teaching Years: Learning to Listen and Accommodating Difference

Kate student taught in a small, predominantly white community in New

England. Due to her dual certification in special education and elementary education,

Kate student taught in a first grade classroom with mainstreamed special education students and in a general education second grade classroom.

Upon graduation, Kate opted to remain in the same community and teach a self-contained Learning Disabled special education class. While she describes the experiences as "okay," she requested a transfer to a program for Emotionally Handicapped students. She felt drawn to the program because she was interested in "what makes kids tick in those circumstances" (I.4-07/p.13). The experience expanded her understanding of what it meant to work with a population outside of general education.

> One of the things I learned is, is to not make assumptions about what
>
> kids are thinking and feeling, because we do that a lot as grown-
>
> ups...And I've kind of learned to say, "Oh man, tell me how that
>
> feels."...[You have] to be very careful about kids' reality, 'cause a kid's
>
> reality can be very different than your own...So you really have to talk to
>
> them and you gotta, I guess you have to really get good at listening to
>
> them and listening under the words almost (I.K.4-07/p.14).

By "listening under the words," she clarified that a child must be understood in context and that a teacher must know who the child is in her world both inside and outside of school to make sense of what the child is doing or saying. "You need to know people in context. You know how you need to know words in context? Well, it helps to know people in context" (I.4-07/p.14). To know a child required listening to the child and

being open to his or her experiences as well as his or her interpretations of those experiences. Just as Kate rejected the Catholic church's right to determine what is right and wrong, she rejected the idea that her way of understanding the world was the only or best way of interpreting the world. She left space for her students' way of understanding and interpreting.

Kate also described as important a belief that she learned at this time about difference. This belief she attributed to her special education training.

> [When] you go into special ed, you're going into difference right from the get-go. Difference is the underlying premise of everything. You know, you're working with kids who are different. They learn differently...Obviously, if kids are identified as special ed., there's something different about them... and it's perfectly acceptable...So we, we, um, maybe enjoyed it or appreciated it, or, that was our choice to work with people who had different kinds of abilities or in some cases disabilities (I.K.5-28/p.15).

What is noteworthy in this quote is the fact that difference is a given. It is not the basis of judgment. In only "some cases," are different abilities considered to be "disabilities." For Kate, a child can be understood by learning about the context in which his or her behavior and learning make sense. Like her experiences with children of different cultures, difference was not problematic. Difference was the norm. It seems that Kate's

many varied experiences continued to provide her with knowledge and understandings to reject an ethnocentric view of diversity (Rogoff, 2003).

Kate's Adventures with Outward Bound: Learning a "Can-Do" Attitude

After three years, Kate left the school where she embarked on her teaching career and took a job teaching special education at Liberty School. Kate continued to grow professionally within the boundaries of Liberty School, but it was her adventures with Outward Bound during the summer of 1989 that inspired her emotionally and physically. Kate enrolled in the program, because she was looking for a "challenge." In addition to kayaking and hiking, participants experienced a solo journey that Kate summarized by saying, "They give you a bottle of water and send you off. They put you in a spot and say, 'Make yourself a shelter and hang out for 2 nights and 3 days' "(I.4-07/p.9). While the physical elements of such a challenge seem obvious, it was the emotional elements of the task that Kate recalled most vividly.

It's very much about, um, developing personal insights, developing...a sense of your strengths...I have found with kids and adults and in my own life, we're all capable of a lot more than we think...And I say to the kids, "Don't give up." I really get 'don't give up.' You know what I mean, and, uh, I think that whole experience with Outward Bound really—there are times when it's really tough physically, when you think I want to go home... And you keep going. And you just realize that your limits are broader than you thought (I.K.4-07/p.10).

Her comments mirror those she spoke in relation to the other challenges she had faced

throughout her life. She faced adversity through the instability of her childhood,

through physical ailments which plagued her throughout college, and through the loss

of her father. Through them Kate learned to be resilient. This sense of resilience is

something she directly taught her students. She said, "I don't allow the kids a can't-do

attitude" (I.K.4-07/p.10).

Kate's Master's Degree: Exploring Multiple Ways of Being Different and Intelligent

Kate earned a Master of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction with a

specialization in Integrating Teaching through the Arts in 2002. This degree allowed her

to explore more fully her interests in the arts as well as build on the beliefs she

developed during her undergraduate work and her teaching experiences that all

children are able learners. Building on Howard Gardner's (1993) work on multiple

intelligences, the program encouraged teachers to think beyond the typical classroom

norms of fostering only three types of intelligence: verbal-linguistic, logical-

mathematical, and visual-spatial. Taken in conjunction with the five remaining

intelligences—bodily kinesthetic, interpersonal, naturalistic, intrapersonal, and

musical—the eight intelligences provided for a variety of ways of learning and knowing.

Having lived and participated in communities throughout her life that provided a

plethora of experiences in which difference was omnipresent, Kate seemed to believe

that her classroom should provide multiple opportunities for different ways of growing,

and learning.

For Kate, the integration of the arts and the theory of multiple intelligences into the classroom seemed to provide a way to ensure that all children had the opportunity to learn in ways that made sense for who they were as people and as learners. The multiple intelligences provided a path to helping all children shine in the classroom as well as a means of giving each child a voice in the classroom. Kate called attention to its relevance with her current class. One of her second graders struggled with reading, but the beauty of his language when he described the sun as "warm lemonade" in one of his poems could not be denied (FN.K.5-18). Another child who often had difficulty finding a focus for his writing created a painting of his main character which depicted not only his story's setting but also the action of the jaguar as he sprung across the page. Using kinesthetic intelligence, the class explored division while they acted out a game of "dogs and chipmunks" (FN.K.5-27). By building on all eight intelligences in her classroom, Kate shaped classroom practices that provided all children with a way to be capable learners. Kate explained her beliefs. "Multiple intelligences says: the idea here is that people learn differently and what makes sense to one person in terms of, you know, learning and retaining information is not going to make sense for another person" (FN.2-19/p.10).

By focusing on the arts and Gardner's multiple intelligences (1993), Kate's Master's degree program seemed to take the idea of difference and provide her with a way to understand, embrace, and address the differences within her students' abilities and ways of learning. Once again, as a cultural agent having constructed understandings of difference within diverse cultural communities, Kate did not view

difference as an indication of deficiency. Difference was a given part of human life. As a teacher, she needed to accommodate and embrace it.

<u>Kate's Continued Explorations of Race and Racism</u>

Kate remembered the shock and horror of September 11, 2001. She spoke to me about the consequences of that atrocity within her classroom.

> I was quite distressed—we were all distressed—um, after 9-11, when
> many of the children...came in and said... "My father says all the
> Muslims have to get out of the country." And I said, "No, no, no, no, no,
> no." I said, "No." ...I was concerned about children *demonizing* a
> population, a particular population here in the United States, or you
> know all of the sudden saying, "All X people are one way or another."
> You know, it's kind of like, "Guys, no, no, no." No (I.K.3-12/p.17).

She emphatically rejected the idea of "demonizing" all Muslims. This way of thinking flew in the face of all that she learned and believed from her years in New York. She used her classroom and her curriculum as a vehicle for countering the lack of information and tolerance that the student's remarks indicated to her. She described the units of study that she created to help her students understand what happened after September 11th and what it means to live in a world populated by people who may look, speak, think, and believe differently. She told me about her goals for students in studying different cultures and countries.

I want them to have an open mind. I want them to be receptive to the

world and to other people and to other *thinking*. I just want them to be

open and understand, you know, it's not just about you and it's not just

about what you need in your life. It's about other people—other people

have wonderful ideas too (I.K.3-12/p.20).

Kate appeared to be concerned about the racism that seemed to be inherent in some of

the comments made by the children. The comments that seemed to lump together an

entire group of people based on their religion "distressed" Kate. Given her own

experiences in diverse communities, the idea that difference seemed to be viewed by her

students as essentially problematic seemed to trouble Kate. As we talked, Kate moved

to her closet to retrieve the boxes of literature that she used when she taught a unit on

South Africa. This unit was based in large part on a trip she took during the summer of

2007 to South Africa.

Kate spoke about her goals for her students. She hoped they would "develop an

appreciation for diversity in culture, diversity in people" as well as a "sense of tolerance

for things that are different" (I.K.3-13/p.19). Her classroom instruction, however,

seemed to foster more than developing tolerance. Analysis of her discourse indicates

her that teaching practice might more readily be aligned with anti-racist education.

Mica Pollock (2008) defines antiracist education as "school-based action educators

take...to help counteract racial inequality and racism in schools and society" (p. xvii).

An observation of Kate's class during a fieldtrip to a local theater to see a play about

Rosa Parks' life revealed how she shaped her teaching to encourage her students to look critically at issues of inequality and injustice (FN.K.3-04).

Prior to boarding the bus, Kate led the class in a discussion about the significance of Rosa Parks' life (FN.K.3-09). First she asked the class to remember what they knew about Rosa Parks. Kate then shifted the discussion from a collection of facts to the meaning of those facts. She asked the children if Rosa Parks broke the law by refusing to give up her seat. The children nodded their agreement, and Kate asked them, "Why is her breaking the law so important? Why would we say in the Unites States that Rosa Parks is very important, because she broke the law? Why are we saying she was brave?" (FN.3-04/p.5). The children offered no response to this series of questions; Kate pushed further: "Help me understand why it's okay that Rosa Parks broke the law...Do you think that it's possible to have bad laws or laws that are unfair?" The children either nodded or said nothing but continued to listen. Kate asked the children what laws do for citizens of the United States. Some children suggested that they keep people safe. Others added comments about laws related to guns, seatbelts, and bike helmets. Kate nodded. "We have laws that say stop at a red light—they keep people safe." She reminded the class that "you can't break those kinds of laws." She then continued. "The law that Rosa Parks broke wasn't about being safe. It was about the color of her skin. It was completely inappropriate. It was a law of segregation." The class discussed what segregation meant, although the topic was a difficult one. Most of the students nodded agreement with Kate's statements; some seemed unfocused as the discussion moved on. It was a topic to which they returned after their viewing of the play.

Upon returning to school, the class met at the rug area to talk about the play. Kate asked if anyone had heard the references in the play to Jim Crow laws. Most shook their heads. "Jim Crow laws were laws that were made by states and towns about separating black and white people. The Jim Crow laws were very, very unfair" (FN.K3-04/p.8). She continued by telling the class that Rosa's refusal to give up her seat was at start of the Civil Rights Movement—a time when many people said that "the laws needed to change." She told the class that the movement to change the laws was unpopular with some people. Again drawing on the content of the play, she asked if anyone heard mention of the Ku Klux Klan in the play. After the children muttered no, Kate told the class that this organization did "very, very, very terrible things" to black people, and "I will tell you, boys and girls, that there are still people in the Ku Klux Klan now in the United States." Surprised by this remark, several children gasped, "Huh?" Another child asked if they were in their state. Kate replied, "I don't know...now the good news is that we have laws that protect *all* people." She continued.

> It doesn't matter. The color of your skin doesn't matter. Your religion
>
> doesn't matter. In the United States, we are a democracy. We are a
>
> government of *all* the people, by *all* the people and for *all* the people. Not
>
> just white people. Not just black people. But for white people and black
>
> people and every skin color in between (FN.K.3-04/p.10).

As the children mulled this over, Kate brought their attention back to Rosa Parks. She asked them to think about what type of person Rosa was. Kate reminded them that

even as a young girl, Rosa Parks asked questions about the world in which she lived and challenged those things that were unfair or unjust. She pointed out that Rosa Parks did not remain silent about the injustices she saw occurring around her daily. Kate also asked the class to consider how hard Rosa Parks worked throughout her life, but she never gave up on her quest for equality and justice. In some ways these comments hint at the beliefs that Kate learned through her own life experiences: finding value in all different kinds of people, challenging injustice, rejecting the norms of institutions that privileged some and disadvantaged others, and persevering despite personal difficulties. These were the characteristics, personal traits, and cultural knowledge that Kate brought with her from her own life into her classroom interactions and practices.

Kate attempted to wrap up the conversation about Rosa Parks, but it seemed the children were not ready to let go of the discussion. From the remarks that followed, it seemed that the concept of segregation was becoming more personal and meaningful for the children. One girl asked if white and black children could live in the same neighborhood. When Kate answered "no, back then, absolutely not," another child asked if they could live in the same state. When told that they could, but they would have separate schools, neighborhoods and hospitals, the class erupted. Many turned to each other to voice their dismay. Some uttered, "What?" One child called out, "Are you kidding me?" Another wanted to know about church attendances. "Oh, the churches were separate too," Kate told him. One girl nodded in response to Kate's answer, "And black and white people couldn't get married." As Kate remarked on the changes to marital laws, the girl who initiated the conversation asked about mulatto children:

"Would they go to a white school or a black school?" As Kate defined the term mulatto to a confused boy sitting to her left, the girl offered an explanation for her question to the group at large. "My mom's mulatto." Kate re-engaged the class by reminding them that President Obama is "the same way. Barack Obama's father was black and his mother was white." The responses to this information triggered so many reactions that the children lost track of the central conversation and turned to each other instead. Conversation abounded.

These discussions revealed so much about what Kate attempted to teach her students about social equality. Kate portrayed Rosa Parks as a person who questioned even from a young age the inequities that existed in her life and in the country. Rosa Parks was an activist; she moved from questioning to taking action. Through her remarks, Kate was reminding her students that anyone and everyone is capable of confronting injustice and effecting change in their lives and possibly the larger society as well, but, like Rosa Parks, they must be persistent in their efforts. By pointing out the existence of the Ku Klux Klan in today's world, Kate reminded the children that racism and hatred are not things of the past. They exist today. There is still work to be done to promote tolerance, open-minded thinking and justice, but there is also the promise of every person reaching his highest potential regardless of his race, religion, or ethnicity. The example of the president as a person of mixed racial descent provided a very powerful model of the achievement that is available to all.

By analyzing Kate's discourse, it is possible to see the identity that Kate assumed for herself as an advocate for social justice. By considering how she structured her

classroom and designed her curriculum, it is possible to see that this identity was not limited to altering societal norms outside her classroom walls. Through her careful assessment and addressing of her students' needs, Kate acted as an advocate for each of the children. In the following section, I look more closely at Kate's identity as an advocate.

Kate's Identity as an Advocate

As an advocate for social justice, Kate addressed the need for children to understand and appreciate differing ways of being in the world as well as confront injustice where it exists in the world. A survey of her room and the activities she created indicated the multiple ways in which she incorporated multicultural materials and resources. Her room was littered with books that showed children of different races, ethnicities, and religions. Frequently, music from different nations settled over the children as they went about their lessons. At the start of this study, the hallway outside Kate's room displayed colorfully painted banners the children created after researching winter holidays celebrated around the world. Each Wednesday the class was joined by Elizabeth, a 19-year old volunteer with Down's syndrome who helped with classroom tasks and activities. Over the course of the winter months, Kate used her morning supervision period to teach a group of children how to do a traditional African dance. The group then shared the dance with the entire 2nd grade and even taught the rest of the children how to do the dance.

Kate's goal in including all of these elements in her classroom was to help the children develop tolerance and appreciation for different types of people and cultures.

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Looking at these activities and Kate's stated goals in isolation might lead one to the conclusion that Kate subscribed to the "feasts and holidays" approach to multicultural education—that is, that she provided lessons that demonstrate some of the ways in which peoples of different countries celebrate festivals without addressing the underlying beliefs and values of the country (Cochran-Smith, 1995a). Kate emphatically rejected the notion of a "feasts and holidays" approach. During the preparations for the African dance celebration, she specifically designed an introduction to the performance to address how this type of dance relates to the larger African culture. She explained her intent to me: "I wanted the children to understand what they were doing in context. I'm always going for context. I'm big on context." In delving into contexts, Kate summarized her goals for the children.

> There are other countries. There are other ways of being. There are other
> ways that families live together that are different from ours in some ways,
> but similar in other ways...[For] similarities you talk about basic needs.
> You know, no matter where you live you need somewhere to live and
> something to eat. Children need someone to take care of them, and
> children need a place to sleep at night. And you know, they need
> breakfast in the morning. They need supper at night...[It's] the idea that
> there is a larger world. And there are similarities and
> differences...[There] are other ways of living and being in the world
> (I.K.4-07/p.13).

By helping her students to understand the context in which different practices made sense to the people who engaged in them, Kate seemed to be trying to reduce the likelihood that her students would subscribe to thinking that privileged one way of thinking and believing over another. She seemed to fear that ignorance of different ways of thinking and believing were the roots of many of the difficulties that arise when two different groups come together. In many ways she seemed to be attempting to recreate in a small way the experiences of her own childhood in New York. Using many of the same words and phrases she used to describe the understandings she gleaned from her youth, Kate seemed to be encourage open-mindedness and flexibility of thought in relation to different ways of being in the world.

It seems, however, that Kate was not content to teach about differences and similarities. Her intent seemed to be that her students act on their understandings of difference and head off the hatred and injustices that often occur when ignorance goes unchecked. As the discussion about Rosa Parks indicates, Kate encouraged her students to see themselves as possible agents of social change who would not remain silent in the face of injustice. For Kate, the injustices the children might someday need to confront were not abstractions. In her life and in her teaching, injustices occurred and could only be rectified if someone stood up to stop them. Kate summarized how she hoped her students would pull together the many different discussions around injustice that emerged through events like the play and the readings of children's literature.

Don't stay silent on what you think about when you see someone

bullying someone on the playground because they're African American.

Think about the book we read...Think about how you felt. And think

about how outraged you were when you found out the kinds of things

that happened to the characters. Think about that, because here it is in

your life in front of you for real...Think about the characters in the book.

They had to make a choice. This is it. Are you going to tolerate it? Are

you going to walk away and deal with it another day? What are you

going to do? You've got a voice. You can use it, or you can be quiet

which for now is fine. But understand there are consequences either way.

There are consequences if you remain silent, and there are consequences

if you use your voice....They're little kids...but some of the issues these

kids are dealing with, bullying and all of that, those are hard things.

Those are real. A lot of this is about, you know, find your voice and use it

for good in the world (I.K.6-11/p.16).

Teaching about issues of social justice was, for Kate, a way of giving voice to the

injustices that surrounded her students in their community and in the larger world .

Repeatedly, Kate appeared to act as an advocate for each of her students by first

and foremost believing that every child had the ability to achieve, learn, and grow in the

school setting. She structured her classroom to support this belief. Detailed analysis of

how Kate shaped her classroom practices and interactions to support her students as

learners appears in Chapter 5. Here I present a few examples to support the claim that she acted as an advocate for each child by structuring her classroom to promote her students' academic success.

Directions were detailed and very specific. The list of required daily tasks was written on the whiteboard at the front of the room each day. After giving an explanation or directions, she frequently asked, "Do you understand?" She followed up on any questions right then and there. She held small group reading instruction daily which allowed her to see student progress and address any issues immediately. Seat work was individualized based on the students' reading levels. While spelling and reading homework was sent home on a weekly basis, Kate sent home and corrected math homework nightly so that she could "deal with any issues" that arose (FN.K.3-9/p.6). At the time of this study, Liberty School allowed teachers to select their own reading program. Kate selected a basal series that provided a scope and sequence chart of all the skills and concepts second graders need. Her rationale was simple: using such a series ensured that her students would have all the skills and concepts they needed to be successful second grade readers. "This way they get everything they need" (FN.K.2-19/p.1). For Kate, a different approach might have put her students at risk by overlooking or eliminating a necessary skill. As an advocate for each of her students, Kate ensured that every child got the skills and concepts he or she needed; no one was going to slip through the cracks. Every child, Kate seemed to hope, would leave her room prepared to take on the challenges of third grade.

Kate acknowledged that the curriculum would not be easy for many of her students, and in many ways the structures of her classroom were designed to help those students persevere even when learning seemed difficult or impossible. Like the time when she put her head down and just kept going after her father's death, these students had to believe that they were capable of learning all that school required of them and that they were stronger than they thought. Through her curriculum, Kate appeared to foster the same can-do attitude that was so important in her own life.

Kate seemed to know that some of her students faced challenges in their home lives and that those challenges might easily lead to a "can't-do" attitude. Many students came from impoverished homes. Several were dealing with divorces or parental separations that left the children without one of their parents. Two children lived with a guardian other than their mother or father. Kate supported these children by not only sharing her faith that they would be okay but also by providing them with someone they could trust to help them. A casual observer might miss the whispered conversations that Kate had with some of the children, but these were the times when Kate checked in with her students. As a small girl entered the room one morning, she told Kate that her father had lost his job, but it was "okay. He got another one" (FN.2-09/p.2). Kate acknowledged that "that's hard," but that she was glad he had found another. Another child on a different occasion entered the room, hung up his backpack, sat down, put his arms on his desk and dropped his head to his desk (FN.3-27/p.1). He said nothing to the boys and girls milling around him. After greeting the rest of the class at the door, Kate moved to his side, bent over and whispered something to him.

He looked up and said a few words. The pair exchanged a few more comments. The boy nodded and left the room. He returned a few minutes later and seemed ready to engage in the day's planned activities. Kate relayed to me later that he had had a difficult morning at home. Knowing about the situation at home, "because [he] told [her] about it," Kate had offered him words of encouragement. On this morning he wanted the additional support of the guidance counselor. Through these exchanges Kate seemed to be encouraging her students to not only persevere but also to trust in others and believe that in the end, it will be okay. Kate specifically related the importance of these values to the insights she developed while with Outward Bound.

> We learned: "All right, we've had a long day on the river. It's been raining for *three* days...But at some point the sun is going to come out'''...And it's just saying, "I can tolerate this."...It's trusting that you're going to be okay...And for some of these kids, things are in crisis...and you say to them, "It's going to be okay...You're going to be okay" (I.K.4-07/p.11)

As a cultural agent, she learned the cultural values that she said were explicitly a part of Outward Bound's mission.

> Let's see, the motto is "To Strive, To Serve, and not to Yield. Okay. It's very much about, um, developing personal insights, developing a sense of your strengths. I have found with kids and adults and in my own life,

we're all capable of a lot more than we think. You just have to trust that

you're going to be okay (I.K.4-07/p.7).

As an advocate for each child, Kate brought into her classroom the cultural values that

she learned within the cultural community of Outward Bound. These values—

perseverance, trusting in others and yourself, having faith that at the end of the day,

everything will be okay—were likely outgrowths of other experiences in her life and

manifestations of innate personal traits as well. Regardless of their origin, these values

shaped her actions and interactions within her classroom. These are the values that she

seemed to offer her students. Analysis presented in chapter 5 returns to these values.

Kate's identity as an advocate for social justice and for each of her students was

rooted in the cultural communities of her life as well as her innate characteristics and

traits. Kate's identity, as I have described it, was not one that Kate would have

identified for herself at the outset of this project. However, after almost six months of

thinking critically about her life during this study, Kate came to see herself in a new

light. In Chapter 7, I discuss how this study altered her understandings of her own life,

her identity and her goals for her classroom practices.

Introducing Elsie

Elsie is a veteran teacher and administrator. This research occurred during her

29th year in the educational field. While 23 years were spent as a teacher, Elsie spent six

years as either an assistant principal or principal of two different elementary schools.

Despite her years of experience, for this particular school year, Elsie might have been

classified as a novice teacher; this was her first year as a general education teacher. All

of her other years of teaching involved special education students in grades

kindergarten through seventh grade.

Elsie's Childhood: Growing Up in a White, Middle-Class Community

Elsie grew up in a small rural town in northern New England. She related that

"everybody knew everybody in the town where I lived" (I.E.1-26/p.7). It was the kind of

town where, if she sent a letter home to her father from college, she didn't need to put

the address on the envelope; the mail carrier knew her dad and his address. She

laughed as she told me about her graduating class, "We all hung out together. There

were only 75 kids...Two towns *combined*" (I.E.2-12/p.7). Summarizing her childhood

years, Elsie described her background as "very middle-class, you know, regular." She

seemed to mean by this that her home and her possessions were much like those of her

friends.

Even within this seemingly homogeneous environment, Elsie learned about

difference. When I asked her when she first became aware of herself as a person of a

specific racial, ethnic, or linguistic background, she laughed.

> Oh gosh. This is what I knew about different (pause) classes or races or
>
> socioeconomics or whatever you want to call it. When I was growing up,
>
> there were Protestants and Catholics. That's what my dad would say.
>
> He would never marry a Catholic...but [he would say it] not in a
>
> disparaging—how can you say that that wasn't in a disparaging way?

(Laughing.) Right? Especially since many of his friends were Catholics,

and for the longest time, actually my father had me believing we were

Jewish….[but] when I talked to my grandmother and grandfather about

it, they said, "You're not Jewish" …That was the only thing I knew

about…it's not race. That's religious beliefs (I.E.1-26/p.9-10).

As the quote indicates, Elsie learned about difference even in her white, middle-class

community. Her laughter seems to indicate that the conversations she recounted were

made in jest, but hidden underneath the joking words is the idea that one group of

individuals is better or has more value than another. This conversation hinted at the

demarcating lines that divide people by religion, race, ethnicity, socioeconomics, and/or

linguistics (Hytten & Warren, 2003; Irvine, 2003). Also hinted at are the difficulties Elsie

had in discussing the categories which divide. The pause in the first sentence seems to

indicate her hesitation to name the different categories around which individuals might

be categorized. The use of the phrase "whatever you want to call it" appears to indicate

a near dismissal of categories that she is aware of but prefers not to speak about or

perhaps consider.

Elsie related that she "never grew up with any sense of one, of one race was

better or inferior than another" (I.E. 6-02/p.4), but she remembered vividly the time a

black family was "run out of town."

Um, like, one time, uh, another family moved… When I was growing up,

I only remember one black family moving into town. And actually there

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were conversations about how they got *run* out of town. That was never

a conversation, or, um, terminology was used by other friends' families,

but not by my parents (I.E.1-26/p.7).

In these few sentences, Elsie revealed the silence that educational scholars note often

surrounds the topics of race and racism (Lawrence & Tatum, 1997; Marx, 2006; Sleeter,

1993/2005; Tatum, 2002). Despite her assertion that race was a "non-issue" for her

family, it seems possible that rather than race being something that did not matter, it

was instead a topic around which her family members were unwilling to engage. Later

in this same interview, her discomfort in discussing race was evident when she talked

about her students' races.

I asked her to give me demographic information about her students: their race,

ethnicity, socioeconomic and linguist backgrounds. Before providing the information,

she fidgeted, and she stated that she "struggled with what's politically correct" in terms

of labeling a child. For example, she asked, should a child be called black or African

American? Is a white child "white," "Caucasian," or "Anglo?" As a cultural agent

raised in a predominantly white community, it seems possible that Elsie might have

learned the cultural belief that scholars argue is the norm for the white, middle-class

mainstream (Howard, 2006; Tatum, 2002): discussing or drawing attention to issues of

race is an indication of latent racist tendencies. To discuss race, is to admit racism. For

Elsie, the values she might have learned in her childhood about race seemed to have

been challenged by the experiences of her later years.

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Elsie's Teen Years: Learning about Power and Status.

When Elsie was a junior in high school, her family moved to Fairbanks, Alaska after her father changed jobs. She described how she attended school in the morning with the other (mostly white) children of the pipeline workers, while most of the native Alaskan children attended school in the afternoon. This was due to transportation issues linked with the different geographic areas in which the students lived. Since there were many other white students in the local high school, she remembered "not standing out" for her race, but she did recall a racial incident.

> I remember, because I had the heavy parka, and it had the fur around it. I
> was sharing a locker with somebody, and we never met, at school,
> because we had different schedules and things, but...I remember her
> saying to me, "Oh, when I saw your coat, I thought I was sharing a locker
> with an Eskimo," and that kind of [feeling of, well] "I'm not." But I guess
> that's not a very good thing either. Like...I had to think, the way she said
> it, "Oh, that wouldn't be a good thing to be: an Eskimo." But I didn't
> think it was a bad thing until she made a comment (I.E.6-02/p.4).

Elsie shared this incident, because she remembered it as the time when she learned that being of a particular race may be problematic. The girl with whom she shared the locker was white. Even given the incident of the black family that was "run out of town," Elsie had not considered the possibility that one race might be considered less desirable than another prior to this event. While Elsie recalled only that racial incident, she

remembered that "there were definitely the socioeconomic differences" (I.E.6-02/p.5). Several of the wealthy boys had their own apartments in their parents' home, and they drove "really nice cars." What stood out about these kids was the status that was connected to their economic level. "They were *the* group that you wanted to hang out with. You know, they were the preppies or the jocks or whatever" (I.E.6-2/p.6).

The experiences of Elsie's teen years shaped her understandings of power and status. Living within the Alaskan community, she learned that being an Eskimo was not a "good thing to be," and she learned that the kids with money "were the group you wanted to hang out with." From these experiences, she learned that some characteristics bestow privilege and status, while others do not. Being white and having money bestowed privilege and status; being an Eskimo and having less money did not. Interestingly, the analytic thinking which Elsie seems to have engaged in to make meaning of status and power is very similar to the theorizing of scholars who examine whiteness (Marx, 2006; Marx & Pennington, 2003; McIntyre, 1997a, 1997b), at-risk pedagogies (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995), and cultural deficit thinking (Banks, 1993; Valencia, 1997). These scholars argue that within the aforementioned ideologies one group of individual benefits to the detriment of another group. In the case of whiteness theory, at-risk pedagogies, and cultural deficit thinking, the group that benefits includes individuals who are white and middle-class. Each of these scholars argues, like Elsie, that status and power are bestowed based upon based on race and economics. Later analysis of Elsie's discourse reveals that this understanding of privilege and status remained with Elsie and found its way into her current teaching work.

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Following her family's return to New England, Elsie finished high school and attended college at a local university. She studied to become a teacher, because she "always knew that was what [she] was going to do" (I.E.2-12/p.1).

Elsie's Teacher Preparation: Learning to Problem-Solve

Elsie is certified in both special education and elementary education. Her elementary education student teaching occurred in a third grade class; her special education student teaching occurred at a residential school for "severely behaviorally disturbed kids" (I.E.3-11/p.1). While Elsie stated that she "learned a lot" during her general education placement, the lessons she learned during her special education student teaching are more relevant to this study.

Elsie spoke about two ideas or values that she seemed to believe were central to the field of special education: the teacher as a problem-solver and the student as a logical person. In special education, she said, the teacher is concerned with "trying to figure out the dynamics of behavior and things like that." For Elsie that meant "if you could just get inside [the kids'] heads and figure out [their behavior], then you'd be better able to manage them or teach them or reach them" (I.E.3-11/p.2). In trying to explain what she meant, Elsie shifted the focus of the discussion to recent occurrences within her classroom.

She mentioned two children and the challenges they faced. She wished that she could "know what they're thinking...then I'd better be able to meet [their] needs. Their behavior makes sense to them, but it doesn't make sense to me." Elsie worked from the assumption that these children were logical. The way they acted and interacted "made

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sense" if she could figure out "their thinking." From Elsie's perspective, the children were not defective or deficient; they simply functioned differently. If she could "figure out" how the children functioned, then it seems she believed she could help them to move toward success in school. As a cultural agent acquiring and constructing knowledge within the cultural community of special education, Elsie came to believe that children, no matter their level of functioning, made sense and that as a teacher she was responsible for figuring out what worked for each child. Analysis presented in later chapters reveals that these cultural values were of great importance to Elsie's work with culturally diverse students.

After graduating from college, Elsie moved back to Alaska to begin her teaching career. It was a time during which she learned a great deal about difference and diversity.

Elsie's Novice Teaching Years: Learning about Difference and Developing Relationships

Elsie spent her first two years as an educator teaching special education students in the Alaskan bush. She taught in three different villages during that time. The most remote of these villages was over 500 air miles northwest of Anchorage.

Elsie described these experiences in Alaska as being central to her understanding of what it means to be different. She said, "How I learned that *I* was different, is when I was *teaching* in rural Alaska. I knew I was different; I stood out" (I.E.1-26/p.10). In a village of 80-90 Yupik Eskimos, only the teachers were white, so it is not surprising that Elsie stood out for her race. While some of the Eskimos accepted the white teachers,

others resented them or feared that the white teachers would undermine the importance of the Eskimo culture. Elsie recalled several instances related to being different racially. Once while sitting in an airport, an Eskimo woman sat down next to her and "started reaming me out and I knew it was just because I happened to be the white person sitting next to her" (I.E.1-26/p.11). While she laughed at this incident she did not laugh as she recounted a time that a family was upset with her and she became a "target." While she did not recall the exact events, it seemed that a girl's family was upset with her, because the girl had stolen something as a gift for Elsie. Elsie shrugged her shoulders as she depicted the event; it was, Elsie believed, a misunderstanding due at least in part to "cultural differences."

Elsie, it seems, was very much aware of herself as a white person in this environment, but she took steps to end the isolation that her race might have imposed. By participating in some of the activities in which her students and their families engaged, she "kind of stepped into their world" (I.E.1-26/p.7). She accepted an invitation to join the village women at the steam baths. Others taught her "how to fish using a stick and line." She laughed as she remembered how the villagers would find her out on her cross country skis and "haul [her] behind their snowmobiles" so that she could ski back down the hill into the village. She recalled these many experiences and the cultural knowledge she gained of the village practices and activities that were so important to her students and their families. Research indicates that cross-cultural experiences may provide white teachers with the opportunity to better understand and appreciate other ways of living and being in the world (Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Sleeter,

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2008). Additionally, such experiences seem to reduce negative stereotypes white

teachers hold of communities outside of the white, middle-class mainstream (Delpit,

1995; Sleeter, 2001b).   While Elsie did not talk about appreciating different ways of life

or reducing negative stereotypes, she did talk about "going with the flow" of the village

activities so that she could learn about their way of life (I.E.1-26/p.6). She said that she

was "blown away" on more than one occasion by how different life was in the Alaskan

bush than it was in the predominantly white, New England town in which she grew up.

Of primary importance to Elsie during this time were the relationships she

formed with the villages. "I think that I developed good relationships with the people in

the villages. I think had I not, um, kind of stepped into that world, I would have been

an outsider. Even though I was still an outsider." By building relationships within the

village, Elsie not only headed off a very lonely and restricted existence, she also opened

up avenues along which she could learn and grow in her understanding of the villagers.

Her efforts to get to know the practices of the village may have acted to reduce

ethnocentric thinking. Rogoff (2003) suggests that "if we can get beyond the idea that

one way is necessarily the best, we can consider the possibilities of other ways, seeking to

understand how they work and respecting them in their time and place" (p. 17). In the

process of coming to better understand the cultural practices of the villages, it seems

possible that Elsie also came to better understand herself (Delpit, 1995; Holme et al.,

2005)

Elsie's use of the word "outsider" and the phrase "their world" seems to indicate

a sense of separation she felt from the villagers. It seems she realized she would never

be a true member of the Alaskan communities, but she seemed to have gone out of her way to become a participant. Erickson (2007) writes that there can be "affiliation as well as conflict across cultural differences" (p. 55). By "developing good relationships with people in the villages," Elsie seemed to be developing an affiliation with some of the villagers despite the conflicts she had with others. The idea that there can be affiliation even when differing cultural groups come together was a belief that Elsie carried into her classroom and it seemed to have shaped how she envisioned her classroom community.

After leaving the Alaskan bush, Elsie relocated to the Mid-West where she earned her Master's degree working with Severely Emotionally Disturbed (SED) students. After completing the degree, she moved to California to teach in San Jose.

Elsie's Teaching in San Jose: Lived Experiences, Collegiality, and Challenging the Role of Status

Elsie described the San Jose School District as the "most diverse" setting in which she ever taught. She described the student population as "68% Hispanic" with very high rates of poverty. Elsie rank ordered other races/ethnicities behind Hispanic as "Asian, African American, and then Caucasian, and then Other[5]" (I.E.4-07/p.1).

In California, like Alaska, Elsie learned a lot about the lives of the students. The information she gleaned from conversations with the students and social workers spanned a wide range of topics. From home visits, she learned first-hand about how her

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[5] The capitalization of racial groups is in accord with the standards of the U.S. Census bureau.

students and their families might experience life, how they might interpret her position in their lives, and the importance of such information for her work as a teacher.

> I really got to see the *lives* the kids lead. Where they live. Because we would go into the barrio and hand out—in the apartment buildings—and hand out fliers...I remember, walking through there, and the men just standing in the hall, in the doorways, *leering* and thinking, this is what the 5th grade girls, or *all* the girls, have to walk by at the end of the day, to get home. Or culturally, how it was for those girls or just learning about immigrant families not wanting to talk to *me* necessarily or unless I was with a teacher who spoke Spanish—they were bilingual. [They would tell the families], "She's okay. It's okay that she's with us." Or bringing it up, "We're not INS"...Learning to be kind of aware of it, and hyper vigilant...of the kids' experience. I mean hyper vigilant—not the wahoo—but taking the information and storing it (I.E.2-12/p.10).

These visits to the barrio provided not only a glimpse into her students' lives but also a view of how they perceived her as a white, non-Spanish speaking teacher. This was the second time that Elsie's work with students from whom she differed culturally was perceived negatively by the adults in the community. In California some of the parents seemed to be suspicious of her presence in their neighborhood because she spoke no English and because they suspected she might be with INS. As noted earlier, some of the Alaskan Eskimos did not want white teachers teaching the village children. These

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events in these two different communities seem to have provided an opportunity for Elsie to consider how others might view white teachers.

Lisa Delpit (1995) argues that white teachers when teaching "other people's children" must consider how their positions of power within U.S. society may impact their work with poor children and children of color. By position of power Delpit is referring to the historical trends within the United States that place whites in the most powerful economic and social positions. Issues of power, and subsequent powerlessness, are problematic throughout our society, Delpit notes, but they become especially difficult when white teachers go into communities, such as the barrios of California and the villages of the Alaskan bush, and educate children whose life experiences may be very different from their own. In such cases, white teachers may impose their own white, middle-class values over the norms of the community. The seemingly negative racial exchanges may have offered Elsie a different perspective on what it means to be white and what it means to teach students who are not white. Delpit explains that "the more fundamental issue" for the adults in the barrio and the Alaskan bush may have been related to "whose voice gets to be heard in determining what is best" in educating children (p. 46). To minimize the conflict that may occur when two cultures come together, white teachers must be "willing to see [themselves] in the unflattering light of another's angry glaze," because "it is the only way to learn what it might feel like to be someone else" (p. 46). Elsie commented that some of the Eskimo village elders "really seemed to resent" the presence of the white teachers, because of their concerns that they "would lose their culture" (I.E.1-26/p.9). In California the

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parents seemed prefer speaking to the "bilingual teacher or whatever" versus speaking to Elsie because she literally could not communicate with them (I.E.2-12/p.10). It seems that these experiences may have provided Elsie with an opportunity to rethink what it means to be a white teacher and what it might mean for parents to have their children educated by someone who does not carry the same value systems. As the phrasing of the final line in the above quote indicates, Elsie attempted to "learn what it might feel like to be someone else" (Delpit, 1995, p. 26) by visiting the barrio. In many ways, Elsie appeared to use these visits and conversations with her students as a way of "stepping into" the lives and worlds of her students. In a manner similar to her constructed understandings about the lives of her Eskimo students, Elsie used this information to better know her students. By being "hyper vigilant" about knowing her students and their lives, Elsie felt better able to meet their needs. As a cultural agent moving through and participating in these two different cultural communities, it seems likely that Elsie altered her perceptions about the role of teachers and the role of parents in the educational process. Later analysis returns to this issue.

While teaching in California, Elsie acted as a participant in a Master's level research project designed specifically to redress the assumption that difference is problematic. Titled "Complex Instruction," the project extended the use of a set of teaching practices and strategies from a mathematics setting to the bilingual and special education setting in which Elsie taught. At the time of this research, Elsie still had some of the program materials in her classroom. I flipped through them during one of my observations (FN.E.5-28), while Elsie explained the program further to me.

The activities that the children are expected to do are so interrelated that the children cannot complete the task unless everybody participates. And it's like group work—cooperative learning—but at a much more sophisticated level. So, you know how in cooperative learning, you've got your note taker, and your time keeper? So, you've still got those roles, but there's an activity such as putting a puzzle together, where everybody would have a piece of the puzzle...and the whole idea was that no one was done until everybody was done (I.E.4-07/p.4).

Complex Instruction was designed specifically to alter students' perceptions of each other's strengths and weaknesses. Because the roles rotated and drew upon varying skills and talents, each student had an opportunity to show the areas in he or she was smart or adept. Elsie remembered the difference this program made for a kindergartener with Down's syndrome named Julia. When Elsie first introduced Complex Instruction, Julia would hide under the table and refuse to participate, but within a few weeks her interactions with her classmates changed.

I remember the kids looking at [Julia], going, "Oh my gosh!" I can't remember what the talent was that she had, but you bring out [through Complex Instruction] that someone is a good explainer. Someone's good at keeping things organized. And they were like, "Look at [Julia]. Look at what she's doing"'...In a few weeks...her status in the classroom raised significantly (I.E.4-07/p.5).

Complex Instruction did not hide the issues of high and low status; it brought

them into clear relief and then took steps to alter them. For Elsie this provided a way to

correct what she felt was the inherent wrongness of inclusion and exclusion within a

group of people. Issues of inclusion and exclusion were salient issues for Elsie. As

noted earlier, she talked specifically about the experiences during her youth when

groups were assigned high or low status based on their race or economic levels. In

California, children were high or low status depending on their ability level. Complex

Instruction provided a way to address status within the classroom. Within the cultural

community of her classroom and in conjunction with woman who facilitated the

Complex Instruction project, Elsie encouraged children to see that everyone is different

and that everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Regardless of strengths and

weaknesses, "everyone is capable of learning" (I.4-07/p. 5). For Elsie, the recognition of

each individual's unique contributions was what seemed to make a classroom a

community rather than a collection of people functioning independently within the

same four walls for six hours a day.

Elsie retained her concern for status and its detrimental effects on students, and

she embraced the idea of classrooms as communities. Over the course of this research,

we spoke often about how to shape classroom communities to support the learning and

development of all students. As later analysis reveals, the values of Complex

Instruction—the commitment to creating classroom communities in which everyone is

valued as a special person and a capable learner—were very much a part of her work

with culturally diverse students.

Elsie's Return to the East Coast: Building Community

After 11 years, Elsie returned to the East Coast where she took a job teaching special education in the same district in which she taught at the time of this research, although she was in a different elementary school. During her 11 years in the district, Elsie taught special education for three years, acted as assistant principal or principal for four years, and taught for a kindergarten intervention program for four years. While participating in this study, she was teaching a general education kindergarten class. This was her fifth year teaching at Liberty.

What stood out for Elsie about her years of teaching in New England was the collegiality of the teams with whom she had worked. For example, she remembered the camaraderie that developed when she shared a room with another special education teacher. In addition to supporting each other, the team's collegiality provided a way to address the needs of the students more effectively and efficiently.

> Our door was constantly open, so we were back and forth, like if the kids were working...[We] were just *together*. But it was wonderful, 'cause then you would talk about the kids. Or I could hear what [one of the teachers] was doing with my speech kids, and I could carry it over into the classroom. And those are the pieces that are important. For me, that's community—the collegiality, the closeness so that you can hear what's happening so that you can better fit your kids (I.E.4-07/p.6-7).

In her current work, this pull toward collegiality was very much in evidence. Collegiality for Elsie appeared to be both social and professional. She frequently stuck her head through the door to the neighboring kindergarten room to consult with the other teacher about plans for upcoming lessons, events, and activities. Since this was her first year in a regular education class, she often asked for help with the math and reading curriculum. She said of the teacher, "She just knows so much. I'm not afraid to ask for help if it's going to help my kids" (FN.E. 2-06/p.5). In March, the two literally put their heads together to plan for a "visit" from a leprechaun (FN.E.3-11). They giggled as they talked about the footprints they painted on their classroom floors overnight so that their students might think a leprechaun was scampering about the rooms. In May, they planned a field trip to the local children's museum (FN.5-28). Each morning, Elsie greeted the paraprofessional who worked one-on-one with one of her students. They might chat about their weekend activities or a new recipe before moving on to discuss what the day's agenda looked like for the little boy with whom the paraprofessional worked. Later chapters reveal how Elsie used the relationships with her co-workers as a means of bridging the cultural gaps between herself and the students from whom she differed culturally.

Drawing on her belief that being part of a community supports growth and development, Elsie shaped her classroom practices and interactions to support a classroom community. By doing so she created "an atmosphere of caring, and kids helping each other out, and acknowledging kids" (I.2-12/p.6). Beyond acting as a way of socially and emotionally connecting with each other, the classroom community Elsie

created acted as a safety net for her students. Elsie recalled her frustration in the past when her ED students were mainstreamed into general education classes for specials and lunch.

> [They] were visitors in every other classroom...And one of the things that really bothered me is, at lunch time, I would see my kiddos sitting at the end of the lunch table, but nobody was talking to them. None of the other kids were talking to them. So I set it up that they had to sit in the middle of the table so that there was somebody...at least surrounding them. That really bothered me. And even to this day, it bothers me when we do this mainstreaming thing, the kids that are mainstreamed in the classroom, regardless of their abilities, they need to be a functioning part of the classroom (I.E.4-07/p.9).

As this quote indicates, Elsie altered the practices that allowed for separation due to difference. Drawing on the understandings she constructed through her work with Complex Instruction she described her ED students as "low status kids. No one wanted to sit with them or talk with them" (I.E.4-07/p.9). She reworked the cafeteria so that at least her students were not physically isolated, but she remained bothered by their social isolation. "Those kids had no community," she stated, so she created one within her classroom.

Elsie's vision of a community relied on compiling and understanding what made each child unique and special and sharing that information with the class so that

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they might all support and encourage each other. In part her knowledge was based on school activities. For example, she and the class applauded a boy's first successful attempt to tie his shoes after they witnessed his struggle with those same shoe laces over many months in the classroom. Another girl's writing became the source of comments like, "She's so smart," after the class had taken in the girl's many struggles with getting words down on paper. Alternately, the information might be based on what the child shared about his life outside of school. For example, one boy's drumming skills became a topic of discussion as did another girl's T-ball team. As the children shared these elements of their lives, Elsie used them as a way of drawing the children together, reminding them to seek out their classmates when they needed assistance or help.

Elsie and I talked about the possible origins of her commitment to building classroom communities. I asked her if having grown up in a small community was what made community so important to her.

> I really don't know. For so long, I was a burn-your-bridges type of gal.
> The Alaska time, I probably wouldn't have stayed in touch with people
> because it was such a transient place for teachers, but community has
> become very important to me. Maybe it's because everybody knew
> everybody within my family. And well growing up, we had that
> community...But when my parents got divorced, that all ended...So
> maybe it's because of the absence of it that I've tried to recreate it. I don't
> know (I.6-11/p.13).

Elsie's train of thought was difficult to follow in this quote. She seemed to be piecing together an understanding of how community came to be so important in her work. She started and ended with the same statement of uncertainty. It seems possible that her commitment to building communities that support children as people and learners might have come from her childhood or her work in California. It also seems possible that the importance of community is just something innate to Elsie and that is why she really cannot say how she developed this value. As Rogoff (2003) notes, there is no real need to tease out whether the importance of community is the result of Kate's nature or the learning she constructing in response to the many different experiences of her life. As a cultural agent, she carried her commitment to building community with her into the cultural community of her classroom where it seems it worked in tandem with her identity as one-caring.

Elsie's Identity as the One-Caring

Elsie assumed identity resembles that of the one-caring as described by Nel Noddings (2002). This identity came to light after I asked her why community was so important to her. She replied:

> Because... I don't know, I guess I look at—that's, like, who we are—you know it's hard to explain I guess but, I think community, building relationships, making connections, having, um,...I don't know why. Why is it so important to me?... I think that that's just the nature of who we are as people, is that you forge

relationships with other people for the.... I don't know. This just sounds silly,

but for the greater good (I.E.4-07/p.3).

As the quote indicates, Elsie stumbled over her response. Even as she spoke, she was

piecing together her own understanding of her own belief system around community

and caring. She continued by stating she was not sure that she could clearly articulate

her thoughts.

> It's just... (pause) and for my students. I mean I'm not saying that you
>
> have to be surrounded by tons of friends and be with people all the time.
>
> It's not the social piece of it, although that's a side effect. It's just that
>
> piece of knowing that you're interconnected with others (I.E.4-07/p.4).

For Elsie, forging relationships was an essential part of being human. Noddings (2002)

asserts a very similar belief: "Taking *relation* as ontologically basic simply means that

we recognize human encounter and affective response as a basic fact of human

existence" (p.4). Caring is basic; it is an essential part of who we are as humans. The

interconnection between all humans is a natural derivative of caring and forming

relationships.

> We feel that we are, on the one hand, free...we know, on the other hand,
>
> that we are irrevocably linked to intimate others. This linkage, this
>
> fundamental relatedness, is at the very heart of our being...I am not
>
> naturally alone. I am naturally in a relation from which I derive

nourishment and guidance. When I am alone, either because I have detached myself or circumstances have wrenched me free, I seek first and most naturally to reestablish my relatedness. My very individuality is defined in a set of relations. This is my basic reality (p. 4).

While Noddings' phraseology is more philosophical, the underlying belief systems are remarkably similar. The relationships in Elsie's life and classroom sustained her, and they are the root of what makes a "good" person. It is through these relationships that she addressed the "greater good." For Elsie and for Noddings, evil is a rejection of the "impulse to care" (p. 115).

Noddings (2002) describes the one-caring.

The one-caring comes across to the cared-for in an attitude...Her attitude is one of receptivity...The one-caring reflects reality as she sees in to the child. She accepts him as she hopes he will accept himself—seeing what is there, considering what might be changed, speculating on what might be. But her commitment, the decision to embrace a particular possibility, must be the child's. Her commitment is to him. While she expresses herself honestly when his vision of himself is unlovely and enthusiastically when it is beautiful, she never reflects a reality that pictures him detached, alone, abandoned (pp. 59-60).

Observations in Elsie's classroom confirm her commitment and receptivity to her students. She cherished what she called "the quirkiness" of her students. There was the small boy whose high-pitched voice and exuberance never failed to draw a smile. There was the little boy who seemed to fall into troublesome situations but always got a high five when he entered the room. There was the little girl who arrived just 17 days before the end of the school year. With each child, Elsie listened and observed to learn who the child was so that she could appreciate his or her uniqueness fully and then encourage the child to grow and develop. With each of these children, Elsie held an image of their capabilities as students but did not ask that they discard or abandon who they were as individuals.

The ability to hold onto a vision of the child as he or she is in the present while also projecting an image of him/her as his/her best possible self is part of the reason that Elsie was drawn to approaches like Complex instruction. She spoke specifically about one little girl and how such instructional activities might benefit her.

> Those opportunities… show that she has talents instead of being the little
>
> kiddo that wears the pull-ups…I think I look at community within the
>
> classroom as also opportunities to level the playing field among kids and
>
> for kids to recognize one another's talents (I.E.4-07/p.5).

By creating a caring classroom environment in which the children were seen as contributors with special talents and skills, by holding up an image of their best selves, she provided a space in which each child was capable.

As I observed Elsie's interactions and routines within the classroom, I was struck

by the many adaptations she made for the different children. One boy chewed gum

(FN.E.22). Another played with a squishy ball. Since these boys could be disruptive

within the classroom, the accommodations seemed like the work of any teacher

attempting to preserve order and maximize learning, but the adaptation she offered to

one girl belie this pragmatic interpretation. Melissa might be classified as a "good"

student; she was reading and working at grade level. She knew all the classroom rules

and routines, was a leader among her peers, and usually followed directions. However,

Melissa could be "bossy" at times and frequently called out during whole group

instruction. Rather than applying the discipline policies associated with calling out—

removal from the group—Elsie made accommodations for her. Melissa was given three

blocks. Whenever she wished to add a comment to the class discussion, she would turn

over one of the blocks to Elsie. Elsie told me that when Melissa was removed from the

group in accord with the class rules, it "devastated her." She "kind of melted" with the

punishment (FN.E.2-12/p.3-4). Elsie, by using the blocks, established a safe environment

that embraced a best image of Melissa while also allowing Elsie to maintain her own

ethical understanding of herself as one-caring. "The blocks don't seem to be as

devastating for her…[This system] seems to work for her. She has to pick her thoughts

wisely and not waste them" (FN.E.2-12/p.4). Through this practice, Melissa grew

intellectually and emotionally. Noddings (2002) writes that "to care is to act not by fixed

rule, but by affection and regard…The actions of the one-caring will be varied rather

than rule-bound" (p. 24). Within Elsie's room, rules acted as guidelines which

sometimes needed to be altered to fit the needs of the specific children and to support

Elsie in her role as the one-caring.

Noddings' (2002) ethic of care is an ideal. It is a personal ethic—"something

explicable—a set of rules, an ideal, a constellation of expressions—that guides and

justifies our conduct" (p. 26). In Chapter 7, "Engaging in the Research Process," I return

to Elsie's attempt to understand her identity as the one-caring. It was through engaging

in the process of this research that Elsie came to articulate and understand her own

ethicality and the role of caring in her beliefs and in her classroom. As we moved

through the process of the research, Elsie confronted her own fears that she might be

"sabotaging" her ethics and ethical self.

Conclusion

Kate and Elsie were cultural agents who carried with them the values, beliefs,

and knowledge sets that they had acquired and constructed within the various cultural

communities in which they participated throughout their lives. They were also

individuals with traits and characteristics that made them who they were. As cultural

agents and individuals, they entered their classrooms. They shaped their actions and

interactions based on who they were and what they knew from the vast array of their

experiences. Through this investigation, I sought to add complexity to the label "white

teacher." Rather than being conceptualized as "mono-cultural" and "mono-lingual"

individuals who function through the single lens of their "putative racial location" as

white women (McCarthy, 2003, p. 132), I argue, like McCarthy, that there is also a need

to consider the teachers "social biographies and the complex and changing social context

of the modern world" in which the teachers lived and worked. In this chapter I have introduced Kate and Elsie as individuals and cultural agents whose social biographies have worked with their racial location to shape how they interpret and make meaning of their work as teachers.

Commonalities between Elsie and Kate

The two teachers led very different lives and carried with them into their classrooms very different sets of experiences, values and beliefs. However, there were areas of overlap.

Both Elsie and Kate had experiences in which they were immersed in and participated in communities which afforded opportunities to consider other ways of being in the world. From these experiences, it seems that the women developed a broad understanding of diverse ways of thinking, believing, and acting in the world. It seems that, as the women moved through these communities interacting with different types of people with varying beliefs, values and practices, they moved away from ethnocentric thinking. Given the varied nature of their life experiences, Elsie and Kate defined "diversity" broadly. During the course of this study, they both reminded me several times that diversity referred to more than race or ethnicity. Diversity also included language, socioeconomics, (dis)ability, and religion. Regardless of the form diversity took, difference was not equated with deficiency for Kate and Elsie.

Bringing all that they had learned about diversity from their own lives into their actions and interactions of their classrooms, Elsie and Kate shaped classrooms that seemed to embrace all students as important people and capable learners.

Although neither Kate nor Elsie linked difference with deficiency, they both had life experiences in which difference was a divider. Both participants had observed how differences in race, religion, language, socioeconomics, and ability acted to divide groups of people. They knew first-hand of how those divisions worked and how the divisions served to privilege one group over another. Because of their experiences in differing cultural communities, the participants both believed that there are many different ways of being in the world. As teachers, they welcomed all the children who arrived in their classrooms. The findings suggest that, in some cases, this meant challenging the belief systems of others who felt their students were less capable due to their race, ethnicity, native language, or socioeconomic level. This is discussed further in chapter 5.

Elsie and Kate were dually certified in special and elementary education and had experience teaching special education. Kate and Elsie specifically referenced the theories of special education in relation to several of their beliefs and how they carried those out in their classroom practices. First they both took difference as a given. In special education, Kate said, "you're going into difference right from the get-go. Difference is the underlying premise of everything." Elsie also noted that difference was the norm in special education. The participants related to special education their belief that the teacher is responsible for finding ways to reach each and every student. The teacher problem-solves to meet each student's needs. If a child does not learn, it is because the teacher has not found ways to address his needs. Ultimately the teacher is responsible for student learning; the student is never to blame. Related to this belief is the idea that

every child is capable of learning. While children may learn differently and may have different levels of functioning, all students can learn. The implications of these beliefs are examined further in chapters 5 and 6.

Elsie and Kate valued what was unique and special in each child. Within their classrooms, they utilized strategies and practices to draw out the uniqueness of each child as well as foster academic growth and development. Kate specifically noted how she used the arts and multiple intelligences to support her students' academic progress as well as providing her students with a way to "give voice" to their own unique interpretations of their learning and the world. For Elsie, the classroom community provided a way for the children to acknowledge and honor each other's special skills and talents as well as support intellectual growth. The implications of this commonality between the two participants are explored further in chapters 5 and 6.

In this chapter, I presented findings about the teachers as cultural agents and individuals. I presented details about the cultural communities in which they participated and offered summaries of some of the belief systems they acquired and constructed in those communities. While Haberman (1996) has argued that white teachers of culturally diverse students should share some of the same cultural experiences as their students, the findings presented in this chapter indicate that these two teachers were able to draw on the personal traits and qualities they possessed in conjunction with the experiences of their lives, and the understandings they learned and constructed in relation to those experiences, to help them interact with and teach students from whom they differed culturally.

An Analytic Endnote: Caring

Before closing this chapter that introduces Kate and Elsie, I want to address caring as an educational value. Many scholars write about the importance of teachers caring about their students (Noddings, 2002; NBPTS, 2010), and indeed the research on teaching culturally diverse students indicates that teachers who care seem to be better able to meet the needs of students who are outside of the white mainstream (Irvine, 2003; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001a; Nieto, 1999; 2000). Despite the existing research, a survey of this study's table of contents reveals that there is no section devoted to caring as a theme. Caring is not a theme, because it would lose its meaning if removed from the context of the teachers' actions and interactions. As the data and analysis of the coming chapters indicate, it was inextricably interwoven throughout their work. It was a part of how the teachers understood and responded to teaching within the social context of Liberty School (chapter 5). It was a part of how the teachers navigated the cultural gaps between themselves and those students from whom they differed culturally (chapter 6), and it was part of the teachers' willingness to engage in the process of this study with me (chapter 7).

The data and analysis that appear in later chapters indicate that caring for Kate and Elsie was not a mushy, overly sentimental affect. Instead, their notion of caring was based on a genuine regard for each of their students as individuals and as learners. Their idea of caring seems to be akin to the dimensions offered by Gay (2000) as part of culturally responsive teaching. The one who cares demonstrates concern through words and deeds for the individual person and his or her academic performance. Caring

provokes action on the part of the one who cares; he or she is not content to remain idle when something can be done to benefit the one for whom he or she cares. Caring is "multidimensional responsiveness" (p.48); it seeks to understand the individual as situated within a particular context. Caring for Kate and Elsie seemed to be concerned "not with affective relations (although these existed). Rather it was the idea that their work was for the benefit of the students in their present and future lives, the welfare of the community and equity in society" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 473). Elsie and Kate cared about their students, and their words and actions reflected that. With these notions of caring in mind, I believe that caring snakes its way through virtually every aspect of the data and analysis that follows. I hope that in introducing the participants I have hinted at the significance of caring for Elsie and Kate. I believe that the coming chapters make it even more obvious.

CHAPTER 5

UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO TEACHING WITHIN

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF LIBERTY SCHOOL

In this chapter, I explore the participants' understanding of the social context in

which they taught. Liberty School educated a large number of "at-risk" students—for

example, children of color, children living in poverty, and/or children whose native

language was other than English. The findings indicate that Kate and Elsie understood

the implications of working in such a setting with regard to their own actions and

relative to the educational programs they provided to their students. The findings also

indicate that there were instances of inconsistency between the beliefs the participants

claimed for themselves and their actions and interactions.

Statistics indicate that students like those at Liberty School do not perform well

in the public schools of the United States (Cochran-Smith, et.al, 2004; Hollins & Guzman,

2005; Sleeter, 2008). Almost fifty percent of the students being educated at Liberty lived

in poverty and qualified for free or reduced lunch (I.P.7-08). While 81% of Liberty's

students were white, the percentage of students who were black, Hispanic/Latino, or

Asia (19%) exceeded the state average by almost 10% (Leclerc, 2009).

What is problematic in educating such students is often not the students

themselves, it is the perceptions that surround their abilities. The educational research is

replete with studies that detail the low expectations that white teachers often hold for students who are of color, are living in poverty, and/or speak a native language other than English (e.g., Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Kailin, 1999; Sleeter, 2008). Hollins and Guzman (2005) in their review of the research on pre-service teachers comment that white teacher candidates often "hold negative attitudes and beliefs about those different from themselves" (p. 9). Christine Sleeter (2008), in summarizing the research on pre-service white teachers, similarly notes that these teachers "question the academic ability" (p. 559) of students of color and consequently "generally assume lower expectations for the achievement" for those students (p. 560). Kailin's work (1999) confirms the national trend toward higher percentages of black students than white students in special education classes and lower percentages in advanced placement. Her work also reveals that white in-service teachers often state that black students' poor academic performance is due to their "bad home environments" in which education has little to no value. The research so strongly indicates the low expectations for academic performance for children outside of the white, middle-class mainstream that Swadener (1995) describes the "at risk" and "disadvantage" categorizations as "labels of anticipated failure" (p. 19).

Many have argued that the low expectations and poor academic performance of students outside of the white, middle-class mainstream are linked to the understandings that white teachers bring to the classroom about the role of culture in the lives of students of color, living in poverty, and/or speaking a language other than English at home (Banks, 1993; Irvine, 2003; Nieto, 2000; Swadener, 1995; Valencia, 1997). Teacher

educator Susan Florio-Ruane (2001) suggests that white teachers often revert to a "culture default setting" when thinking about their culturally diverse students. The "cultural default," she argues, states that "culture is what 'other people (usually different from us in skin color, first language, or economic circumstance) have'" (p.33). From the cultural default perspective, white teachers offer two explanations for why culturally diverse students fail to achieve in school.

> One cites the child's intrinsic psychological characteristics in determining what is possible for the child to learn (e.g., "Adam can't read because he is learning disabled.") The second is a cultural explanation where responsibility for learning difficulties rests with the family's childrearing practices that are thought to be culturally determined (e.g., "Eve could learn to read if only her parents were more involved in her schooling."). In each case the learner's difficulties lie mostly outside of the teacher's sphere of influence (p.34).

The cultural default setting to which Florio-Ruane refers is another incarnation of the cultural deficit and at-risk ideologies theories that Banks (1993), Valencia (1997), and Swadener (1995) argue is responsible for the repeated school failures of children of color, children living in poverty, and children whose first language is other than English. Essentially, these ideologies assert that culturally diverse students fail to achieve in school because of inherent flaws in the children themselves and/or in the homes and communities of the children. These belief systems support discrimination which "can

result in denying some groups life's necessities as well as the privileges, rights and opportunities enjoyed by other groups" (Nieto, 2000, p. 35). While the ideologies of deficit thinking and at-risk theories affect the individual teachers who operate from those perspectives—and the students with whom they interact and teach— discrimination "is not simply an individual bias; it is above all an *institutional* practice" (Nieto, 2000, p. 35). At the institutional level, such ideologies may become a part of what Spindler (1994) called the submerged cultural knowledge.

As a form of submerged cultural knowledge, the at-risk and deficit thinking ideologies have the potential to adversely affect the educational programming and academic outcomes of students like those at Liberty School. In *Children and Families "At Promise:" Deconstructing the Discourse of Risk* (1995), Swadener questions the "at-risk" ideologies at the institutional level.

> Are children and their families the ones who are truly at risk and to
>
> blame? What are the responsibilities of schools and the individuals and
>
> groups within them who are perpetuating the classism, racism, sexism,
>
> ableism, ageism, and other forms of structural, yet ever changing,
>
> oppression? (p.33)

In this chapter I present findings about how Elsie and Kate took responsibility for educating their students within the social context of Liberty School. Analysis of the data reveals that Elsie and Kate understood the types of thinking that typically stereotyped their students as less capable of learning and achieving in school. Their

discourse revealed tensions between the "at-promise" ideologies that argue all children are capable of learning and the "at-risk" ideologies that suggest that children who are poor, of color, and/or are non-native English speakers are limited by deficiencies intrinsic to their psychological and/or biological make-up or inherent in their home environments. The findings indicate that Elsie and Kate were aware of and often articulated a rejection of the Deficit Thinking Discourse model and the related White Knight Discourse model. However, the findings also suggest that there were times when the teachers did not challenge those Discourse models. The participants seemed to recognize and refute the Deficit Thinking and White Knight Discourse models when their tenets were explicitly stated, but when theses Discourse models were implicitly interwoven into the fabric of their conversations, they seemed unable or unwilling to recognize and challenge them. Within the context of their classrooms, Kate and Elsie structured their classrooms and their interactions around two sets of goals that were consistent with the "at-promise" ideologies. The first set of goals addressed the academic standards set by the federal, state, and district level school systems, while the second set of goals addressed the student's social and emotional development. Working through the unofficial and official curricula, Kate and Elsie fostered identities of achievement and worked to eliminate identities of defeat in their students. Underlying their work in their classrooms were the understandings, beliefs and values the teachers had acquired and constructed throughout the experiences of their lives. As cultural agents, Kate and Elsie set about their jobs as teachers at Liberty School.

Understanding the Social Context of Liberty School

In the following sections, I present data and analysis about how Elsie and Kate interpreted the social context of Liberty School and how they assumed responsibility for student learning in relation to their understanding of how the school and its student-body were positioned. While examining the language and actions of Elsie and Kate in relation to their students and the school in which they taught, it is important to look critically at how their discourse, their language-in-use, intersected with Discourse models which provide ways of understanding and interpreting how the teachers carried out their work. As described in Chapter 2, a Discourse model is a "theory" or "storyline" that individuals use to make sense of the context in which they are operating (Gee, 2007).

Deficit Thinking in its Explicit and Implicit Forms

Analysis revealed that the Deficit Thinking Discourse model was very relevant to the two teachers in how they understood their work at Liberty and in how they operated within their classrooms and in relation to their students. As noted earlier, deficit thinking refers to the "theory" held by many teachers that students of color, low-income backgrounds, and/or a native language other than English are placed at a disadvantage in their academic pursuits by "internal deficits or deficiencies" (Valencia, 1997, p. 2).

During our interviews and conversations, both Kate and Elsie referred to specific comments they made as "getting up on their soapboxes." According to *The New Oxford American Dictionary* (2005), a soapbox is "a thing that provides an opportunity for someone to air his/her views publicly." While Kate and Elsie used their "soapboxes" to

challenge deficit thinking where it seemed obvious to them, there were also instances in which their discourse seemed to be inconsistent with their soapbox assertions. In this section, I tease out their understandings of deficit thinking as well as turn a critical eye to those inconsistencies.

Elsie was aware that deficit models impacted the educational process of the students she taught. She often used her soapbox to reject those models and their implications for her students. However, the quote below indicates that, while she identified deficit thinking in the language and actions of others, she seemed less able or willing to identify its presence in her own language and actions. She spoke about conversations she had overheard around the negative stereotypes associated with individuals of color, of poverty, and/or who spoke a native language other than English.

> I cannot, I've a really hard time tolerating if people are making negative
>
> comments about adults or children based on socioeconomics or their race,
>
> and trying to learn how to balance that...A teacher was talking about
>
> how a black family was moving, and then... the [white] Jacobsons were
>
> also moving, and finally I looked at [the teacher] and I said, "Why is it
>
> that you know the Jabobsons' last name, but you don't know [the black
>
> family's] last name? Why do they get referred to as the black
>
> family?"...And then I've had people make comments like, you know, rag-
>
> heads or towel-heads, and I've come out and said, "Sorry you just can't
>
> say that around me." And that a really tough thing to have [to say]

working here in this school, and I know sometimes we'll joke and say,

"Oh yeah, well, what do you expect?" but deep down in my heart I feel

like these kids need to, sometimes I feel like I need to work harder for

them, because they may not have the same chances as the rest of us"

(I.E.1-25/p.13).

Elsie's discourse initially seems to indicate that she rejected deficit thinking and

challenged those who held with its tenets. She specifically referred to the negative

comments that discriminate against students of color, of low-income backgrounds or

those who hold different religious beliefs. These remarks seem to indicate that she was

well aware of the political and social climate in which she taught and the implications of

that climate for her students. By stating that her students may not have the same

chances "as the rest of us," she acknowledged the benefits bestowed upon those who are

white and middle-class. Her use of the first person possessive pronoun "us" indicates

that she recognized her own position as white and middle-class. By stating that she

must "work harder" for her students who were outside of the white, middle-class

mainstream society, she asserted her own responsibility for altering her classroom

practices to better meet the needs of those students.

Notwithstanding her assertions that she has a "hard time tolerating" people who

seemed to be operating from a deficit standpoint, Elsie in the latter part of the quote

included a reference to jokes that she and her co-workers sometimes made about their

low expectations for students who are low income and/or of color. This seems to

contradict her rejection of deficit thinking and align her instead with the "cultural

default" paradigm (Florio-Ruane, 2001) described earlier. Since Elsie indicated that

these jokes were shared with other teachers, her discourse also seems to hint at this type

of thinking as a form of institutional practice. Elsie's remarks seem to suggest that these

conversations were a part of the discourse of at least some of the teachers working at

Liberty.

Tatum (1999) argues that white individuals may engage in a practice that she

terms "passive racism" (p. 11).

Passive racism is more subtle [than active racism]. Because [passive

racism] is so ingrained in the fabric of American institutions, it is easily

self-perpetuating. All that is required to maintain it is business as usual.

It seems that for Elsie and the other teachers with whom she was interacting,

"maintaining business as usual" might have taken the form of jokes steeped in deficit

thinking. In doing so, the teachers seemingly perpetuated deficit thinking at an

institutional level within the walls of Liberty School. Given the school's recent change

toward serving higher percentages of diverse students, these types of conversations may

be typical of the form that passive racism takes in such a setting.

Elsie followed her statement about the jokes by asserting that "deep down in

[her] heart" she felt compelled to "work harder" for these students. She seemed to be

indicating that despite the jokes she realized how these students were positioned within

the educational system and so she adjusted her teaching to address their needs.

Marx (2006) argues that oftentimes passive racism may be invisible to white teachers who operate under its tenets. While such teachers may be able to identify such racism in others, they view themselves as "open-minded" and free of racist beliefs (p. 83). McIntyre (1997b) labels as "white talk" the "infinite number of ways [white people] manage to 'talk themselves out of' being responsible for racism" (p. 45). The tactics of white talk include "derailing the conversation, evading questions, dismissing counterarguments, withdrawing from the conversation, remaining silent...and colluding with each other to create a 'culture of niceness'" (p. 46). In the comments of Elsie it seems that white talk may have been utilized to cover the passive racism that seems inherent in the jokes shared by Elsie and her colleagues. By stating her convictions that she felt compelled to work harder for these children despite the off-handed remarks, it seems possible that Elsie was attempting to engage in a "culture of niceness" that off-set her deficit-based comments with kind-hearted sentiments.

The comments offered by Elsie may reflect a "dysconscious" understanding of race and racism (King, 1991). Although Elsie was aware of overt racism in the remarks of others, she was less-able to locate racism in her own language, and she did not seem to view as problematic jokes rooted in deficit thinking. This is reflective perhaps of the larger trend in the United States of silencing discussions of race and racism (Marx & Pennington, 2003; Sleeter, 1993/2005; Tatum, 2002). Educational theorists and researchers have long argued that teachers in general and white teachers in particular need to engage in open discussions about the ramifications of race within the public schools (Howard, 2006; King, 1991; Sleeter, 2008). Despite the need for white teachers to

engage in a self-reflective examination of the privileges bestowed by whiteness, there is very often little opportunity for teachers to engage in activities designed to foster such a critical understanding of the role played by whiteness in the larger U.S. society and its public schools (Cochran-Smith, 1991, 1995b; Marx, 2006; McIntyre, 1997a, 1009b; Sleeter 2008). The consequence of not critically examining the role of race may be that passive racism creeps into the institutions of the United States, including its schools, in conversations like those in which Elsie and her colleagues engaged. This may be particularly problematic for teachers working in settings such as Liberty School. As these schools move toward greater levels of student diversity, there is a need to look at the ways in which passive racism steals its way into the language and thinking of the teachers. The white talk that often masks its presences needs to be examined as well.

Another conversation with Elsie helps to tease out further these contradictions and tensions around race and racism. During a different interview Elsie recalled an instance in which an acquaintance started what Elsie called "the rag-head conversation" (I.E.5-28/p.1). After several remarks in which the acquaintance referred to individuals as "rag-heads," Elsie stopped the conversation: "I just said, 'Oh, sorry, that's not in my world. And, talk like that isn't in my world.' And somehow, it was uncomfortable, but it got the point across, and I felt better for having said something." Elsie stated that she "felt better" for having stopped the conversation and for "having said something." What was unclear to me was what "point" she had gotten across. I asked her what her intent was in stopping the conversation. She responded.

I wasn't trying to say that the terminology you want to use is wrong...but

that, you can't use it around me. 'Cause I've tried to come up with a

way...but I didn't know how to deal with it....It was more, "Oh no, that's

not in my world," so kind of deflected it without placing judgment (I.E.5-

28/p.1).

Elsie's "point" seemed to be that explicitly racist language could not be used in her

presence. It seems Elsie did not want the speaker to think that the racist terminology

was "wrong" but only that the speaker should refrain from using it around her. Elsie

said that she was "kind of deflecting" the racist remarks "without placing judgment."

Elsie's goal may have been ending her complicit involvement in a racist conversation. It

seems she did not want to directly state her concerns that the remarks were racist.

Instead she opted to deflect the statements.

Elsie's attempt to end a racist conversation while not fully addressing her

concerns mirrors the trends noted by educational scholars: silence around race and

racism and a maneuvering of the conversation to eliminate critical considerations of race

and racism. The educational research indicates that Elsie is not alone in resisting or

refusing to engage in open conversations about racism (Hytten & Warren, 2003; Marx &

Pennington, 2003; Sleeter, 1993/2005; Tatum, 2002). Engaging in such a discussion made

Elsie "uncomfortable," because the issues of race and racism are so value and judgment

laden given the U.S's history. Teachers who face similarly overt racist remarks may opt,

like Elsie, to end the conversation rather than attempt to confront the speaker. Marx

(2006) notes that in the United States "racism has such a negative connotation" that she

wonders if "murderer" is the "only appellation with a worse connotation" (p. 15)

Within these two quotes from Elsie there seem to be contradictions. She asserted

that she does not easily tolerate negative stereotypes toward individuals of color, yet she

admitted to having engaged in such conversations. She challenged overtly racist

statements, but she perhaps engaged in passive racism. The work of educational

scholars and researchers indicate that these tensions are typical of white teachers who

often have not had an opportunity to look critically at issues of race and/or who have

been unwilling to move past their own resistance to such critical examinations (Cochran-

Smith, 1995; Howard, 2006; Kailin, 1999, 2002; Marx, 2006; Sleeter, 1993/2005; 2008).

In looking at Elsie's teaching practice, there is a further contradiction. Within the

context of her classroom, Elsie consistently held high expectations of her students'

capabilities regardless of their race, ethnicity, native language or economic background.

She offered her students educational programs that seemed to reject "at-risk" ideologies

and promote "at-promise" ideologies. While the latter parts of this chapter are devoted

to providing examples to substantiate that claim, one example is presented here to fully

flesh out this contradiction.

One spring morning, Elsie gathered her class together on the rug for a reading

lesson (FN.E.5-28). She brought with a book titled *What Readers Can Do*. As the class

settled down, she asked the children to consider what readers can do. The children

offered a variety of responses: readers "can be a pirate," a queen or a king. Elsie

nodded and got up to retrieve two books from her bag about Alaska. She told the class

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that she would be traveling to Alaska over the summer and needed to find a place to stay. They flipped through the books together and discussed what information readers might get from the books about different places to stay. Elsie then put the books down and told the class, "To read a newspaper you have to read like a 5th grader. Do you think you could pick up a newspaper right now and read it?" The children shook their heads and murmured, "No." Elsie continued, "To read about travel, like these books, you need to be able to read about like a 7th grader." The kids nodded; Elsie persisted. "You gotta keep moving up the ladder, and you don't stop at high school. What comes after high school?" The children called out, "College." "At college you learn about what you want to do. You read books about what you want to do. What do you want to be when you grow up?" One little boy called out an x-ray man, while a little girl noted that she was "really, really interested in being an art teacher." Elsie responded to their career goals. "In college you read about what you're interested in. That's the cool thing...What do x-ray men need to know? What's some of the x-ray stuff? Will you read about being an art teacher?...College is the coolest place to be." As the children enthusiastically called out their career plans and what they would do as readers in a college setting, Elsie smiled and nodded. "You can do that," she told them.

As the conversation ended, Elsie got up to hand the travel books to her assistant. She looked at her assistant and me and nodded. "I think that's enough [of my soapbox] for one day," she told us. Elsie used this lesson to instill in her students the belief that they were capable of becoming anything they chose to be. They needed to work hard at learning to read so that they might one day enter college to study further whatever they

might be interested in becoming. In her comments there were no low expectations and negative stereotypes. The examples presented later in this chapter further examine how she promoted in her students a sense of their abilities as capable learners and valuable individuals.

Unlike Elsie, Kate seemed to be consistent in her beliefs. She spoke of the detrimental effects of deficit models in relation to the negative stereotypes about the home lives of children of color and/or low-income backgrounds. She recalled the remarks of (white) teachers who subscribed to deficit thinking. According to Kate, the teachers said things like, "You know, ...those people from the projects they have dirty clothes and they don't care about their kids, and, you know, everyone's always drinking. And they're doing drugs" (I.K.6-11/p.9). This type of deficit thinking, according to Kate, was "like poison." These same teachers, asserted Kate, offered explanations for their students' lack of success that were rooted in the deficits they ascribed to the children's homes. "These kids are from the projects," the teachers argued. "No wonder we're a failing school." Kate rejected the deficit theories that blamed the students and their families for their poor school performance: "That is bullshit. That is for the birds" (I.K.5-27/p.22).

When she was present during such conversations, Kate reminded the teachers that many of the students and families who lived in public housing did not fit these stereotypes. She told the teachers, "Look at this family. They're from the projects, and they care about their kids" (I.K.6-11/p.6). The kids were "loved" and did "well in school." Kate felt that when poor children or children of color did not do well in school

it was not the students and the families that were to blame. It was the school system that was to blame. She stated this clearly: "the system is failing these kids and their families" (I.K.6-11/p.3). Failure in school, for Kate, was not due to inherent deficits in the children or their homes, it seems it was due to issues within the school system that did not properly support the children and their families.

While it is impossible to fully know how Kate came to her understandings of deficit thinking, it might be that her youth in New York City and her father's reaction to the treatment of black citizens during the Civil Rights Movement informed her stance. As the research of Holme, et,al, (2005) and Johnson (2002) indicate, experiences with diverse groups of people may offset deficit thinking. For Kate, her experiences may have provided her with both an understanding of diversity and a passion to confront inequities and racism. Kate's actions and interactions bring to light the possibility that white teachers can and do engage in efforts to confront racism and injustice within the U.S. public schools.

Elsie also discussed the notion of deficits as being inherent in an individual. In this case she brought up conversations outside of the classroom context in which she rejected the idea that if an individual does not succeed in life then it was due to some internal flaw in the individual.

> I just, you know, I just have this thing, I think it's in me, of helping the
>
> underdog. Like even when we have conversations, dinner parties, and
>
> things like that, I'm always bringing up, "Well, this is your life. Here's

how other people live. Um, when you say they should pull themselves

up by their boot straps, please explain to me how you're better off than

your parents were. And why these kids should be better off than their

parents were if we're still functioning at the same level as our parents

were." You know. I just, I'm just, I've always been drawn to it...Like

even in the classroom...I am really drawn to the kids that needed more

help...I do feel that I want to advocate for the underdog (I.E.2-12/p. 5).

In this excerpt, she clearly identifies and challenges deficit thinking that suggests that

pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps is a matter of hard work and persistence (Sleeter,

1993/2005; Swadener, 1995). By this line of thinking, anyone who is willing to put in a

sustained effort toward an end-goal is capable of achieving success in whatever goals he

or she sets. The corollary deficit view suggests that anyone who does not succeed in

pulling himself up by his bootstraps is lazy and lacking in ambition. Her word choice

reveals that she rejected the idea that hard work and persistence are enough to alter

one's life chances; she pointed out that her own hard work and persistence have left her

"at the same level" as her own parents. Within the current system of schooling and

employment within the United States, there is more to achieving than simply working

hard. With her comments Elsie seems to hint at the systemic issues that prevent some of

her students from pulling themselves up by their boots straps. If her students who were

members of groups that historically did not do well in school and in the larger U.S.

society were to have a better life than their parents, they must have access to more

resources than their parents. As a result, Elsie felt drawn "to the kids that needed more help" to achieve within the educational system: she wanted "to advocate for the underdog." In the next section, I examine how the participants advocated for the underdog and how they rejected for themselves the role of the White Knight.

Advocating for the Underdog and Rejecting the Role of the White Knight

Related to deficit thinking is the Discourse model of the White Knight (Marx 2006; Marx & Pennington, 2003; McIntyre, 1997a, 1997b). The White Knight Discourse model suggests that white teachers

> view themselves as coming from good backgrounds and 'having' good values, good parents, a good education, and a good sense of what they need to do in the classroom in order to teach effectively. In contrast they see their students of color as 'not having'—as somehow deficient (McIntyre, 1997a, p. 662-663).

The White Knight believes that she must help her deficient students overcome the disadvantages of their home culture, language, and/or family (Marx, 2006). In overcoming these disadvantages, the child may be "saved," "fixed," or "rescued" as the White Knight helps the child to elevate his beliefs, values and practices to a higher cultural level—the level of the white, middle-class (Marx, 2006; Marx & Pennington, 2003; Sleeter, 2008).

Elsie differentiated between the "underdogs" she must advocate for and the "bow-heads" who would likely experience success within the current educational

system. The "underdogs," she said, were the "tough cookies. They just know the way

of the world" (I.E.5-14/p.4). They were the ones who were "street smart" but may have

lacked the knowledge or skills to do well in school. The "bow-headed kids," on the

other hand, were the "good little girls who come in already ready to learn." The bow-

heads were the children who Elsie did not need to advocate for "because they'll do fine"

in school (I.E.2-12/p. 6). They came from white, middle-class backgrounds and had

parents whose expectations for school aligned with those of the school system. While the

terms "underdog" and "bow-head" may seem to be as problematic as "rag-head" or

"black family," Elsie did not use them to stereotype or gloss over the individuality of

each child, and she did not view them as derogatory or negative. Instead she spoke

affectionately of the "good little girl" who came to be one of Elsie's favorites after she

"really got to know her." To ensure her success in school, this "bow-head" needed

special attention paid to her emotional needs. Toward the close of the school year, Elsie

met some of the "underdogs," the "tough cookies," she would have in the coming school

year. She had already heard tales of the behavior problems she should anticipate. After

meeting them, she said, "It's like they're people. The mask has been removed. They're

not little monsters. We'll be able to work with them" (I.E.5-14/p.5). These "tough

cookies" were not problematic once she met them and rejected the negative stereotypes

often associated with children of poverty and color. "Bow-head" and "underdog" were

terms that Elsie used to refer to some general characteristics of her students. The terms

did not negate her obligation to each of her students; they pointed out the students'

putative locations in our society and the deficit thinking that often surrounds the

"underdogs" but not the "bow-heads." Elsie did not attempt to "fix" the underdogs as

the White Knight Discourse model might suggest (Marx, 2006; McIntyre 1997a, 1997b).

Instead, she acknowledged their position within the educational system and society and

then set out to create a learning environment that fostered their growth and

development.

Lisa Delpit (1995), drawing on conversations with black and Native American

teachers, makes explicit why the "bow-heads" are positioned to succeed in school, while

the "tough cookies" may not be.

> Children from middle-class homes tend to do better in school than those
>
> from non-middle class homes because the culture of the school is based
>
> on the culture of the upper and middle-classes—those of power. The
>
> upper and middle-classes send their children to school with all the
>
> accoutrements of the culture of power; children from other kinds of
>
> families operate within perfectly wonderful and viable cultures but not
>
> cultures that carry codes or rules of power (p. 25).

Elsie seemed to be acknowledging issues of power when she said that the "bow-heads"

will "do fine" in school. Although she taught each and every child who entered her

room, she felt compelled to "work harder" and "advocate for the underdog," because

these children did not bring with them to school and schooling the "accoutrements of

the culture of power." While it might be argued that Elsie is assuming the role of the

White Knight in her efforts to advocate for the underdog, a careful look at her discourse

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in conjunction with her teaching practice reveals that in many ways she was closely aligned with the assertions of Lisa Delpit: children outside of the white, middle-class mainstream need to be explicitly taught the "rules of the culture of power." The White Knight views children who live in poverty, who are of color, and/or who speak a native language other than English as "passive recipients of the white teacher's good will" (McIntyre, 1997b, p. 123). Through his/her good work, the White Knight attempts to save these children from the deficiencies inherent in themselves and/or their families. Unlike the White Knight, Elsie recognized power as being in play in her classroom; she recognized both her own status as white and middle-class and that of some of her children, "the underdogs," as marginalized by the school system and the larger U.S society. In advocating for them, she seems to attempting to bring to the forefront those types of knowledge which privileged the "bow-heads" and disadvantaged the "underdogs." Seemingly, what remained unexamined and unstated was a critical look at how she as a white, middle-class woman acted as part of the system that bestowed privilege to some and disadvantage to others. McIntyre (1997b) termed this lack of critical awareness the "caring without critique discourse" in which teachers see that inequities exist in educational success, but they are unclear about and/or unwilling to engage in a critique of the educational processes that may lead to such inequities. Elsie clearly articulated that the "underdogs" did not have the same chances in school as the "bow-heads," but she did not probe into the role she may have played, even inadvertently, in bestowing privilege to the "bow-heads." The educational research and teacher education research indicate that Elsie is not alone. Rarely are teachers given the

opportunity to explore the ramifications of being white and middle-class (Ballenger, 1999; Carter, 1997; Cochran-Smith, 1995a, 1995b; Fine, 1997; Howard, 2006; Irvine, 2003; Marx, 2006; McIntyre, 1997a, 1997b; McCarthy, 2003; Nieto, 2000; Sleeter, 2008; Swadener, 1995; Tatum, 2002). If teachers are not given an opportunity to examine and make explicit the issues of power that perpetuate inequalities in the U.S. public schools then there is little chance that the inequities can be fully addressed and corrected.

Kate also recognized that the educational system did not always benefit her students of color, of low-income backgrounds, and/or a native language other than English, and she emphatically rejected the idea that these children needed to be fixed.

I got into this job—I love children. That's why I do this work. And I, as far as I'm concerned, children don't need to be fixed. Children don't need to be *fixed*, because they're not *broken*! And I don't know that people are broken. (Pause.) I mean we all have things that don't work in our lives. I look at it as not good or bad, not broken or [you have to] fix it. I look at it as, okay, what's not working? What's not working? (Pause.) To me that tends to be more neutral...It just, it just drives me nuts. To hear people, and me (sigh), and all of us, how we get in our, in our, just, our, our, like superior, like Mother Superior thing going on. It's like nobody has time for that crap. There is no place for it (I.K.6-11/p.10).

Kate repudiated the role of the White Knight. She said there are no "broken" children, so she did not need to "fix" them. A deficit model might suggest there are broken

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children, but for Kate, there are children and families who needed help with what is not working in their lives. By refusing to look at the circumstances of the children's lives as "good or bad," Kate tried to remain "neutral." Through this choice of words, she seemed to suggest that assigning blame was purposeless. The goal of the schools, in Kate's opinion, was to meet the students' needs. Rather than assigning blame, she preferred to assess what was not working and address those needs. To blame her students or their families for poor academic growth would, she said, "drive her nuts."

Kate's words and actions also reveal how she felt about her own position as a white, middle-class woman. As she spoke, Kate sighed when she included herself as one of the people who act "superior. The sigh, in addition to the pauses and the repeated words and phrases, suggest that she knew her own position as a white, middle-class woman and was uncomfortable with the assertion of superiority that may come with her racial, economic and/or linguistic background. What remained unspoken and unarticulated was the meaning she assigned to her hesitations, her repeated words, and the phrase "Mother Superior thing." Her discomfort may be indicative of the tensions around race and dominance that teacher educator Gary Howard (2006) addresses in his work.

Howard (2006) suggests that white teachers must examine and understand the ramifications of their whiteness within the educational system and larger U.S. society. He cautions, however, that whiteness in and of itself not be viewed as the enemy or the force that drives inequality within the schools. The "enemies" in multicultural settings, he argues, are "dominance, ignorance, and racism" (p. 114). For Kate and perhaps other

teachers like her, there seemed to be the suggestion that she is part of those who perpetuate inequalities, and "act superior," by virtue of their whiteness. While Kate can do nothing about her whiteness, she can "acknowledge and work through the negative implications of whiteness" (Howard, 2006, p. 116). In the above quote, Kate finished by stating that there is no time for such "crap. There is no place for it." Howard writes that "if we do not understand dominance, we cannot hope to transcend it" (p. 57). Through her word choice, it seems that Kate was perhaps beginning to move toward understanding dominance and the role she played in its perpetuation. With her admission of her position of superiority comes responsibility. In Chapter 7, I explore how the process of this research provided Kate with an opportunity to examine and take greater responsibility for her position as white and/or middle class.

Both Elsie and Kate recognized the Deficit Thinking and White Knight Discourse models when these Discourse models were explicitly articulated, and they recognized their own position as white, middle-class women. Unlike the scholars who argue that white, middle-class teachers are like the proverbial fish who does not notice the water in which it swims (Cochran-Smith, 1995b; Delpit, 1995; Kailin, 1999, 2002), these two women were aware to some extent of how being white and middle-class situated them in positions of power within the larger U.S society. Juxtaposed to this awareness was the participants' seeming unwillingness and/or ablity to tease out Deficit Thinking and White Knight Discourse models when they were implicitly interwoven into their discourse. As noted earlier, scholars have argued that deficit thinking and white privilege weave their way into virtually every aspect of school and schooling. Elsie and

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Kate, like all teachers in the United States, are part of a culture that does not always confront and take steps to correct the injustices and inequalities that exist based on racial, ethnic, economic or linguistic background. The issues that Elsie and Kate faced as they navigated the gaps between themselves and the students from whom they differed culturally are likely the same issues that other teachers like them grapple with in their classrooms and in their schools. Kate and Elsie confronted and challenged deficit thinking when it was explicitly stated, but they did not always do so when it was an implicit undercurrent of an interaction. Chapters 6 and 7 explore these issues further.

Although Elsie and Kate might not have been comfortable confronting racism, they did take action within their classrooms and within the school to counteract explicit deficit thinking. In the next section, I explore how the participants were not content to let "their *critiques reside solely in* words" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 129). They turned their words into actions by challenging and altering school practices which they felt did not benefit their students. By doing so, they were taking responsibility for altering institutional structures that perhaps served "to create and maintain inequality" (Swadener, 1995, p. 3).

Challenging and Influencing School Practices to Support Student Learning

Elsie and Kate were willing to challenge and influence school-wide practices and policies that they believed were detrimental to their students' success. Specifically, they challenged and altered those practices and policies which seemed to them to be based on low expectations of their students' achievement and performance capabilities.

I sat in on a grade-level meeting during which Elsie and the other kindergarten

teachers were asked by the principal to consider how they were improving student

achievement using data from the NECAP scores (FN.E.3-11). As the teachers discussed

how they used the data to plan for instruction, Elsie voiced her frustration with the staff

of the school as a whole. Shaking her head, she told the team that she felt "it is okay

culturally in this school to say we're working hard." She stated that many teachers

seemed "unconcerned" with whether or not student achievement showed improvement

or not. From her perspective, it appeared that the teachers' seeming contentment with

"working hard" supplanted a commitment to their students' achievement. The lack of

concern for student achievement seemed to be linked for Elsie with the low expectations

connected with deficit thinking.

With a slightly raised voice, Elsie fumed that she did not "get a sense of urgency"

from the staff about student achievement. For her "working hard" was inconsequential

if there was no substantial student growth. Accepting low levels of achievement meant

buying into the Deficit Thinking Discourse model which implied that many of the

students of Liberty School were unable to learn and develop due to limitations of the

children and their families. Referring to the NECAP data, Elsie pointed out that the

students' scores fell in the middle of the range of scores for students in similar schools.

As she tapped the sheet of paper with the test scores, she shook her head and told the

other teachers, "That tells me we're not serving our kids well. It's not okay to settle for

mediocrity." She continued, "Our kids need more than that, and it's not like all of a

sudden we're going to be at the top if, if we all keep going through the motions" (I.E.6-

11/p.19). For Elsie, "going through the motions" was not an acceptable course of action. Because she understood the position of many of her students as "disadvantaged" and because she understood the mind-sets of those who subscribed to the deficit model, she had to do more to address her students' growth and development.

An example of how the participants took responsibility for their students' growth and development instead of accepting the ramifications of deficit thinking were their actions in relation to a new reading program being implemented at Liberty School. At the time of this research, the school was in its first year of a reading intervention program using Title I funding to support the use of reading tutors at each grade level. Elsie and Kate seemed to be concerned about two aspects of the tutoring program. First, the program required the tutors to split their days between different grade levels depending on each grade level's schedule. Second, the tutors assumed the bulk of the reading instruction for the children with whom they worked. Although some of the Title I tutors were certified teachers, the job did not require certification. Kate went to the principal and the reading coordinator to request that she rearrange her class' daily schedule to allow for reading in the morning when she felt the children were more apt to learn and to shift the bulk of the reading instruction responsibility from the Title I tutors to herself. She told me about her decision-making process around altering her schedule. "I'm not seeing [the kids] enough. Their primary [reading] instruction is from the Title I tutors. That's not acceptable. It's good, but it's not enough" (FN.K.4-14/p.1). By rearranging the schedule she was able to meet with each child every day and ensure that he or she was progressing in her reading development.

Elsie was similarly concerned about the use of the Title I tutors. She shared with me some comments she made to another teacher about the tutors.

> If we're going to split Title I tutors again next year, it's not going to be good enough for me to have somebody in the morning when I have a special and lunch and recess...It is wasted academic time. Just because it's really neat (raised pitch of voice) to go three hours here and three hours there, and it's convenient, it's not, that's one of my things about we're not doing, we need to look at things differently (I.E.6-11/p.19).

As Elsie offered her critique of the Title I tutors, she raised the pitch of her voice and seemed to mock those who designed it. Having a program that was "really neat" was not enough, in Elsie's opinion, to ensure that the children progressed in their reading development. Elsie worried that the use of the tutors "looked good on paper" but was not really meeting the needs of the students and teachers. For both Elsie and Kate, the scheduling and use of Title I tutors seemed to allow for mediocre growth and performance. Both teachers stated that the reading program was "not good enough."

Beyond challenging and influencing practices and policies that seemed to unbeneficial to her students, Elsie seemed to feel a strong professional commitment to advocating for her students in light of her understanding of deficit thinking. As an afterschool homework lab teacher, Elsie noted the difficulties the students were having with the math homework. She went to the school improvement team to voice her concerns. She recalled what she had said to the team and their reaction to her concerns.

The kids can't do the math homework. They can't read it. It's way

beyond them, and I brought it up to the school-improvement team, and

it's like it fell on deaf ears. 'Well, we have to hand out that homework.'

'But the kids can't do it!' So, I've been going around to the first grade

teachers one-by-one...letting the teachers know that, here are some things

that are not being very effective and maybe we change that for next year

(I.E.6-11/p.4).

This quote reveals the frustration that Elsie seemed to have felt with some of the systems

that were in place in the school that were convenient or traditional but from her

perspective were inadequately addressing student needs. Elsie noted that, while

teachers were required to give homework, they were not required to give homework

that students were unable to understand or learn from doing. In the case of the math

homework, "the kids were just filling out paperwork. They didn't understand what

they were doing" (I.E.6-11/p.5). When her concerns "fell on deaf ears," she

circumvented the system and went to the individual teachers. Her goal in doing so was

to encourage her fellow teachers to rethink practices that were "not very effective" so

that changes might be put in place for the coming school year. She ended this

discussion by stating once again that "it's not okay to settle for mediocrity" (I.E.6-

11/p.17). For Elsie, allowing practices and policies that did not benefit the students was

allowing for mediocrity. If one subscribed to deficit thinking, mediocrity is what might

be expected from at-risk and disadvantaged children. Elsie did not subscribe to deficit thinking, so she did not accept the limitations of mediocrity.

Kate and Elsie seemed to know how Liberty School and its student body were positioned. They knew that educational statistics predicted that many of their students would not perform well in school and on national tests. Elsie summarized her concerns. "We talk about our low-test scores. Well, why aren't we looking at things differently so that we can make sure our kids are doing well?" (I.E.6-11/p.4) Both of the participants seemed to "look at things differently" and accordingly altered practices and routines to ensure that their students were "doing well" or at least moving toward doing well. They assumed responsibility for altering classroom and school routines that did not benefit their students. They engaged in the "struggle against the status quo" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 117). In the next section, I look at how Elsie and Kate designed their curricula to support not only the academic growth of their students but also their social and emotional development.

The Official and Unofficial Curricula

Two different curricula seemed to exist in Kate and Elsie's classrooms: the official curriculum and the unofficial curriculum. The official curriculum encompassed the academic goals of schooling, white the unofficial curriculum encompassed the social and emotional development of the children. The educational research suggests that a third curriculum might also have existed.

Boyd, Ariail, & Williams (2006) write that a "hidden curriculum" infiltrates the classrooms of the United States. This curriculum refers to

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...the tacit teaching to students of norms, values, and dispositions that
goes on simply by their living in and coping with the institutional
expectations and routines of schools day in and day out for a number of
years (p. 329-330, as quoted from Apple, 1979, p. 14).

Boyd et al., suggest that the hidden curriculum teaches students to conform to the values
and norms of schooling. As the authors point out, these values and norms are most
often based on white, middle-class values. Others (Delpit, 1995; King, 1991) have made
similar arguments that the hidden curriculum may "serve to marginalize" (Boyd et al.,
2006, p. 330) students outside of the white mainstream and subsequently negatively
affect the schooling experiences of diverse students. Just as the Deficit Thinking and
White Knight Discourse models may encroach on classrooms of the public school
system, the hidden curriculum may eek its way into the actions and interactions of
teaching and schooling. When this occurs, teachers become "complicit in the
reproduction of racial and socioeconomic inequality" (p. 331). As the analysis already
presented indicates, Elsie and Kate were well aware of the Deficit Thinking and White
Knight Discourse models and the underlying tensions of racism, discrimination, and
inequality that existed with the context of Liberty School. Their discourse reveals that
they understood very well how those children who were outside of the white
mainstream were situated within the school. The focus in this chapter is on Kate and
Elsie's understandings of the social position of the Liberty School and their subsequent
work in their classrooms. Although the existence of the hidden curriculum alongside

the official and unofficial curriculum is certain possible, the discourse of Elsie and Kate did not bring it to the forefront. In the coming sections, I look at how Kate and Elsie addressed the goals of the official and unofficial curriculum, but it is worth keeping in mind the hidden curriculum. Like the Deficit Thinking and White Knight Discourse models, the hidden curriculum was likely part of the backdrop against which Elsie and Kate engaged in the process of teaching.

Kate and Elsie would not have selected the names "official curriculum" and "unofficial curriculum," yet they clearly articulated the different goals associated with each curriculum and how they hoped the different curricula would serve their students. For the purposes of analysis, the two curricula are discussed separately, but they existed side-by-side in the participants' classrooms and were interwoven throughout any given day's lessons and activities.

In addressing the goals of the two curricula, Kate and Elsie seemed to be casting aside the possibility of academic failure or deficit thinking filtering into their classrooms. By making sure that their students achieved academically and believed in themselves as learners and valuable human beings, the two teachers seemed to be sheltering their students from the low expectations and negative stereotypes that others might thrust upon them. As with their rejection of the Deficit Thinking and White Knight Discourse models, Kate and Elsie seemed to acknowledge and respond to the social context in which they taught as they addressed the official and unofficial curricula.

The first set of goals, the official curriculum, encompassed the academic goals mandated by the federal, state, and local educational systems. These goals addressed

math, reading, writing, science, and social studies standards as outlined in the state grade level expectations and/or tested through the NECAPs. In terms of the reading curriculum, Liberty School was in a time of flux at the time of this research. The district was in the process of creating a new curriculum, and, until that new program was in place, Mr. Parker allowed the teachers to utilize a program of their choice from those whose materials already existed within the school. Kate chose the basal reading program Storytime by Harcourt School Publishers (2006). Elsie used the guided reading framework by Fountas and Pinnell (1996). The other set of goals, the unofficial curriculum, encompassed the social and emotional goals the participants felt their students needed to thrive in their current and future lives.

Broadly speaking, the official curriculum was designed to provide students with the intellectual skills needed to master academic standards, while the unofficial curriculum was designed to provide students with a sense of themselves as capable individuals able to make their way in the world. The unofficial curriculum seems to have provided Elsie and Kate with a way of countering the deficit theories that surrounded their students in educational settings as well as the larger world. Through this curriculum, they "paved the way" for the students to make their way in the world.

Before looking at the specifics of the official and the unofficial curriculum, I want to consider the possibility that the way the teachers set goals for their students and shaped their curriculum was simply good teaching rather than teaching directed specifically toward an at-risk population. Based on the data and my analysis, the argument can reasonably be made that what Elsie and Kate did within their classrooms

was good teaching with a little something more. That "little something more" relates to

their understanding of the social context in which they taught and their taking

responsibility for educating their students to the best of their abilities because of that

understanding. As the previous discussion revealed, Elsie and Kate did not teach in a

vacuum, and they knew it.

Sleeter (2008) argues that white teachers inadequately understand the cultural

deficit ideologies that infiltrate the educational experiences of children who are outside

of the white, middle-class mainstream. As a result, she argues that pre-service white

teachers must be prepared differently.

> It is not enough to prepare White teachers to teach *as well as* the average
>
> white teacher currently does. Doing so would only perpetuate lower
>
> expectations, discomfort, and lack of appropriate pedagogical knowledge.
>
> Instead, if we are serious about preparing white teachers who are able to
>
> help close the racial achievement gap, we need to prepare them to teach
>
> *better* and *more equitably* than the average white teacher does currently
>
> (p.561).

The findings of this study indicate that these two teachers were utilizing their

understanding of the social context in which they taught to implement curriculum and

shape classroom interactions that addressed issues of equity within the school. As a

result, it can be reasonably argued that what they did was good teaching with a little

something more. Swadener (1995) argues that the "at risk" ideology be reframed as an

"at promise" ideology. The "at promise" ideology acknowledges that all children face

challenges but are capable of learning, growing, and developing within the public

schools of the United States and the larger American society. The data revealed in the

coming sections suggests that Elsie and Kate held a vision of their students that is more

consistent with the "at promise" ideology rather than the "at risk" ideology. For that

reason, their teaching was more than "just good teaching."

The Official Curriculum

Elsie summarized how she planned her lessons and activities: "Every decision I

make about what we do in the classroom is about student achievement" (I.E.2-06/p.12).

While Kate did not offer such a succinct statement about her curriculum decisions,

analysis in the coming pages suggests that she seemed to hold the same beliefs and

goals.

For Kate, ensuring academic growth meant adopting reading and social studies

curricula that met the state's grade level expectations. Included with each of these

curricula were scope and sequence charts that listed the skills and concepts that needed

to be taught and mastered at each level. Without such charts, "stuff gets missed,"

(FN.K.2-19/p.1) she said. If a skill or concept was overlooked, then the students would

be unprepared for later lessons that build upon those skills and concepts. "With reading

programs, the main thing is continuity [across the grades]. That's what makes

something successful" (FN.K.2-19/p.1). By using prepackaged, scripted programs that

listed sequentially the skills and concepts that needed to be mastered, Kate ensured that

her students were prepared academically for the next grade level.

Elsie felt similarly that she needed to prepare her students for the next grade level. She clearly stated her goals: "I've gotta create the foundation here, so that when they go to the next grade, they've got that foundation that can be built upon, and built upon" (I.E.6-11/p.5). Elsie used a reading curriculum that provided guidelines for how and when to introduce and reinforce skills and concepts. Unlike the curriculum chosen by Kate, this curriculum lacked scope and sequence charts. The lack of sequence charts was problematic for Elsie. She noted that the curriculum was a "bit overwhelming," and she worried that she might overlook important skills and concepts. To address what she called the "disjointed" nature of the reading curriculum, Elsie met with the other kindergarten teachers and suggested that they use the framework provided within the curriculum to develop their own scope and sequence charts for the following school year (FN.E.3-11). By doing so, Elsie felt she would be more likely to ensure her students mastered all the skills and concepts they needed to be successful readers. In the meantime, Elsie listed the state mandated kindergarten readings skills on the whiteboard in her room (FN.E.5-14). When asked why the list was on the board, she stated that the list "acted as a reminder" of the skills and concepts she had to present, and her students had to master.

Kate also described her work as "building a foundation" for future academic success. For example, Kate adopted and implemented a NECAP reading prep program, although her students would not take the state-mandated NECAPs until the following fall. Her rationale was simple.

I'm prepping them with strategies for taking the test. In a larger sense,

they're prepared, because they can read and they're doing a good job.

But, um, it also, I'm really concerned about them all of a sudden sitting

down to take these tests and having to read, and read, and read, and

answer questions, and answer questions and, you know, for the kids who

are the better readers, they're just going to do it. But it's our struggling

readers that I'm concerned about. Can you imagine sitting through a

piece of, trying to read something, and you know you can't read it, and

then you try and answer questions and you really don't know. I mean

that's a horrific experience. That's miserable (I.K.5-16/p.5).

By providing instructional activities to help the children prepare for the NECAPs, Kate

hoped that her children would feel comfortable about their capabilities when it came

time to take the tests. By preparing the children a year early, she felt that she and the

other second-grade teachers might be able to provide the students with the academic

foundation they needed to do well. It seems that Kate's goal was to prevent the low

tests scores that educational statistics predict for students like those at Liberty. Given

the school's tenure on the SINI list, it seems that Kate's concerns for her students' test

performance and in their academic pursuits was warranted.

In addition to low test scores, Kate's "fear" was that the struggling readers, if

unprepared, might see the test as an "affirmation of their belief in themselves as failures

in school" (I.K.5-16/p.5). In combination with the test prep materials, Kate told the kids,

Okay, here are some strategies to help you with that. You're not going to

be able to read every word. That's okay. Your life doesn't depend on this

test...If you can't do all of it, don't worry. It doesn't mean that you're not

able to learn. It doesn't mean that you're not doing a good job in school

(I.K.5-16/p.6).

Kate's work was not only directed toward academic goals, it was directed at protecting

the children's sense of self as learners and as capable people.

The Unofficial Curriculum

Analysis of the data suggests that the unofficial curriculum was designed to

develop a sense of self in each of the students. Through classroom interactions, lessons,

and activities, Kate and Elsie hoped that their students would come to see their own

worth and value; that the children would recognize in themselves and in their

classmates the characteristics and traits that make each child special and unique; and

that the children would come to see their potential as capable learners and caring

people. The unofficial curriculum seemed to be directed toward buffering the children

from the negatives stereotypes connected with deficit thinking. Not surprisingly, the

explicit and implicit tenets of the unofficial curriculum greatly resembled the values and

outcomes that Elsie associated with Complex Instruction (I.E.4-07/p.4-5) and that Kate

associated with the arts and multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993). As cultural agents,

the participants drew on the learning of their pasts in designed their classrooms and in

setting goals for their students.

Kate and Elsie crafted classroom environments designed to highlight the special attributes and characteristics that each child brought into the classroom. For example, a boy in Elsie's class loved to run, so Elsie challenged him to a race around the playground's track (FN.E.4-10). Before the race, the class voted on who they thought would win (FN.E.5-21). The vast majority of the class voted for the boy, but Elsie assured him that she was in it to win. She would not throw the race. In the end, he won (handily), but the winner of the race was not the point for Elsie. Instead, Elsie saw it as "a way to make him shine" (I.E.14/p.1). The little boy was black. He qualified for free breakfast and lunch, and he lived in a public housing. While he was certainly bright, he frequently disrupted lessons. His high activity levels made academic success difficult. In many ways, he epitomized the type of child that the deficit models revolve around, but Elsie rejected the negative stereotypes and instead found something unique and special in him. Through his running, he excelled. He could beat his teacher in a race; he was that good.

Kate did much the same thing with her African dance group. As the group struggled with the difficult steps of the dance, Kate called to the front of the group those children who moved with ease through the steps (FN.K.3-09). Some of these children had IEPs and were considered behavior problems in their classrooms. Many were black. Several spoke a language other than English at home. Within the context of the African dance group, however, these children had skill and grace. Because the arts were so integral to Kate's teaching, she drew upon them as a way of drawing out the special talents and skills of her students. "I mean the whole point of arts-based instruction is

that children are not defective...through the arts children can realize a different sense of themselves and their potential" (I.K.5-27/p.1). Unlike the stereotypes that surround children of poverty or children with special needs, the unofficial curriculum provided a way for children to see their own unique talents and skills as well as honor the unique talents and skills of their peers. In this way, it served to "level the playing field."

Elsie and Kate both used the same phrase—"level the playing field"—to describe how and why they structured their classrooms to support their students' social and emotional development. In essence, they used the unofficial curriculum to remove obstacles that might advantage some children and disadvantage others. The obstacles might include differing abilities, differing languages, differing races or ethnicities, and/or differing economic backgrounds. Through the unofficial curriculum, each child had a chance to "shine" regardless of, or perhaps because of, how he or she differed from his or her classmates.

The analysis indicates that Kate and Elsie felt the need to address the academic goals of the official curriculum, but they felt equally compelled to address their students' social and emotional development. Elsie summarized her position. School, she said, is about "having kids seeing what their characteristics are... That's what we take with us when we leave school: those little memories of feeling valued" (I.E.6-11/p.7). In her opinion, a positive sense of self would provide the children with a "foundation wherever they may go." Kate mirrored this sentiment.

What I'm trying to do in this classroom is create an environment that is

relatively democratic in that children feel like they are important people

in this room. They feel like their voices have space in this room. They

feel like they belong here. They feel like it's okay to be who they are

(I.K.6-11/p.8).

Kate and Elsie seemed to view their classrooms as "humanely equitable" places in which

all children could succeed academically and in which all children felt supported

emotionally and valued socially (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 61).

Identities of Achievement and Defeat

Analysis of the data indicates that Kate and Elsie fostered identities of

achievement in their students and worked to eliminate identities of defeat. With goals

related to academic, social, and emotional development, the identity of achievement

spanned both the official and unofficial curricula. The identity of defeat, which the

participants sought to eliminate, was linked with behaviors that limited the students'

abilities to master the official and unofficial curricula. Both identities were fostered by

the participants in response to their perceptions of the social context in which they

taught. Through these identities, Elsie and Kate seemed to be striving to negate the

influence of deficit thinking and instill in their students a sense of possibility for who

they were now and who they might become in the future. Before analyzing the

identities of achievement and defeat, I return to Murrell's conceptualizations of ascribed

and assumed identities.

Murrell (2007) notes that, within any given social context, there is the possibility of an ascribed and an assumed situated identity. The ascribed identity follows from "the positioning others do of the individual" in a given social context, while the assumed identity describes "the positioning the individual does for himself or herself" (p. 90). Additionally, the identities, either assumed or ascribed, flow from the positioning of the individual according to the "storyline or script or frame" (p. 92) of the situation. Within the context of this study, it might be assumed that Elsie and Kate would ascribe to their students an identity of achievement, yet that assumption seems inaccurate. The teachers did not impose the identity of achievement on their students. Instead they held a vision of their students as achievers. Much like Nel Noddings' (2002) claim that the one-caring holds an image of what the one-cared-for is capable of becoming, the participants held a vision of all of their students as socially, emotionally, and academically capable. Rather than ascribing an identity of achievement, the teachers designed their classrooms to foster that identity. The achiever identity contradicted the identity that those subscribing to deficit models might ascribe to them. Once again, the teachers' actions and interactions were shaped by their understanding of the social context in which they taught.

Fostering Identities of Achievement

The identities of achievement and defeat were elusive concepts, because so much of the language of teachers used was linked to the texts from which they drew their curriculum. In a sense, the language of these various texts masked the identities. For example, both teachers referenced Lucy Calkins' *Units of Study for Primary Writing*

(2003). In this series of books designed to help teachers implement writing workshops, Calkins suggests that teachers encourage their students to think like writers. She argues that "good writers" think and act in certain ways. The language that Calkins uses filtered into both of the participants' classrooms. Elsie worked with her class to create a list of "things that good writers always do" like start a sentence with a capital, leave a space between words, and write the sounds they hear in a word to help them spell (FN.E.3-23). Kate reminded her students that "good writers" craft pieces with a beginning, middle, and end (FN.K.3-26). Similarly, the teachers were influenced by the works of Irene Fountas and Gay Pinnell (1996) whose writings on guided reading were used throughout the school. In *Guided Reading*, Fountas and Pinnell argue that teachers instill in their students the skills of "good readers." A good reader makes use of many different strategies to help decode words and make meaning of what she is reading. Elsie praised a student for applying the decoding strategy of finding smaller words within a larger unknown word (FN.E.5-14). Kate asked her students to make connections between their lives and those of the characters they find in books. This is what "good readers" do, she reminded them (FN.K.4-14). Also evident were the structures and language of Ruth Charney's *The Responsive Classroom* (1997). In this book and others by Charney, are the steps and procedures to shape and create a classroom community that supports the teacher and students in positive and supportive interactions. The structure of Elsie and Kate's daily schedules, from their morning meetings to their share times, was influenced by Charney's works as was their language.

In using the language and principles of all of these authors, however, the teachers seemed to be doing more than encouraging their students to be "good writers," "good readers," and "responsible" classmates. Instead of developing discreet sets of skills related to reading, writing, and/or interacting positively, the teachers seemed to use these labels and the principles behind them to help the children envision the possibility of themselves as achieving at high levels academically, socially, and emotionally. By fostering an identity of achievement, the teachers hoped to eliminate an identity of defeat. As achievers, the children might move beyond the negative stereotypes, the deficit thinking, that might otherwise overshadow their current work in school and their lives beyond the classroom.

A quote from Kate helps clarify the two identities and the possibilities that await a child who assumes the achiever identity. The statements that follow were part of a conversation in which Kate and I discussed issues of equity and inequity within the educational system. Kate rhetorically asked me, "Is [the educational system] equitable? God, no. Do we have a long way to go in terms of equity in the public schools and all of that? Oh yeah. Oh yeah" (I.K.5-27/p.11). In response, I asked, "What would make a difference in our classrooms?" She did not hesitate with her answer.

> I think one of the things you do is you say to kids, I don't want to hear "I can't," because you can. You can. And if you can't do it this way, we'll find a way to make it work for you, but do not be defeated. Do not sit back and say, "I just can't do it." You don't allow them to give up on

themselves. You say to them, "No, no, no." And you say to them, "It's

very important for you to learn to read. It's important for you to finish

school"....And, I've heard a lot of kids talk about, you know, I want to be

a doctor when I grow up. I want to be a teacher when I grow up. I

want....Those are their dreams. I don't know if they'll get there, but as

long as a kid can say and can even envision that possibility for

themselves then you say to them, "Well, what do you think it takes to be

a doctor, or a teacher, or a nurse, or a lawyer?" "Oh, I gotta go to school."

"You bet you do."

With these words, Kate differentiates between the achiever identity and the defeated

identity. The achiever "can," while the defeated "can't." Kate did not say that the

achiever can read or write at a particular level. She said only that the achiever "can."

The achiever is resilient. If one approach is ineffective, another strategy is needed.

Regardless of how a problem is approached, the achiever must not accept defeat. For

Kate, the dreams of her students rested on their ability to persist, to think, and to act like

achievers. Her words also indicate that she saw her job as extending beyond the

academic goals of the current school year. She directed her comments to the distant

future and the careers that her students may dream of entering. Her job entailed

protecting and promoting those visions of the future.

What is also interesting in the above quotes is the link that Kate seems to make

between issues of equity and inequity on the one hand and the identities of achievement

and defeat on the other. I asked her "what would make a difference in our classrooms" in terms of addressing "equity in the public schools." She replied by saying that she did not want to hear her students say "I can't." Instead, she insisted that her students declare "I can." It seems from her comments that by refusing to allow the kids "to give up on themselves" she was encouraging them to fight, or at least resist, the inequities that exist within the educational system. By adopting an identity of achievement, by finishing school, by going to college, the children could take steps toward realizing the future that they envisioned as a possibility for themselves.

Within these comments, are the life experiences of Kate, the cultural agent. As Rogoff (1990; 1998; 2003) notes, an individual carries into to her present what she has learned in her past. Kate's refusal to accept defeat for her students mirrors the defeat she refused to accept for herself during her childhood, her early adulthood, and during her summer with Outward Bound. Additionally, her pledge to find "a way to make it work" reflected her special education training that suggested that the teacher is responsible for helping each child to be successful.

Kate had more to say about the achiever identity and how she would ensure its development.

> I would like to put this in the front foyer. I would like this to be the
>
> motto for the whole school. Very straightforward. Very simple. Every
>
> parent, every kid sees it when they walk through the door. It would be:
>
> Every child can and will learn. Period. That's it. This is the mission of

every adult and child in this building. That is our goal. Every child. That is our belief: every child *can*. And our goal: and *will* learn. So simply stated. And that's what you do. And you set the bar high and you say, this is what you're going to do. This is what we expect (I.K.5-27/p.11).

Kate very simply stated what she viewed as the goals for every student in the school. Every child can and will achieve; there is no room for defeat. Unlike deficit thinking which might allow for mediocrity, Kate asserted that the school "set the bar high."

Academically, the participants designed and implemented curricula to support identities of achievement. They created lessons like those already described to support "good readers" and "good writers" They complemented their students for "thinking like a math person" and acting as "measuring experts" when children utilized math strategies drawn from the math curriculum. A child in Elsie's class was "thinking like a scientist" when she figured out why and how a particular outcome occurred following an experiment (FN.E.1-25).

Beyond praising the class as a whole for adopting strategies related to a specific element of the curriculum, Kate and Elsie focused their attention on the achievements of children who struggled in a particular subject area. For example, a boy in Kate's classroom struggled with reading and writing (FN.K.3-26). When he completed the writing and revision of his first story, he asked if he might read it aloud to the class. As he stood before his classmates and read his story, a small smile played across his lips.

As he reached the climax of the story, he paused for dramatic effect and read the final

lines of his story. The class erupted into giggles at the antics of his characters. He

bowed his head as they laughed. Quietly, he told his classmates, "I knew you would

laugh at that" (FN.K.3-26/p.4). After the class applauded his finished work, he returned

to his seat with a huge smile. Kate smiled as well and told me that this story

represented a "huge accomplishment" for the boy. Similarly, a girl in Elsie's class

struggled with making the connection between letter sounds and the letters representing

those sounds. As the girl stood in front of the class writing a word on the whiteboard,

there were long pauses as she sounded out and wrote the word (FN.E.6-02). The class

sat quietly as she worked. As she completed the task and handed the pen back to her

teacher, a pair of boys leaned toward each other and commented, "That's good writing."

Hearing their comment, the girl smiled shyly as she moved back to her seat. For her,

writing the word was an accomplishment that came after months of frustration. The

boys' comment acknowledged her hard work. Piggy-backing on the words of the boys,

Elsie asked the class if they thought they should clap for the girl's successful spelling of

the word. As the class erupted into applause, the girl looked down at her lap and

smiled. As these examples indicate, the identities of achievement acknowledged the

individual successes of the students while rooting those identities within the classroom

context.

Social and emotion development were also areas in which a child might assume

an identity of achievement. In Elsie's class, one of the weekly jobs was "Super Kid."

This job required the child to find "something good that someone else did" (FN.E.1-

22/p.3). One week it was a child who helped an injured friend on the playground; another week it was a child who helped find a missing article of clothing. In Kate's class, the children worked to fill out "The Kindness Chart" that hung on the wall (FN.K.2-19). Kindnesses listed on the chart included "Matthew gave me a nice compliment, Thank you, Dericka" and "David reminded us to pick up, Thank you, Tyrelle." When the principal, Mr. Parker, walked through the room one afternoon, a student complimented his tie, so the class insisted he write about the incident on the Kindness Chart. As he did so, Kate explained to him the rationale for the chart. "They do a lot of kind things for each other, so we're kind of writing it down." As these incidents indicate, social and emotional achievement were rooted in the classroom communities. The children learned to care for and support each other as they moved through their days together. And, just as the teachers celebrated academic success, social and emotional success were cause for rejoicing.

In Elsie's class, the little girl who wore training pants stood before the class and shared the chart she and her mother had created at home (FN.E.2-17). She explained to her classmates how she would get a sticker on the chart each time she used the potty at home. As she finished speaking, one of the boys burst out, "Wow! She used the potty that many times!" Others nodded in agreement; it did seem like quite an accomplishment. When the girl asked if her classmates had any "questions or comments" about what she shared, the class enthusiastically asked about what types of stickers she had and what she would get after she filled out the chart. As her sharing time ended, the little girl resumed her seat. Elsie turned to the class and asked, "Boys

and girls, do you think we need to clap for her?" As the class cheered for her efforts at

potty training, the girl beamed at those around her. These examples demonstrate that,

regardless of where and how children demonstrated their achievement, the efforts were

cause for celebration. The classroom contexts designed by Elsie and Kate supported the

children as they assumed identities of achievement that recognized who they were as

learners and individuals.

Resisting Identities of Defeat

In addition to fostering identities of achievement, Elsie and Kate also helped

their students to resist identities of defeat. Analysis of the data indicates that the

teachers employed two strategies to help their students resist identities of defeat. First,

they drew upon their special education training. Second, the teachers worked within the

contexts of their classrooms to eliminate any behaviors related to identities of defeat.

Drawing on and Utilizing their Special Education Training. Kate and Elsie were

trained in and had experience teaching special education, so it is not surprising that they

drew upon the understandings and interpretations they related to their special

education training. Both stated that their approach to meeting their students' needs was

influenced by their training and work in the special education field. They noted that in

general education teachers taught "to the middle," but special education teachers, they

said, were trained to assess individual student's needs and then design lessons to

address those needs. Elsie explained from her perspective the difference between the

Special Education Discourse model and the General Education Discourse model.

One of the things we talk about in regular ed. is you teach to the middle.

The kids on the high end, well, maybe they will take off with it. The kids

on the low end, let's have someone come in and rescue them and teach it

a different way. I can see myself going that route a little bit sometimes,

and then I feel myself pulling back and going, "Okay, she didn't get that.

How am I going to break it down? (I.E.6-12/p.11)

Elsie's comments and her work in the classroom indicate that she rejected the idea of

teaching to the middle and hoping that the students "at the ends" will either "take off"

with the concepts or be "rescued" by specialists who come in to re-teach the concepts.

The words here are Elsie's, but Kate also noted the tendency in general education to

teach to the middle, and, as she put it, "hope for the best" for the children who are either

not challenged by the curriculum or overly challenged by it. Elsie's statement that the

kids at the low end may need to be "rescued" is a reference to the Deficit Thinking and

White Knight Discourse models. Elsie described her reaction to such thinking as a

"pulling back" and a reminder to herself to problem solve for the child. She linked her

problem solving strategies to her special education training and teaching.

With special ed., you have to figure out the puzzle. Why is this kid not

learning to read? What is that I need to do that's gonna help him to learn

to read? What tools do I need? How do I break it down? And so I think

I've carried that over into regular ed. by still looking at the kids like

they're puzzles. What am I going to do to get that little girl to feel more

confident? What am I going to do so that another girl doesn't feel

stressed out when I ask her not to talk out? So it's constantly, even

though it might not be as academically based for every child, it's still that

special ed. training of trying to figure things out that has carried through

(I.E.5-14/p.3).

As her words indicate, Elsie saw her job as assessing the needs of the children and then

problem solving to meet them. She did not prioritize the official academic curriculum

over the unofficial social and emotional curriculum. Kate also referred to herself as a

"problem-solver," and like Elsie, she traced her understanding of her role as a problem-

solver to her special education training.

As Kate and I sat talking about her special education training, she told me about

how identities of defeat can enter into the classroom setting and become problematic for

a child.

Here's where difficulties become a problem: if a child is failing. Feels like

they are failing. Feels like a failure. That's a huge problem. If, you

know, if a child's self-perceptions or experiences are such that they are

not good, you know, negative, that's where the problem exists and that's

where it's our job to meet the needs of the child. To figure it out. Just

figure it out (I.K.5-16/p.14).

For Kate, a "huge problem" occurred when a child felt like a failure. Her words reveal that "difficulties" learning a particular subject were not necessarily problematic until those difficulties led a child to believe that he was a failure. In such a case, it seems that Kate believed that a child might assume for himself an identity of defeat. An earlier quote from Kate referred specifically to the connection between problem-solving and overcoming defeat. When faced with a challenge, Kate told her students, "If you can't do it this way, we'll find a way to make it work for you, but do not be defeated" (I.K.527/p.11). Drawing on her understandings and interpretations of her special education training, Kate asserted in both the above quote and in the earlier quote that the teacher's job is to "figure out."

The belief that the teacher is responsible for problem-solving was visible in their classrooms. After a whole group lesson in which Elsie integrated alliteration, sight works, and number words, she asked each child to write a sentence using the three skills (FN.E.3-23). Her eyes scanned the faces of her students spread out before her on the rug. "Do you understand what you're supposed to do?" she asked. Several children nodded. Others shook their heads. Many did not respond. Rethinking the course of the lesson, she asked several children to provide examples. After the examples, she restated the directions and told the children to turn to a partner and share their sentences. Elsie moved around the pairs scattered on the rug checked in with the children. She helped several pairs before regrouping the class. She again told the children what they were to do and then asked for a few more examples. Finally Elsie sent them to their tables to write and illustrate their sentences. Later than afternoon, Elsie explained to me what

happened during the lesson, "I'll repeat directions three different ways until I know everyone understands." She laughed as she said that. "You must think I'm crazy, but that's the only way I know they all get it." While her actions might simply be the actions of a good teacher, Elsie saw them as rooted in her special education training and directed toward ensuring success and eliminating the possibility of failure.

Consistent with her beliefs based on her special education training, Kate utilized multiple intelligences as a way of problem-solving to ensure that her students would experience success rather than defeat. Like most second graders, Kate's students were required to do homework each night to help them master a list of 10-15 spelling word (FN.K.2-19). Integrating the linguistic and spatial intelligences, Kate had the students use their spelling words in a picture. One little girl filled her paper with flowers of varying sizes and wrote her spelling words along the outlines of each petal. The spelling words also flowed around the curves of the sun and up the trunk of a tree. When I asked Kate about the homework, she explained, "That's for the spatial and linguistic learners." At other times, the children sang their spelling words. Although Kate's use of multiple intelligences might be considered simply good teaching inspired to help all learners grow, it seems the use of multiple intelligences was about finding a way to make the educational program "work" for each of the students. Utilizing her interpretations of special education to think flexibly about the lessons she offered, and by problem-solving with the students about which approaches to learning were most effective, Kate hoped to have her students avoid ever feeling like "a failure" and possibly assuming an identity of defeat.

<u>Eliminating behaviors related to defeat</u>. In addition to drawing on their understandings of special education, Elsie and Kate took action to eliminate behaviors that they viewed as related to defeat. They specifically addressed with their students those behaviors that they felt were counterproductive to achieving in school.

Elsie often worried about "the cranky teacher" she became when she was frustrated or disappointed with her class. It was incarnation of the cranky teacher, however, that helped her students resist the identity of defeat. When the cranky teacher showed up in Elsie's class, it was because the students were behaving in a manner that inhibited their chances to achieve. For example, while Elsie and the class worked with math manipulatives, the noise level started to rise, and it became difficult for Elsie to teach. Knitting her eye-brows and frowning she said to the class, "Now you're going to start to hear a cranky teacher voice. And the reason it would be a cranky teacher voice is because while you're playing with your penny bags, you're not listening" (FN.E.2-12/p.8). At another time, Elsie asked the class to sit silently after a series of interruptions made it difficult to complete a whole class instructional activity. She told the class "now you have a cranky teacher. Why is that?" (FN.E.5-21/p.4) She answered her own question: the class was having trouble sitting quietly and listening to their teacher and their classmates. As a result, no learning could occur. As the school year came to a close, Elsie voiced her aggravation with some of the disruptive behaviors (FN.E.5-28). She was "frustrated and annoyed" that she was still dealing with some of the same behavioral issues that were problematic at the start of the year. With these behavior issues to contend with, she was anxious about meeting all her goals for her students, but

she phrased her concerns to her students differently. She told the class, "Even though I get cranky, I still love you. I just wanted you to tell you. You do some good work. There is still more to do" (FN.E.5-28/p.3). The cranky teacher showed up when the behaviors of the students made it impossible to do the good work that was necessary for successful completion of kindergarten.

During other observations, Elsie used the terms "lazy learner" and "learned helplessness" to describe instances when the children were not taking responsibility for their behavior and their learning. In one such case she told her class, "You guys, I told you this was important, and I wanted you to pay attention to it. You have a responsibility to pay attention and take the information in" (FN.E.5-14/p.3). It seems Elsie was upset not as much by the inattentive behavior as she was by the inability of the students to learn as a result of their behavior. Their actions were inhibiting their learning. Like her discussions with the class of the cranky teacher, Elsie used this as an opportunity to teach the children what behaviors would lead to achievement and which would not.

About two months into my observations, I entered Kate's room and found that Kate had put into place a new behavior plan for the class (FN.K.4-02). Based on Lee Canter's *Classroom Management for Academic Success* (2005), Kate instituted what she called "the dot system." If a child broke one of the classroom rules, a dot sticker was placed on their desk. A child had three chances. First they were given a blue or green dot. If a problematic behavior occurred again, then a yellow dot was placed next to the blue or green dot. Finally after a third transgression, a red dot was placed on the

nametag, and a note was sent home. As the class sat on the rug for morning meeting, Kate restated for them how the system worked. Of particular relevance to this study were her comments about what happened if a yellow dot was given. When a yellow dot arrived on a student's desk, Kate said, the child would need to "spend time talking to me about why that rule is hard for you to follow." Although I did not have an opportunity to observe a yellow-dot conference, Kate's words seem to indicate once again the role of problem-solving in her classroom as a means of ensuring success. She implied with her word choice that, if she and the child could figure out why a rule is hard to follow, the child might experience success rather than defeat. After completing the explanation of the dot system, Kate told the class, "If you're not listening, you're going to get zapped. The things we—meaning the teachers—expect to see, if we see you doing those, you're good to go." Through the implementation of this behavior system, Kate appeared to be trying to eliminate any behaviors, like "not listening," that might lead to poor performance in school. If the students engaged in a behavior that was unsuitable to learning, they would get "zapped," but if they engaged in behaviors that would promote their learning and the learning of their classmates, then they were "good to go." With this system, Kate took action to eliminate behaviors related to defeat.

Kate and Elsie recognized for their students the possibility that they might assume identities of achievement or identities of defeat. Because many of the students with whom they worked typically did not succeed in school, the teachers intentionally structured their classroom environments to foster identities of achievement and minimize behaviors that might lead to identities of defeat. Consistent with Murrell's

assertion (2007) that identities are socially situated, Kate and Elsie fostered identities of

achievement in response to their understandings of the social context in which they

taught.

Conclusion

Boyd et al. (2006) argue that teachers need "to understand and acknowledge the

racial and socioeconomic inequalities that exist and that schools perpetuate" (p. 335). It

seems that Elsie and Kate did that to some extent. Teaching in a school populated by a

large number of children who were typically underserved by the educational system (i.e.

of color, low-income, and/or spoke a native language other than English), Elsie and Kate

seemed to acknowledge the negative stereotypes and low expectations that others might

hold of their students and they responded by shaping their classrooms to support and

foster identities of achievement. However, while Elsie and Kate rejected and refuted the

Deficit Thinking and White Knight Discourse models when explicitly articulated, the

teachers were less able and/or willing to view their own language and/or interactions as

rooted in deficit thinking when these ideologies assumed implicit forms.

From the analysis presented in this chapter, it seems that these two white

teachers worked from an "at promise" ideology that suggests that all children are

capable learners who will someday be fully functioning members of the larger American

society (Swadener, 1995). The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

(NBPTS) states that accomplished teachers "adjust their teaching practice based on

observation and knowledge of their students' interests, abilities, skills, knowledge,

family circumstances and peer relationships" (2010, p. 3). Beyond these criteria, it

seems that accomplished teachers must also acknowledge, understand, and respond to the social context in which they teach. Elsie and Kate seemed to have done that to some extent. Irvine (2003) writes that in teaching "context is the operative word...Caring, competent educators understand the context and the complexity of teaching" (p. 48). Kate and Elsie understood the negative stereotypes and low expectations that some held of their students. They responded by adapted their teaching and interactions to meet their students' academic, social, and emotional needs given that context. What remained unspoken and unexamined, however, is how deficit thinking may have existed at an implicit level in their thinking and their language.

Many scholars argue that teaching is a political activity and that teachers must act as agents of change who actively seek to disrupt the educational status quo by critically assessing and altering practices which advantage some students while disadvantaging others (Cochran-Smith, 1995b; Delpit, 1995; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1999, 2001a, 2001b; Pollock, 2008). While neither Elsie nor Kate described teaching a political activity, their discourse indicates that they did take on the role of agents of change in creating their classroom environments and their curriculum. Notwithstanding these actions, they did not critically assess how their own language and interactions might have served to perpetuate the educational status quo when deficit thinking in its implicit form remained unexamined and unchecked. In the next chapter I examine how Elsie and Kate navigated the cultural gaps between themselves and the students from whom they differed.

CHAPTER 6

BRIDGING THE CULTURAL GAPS

In this chapter, I return to the central research question: how did these two

white teachers in the contexts of their classrooms navigate the cultural gaps between

themselves and the students from whom they differed (i.e. racially, ethnically,

linguistically, economically, etc.). Analysis of the data suggests that the two participants

utilized two strategies to bridge the cultural gaps. First, they explored and developed a

sense of their students' "experiential diversity." By understanding who their students

were outside of school, the teachers were better able to connect with the students and

form strong and caring relationships. These relationships supported both the teachers

and their students as they addressed the academic, social and emotional demands of

school. Second, the participants formed relationships with others who could support

them in their work with the students. Relationships of importance included those with

the students' families and those with staff members of Liberty School. Although these

strategies worked in tandem, they are examined separately. In addition, I examine two

metaphors of importance in this study: the metaphorical gap that divides the teachers

and their students and the metaphorical bridge that spans the divide between them.

These metaphors have implications for multicultural education as a whole. I conclude

the chapter with a discussion of the participants' views of their whiteness and its

meaning for themselves, their students, and their teaching.

<u>Experiential Diversity</u>

<u>Defining Experiential Diversity</u>

Elsie coined the term "experiential diversity" to describe the variety of

experiences the children encountered in their home lives and in their daily lived

experiences. Experiential diversity came up during our second interview when I asked

her "how was difference in general, and cultural difference in particular, addressed"

during her teacher preparation. Although Elsie stated that "it really wasn't," this

question triggered a discussion about an incident related to diversity that had occurred

in her classroom that day.

> Well...when I do a lesson, like when I talked about Martin Luther
>
> King...what I do is kind of drawing on the kids' experiences and what
>
> little I know about their lives. So sometimes it's not as much the *racial*
>
> diversity as it is the experiential diversity (I.E.2-12/p.8).

She explained further using an example drawn from her class.

> One of the little girls, whose mommy's boyfriend is in jail. I don't bring it
>
> up. They bring it up. It's a fact of their lives. So I don't hush-hush it, but
>
> there are things that have come up...So, I'd asked the little girl, um, about
>
> jail. "Could you bring this book...when you go to jail and read the book

to him?" 'Cause I guess he'd read the story to her... "No, you can't bring

things in." "Oh, that's right, you can't. Okay." And just kind of leave it

at that. 'Cause their lives are—it's so matter of fact...It's more the

diversity of who lives in their house. I don't ask who's in their family—

sometimes I say who sleeps at your house. Because it's an easier word for

the kids to understand...Um, blended families, interracial families,

maybe. There are things that I bring up *that* way. "Oh, Grammy brought

you to school today—and it's a Monday. Were you at Grammy's for the

weekend?" And, that's how I address the diversity in the classroom...

And I try to know as much as I can, but without grilling them. Like I

know some families that you might not expect are kind of struggling

financially from a couple of things that the kids have said...And also, um,

I'm not afraid about bringing it up in conversation...if the kids are

bringing it up, I'm not afraid to go to the next step and have a

conversation about it (I.E.2-12/p.8-9).

Experiential diversity described the "facts" of the children's lives. It referred to myriad

elements of the children's daily lived experiences. These experiences might include

visiting a jailed family member, or they might include who lived with and parented a

child; what languages were spoken in a child's home; economic issues such as

unemployment or underemployment; religious beliefs and practices; activities the child

engaged in after school; and special talents and skills that were enjoyed at home. As the

quote indicates, these facts were gleaned from conversations with the children, but they were facts that Elsie felt were of importance to the children. She did not "hush-hush" them even if a child divulged information that might be sensitive in nature. Drawing on what she learned about each child's experiential diversity, Elsie felt better able to connect with and subsequently teach each child. Elsie told me, "I make a point of connecting" with every child (I.E.2-12/p.10). Talking with a child about his or her life and interests outside of school, his or her experiential diversity, provided a way to connect.

The term experiential diversity was coined by Elsie, but it also seemed to apply to Kate's understanding of her students and their lives. Kate explained that in working with children who might differ from herself she needed to be "thinking about what is this child's life" (I.K.6-11/p.1). She explained further the connection between experiential diversity and her work as a teacher.

> The reason that [knowing about a child's life] is important to me is
>
> because I, even though I see a child in my classroom for 6 hours a day,
>
> you cannot teach a child in isolation as if the rest of the world around
>
> them does not exist. You can't pretend that because this child comes
>
> from a family who's struggling with issues around poverty and issues
>
> around joblessness or homelessness that this does not affect what's
>
> happening for them in the classroom. I think that we need to always be
>
> cognizant of children as, as human beings in the world and in their

families and in their communities first. And when they come into your

classroom, they are a whole person. They are not just little bodies, and

you want them to bring their background experiences and stuff (I.K.6-

11/p.1).

Kate's words indicate that each child's life outside of the classroom had meaning in the

classroom and that a teacher must consider how the circumstances of a child's life may

affect his or her work in school. She argued that teachers cannot teach a child "in

isolation." Instead, she said, teachers should encourage children to "bring their

background experiences" to the classroom. The background experiences to which she

referred are what Elsie labeled "experiential diversity."

The notion of experiential diversity resembles what anthropologist and

ethnographer Frederick Erickson (2007) terms a student's personal culture. Erickson

recommends that teachers of diverse student-bodies move beyond stereotypes about a

child's home culture by experiencing first-hand what a student's life outside of school is

like.

An index for the individual students' distinctive cultural repertoire is that

student's distinctive *daily round*—where that student shows up and what

is happening there, in the specific sequences and ranges of engagement of

the student in local communities of practice inside and outside of school.

By learning which particular communities of practice a student has had

access to, and the kinds of participation in those communities that a

student has engaged in, a teacher can come to understand the personal

culture of each student—to see each student as "cultural" without

stereotyping the student simplistically as "Anglo" or "African

American," as "lower class" or "upper middle class," as "boy" or girl"

(Erickson, 2007, p.49).

Essentially, Erickson is arguing that teachers view their students as cultural agents who

participate in varying communities of practices and as a result acquire and construct sets

of understandings that they bring with them into the classroom. Elsie and Kate, by

considering their students to be, in Kate's words, "human beings in the world and in

their families and in their communities," were accessing the personal cultures of their

students. Knowing their students as cultural agents seems to have provided a way for

Elsie and Kate to address the school's academic goals as well as foster each child's sense

of self.

Kate and Elsie both drew on the experiential diversity of their students—their

knowledge base and ways of knowing—to enhance the educational program they

provided for their students. For example, Kate encouraged her students to think about

their own experiences with bees when they read a story about the lives of bees (FN.K.4-

07). She told the class, "Take what you know from home and use it to understand this

story." By doing so, Kate optimized the students' opportunities to make the learning

more meaningful. Similarly, Elsie encouraged her students to make connections

between their home lives and the content presented in school. As the children listened

to music related to their study of the Chinese New Year, Elsie asked them to consider what the music made them think of from their own lives and how it was different from other types of music they might have heard (FN.E.2-06). These lessons capitalized on the students' experiential knowledge to address the demands of the official curriculum. The participants' efforts to integrate their students' experiential knowledge is in agreement with Erickson (2007) who notes that making connections between student knowledge bases and school curricular content shifts learning from "lower-order mastery of facts and simple skills to higher-order reasoning and the construction of knowledge that is personally distinctive and meaningful" (p.50). Kate stated a very similar belief about how she used her students' experiential diversity to address the academic curriculum: "That's just good teaching," she said of how she drew upon the children's knowledge from their experiences outside of school (FN.K.4-07/p.6). "That's what all the books tell teachers to do."

The participants also used the knowledge they gleaned about their students' experiential diversity to address their unofficial curriculum. Analysis revealed that, by knowing about their students' lives outside of school, the teachers were able to support their students' developing sense of self. In Elsie's class, children shared events from their outside-of-school lives. They might tell about a t-ball game or the visit of an out-of-town family member. A little boy shared stories of his drumming lessons. A girl taught a cheer to the class that she had learned as a part of the town's cheering squad (FN.E.1-27). Each Friday the class celebrated Fun Fabulous Friday. The fun activities each Friday afternoon extended the curriculum, and oftentimes these afternoons provided a

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way to bring in the students' family members. One afternoon, a boy's father and mother came in to cook fried chicken and macaroni and cheese for the class (FN.E.4-10). The recipes they used were family recipes passed down through generations. The boy's father, a trained chef, shared his expertise and discussed with the children what types of schooling they would need if they chose to become chefs. Another Fun Fabulous Friday celebrated a little boy's Indian heritage (FN.E.5-21). His mother prepared his favorite rice dish, and the class tasted naan and yogurt dip. In Kate's class, children used the morning circle time to share stories of their brothers and sisters' hobbies. They talked about the churches they attended; some, like the church of an Indonesian girl, were linked with a particular cultural group (FN.K.3-10). They told tales of their afternoon exploits roaming the fields around the housing projects with their classmates and siblings. One girl shared the news of a house fire that occurred next door to her grandmother's house the night before (FN.K.5-13). As she struggled to convey images of the flames engulfing the house, a boy in the class who lived in the same neighborhood added details to her story. By truly listening and responding to the students' stories, the teachers promoted the students' sense of self.

For Kate and Elsie, the students were unique and special individuals whose lives had meaning in the classroom. Kate made explicit the connection between the students' sharing of their home lives within the school context and their sense of self.

> The students bring their experiences and their life into the classroom, and
>
> it's going to be honored as real...That has to be in the classroom. In my

opinion, that has to be in the classroom, because children have to be who

they are in the classroom. I think it has to come out in conversation. You

just have a simple conversation. I've seen it come out in writing, in

children's writing projects. Tell about something really neat you did over

the weekend. "Went to a church party." Um, it comes out, because this,

what I'm trying to do in this classroom is create an environment that is

relatively democratic in that children feel like they are important people

in this room. They feel like their voices have space in this room. They

feel like they belong here. They feel like it's okay to be who they are

(I.K.6-11/p.7-8).

Elsie and Kate supported the goals of the unofficial curriculum by valuing within their

classrooms each child and his or her life experiences. By listening to and encouraging

the children to share their lives, they hoped to create classrooms in which the children

felt "important" and as if they "belonged." By welcoming the stories of the many

different aspects of the children's personal culture, it seems that Elsie and Kate fostered

the social and emotional development of each child as a "whole person."

The stories the students shared of their lives outside of school were in many

cases stories full of humor and silly antics. These stories, and the communities in which

the children experienced the events conveyed by the stories, were sources of strength for

the students. Unfortunately, at other times, the teachers learned about aspects of their

students' lives that were troublesome and hurtful. When such events occurred, the

participants responded emotionally to the child and pragmatically to the impediments linked with the situation. Elsie learned of a boy's family struggling to make ends meet after the father lost his job (FN.E.2-6). Consequently, she arranged for the boy to take home the leftovers from a Fun Fabulous Friday that featured Chinese food from a local restaurant. As the boy and his family left the building after school, they held up the containers of food, waved to Elsie, and thanked her for the food. "I just wish I'd known earlier," she told me. Later in the day, she and a co-worker spoke about connecting the boy's family with community services that might help the family weather the financial challenges they faced. A young girl in Kate's class struggled when her mother moved out. Kate made contact with the girl's aunt and father to ensure the girl's emotional well-being during the difficult transition (FN.K.3-9). In these instances, the teachers reached out to the children to provide them with the emotional support they needed, and they took steps to help the families in whatever ways they could.

These examples show the many ways in which the teachers came to know who each of the children were as a "whole person." Elsie and Kate were interested in their students as individuals with a wide range of experiences. They laughed with their students over the silliness of some experiences, but they also comforted and problem-solved when these actions were needed. It seems they did not shy away from any of the experiences the children brought into the classroom. Kate and Elsie used the interactions with the children around their experiential diversity as ways of learning about and connecting with their students. In this way, experiential diversity seems to have allowed the participants a way to construct meaningful relationships with their

students. Sleeter (2008) in her analysis of research on teachers working with culturally diverse students argues that white teachers often have "difficulty forming constructive relationships" with their students of color (p. 559), but that did not seem to be the case here. Elsie and Kate seem to have used experiential diversity as an avenue for building positive relationships. By learning about their students' lives outside of school, they learned about their students and the communities in which they lived and participated. The knowledge the participants constructed as a result seems to have helped them navigate the cultural gaps between themselves and the students from whom they differed.

Experiential Diversity versus Other Conceptualizations of Diversity

While drawing on the experiential diversity of the students seems to have benefitted Elsie and Kate and their students, this notion of learning about a student's life experiences, or personal culture, does not fully address the concerns of others within the multicultural education field. Others (e.g., Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings 1994, 2007; Nieto 1999, 2000) argue that students must develop and maintain a sense of themselves as members of a particular racial or ethnic group. For example, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994; 2007) argues that instructional practices be designed to address academic goals as well as encouraging students to "accept and affirm their cultural identity" (2007, p. 231). After studying eight exemplary teachers of African American students, she suggests that teachers who create "culturally relevant" pedagogy find ways to ensure that students maintain their cultural identities within the school context. She recommends, for instance, that language instruction draw on the linguistic patterns commonly associated

with African American students. Similarly, other researchers suggest that instruction be aligned with the cultural norms of the group being taught. For example, Au (1980) asserts that "culturally appropriate" reading instruction for Hawaiian children closely resemble the linguistic patterns of their native language. Lipka (1991) argues for a "culturally based pedagogy" that mirrors the values and interactional patterns of the Yup'ik Eskimo students he studied. Irvine (1999) argues for "cultural synchronization" between the school curriculum and African American students. Cultural synchronization suggests that attention be given to synchronizing speech and language patterns as well as the interactional norms Irvine describes as typical of African American communities. As each of these examples demonstrates, many researchers believe that students outside of the white mainstream be instructed in a manner that develops and maintains their cultural identity in relation to their racial or ethnic group.

The approach taken by the two participants differed greatly from the cited researchers. Elsie and Kate did not work to develop and maintain their students' cultural group membership as related to a particular race and/or ethnicity. In many ways, by choosing to know each student as a cultural agent—by learning about each student's personal culture—they side-stepped the issue of racial and/or ethnic cultural identity. However, that is not to say they ignored what racial or ethnic groups their students belonged to; they acknowledged these aspects of their students' lives. In fact, both Elsie and Kate had discussions in their classrooms around racial group membership, and both helped their students to understand what "mulatto" meant in relation to their classes (FN.E.2-3; FN.K.3-4). In response to a child's mention of race

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during a discussion of Abraham Lincoln, Elsie stated, "If students bring race up, I'm not afraid to talk about it" (FN.E.2-6/p.4). Kate, as discussed earlier, had a very forthright discussion with her class about how segregation, if still in existence, would affect the class (FN.K.3-4). Although the participants seemed to agree that race and ethnicity played roles of varying importance in their students lives and in their classrooms, they did not focus on these dimensions of their students' lives.

Elsie and Kate offered two reasons for focusing on their students' experiential diversity rather than a racial or ethnic category. First, the participants repeatedly noted that diversity included more than race and ethnicity. Before my first visit to her classroom, Kate emailed me to ask if I had given thought to "extending the concept of diversity to include economic diversity" (personal correspondence, Feb. 7, 2009). When I arrived in her classroom, she followed up her email by telling me "there is a diversity, a *hidden* diversity…an economic diversity, that's more compelling in terms of progress in school than any other factor—more than race or any other factor" (FN.K.2-09/p.1). Elsie expressed a similar sentiment when she told me about a student whose single mother had four children at a very young age. She told me, "And it's not about race; it's about poverty" (I.K.6-11/p.11). Elsie also brought up other forms of diversity. After speaking about her work in Alaska and California, I asked her: what are some of the issues that you think are important to look at or address when working with diverse students? She shrugged her shoulders. "It's about language. It's about how they're raised—and I mean what it's like for them at home. That kind of thing. What the cultural differences are" (I.E.6-02/p.9-10). With their background in special education,

both participants cited differences in abilities and capabilities as a form of diversity.

Kate told me, "Everyone has different ways of learning, or not learning. You have to

think about that in the classroom. Every classroom teacher is a special ed. teacher"

(I.K.4-07/p.16). For these two teachers, it seemed diversity extended beyond race and/or

ethnicity. Linguistic, economic, religious, and ability differences, and the impact of

these differences, needed to be considered in constructing curriculum and in building

relationships with their students. To ignore these elements of their students' lives and

experiences would have been to overlook issues of importance to the children. For both

teachers that would have been tantamount to dismissing their students' experiences and

lives. Kate explained further.

> [If] I discount a child's experience. If a child comes in and says, "I didn't
>
> sleep all night." You, you, you gotta look deeper. You gotta talk to 'em.
>
> You gotta listen. Listening is absolutely critical, and you say to them,
>
> "Well, yeah, you do look tired. What's happening?"...You have to pay
>
> attention to that. You cannot discount or ignore a child's reality" (I.K.6-
>
> 11/p.7).

The classrooms of this study had students who differed in many ways culturally.

Analysis revealed that, for the participants, focusing on race and/or ethnicity exclusively

might have overlooked some element of a child's life that was essential to his or her

sense of self. To think of diversity in terms of race and/or ethnicity to the exclusion of

the students' lived experiences would have been to "ignore a child's reality."

The second reason the participants cited for relying on experiential diversity was their feeling that they could not know everything there was to know about all of the different forms of diversity they found in their classrooms. The analysis suggests that, when the participants found that they did not understand a child's actions or interactions around issues or topics that seemed to be cultural in nature, they did not rely on a child's racial or ethnic group membership to interpret what the child said or did. Instead they sought understanding by learning more about the child's lived experiences.

Kate summarized why she felt compelled to learn more about a child's life in order to understand a particular behavior. We were speaking about the religious diversity she had experienced in her classroom in the past. During the year in question, she had children who were Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and Jehovah's Witnesses. She described how one child was hit by his father with the bottom of a shoe; this, she learned later, "indicates that you've really done something dishonorable or bad" (I.K.5-16/p.8). At another time, a child told Kate that she was hungry. Realizing that it was Ramadan, Kate called the girls' parents to find out if she might give the girl a snack. As Kate relayed these stories, I wondered aloud how she knew what to do. I asked what might interfere with her ability to work with and teach students with such varying home experiences and cultures. Kate shook her head. "What interferes is my, um, my lack of experience and background with a particular culture or custom. *I* interfere with my own work" (I.K.5-16/p.9). For Kate, it was essential to ask questions about what an event meant for a child and his family. Rather than assuming being of Indian heritage meant a

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child celebrated Ramadan, she sought information from the child and her family. To assume that membership in a particular racial or ethnic group dictated how a child and her family acted or interacted with others might lead to a child being harmed in some way. Because it was impossible for Kate to know everything about all the forms of diversity within her classroom, she relied on what she knew, or could learn, of the children's experiential diversity rather than their racial or ethnic group membership.

Elsie expressed a similar sentiment. She spoke of how the little Indian boy in her class forgot his lunch one day. The lunch aides supplied him with a school lunch, but unfortunately they did not think to consider that the boy was a vegetarian. The school lunch had meat. Elsie angrily recounted the story and its meaning for her. "We didn't respect the family. Um, but, so that's what you gotta do, you gotta try to seek out what you can and learn what you can" (I.E.6-11/p.11). Like Kate, she felt compelled to learn about and act on knowledge from the family. Despite her efforts to learn about her student's home lives and cultures, Elsie acknowledged the limitations of her approach. "I think that knowledge is so important, but I'm also not going to know *everything* but when I learn it I have to act upon it" (I.E.6-02/p.10).

For these two women, the number of cultures in their classrooms made it seem difficult to know how to respond and interact appropriately at all times. As they moved through the school year with their students, Elsie and Kate often felt as if they "stumbled onto new knowledge" about the different cultures represented in their classrooms (I.K.5-16/p.11). By drawing on the students' experiential diversity, the participants had the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with their

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students while simultaneously learning about the practices and beliefs of different cultural communities. Rather than relying on racial or ethnic group membership as categories that dictated or presumed particular actions and beliefs, the analysis suggests that the participants explored with their students and their families the many varied ways of being in the world that might be related to different racial, ethnic, linguistic, economic, and religious backgrounds.

Experiential Diversity as Cultural Competence

In utilizing experiential diversity rather than cultural group membership, the participants' view of working with diversity was akin to what Howard (2006) labels "cultural competence": "the *will* and the *ability* to form authentic and effective relationships across difference" (p.130). He explains further.

> "Authentic" in this definition of cultural competence means that our students trust that we are being real. Students have antennae for authenticity, and they know whether we are being genuine with them. "Effective" in the definition means that the relationships are working, that our students across their differences are learning, that the doorway to the house of success is being opened for them (p.130).

Analysis indicates that Elsie and Kate bridged the cultural gap between themselves and their students from whom they differed by creating authentic relationships with their students. They used their knowledge of their students' experiential diversity as the basis of those relationships. Elsie told me that in working with children who are

different from herself that "the first thing that comes to mind....is you just have to show

the kids that you care about them and you respect them. It doesn't matter what culture

they are" (I.6-2/p.13). Kate expressed a similar sentiment and shared the mechanism by

which she showed that she cared about her students.

> The most critical thing we do to bridge that gap is listen...Sit down, and
>
> just let the child talk. You listen to their art work. You listen to their
>
> words. You find out about what they are writing about. What are they
>
> drawing about? What are they talking about? On the weekends what do
>
> they do with their families? What's interesting to them? And you listen.
>
> I think that, of all the things you, human beings can do for one another,
>
> really listening is probably one of the kindest things you can do. It can
>
> cure a world of ills" (I.K.6-11/p.10).

Social psychologist Joshua Aronson (2008) explores further how teacher-student

relationships rooted in knowing students as individuals can alter the possibilities that

exist for students in the classroom. He argues that teachers "cultivate a mindset of

insatiable curiosity" about their students as individuals (p. 67). By doing so, teachers

dismantle practices that might be connected with racism and discrimination. Aronson

suggests that teachers bring curiosity to bear on

> ...who the students are, the experiences they have, what they think about
>
> things, and how they think. Curiosity is the diametrical opposite of

stereotyping and prejudice, the assumption that you know who a person

is, what they think, or how they will act simply because you know what

category they belong to. Stereotypes are a lazy mind's best friend, a

mental shortcut to save us the trouble of asking and listening. I try to do

the opposite by getting curious...Curiosity, I have learned, tends to be

contagious; when I model it to my students by asking them questions

about themselves as individuals and their individual opinions in class

discussions, they become more curious about one another, more

respectful, more open. True curiosity is not a tactic; it is a mindset that

cannot be faked (p. 68).

Just as Aronson (2008) suggests, Elsie and Kate's earlier quotes testify to the curiosity

they felt toward their students and their lives.

In the next few paragraphs, I look at Aronson's second point about curiosity:

through a teacher's curiosity about different ways of being, students may acquire a sense

of openness and respect for different cultural practices and beliefs. This may seem in

some ways to be an aside. However, I include this discussion, because this study is

situated within the context of multicultural education, and one of the goals of

multicultural education is ensuring that students who differ from each other can interact

positively and productively (Sleeter & Grant, 1987; Banks & Banks 2008). Below I

discuss how the teachers used the knowledge of their students' personal cultures to

bridge cultural gaps between students and to encourage their students to see difference as a given element of our society.

Experiential Diversity as a Means of Developing Open-Mindedness to Difference

The two participants stated that they used their awareness and understanding of their students' experiential knowledge as a way of encouraging the children to be open to and interested in learning about different ways of life. Elsie told me of class discussions around different religions and what they meant for her in the classroom.

> What I'll say to the kids is, "That's right. Some people believe..." So what
>
> I try to do is acknowledge them but also make sure that I pave the way
>
> for other kids who may have different belief systems. When I say, "pave
>
> the way," I don't want to agree with one child by excluding another's
>
> beliefs (I.E.5-14/p.1).

By approaching the experiential knowledge of the children with curiosity and open-mindedness, Elsie created opportunities for the children to learn about other ways of being in the world. Her curiosity was in evidence during a class discussion about a book whose main character was from Korea (FN.E.2-06). As Elsie introduced the book to the class, a child called out "Hey, that looks like Alexandra!" Alexandra, the small girl born in Laos, sat among her peers and looked at the character depicted on the front cover. Elsie turned to the girl and asked, "What do you think? Can I talk about it?" By "it" she was referring to the physical characteristics of the character. Alexandra nodded her consent, and the class held an animated discussion of how the character physically

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resembled Alexandra. They talked about how the eye shape of the white and black

children in the class was different than the character's and Alexandra's. Elsie asked the

girl to share what language her family spoke at home and contrasted that with what the

character spoke. Elsie taught the class how to say hello in Korea. Many children

shouted out that they knew how to say hello or count to 10 in Spanish. Elsie nodded,

affirming their statements. Before ending the conversation, Elsie informed the class,

"Alexandra may look like someone from Korea, but she is from Laos." This discussion

seems to demonstrate how Elsie "paved the way" for the children's growing knowledge

of and acceptance of different ways of looking, speaking, and being in the world.

In a similar manner, Kate described her interactions with students around their

personal cultures as "planting the seeds" for their future understandings of different

cultures. She hoped that her students would leave her classroom with a "broader

mindset" about how different people interacted and lived in the world (I.K.5-16/p. 5).

Her class discussed different religious beliefs during the winter holiday season. At

another time, the class discussed different types of communities (FN.K.3-09). In

conjunction with a social studies unit, the children shared what types of homes they

lived in within their community. Some lived in single family homes, while others lived

in the public housing development. Through the stories they shared, the class came to

see the advantages and disadvantages of different homes. A child living in the single-

family home might have a trampoline in his backyard, but the children living in the

housing development had more friends next door. Through these discussions the

children learned about communities within their community. They learned about difference within the same community.

Through their curiosity, both participants seemed to be helping their students become "more curious about one another, more respectful, more open" (Aronson, 2008, p. 68). In doing so, they hoped to shape how their students would interact and think about others in the future. Kate spoke specifically about her goals for her students for both their current level of development and for their future understandings of diversity.

> You know, they're little kids. They're still egocentric and to a certain
> extent some of it's going to go over their heads to be sure, but you always
> present it. You present it and hopefully, at some point, bing, it rings a
> bell. And I think that's the groundwork when you're talking about
> diversity in this world of ours and trying to lay the ground work for a
> broader mind set (I.K.5-16/p.4-5).

For Kate the "groundwork" for a "broader mind set" meant shaping her classroom to include discussions about differences in the students' homes and in their lives. By thinking about the different types of homes the children might live in, the different languages they might speak, and the different ways they might look, Elsie and Kate seemed to use the children's experiential diversity to develop a sense of curiosity and respect for difference and diversity.

In the two sections, I look at how Elsie and Kate acquired knowledge about their students beyond what they could gather through their work with the children in the

classroom and how they used that knowledge. Analysis suggests that the participants built relationships with their students' families that supported them in their work with the children. Additionally, the findings indicate that the participants drew on their knowledge of others within the school and their community to supplement their knowledge of their students' lives outside of school and the meaning of those lives for their work in school.

Relationships with Family Members

Elsie and Kate worked to build relationships with their students' family members. Although the teachers learned a great deal from the students themselves, the analysis indicates that they viewed the family members as experts on their children. In Elsie and Kate's view, their work in the classroom was made more successful by drawing on the expertise of the families. Additionally, by working with the families, the participants felt they could help the families work more effectively to ensure the children's success in school.

Elsie and Kate rejected the idea that school and home were separate worlds. Kate stated that the children "bring the sum of their experiences into the classroom" (I.K.5-27/p.21). Elsie said that the children carried "the microcosms" of their home worlds into the classroom (I.E.6-11/p.1). It seems that Elsie and Kate viewed severing the connection between the child's home life and school life as detrimental to the children and their educational process. Like Irvine (2003), the participants seemed to believe that of greater importance than a possible mismatch between white teachers and culturally diverse students was "a type of seamlessness between home and school" (p.

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7). Working from the assumption of the importance of a home-school connection, Elsie and Kate set out to build and maintain positive relationships with their students' families.

Building and Maintaining Positive Relationships

The participants used a variety of approaches to building relationships with the families. Newsletters went home weekly in Elsie's class, although she stated that she would "rather stand in the doorway and have a conversation" than rely on formal communication like the newsletters (FN.E.6-12/p.2). Realizing the difficulty of relying solely on face-to-face interactions, Elsie sent home the newsletters as well as many notes related to happenings within the classroom. She wrote notes about a child's spilled lunch, about a child's indecipherable comment, and about reminders for a field trip slip. When a child came in after an appointment with an allergist, Elsie sent a note home about how the child's day went after she returned to school (FN.E.2-06). However, Elsie also realized the limitations of notes given the different lives of her students. While trying to find a way for the little boy moving back to India to stay in contact with one of his closest friends, Elsie relied on email instead of notes (FN.E.5-21). Elsie emailed the boy's father with the girl's email address. Because of the parents' limited English, she felt that email was a more effective form of communication.

Kate used several different strategies for building relationships with family members. When a little boy was having difficulty with his classmates, she phoned his mother to discuss how the parents and Kate might work together to help him interact more effectively with his peers (FN.K.4-02). Kate also considered the nightly homework

to be a form of communication. By looking over and/or helping with the homework, parents would "know what the kids are learning in school" (FN.K.3-09). To bring the family members into the classroom, Kate worked with the children to develop a "Learning Celebration:" an event designed by the children to show their families what they had learned over the first half of the school year (FN.K.3-09). When the families arrived, the children showed them around the room and described the different types of learning activities that occurred in each section of the room. Through the event, Kate hoped that the families would "better understand what the children were doing and learning each day and feel more comfortable" in joining them for future events.

The participants believed their relationships with family members were so important that they took actions to protect them. One of the boys in Kate's class walked home from school several winter afternoons in his sneakers rather than his snow boots (FN.K.2-19/p.3). The mother called Kate after school, because she was worried her son would get sick. The mother had spoken with the boy about wearing his boots, but he still refused to wear them. Eventually it seems the mother turned to Kate for help. While Kate felt this was a "parenting issue," she spoke to the boy the next day and made sure he changed back into his snow boots before heading home. Her actions seem to indicate how important she felt it was to maintain a positive relationship with the boy's mother. She disagreed with the mother's assumption that the teacher should step in, but nevertheless she honored the mother's request.

Elsie had a mother who volunteered in her classroom one afternoon a week. Because Elsie felt the woman was effective in her interactions with the children, she

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often had her teach a skill to a small group of children. After a month or so, Elsie noticed that the woman did not seem comfortable with the teaching role, so she changed the type of activity she asked her to do. Elsie explained that she "was asking too much of her. She wasn't comfortable, and I didn't want her to be uncomfortable in the classroom" (FN.E.3-23). Elsie, it seems, protected her relationship with the mother by noting her discomfort and taking steps to eliminate it.

The analysis indicates that the relationships between the teachers and their students' families were important ones for Elsie and Kate. Since these relationships seemed to act as a means of ensuring that the home and school lives of the students were not separate, the participants took steps to foster and maintain positive relationships. In the next section, I look at how the participants viewed the family members as experts on their children and their home cultures.

Drawing on Family Members as Experts

Analysis of the data suggests that Elsie and Kate viewed family members as experts on their children as well as on their own cultural communities. They frequently drew on the families' expertise in these two areas.

In Elsie's room a little girl seemed to be feeling distraught over an on-again, off-again relationship with another little girl in the class. The mother emailed Elsie and asked her to separate the girls at times throughout the day (FN.E.5-28). Elsie recounted the mother's concerns and stated that the email confirmed her own observations. At another time, a parent from India spoke to Elsie about his son's fear of being yelled at in class. She told me about the incident.

I would talk to [the father] about something, let's say [the boy's]

academics...and [the father] said something like, "Mrs. Sparks yells at

him." So I knew what [the boy] is telling Dad is not connecting with

what I'm telling him. And as much as I adored [the boy], I was able to

say, "You're right." I'm not angry, but I am the one that has to be, give

him the directions, be firm, so it's that mean voice. And I used that term

with another, another English-only parent, if I said I used that "mean

teacher voice," they would understand, but with him I had to say, "Yeah,

that mean voice"...My being firm wasn't working for him, so I had to

assign someone to help him (I.4-07/p.9-10).

In this case, Elsie felt the child misinterpreted her firmness as yelling. She attributed the

misinterpretation to cultural differences, but she listened to what this boy's father told

her. She respected his expertise about his child. By doing so, she gained greater

knowledge about the boy and his family's cultural norms and expectations. As a result,

she altered her interactions with the boy and paired him up with another student who

could help him stay on task and complete assignments. She told me about her

approach: "The best thing is to be able to see parents as much as I possibly can and chat

about stuff and have them tell me what's going on. And then I can say, 'Oh, this is

impacting her in this way" (I.E.6-02/p.10). By listening, respecting, and honoring what

the families knew about their children, the teachers felt they could better meet their

students' needs. Analysis of the data indicates that, by drawing on the parents'

knowledge, the teachers seemed to feel they could more readily bridge cultural gaps between themselves and their students.

At other times the participants drew on their students' families as experts about a particular cultural community. Kate discussed how her class responded to the holidays in years past. She spoke in relation to the class that had children who were Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, and Christian. She said that "every holiday that came up, you know, someone would come in and talk to us about it" (I.K.4-07/p.15). I asked who would come in and speak to the class.

> Parents. I contacted them, and I said, "Would you be interested in
>
> coming in?" Because the kids would talk about the holidays, like
>
> Ramadan, and stuff like that. And I'd say to them, "Okay, tell us about
>
> that." And then I'd call the parents and say, "Would you be interested in
>
> coming in?" Because the children are talking about it, and frankly, I'm
>
> not informed enough to speak to it, and I don't want them to be
>
> misinformed. I think it's very important for them to get accurate
>
> information. And you know, and to meet nice people who represent
>
> other ideas (I.K.4-07/p.15-16).

Kate brought in parents to act as experts on topics related to the communities of their lives. In this case the communities were religious. The topic of different religions was beyond Kate's own areas of knowledge, so she drew on the parents. As noted earlier, the participants often felt that they lacked the necessary knowledge to address all of the

different forms of diversity they faced in their classrooms. In addition to building a bridge to support her own knowledge of the students' lives outside of school, Kate was broadening her students' understanding of what it means to live in a society in which so many different types of beliefs exist side-by-side.

Elsie explored a different cultural community with her class when she took a parent up on her suggestion to write a class cheer and teach it to the children (FN.E. 3-11). The parent was a cheerleading coach, so she drew upon her knowledge of the cheerleading community to devise a cheer and then teach the children about the practices of that community. She taught them about synchronization, articulation, and cooperation and the roles played by these skills in the cheerleading community. The class learned these skills as well as different ways of interacting and supporting each other. By drawing on the interests and talents of one of the parents, Elsie strengthened her relationship with this mother. This relationship was of value later; this was the mother who was worried about her daughter's friendship with another girl in the class. Because of the strength of this relationship, Elsie felt she was more able to converse and problem-solve with the mother with relative ease. She used the relationship to overcome obstacles and meet the girls' needs (FN.E.5-28).

Supporting Families

The findings indicate that the participants viewed the parents as experts on their children and on their cultural communities, but Elsie and Kate also felt that there were times when they needed to assist the families in supporting their children to flourish socially, emotionally, and academically in the school environment. In some cases, the

participants felt that family members were not assuming full responsibility for their children and needed to be "parented" themselves. In other cases, the participants felt that family member either lacked the knowledge or resources necessary to meet their children's needs fully, so the teachers provided either the necessary knowledge or resources. The two women used their relationships with the families as a means of addressing these concerns.

Both participants used the phrase "parenting the parents" to describe how they structured their interactions with family members at times. In these instances, the teachers felt that some course of action on the parents' part was interfering with the children's well-being.

Elsie spoke about how she was willing to "cross the line" with the parents when she felt they were not assuming responsibility for their child's well being (I.E.2-06/p.1). She spoke about this issue in relation to tooth brushing.

> You know that's one of those fine line things. And I think I'm willing to
>
> cross the line a little bit...Because there are some kids that are coming in
>
> and I'll ask them, "Did you brush your teeth last night?" "No." "Did you
>
> brush your teeth this morning?" "No"... When I asked the class one
>
> morning to let me know how many brushed their teeth, less than 50% of
>
> them had brushed their teeth...So, that's the gray area where you might
>
> be thinking, that note about tooth brushing may not be appropriate for a
>
> teacher to send home, but then, if parents aren't making sure their kids

are brushing their teeth, I'm okay with letting them know that. And

letting them know we notice (FN.E.2-06/p.2-3).

As Elsie's word choices indicate, she worried less about offending parents and more

about ensuring that the children's health needs were being met. In conjunction with a

health lesson on tooth brushing, Elsie addressed this issue in her weekly newsletter. I

asked her what her intent was in putting the reminder in the newsletter. "Oh, what was

my intent? Just for the parents to have that realization and to remember to assume part

of their responsibilities as a parent...Live up to them." Elsie was willing to "cross the

line" and "parent the parent" if she felt her students' parents were not assuming full

responsibility for their children.

Kate spoke of acting in a similar manner. She related an incident from a previous

school year.

> We had a kid, he never got—he wasn't eligible for free lunch, and he
>
> would pack his own lunch, 'cause the people at home couldn't get out of
>
> bed to do it. This baby came to school—I would always check, because
>
> he would come to school with things in dirty containers. And he would
>
> come to school like with a fist-full of Cheez Its that obviously he took out
>
> of a box. And I would say to him, "That's not a whole lunch." And I'd
>
> get on the phone again, repeatedly had to get on the phone...Sometimes
>
> you have to step into those parenting roles (I.K.3-26/p.8).

Kate was willing to "step into" a parenting role by calling the family to make sure this child's dietary needs were being met. In Kate's opinion, it seems, this child's health was at-risk, and his school work suffered as a result of his parents' actions or inactions. Kate "crossed the line" to ensure that the parents assumed responsibility for their child's well-being so that she could address his school needs.

Juxtaposed to these scenarios were others in which the teachers assumed that family members were willing to accept responsibility for their children but lacked either the knowledge or the resources to do so. In these cases, the teachers did not "cross the line" or even "parent the parent." Instead, it seems, they gently prodded or guided the parents toward understanding what they did not know, altered their expectations, or provided resources to meet the family's needs.

The little boy from India broke his leg one weekend (FN.E.2-17/p.8). Elsie learned of the injury from the ESOL teacher who was informed about it by the boy's older brother. Although the boy had a walking cast, he had not yet returned to school when the ESOL teacher talked to Elsie. The two wondered if maybe the boy's family did not know that he could come to school with the cast. They hypothesized that cultural expectations in India might not allow someone to attend school with a cast. As they spoke, Elsie created a plan. "I'll call the family and say we can't wait until he comes back to school." By contacting the family and telling them that the boy was missed, she could convey that cultural norms in the United States allowed children to attend school with a broken leg. In this example, Elsie seems to have assumed that the parents were accepting full responsibility for the child's well-being, but they may have lacked

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information about what was acceptable and expected in the United States. She took steps to provide them with the necessary information. She "couched" the information by saying that the class missed the boy. In doing so, she told me she hoped to be "respectful of any cultural differences" that might exist between the family's expectation and those of the school.

Another little girl came to school with a backpack that "reeked" of cat spray (I.E.2-06/p.4). Drawing on what she knew of the family's strained financial resources, Elsie sent home a note addressing the problem and offering a solution. "I sent a note home saying just that I think the cat peed on her backpack, and would you like me to send another backpack home to you because I don't think it comes out when you wash 'em." Elsie's comments indicate that she assumed the parent would take steps to remedy the problem by attempting to wash the backpack. Since the parents' solution seemed unlikely to work, Elsie offered to supply another backpack from the extras kept in the school guidance counselor's office. Elsie used what she knew of the family from her interactions with them as the basis for her actions. When necessary, she utilized resources at her disposal to assist her students and their families.

In navigating the cultural gaps, the participants seemed to make demands of their students' families, but they also seemed to make demands of themselves in terms of the families. Elsie phrased it very succinctly. "[The family's] role is to care as much about their child's education as I do…Then my responsibility is also to know what their limits are" (I.6-11/p.10). Kate said much the same thing. "I can't be yap, yap, yapping" at the parents; "I have to respect where they are in life too" (I.K.4-07/p.5). Analysis

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revealed that the participants would "parent the parent" and "cross the line" when they felt that a child's needs were going unmet, but they also felt responsible to the families with whom they worked. For example, Kate spoke about being careful with the cost of field trips (FN.K.3-04). Even a $2 field trip might be difficult for some families to manage financially. Elsie intended to alter the homework format after she learned that many families found that homework given on a monthly basis was too difficult to complete (FN.E.6-11). For Elsie and Kate, analysis indicates that knowing their families "limits" and "where they are in life" referred to understanding, as much as possible, how the work of the classroom was impacting students at home and, vice versa, how the home lives of the students were affecting their schoolwork.

Analysis of the data indicates that Elsie and Kate utilized their relationships with families to navigate the cultural gaps between themselves and the students from whom they differed. The participants took steps to build and maintain strong relationships with family members, and they viewed those family members as experts on their children and on their home culture. However, at times, both participants stated that they were willing to "cross the line" and take on the role of "parenting the parents." This occurred when they felt that parents were not assuming full responsibility for meeting their children's needs. In contrast, when the participants knew of cultural differences or challenges facing a family, they did not "parent the parent." Instead they offered support to families by providing them with information and/or resources they might lack. The findings suggest that, by building and maintaining relationships with family

members, Elsie and Kate felt they were more successful in helping the children to grow

and thrive emotionally, socially, and academically within the classroom.

Relationships with Co-Workers

In addition to their relationships with the families, the findings indicate that the

participants relied on their relationships with their co-workers to support their efforts in

educating children who differed from themselves. The data suggest they sought

information and emotional support from the school psychologist, the guidance

counselor, the social worker, the behavior specialist, and their fellow teachers. Elsie told

me that as a teacher working with so many different children "you can't do it on your

own" (I.4-17/p.13). Mirroring that sentiment, Kate stated that as a teacher "you need lots

of support" (I.K.5-16/p.9). She explained further what she meant by support. "These

people are invaluable, because you can go to them and ask them and they're going to

help me think it out, think it through" (I.K.5-16/p.10). The individuals to whom she was

referring were the school staff listed earlier. "They just have so much information," she

said, and these individuals utilized this information to help the participants "think out"

and "think through" the meaning of cultural differences within their classrooms. The

types of information varied. Some knew about cultural norms related to different

countries from which a child might originate. Others knew about the individual lives of

the children. Regardless of what type of information the support staff possessed, the

data indicates that the participants sought out the advice and knowledge of others to

improve their teaching practice.

Kate spoke about her need to gather information about children who lived in homes with different cultural values and norms than her own (I.K.5-16/p/10). The differences might be due to language, race/ethnicity, religion, or economic issues. She recalled times when she encountered issues in her classroom that she was unable to interpret; she "just did not have enough information." Specifically, she referred to the Indian student whose father hit him with the bottom of a shoe. Kate remembered the moral conundrum she faced at the time.

> I was uncomfortable. I didn't know quite what to say to the kids. You
>
> know obviously a kid having a mark on his face. That's not a good thing,
>
> but what do you do? Do you report that to DCYF (The Division for
>
> Children, Youth and Families)? Do you, what do you do with that?
>
> Because, again, there are times when, you know, the cultural differences.
>
> In this culture, mmmmm, you don't do that, but in their culture (shoulder
>
> shrug), you know, so sometimes you have to be careful...I did go to the
>
> guidance counselor. And I said, "Here's what happened, but here's my
>
> understanding of it." And I talked to the ESOL teacher. She knew
>
> exactly what was going on. Those people are invaluable, 'cause they
>
> know the culture as well as the languages, you know, which is why I
>
> went to her, and said, "I'm thinking there's something here that doesn't
>
> meet the eye, and I'm not getting it." And that's when she said [told me

about the meaning of the shoe in Indian culture]. She said, "Yup, you're

right." And I went, "Oh, I'm so glad I asked" (I.K.5-16/p.10).

Kate's words indicate the discomfort she felt when confronted with a situation that did

not match her own cultural expectations. Rather than acting on her own cultural

knowledge which might have resulted in a call to DCYF, Kate sought information about

possible cultural norms of the student. She stated again that the support of the school

staff was "invaluable" to her in learning about and responding appropriately to other

cultural norms.

Kate summarized how she drew on the knowledge base of others.

So [the guidance counselor and the social workers] are very helpful and

the ESOL people are very helpful. And then if I have friends that have

been somewhere, like [another teacher] taught in South America, and my

housemates have taught in Hungary and South Korea. So, there are

people in my life who I can go to and say, "You know, what's the scoop

with this? What's the scoop with that?" (I.K.5-16/p.10).

To be effective in her interactions with her students and their families, Kate needed to

know about the belief systems that guided their actions and interactions. To reduce the

possibility of tensions around misunderstandings due to cultural differences, Kate

compensated for her "lack of experience and background" with a particular culture by

seeking out individuals who might know more about it and asking questions of them.

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Elsie also noted how important it was to learn about and better understand cultural differences that might make teaching children who differed from her more difficult or less effective. Several examples have already been discussed. Those incidents include the misunderstandings of the "cranky teacher" voice by the Indian student and the differing expectations about school attendance for the Indonesian boy with the broken leg. Here, one additional example is presented to develop more fully how Elsie drew upon the knowledge and expertise of others within the school to help her understand and navigate differences between her own cultural knowledge and those of the families with whom she worked.

During the course of this research, Elsie encountered a difficulty with one of the families around sending in money to support a classroom activity (FN.E.2-06). In this case, Elsie felt that the parents had the necessary financial resources but were opting to not send in the money for other reasons. Elsie was unsure of what the exact reason might be, and she told me that her best guess about the reasons were not something she could "share" with me. To do so would have violated "the privacy and confidentiality" of the student and family. Because Elsie wanted to be sure that her assessment of the situation was accurate, she consulted with the guidance counselor as a way of "checking out" her interpretation of the situation. The counselor "kind of supported" Elsie in her thinking, and they agreed that she should continue to attempt to contact the parents by notes and phone calls. When these proved fruitless, she again sought out the guidance counselor. Eventually, the guidance counselor was able to make contact with the parents and secure their permission and the cost of the activity. Elsie's goal was that the

child be a fully participating member of the classroom. To achieve that end, Elsie stated, "If I know that I'm not going to be able to communicate effectively, I will find somebody who will" (I.6-12/p.14). The "somebody who will" might be the ESOL teacher, the school psychologist, the behavior specialist, other teachers, or their neighbor.

The findings presented here substantiate the claim that the participants drew on the knowledge base of whoever they could to ensure that cultural differences did not interfere with their ability to meet their students' social, emotional, and academic needs. When Elsie and Kate noted a behavior or action that did not meet their expectations based on their own cultural knowledge, it seems they turned to others to increase their own level of understanding and comfort in working with children and families who were culturally different from themselves.

Conclusion: Tying Together Experiential Diversity and Relationships with Families and Co-Workers

The analysis suggests that, in navigating the cultural gaps between themselves and the students from whom they differed (e.g. racially, ethnically, linguistically, and/or economically), the participants learned about and built upon their students' "experiential diversity" to make their classrooms places that valued all students and to make their classroom interactions and practices meaningful and relevant to their students regardless of their home culture. Experiential diversity was also used by the participants as an avenue to help their students learn to respect and value cultural differences within their current lives in the classroom and in relation to their future lives in the larger US society. To better understand their students' experiential diversity, the

participants utilized relationships with their students' families and their co-workers to supplement their own knowledge of other cultures. Through developing a sense of their students' experiential diversity and drawing on the knowledge of family members and co-workers, the participants bridged the cultural gaps between themselves and the students from whom they differed.

Metaphors within this Study

Rethinking the Cultural Gap and the Bridge as Metaphors

This study has made repeated use of a gap and a bridge as metaphors to explain at least in part the mechanisms that divide and the mechanisms that bring together white teachers and culturally diverse students. Since, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) note, metaphors give shape and structure to thinking, it is important to look critically at the gap and bridge metaphors and what they might imply for this investigation.

The gap and bridge metaphors imply that there is a chasm that lies between the participants and the students who differ from them racially, ethnically, linguistically, and/or economically and that a structure needs to be constructed to span the chasm. From the perspective offered by these metaphors, the white teachers seem to stand on one side of the gap and the bridge; the culturally diverse students stand on the other. Standing on their respective sides, both or neither party may decide to move across the bridge; both or neither may decide to stay on their opposing sides. If both parties choose to move across the bridge, the groups come at each other. Will they meet in the middle and face each other? Will one group give way for the other to pass, or will they decide to move in the same direction? If so, will the students follow the teacher back to

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her side of the chasm, or will the students convince the teacher to join them on their side? What if neither party attempts to cross the bridge, and both parties stay on their opposing sides? What does this mean for the educational process?

The findings of this study indicate that the gap and bridge metaphors inaccurately depict how the participants viewed diversity within their classrooms. Rather than being divided by cultural difference, the participants shaped their classroom practices and interactions to encourage, and approach with curiosity, multiple viewpoints and ways of being.

Re-envisioning Interactions around Cultural Difference

As opposed to the gap and bridge metaphors, Elsie suggested a different metaphor: the overlapping and intersecting circles of a Venn diagram. In describing the metaphor, Elsie explained how the individual worlds of each of the classroom members including the teacher come together to create a new community: the classroom . "I think we all have our own little worlds [at home]," she told me. "You know, your family is your microcosm and then your friends are a broader part of your microcosm... We all bring our own experiences into this classroom (I.E.6-11/p.1)." Elsie commented further on how she conceptualized the classroom in relation to these different worlds and microcosms.

We've just created another world. It's like a Venn diagram. All those

worlds combine and then we created this little world right here.

Somehow all of these personalities in this classroom created the

classroom that we are. It's different than the classroom next door...We

are a class. We are a community. We're not just a bunch of separate

bodies (I.E.6-11/p.1).

The Venn diagram is formed by the overlapping and intersecting worlds of the

individuals within the classroom. Elsie noted that "what happens for my students at

home is so different than probably what happened for me at home. And maybe not so

different" (I.E.6-11/p.2) Although Elsie may not have shared racial, ethnic, religious,

economic, or linguistic membership with some of her students, she may have shared

other experiences in different types of cultural communities. As a cultural agent with

experiences in many different cultural communities, she shared some beliefs, values,

and traditions with her students just as she had some that differed. For example, Elsie

may have played the same games with her siblings and her friends that her students

played, and she may have followed holiday traditions that greatly resembled her

students'. The circles of their life experiences overlapped in these similarities and

remained separate where there were differences. The classroom community was a

creation that existed in the overlap. Rather than the chasm suggested by the gap and

bridge metaphors, the Venn diagram suggests communion. As Elsie stated, in her

classroom the teacher and the students were "not just a bunch of separate bodies;" they

were joined together. They were joined together by their similarities, but they were not

pulled apart by their differences. As Elsie learned more about the experiential diversity

of the children, and as they grew in their understanding of school's relevance to their lives outside of school, the areas of potential overlap expanded.

The Venn diagram metaphor does not suggest that what falls outside the overlap be ignored. Rather, it seems to point to the possibility of exploring what makes the children differ from each other and from their teacher. As noted earlier, Aronson (2008) argues that curiosity toward other ways of life generates opportunities to value and respect differences. The non-overlapping areas of the Venn diagram provide myriad possibilities for fostering curiosity toward difference.

Kate explained how she used multicultural materials as well as her students' experiential diversity to explore the differences within the children's lives. As the class explored what it meant to live in Africa as part of their African dance celebration (FN.K.3/13), the children also examined how they were similar and different from the children living in Africa. As the class read books about African and studied the world map, they asked "well, what if..." questions. Kate said, "That's their curiosity. When they say, 'What about such-and-such?' I will follow that train. I will follow that line of thought" (I.K.5-16/p.4). Kate designed activities and followed the children's curiosity to help the children "develop a sense of other"—that there are other ways of living and being in the world. This process of discovering the "other" was not the "othering" that many scholars argue marginalizes populations outside of the white, middle-class (Delpit, 1995; Polakow, 1993; Valencia, 1997). Instead these explorations of other ways of living and being acted as a "relational process through which a definition of Other as well as Self, of Them as well as Us...becomes more focal in conscious awareness"

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(Erickson, 2008, p. 47). While there might be difference, there might also be similarity. By drawing attention to the similarities and differences, Kate seemed to be helping her students learn more about both the "other" and the "self." From the perspective offered by the Venn diagram, Kate led her class in an exploration of the areas of overlap and areas of separation. Unlike the separations inherent in the gap and bridge metaphors, the areas were not separated by a chasm, and they need not be problematic.

Erickson (2008) writes that "the presence of cultural difference in society does not necessarily lead to conflict" (p. 43). Conflict, he argues, occurs when cultural differences are viewed as "borders" which may not be easily crossed. The alternative is to consider cultural differences as "boundaries" which acknowledge differences but do not attempt to contain them. Movement is possible across a boundary. The bridge and gap metaphors seem to suggest that cultural differences are borders that divide and separate groups of people. The Venn diagram, however, suggests that directing curiosity toward the overlapping and non-overlapping areas might bring about interactions that better meet teachers' and students' needs in their work within the classroom as well as their lives outside of the classroom.

The findings of this study suggest that conflict need not occur when cultural differences come together. These two teachers navigated the cultural gaps between themselves and the students from whom they differed by drawing on and capitalizing on their students' experiential diversity to meet their academic needs as well as show how they valued their students' life experiences. By doing so, these two teachers

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provided opportunities to learn about differences as boundaries which may be crossed in friendship and without conflict.

In considering the differences which divide groups of people and incite conflict, one issue still remains unexamined within the context of this study: race. The multicultural education research indicates that one of the most salient features around which teachers and their students may experience difficulties is racial group membership (Howard, 2006; Sleeter, 2008; Tatum, 1999). In the next section, I examine how these two teachers understood their positionality as white teachers and what that positionality meant to their teaching.

Whiteness in the Classrooms

As white teachers from middle-class, mono-lingual backgrounds, the two participants differed from many of their students racially, ethnically, economically, and/or linguistically. The discourse of the two participants indicates that they were well aware of the fact that they were white and of middle-class background. When I asked Elsie how she might have benefitted from her racial group membership, she responded without pausing.

> I've had, I am so sure that given where I grew up and (pause), um (pause), the, just being middle class was enough for me to make my way in the, in the world. I think that I've been pretty fortunate, and if I was an inner city African American girl, Hispanic girl, would I have had the same options that I have now? Would the expectations be the same? Just

the fact that I am a, a white woman has paved the way for me as it has for

many others. I've never felt that in the different places I've lived that my

race has *gotten* in the way…but I, um, but I'm pretty sure that it's

probably helped me get to where—even in, even in ways that I haven't

been able to see (I.E.1-26/p.11).

Elsie was very clear. She benefitted from her cultural background. Being white and

middle-class gave her advantages; she considered herself to be "pretty fortunate" as

compared to others who might be African American or Hispanic and/or raised in an

inner-city community. Unlike scholars who argue that white individuals are unaware of

the privileges associated with being white (Kendall, 2006; Marx, 2006; Marx &

Pennington, 2003; McIntyre 1997a, 1997b; McIntosh, 2004), Elsie knew there were

privileges. They "paved the way for [her]," yet she seemed to be unable or perhaps

unwilling to list them. Her speech lacked fluency. She paused several times, and she

repeated words and phrases. In her final sentence, she equivocated and used two

qualifiers: "pretty sure" and "even in ways that I haven't been able to see." Elsie

seemed uncomfortable discussing this topic, and the pauses indicate perhaps that Elsie

had never fully explored the ramifications of being white. While it is impossible to

know what the pauses indicated, it seems possible that her resistance is linked with the

idea that where there are advantages to being white there are disadvantages to being not

white. King (1991) labels such thinking "dysconscious racism" (p. 135).

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Dysconsciousness is an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions,

attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequality and

exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as a

given...Dysconscious racism is a form of racism that tacitly accepts

dominant White norms and privileges. It is not the *absence* of

consciousness (that is not unconsciousness) but an *impaired* consciousness

or distorted way of thinking about race...Uncritical ways of thinking

about racial inequality accept certain culturally sanctioned assumptions,

myths, and beliefs that justify the social and economic advantages White

people have as a result of subordinating diverse others.

Elsie's discourse seems to, at the very least, indicate her discomfort with the topic of

discussion. As Marx (2006) notes, racism has such "a negative connotation" (p. 9) that

few white people are willing to engage in open discussions of their own culpability even

if that culpability is rooted in historic norms. While Elsie would likely have rejected

"active racism" in the form of "blatant, intentional acts of racial bigotry and

discrimination" (Tatum, 1999, p. 11 as quoted in Marx, 2006, p. 9), she may not have

resisted passive racism in the same way. Elsie's pauses and qualifiers may be a form of

passive racism. Scholars argue that passive racism (Kailin, 1999, 2002), dysconscious

racism (King, 1991), and/or liberal racism (Sleeter, 1993/2005) permeate the American

culture, so it seems very possible that Elsie like other white Americans "breathed it in

and it became a part of [her]" (Marx, 2006, p. 10).

When I asked Kate how she benefitted from being white, her response was unclear. She shrugged and said, "That's a really good question" (I.K.3-13/p.14). She paused for about six seconds before she continued. "I kinda, I kinda don't know." She paused again.

"I mean certainly, if we, the short time [my family] lived down south, I know that if I was driving and got pulled over, I imagine my experience might have been better than a black person. I don't know though. I don't know (I.K.3-13/p.14)

Kate then related the story of a black male friend in college who was frequently pulled over for speeding. She and her friend discussed the unfairness of his being pulling over. She told me, "He didn't do anything. You know his car was fine. He wasn't speeding." She recalled her discussions with her friend about the injustice of his being pulled over, because he was black. She and her friend agreed that being pulled over was related to his race, not his gender. While Kate was unable to list specific advantages due to her whiteness, she also did not deny that she had benefitted from the color of her skin. In fact she stated that she was "certain" that she had benefitted from being white, but she could not state clearly how she benefitted. Just as Elsie seemed uncertain about the role of whiteness in her life, Kate seemed to experience some uncertainty too. Perhaps, like Elsie, there existed in her response a form of passive racism. Perhaps, as Marx (2006) argues, "no one is immune to [passive racism's] grasp" (Marx, 2006, p. 10)

I asked these questions of Elsie and Kate early in the research process, but, as we moved further into the research, we returned to the issue of what it might mean to be a white, middle-class, mono-lingual teacher. At this point, we had discussed how their experiences in different communities might have impacted their beliefs about teaching during the current school year at Liberty School. Returning to the role that whiteness might play in their classrooms, I asked both women what it meant to be a white teacher. Elsie sighed and then responded.

> For me, [being white] doesn't matter. It didn't matter when I was in
> California. It didn't matter when I was in California. It didn't matter
> when I was in Alaska as far as teaching, because, for *me* it didn't matter, I
> would try, all of these places I've tried to learn something about the
> culture in which I'm living. So, in California, it was really easy because I
> had friends from so many cultural backgrounds. One friend was a
> migrant worker—or her parents were migrant workers when she was
> growing up—so she could explain that. In Alaska, since I had known
> people that lived in the village, didn't talk about school very much, but
> kind of got the lay of the land, knew that in some cases they weren't
> happy about white teachers being there because, they might be, that
> concern about losing their culture....Around here, I don't think it so much
> matters to parents, because we're in [New England], but I also look and
> think, boy it would be nice for our kids to have male teachers, um,

teachers of color here. I think it would be great, but I don't think it

matters as long as you're a good teacher (I.E.6-11/p.10-11).

Elsie replied that her whiteness did not matter to *her*. As a cultural agent with

experiences in many varied settings, it seems Elsie felt capable of taking on the

challenges of working with students who may look or sound different than she did.

What mattered more than a teacher's gender or race was his or her skill as a teacher. To

be an effective teacher, Elsie took opportunities to learn about "something about the

culture" of the communities in which she taught and lived. She learned about the daily

practices and activities of her students so that she could draw upon the similarities and

differences that she and her students experienced to create a classroom environment that

welcomed all students. She developed a sense of her students' experiential knowledge.

As described earlier, she used this knowledge as the basis for forming strong

relationships with students and families.

Elsie also learned about how she was perceived by members of the different

communities in relation to her race. In the above quote, she specifically referenced the

reactions of some of the native Alaskans who were not pleased "about white teachers"

working in their communities. At other times she spoke about how some of the families

of her Hispanic students in California worried that she might be INS.

After she finished speaking, I responded to her comment. "You said it doesn't

matter to *you*. Who else might it matter for?" She nodded.

Yeah, it might matter to the kids, or it might matter for the parents in that

it would be more comfortable maybe for some parents if they had a

teacher that they could connect with more either via language or race

(I.E.6-11/p.12).

Elsie's discourse clearly indicates that she realized that racial differences might be an

issue for parents. When I asked her if she felt "comfortable" teaching children who

differed from her in so many ways, she shook her head. "Oh no. But I do know that I'll

try to get some information, and I'll draw on who I can" (I.E.6-11/p.13). With all of her

experiences in so many different settings, Elsie believed that she could connect with, and

establish strong supportive relationships with, her students and their families if she

learned of their home lives.

When I asked Kate what it meant to her to be a white teacher, she too referred to

the life experiences she brought with her into her current teaching situation.

I don't think of myself in a color. I think of myself more in terms of my

experiences in life. You know, I don't think of myself as a white

teacher...I think of myself as a person who grew up in a family where

money was tight, but we had what we needed. I came from a family

where my parents didn't know how to get me to college, 'cause they'd

never gone, so we had to work on that. But they did, and they helped me

out, and they let me know how important it was. So I think of myself in

those terms. I don't think of myself as a white teacher (I.K.6-11/p.12).

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Kate paused for a few seconds and then continued. "Um, if I was teaching in Baltimore, I would [think of myself] as a white teacher. It would bring a whole new experience to me, but I'm teaching in white [New England]." Kate referenced Baltimore in particular, she said, because she knew of my teaching experiences there. Kate stated that she thought of herself less as a white person than as a person with a particular set of experiences. She pointed out that, because many of her students were also white, whiteness was not as likely to act as a line of demarcation between her and the majority of her students. In a place like Baltimore, where she presumed there would be more students would be of color, she supposed that she might think of herself as a white teacher. For Kate, whiteness did not act as a differentiator within the context of Liberty School. Instead whiteness and the implications of being white might have been areas of overlap or shared experiences and understandings between her and her students. As a cultural agent, Kate drew on the experiences of her life that had the most meaning. Being white was not as salient to Kate as the experiences of being raised by a struggling family and still graduating from college.

In analyzing the discourse of Elsie and Kate in the above quotes, it seems possible that something remains hidden under the surface of their comments. Neither Elsie nor Kate seemed to be operating from color-blindness (Paley, 1997/2000; Sleeter, 1993/2005). Meaning, neither denied that the race of their students was of importance, and neither suggested that they did not "see" the color of their students. Instead what might to be happening is "white talk" (McIntyre, 1997b).

White talk "serves to insulate white people from examining their individual and collective roles in perpetuating racism" (McIntyre, 1997b, p. 31). Elsie and Kate both shifted the focus of the conversation to the experiences they brought to the classroom that helped them work with culturally diverse students. They did not talk specifically about what it meant to be a white teacher. Elsie ended her comment by stating that what matters is that "you're a good teacher." Kate ended her comments by stating that she did not think of herself as "a white teacher." McIntyre argues that the "maneuverings" of white talk "repel critical conversations" (p. 47). Again, given the tensions around discussions of race and racism within the United States, the teachers' hesitancy to enter into a discussion that might force a critical examination of their own role in perpetuating racism and discrimination is not surprising. However, there always exists the possibility that a white individual will enter into, rather than repel, a "critical conversation."

Kate was not yet done answering my question about the meaning of being a white teacher. She shifted the focus of her comments to address what she felt she had learned throughout the course of this study.

> And has my attitude or my thinking changed after this study? Oh yes.
> How? I think I'm aware of the fact that I need to pay attention in a way
> that I've never paid attention before...I need to pay attention in terms of
> my attitudes, about children and about families. I come back to this a lot,
> about assumptions and not making them. The biases that I have...I just

need to be careful...My job is about the kids and their families and

listening to them. And, and clearing my own cobwebs away, so, like I

say, there is literally space to hold their experiences and their voices in

the spotlight (I.K.6-11/p.12).

For Kate, this research project provided an opportunity to critically reflect on who she

was as a teacher and what it meant to teach children who were similar to and different

from herself in background experiences. As data presented in the next chapter indicates,

Elsie too found that engaging in this research altered her understandings of how her

past experiences played a role in shaping the values and beliefs she carried with her and

acted upon in the classroom. In the next chapter, I discuss how the process of the

research unfolded and what it meant for Kate and Elsie as teachers at Liberty School.

CHAPTER 7

ENGAGING IN AND GROWING THROUGH

THE PROCESS OF THE RESEARCH

In this chapter, I present a finding related to the process of the research: how

interacting throughout the course of this study altered the understandings of the two

teachers by providing them with an opportunity to examine their own autobiographies

and the impact of those autobiographies on their teaching. Many educational scholars

argue that both pre-service and in-service white teachers need to be aware of how their

own autobiographies impact their work in the classroom (see Hollins & Guzman, 2005;

Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996). Succinctly stating the need for teachers to examine their own

autobiographies, Courtney Cazden (1999) notes that white teachers must "reflect on

their own personal and cultural background instead of unthinkingly living it as an

unexamined norm" (p. vii). This seems to be especially true for white, middle-class,

mono-lingual teachers working with students who are of color, who live in poverty,

and/or who speak a language other than English at home (See Sleeter, 2008, for a review

of the relevant research). The findings presented in this chapter indicate that

engagement in this research provided an opportunity for the participants to examine

their autobiographies and consider how those autobiographies shaped their work in the

classroom. Through the interviews, discussions, and interactions that were a part of this

study, both participants revealed that thier understandings of themselves were transformed.

Our engagement in the research process created a dynamic, fluid space that allowed the participants and me to probe and question, critique and analyze, and finally seek clarity and create meaning. While I include methodological details, the focus is on the interactions that occurred between me and the teachers; between the teachers and their pasts, presents, and futures; and between the teachers and I and the various texts and authors. Through these interactions, analysis indicates we altered our understandings of what it means to be a teacher, to hold specific beliefs, and to teach in a specific context. In a manner consistent with Rogoff's work (1990; 1998), the research process acted as a site of transformation. In the following pages, I analyze how this project re-shaped the teachers' understandings of their own lives, their beliefs, and their classroom practices. Additionally, I consider how my own thinking was transformed through my engagement with the two teachers, their maps, and the related texts.

I begin with a few of the comments offered by Elsie and Kate about the research process. These comments occurred during some of the final interviews. At this point, both women had been in possession of their cultural maps for over a month. Additionally, we had critically discussed several texts related to their teaching. Elsie's comments came in response to a reference I made about how the process affected her thinking about her work. The quote begins with my remark to her and follows with her response.

R: It seems like stuff happened for you [during this research]. What is that?

E: Stuff *really* happened for me...I've been able to reflect and go: 'Wow! This really *is* my belief. These *are* my core values. This is what I want to bring to my classroom. And what I want to do for my students.' And I think for so long, we, we may go through the motions without really thinking about what are our goals for the kids, um academically or personally...I can't just go through the motions of the classroom and, when I am rewarding someone or learning something about a kiddo or learning something about the family, it all has a purpose, and that purpose is to make them feel good about themselves, have that sense of self, and learn academically (I.E.6-11/p.16).

Kate commented on how her perception of this project changed over time.

When you first came to me, I'm thinking, 'I don't know quite what she's getting at, but [it] doesn't matter. I'm willing to go along for the ride'...'cause it piqued my interest...[But now] I'm thinking...it's not just the map. It's the conversations I've had with you that have really brought me to a place, and your questions... It's kind of like, 'Well, why do you feel that way?'...You know, it's almost like that Dan Fogelberg song. You're walking down the street and you're like, 'Whoa, how did I

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get here?' And that is what this process is like. It's like, 'How did I get here? Why am I saying these things to children?' You know, and it raises your level of awareness. And all it can do is make me better at my job (I.K.5-27/p.20-21).

Both quotes reveal the value and the transformative effect of the process of this research for the two teachers. They also hint at three components of the project that facilitated the growth and development of Elsie, Kate, and myself: (1) the relationships that formed between the researcher and the teachers; (2) the cultural maps as artifacts; and (3) the texts the teachers read and to which they responded. I treat these three components of the research separately, but they were in fact interwoven. In the following sections, I look more closely at the three components.

The Collaborative Relationship

Rogoff (1998) describes collaborative relationships as including "face-to-face mutual involvements;...side-by-side engagements; and participation in shared endeavors without physical co-presence (such as occurs between...authors and readers of articles, or in remembered conversations)" (p. 680). By this definition, the relationships between me and the teachers, between the teachers and the authors of various texts, and between the teachers and the memories of their pasts and the anticipated conversations of their futures might be considered collaborative. The growth and development experienced by Kate, Elsie and myself were in large part due to the collaborative relationships we developed throughout the research process.

The nature of the collaborative relationship evolved over time and through our interactions. At the outset of the research, I took on the role of participant observer, interviewer, and artifact collector. I observed in their respective classrooms, jotting notes and asking questions about what I saw and heard. I began by asking broad interview questions to learn about their lives both inside and outside of the classroom. I collected items of interest, like the script from Kate's African dance introduction and the newsletters Elsie sent home each week. As I came to know Elsie and Kate better, and they came to know me, the relationship grew into one that moved beyond observations, interviews, and artifact collection. As we learned about each other, we found a mutual focus: understanding what it means to be who they are as cultural beings teaching in this particular context. While neither Elsie nor Kate would have expressed our shared goal in these terms, both described how the project helped them to reflect on their work as teachers. As we came to the end of almost six months together, Kate described how she saw the study as having re-structured her understanding of her work as a teacher.

> I guess, one of the things your project has done, and your questioning
> and all of this (gesturing to her cultural map), has made me stop and all
> of a sudden, say, "Uh oh!" (chuckling). And I'm listening to myself a
> little more carefully. Actually a lot more carefully. I think it's like,
> you've raised my awareness" (I.K6-11/p.1).

As result of our mutual focus on her teaching work in relation to her autobiography, Kate described herself as listening "a lot more carefully" to the way she interacted with

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her students and their families. After examining her cultural map and interacting with me around the writings of Ruby Payne (2005) and Paul Gorski (2008), she brought an increased "awareness" to her teaching and the values and beliefs that supported her teaching. She made clear the connection between her increased awareness and the collaborative relationship, her cultural map, and the related texts.

> I read Payne's book, and I was ignorant...but it wasn't until I saw the map, and I started talking to you that I started to go, "Ohhhh." So you *need* someone else. You need other people's thinking. Teachers cannot be in a vacuum any more than students can be in a vacuum" (I.K.6-11/p.9).

Kate seems to have found value in the collaborative relationship. She "needed" someone else and someone else's thinking. Within the collaborative relationship, she seemed to have found that. She noted as well that the cultural map and Ruby Payne's book (2005) played a role in how she came to better understand her work as a teacher.

Similarly, Elsie described how the research process allowed her the opportunity to reflect on her work as a teacher. As we sat together on June 11th, one of our last days together, Elsie thanked me for spending time with her and discussing her work as a teacher. "It's been so enlightening. It really has," she said.

> Honestly, 'cause it makes me think about—when I have to sit here and defend my—you know, why did you to that, and defend decisions, and I

feel like it's defending and not in a negative way. It's like, well, why do

you do this? (I.E.6-11/p.17)

For Elsie, our mutual engagement around her classroom practices and their meaning for her helped her to better understand why she acted and interacted in particular ways. At another time she told me that our conversations acted as a way to "process and think through" what she valued and believed about her students and her work within the classroom.

Our collaborative relationship was not stagnant; it shifted and changed to meet our needs at any given moment. At different times, we each assumed shifting roles as teacher, student, and peer. Kate became the student as we talked about racism as a systematic problem in our society; she referred to me as her "teacher." Elsie became the teacher when she laid out the format and goals of Complex Instruction (I.E.4-07). As peers, Elsie and I, as well as Kate and I, co-constructed our understandings of how this research might act as professional development or be incorporated into teacher education. Regardless of the roles we assumed, the knowledge we created occurred in the space between us; it did not reside in any of us individually (Rogoff, 1990, 1998). The knowledge that was the outcome of this project was possible only through our collaborative relationship.

The Cultural Maps

In the methodology section, I describe how I constructed the cultural maps for Elsie and Kate. Here I discuss how the maps acted as data sources that were integral to the research process.

The maps summarized the women's lives and the beliefs they acquired and constructed in various cultural communities through their life spans (See Appendices F and G). The maps offered snapshots, brief snippets, to capture a particular time and/or belief system from the teachers' lives. In essence the maps served to strip down the teachers' lives to the bare bones so that we could see what was of importance at different times in their lives. Because they could be critically examined, the maps became powerful tools: they became texts around which we interacted. Since the maps highlighted milestones in Elsie and Kate's lives, we could scan the maps and see how an experience during a particular time in their lives may have shaped an understanding that impacted classroom interactions and practices in the present. Findings presented later in this chapter detail how we used the maps to help us better understand Elsie and Kate's work in their respective classrooms.

Beyond exploring what the maps presented about the lives and beliefs of the women, the maps revealed topics of relevance in the women's lives and careers that might be explored further. Using the maps as a springboard, I met with each of the participants to discuss texts related to their lives, their teaching experiences, and their interests.

The Related Texts

Elsie and I read and discussed two book chapters related to bilingual and multicultural education. The first text was a chapter from Jim Cummins' *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowering in a Diverse Society* (1996). The second text was a chapter by Eugene Garcia entitled "Valuing Students' Home Worlds" which appeared in Mica Pollock's edited volume *Everyday Antiracism: Getting Real about Race in School* (2008). I asked Elsie to read and discuss these texts with me for two reasons. First, despite her many years of teaching bilingual students, Elsie never mentioned during any of the interviews having had any training related to working with bilingual students. Second, Elsie seemed to separate her notions of experiential diversity and multicultural education. In selecting these two texts, I thought we might explore further these two issues.

Kate and I read Ruby Payne's *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (2005) and a critique of the book written by Paul Gorski (2008). Kate approached me about reading Ms. Payne's work. I assented but asked that we might also read a critique of the book, since it has been criticized for operating from a deficit perspective.

In the following sections, I look at how the women and I interacted through our collaborative relationship to explore and make meaning of their cultural maps and the texts related to the maps. I look at each participant separately, since we engaged in the research as two separate pairs: Kate and I; Elsie and I. Although the women knew each other and knew of each other's participation in the study, we did not interact as a group of three. Data drawn from interviews, participant observation, and artifacts support the

finding that this research altered these teachers' understandings of themselves as educators. Of particular interest is how the women used our collaborative relationship in conjunction with their cultural maps and the related texts to learn about themselves; to connect their pasts to the present and future; and to work through difficult concepts.

Kate's Experience with the Research Process

Seeing the Relevance of the Past to the Present

Kate and I spent over six hours involved in interviews. During the initial interviews, Kate shared her childhood years. She told me of the challenges she had faced and the perseverance and resilience that she developed to carry her through those difficulties. Analysis of her discourse during interviews reveals the parallels between her own life and the challenges faced by some of her students. In response to her statement that her family had been "basically homeless" (I.K.3-13/p.2), I asked her if the poverty some of her children faced did not in some way "make sense" to her because of her own early experiences. Kate paused before she replied, "You know what? I never thought about it. But you're right." (I.K.3-13/p.2) We returned to the interview protocol after a brief conversation about the economic turmoil facing the country. Just over two minutes later, as Kate was speaking about how difficult her transition to college had been given her family's move up and down the east coast, she interrupted the flow of the interview. "Maybe I do understand the whole moving thing," she told me. "See what this project is doing? I never thought about that. I mean I get being the new kid. I was the new kid a lot" (I.K.3-13/p.4).

With this connection, Kate began to see the many connections that tied her past experiences to her present work in her classroom. Later in this same interview, Kate told me stories of her life in New York City. She regaled me with tales of her "naughtiness," like the infamous rice bowls in the alley. She laughed about her desire to wear her hair in corn rows. When I asked her to tell me about what it meant to live in an apartment building, she told me about the different languages, the different foods, and the different religions of those who shared the apartment buildings of her youth. As she spoke about the "stoop—you know which are the steps out in front," she lost her train of thought as the relevance of these formative experiences to her current work began to take shape. "And, um, you know, so I think that's, I guess, you know, and again, some of these things, I don't think about. It's just not something I think about. But now I'm thinking about 'em" (I.K.3-13/pp.11). In her fragmented language, it is almost possible to hear her making connections between her past and her present. This connection, it seems, altered the course of the project for her.

In a later interview we talked about Kate's insistence that her students begin in 2nd grade preparing for the standardized tests they will take in 3rd grade. Although her rationale was explained earlier, I include an additional segment of our conversation here. She told me, "I'm trying now to say to them, 'You're not going to be able to read every word. It's okay. You're life doesn't depend on this test...It doesn't mean that you are not able to learn..." (I.K.5-16/p.5). As I listened to her remarks, I helped her to see a possible connection to her own past. To her comments, I responded, "I am wondering if, in some ways, the way you teach isn't a way of giving [your kids] a sort of academic

resilience. The ability to persist while [they're] taking the test." Kate looked at me.

"Geez, you know. I never thought about that, but maybe that's exactly what it is."

Through these exchanges, Kate saw that who she was as a teacher was related to the girl

who faced homelessness and physical difficulties and so taught herself to be resilient.

As this understanding started to take shape, with its implications for her teaching

practice, she voiced her opinion about this research.

> When you first told me about this project, I thought how is she going to
>
> turn that into a project? But as we're going on, it's a very cool project. It's
>
> fascinating. This idea of teachers mapping out our stuff so that we can be
>
> aware of it and know our biases...That's important (I.K.3-13/p.24).

The importance of understanding her "stuff" became more obvious after Kate spent

some time examining her cultural map.

I gave Kate her map about half way through the project. She stopped what she

was doing when she saw it. The map must have seemed somewhat overwhelming. The

map was a 11" X 17" sheet of paper littered with text boxes. The 26 textboxes contained

quotes from our interviews or observations lifted from my field notes. When I handed

the map to Kate, she took it from me and told me that she "really [needed] to take some

time to study it" (FN.K.2-26/p.1). At each of the three remaining interviews, Kate

brought out her map. She and I sat, resting our elbows on a table in her room. We

peered at her map and considered its meaning for her. Sometimes we were silent. At

other times we talked about her life and the map.

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Kate described the map as containing "the highlights" of her life. When I asked

if she thought it needed to be altered or changed, she shook her head. "This map," she

said, "represents who, part of who I am in this classroom, who I am in this life. When I

read these quotes, I'm kind of like, "Yeah, that is the way I feel" (I.K.5-27/p.21).

Kate commented on what it meant to have her beliefs and life experiences

confront her in written form.

> It's interesting to see this stuff in writing, because it's a different level of
>
> commitment. 'Cause, you know, 'Yap, yap, yap.' But when it's in
>
> writing, 'Oh, is that really what I wanted to say? Oh, do I really want that
>
> attributed to me?' So it is really interesting to see this stuff" (I.K.5-27/p.
>
> 17).

She leaned over the map and read passages related to her childhood and her goals for

her students around diversity. She nodded. "See they're related." She read aloud a

quote about teaching tolerance and antiracist thinking to her students. She nodded her

head. "That's kind of it" (I.K.5-27/p.24). She sighed and read her response to September

11th and her goals for her students. Tapping the map, she said, "All of this stuff matters

in the classroom. I bring all this stuff into the classroom, so I better understand it"

(I.K.5-27/p.24). Analysis of Kate's discourse indicates that engaging in the process of this

research helped Kate to gain greater understanding of how her life experiences shaped

her understandings of how people live and function and how her teaching practices

were a response to those understandings.

Examining and Challenging Deficit Theories

Not content to stop with examining and discussing her cultural map, Kate and I

embarked on a critical reading of Ruby Payne's *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*

(2005). The book was one that Kate pulled out of the school's teacher resource library.

She told me she had always wanted to read it but never had. Since this project focused

on diversity, she felt that this was the time to read it. Because the book has been

criticized for being rooted in deficit theories (Gorski, 2008), I asked Kate if we might also

read a critique of the book. I suggested Paul Gorski's article "Peddling Poverty for

Profit" which appeared in the journal *Equity and* Excellence. Kate agreed.

Before analyzing how our discussions of Payne (2005) and Gorski's (2008) works

unfolded, it makes sense to provide an overview of the texts. In her *Framework*, Ruby

Payne defines poverty as "the extent to which an individual does without resources" (p.

16). While the most obvious resource that those living in poverty lack is financial, Payne

delineates seven other resources: emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support

systems, relationships/role models, and knowledge of hidden rules. The success of an

individual is dependent on all eight resources, but "the ability to leave poverty is more

dependent upon the other resources than upon financial resources" (p. 17). In her

framework, Payne provides cases studies of different individuals living in poverty and

highlights the resources they have versus those they lack. Through these examples,

Payne attempts to reveal the "hidden rules of economic class" and provide "specific

strategies for overcoming the obstacles of poverty" (back cover).

Gorski's article (2008) is a synthesis of 16 different critiques of Payne's framework. Based on his own work and the critiques he summarizes, Gorski argues that Payne's book "epitomizes deficit theory" (p. 138), because she asserts that there is a "culture of poverty" which makes it difficult for people to climb out of poverty. Examples Payne offers of the mindset of the culture of poverty include the acceptance of jail time as a given; the idea that poor women accept that they may need to sell their bodies to generate money to survive; and the idea that people living in poverty are hesitant to call for police assistance for two reasons. First, the police are slow to respond, and, second, the police might be looking for them. Gorski (2008) emphatically rejects Payne's assertions and argues that there never has been, and never will be, a "culture of poverty." He suggests instead that there is a "set of structural, systemic, oppressive conditions that disproportionately [affect] the most economically disadvantaged people, such as lack of access to quality healthcare, housing, nutrition, education, political power, clean water and air, and other basic needs" (p. 135). From Gorski's perspective Payne is not only working from deficit thinking she is encouraging teachers to adopt that mindset and use it as the framework for how they educate children.

When Kate and I met to discuss Payne's book (2005) for the first time, Kate's initial responses to the book were very straightforward. "It's just very, very true. Very familiar" (I.K.3-26/p.1), she commented as she pointed out passages that argued that children living in poverty had different family structures than children of middle-class backgrounds. Kate said that the observations that Payne offers are "something that the

teachers in this building have known intuitively for years" (I.K.3-26/p.2). During these comments I remained silent or spoke only to ask her to clarify something.

Mulling over what I knew of the critiques (Gorski, 2008) of Payne's work (2005), I asked Kate how the book changed her perspective and how this might matter to her as a teacher. She promptly replied, telling me that the book suggested to her that her poorer students were operating from "a different frame of reference" than she did from a middle-class perspective. She continued. "In other words, my mother came in, and my mother is Mrs. Friel, and I'm Ms. Friel. And the kids went, 'You have the same last name.' 'Well, yes, that's my mother. I'm her daughter.' [The kids] don't have the same last name as their parents...It's different for them than it is for me" (I.K.3-26/p.2). In Kate's opinion, Payne's book made clear that children who were from poor homes had different sets of experiences and understandings than she did with her middle-class upbringing. Kate flipped Payne's book open to a diagram depicting the structures of poor families. The text related to the diagram suggests that families living in "generational poverty" (p. 55) often have many different adults moving in and out of the household either through marriage or co-habitation. As Kate talked I was unsure of her point, so I asked again, "How does this change your perspective? Your understanding? How does this matter?"

As she responded, Kate waved the book at me and asked with a vehemence that left her voice just shy of yelling,

Where are the children? Who are these children to look to as the

consistent adults in their lives? You know, it's not so much a judgment,

but who are the 24/7 adults in the children's lives? The people they can

count on...It's about having continuity in their lives" (I.K.3-26/p.3).

Her words once again seem to bring up the issues of stability that she struggled with

during her own childhood. Kate went on to talk about the stress on the adults who are

trying to raise children while struggling to pay bills and possibly juggling the

responsibilities of single-parenting.

Payne's book affirmed what many of the families in this area struggle

with—the lack of resources, financial resources, families, single mothers,

struggling to work full-time and raise children—and many of those

mothers wind up at the poverty level or below, you know what I mean,

because they don't get the high paying jobs (I.K.5-27/p.6).

It seemed that just below the surface of Kate's zealousness were some of the issues of her

own childhood: stability and constancy. She wanted her students to have a sense of

safety that she felt could most easily be found through the stability of family and home.

Kate argued that some of the children experienced safety and stability through their

neighborhoods. "I mean in the neighborhood—in the, in the housing projects, they do a

little more, 'cause there's a lot of people around" (I.K.3-26/p.5). While Payne's book

depicts low-income families as being frequently in flux, Kate disagreed with statements

that stereotyped low-income families as unstable. She reminded me of an incident I observed during her class' Learning Celebration.

Despite the personal invitations every child sent home, not every child had an adult attend the event (FN.K.3-13). When the celebration started, one little girl, Labraysha, sat alone at her desk and watched as each visitor arrived. No one came from her family. After the guests were seated, the class began the activities they had planned for the afternoon. A few minutes passed with Labraysha sitting alone at her desk. Then she burst into tears. The father of another girl, Shea, came over, picked Labraysha up and put her in his lap. Labraysha rested with her head against his shoulder until her tears subsided. The man was the Labraysha's neighbor from the projects. Kate recalled the exchange between the man and the little girl.

> That was wonderful. What a wonderful moment that was. Shea's father
> came over to Labraysha, and said, "It's okay. We're here for you." I
> mean that's worth the weight of the world. That's worth everything"
> (I.K.3-26/p.6).

While Kate's initial comments about the family patterns seemed linked with the deficit theories (Banks, 1993; Valencia, 1997) that Payne's book (2005) is so widely criticized for (Gorski, 2008), a more careful analysis reveals that Kate saw the lives of her students as different from her own. She had two parents raising her; many of her students had only one. Her mother was home each day when she arrived home from school; many of her students attended after school programs or went home to empty houses (I.K.5-27/p.14).

Just as difference was the norm during her childhood in New York and during her undergraduate work in special education, difference was the norm in family life. Because many of her students did not lead a life like her own, she sought information about, and an understanding of, what their lives were like through Payne's depictions of lives lived in poverty. From Kate's perspective, an understanding of her students' "different frame of reference" would help her to be a better teacher. A later conversation brought this out more clearly.

After reading Ruby Payne's book (2003), Kate and I read Gorski's (2008) summary of the critiques of the book. Kate summarized her reaction to the article and to Payne's book.

> What I took from Payne's book was someone talking about...children, and, and thinking about, what is this child's life...Because when I read this book, I appreciated that for the first time for *me*, I'm reading about someone talking about people who live at the poverty level in, in this country...I appreciate that...someone's talking about this and someone's saying, you know, huge stereotypical generalizations aside, someone is actually saying, '*Pay attention.*' What these children's lives are like is going to affect what they are doing at school. They're not, they're not the, the, from the white middle-class socioeconomic bracket that you grew up in. *Pay attention* (I.K.6-11/p.1-2).

Kate said that Payne's book offered a way to "hear new voices," the voices of people

who are living a life at or below the poverty level (I.K.6-11/p.5). By listening to these

voices, Kate seemed to hope to better understand their experiences and their

perspectives. She was looking to learn more about their experiential diversity. I asked

Kate, "So this book gives you a way to better understand these kids' lives?" She

nodded, "Yes, finally somebody's writing about this." She tapped the margin of her

copy of Payne's book where she had written a note alongside the text.

> This is where I [wrote]: I want to hear new voices about this. Okay? I,
>
> and I will read more of what these people have to say (referring to the
>
> Gorski article), because some of the things they have to say are very
>
> important to me, and I really want that alternative point of view. [But] I
>
> want to hear new voices. I want to hear from these people who are living
>
> this life. I don't want to hear Ruby Payne talk about it, and yes these
>
> people (Gorski) are going to talk about it, but I don't want to hear it from
>
> them either. I want to hear from *the* people living in poverty what their
>
> lives are like (I.K.6-11/p.5).

Payne's book (2005) seemed to offer Kate a glimpse into her students' world, but

Kate noted the book was a "good place to start, but a horrible place to end" (I.K.6-

11/p.6). Kate rejected the "huge stereotypical generalizations" Payne offers. Instead

Kate shared vignettes of families living at the poverty level who taught their children

right from wrong, who encourage their children to excel in school, and who would never accept jail. "These are not lazy people," she said, shaking her head.

> These are people who are working their butts off, and they still can't make two ends meet. These are people who love their children and read to their children. These are good people. They have a sound moral core, and they know right from wrong. That's not the gig of what's going on at all (I.K.6-11/p.3).

As her discourse reveals, Kate rejected the line of thinking that portrayed the homes of her students as deficient.

Kate also clearly articulated her disgust around deficit theories which labeled the school in which she taught a School in Need of Improvement and a special needs child as "disabled."

> In the system of public education in this country, when you have something like No Child Left Behind, you are looking at a deficit way of thinking about schools and children in this country...We are obviously a deficit school...The fact that many of the children taking these tests in many of the school districts across the country—first of all, it's almost always identified children. Identified children. Who are seen as bringing the whole school down. Deficit. They have deficits, because they score below a certain level. Okay? I really object to this way of looking at

schools and looking at children. There are some factors that we have no

control over, and those factors are being used to measure the

effectiveness of our school. Doesn't matter that over 80% or more of our

children are making the grade. They are looking for the deficit. They are

looking at 10%, and they say that because that 10% isn't making the

grade, Liberty School is a school in need of improvement. That's deficit

thinking...We are a *public* school...It's not about, what does Liberty

School do really well? Let's build on that...The other thing we need to

think about is when children are identified as "dis"-abled. Again, we

have the negative language. Those children are struggling for a reason.

If we expect them to be on grade level—that's a fine expectation—but if

they don't make it, it doesn't mean they are deficit. What I mean is, I get

a kid that comes into 2nd grade reading at..a pre-first grade level. That

kid, by then end of the 2nd grade makes it to, like, the middle of 2nd grade,

okay? Do you think I'm going to say that, with that much learning under

his belt, I'm going to say that kid is still deficit? Below? God forbid

(I.K.5-27/p.14-16).

Embedded in Kate words are her beliefs that policies like NCLB and special education

terminology like "disabled" were rooted in low expectations and negative stereotypes

that led to poor student outcomes. Kate argued that children who were

underperforming in school, rather than being deficient, were at a "disadvantage." While

scholars (Banks, 1993; Marx. 2006; Valencia 1997) argue that deficit theories view children as "disadvantaged" by deficiencies in their home and community lives, Kate viewed disadvantage differently, but she struggled to articulate the difference between deficit and disadvantage. She noted that a "disadvantage is situational. You are at a disadvantage if you have a flat tire along the road... You're not deficit" (I.K.5-27/p.9). I attempted to summarize her point. "Okay, so [a disadvantage] can be remedied." She looked at me and the texts spread out before us on the table. She nodded, "Huh. Maybe that's it. Yes, yes. Disadvantages can be remedied. You know, if you're a deficit person, you're a deficit person, and I, I just don't see people as deficit" (I.K.5-27/p.9). Kate paused to reflect on her life and her experiences with difference and the institutions that decree what is right and wrong.

> There were things that I rejected even as a kid: the fact that my father
> was going to Hell, because he doesn't go to church every Sunday. That
> was complete nonsense...I just didn't buy it, and I guess it's the same
> kind of thing...You know you don't think of children as deficit. That's
> crazy. I mean do they have flat tires? Yup! Is that a disadvantage? Yup.
> Oh, you bet. I mean, and that puts them as a disadvantage, and it's up to
> those of us who...are in positions of power, if you will, to say, 'What can
> we do to make this a more equitable place for children and for families?
> What can we do? (I.K.5-27/p.10).

She related how her mother lived in subsidized housing, because she could not afford to live on her own. "Now, is she deficit? Of course not." She chuckled and shook her head. "But the government has figured out a way for her and all the people living in her building to have a nice place to live at an affordable rate…Those people are not deficit people." Those people, she said, are not "less than": "less worthy, less intelligent, less whatever" (I.K.5-27/p.8).

In the inset quote above, Kate referred to herself as a person in a "position of power," but she did not clarify what attributes placed her in a position of power. She might have been referring to being white, being of middle-class background, or some other attribute. What she did state, however, is that she and others in positions of power are responsible for taking steps to make school a "more equitable place for children and families," and she spoke specifically about steps she took to make schooling more equitable *for her students. As a person in a position of power, Kate fought for greater equity* when she acted as "a bulldog" during IEP meetings on behalf of some of her students.

> The parents were not aware of their rights or their children's rights. They
>
> weren't aware of the legislation. I was a bulldog. No one wanted to have
>
> an IEP meeting with me, because my parents didn't know the system well
>
> enough. I did. I fought. I would not give up until my student has an IEP
>
> in place that would meet that child's needs. So because I knew the
>
> system, I was able to advocate for the children (I.K.6-11/p.3).

She said that, while the parents might not know what their children needed, she did, and she fought to get those students the services they needed. It may seem at first glance that her words indicate deficit thinking, but her comments more likely indicate how difficult the special education laws are to comprehend. As a person in a position of power, who knew "the system," she felt compelled to make sure that her students receive the education to which they were entitled even if the laws made it difficult for the parents to know what those services should be. Through her comments, she seemed to indicate once again that she would not tolerate others offering her "at-risk" children a less than adequate education. As both a "bulldog" and an "advocate," she indicated that she would fight to ensure that these children received the services they needed.

While Kate was able to relate to, and reject, some of the issues surrounding deficit theories, she struggled with how the difficulties faced by children living in poverty might be systemic issues ingrained in the larger U.S. society. Our collaborative relationship offered a way to grapple with this difficult concept.

Exploring a Salient Topic: Poverty as a Systemic Issue

As we discussed Payne's book (2005), Kate talked about how single mothers living in poverty face many challenges due to the time-consuming responsibilities of parenting combined with a lack of financial resources. This she understood. All too often she had witnessed what it meant for a child when his family's car broke down, and there was no money to fix it. We talked about how these mothers could not get good paying jobs, because they often lacked job skills and reasonable child-care options. She recalled a poor school system she visited as part of a professional development

workshop and the defeat of the teachers who could not offer their students what she could offer hers. The systemic inequity of the educational system in this instance was obvious, but Kate had a harder time relating how deficit theories might be at work in her own thinking and in her own school.

Kate told me about the five letters sent home to parents of struggling students in her class for summer school.

> So here is a summer school opportunity for *free* with a bus resource for
>
> struggling students. Income, color, any…completely out of the mix. This
>
> is about struggling students, okay? Not one of those parents has taken us
>
> up on that opportunity (I.K.5-27/p.10).

In response, I suggested that there might be a large number of reasons why the parents had not responded and why the summer school option might not be a good one for a family. The family might already have plans for the child over the summer. The family might not be able to get the child to and from summer school even with the bus option. When I paused, Kate urged me to continue: "Tell me more" (I.K.5-27/p.11). I attempted to clearly articulate how the "opportunity" presented by the school system might not be as equitable as it appeared and how her frustration with the parents might be indicative of deficit thinking. I asked her:

> Do we line up the resources to support those families, so they can get
>
> them here? Even if there is a bus, you still have kids that are then

dropped off somewhere in the middle of the day. They can't go to camp. Where are the kids supposed to go? Do the parents understand this is free? Is there a stigma attached to your kid going to summer school? What about the parents who can't read the letter? Do we ask what the problem is when [the parents] don't return the forms, or do we just turn around and say, 'The problem is you. I'm offering this to your kid *for free.* You don't have to do anything...So if your kid's not here, it's your fault, not mine.' Do you see what I'm saying? That we sometimes impose these things without asking what the other view might be? (I.K.5-27/p.12).

Kate listened. She admitted that she had "absolutely stepped" into deficit thinking at her "most frustrated moments." At these times she found herself shaking her head and muttering, "These people just don't give a...care" (I.K.5-27/p.12). Over the remaining interviews and conversations, Kate and I continued to wrestle with the difficult notion that poverty, and racism, exist because of systemic issues within our society. We struggled to make sense of the idea that inequity exists in part because of things that we, as white, middle-class women, do, or choose not to do. These are very difficult ideas that challenge the foundation of what we strive to do as teachers and citizens. We made progress, but there was still more work to be done. Kate summarized our position.

> One of the things that your project has done, and your questioning and all of this, has made me stop and all of a sudden say, 'Uh oh.' And I'm listening to myself...a little more carefully. Actually a lot more carefully.

I think it's like, you've, you've raised my awareness...Clearly, however,

reading Payne's book and then Gorski's article says to me, 'I gotta lot of

work to do.' And like anything that I feel is worth your time, it leaves me

with more questions. It leaves me saying, "Oh, there is a lot more here to

look at" (I.K.6-11/p.1).

Through our collaborative relationship and the insights we developed by

exploring Kate's cultural map and our critical readings of Payne's (2005) and Gorksi's

(2008) work, Kate and I grew. We learned. For my part, I feel less afraid to engage in

conversations around these very sensitive issues. I do not fully understand all of the

ramifications of what it means to be white and middle-class in the United States, but that

does not mean that I cannot engage in meaningful dialogue to further my own

understanding and to challenge deficit thinking where it seems obvious to me. Kate

expressed her own growth and how the process of engaging in this study aided her in

her understandings about poverty, about who she was as a person, and about who she

was as a teacher.

I read Payne's book, and I was ignorant. Yes, there were little tweaks in

the back of my brain going, 'Oh, I don't know.' But it wasn't until I saw

Gorski's article and started talking to you that I started to go, 'Ohhhh.

And if you are not careful to examine your thinking, and consider biases

and hidden assumptions, and if you don't have someone like Rachel in

your life to say, 'Where did that come from? Take another, let's take

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another look at that.' You're just gonna bop along, and, and you're

gonna—*crunch, crunch, crunch*—gonna be stepping one toes everywhere,

and you're not even going to know it. You are going to be blissfully

walking through the world without any *genuine* awareness of who you

are as a teacher, as an adult in these children's lives" (I.K.6-11/p.9).

Kate stated that teachers need "genuine" awareness of who they are as people and

educators. Without such awareness, teachers risk imposing their own unexamined

biases and assumptions on their students. As I look back on our work together, I think

we took some first steps. I wonder, however, when and if white talk found its way into

our discussions (McIntyre, 1997a; 1997b). How genuine was our "awareness" of who we

are as "white" teachers and as adults? Were we really engaging in critical discussions

that implicated us in systemic issues involving racism and discrimination, or were we

engaging in conversations that skirted some of these difficult topics? Were we using

white talk to maintain a "culture of niceness" that protected us from really facing the

implications of our own whiteness and the benefits it bestowed (McIntyre, 1997b, p. 46)?

I will likely never know the answer to that question, but I think our efforts did move us

toward greater understandings of ourselves and our work.

<u>Summarizing Kate's Experience</u>

For Kate, the research process offered her an opportunity to look carefully and

critically at the experiences and belief systems of her life and consider anew what they

meant to her as a person and a teacher. Because of, and through, our conversations,

interviews, and readings of various texts, she gave thought to what it meant to be a white teacher in her classroom at Liberty School with her set of background experiences. The research, for Kate, acted as form of what Spindler and Spindler (1994) called "cultural therapy." Cultural therapy is

> a process of bringing one's own culture, in its manifold forms—
> assumptions, goals, values, and communicative modes—to a level of
> awareness that permits one to perceive it as a potential bias in social
> interaction and in the acquisition or transmission of skills and knowledge
> (p. 3).

Kate used our time together to relate the experiences of her past to those of her present and those she anticipated for her future. She grappled with difficult concepts like deficit thinking and the meaning of poverty for herself and her students. Through this research she grew in her understanding of herself and in her understanding of her work as a teacher.

Elsie's Experience with the Research Process

The research process unfolded very differently with Elsie. While she came to better understand herself as a person and a teacher, she did not experience the process of this research as a dislodging or challenging of unexamined biases and assumptions. Instead, this research affirmed Elsie's beliefs about how she functioned in her classroom. In the next sections, I describe how Elsie came to see the relevance of her past to her current work in the classroom, how she used our time together to grapple with her

uncertainties about what it might mean to function from an ethic of care (Noddings, 2002), and how the knowledge she constructed has the potential to influence her in the future as both a teacher and a citizen.

Seeing the Relevance of the Past to the Present

Elsie's map was rarely in evidence when I interviewed her or spent time in her classroom. During one observation, I stood with Elsie as the children lined up for dismissal. We stood next to the table which often held her lesson plan book and the random notes from parents, students, and the office that accumulated each day. As I glanced down to say good-bye to one of the children, I noticed the corner of Elsie's cultural map peeking out from underneath her lesson plan book (FN.E.3-23). Elsie seemed to notice where my gaze was focused, because she quickly assured me that she kept it there so that she could periodically contemplate the various experiences and beliefs it represented. Elsie told me she needed time to "process" the information the map conveyed.

> Just looking at the different experiences and just looking back and
>
> thinking how it's so interesting that I, I, from an outsider looking in,
>
> "Wow, look at those experiences that she has had," which I just take for
>
> granted. It's right here (gesturing toward the map)...Yeah, so that's just
>
> what I do, or did. I bounced around. I had these experiences, and I've
>
> never really thought about how they blended into who I am as a teacher,
>
> but obviously they have (I.E.6-12/p.10).

Elsie's words suggest that the map allowed her to assume a different perspective on her life. It seems that seeing her life's experiences and belief systems in print allowed Elsie a way to consider their meaning from a more neutral, or "outside," perspective. As she considered its content, she reflected on how the map helped her to see the relevance of her past experiences to her current work.

> ...Just looking at this [map] you can see where [my life] may have lead me, and...because I've had the opportunity to have so many experiences, it's allowed me the opportunity to see people from so many different cultures and belief systems that I've taken a piece of each of those experiences which have allowed me to come back and work in a classroom in [New England] that isn't as diverse as some of the places but still has diversity (I.E.6-12/p.10-11).

The map depicted her life in black and white on an 11' X 17' sheet of paper. Packed with 29 textboxes filled with quotes about the different experiences of her life, the map became a text with which we interacted. In some ways it shifted her perspective from that of an insider to that of an outsider. By gaining distance from her own experiences, she came to see the connections between different parts of her life and the beliefs she constructed within them. She saw the relevance of her past to her present. It allowed Elsie to see what she might otherwise have "taken for granted:" how her beliefs and practices in the classroom were related to her life's experiences. Who she was in the

classroom today was the result of all that she had learned in the communities of the past. She carried with her "pieces" of all that she had learned throughout her life.

In the next section, I look at how the ethic of care was both a source of pride and concern for Elsie. She used this study as a means of grappling with her identity as one-caring.

Struggling with her Identity as One-Caring

As Chapter 4 indicates, Elsie actively created a classroom environment to develop and nurture caring relationships. However, during the course of this research, she shared with me her "struggle:" she sometimes made demands of her students that seemed to not be in keeping with her beliefs about community and caring relationships. In making these demands she assumed the role of the "cranky teacher." Chapter 5 presents findings in relation to how Elsie used the cranky teacher, or mean teacher persona, to help her students reject identities of defeat. In this chapter, I return to the cranky teacher, because this persona troubled Elsie. She used our time together to wrestle with her discomfort around the cranky teacher.

Early in the research, an occurrence in the classroom greatly upset Elsie. A little girl who often lacked self-confidence in her academic abilities did not complete an assignment requiring her to write several of the kindergarten sight words (FN.E.2-12/p.8). Because Elsie "knew she could do it," she told the girl to return to her table and refused to allow her to leave until she had written the two words. The child cried, but she completed the assignment. Elsie described her response to the incident later in the day. Holding her right hand on her stomach, she told me she was "literally sickened"

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by her own behavior. Despite her reaction, she reported a few days later that the girl's

writing skills "improved" on subsequent days.

Toward the end of an interview during which we discussed community and

Elsie's beliefs about building and supporting caring relationships in her classroom, Elsie

turned to me and expressed her concerns.

> I'm so interested in finding out that I talk about this community but then
>
> I have the 'cranky teacher' and the demands...With this belief system, do
>
> I really carry it out, or do I sabotage it?...Even though I say building
>
> community is important to me, and building kids' status is important to
>
> me, do I pull the rug out from under them sometimes. Sometimes, I
>
> worry that when I'm "duh, duh, duh," I'm sabotaging or am I? I worry
>
> do I beat them down to build them up like I did to [that little girl] that
>
> day when I had her sit and sit and sit until she put two words on the
>
> paper?" (I.E.4-07/p.12).

In response to this question, I wrote and e-mailed to Elsie a letter explaining Nel

Nodding's (2002) ethic of care and her description of the one-caring. Much of the

content of that letter appears in Chapter 4 in which I depict Elsie's assumed identity as

one-caring. Elsie's response to the letter was a very brief email: "I am, if you can believe

it, speechless" (personal correspondence, April 6, 2009). She told me later that she "so

appreciated the feedback...about creating community. And honestly, I was just like,

'Wow, I really need to sit with this'" (I.E.5-14/p.1). Reconciling actions that she

sometimes worried were too demanding with her beliefs around creating caring relationships and building community was a topic to which we returned repeatedly throughout the course of the research.

It seems that Elsie used our collaborative relationship to try and make sense of how she could be both the one-caring and the "cranky teacher" who pushed children to tears. Noddings (2002) argues that the one-caring holds a vision of the cared-for at his or her best and that the one-caring may demand that the cared-for reciprocate in some fashion by making steps toward realizing that vision. While Elsie and I had discussed this aspect of Noddings work and it seemed to make sense to Elsie, the struggle around the "cranky teacher" seems to have remained salient for Elsie as another incident revealed.

About four months after the incident with the little girl, Elsie faced a similar event. This time a different little girl refused to complete an assignment that Elsie "knew she could do" (FN.E.6-02/p.5). Elsie pushed the girl to complete the task. The child cried but complied. Elsie described her response to the little girl as a "guttural reaction." Elsie described her emotional state as "mad or frustrated or angry" that the child did "live up to her potential." After completing the activity, Elsie noted that the child approached a similar task with greater skill and confidence the next day. While Elsie believed in the child's capabilities, she seemed conflicted by her own actions. They seemed to fly in the face of her beliefs. After reading about Noddings' work (2002) and talking with me about the ethic of care and her own beliefs around building relationships and community, Elsie was more at ease.

When you wrote to me about [the little girl] and receiving and all of that,

I was like, wow, someone has put this into words—my belief system. I've

never really thought of it as anything other than this is just what you

do...It's my struggle, but it's also just what I do...There's that piece of

being validated and also...to develop my skills or my knowledge base.

There are actually people that have written about this that I can learn

from (I.E.6-2/p.12).

As a result of our conversations, Elsie told me, "I'm more conscientious of what I'm

doing. I really do believe that" (I.E.6-11/p.17). Through our discussions of Noddings'

(2002) work in relation to what I observed in the classroom and learned through

interviews and conversations, Elsie felt affirmed in her beliefs about caring and

community that directed her actions and interactions within her classroom. Our

discussions seem to "validate" her sense of self and appeared to help her be more at ease

with her struggle to reconcile the "cranky teacher" with her views of herself as a caring

and nurturing teacher. The process of engaging in this research appears to have

transformed Elsie's understanding of her own identity and the belief system that

supported that identity. Through our discussions, she seemed to clarity how her goals

for her students were rooted in the ethic of care and her identity as one-caring. She told

me, "This is what I give my students. This feeling of community. I really feel like you

could ask me questions about my kids and I could tell you things about them—each and

every one of them and what makes them unique" (I.E.6-11/p.18). As the one-caring,

Elsie was committed to building community and creating a classroom environment in which each child knew he or she was "unique." Engaging in this research allowed her to "develop" her "skills or knowledge base" of what it means to be one-caring. "These really are my beliefs," she said, "and I stand by them." (I.E.6-11/p.19). Through these caring relationships Elsie seemed to find what was unique and special in each child. Rather than focusing on a child's race, ethnicity, economic background, or native language, Elsie focused on what she knew about each child and used that knowledge to shape the vision she held of the child as well as the goals she set for the child. Like Ladson-Billings' (1994) "dreamkeepers," Elsie seemed to believe that "good teaching starts with building good relationships" (p. 125).

Exploring Salient Topics: Experiential Diversity, Multicultural Education, and Bilingual Education

Chapter 6 details Elsie's concept of experiential diversity. In this section, I use discourse analysis to look carefully at how Elsie conceptualized and differentiated experiential diversity and multicultural education. The process of engaging in this study allowed time and space to explore these issues as well as her beliefs about how to approach the three bilingual children in her class.

In our first interview, I asked Elsie about experiences related to diversity that might be important for her in her teaching. She began by telling me that she had "always been interested in other cultures" (I.E.1-26/p.15). This interest started during her childhood when her parents "brought in other cultures just by the foods [they] ate."

She talked about the differences in her inclusion of multicultural materials in New England versus California.

> I've always been interested in different cultures, so trying to bring it in. What I do find is, it's much harder to [do] it here [at Liberty], because we're so driven by the curriculum. And, so we just kind of bring it in when we can and...I did so much more with it when I first came here from California, because I didn't know you weren't doing it. Um, people weren't doing it. Um, it wasn't a part of your lesson planning on how you're going to bring in diversity and differentiate instruction within your lesson...Back then, 'cause I taught a self-contained LD classroom, so I really had this opportunity with two or three different grades to broaden what we were doing...Whereas here, I feel so driven and over time, you take that out and then you take that out and after a while you just stop using it (I.E.1-26/p.15-16).

Elsie's goal in integrating multicultural materials into the classroom was typical of what Banks (2007) calls "content integration:" the teacher uses examples drawn from different cultures to demonstrate concepts or principles. For example, Elsie used literature from a variety of different cultures. As her discussions around the physical appearance of the Laotian girl demonstrate, Elsie also hoped to develop positive attitudes toward different racial or ethnic groups, so her multicultural lessons might also be categorized as "prejudice reduction" (Banks, 2007). While her comments, like those above, clearly

indicate that she believed in multicultural education, it is worth looking more carefully at her word choices.

Culture, for Elsie, was something that was "done" in the classroom. Teachers "bring it in," and they "take it out." Thinking about Elsie's words, an image of a suitcase comes to mind. The teacher fills the suitcase with lessons about culture, brings it into the classroom, does the lessons, and then takes it out again. What stands out in Elsie's description of her work is that the teacher controls culture in the classroom. She brings it in, and she takes it out. It is not present unless the teacher brings it. This is in direct contrast with Elsie's views of experiential diversity. Experiential diversity, she said, is "how the kids experience diversity at home" (I.E.5-28/p.5). The teacher does not "bring it in." Experiential diversity resides in the members of the classroom community and their respective life experiences.

Noting the contrast in Elsie's statements about multicultural education and experiential diversity, I asked her to read two chapters related to multicultural education. The first chapter, "Valuing Student's Home Worlds" by Eugene Garcia, was pulled from Mica Pollock's edited volume *Everyday Antiracism: Getting Real about Race in School* (2008). The second chapter was an excerpt from Jim Cummins' *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowering in a Diverse Society* (1996). In addition to addressing multicultural education, the selected texts related to bilingual education. As mentioned earlier, Elsie's map indicated that she had a great deal of teaching experience with children who spoke a language other than English at home, but there was never any mention of her having studied bilingual education and its ramifications for her

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classroom. Given the fact that she had three students who qualified for ESOL services at the time of this research, the texts seemed like a good fit for Elsie.

Our discussions started with Garcia's chapter (2008). The chapter is a vignette drawn from the author's life. Elsie chose the name by which she would be called in this study based on this vignette. Garcia tells the story of his younger sister's first day at school. Her teacher asked her name, and she replied, "Ciprianita." The teacher attempted to pronounce the name and failed. "Can I call you Elsie?" the teacher asked. "It's my favorite name" (p. 294). The girl assented, and Garcia related that his sister still goes by this name that the teacher chose for her. As we considered the chapter, Elsie shook her head. She wondered, "How could people have done that? But I know it's still done" (I.E.6-12/p.1). She went on to describe an incident in her own classroom that related to the little girl from Laos.

> Actually something happened with Alexandra. I think we were talking about nicknames, and she said her nickname was Alex. So one day after school, I said to her mom, "Oh, she said she goes by Alex at home, so we'll just call her Alex at school." And I kind of saw the mom's reaction and went, "Oh, not such a good idea?" So we stopped doing that (I.E.6-12/p.1).

By honoring the mother's implied request that Alexandra be called by her full name, Elsie respected the mother's right to make decisions about her daughter's school life, and she seemed to realize that there may be subtle cultural nuances to the mother's

decision. When I asked this participant what name she would like to be called by in the dissertation, she replied, "I can have any name?" She laughed. "How about Elsie? To honor this language thing" (I.E.6-12/p.8).

In addition to the vignette offered by Garcia (2008), Elsie also read a chapter from Jim Cummins' *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowering in a Diverse Society* (1996). In this book Cummins argues that bilingual children are often asked to give up their native language and their cultural identities when entering the U.S. public school system. Rather than giving up the knowledge they have constructed in their native languages and in their homes, Cummins suggests that bilingual children be encouraged to build upon that knowledge within the school setting. The approach advocated by Cummins appears to be consistent with Elsie's notion of experiential diversity.

When Elsie and I discussed the Cummin's (1997) article, she described it as "interesting" and noted that it "just brought back" the language training she went through in California (I.E.6-12/p.9). It seems that, despite the many hours we had spent in interviews, there was so much more that I did not know about Elsie. While teaching in California, she took part in a professional development program designed to train teachers to "basically becoming ESOL certified."

It took us through all the stages of second language development. Um, how bilingual education is so important and that if a child has a solid foundation and can perform in a fourth grade in their primary language, they will be more effective and better learners in two languages. So we

got into all of that background and the importance of bilingual education,

which you know politicians don't believe in. So anyways, when you

think creatively in two languages, you're a much more effective learner

and participant (I.E.6-12/p.9).

From her description of the training, it seems likely that she and her co-workers

explored many of the topics and issues related to both texts: respecting and honoring

the home life/culture of students, fostering fluency in two languages rather than

teaching English to the exclusion of the children's native languages, and creating

classroom environments that fostered positive cultural identities related to the children's

homes. Elsie also hinted at the political issues that surround bilingual education

(Cummins, 1996; Pollock, 2008).

As we discussed the difficulties that the three ESOL students in her classroom

face as they tried to become members of the school community, Elsie shared with me the

subtle ways that she brought in the students' home cultures and identities. Using the

small boy from Indonesia as an example, she explained how she structured her

classroom to support the development of strong cultural identities. "What we do now

is we focus on what we know about him. He plays the drums. You know I first started

doing it through what he brought for lunch" (I.E.6-12/p.10). Unlike the feasts and

festivals approach to multicultural education that celebrates holidays and foods without

exploring their context in a culture (Erickson, 2007), Elsie used what she knew about this

child, his experiential diversity, to create an authentic conversation with this boy. She

honored his cultural identity by seeking information about his experiential diversity.

Cummins (1996) argues that the home languages of bilingual children have a

place in the schools, but Elsie appeared to shy away from this based on her own

experiences.

> One of the things I've tried to do that has never worked out for me is to
>
> ask kids to speak, like "Can you count for me? How do you say this in
>
> your own language?" And they don't want to do it, so I'm not going to
>
> push (I.E.6-12/p.5).

In shying away from some of Cummins' truisms of teaching ESOL children, like using

their native language in school, Elsie hoped to shield her students from a sense of

failure. She explained her rationale.

> I guess, for me, the hard part is understanding or knowing their
>
> knowledge base so if I'm going to draw on something culturally, and I'm
>
> not sure about it, um...I want to be able to help if they need to have some
>
> direction from me in rephrasing it so the other kids understand or
>
> whatever. So, I'm just cautious because...if I don't have the background
>
> knowledge myself, I don't want to put them in a situation of explaining
>
> and us not understanding (I.E.6-12/p.6).

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Elsie's intent in working from the knowledge the children brought into school, rather than introducing new cultural content that might or might not be within a child's life experiences, appeared to come from her desire to protect the child. She did not want a child to be placed in a position where he or she was not understood by teachers and/or peers. Although scholars like Cummins (1996) suggest that doing things like bringing in a child's native language is almost essential to the development of a strong cultural identity, Elsie found greater success in building on her relationship with the child based on what she knew of a child and his or her experiences at home.

Returning to the idea that Elsie seemed to consider multicultural education to be separate from "experiential diversity," I asked Elsie about how she differentiated the two. She was puzzled by my question; she shook her head and frowned. "Isn't that weird?" she replied, "I wonder if it just (pause) I think they're interrelated" (I.E.5-28/p.5). Her hesitation, indicated by the pause, suggested to me that she was either unsure of what I meant or unsure of whether or not she separated the two, so I asked her to explain what she meant by "interrelated."

> I might talk about multicultural more when we're talking about specific
>
> countries or things that come from activities...That's like the literature.
>
> For me, the multicultural, when I think multicultural, I think the
>
> literature piece and when we're doing that literature piece, like Anansi
>
> the spider is from such-and-such a country, or when we study Africa,
>
> we're going to make our Kufis and read African books about Africa.

We'll find a way to weave the experiential diversity in, because, uh, like if

we're talking about, I don't know, one of those things might come up and

you weave in the experiential piece (I.E.5-28/p.5-6).

At this point in our conversation, there was brief interruption. Elsie continued after the

interruption.

Yeah, when I used to teach [in California], you know there would be the

multicultural unit. Well, yeah, I guess it is separate but you weave

experiential diversity in, or if we pull books from the library about India,

we're focusing on multiculturalism but we're also focusing, addressing

the little boy from India's experiences (I.E.5-28/p.5-6).

In these statements, Elsie seems to equivocate between seeing experiential diversity and

multiculturalism as separate on the one hand and interwoven on the other. In looking at

her discourse, it is difficult to tease out how she envisioned experiential diversity and

multiculturalism working in the classroom. She specifically spoke about the little boy

from India and referenced pulling in multicultural books on India to relate to his

experiential diversity, but in actuality that did not seem to occur. As noted earlier the

boy was moving back to India, so, on his last day, the boy's mother brought in

traditional foods from India for the class to share and enjoy. What did not happen was

the class reading any books or stories related to India. There was no multicultural unit

integrating this boy's experiences into the classroom setting. It seems there was a

separation of the goals directed toward incorporating the boy's experiential diversity on the one hand and the goals of multiculturalism on the other. As Elsie said, "the experiential is how they kids experience culture at home" (I.E.5-28/p.6).

Elsie's multicultural goals were evident during the unit she and her assistant designed around the Chinese New Year. This was a stand-alone unit that occurred over a month's time. During one lesson, she wove in the experiences of a Laotian girl who physically resembled the character in the story, but this was the only time during the four full-day observations that occurred during the unit that Elsie drew upon the experiential diversity of the children in her class. The other lessons, activities, and discussions focused on the experiences of characters in books and films (FN.E.1-25; FN.E.1-27; FN.E.2-03; FN.E.2-06).

Elsie talked about multiculturalism and shared her goals for the following school year. She said, "I'm already thinking" (I.E.5-28/p.6). She referred to a weaving activity that the students did as part of a science unit; the activity reminded her of a lesson she had used in the past.

> There is a weaving activity that I have in my multicultural book that's
>
> African. So next year, I want to tie that in. When I can drop it in there,
>
> I'm going to, 'cause I have all these books just sitting there waiting to be
>
> used (I.E.5-28/p.6).

Once again, Elsie's word choices indicate that she controlled culture in the classroom. She "tied it in" and "dropped it in." She owned the books that were "just sitting there

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waiting to be used." She made no mention of how these books and the weaving activity might relate to the experiential diversity she anticipates the children will bring to the classroom.

The exchanges with Elsie did not seem to transform or deepen her understanding of how her conceptualizations of experiential diversity and multicultural education as separate entities might impact her instruction or her relationships with her students. As noted earlier, Elsie truly believed that the relationships with her students and their families were of utmost importance to her ability to work with her class, but she did not seem to see a connection between her multicultural goals on the one hand and her goals around experiential diversity on the other.

Sleeter and Grant (1987) over two decades ago noted the confusion around defining and implementing multicultural education. At the conclusion of their synthesis of research on multicultural education in the United States, they wrote:

> [The] term *multicultural education* means different things to different
>
> people. The only common meaning is that it refers to changes in
>
> education that are supposed to benefit people of color...Statements
>
> concerning goals are often vague, and what [the researchers] recommend
>
> as practices for educators are either ambiguous or missing altogether (p.
>
> 436-437).

Elsie began her teaching career in the late 1980s when Sleeter and Grant conducted their synthesis, and Elsie specifically stated that she never had any professional development

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directed toward teaching culturally diverse students. Given the confusion of

educational scholars like those studied by Sleeter and Grant, it is not surprising that

Elsie should also be confused by the goals of multicultural education. In 2007, Banks

describes multicultural education as "a broad concept with several different and

important dimensions [that teachers] can use [as] a guide to school reform when trying

to implement multicultural education" (p. 20). He goes on to define the dimensions

(content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, an equity

pedagogy, and an empowering school culture), but a careful read of these dimensions

does not fully clarify what multicultural education is and how it should be

implemented. After reading about the dimensions, the reader is left wondering which

of the dimensions is most important and how might one go about implementing it.

Perhaps, what Elsie's seeming confusion around multiculturalism and experiential

diversity does is point to larger difficulties within the educational field. Thought and

consideration need to be given to what multicultural education is and how should it

done. As for Elsie, as we concluded our time together, she continued to articulate that

experiential diversity and multiculturalism were interrelated but treated them

separately in her planning and instruction.

Summarizing Elsie's Experience

The process of engaging in this research appeared to allow Elsie time and space

to consider two aspects of her teaching: how her life experiences tied in with her current

teaching work and how her beliefs about caring and building classroom communities

translated into her work. Through our time together she explored these two issues and

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came to better understand herself and her goals as a teacher. Through this research she

"learned things" she did not know about herself. This research allowed her an

opportunity to explore her own autobiography and its relevance to her work as a

teacher.

The Research Process: A Place of Possibility

Through the observations, the interviews, and the shared discussions, the

participants and I created a place of possibility. We created a shared space to explore

what was, what is, and what might be. Through our interactions, we moved to a more

sophisticated understanding of what it means to be a teacher in general and what it

meant to be these two teachers in particular. For Kate, that meant examining

philosophical goals of education related to deficit theories. For Elsie, that meant taking a

critical, but practical, look at the structures of her classroom and her role in creating

them.

As I reflected on our growth and development through this project, a vortex

came to mind. According to Wikipedia (2009) a vortex is "a spinning, often turbulent,

flow of fluid. The motion of the fluid swirling rapidly around a center is called a vortex.

The speed and rate of rotation of the fluid are greatest at the center, and decrease

progressively with distance from the center." In our pairs—Elsie and I, Kate and I—we

began at the base of the vortex. We were still. In our pairs, we had only a small amount

of energy. However, as our collaborative relationships took form, we created a dynamic

energy flow that began to rotate around a shared interest: finding out who these two

women were as teachers, cultural agents, and individuals. Over time, Kate and Elsie

came to see themselves as persons with sets of experiences and beliefs that related very directly to who they were as teachers. These experiences and beliefs dictated how they interacted with students of all abilities, races, religions, income levels, and linguistic backgrounds. As we moved through the process, we picked up speed as we engaged in conversations about, and analysis of, what it meant for these women to have had particular sets of life experiences and be teaching in this school at this time. As we gained momentum, we added additional information to our knowledge set. We brought in texts related to their experiences and beliefs and probed them for what they might tell us about teaching children of color, who live in poverty, or who speak a language other than English. As we picked up speed, we also circled back to topics of previous discussions. We linked the texts with earlier life experiences. We made connections between childhood experiences and current teaching practices.

The vortex metaphor is limited, however, in its ability to represent this research process. The metaphor suggests that the energy that sustains a vortex will wane as the spinning moves further from the vortex's center. While that is the course of a true vortex, it was not the course of this project.

It seems likely that the effects of our new understandings will propel us toward different insights and conceptualizations of ourselves and our work in the future. Rogoff's notion (1998) of transformation through participation aptly captures this element of our work.

...a person develops through participation in an activity, *changing* to be

involved in the situation at hand in ways that contribute both to the

ongoing event and to the person's preparation for involvement in similar

events...The central questions raised in the transformation of

participation view deal with how people's roles and understanding

change as an activity develops, how different activities relate to each

other, and how people prepare now for what they expect later on the

basis of their prior participation (1998, p. 690).

This research not only provided us with the means of changing to better

understanding ourselves and our work in relation to the past and present, it also

helped us to prepare for what we anticipate in our futures.

Kate directly linked her work during this project with her future. At our last

meeting she told me that she was torn between two different Certificate of Advanced

Graduate Study (CAGS) programs. She was already enrolled in one; in fact she was just

five classes short of completing the degree. The other program, however, combined an

arts-based curriculum with a mission devoted to promoting equity and justice in the

schools. I commented that the social justice component seemed like "a good fit" for her.

She waved her hand over her cultural map as she continued to talk about the second

CAGS program in relation to our time together.

The other thing that this project has really helped me clarify is I didn't

realize the passion I had for this social justice subject. I mean I always

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knew I got my master's degree in integrated arts and stuff, but I didn't

realize the passion I had for all of *this* (I.6-11/p.15).

She chuckled and continued. "Until I'm looking at my background experiences and I'm

saying, 'Oh, no wonder I feel this way.' It kind of puts me back in touch with my own

center." I must have looked at her as if she was the proverbial two-headed chicken. I

pointed to her map, to the large textbox devoted to how she taught anti-racism to her

students, to the textbox detailing her experiences around diversity. "But that's been

throughout your whole life," I told her. She nodded. "Well, it's not something I was

aware of. Until I'm looking at [the map] and going, 'Oh, that's how I got here.'" (I.6-

11/p.15). This new understanding of her commitment to social justice will likely impact

her future interactions in her work as a teacher and a student.

For Elsie the learning that occurred throughout this study seems to have been

directed more toward understanding her values and beliefs as a teacher. She did not

seem to experience the research process as cultural therapy, although she did speak of

the process as a "reminder" to integrate her bilingual education training. She planned in

the future to work more closely with the ESOL teacher to "frontload the materials" so

that her bilingual students would have an opportunity to preview, think about, and

discuss the vocabulary and concepts which the class would work with in coming lessons

(I.E.6-12/p.3). She also planned to bring in "artifacts" to assist the children in

understanding and learning new concepts. In a manner consistent with what Cummins

(1996) asserts, she anticipated building on her ESOL students' "experiential knowledge"

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from home to support them as they take on the challenges of what the school system wants them to learn. Perhaps by considering her professional development around bilingual education in light of the readings and our conversations around experiential diversity and multicultural education, Elsie's views on the two may shift. Maybe she will come to see the natural overlap between the two. I will likely never know if this is the case, but as Rogoff (1990; 1998) argues, our collaborative relationship extends beyond the boundaries of the time we spent in physical proximity to each other. Just as I will continue to process what I learned through our time together, so too may Elsie.

As we ended our final interview, I thanked Elsie for the time she devoted to this project and for giving so freely of herself and her classroom. She thanked me in return

> This is professional development. How often do teachers get to reflect
>
> and have to really think about it? We reflect, but then when you have to
>
> articulate to somebody, you really have to own it. So we don't have that
>
> opportunity very often. Maybe once in 23 years (I.6-12/p.14).

The vortex metaphor suggests that the dynamic energy of the vortex wanes over distance and time, but the knowledge that Elsie, Kate and I constructed and re-constructed through this process seems likely to carry into the future.

Kate emailed me a few months after our last meeting to tell me about a class she was taking and an author I might enjoy reading.

If you have never read Maxine Greene, add her to your list. I am reading

Releasing the Imagination and I am bumping into so many ideas that are

akin to our great talks. Greene is discussing Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible*

Man when she says, "Think of what it would mean, in our increasingly

multicultural classrooms, if all teachers were enabled by Ellison's art to

imagine what it signifies to be invisible and to realize that the invisible

person, too, is kin to them." Really interesting to consider some of

Greene's statements about children in poverty in contrast to Payne's

statements. I come down hard on the side of Greene (personal

correspondence, 7-24-09).

Rogoff noted that the collaborative relationship is one that offers the possibility of

"changing the nature of the understanding that [we] may bring to other situations"

(1990, p.73). Kate's email seems to indicate that the understandings that she brought to

her CAGS studies were transformed by her work throughout this research project. Elsie

has not contacted me, since we finished the research. However, she did leave me with a

thought that leads me to believe her future work may well be impacted by this study.

At the conclusion of our final interview, as I readied myself to turn off the recorder, I

asked Elsie if there was anything else she wanted to tell me. She laughed. "Well, I

learned things I didn't even know about me" (I.E.6-12/p.15). It seems possible that these

things that she learned about herself might have the potential to alter how she

participates in the cultural communities of her future.

Ladson-Billings (2001), in a review of the literature on multicultural teacher education, observes that "teaching and teacher education in general are looking increasingly to autobiographical storytelling for deeper understandings of the complexities of teaching" (p. 754). Through the collaborative relationship and discussions of the cultural maps and related texts, this research project seems to offer a way to explore the relationship between a teacher's autobiography and the complexities of teaching.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

This study asked one central question: Within the context of their classrooms,

how did these two white, elementary school teachers navigate the cultural gaps between

themselves and students who differed from themselves (e.g. racially, ethnically,

economically, and/or linguistically)? In order to understand how these two teachers

interpreted and acted on difference, this study asked three sub-questions: 1) what life

experiences shaped how the teachers understood difference and diversity within their

classrooms, 2) what system(s) of beliefs did the teachers learn and construct through

those experiences, and 3) what identities did the teachers assume and/or assign to

themselves and their students. In order to answer these questions, the study utilized the

sociocultural theories of Barbara Rogoff (1990, 1995, 1998, 2003) and Peter Murrell (2007)

as the theoretical framework and discourse analysis as described by Gee (2007) as the

analytic framework.

In the introduction, I argued that the educational literature often uses the term

"white teacher" as an overly simplistic shorthand label which serves to overlook the vast

array of experiences with and around diversity that white teachers may bring to their

classrooms. Instead of being conceptualized as "a deposit, a stable cultural and

biological sediment that separates whites from blacks and other minorities" (McCarthy,

2003, p. 131), whiteness may be conceptualized as one of many cultural frames of reference through which an individual makes meaning of the experiences of his or her life (Gay, 2000). With this study I added complexity to the term "white teacher" by looking at the two participants as individuals and as cultural agents who bring to their work with diverse students a plethora of experiences and personal traits, qualities, and characteristics that shape how they made meaning of difference and diversity. Like Ladson-Billings (2001), I believe it would be "a mistake to assume that [anyone's] racial or ethnic label explains them fully" (p. 35). This study attempted to look more deeply and with greater care into what it means to be a white teacher of diverse students.

Summary of the Study Findings and their Implications

In Chapter 4, I introduced Elsie and Kate as cultural agents and as individuals. The findings indicate that Elsie and Kate were not "culturally deprived" (Gay, 2000, p. 25) individuals viewing the world from the lens of the white, middle-class without understanding that other perspectives and possibilities exist. Instead, these women had participated in communities with a wide range of differing world-views. Through these different experiences, Elsie and Kate seemed to have moved past ethnocentric thinking which might have privileged the cultural knowledge of the white middle-class. Their life experiences allowed them to "step into other worlds," to paraphrase Elsie, and develop a "broader mind set," to use Elsie's words, about how different people think, believe, and act in the world. As cultural agents moving through and participating in different cultural communities, Elsie and Kate acquired and constructed understandings about how people live and function in their own lives and communities. Far from being

"culturally encapsulated" white teachers, Kate and Elsie were "intercultural beings" who drew upon both their individual characteristics and traits and the cultural knowledge they had constructed within the various cultural communities in which they participated to understand difference and diversity (Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996, p. 525). While it impossible to say that all white teachers will bring to their classrooms the same array of cultural knowledge constructed in as many varied cultural communities as Elsie and Kate did, it seems that adding complexity to the term "white teacher" by exploring the personal biographies of the individuals in question will add greater depth of understanding to what it means to be a white teacher and what it means to hold certain values and beliefs in the context of teaching.

Elsie and Kate are "white teachers," but they are also cultural and multicultural individuals. "In other words, and to put it more bluntly, within U.S. society," writes Erickson (2007, p. 34), "white people are just as cultural as are people of color." While that assertion may serve to negate the statements of those who argue that white teachers lack enough cultural knowledge to effective connect with students from they differ culturally (Haberman, 1996), the larger point is that white teachers, like Elsie and Kate, may well have cultural knowledge that will allow them to effectively teach students from whom they differ culturally. Erickson argues that "as diverse persons show up in the scenes of daily life, they bring their heteroglossia with them" (p. 55). That seems to be exactly what Kate and Elsie did; they brought the knowledge, values, and beliefs they acquired and constructed throughout their lives, along with their personal characteristics and traits, to the scenes of daily life in the classroom.

While this study sought to add complexity to what it means to be a "white teacher," the notion of being more complex than a simplistic racial or ethnic label seems to indicate applies to more than white teachers. By extension, "black" teachers are also multicultural individuals. "Diverse" students are not simply other-than-white students; they are multicultural people who carry with them into the classroom sets of experiences that have shaped the cultural knowledge they will use to make meaning of the classroom and instruction. While categories like race, ethnicity, and economic status may sometimes be useful, there are other times when the use of such categories glosses over what makes an individual unique and overlooks the knowledge that an individual draws on to function in his or her world. Kate and Elsie very definitely drew on more than their "putative racial location" in navigating the cultural gaps between themselves and the students from whom they differed culturally (MCarthey, 2003, p. 132).

The experiences of Kate and Elsie's lives seem to have informed their understanding of the social context of teaching at Liberty School. Findings presented in chapter 5 indicate that the participants were aware of the negative stereotypes and low expectations others may hold of students like those at Liberty who come from families living in poverty, who are of color, and/or who speak a language other than English at home. Elsie and Kate recognized and refuted the Deficit Thinking and White Knight Discourse models when the tenets of these ideologies were explicitly articulated. However, the teachers seemed less willing and/or able to recognize these ideologies and their potential consequences for their own work and their students' education when these Discourse models were implicit in their own language or that of their colleagues.

Where they were able to identify deficit thinking, these two teachers seemed to view the educational system and some teachers within the educational system as "complicit in the reproduction of racial and socioeconomic inequality" (Boyd, 2006, p. 335). As a result, Elsie and Kate took action. They challenged practices and policies within the school that did not meet their students' needs. Furthermore, they seemed to adopt and implement two sets of goals for their students. The official curriculum addressed the academic goals of the local, state, and federal government. The unofficial curriculum addressed the social and emotional development of the students. Through these two curricula, the teachers seemed to promote the full development of their students. Beyond their curricular goals, the teachers seemed to foster identities of achievement in their students. In contrast to the identity of defeat, the identity of achievement seemed to encourage the children to view themselves as capable learners within their current work with Elsie and Kate as well as look to their futures as capable, functioning members of society.

Through their actions and interactions, Elsie and Kate demonstrated the qualities that Gay (2000) argues are necessary for teachers working with culturally diverse students. They had "the *courage* to see the educational system as at fault for educational failure rather than the students" and "the *tenacity* to pursue academic success for all" (p. 44). Acting in response to their understanding of the social context which often allows for poor academic outcomes for students like many of those at Liberty School, Kate and Elsie promoted the academic, social, and emotional growth and development of their students. Just as the NBPTS (2008) asserts accomplished teachers must do, these two

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participants acted on "the belief that all students can learn" (p. 3). The actions and interactions of Elsie and Kate seem to indicate that they knew who they were teaching and where they were teaching. They adjusted their practice accordingly.

The implications of teachers understanding and responding to the social context in which they teach seem three-fold. First, while the explicit forms of the Deficit Thinking and White Knight Discourse models may be readily identified, the implicit forms are difficult to clearly name and articulate. If, however, teachers are going to act as agents of change working toward equality within the public schools of the United States, it seems they will need to critically examine and uproot these ideologies in both their explicit and implicit forms. Second, working from their understandings of the social context and the related deficit thinking informed Kate and Elsie's teaching practices. By extension, it seems that other teachers working with similar student populations may be more effective teachers if they too understand the social context in which they teach. Irvine (2003) writes that "when differences are perceived as deficits, deficiencies, or dilemmas, students are treated as lacking in qualities and attributes necessary for school success" (p. 86). In order to view diversity as differences, rather than deficits, it seems that teachers must first understand the role of deficit thinking in relation to students who are outside of the white, middle-class mainstream in terms of their race, ethnicity, native language, economic background, and/or ability level (Irvine, 2003; Marx, 2006; Sleeter, 2008).

Third, Elsie and Kate's understandings of Liberty's social context seemed to be rooted in their own life experiences. While the participants still seemed to need further

understandings of the implicit forms of deficit thinking, their life experiences did seem

to provide them with understandings of deficit thinking in its explicit forms. Elsie

learned about biases and discrimination around race and socioeconomic levels during

her teen years in Alaska and in New England. Kate learned about racism during her

childhood years as well as during the Civil Rights movement of her adolescence. It

seems likely that Elsie and Kate were sensitive to the undercurrent of explicit deficit

thinking at Liberty as well as the larger educational system because of these experiences.

For other teachers, life experiences may not teach these same lessons. Reading and

studying the work of educational scholars and researchers like Delpit (1995), Marx

(2006), and Howard (2006) may provide one way of examining the presence of deficit

thinking in both its implicit and explicit forms. From the perspective offered by Elsie,

Kate, and researchers within the educational field like those already cited, there is a

need to "understand and acknowledge the racial and socioeconomic inequalities that

exist and that schools perpetuate" (Boyd, 2006, p. 335). Beyond understanding and

acknowledging, Elsie and Kate seemed to believe there was a need to take action.

Cochran-Smith (1995b) argues that teaching is a "political activity in which every teacher

participates by engaging in practices that either perpetuate or challenge the educational

system and its inequalities" (p. 543). If professionals within the educational field—

practicing teachers, teacher candidates, and teacher educators—are to take to heart

Cochran-Smith's assertion that teaching is a political activity, then it seems likely that

they will need to explore the ramifications of the social context in which they teach as

well as the larger educational context of the United States.

Cazden (1999) describes classrooms inhabited by white teachers and diverse students as containing a potential "cultural fault line" between teachers and students. Such a fault line did not seem to exist for Elsie and Kate. Chapter 6 presented two strategies that the participants used to bridge the cultural gaps between themselves and the students from whom they differed (e.g. racially, ethnically, linguistically, and/or economically). First, they explored and developed a sense of their students' "experiential diversity." Elsie and Kate seemed to work from the assumption that their students brought to the classroom "rich and varied language, cultural experiences and practices" (Boyd, 2006, p. 337). The participants used their understanding of their students' experiential diversity to support their students as learners and as the basis of relationship building between themselves and their students and between the students themselves. Through their exploration of their students' experiential diversity, the participants encouraged their students to develop greater appreciation for difference and diversity in each others' lives. Much like Humphrey, et al., (2006) in their international study of 35 primary school teachers in six countries, Elsie and Kate "actually tried to develop *inclusive* and *solidarity* values in their students as they strived to build classroom community" (p. 310).

The second strategy used by the participants was the utilization of relationships with their students' family members and their co-workers as sources of information about the different cultures represented in their classrooms. Elsie and Kate used these relationships to address the gaps in their own information about what the children's lives were like outside of school. Through these relationships the participants also

offered support to their students' families. The NBPTS (2008) states that accomplished

teachers know more about their students than how they perform on academic tasks each

day in the classroom. Accomplished teachers know "who their students go home to at

night [and] what sparks their interest. This kind of specific understanding is not trivial,

for teachers use it to constantly decide how best to tailor instruction" (p. 6). Elsie and

Kate would likely have described these types of information as elements of their

students' experiential diversity. They would likely have said that they used the

information to first build strong relationships with their students and then to address

the curricular goals of schooling.

The implications of the notion of experiential diversity seem relatively

straightforward, and it has been argued that good teaching requires that teachers know

their students as unique individuals who carry into the classroom a life's worth of

experiences which have value in and of themselves and in relation to the school

curriculum (Aronson, 2008; Howard, 2006; Irvine, 2003; Nieto, 1999, 2000). Fortunately,

the experiential diversity of students is accessible to all teachers. Kate and Elsie accessed

their students' experiential diversity by talking with and listening to their students.

They did not rely on special materials or resources, although the social curriculum

detailed in *The Responsive Classroom* materials may offer guidelines for teachers who feel

less comfortable than Kate and Elsie did in approaching the unknown terrain of cultural

diversity. By exploring their students' experiential diversity, Kate and Elsie seemed to

come to know their students better and the students came to know each other better.

Such explorations of difference and diversity may provide a way to move past ethnocentric thinking (Rogoff, 2003).

Chapter 7 presented findings about how the participants engaged in and grew through their involvement in this research project. Through their engagement in this study, the participants examined their own autobiographies and the meaning of those autobiographies to their current teaching practice. This project allowed them a way to look carefully at their past, their present, and their future work. This level of critical self-evaluation seemed to be made possible by the collaborative relationships formed between the participants and the researcher, by interactions around their cultural maps, and by the reading of texts related to their teaching practice. In considering their pasts, Elsie and Kate seemed to note the relevance of their life experiences to their teaching work. In examining their current work in their classrooms, Elsie and Kate used our collaborative relationship, their maps, and/or the related texts to give thought to salient issues in their classrooms and practice. For Kate, that meant exploring the ramifications of deficit thinking in relation to poverty. For Elsie, that meant exploring her own beliefs about caring and building community within the classroom. In looking to their futures, Kate considered how her new insights about the importance of social justice might impact the course of her future studies, while Elsie considered how she might further her goals for her ESOL students. Although the process unfolded differently for the two participants, both experienced it as time of critical self-reflection on their lives and their work in their classrooms.

The multicultural education literature and the multicultural teacher education

literature have long called for the engagement of white pre-service and in-service

teachers in critical, self-reflective examinations of their autobiographies (Cochran-Smith,

1991; McIntyre, 1997a; Sleeter, 1993/2005). By doing so it is hoped that the teachers will

develop an awareness of themselves as "cultural beings" (Sleeter, 2008, p. 560). As

researchers have noted, autobiographical studies may be difficult for white pre-service

and in-service teachers, because of the difficulty these individuals often feel when

discussing issues of race and culture (Florio-Ruane, 2001; Howard, 2006; Lawrence &

Tatum, 1997). In contrast, this study seems to almost sidestep some of the emotional

turmoil connected with these topics. Both Elsie and Kate noted that the cultural maps

offered them a different, outside perspective on their events of their lives and the

meaning of those events for their teaching. By rooting the discussions of difficult topics

in what was learned by studying the cultural maps and by examining the relevant topics

through the related readings, "a certain comforting distance and objectification [became]

possible" (Spindler, 1999, p. 466). It seems that the process of this study may provide a

feasible way to engage teachers in a critical, self-reflective study their autobiographies

and their implications for teaching practice.

The creation of the cultural maps and the interactions and reflection that

occurred around them seemed to make real for the participants the idea that they are

cultural beings who bring many different experiences, values, and beliefs into the

classroom. As they examined their cultural maps, Elsie and Kate seemed to fully

appreciate that their life experiences matter to their work as teachers. The process of

examining the maps, discussing the related texts, and engaging in discussions around diversity, difference and their teaching practice seems to have altered Kate and Elsie's perceptions about themselves and their work.

Limitations and Considerations for Future Research

The Participants' Perspective

The findings of this study rely on the perspectives offered by two participants. While not seeking generalizeable findings, this study provides insight into how these two participants in particular understood diversity in their classrooms, but it excludes other perspectives which might provide different insights. In some ways the participants greatly resembled each other. Both of the participants were women in their forties with no children. While one participant was married, the other was not. Additionally, the women described themselves as middle-class. Both participants were veteran teachers with almost 30 years of educational experience. Furthermore, both women were certified in special education as well as general education. Since this study is rooted in sociocultural theory which argues that the life experiences of an individual shape who they are and how they interact with the world, it seems likely that this study's findings would have been different if the participants had not had these sets of characteristics. Further research might explore how younger teachers or teachers with fewer years of educational experience might understand and navigate cultural differences in the classroom. Also of interest might be examining how teachers who had children of their own, who were of lower or upper socioeconomic background, or who were certified in only special education or general education understand diversity and

educate children who differed from themselves culturally. The perspective offered by participants who were not voluntarily engaging in the research might provide further insight into how the research process might unfold. Also of interest might be a study that explored how teachers who are of color might make meaning of diversity in their classrooms and what life experiences shaped those understandings.

The Research Setting

This study was conducted in northern New England in a community that was moving toward increased levels of diversity. While the school reflected the nation-wide trend in public schools toward increasing levels of diversity, there are limitations due to the research setting. The school was set in a small city and had a student population that was predominantly white. A setting in a more urban or more rural area with higher or lower percentages of students who were of color or who spoke a language other than English at home might have resulted in different findings. Additionally, a research setting in another part of the United States might have found alternative understandings of diversity for both teachers and students. Furthermore, Liberty School employed a staff of white teachers. A different research setting that included teachers of color or teachers who spoke a native language other than English might yield some interesting results.

Limitations in Design

This study built upon the collaborative relationship between the researcher and each of the participants. While all three would say that we grew as a result of our work together, our growth might have differed through other types of interactions. Future

research might explore how this process unfolds if engaged in by a larger number of people. In such a case, the group might read a selection of texts related to the group's needs and/or interests. Since this study features a researcher who was an outsider to the research setting, future research might examine how this process unfolds if engaged in by a group of colleagues. Moreover, since the cultural maps were constructed by the researcher, future research might investigate what happens when the teachers/participants construct their own maps. It seems likely that this will alter the course of the study and perhaps provoke the participants to different understandings about themselves and their work as teachers.

Conclusion

Teacher educator, Susan Florio-Ruane writes that there is "the possibility that the 'self' is neither static nor one dimensional" (p. 40). There exist "the possibility that one's autobiography can be revised as the story of the self can be told and retold in different ways and for different purposes." It seems possible that Elsie and Kate revised the stories of their "selves" as they considered their lives from the perspective offered by this research. Cochran-Smith (1995a) argues that teachers must have the opportunity to "re-see" their lives through critical self-examination of their own autobiographies and the meaning of those autobiographies for their teaching practice. I think it is likely that Elsie and Kate would agree. In one of our final interviews, Kate stated her thoughts on this study.

Teachers need to be clear about who they are, about any prejudices they bring to the classroom. I think you're onto something with [this project]. You have to have people who are *aware*—people who are introspective enough to discern those stumbling blocks. Looking at the [cultural] map and talking to you, I'm thinking we *all* need to be doing this. We all need to be paying attention. You can only ferret out stuff by going through an introspective process like this (I.K.5-13/p.4).

As cultural agents, Kate, Elsie, and I may have discovered another dimension of ourselves through our interactions within the cultural community we created around this research. We revised our notions of "self" in relation to what we learned together.

In the quote that appears in this paper's introduction, Conley (2000) describes his childhood as a "social science experiment:" he learned about himself as a white, middle-class child through his interactions with others. This study may have acted as a social science experiment of sorts for Kate, Elsie, and I. We learned about ourselves through our interactions with each other. In the end, we are still "white teachers," but we know a lot more about what that means for ourselves and for the children with whom we interact.

Irvine (2003) argues that teaching involves four "essential elements:"

1. Some person,

2. Teaching something,

3. To some student

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4. Somewhere (p. 45).

If the goal of this study and others like it within the multicultural education field is to better educate students who have historically been underserved by the public school systems of the United States, then it seems that Irvine's elements must be addressed. This study may shed light on these essential elements by providing teachers with a way to better understand who they are as "some person teaching something to some student somewhere."

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

University *of* New Hampshire

Research Conduct and Compliance Services, Office of Sponsored Research
Service Building, 51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585
Fax: 603-862-3564

13-Jan-2009

Johnson, Rachel
Education, Morrill Hall
66 Aldrich Road
Portsmouth, NH 03801

IRB #: 4419
Study: Navigating the Cultural Gap: Whiteness & Diversity in Elementary Classroom
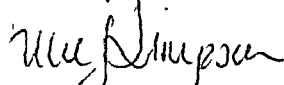**Approval Date:** 12-Jan-2009

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Expedited as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 110.

Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol for one year from the approval date above. At the end of the approval period, you will be asked to submit a report with regard to the involvement of human subjects in this study. If your study is still active, you may request an extension of IRB approval.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the attached document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects.* (This document is also available at http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/irb.html.) Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,

Julie F. Simpson
Manager

cc: File
Fries, Mary

APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

University *of* New Hampshire

Research Integrity Services, Office of Sponsored Research
Service Building, 51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585
Fax: 603-862-3564

18-Dec-2009

Johnson, Rachel
Education, Morrill Hall
66 Aldrich Road
Portsmouth, NH 03801

IRB #: 4419
Study: Navigating the Cultural Gap: Whiteness & Diversity in Elementary Classroom
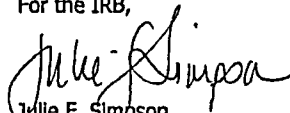**Review Level:** Expedited
Approval Expiration Date: 12-Jan-2011

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has
reviewed and approved your request for time extension for this study. Approval for this study
expires on the date indicated above. At the end of the approval period you will be asked to submit
a report with regard to the involvement of human subjects. If your study is still active, you may
apply for extension of IRB approval through this office.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the
document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects.* This
document is available at http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/irb.html or from me.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me
at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence
related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,

Julie F. Simpson
Manager

cc: File
    Fries,Kim

APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED LIFE HISTORY INTERVIEW

1. Describe yourself to me: culturally, racially, ethnically, linguistically, etc.

2. Tell me about your family's ancestry, your childhood, and your adolescence.

3. Describe the types of activities you participated in as a child/young adult? Who were you interacting with? How did these activities affect you?

4. Tell me about when (and how) you first became aware of yourself as a person with a specific racial/ethnic/linguistic/economic background?

5. Describe an event or situation where you first realized someone was different from you racially, ethnically, linguistically, economically.

6. What advantages or disadvantages exist for you today (or have existed for you in the past) as a white person in society?

7. What meaning does that history have for you today?

8. What experiences from your past relative to issues of diversity do you think are important in your work today?

APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED EDUCATIONAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

1. Tell me how and why you became a teacher.

2. Describe your teacher preparation process and program—its goals, structure, etc.

3. How was difference in general and cultural diversity specifically addressed during your preparation?

4. Describe the various field experiences and/or student teaching/internship experiences that you engaged in during your teacher preparation.

5. Describe your experience as a first-year teacher. Describe your adjustment to this school. What made it easy? What made it hard?

6. What professional development opportunities have you been involved in that have addressed issues surrounding culturally diverse students?

7. What professional development opportunities would you like to have available to you in the future relative to issues of diversity?

APPENDIX D: SEMI-STRUCTURED CULTURAL DIVERSITY INTERVIEW

1. Tell me about your class this year. In terms of racial, ethnic, linguistic, and/or socioeconomic characteristics, how are your students the same or different from you?

2. In what ways might these differences or similarities impact your classroom environment, student learning, or your teaching practices?

3. What are your goals for your class this year? What are your short term goals for your class? What are your long term goals for your class?

4. Tell me about students you find it is easy to connect with. Tell me about students you feel it is difficult to connect with.

5. In what ways do you address issues of diversity directly and/or indirectly with your students? What does it mean to be a "white teacher"?

6. Are there some issues that you feel are very important to think about and/or address when working with diverse students?

7. How might your background impact children who are different from you?

8. Can you give me an example of a time when you were confronted with an issue related to diversity that made you uncomfortable or that you didn't quite know how to handle?

9. In working with diverse students, what resources do you find helpful or not helpful? What guides you in your work?

10. How have your views about diversity shifted or changed over time? What caused that shift?

11. What do you wish you had known about diversity and/or teaching diverse students before entering the classroom?

12. If you could offer advice to a new teacher entering a similar school setting, what would it be?

APPENDIX E: SEMI-STRUCTURED EXIT INTERVIEW

This interview will be conducted either at the close of the observation work or very near its completion.

1. In relation to cultural diversity, what do you want to be sure I know about you as a teacher before I leave? About your practice? About your classroom?

2. What do you want to make sure I know about teaching in a diverse school setting?

3. What do you want to make sure I know about teaching diverse students?

4. Where do you see yourself a year from now? Five years from now?

5. Have you learned anything from this process (i.e. being a participant in this study)?

6. Is there anything you want to know about me or this study?

7. Would you like a copy of the final paper?

APPENDIX F: ELSIE'S CULTURAL MAP

	Childhood and Youth	Teacher Preparation and Novice Teacher Years	Teacher Preparation: Masters	Teaching 1985-1995	Teaching 1995-present

Cultural Communities	Grew up "small town [New England]"
	
	"Just very middle class, you know, regular background"
		Bachelor's degree with dual teaching certification— elementary education/special education (1981)	Master's of Science in Education Severely Emotionally Disturbed 2 year internship, 1983-1985	San Jose School District, CA (11 yrs)
				68% Hispanic
				  SED program (2 yrs)
				- Self contained ED class (7 yrs)
				  Assistant principal (2 yrs)
					New England (11 yrs)
					Asian 5%, Hispanic 2%, Black 11%, White 81%
					Free/reduced lunch 48%, ESOL 3%
					- Self contained Sped (3 yrs)
					  Assistant principal (1 yr)
					  Principal (3 yrs)
					  Kindergarten intervention program (4 yrs)
					- Kindergarten, general education

	Grades 10, 11 living in Fairbanks, Alaska	Novice teaching Alaskan Bush—2 yrs , special ed 500 air miles northwest of Anchorage		Diverse teaching staff Learning of differences in lived experiences around race/ethnicity	
	Living in a community "The one thing is everybody knew everybody in the town I lived in "	Stepping into their world "I, I kind of stepped into their world and just kind of went with the flow I think I just remember being blown away how animals were treated as work dogs not pets Or things like the mail plane coming in versus going to your mailbox and picking it up '	Collegiality "I remember how fun it is to work as a team At the SED program, we were very collegial and supportive, and that's so important To me Sense of humor and collegiality "	Creating a classroom community "I love the ability to build community and create an atmosphere of that caring, and kids helping one another out, and acknowledging kids " " there's more to that building community than just social chitchatting It's recognizing one another's talents "	
Beliefs, Values, and Lessons Learned	Learning about difference due to race, religion, socioeconomics - New England When I was growing up, there were Protestants and Catholics That's what my dad would say He would never marry a Catholic That was the only thing I knew about it's not race That's religious beliefs - New England black family "run out of town" "I do remember reacting to it I think that's why I remember it thinking how could you do that? What was the point? Why would you even want to do that?" - Alaska "I had the heavy parka I had to think, the way she said it, 'Oh, that wouldn't be a good thing to be an Eskimo' But I didn't think it was a bad thing until she made a comment " - Alaska "They were the group that you wanted to hang out with You know, they were the preppies or the jocks or whatever"	Building relationships Being an outsider - " how I learned that I was different, is when I moved, not necessarily living in Alaska but when I was teaching in rural Alaska I knew that I was different, I stood out " - "[There were] maybe 6 [white] teachers in a village of maybe 80 or 90 people " - "I developed good relationships with the people in the villages I think had I not, um, kind of stepped into that I would have been an outsider Even though I was still an outsider I was, was brought into their homes ' Educational goals—differentiated instruction "I spent a lot of time trying to figure out how to do lessons that would meet the needs of all the kids "	"Getting inside their heads," Behavior as understandable "Which I do love—trying to figure out the dynamics of behavior and things like that Sometimes, why kids are doing what they're doing it s just always kind of like if you could just get inside their heads and figure it out, then you'd be better able to manage them or teach them or reach them '	"And, again, community, because I hooked up with a group of teachers that we were so invested in providing developmentally appropriate education " Observing the lives and experiences of kids ' 68% of the school was Hispanic I really got to see the lives kids lead Because we would go into the barrio " Acknowledging the kids' experiences as relevant to schooling "taking the information and storing it" Complex Instruction ' the activities are so interrelated that the children cannot complete the task unless everybody participates And it's like cooperative learning but at a much more sophisticated level" "I look at community within the classroom as also opportunities to level the playing field among kids and for kids to recognize one another's talents "	Collegiality - ' Our door was constantly open so we were just together But it was wonderful, 'cause then you would talk about kids for me that's community, the collegiality, the closeness so that you see and hear what's happening so that you can better fit your kids " - ' You can't do it on your own " Experiential diversity 'I kind of draw on the kids' experiences and what little I might know about their lives So sometimes it's not the racial diversity as much as it is the experiential diversity It's a fact of their life So I don't hush hush it It's more the diversity of who lives in their house—'cause their experiences in their lives are so different " Ethic of care I think that that's just the nature of who we are as people, is that you forge relationships with other people for the I don't know This just sound silly but for the greater good "

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APPENDIX G: KATE'S CULTURAL MAP

	Early Childhood	Adolescence	Teaching Experiences: 1980-present	Further Educational Experiences	Experiences Beyond the Classroom
Cultural Communities	Born to first generation Irish Catholic parents Middle-class upbringing Queens, NYC (birth-10yrs) - Elmhurst (parents' household) "moved around a lot, around the area of the city" - Jackson Heights (grandmother's household) "I think I just grew up expecting that people were all different They were different colors They had different-looked different They spoke different languages"	Moved to New England (10-18 yrs) "Once we got to New England, we were fairly stable You know, which, is the good news and from there, I'd say in terms of our family life, I things were pretty good You know, steady on" Temporary homelessness due to father's job loss " we sold our stuff except for a few things We didn't have a house We didn't have a job So we stayed with my Uncle Larry We were basically homeless Dad didn't have a job" Resilience during student teaching 1979 - "And, um, you know it was one of those times when you have to make a decision about going forward" - "It was a very difficult time you just put your head down and you go"	New England (29 yrs) Asian 5% Hispanic 2%, Black 11%, White 81%, Free/reduced lunch 48%, ESOL 3% - SED (4 yrs) - LD (5 yrs) - General ed (20 yrs) grades 1, 2, and 3 " one of the things I learned is not to make assumptions about what kids are thinking or feeling To be very careful about kids' reality, 'cause a kid's reality can be very different from your own"	Master's of Education, 2002 Art based instruction/Multiple Intelligences " the idea here is that people learn differently and what makes sense to one person in terms of learning and retaining information is not going to make sense for another person" - There are different ways of learning, growing, and achieving which need to be accommodated in the classroom This is especially relevant to low-income children and children who are of color	Outward Bound (summer 1989) " it's very much about developing a personal insights, a sense of your strengths we're all capable of a lot more than we think And, we don't know that until we're tested how do you get up? How do you survive? How do you make it work? But you do You just do" Trust in others "You have to trust the people in your patrol, and that for a lot of people, adults and kids, that is a huge leap" Trust as faith in self and a greater good " trusting that you're going to be okay at some point the sun is going to come out and it's *trusting* that you're going to be okay '
Beliefs, Values, and Lessons Learned	Diversity "When I was growing up [in NY], it was *nothing* for us to, I mean, we just saw people of every religion, we heard lots of different languages it just wasn't a big deal When we came *here*, we noticed there was a difference I remember saying to my parents, "Where is everybody? Everybody is the same it was odd at first" Rejection of racism during race riots of 60s "I think I, I didn't have an awareness of [race] as a *problem* until my father started talking about some of the awful things that were happening down South And my parents had to explain to me that there were people who believed that because people had dark skin, they weren't as good, or they shouldn't have the same rights And my brothers and I were like, "That's nuts" Catholicism - Source of stability, Attendance in Catholic schools (k-12) - Questioning and challenging tenets " I had friends that were Jewish and again the teachings were that if you weren't Catholic, you weren't going to heaven And *again*, I'd say, "Now wait a minute, God I know that you love Jewish children too" So there were certain things (chuckling) that made no sense to me, so I decided early on that there just some things that were stupid"		Resilience and trust - "I say to the kids, "Don't give up" I really get 'don't give up'" - "Okay, you can count on me I'm going to be here every day for you I'm going to hold you accountable" "You try and have the same thing happen every day That's a very basic level of trust An intuitive level of *trust* is that the kids trust that you're going to be fair and that you're every consistent, and that the rules are applied across the board" Teaching tolerance, anti-racist thinking "I want them to be receptive to the world and to other people and to other thinking I just want them to be open and understand it's not just about you, and it's not about what you need in your life It's about other people—other people have some wonderful ideas too" - 'Guys, this doesn't just happen in Africa or Europe It happens here Pay attention *here* "	Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study (ongoing) "I always like to learn more I'm very interested in the idea of poverty and the arts and the possible impact on learning and student achievement" This study Examining own social biography "This idea of teachers mapping out their stuff so that they can be aware of it, our biases, our cultural biases and stuff I've said stuff over the years, and I just thought, " I can't believe that just came out of my mouth What am I even thinking?" Exploring the ramifications of poverty Ruby Payne's framework " it's stuff that I've know intuitively since I've been in the building, and I'm reading it going, "Yes! Yeah! That is true!" It's just so affirming to have it written down I said "Oh this makes so much sense" And it gives you a whole new perspective on things" Critiques of Ruby Payne "This is good place to start but a horrible place to end A horrible place to end"	Trip to South Africa (Summer 2001) - Visits to Apartheid museums and local schools - Strengthened commitment to teaching tolerance, resisting hatred, rejecting imposed separation and deprivation for racial and/or religious reasons

APPENDIX H: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I understand that I am being invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Rachel Johnson, a doctoral candidate from the University of New Hampshire's Department of Education. The purpose of the study is to explore how white, elementary public school teachers understand cultural diversity and its role in the classroom.

I understand that I am being asked to participate in a study for approximately 2 months time. During that time I will allow the researcher to join me throughout the course of the school day for 1-2 days per week for a total of 8-10 visits. I understand that the researcher will observe my classroom and take notes using a notebook and/or computer and that she may ask questions about a particular classroom event or instructional activity. Additionally, I understand that the researcher may accompany me to teachers' meetings or staff trainings if they seem relevant to the topic of study. As part of the study, I agree to be formally interviewed four times by the researcher. These interviews will be audio-taped and later transcribed for analysis. Although the tapes will be stored by the researcher for future possible research, they will remain in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home.

To protect anonymity, my name and any features that may identity me will be removed from all written materials and oral presentations in which the findings of the study may be used. I understand, however, that there are rare instances when the researcher is required to share personally-identifiable information (e.g., according to policy, contract, regulation). For example, in response to a complaint about the research, officials at the University of New Hampshire, designees of the sponsor(s), and/or regulatory and oversight government agencies may access research data. I also understand that the researcher is required by law to report certain information to government and/or law enforcement officials (e.g., child abuse, threatened violence against self of others, communicable diseases).

I understand that the process of being interviewed and exploring topics related to cultural diversity may present the risk of minimal psychological discomfort. I also understand that my participation may provide the researcher with information that will lead to greater understanding of cultural diversity and the role it plays in elementary school classrooms. This information may be of benefit to those who recruit and educate both pre-service and in-service teachers. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and at any time during the research, I may refuse to continue participating without penalty.

If I have any questions about my rights as a research subject I may contact Rachel Johnson's dissertation chair, Dr. Kim Fries (603 862-2647 or kim.fries@unh.edu) or Julie

Simpson in the UNH Office of Sponsored Research (603862-2003 or
julie.simpson@unh.edu).

I, _____, agree to participate in the above study
conducted by Rachel Johnson. In signing this form, I agree to participate under the
conditions stated above.

_____ (Participant's Signature)

_____ (Date of Signature)