UNDERSTANDING CURRICULUM IN CONTEXT:

USING *CURRERE* TO EXPLORE THE PERCEPTIONS, ATTITUDES AND

PRACTICES OF WHITE TEACHERS IN CLASSROOMS WITH AFRICAN

AMERICAN STUDENTS

A Dissertation

by

JENNIFER LOUISE MILAM

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2008

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

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Approved by:

Co-Chairs of Committee, G. Patrick Slattery, Jr.
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ABSTRACT

Understanding Curriculum in Context: Using *Currere* to Explore the Perceptions,

Attitudes and Practices of White Teachers in Classrooms with African American

Students.

(December 2008)

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As a careful look into the daily lived experiences of teachers in today's schools,

the overarching purpose of this study was to seek a clearer understanding of how race

may be reflected in the construction of teachers' perceptions and practices. More

specifically, the intent was to understand the relationship between the selected White

teachers' perceptions of themselves as White educators, their perceptions of the African

American students they teach, and their teaching practices. Further, this research also

sought to explore the potential and possibilities for engaging *currere,* as defined in

Pinar's 1976 work, as a method of study in educational research. With this in mind, this

study was not only a journey to explore the complexities in classrooms of selected White

teachers and their African American students; it also became a complicated process of

self-excavation and deconstruction of myself, a former White teacher of African American students.

A qualitative methodology, guided by critical epistemologies was used. The researcher, acted as participant observer. The research included four components: teacher interviews, classroom observations, informal dialogue, and teacher reflection.

Four significant instructional practices and interactions emerged from classroom observations that seemed to reflect the relationship between selected White teachers' perceptions of themselves and the African American students they teach. These were: (1) overcorrection and inconsistent (re)direction, (2) failure to engage, (3) isolation and dismissal, and (4) lowered expectations and lesser curriculum.

While the research in education has identified similar themes and practices, when viewed in and through the context of *currere*, a greater complexity in classrooms with White teachers and African American students is exposed. *Currere* holds that each of us is a manifestation of our past and that in order to realize any semblance of meaningful, authentic progress in the future, each of us must first examine our past, our perceptions and our ways of knowing and being in the world. *Currere* offers us a method by which to begin this journey – as individuals, as a collective society, and certainly as teachers.

DEDICATION

To my best friend, soul mate, and husband, John, a remarkable man who brings out the best in me. Your unwavering support, generous patience, and unconditional love have made this work possible.

To my children, Alexandra Nicole and Keith Oliver. You are the light of my life, the joy in my heart, and my greatest accomplishments.

To Rodderick, Timothy and Ometrius, three of my third grade students at Hancock Elementary. Thank you for teaching me how to be a better person and teacher. You are the inspiration for this work. You are *Every Child*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

You must be the change you wish to see in the world.

--Mahatma Ghandi

Each member of my committee has contributed in a profound way to my work and my understanding of what it means to be a conscientious scholar, a committed activist, and a compassionate human being. Dr. Patrick Slattery, a brilliant intellectual and mentor. Always unwavering in his support, enthusiasm, and encouragement – even as the years passed – I could always count on his being there, no matter what time of day or where he might be. Dr. Kathryn McKenzie, a remarkable woman and incredible teacher. She taught me more about being a woman, an academic, and a committed public school advocate than anyone. Dr. Steve Carpenter, a gifted artist and treasured confidante - always just a phone call, email, text message or IM away. He taught me that the race is much more important than the finish line and that the life one lives should be a model for others. Dr. Patricia Larke, always a critical and thorough voice. She held me to the highest of standards, pushed me when I needed to be pushed, and consistently offered a strong, decisive eye on my work. I also want to thank Dr. Jim Scheurich, a gifted professor who mentored and nurtured me in my quest to become an academic. You all helped to make this work possible, and I will forever be grateful for you and what you have brought to my life.

I want to thank all of my dear friends and family who supported me in this journey. While pursuing this degree has been complex and challenging, I appreciate your steadfast support in helping me realize my dream of completing the Ph.D. In particular, I

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH

> The black child is *Every Child*…The challenge in teaching is to find a way of communicating to each child the idea that his or her special quality is understood, valued, and can be talked about. It is not easy, because we are all influenced by the fears and prejudices, apprehensions and expectations, which have become a carefully hidden part of every one of us.
>   Vivian Gussin-Paley, 1979
>   *White Teacher*

As I sit at my computer to write this dissertation nearly six years to the day after I said good-bye to my third-grade students and put them on the bus home for the summer, I see myself, a White teacher of African American students, reflected in the stories and lived-experiences of the teachers that shared their classrooms with me in this research. My initial assignment that year was third grade self-contained. In my classroom of 26 students, I had every special education student in third grade as well as all students for whom English was their second language. All but a handful of my students were racial and ethnic minorities. In what would be my first and only year of full-time public school teaching, I learned valuable lessons about equity, curriculum, racism, discipline,

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This dissertation follows the style of the *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*.

tracking, wise practices, and humanity in the public schools. I also became increasingly aware that the public school system in which I myself had been educated and in which I wholeheartedly believed, was failing certain students – many of them students of color and language minorities.

I was immersed in an environment in which I found myself unprepared and struggling to meet the needs of my students. Issues of race, class, gender, and social inequity were daily reminders of difference and often struggle – barriers to overcome but offering opportunity to transgress. At the time I was teaching, I could neither articulate nor discern my own struggles or those of my students. Why was I not able to reach all of my students every day? How was I to teach 26 different children, all with individual needs, many of whom were so different than me? Why did it seem my greatest challenge was teaching well my African American students? Was I not prepared to be a teacher after six years of university training and countless hours of field experiences in public schools? The answers to these questions were different almost daily as I drove home after long days of teaching math, science, language arts, and social studies, participating in team planning meetings with other teachers, conducting parent-teacher conferences, completing mountains of administrative paperwork, collecting money for various school functions and fundraisers all the while trying to take time to connect with my students in such a way that let them know I cared for and loved them as human beings.

As challenging as a first year teaching position can be, I was privileged to work with some of the most exceptional children in the state. And as I look back on that year of teaching, I am certain of only one thing – that my third-grade students taught me

much more than I taught them. That while I delivered a curriculum (some days better than others), handled teacher-tasks, and did my share of bathroom, lunch, and recess duties, in the end, what I learned is that I, we, still have a lot to learn. Our students, especially those who are struggling and whose needs are not being met, need us to acknowledge what we do not know and actively seek out solutions. For our students of racial and ethnic minorities, the call for answers is even more pressing. Our schools and our teachers, teachers like me, are failing to meet the needs – not only the academic, but also the social and emotional needs – of an ever-growing number of these students. As Vivian Gussin Paley (1979) so brilliantly noted "The Black child is *Every Child*..." - we, as White teachers, must bring ourselves to the questions about schooling inequity and our seemingly persistent inability to bring our children of color, specifically our African American children, to achievement and success. We must actively and honestly seek out the answers that allow us to teach in such a "manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students…to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin" (hooks, 1994). This work is my attempt to ask the honest questions and seek difficult understandings. In this first chapter, I will briefly note the literature that further framed the problem and the methodology that was used in this study.

Literature Review

Educational research that ignores [these] racialization processes and that treats race simply as a variable reifies racial categories and misses the role schools play in the production and reproduction of race, racial identities, and racial inequality.

Lewis, 2004
Race in the Schoolyard

The myriad of issues and challenges present in the context of United States' society and public schools in the 21st century include, but are certainly not limited to, the intense pressure of high-stakes testing and accountability of the standards movement, the *de facto* restoration of segregated schooling and education, and the overwhelming crises of school funding. One of the most critical issues with the most far reaching consequences for the well-being of our society is the persistent underachievement of an increasing number of students – our students of color – more specifically, our African American children (Jenks & Phillips, 1988; Skrla & Scheurich, 2004; Banks & Banks, 2004; Marshall, 2002; Nieto, 2004).

The literature in educational research, is replete with references to minority groups, compressing all cultural experiences, other than European (read: White), into a singular "Other" (Hunter & Bartee, 2003; Resnik, 2004; Thiranarayanan, 2004) or "urban" perspective intended to encompass all students and communities of color (Kretovics & Nussell, 1994; Knight, 2004; Parker in Skrla & Scheurich, 2004). Because "race assumes an irrefutably prominent position in how people are perceived and received in the United States" (Marshall, 2002, p. 47) it is not particularly productive to ignore the specific and unique qualities and experiences of individual racial groups. Moreover, an examination of achievement data reveals a disproportionate gap in success

between African American students and their White counterparts that exceeds all other subgroups (Latina/o, Limited English Proficient, economically disadvantaged, etc) in most instances. Steele (1992) notes that while African American children begin school with test scores comparable to their White counterparts, as they progress through primary and secondary school, the more they fall behind regardless of their socio-economic status. Very pointedly he adds "[S]omething depresses black achievement at every level of preparation even the highest" (Steele, 1992, p. 69). It is for these reasons, coupled with my own experiences as a White teacher struggling to meet the needs of my African American students, that I have chosen a specific focus on White teachers in classrooms with African American students.

Literature in education since the advent of *No Child Left Behind* (2002) has begun to explore reasons for what seems to be the public schools' consistent inability to serve poor, minority students in general (Johnston & Viadero, 2000; Hunter & Bartee, 2003; Skrla & Scheurich, 2004). However, investigations that thoroughly and critically explore the context of schooling and educational practices that may contribute to this inequity are inadequate (Nieto, 2004). Research on the significance of the race of the teacher as a factor in students' personal and academic success is limited and often misunderstood (Douglas, Lewis, Henderson, Scott, & Garrison-Wade, 2005) and fails to examine how Whiteness and White teachers' identities, perceptions, and attitudes contribute to her/his role as a teacher within the context of the classroom (Allen 1999). Speaking directly to this, Marshall (2002) further illuminates the importance of considering the role of teacher subjectivities in the context of our schools by writing,

"One of the most urgent challenges facing teachers of African American students is to become critically aware of factors that influence their perceptions and attitudes toward these students. Teachers' perceptions and attitudes directly affect the substance of the academic content they teach and their interactions with students" (p. 91). It is not however enough to consider teachers' perceptions in a vacuum, we must also consider how they, and their practice are situated in society, history, and in relation to others within and without the school. As Giroux (1992) notes, "…any discussion of public schooling has to address the political, economic and social realities that construct the contexts that shape the institution of schooling and the conditions that produce the diverse populations of students who constitute its constituencies" (p. 162). To this end, the purpose of this study is to develop a clearer understanding of how race may impact the construction of White teachers' identities and perceptions and how these perceptions may be reflected in decisions about what to teach, what not to teach, how to teach and to whom in classrooms with African American students.

The field of curriculum studies and the work of Pinar (1978, 2004; Pinar et al, 2004) and other critical curriculum scholars and theorists (Slattery, 1995, 2001; Miller, 2005; Edgerton, 1996) offer promise for a method in which we can study the curriculum – both formally and informally – not as a separate, apolitical, canonical entity that is delivered in classrooms, but that which is enacted through us and as "that experience [is] encoded in the school curriculum" (Pinar, 2004, p. 20) and schooling experience. Curriculum research is study maintained "through conscious work with oneself and others" (Pinar, 1978) and because it is "highly symbolic, the theorization of curriculum

requires situating itself historically, socially, and autobiographically" (Pinar, 2004, p.20).

Reconceptualized as *currere*, research in curriculum requires a critical and thoughtful

examination of the ideals, purposes, and current practices of education and schooling

vis-à-vis a complicated conversation, the point of which is autobiographic, political, and

cultural movement (Pinar, 2001). Again, because curriculum is not only the guide of

lessons to be taught and objectives to be learned (formal curriculum) but that which is

not taught (the null curriculum) and that which is taught through actions, ideologies, and

philosophies in the school (hidden curriculum), an engagement with curriculum and

schooling that questions each of these is essential. Giroux (1992) explains that this

engagement, takes "seriously how ideologies are lived, experienced, and felt at the level

of everyday life as a basis for student experience and knowledge." In this engagement

with curriculum and in this mode of study, we must give careful consideration to how

our schools are "raced" as embedded institutions in society and look closely into the

classrooms of teachers and students to better understand how these ideologies are

enacted (Giroux, 1992). The method of study that is *currere* urges us to "slow down, to

remember even re-enter the past, and to meditatively imagine the future" (Pinar, 2004, p.

4). *Currere* requires that not only will I explore and analyze the experiences of the

selected White teachers in classrooms with African American students, but I will also be

reflecting on my own experience of being a White teacher with African American

students, looking back into my own struggles in such a way that our understanding

becomes "expanded…and complicated, then finally mobilized" (Pinar, 2004, p. 5). The

first step in realizing any real change, any real progress toward a more equitable school

experience for all students is to better understand our own experiences, to name the injustices, and begin to grapple with how we can work within a system that resists change.

Again, because race assumes such a prominent position in how individuals are perceived and received in society, it is hugely important that we consider more critically how this positionality influences our schools. Jenks & Phillips (1988) speak directly to this when noting that the public school is influenced by an existing "racism…that continues to be a significant barrier to student achievement." This racism manifests itself in many different ways, namely in the citing of any number of deficit explanations for why children of color are not attaining comparable levels of achievement with their White counterparts. These might include, but are not limited to claims of inherent inferiority based on race (D'Souza, 1997) and/or a deterministic culture of poverty (Payne, 1995). While many perceived deficit explanations place the burden of school failure external to the school (Lewis, 1965; Payne, 1995; Valencia & Solarzano, 1997; Douglas et al, 2005), it is important to note that inequity in school achievement is *not* a result of innate differences based on race (Jenks & Phillips, 1988). Rather, when these deficit explanations take hold in schools, teachers begin to see their students as deficient which likely impacts their expectations, teaching, and ultimately, the student outcomes.

A teacher's perceptions and expectations for her students will affect the choices she makes about the content and skills she will teach and therefore, these decisions about who is taught and how will directly determine students learning experiences in the classroom (Schmidt, Porter, Floden, Freeman, & Schwille, 1987). In one of very few

studies that examine the influence of White teachers' racial identity on teacher practice, Ratesic-Koetke (1995) suggests that racial identity has an impact on teachers' classroom practices, beliefs and curriculum considerations. Using Helms' (1990) theory of White racial identity, Ratesic-Koetke (1995) outlines how the relationship between racial identity and teaching can be documented and can be the foundation of a more reflective practice for White teachers in uncovering their own biases and how they impact their students. Moreover, teachers are influenced by the politics in and about society as well as those politics lived in the school building (Pinar, 2004). Deficit explanations, socializations processes, life experiences, all work to shape a teachers' perceptions and practices with her students. Moreover, the race and gender of the teacher, likely influence her work in the classroom as well. The intersections of identity and race are powerful social constructions that serve as foundations for daily interactions (Woodson, 1933; Watkins, 2001; Pinar, 2004). Race is a powerful aspect of schooling given its impact on attitudes towards African American students (Pang & Sablan, 1995); however, this racial juxtaposition of White teacher and African American student is currently under-theorized; specifically when it comes to classroom-based research. Watkins (2001) notes, "Issues and questions surrounding the education of Blacks date to 1619 when the first slaves were brought to the new land…still after four centuries, the "Negro Question" or "Negro Problem" remains at the heart of the social and education conundrum" (Watkins, 2001). And while C.G. Woodson (1933) and W.E.B. Dubois (1935) both challenged the quality of education for African American students post-desegregation several decades ago, African American students continue to lag behind

others on standard measures of achievement, are three times as likely to drop out of school and are twice as likely to be suspended from school as White students (Ladson-Billings, 1994; NCES, 2003). Many of the questions surrounding the impact of race on teaching and learning in the classroom remain. This work is an attempt to theorize the perceived relationship between the "curriculum, the individual, society, and history" (Pinar, 2004, p. 21). More succinctly, it is my journey to examine myself as a White teacher and other White teachers in classrooms with African American students to better understand how race may be reflected in perceptions, attitudes, and classroom practice.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the term race is defined as a "sociopolitical designation in which individuals are assigned to a particular racial group based on presumed biological or non-white characteristics such as skin color, physical features, and in some cases, language" (Carter, 1995, p. 15).

As articulated by the United States Census Bureau, the term White is used to describe a "person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as "White." (http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/meta/long_RHI125206.htm)

Africa American and Black are used interchangeably in this study to refer to individuals having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as Black or African American (http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/meta/long_RHI125206.htm).

Racial identity, is the "belief system that evolves in reaction to perceived differential racial group membership." (Helms, 1990, p. 4) Racial identity development is considered an ongoing and non-linear process through which people move to varying degrees depending on experience and motivations.

Culture is defined as "the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group" and can include "the characteristic features of everyday existence (as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time" (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture). According to Banks & Banks (2004) culture is a "sedimentation of the historical experience of person and social grouping of various kinds, such as nuclear family, kin, gender, ethnicity, race, and social class, all with differing access to power in society" (p. 32). The term culture is not to be equated with the term race.

Methodology

As a careful look into the daily lives and experiences of teachers in today's schools, this qualitative investigation seeks to uncover and explore how racialized dynamics of curriculum are reflected in perceptions and practice in classrooms of selected White teachers and the African American students they teach. Moreover, by means of a careful and conscientious engagement with *currere* as a method of study, the purpose of this research is to elicit a clearer understanding of how race may influence the construction of a teacher's perceptions and how these perceptions, coupled with a teacher's experiences, may be echoed in her decisions about *what* to teach, what *not* to

teach, *how* to teach and *to whom*. The findings of this study are intended to contribute to a growing body of literature and theory on race and curriculum as well as to inform teacher education programs, in-service teachers, school administrators, and other stakeholders committed to improving the educational experience for all students. Understanding how race and potential racialized dynamics between teachers and students are enacted in classrooms either supporting or hindering the personal and academic success of African American students may provide insight into how we might better prepare teachers to work in schools situated in an increasingly complex society and to better meet the needs of all students.

Situated primarily in the literature of curriculum studies with influence from various fields that include multicultural education, critical white studies, critical race theory and feminism and framed in the method of *currere* (Pinar and Grumet, 1978; Pinar, 2004), the following questions guided this research:

1. What are selected White teachers perceptions of themselves as White educators?

2. What are selected White teachers perceptions of the African American students they teach?

3. What are selected White teachers' perceptions about the relationships between their perceptions of themselves as White educators, their perceptions of the African American students they teach, and their teaching practices?

In addition to the above noted research questions, this study also sought to explore the potential and possibilities for engaging *currere* as a method of study in educational research. As noted earlier in the chapter, *currere* is curriculum research maintained

"through conscious work with oneself and others" (Pinar, 1978). With this in mind, this study was not only a journey to explore the complexities between selected White teachers and their African American students; it also became a complicated process of self-excavation and deconstruction of myself, a former White teacher of African American students. In many ways, I became the seventh teacher participant. At all times during the research and analysis, my ways of knowing and understanding what it meant to be a White teacher of African American students was challenged. In many instances, I saw myself and my own teaching in the teachers and classrooms I observed. I witnessed classroom interactions that were eerily similar to those in my own classroom just a few years ago. I felt both reassurance and discomfort in the similarities between myself and the teacher participants – reassurance that my observations and research were indeed unveiling the important, complex, and often harsh realities in classrooms and discomfort in the realization that I too had been complicit in the very same way as a teacher too. While the examination of *currere* as a method of study and research began as a secondary aim of this study and process, as I will discuss in detail in Chapter VI, it swiftly and decisively became a critically important contribution to the research, my own understanding of the data, and my own sense of being a White teacher of African American students.

This research is used a qualitative methodology (Merriam, 1998), guided by critical and interpretive epistemologies was used. As Merriam (2002) explains, interpretive research strives to "understand the meaning people have constructed about

their world and their experiences" (p. 4-5). Serving as the primary research instrument, I (the researcher), acted as participant observer.

For this study, six White, female teachers were chosen by purposive sampling (Patton, 1990). These teachers were from two campuses – one elementary (grades pre-K through 3), one intermediate (grades 4 and 5) – in the same district. The district was chosen because its demographics mirrored that of the state. Students of color comprised over half of the total student enrollment (29.2% African American, 35.0% Hispanic) when conversely the teaching population was overwhelmingly White and female (85.7% and 75.4% respectively). This district served a total of approximately 3,000 students in 2006-2007, the year this study was conducted. Initial interviews were conducted to establish a relationship of trust and openness with participants (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Following initial interviews, classroom observations, reflective activities, and summative interviews were conducted. Throughout the research study, participants were asked to share their ideas about teaching and learning, instructional decision making, expectations and perceptions of their students, and achievement.

All interviews and focus groups were audio taped (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) and later transcribed and coded. Member checks were conducted and themes/patterns were identified to guide and inform the next observations, interviews, and informal conversations (Glesne, 1999). In sum, data collection was completed in eight weeks during the 2006-2007 school year.

Limitations

As a qualitative research study, this research is subjective, specific to the context and does not hold as its goal generalizability. Rather, qualitative research is "inquiry that help[s] us to understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (Merriam, 1998, p.5). Holding to the primary assumption that reality is constructed by individuals as they interact with and are acted upon by their social world, in this case the school, subjectivity is embraced, not avoided and the focus is on understanding the phenomena from the perspective of the participants.

This research is specific to the context of the school in the study and the experiences and narratives of the six teacher participants and me. Together we sought to understand how our perceptions and attitudes impact our practices as White teachers in classrooms with African American students. While not generalizable, the research methodology is well articulated so that others might attempt a similar project or inquiry.

Also in line with qualitative research was my decision to serve as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998). As participant observer (Ladson-Billings, 2000) I was immersed in the research context, sometimes more actively than others, but always within and amidst the teachers and students I was studying. With this in mind, it is important to acknowledge that my own understandings, perceptions, and theoretical biases impacted this work. It is not only important to acknowledge my own subjectivity in the work, but to work throughout the research toward a "reflexivity of discomfort" (Pillow, 2003). In this version of reflexivity, Pillow

(2003) suggests that we engage in a "possibility of critique beyond a certain kind of paralyzed reflexivity" that has resulted in the research community's becoming overly comfortable in the common uses of reflexivity that presuppose the ability to "transcend" or "distance" oneself from the research, the subject of the research, and the world (p. 187). This use of reflexivity as a means to work both "within and against" mirrors Scheurich's (2002) assertion that White, anti-racist scholars must work both within the white racist system and against it at the same time. Reflexivity in this way becomes a "methodological tool interruptive of practices of gathering data as 'truths' into existing "folds of known" to practices which interrogate the truthfulness of the tale and provide multiple answers" (Trinh, 1991, p. 12 as cited in Pillow, 2003, p. 192). Being a White teacher and researcher, privileged by race and thus given voice in the system, demands my moral and ethical attention to uncover, trouble, and problematize the inequities in the system. It is not my goal to "tell the story" of the Other, but to unveil the oppression of Others by those like me through a careful, critical, complicated, and complex study of race and curriculum that examines the "relations between academic knowledge and life history [my own and that of the teacher participants] in the interest of self-understanding and social reconstruction" (Pinar, 2004, p. 35).

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have outlined the critical nature of our need to better understand the daily interactions in classrooms of White teachers with African American students in an effort to gain more knowledge about how race and curriculum intersect and impact

both teacher and student. While there is a growing body of research that considers race, there is still limited research that is conducted *in* the classroom – perhaps because of accessibility issues or because of the sensitivity of the subject. In any case, we cannot allow the conversation about race to be reduced to racial/ethnic subgroup assessments that look at who is achieving and who is not. We must look beyond the raw data to ponder what might be hidden – hidden in the curriculum, disguised by the implementation of curriculum, and obscured in schools by only superficial conversations about race, equity, and teaching. Also in this chapter I outlined the methodology used in this study.

In Chapter II, the theoretical underpinnings of this research have been presented in great detail. I contend that using *currere* both as a method of study and lens for research, we might better "understand the overall educational significance of the curriculum… the relations among the curriculum, the individual, society, and history" (Pinar, 2004, p. 21). I will further extend the framework provided in Chapter I with regard to how teaching is raced and gendered, the current experiences in schools for many of our African American students, White racial identity, and the impetus for this study.

Chapter III provides a detailed explanation of the method of inquiry and research methodology that were used. Included is an explanation of my role as "participant observer," the selection of the site and the participants, research design and implementation, and data analysis.

In Chapter IV, I have provided a description of the school district in which this study took place, the schools themselves and the teacher participants. In this chapter, I focused primarily on the information teachers shared with me in their initial interviews. Also in this chapter, interview data were carefully examined in an effort to locate an understanding of each teacher's racial identity (Helms, 1994) and her perceptions of the African American students she teaches.

Chapter V is an analysis and synthesis of the data in response to the three research questions outlined here. In this chapter, I present data that provides a brief glimpse into how the teachers' perceptions and attitudes may be reflected in the daily interactions and instruction in classrooms. The four primary themes described as classroom interactions and instructional strategies that emerged from analysis of data are also presented in this chapter.

Finally, in Chapter VI, I will discuss in detail the method of *currere*, my autobiographic moment, and how this study of curriculum reflects not only the lived experiences of the teacher participants, but mine as well. I will also briefly note implications of this research for teacher education programs, educational research and practice in schools and classrooms.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In seeking a deeper understanding of the daily experiences of teachers and students in schools, Nieto (2004) illuminates the importance of considering the broader sociopolitical context of education. She writes:

> It is clear that no single explanation [of academic achievement] is sufficient to explain why some students succeed in school and others fail…we need to understand school achievement as a combination of *personal, cultural, familial, interactive, political, relational, and* societal issues, and this means understanding the sociopolitical context in which education takes place (emphasis in original; Nieto, 2004, pp. 274-275).

Giroux (1992) further urges us to consider "making visible the social problems and conditions that affect those students who are at risk in our society while recognizing that such problems need to be addressed in both pedagogical and political terms, inside and outside of the school" (p. 162). This chapter will note the literature in curriculum studies, cultural studies, and multicultural education, as well as the socio-political and pedagogical terms, which frame this study.

Curriculum as *Currere*

As Pinar (2004) writes of *currere*, his conception of curriculum as action (that which we *do* in classrooms) and complicated conversation (how we *think about* what we

do), we must aspire "to understand the overall educational significance of the curriculum, focusing especially on interdisciplinary themes – such as gender or multiculturalism…as well as the relations among the curriculum, the individual, society, and history" (p. 21). Some time in the making and first put forth by Pinar and Grumet (1976), the reconceptualization of curriculum as *currere* envisions curriculum as both public and intimately personal – it is a "heightened engagement with the world" (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995). *Currere* as a verb encompasses the infinitive autobiographical nature of the lived experience; as a method it requires both inward and outward reflection and imagination; and in practice, it is temporal, tentative, historical, and social (Pinar, et al, 2004; Slattery, 1995; Pinar, 2004). More clearly, *currere* requires that we, as curriculum theorists, researchers, and teachers, reflect on the past and look toward the future – "then, slowly…analyze[s] one's experience of the past and fantasies of the future in order to understand more fully, with more complexity and subtlety, one's submergence in the present." (Pinar, 2004, p. 4). Much of the work done in critical curriculum studies that seeks an understanding of curriculum, individual, society, history, and education is similar to other critical traditions in that they share, as Sleeter and Bernal (2004) write, "an insistence on grounding practice in ideological clarity that explicitly critiques at least one form of collective oppression" (p. 252). In this way, *currere* and the work of critical curriculum studies calls us to trouble our past and problematize our future with regard to educational experience all the while working within and against our own submergence in the present. In *Notes on the Curriculum Field 1978*, Pinar insisted that "curriculum research must emancipate the researcher if it

is to authentically offer such a possibility to others" (p. 9). Curriculum research, or

currere, is study and research maintained "through conscious work with oneself and

others" (Pinar, 1978, p. 10). A complex understanding, or comprehension, is critical as

the first step toward realizing true "curricular possibilities" (Pinar, 1978, p.10).

Moreover, since the reconceptualization of curriculum studies in the late 1970's,

curriculum research has identified race, culture, ethnicity, and gender as primary sites of

understanding curriculum (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman, 2004).

   Curriculum reconceptualized requires a critical and thoughtful examination of the

ideals, purposes, and current practices of education and schooling. Slattery (1995)

writes of a world view that would allow "educators to envision a way out of the turmoil

of contemporary schooling that too often is characterized by violence, bureaucratic

gridlock, curricular stagnation, depersonalized evaluation, political conflict, economic

crisis, decaying infrastructure, emotional fatigue, demoralization of personnel, and

hopelessness" (p. 20). Indeed, envisioning such a way of schooling is a monumental

task, one that can only be accomplished by naming the turmoil and inequity, locating it

in its place of (re) production, investigating the roots and repercussions, and finally

moving toward an ever-expanding, complex understanding of what it means to be in the

world.

   Certainly this new view of schooling and education will require a constant and

consistent reflection and inquisition of our daily experiences and practices in schools.

Nieto (2004) claims that it is the responsibility and challenge of every educator and

researcher "to make explicit the image of our students and of our society that is implied

in our interactions in the school context" (p. xvi). She continues to note that societal

aims for education, the hopes we have for our students, the abilities, knowledge, and

opportunities that we as a society intend for all children to have and the evolving society

in context "are all written in the daily record of our interactions with our students" (p.

xvi) and are thus *currere* in its most clear sense. Only once we understand curriculum in

its context as all that we do, think, and feel in education and in schools can we conceive

of *currere* and examine seriously the impact of academic studies and experience on our

students. This type of curriculum and pedagogy takes "seriously how ideologies are

lived, experienced, and felt at the level of everyday life as a basis for student experience

and knowledge" (Giroux, 1992, p. 176).

The Significance of Race in Education

Many scholars have explored the significance of race in education from multiple

perspectives (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Howard, G. 1999; Gay, 2000; Perry, Steele, &

Hilliard, 2003; Paley, 1989). Nieto (2004) writes, "our public schools are unsuccessful

with many students, primarily those from racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse

and poor families" (p. 2). Many explanations have been offered for the inequity present

in our schools and society. In fact, a long history of perceived deficit explanations for the

failure of students of color exist that place the burden of failure external to the school –

such explanations include, but are certainly not limited to, students performance,

inadequate preparation, and lack of family support (Valencia & Solorzano, 1997;

Douglas, et al, 2005). While at the outset, deficit explanations for school inequity might

seem innocuous and offer potential insight, the beliefs held by teachers and school people spill over into the daily interactions in school in the form of low expectations and self-fulfilling, generative modes of address that serve to privilege some and disadvantage others (Good, 1987; Oakes, 1990; Ellsworth, 1997a). These explanations become even more problematic when considered in concert with the racial dynamics of our schools in which the overwhelming majority of teachers are White and increasingly, more than 50% of our students are of racial and ethnic minorities and where increasingly, racial and linguistic minority students are not performing to the same levels as their White counterparts.

Beyond deficit thinking and an overwhelming demographic of high numbers of White teachers and increasing numbers of students of color, the public school is influenced by an existing "racism within schools [that] continues to be a significant barrier to student achievement" (Jenks & Phillips, 1988) and "hegemonic discourse that advantages whites and disadvantages those of color" (McKenzie, 2001). While the many studies and attempts at explanation of difference in achievement are pervasive in educational literature, there are few that address specifically the nature of race in the schools and therefore, fail "to capture the reality of race as a product of schooling, (and) as part of the schooling process" (Lewis, 2003, p. 3). In other words, in what ways are we 'raced' by our experiences? In what ways does race (if at all) influence the way we get to 'be' in schools?

There exists a systemic impact of race and racism present in our everyday experience (Feagin, 2000) that influences the very nature of the schooling and lived

experiences in general. However, while race is an inextricably prominent force in US

society, it remains a socio-political construction (Carter, 1995; Rogers and Mosley,

2006). It is critical to note that inequity in school achievement, while complex, is *not* a

result of innate differences in ability based on race (Jenks & Phillips, 1988). Rather, we

might consider the context of systemic racism and the social constructions of race and its

potential impact on teachers, students, curriculum and teaching in the classroom to better

understand the inequity in our schools as embedded in a much larger societal context.

Feagin (2000) claims, "People are born, live and die within the racist system" (p.

4). Realization of our participation in this system and the multitude of implications that

this position suggests for the way our educational system is structured, the way it

reproduces inequity and maintains a hegemonic hierarchy of achievement in our schools,

should at the very least urge us to consider the role of race, racism, and seemingly racist

practices in producing the striking inequities in achievement. The racialized dynamics in

our schools include not only those external forces acting upon the school but also those

acting from within the educational context (Nieto, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 1994;

Pinar, 2004). These can include, but are not limited to, the potential influence of the

race of the teacher, the race of the students, conversations about race, references to racial

identity or difference on the playground or in the teacher's lounge, or interactions with

parents or community members. Taken into consideration, we might better understand

the significance of race in the educational experiences of our young people.

According to Ayers (1995) and Kohl (1998) very little is known about the

effectiveness of White teachers on African American students' personal and academic

success. To study the role that race of the teachers plays in relation to that of the students' personal and academic success offers opportunity for illuminating the classrooms barriers, struggles, and misinformation that plague our system currently (Douglas, et al, 2005; Nieto, 2004). If ever the public school will transgress the racial divide reinforced by hegemony, racism, and the structural inequality that segregates our teachers and students, we must consider what it means to be a racialized being in the schooling context – both as a student and a teacher. Speaking to the interactions among those in schools, Martin & Baxter (2001) make clear the importance of the relationship between the teacher and the student and its powerful impact on school performance. If we continue to neglect seemingly poor quality interactions between White educators and African American students the achievement gap will not only persist (Martin & Baxter, 2001) but grow larger and even more deleterious.

Teaching as Raced

Hofstadter (1963) notes, "The figure of the school teacher may well be taken as a central symbol in any modern society." However, the identities, purposes, and true nature of teaching, or what it means to be a teacher, are often much more elusive. While the role and societal prescription of what it means to be teacher have changed as demands for education change, teachers are no doubt influenced by the politics located in society as well as those politics lived in the school building. These politics are reflected in the multiple identities of teachers – in their bodies, their minds, their everyday speech and conduct – and these politics are as multiple as the teacher

subjectivities (Pinar, 2004). According to Pinar (2004), teaching is "a matter of enabling students to employ academic knowledge to understand their own self-formation within society and the world" (p. 16). We must conceive of teaching and teachers as but one identity or role within society and the world and study how teachers are conceived by others as well as formed by their "own internalized life stories" (Pinar, 2004, p. 30).

Embedded in societal context, education in America is racialized. We cannot ignore race as a factor that influences educational opportunity (Kozol, 1991) and influences teacher expectations and student achievement (Winfield, 1986; Marshall, 2002; McKenzie, 2001). Situated among a racial hierarchy with White and Black as opposites (Ladson-Billings, 2000), the racialization of society can be seen "not only in the social, economic, and cultural resources passed along generations…but also in [White] dominance of the economic, legal, educational, and political arrangements" (Feagin, 2000, p. 206). Feagin (2000) continues, "From the colonial era to the present, educational institutions have been critical to the transmission of the racist ideology…Elites have long maintained power in part by controlling the processes of learning and knowledge dissemination through public, religious, and other private schooling" (p. 76). As an ever-present dynamic in American society, the politics of race and repression are (mis) represented in textbooks, curriculum, and every day practices in schools. Pinar et al (2004) notes that a lack of understanding of the racialized nature of curriculum may lend itself to a denial of the racial nature of curriculum and to the denial by most "Whites" of a racialized self – lending a view of the racialized "other" that is focused on difference and separateness (and all too often deficiency). This becomes

critical when considering the dynamics in classrooms of White teachers and African American students. As noted by several scholars, education in America is often designed to control and socialize people – and the education of African Americans has been and is no exception (Woodson, C.G, 1933; Watkins, 2001). The intersections of identity and race are powerful social constructions that serve as foundations for daily interactions (Pinar, 2004) in and about schools.

As noted by Lewis (2004), "More than any other time in U.S. history, Black students are being educated by people that are not of their race or cultural background." More specifically, almost 87% of the United States' teachers are White – only 8% are African American. While it has been noted that race is a powerful aspect of schooling given its impact on attitudes towards African American students (Pang & Sablan, 1995), this classroom-based examination of the dynamics between White teacher and African American student at present time is under-theorized – unclear is the impact of the White teacher, her perceptions, attitudes and her practices, on the achievement and well-being of African American students. Moreover, historically ignored is the significance of what the African American community values in the education of its people (Perry, et al, 2003; West, 2001; Cochran-Smith 2000; Douglas, et al, 2005). We must look carefully into the nuances of what happens in classrooms each day – not only at structural and historical inequities – if we are to dismantle and disrupt current trends with respect to our African American students.

Teaching as Gendered

Of the gendered nature of curriculum and teaching, Pinar (2004) writes "students [are] affected, often in brutal ways, by the gender system that forms and deforms us" (p. 403). Feminist theorists take as their call the challenge to focus on practices and to theorize ways to make teaching and learning more democratic. Ellsworth (1994) struggles to find an "educational project [that] would refine the silence of the unknowable, freeing it from 'the male-defined context of Absence, Lack, and Fear' and make of that silence 'a language of its own' that changes the nature and direction of speech itself" (p. 320). In the same article, "Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy," Ellsworth (1994) grapples with the "myths" of empowerment, de-objectification of the teacher, balanced and shared dialogue. Essentially, she illuminates the inherent and essential paternalistic project of education and makes clear that all educators are not "free of these learned and internalized oppressions" and therefore reproduce them even when their intention is otherwise (p. 308).

Miller (1980) further troubles the gendered nature of schooling and education. While women have always "found a place in education" it was men who administered schools and called for "dutifulness, respect for righteousness, and obedience to existing social authorities" to be imposed on the children (p. 32). Miller (1980) continues, "Women could provide the gentility and docility to maintain such an atmosphere…women were in no position, economically or socially, to question their roles as dutiful and dependent subordinates" (p. 33). Troubling here is that while women

have served immeasurably and valuably in building the foundation of the education system in place today, their role was predetermined and necessarily constrained by others.

While women and their role in education have changed in many ways, there remains a dichotomy for the female teacher – between her conception of herself and what she "should be" within the world. The role of caregiver, servant to others, and subjugation of self often overshadows the need for women to attend to themselves. Moreover, the role that the female is to assume in relation to the masculine other is problematic because her perceived reality and the construction of that reality from the "overriding patriarchal nature of the generally accepted social reality" (Miller, 1980, p. 37). Miller (1980) contends that not only must she, the woman, attempt to "uncover the layers of the hypothetical self to reach her own essence" but that curricularists must examine the "particular nature of women in their roles as educators" and the complex problems that arise from their origins and expressions.

While acknowledging the origins and manifestations of the what it means to be a female teacher, one cannot ignore the gendered nature of education that is embedded in each and every level and therefore impacts not only the teacher, but also the curriculum, the organization of the school building, the administrative and staffing structure, establishment of daily procedures and certainly the interactions and relationships between teachers and students (Pinar, 2004; Pinar et al, 2005; Ellsworth, 1997a; Miller, 1980). It is certainly true that we are engendered in our experience and often without our conscious acknowledgement.

Taking into account the multidimensional nature of education in American society and those racialized and gendered dynamics of curriculum embedded in teachers, students, and classrooms everywhere, the necessity of a view and study of education that considers how these dynamics both function upon and from within the school itself becomes clearer. At the intersection of race and gender, is a powerful confluence of identity and subjectivities. Giroux (1992) suggests that "understanding more clearly how questions of subjectivity can be taken up so as not to erase the possibility for individual and social agency" (p. 165) is an important step toward unearthing the complexities of society and its citizens. While these subjectivities are often seen as "contradictory and multiple, produced rather than given, and are both taken up and received within particular social and historical circumstances" (Giroux, 1992, p. 165) a deeper understanding of the intersections of race and gender as they relate to curriculum and teaching offer us possibilities, not regress. While the focus of this study is on race, the importance in considering the race and gender of the teacher cannot be underestimated as it is these subjectivities that are reflected in the lives of White, women teachers and ultimately how they act within/upon/about the classroom and curriculum.

African American Education and Experiences

"Issues and questions surrounding the education of Blacks date to 1619 when the first slaves were brought to the new land by European colonialists. Still after four centuries, the "Negro question" or "Negro problem" remains at the heart of the social and education conundrum" (Watkins, 2001, p. 11). A retrospective glance of history

reveals theory, practice, policy, and movements in the education for Blacks in the United

States that are marked by moments of progress, regress, and quite often, conflict. Public

education as a means of creating ideological and social consensus has rarely, if ever,

been equitable for all groups (Watkins, 2001). As Joel Spring (1997) notes, "The

common school was never common to all children and the struggle over cultural

dominance continued through the end of the twentieth century" (p. 93). I, along with

other researchers in the field of education (Kozol, 2005; Pinar, 2004; Slattery, 1995)

would contend that this struggle remains as powerful today, as we enter the twenty-first

century, as it ever was.

Turning our gaze first to the past, it was in 1933 that Carter G. Woodson wrote

The Mis-Education of the Negro in which he challenged the ideals of American

education, its service to Black citizens, and the conflict that exists in a system dominated

by Whites and aimed at social control. While questioning the effectiveness of the

educational system as it was conceived even for the European (read: White) man, he

claimed:

> that the same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor
>
> with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worth
>
> while, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by
>
> making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure
>
> up to the standards of other peoples. (p. xix)

Troublesome to Woodson (1933) was the education of Blacks in a White system that

rendered them "a hopeless liability of the race" having difficulty living among their own

people after having been educated in a system that trained them to be "White" and at the same time "convinces them of the impossibility of becoming White" (p.23). The irony of the early education as an emancipatory act for Blacks was that it almost entirely rested "in the hands of those who have enslaved them and [now] segregate them" (Woodson, 1933, p. 22).

Just two years later, W.E.B Du Bois' (1935) interrogation of the public school system challenged the quality of education that African American students were receiving after desegregation. Continuing into the present day, we find a school system that remains largely unsuccessful in meeting the needs of African American students. African American students are not only lagging behind other students on standard measures of achievement as mentioned above, but are also three times as likely to drop out of school and twice as likely to be suspended from school as White students (Ladson-Billings, 1994; NCES, 2003). They are more likely to be poor, living in substandard housing, dependent on welfare, and African American boys are more likely to be under the control of the criminal justice system than in college (Ladson-Billings, 1994). With all of this said, it is critical to note that for the most part the literature and research in the field of education does not explicitly address the African American racial and cultural experience relying instead on generic models of pedagogy that attempt to be "culturally neutral" (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Shulman, 1987).

Without an appreciation for the uniqueness of the African American racial and cultural experience, there is little chance that the needs of African American students will be adequately met. As Ladson-Billings (2000) explains, the African American

cultural experience is distinct in that African Americans are the only group forcibly brought to the Americas - in some cases, predating the arrival of most European groups. She continues, "The creation of the racial hierarchy with White and Black as polar opposites has positioned all people in American society and reified "whiteness" in ways that suggest that the closer one is able to align oneself to whiteness, the more socially and culturally acceptable one is perceived to be" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 207). Ladson-Billings (2000) calls attention to this ideology of White supremacy that has allowed African Americans to be perceived as genetically inferior and deficient while the expectation for educating them has mirrored this perception and continues today (p. 208). Most poignantly she writes, "As a group, African Americans have been told systematically and consistently that they are inferior, and that they are incapable of high academic achievement. African American students' performance in school has replicated this low expectation for success (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 208).

These low expectations and the internalization of deficit perceptions are further complicated by disengaged and disingenuous teachers. As Grant (1989) and Haberman (1989) explain, not only are African American children told they cannot perform but the very people teaching them would rather not be teaching them. In short, the historical and social context of education, pervasive deficit perceptions and beliefs, the continuance of substandard education, relative silence in research and educational theory, and the daily inequities manifested in the classroom have not only prevented African American students from achieving in the past, but continue to do so actively in today's schools (Nieto, 2004; D'Souza, 1997; Steinberg, 1989; Paine, 1995; Lomotey,

1997; Delpit, 1995). A thorough examination on the potential impact of race, that of the teacher *and* her students, is needed to better understand the culture and dynamics at work in classrooms in our schools.

White Racial Identity

First introduced by Helms in 1984 and later refined (1990, 1994), White racial identity theory includes six stages that propose implications for "belief systems that evolve in reaction to perceived differential racial group membership." (p. 4) Because this study seeks to explore White teachers perceptions of themselves as educators and of the African American students they teach, locating their position with regard to racial identity is critical to this research. Not only do teachers' values and experiences influence how they interact with others, but so too does their racial identity (Marshall, 2002). Marshall (2002) continues, "The personal identities people embrace as defined by their racial group classification affect their self-perceptions and the worldviews and value orientations they acquire and defend." (p. 47) In this section, I will discuss the six stages of White racial identity which include contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independence, immersion and internalization (Helms, 1994; Tatum 1992).

The initial stage, contact, is "marked by attitudes that reflect obliviousness to the implications of racial classification." (Marshall, 2002, p. 55). The person in this stage is not even aware of her or his identity as a racial being and often professes a philosophy of colorblindness. The only interaction persons in this stage have with the racial other are in

situations defined by obligation (i.e. work). Unfortunately, most whites never move beyond this stage (O'Keefe, 1994).

In the second stage, disintegration, Whites "attempt to deal with the harsh realities of racial diversity" as they confront the realities of racial differences (Marshall, 2002; Carter, 1997). White people in this stage become entangled in disequilibrium when they realize the inherent difference in how Whites and Blacks are perceived. It is in this stage, too, that Whites realize that their own racial classification affords them a preferred status over other racial classifications (Marshall, 2002). This stage is usually marked by anxiety and an event that "invokes a serious consideration of race" (Ratesic-Koetke, 2005, p. 23) and while some will "try to make sense of this reality within a hegemony of white dominance they typically slip in to the next stage, which is reintegration" (McKenzie, 2001). In the third stage of reintegration, Whites succumb to either conscious or subconscious beliefs that Whites are superior and more often than not, tend to be participants in actions congruent with racism (O'Keefe, 1994). Marshall (2002) notes that in a school environment, "both disintegration and reintegration status identities may be manifest among those teachers who acknowledge differences in their students yet fail to institute teaching practices and policies that will result in high-quality learning experiences and equitable outcomes for all students." (p. 58)

In the forth stage, pseudo-independence, an initial emergence of a racial identity that moved beyond overt forms of racism can be seen. Whites in this stage begin to distance themselves from others in lower stages but remain disconnected from engagement with real "racial issues." (Ratesic–Koetke, 2005) This stage, according to

Helms (1994) is marked by an intellectualization of race and racism – while espousing

an equity consciousness they may still hold beliefs and perceptions to the contrary.

In the next to last stage, immersion, Whites can "no longer tolerate the impact of

White superiority even in its ostensibly benign forms" but see a need to embrace an

identity that "is not based on rejection of their whiteness." (Marshall, 2002, p. 60)

Whites in this stage seek to explore misconceptions that may have resulted as a part of

their upbringing and socialization.

In the final stage, internalization (autonomy), a healthy White identity emerges

when "the white individual recognizes and develops a critical understanding of the fact

that to be white in America means to enjoy certain privileges not afforded people of

color." (Marshall, 2002, p. 61). Moreover, individuals in this stage move beyond an

intellectual, reflective conception of whiteness toward an understanding of "the concept

of Whiteness as social construction" and assume an activist orientation toward

eradicating inequity (McKenzie, 2001; Marshall, 2002).

Racial identity theory as discussed here will provide the foundation for the

analysis of the selected teacher participants in this study – how she feels about herself,

the African American students she teaches, and her perceptions about how these

perceptions may be reflected in her classroom practice. Marshall (2002) acknowledges

the importance of considering racial identity in exploring the complexities related to

teaching in diverse settings and notes that a greater understanding of racial identity "can

be applied to interactions with colleagues and students" to strengthen said interactions

for all involved (p. 62).

Educational Attainment and Achievement – National and State Trends

To date, there is an ever increasing amount of data and research that speaks to a growing and "significant gap in achievement between white students and students of color." (Jenks & Phillips, 1988; Campbell, Hombo, & Mazzeo, 2000) This data includes test scores, grades, graduation rates, employment statistics, and post-graduate education attendance. Nationally, the 2004 United States Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR) report and the 2003 National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education both reported evidence of the persistent inequity in achievement between Black students and their White counterparts. There is a significant amount of evidence in the form of test scores, demographic data, and national trends that demonstrates the inequities in our schools. While there have been multiple studies that seek to account for this inequity, the significance of the race and role of the teacher on curriculum and classroom interactions remains largely unexplored. A closer examination of the role of teacher is needed in such a way that refrains from positioning education as an additive or compensatory venture – to "fix" or "fill in" for what is presumed missing in students' backgrounds (Foorman, Francis, & Fletcher, 1998). Rather, we must look critically at how teachers embody and enact the curriculum with which they are charged.

On a state level, a brief examination of achievement scores of Texas' children on the state measure of accountability (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) and the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)), between 2001 and 2004, reveals a significant inequity in the achievement of African American and Hispanic

students when compared with their White counterparts. The disparities in scores on *all tests* when examined at grades 5, 8, and 10 for the state overall, range from 11% to 35% between African American students and White students and from 7.4% to 31% between Hispanic students and White students. Consistently, the disparity between African American students and White students is greater than that of any other racial/ethnic minority group when compared with White students (Texas Education Agency (TEA), 2005). Moreover, the "gap" widens significantly as students progress from the 5th to 10th grade (TEA, 2005). This same trend exists in multiple regions of the state and in both rural and urban schools (TEA, 2005).

Considering that access to a quality education, school completion, and achievement are the point of departure for entrée to a wide variety of opportunities including admittance to higher education, professional employment, sustainable income and accumulation of wealth, quality health care, and participation in various civic and political entities of society, the apparent denial to a quality education and the seemingly consistent failure of society and schools to serve *all* children well, is not only a critical issue for our public schools but for the larger society as well (National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 2003). As Skrla and Scheurich (2004) note, "The apparent inability of our public school system to be as successful with children of color, particularly with those from low-income families, as it is with middle-class White children is a direct threat to our claims to be a truly democratic society" (p. 14). In addition to falling short on our ideal for an equitable and fully participatory democracy, there are certainly other significantly negative effects of our failure to educate *all*

children well. Jenks and Phillips (1998) suggest that the achievement gap is a fundamental source for determining educational attainment and economic influence. Students, in particular African American students, who do not perform well on standardized tests, are "essentially [and significantly] limited in their levels of educational attainment, which in effect influences their economic standing" (p. 155). It is easy to see when examining the data, the critical significance of a serious study of the potential impact of race on teaching and learning, specifically that of White teachers in classrooms of African American students.

Given the complexities of curriculum and teaching, the significance of race in education, and the unique cultural and educational experience of African American students in U.S. schools coupled with the incomplete research in the field on the effectiveness and/or impact of White teachers on Black students' personal and schooling success and lack of clarity about the critical nature of race in education, this study holds as its central aim a better, more complete understanding of the racial dynamics at work in classrooms of White teachers and African American students.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

As a careful look into the daily lives and experiences of teachers in today's schools, this qualitative investigation seeks to uncover and explore how racialized dynamics of curriculum may be reflected in perceptions and practice in classrooms of White teachers and African American students. The marked absence of research and literature in education addressing specifically African American students' racial and cultural experiences *in* the context of American schools and classrooms, as well as the potential impact of a predominantly White teaching force on these experiences, provided the impetus for the focus on African American students and White teachers in this study.

The overarching purpose of this study is to seek a clearer understanding of how race may be reflected in the construction of teachers' perceptions and how these perceptions may be echoed in decisions about what to teach, what not to teach, how to teach and to whom. Extensive research has been performed in recent years in an attempt to examine critically issues of teaching, learning, inequity and achievement in the United States, specifically with children of color (Lomotey, 1997; Hunter & Bartee, 2003; Jenks & Phillips, 1998; Nieto, 2004; McKenzie & Scheurich; 2004) To this end, scholars and educators alike have sought to offer explanations for and to pose solutions to existing inequity, to expose and critique the system of education, practitioners, and policy that maintains this hierarchy of achievement, as well as to challenge existing ways of

thinking and knowing about cultural, racial, and ethnic minorities and their education in our schools (McKenzie, 2001; Skrla & Scheurich, 2004; Nieto, 2004; Lewis, 2004). While much of this research points to teacher expectations, perceptions, and school socialization processes, for explanations of inequity and injustice in schools (and rightfully so), this study aimed to explore further how these expectations and perceptions may influence the enactment of curriculum in the classroom – each minute, each day, with each student.

It is my sincerest hope that the findings of this study contribute to a growing body of literature and theory on race and curriculum as well as to inform teacher education programs, in-service teachers, school administrators, and other stakeholders committed to improving the educational experience for all students.   Understanding how race and potential racialized dynamics are enacted in classrooms by teachers either supporting or hindering the personal and academic success of African American students may provide insight into how we might better prepare teachers to work in schools situated in an increasingly complex society and to better meet the needs of African American students.

Epistemological Frame

This study draws on literature from and research conducted in the fields of cultural studies, multicultural education, critical white studies, and sociology and is informed by critical perspectives in qualitative research while being firmly situated in the literature and context of curriculum studies. As an extension of the work done by

McKenzie (2001) and Lewis (2004) in which they examine the perceptions and beliefs of white teachers and attempt to "theorize a more dialectical relationship between culture and structure and its attention to the contextualized making of meaning" (Lewis, 2004, p. 209) respectively, this dissertation seeks to "describe and analyze precisely that 'bounded reality' as people themselves live and perceive it and as it thus guides their perceptions and behavior" (Hasso, 1998 as cited in Lewis, 2004). More specifically, this study will examine the perceived significance of race in selected White teachers' perceptions of themselves and of the African American students they teach and further, how these perceptions may be reflected in classroom practice.

Grounded in education and sociology, a qualitative, interpretive epistemology, helped to guide this work. As Merriam (2002) explains, interpretive research strives to "understand the meaning people have constructed about their world and their experiences" (p. 4-5). Patton (1990) extends this by noting that qualitative research "is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there" (p. 1). In this study, as in all interpretive research, the researcher will be the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. Merriam (2002) articulates the importance of the researcher as the human instrument and explains, "Since understanding is the goal of this [interpretive] research, the human instrument, which is best able to be immediately responsive and adaptive, would seem to be the ideal means of collecting and analyzing data" (p. 5). Acting as participant observer, this research sought not only to gain a better understanding of the selected White teachers

and their experiences in classrooms with the African American they teach, but also to unearth and trouble my own experiences as a White teacher in diverse classrooms.

Use of the interpretive framework of qualitative research is enhanced when coupled with *critical* epistemologies. As they draw on critical social theory, critical research studies seek to "investigate how the social and political aspects of the situation shape the reality; that is how larger contextual factors affect the ways in which individuals construct reality" (Merriam, 2002, p. 4). Holding as one of its primary endeavors, critical research "uncovers, examines, and critiques the social, cultural, and psychological assumptions that structure and limit our ways of thinking and being in the world" (Merriam, 2002, p. 9). Schwandt (2001) expands on this notion in his discussion of the aims of critical social science to "integrate theory and practice in such a way that individuals and groups become aware of the contradictions and distortions in their belief systems and social practices" (p. 45). There are indeed several critical epistemologies that have helped to shape the conception of this work and the analysis contained therein, including critical white studies, critical race theory, multicultural education and feminism.

Whiteness studies (McIntosh, 1988; Sleeter, 1994, McIntyre, 1997; 1997b; Delgado and Stefancic, 1997) seek to theorize and problematize the "construction of [W]hiteness as an absent racial category." (Rogers and Mosley, 2006, p. 466) Critical studies of Whiteness, like this one, aim to analyze and critique the power and privileges associated with Whiteness. As Marx (2004) pointedly remarks, "Because the great majority of teachers in this country are [W]hite, addressing the effects of whiteness is a

necessary aspect of addressing world view." (p. 32) Examining whiteness includes identifying and naming the "invisible package of unearned assets" that White people have as well as postulating the potential impact of such assets on all members of society – both White and non-White. As McIntosh (1988) explains, "Power from unearned privilege can look like strength when it is in fact permission to escape or to dominate." (p. 4) Both curriculum studies (e.g. Pinar, 2004) and critical white studies (e.g. Marx, 2004), stress irrefutably that Whiteness is situated and powerful and is not a neutral, non-racial identity. Rather, it is "an imprecise and often shifting racial consortium, one that is influenced by time, space, and relations" (Marx, 2004, p. 32) between power and the struggle for power. Critical white studies as a theoretical and deconstructive endeavor is reflected not only in the underpinnings of this study, but also provides a rationale for and lens through which to view the narratives of the White teacher participants and their classroom practices in this study. Haviland (2008) notes that still, even with the emergence of critical whiteness studies, there remains "little evidence to demonstrate how discourses of Whiteness get enacted" (p. 42).

While also similar to critical tradition in many ways, critical race epistemologies are distinct in that they hold central that "race is always already present in every social configuring of our lives" (Ladson-Billings, 1998). As Delgado (1995) notes, racism is "normal, not aberrant, in American society" (p. xiv) and the purpose of critical race theory and methods "becomes unmasking and exposing racism in its various permutations" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11). In keeping with these perspectives, this research not only seeks to examine the possible significance of race but also to "see"

classrooms differently – "to make visible what is often invisible, taken for granted, or assumed in our knowledge and practice" (Pillow in Lopez and Parker (Eds.), 2003, p. 189). While no singular method is used among scholars and researchers that cite critical race theory, research in this area seeks to "analyze the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably render blacks and other minorities one-down" (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv). Building on the work of Derrick Bell (1992), critical race epistemologies and research move beyond the "belief that time and the generosity of its people will eventually solve America's racial problem" (p. 13). In this study, a critical race theory contributes a construct to enable an examination of the language, attitudes, behaviors, and classroom interactions in such a way that race, racism, and racialization are prominent factors acting within and upon curriculum, teachers, students, and classrooms in "various permutations."

Also contributing to the shaping of this study and my understanding of the intersections of race, identity, education, and schooling is multicultural education. With a long history as an activist movement to "transform schools and their contexts" (Sleeter and Bernal, 2004 in Banks and Banks, 2004), multicultural education holds as its central tenet the "idea that all students – regardless of their gender and social class and their ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics – should have an equal opportunity to learn in school" (Banks and Banks, 2004, p. 3). Multicultural education is a movement toward equity in educational opportunity. In viewing the school context as a dynamic social system in which many interrelated variables are at work, multicultural education teaches us that in "order to transform the school to bring about educational equality, all major

components of the school must be substantially changed" (Banks and Banks, 2004, p.

25). Given its highly idealized goals of complete equity and the end of discrimination,

multicultural education is always a process of becoming – of looking back, looking

forward, and working toward "helping students to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and

skills needed to function within…the global community." (Banks and Banks, 2004, p.

25). The influence of multicultural education is a natural fit with the theoretical

underpinnings of this research in curriculum studies and the conscientious study that is

currere.

     As a woman researcher, a *feminist* epistemology serves not only to validate my

own voice and experience, but the voices of the selected teacher participants in this

study. As Miller (2005) writes, "Feminist perspectives…acknowledge the interrelation

of the personal and the political in attempts to reconceptualize the traditional curriculum

field" (p. 136). Influenced by a variety of political, economic, and social movements

and factors, feminist theory, like the women it represents, has multiple subjectivities and

perspectives. Liberal, radical, and cultural feminism, while different on some levels, all

hold central the autobiographical experiences of women and "force silences to be broken

with regard to patriarchal constructions of and interests in maintaining a public-private

binary" (Miller, 2005, p. 67). In her most recent publication, *Sounds of Silence*

Breaking: Women, Autobiography and Curriculum, Miller (2005) expands the notion

and purpose of feminist pedagogies and epistemologies to include the redefining of

relationships "between teachers and students; public and private; the 'knower' and the

'known'; and the academic disciplines and what 'counts' as curriculum and as

'knowledge'" (p. 67). As this study seeks to better understand the perceptions and practices of White, female teachers, embracing aspects of a feminist epistemology will enable the "braiding (of) gender with race...(to) expose critically the multiple and contradictory silences that women have long preserved and transgress creatively at the negotiated boundaries of 'what's possible'" (Fine, 1992, p. ix).

Enmeshed and interwoven in my own thinking, reading, and development as a researcher, critical epistemologies like critical white studies, critical race theory, multicultural education and feminism helped to enable this in-depth, personal, and reflective exploration of classrooms of White teachers and African American students. The outlining of these perspectives here is not intended to necessarily render this study captive ideologically or methodologically in any singular way of knowing or exploring the world, rather, the purpose of outlining and framing my way of knowing, should provide insight into how the study was conceived, developed, and informed through my own work and reading in several different, but complimentary fields of research.

Participant and Site Selection

As noted by Lewis (2003), a "central aspect of interpretive work is the process of theoretical sampling" and "in the study of schools (and teachers), the selections process has two components – one driven by theoretical issues (i.e. current research in the field, epistemological frames, and intellectual tradition), the other by practical issues (i.e. accessibility, location, time)" (p. 198). With the help of school administrators and purposeful sampling, I was able to attend to both theoretical and practical considerations

in participant and site selection. As Patton (1990) writes, "The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for in depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful* sampling" (p. 169).

Theoretically, it was important that the context and demographics of the district, schools, its teachers, students and community members were similar to those of the state (Texas) as this research seeks to understand complex curriculum dynamics and contribute to a body of knowledge to address the challenges present in today's educational context. It is important to note, however, that the goal of this research is not to generalize to all contexts, but instead to offer some insight into schools and classrooms that reflect greater trends with regard to teacher and student demographics. Current demographic data for the state show African American and Hispanic students making up the majority of the public school student population at 14.4% and 46.3% respectively (TEA – AEIS Data, 2006-2007). Teacher demographic data for the state show that approximately 69% of teachers are White, European American, with an overwhelming majority (77.2%) of all teachers being female (TEA – AEIS Data, 2006-2007).

The district selected as the site for this research study is a small, rural district in southeast Texas. Serving nearly 3,000 students, Neverland ISD is a student of color majority school district in which the two primary racial/ethnic groups (Hispanic and African American) made up a majority of the student population (35% and 29.2%

respectively). As similarly reflected in the state data, the schools selected for this study also had a primarily White (85.7%), female (75.4%) teacher demographic. Two schools in Neverland ISD were selected – one elementary the other intermediate. The elementary school served approximately 900 students and the intermediate approximately 320 students during the 2006-2007 school year.

At the outset of my conversations with the district where this research was conducted, it was decided that the teachers selected for this study would have racially diverse classrooms in which at least 40% but not more than 80% of students were African American. This consideration allowed for there to be a significant population of African American students in the classrooms of the teacher participants. My intention was to ensure that my research would not single out the interactions of the teacher with only one (or very few students) while at the same time allowing for a rich experience in diverse classrooms. Teachers selected for participation in this study had a minimum of three years teaching experience. Given these criteria, administrators (principals and curriculum specialists) helped to identify teachers that not only met the above referenced considerations, but that might also be willing participants in my study. I chose to utilize the recommendations of administrators because they knew their staff well and were able to select participants they thought would make particularly "information-rich cases for study in depth." (Patton 1990) Once a list was generated of interested parties, I held an informational meeting after school during which I explained the purpose and details of my research agenda. Attendees were given a brief outline of my study, the goals, and explanation of what their role would be with regard to interviews, focus-groups,

reflective activities, and classroom observations. Initially, 10 teachers were interested. By the time the study began, only six were certain that they wanted to continue and did so completing all observations, interviews, and reflection activities.

The six teachers selected for this study were female and identified themselves racially as White. Their years of experience ranged from 5 years to 29 years. During the year of this study, they taught grades PreK-4 in the two schools selected – Neverland Elementary School and Neverland Intermediate. The elementary school housed grades pre-K through 3; the intermediate grades 4 and 5.

Once selected, teachers were interviewed individually to establish personal rapport, gather biographical data, and to assess their initial thoughts about teaching, learning, and working with African American students and in diverse school settings. These interviews were semi-structured in nature and while guided by a specific set of questions, allowed for each teacher to share details about her own life, perceptions, attitudes and experiences as women and teachers of diverse students. I felt it most important to establish a relationship of openness and candor with my participants. I shared with them my own experiences, what led me to this study, and what I thought we – as co-researchers and teachers – might contribute with this research to education and society.

Research Design and Data Collection

As an qualitative study informed by diverse epistemologies, multiple strategies for data collection, analysis, and representation were employed. Merriam (1998) writes

of qualitative research, "The researcher must physically go to the people, setting, site, and institution (the field) in order to observe behavior in its natural setting" (p. 7). With this in mind, as the research instrument, I acted in the role of participant observer – both participating in the daily activity of the school and classrooms while also observing the actions, practices, and people as a researcher. As noted by Lewis (2004), the role of participant observer in schools helps to "gain the trust and respect" of the adults that work there and the students who enter daily to learn. I feel confident that I achieved this level of trust and respect among the teacher participants as well as in the school building and with students.

As the nature of qualitative research is to understand in depth a particular situation or experience, Bogden and Biklen (1998) explain that not all methods "exhibit all traits to an equal degree." As put forth by Schultz (2005), the use of "multiple modes of inquiry" provides for the use of multiple theoretical lenses and methodologies for data collection and analysis to gain a richer understanding of the essence of the experience or phenomena being investigated. Data collection and analysis through multiple modes of inquiry including active participation, observations, formal and informal interviews (individual and in focus groups), as well as through examination of curriculum artifacts and documents used daily in the planning, teaching, learning, and assessment of students, and analysis of teacher narratives have the potential to more thoroughly represent the context or experience being studied. Denzin (1989) explains that triangulation of data is an effective way to sustain trustworthiness. In combining various theories, methodologies, and data collection/analysis strategies, this study aimed to gain

a more thorough understanding of the racialized dynamics in classrooms of White teachers of African American students and how these intricacies impacted teachers' perceptions and instructional practices carried out daily in classrooms.

At the conclusion of all initial, individual interviews, I began eight weeks of classrooms observations. I spent one full day per week in the classrooms of the PreK – 2nd grade teachers and a half-day per week with the two 4th grade teachers. When classes were in session, I was in the classroom – many times I was observing, other times I was interacting with students in small groups or individually. The teacher participants in this study were very gracious about sharing their classrooms with me and encouraged me to be and interact wherever and whenever I wanted to. When classes were not in session, I would have lunch with the teachers to talk with them about the daily goings-on in the school and classroom, I would visit with auxiliary personnel (computer lab teachers, counselors, teachers aides, suspension coordinators), or I would just reflect on my observations, gather my thoughts, and/or record my experiences as a researcher. It was my goal to be as immersed in the school setting as possible – to see and better understand the sometimes small, often-unnoticed, nuances of the daily lives of teachers and students. I attended field-trips, sat in on planning meetings, overheard conversations in the hallway, and visited with teachers and administrators when "critical" moments presented themselves.

During my time in the schools, I also explored the artifacts of teaching and learning – daily assessments, benchmark tests, and teacher progress reports. In an effort to better understand how students were performing and how they were being assessed.

Often these explorations provided ways for me to begin more informal conversations with the teacher participants about their students' performance, their teaching, the curriculum and how all of these impacted one another. As I will share later in the research, many times it was these small side conversations that revealed the most about how curriculum moves from formal to operational by and through these teachers.

Additionally, during this time, I asked the teachers to complete a reflective exercise about their students – the classrooms I was observing. This activity asked teachers to provide the race/ethnicity, gender and name of each student in their class. Then, I asked them to list three strengths, three challenges and their initial thought about instruction as it related to each student. Finally, I asked them to write down what each student's contribution was to the class. These worksheets (See Appendix C) were given to teachers and they were given as long as they needed to complete the worksheet for each student. With this activity, I was seeking an understanding about how the teachers participating in this study perceived their students – their strengths, their weaknesses, how to best teach them, and what they saw as the student's ability to contribute to the class as a community. Teachers completed these worksheets in written form or on the computer.

At the conclusion of my observation time in the schools summative individual interviews were also held with each of the teachers. During these interviews (semi-structured in nature), I asked several questions that emerged from my observations and experiences in their classrooms. I asked for clarification, extension, and explanation of

certain classroom events, instructional decisions, and curriculum issue in addition to some more general questions I developed that I thought were pertinent to the research.

Data Analysis

Interpretive analyses in qualitative research hold that the "meaning of human action is inherent in that action, and that the task of the inquirer is to unearth that meaning" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 134). Merriam (1998) adds that interpretive research considers education to be a process and schooling a lived experience. In this way an interpretive mode of inquiry seeks to gather data about and thick description of the experiences that are the foci of the study. From this data, themes and meaning are uncovered and illuminated.

The data collection phase of this study lasted nearly twelve weeks – two weeks to conduct initial interviews, eight weeks of formal classroom observation, and finally, two weeks to conduct summative, individual interviews and the focus group. Documents and school data related to the study including classroom assessments, lesson plans, and formal school curricula were analyzed when available. Extensive and careful field notes were recorded, analyzed and organized throughout the data collection process.

Data analysis began during the data-collection process to uncover emergent themes, patterns, and practices. This preliminary analysis allowed me to conduct member checks to clarify observations, data from interviews, and documents. Moreover, as Merriam (1998) notes, "the design of a qualitative study is emergent and flexible, responsive to changing conditions of the study in progress" (p. 8). By being responsive

to emergent themes, I was able to ask clarifying questions, pursue other data sources, and/or explore the validity of emerging themes (Lewis, 2003). Guided by literature in curriculum studies, cultural studies and multicultural education, data analysis sought to interpret the daily interactions of teachers and students in the school and classroom as reflections of the greater racialized societal context. Additionally, analysis concentrated on the classroom, to investigate how the complexities of race and teacher perceptions were being reflected in classroom practice. Critical white, multicultural, feminist, and critical race epistemologies helped to inform my analysis of the racialized and gendered dynamics of curriculum, teaching and interactions between teachers and students. Member checks were conducted regularly following interviews and focus groups and transcripts were provided to the teacher participants to ensure that the research record of interviews and discussions were accurate and representative of their intentions and conceptions.

At the conclusion of the research period, data were analyzed for emergent themes and used to develop a coherent and meaningful account of the classroom, the teachers and practices in the school with respect to the impact of race on the construction of teachers' perceptions and practices.

<p align="center">**Trustworthiness**</p>

Trustworthiness, as noted by Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993), is a purposeful and careful consideration of the various aspects of an inquiry and is established through techniques that give truth value, consistency, applicability, and

neutrality. The qualitative researcher seeks to establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in her research. In this study, trustworthiness is established through triangulation of data from interviews, the reflection activity, and classroom observations as well as member-checks and researcher reflections. Prior to beginning classroom observations, each teacher was interviewed. This interview served to introduce us to one another, for me to gain an understanding of the teachers' backgrounds and their experiences in teaching to date. This initial interview also helped me, the researcher, to establish a relationship of trust and openness with the teachers, the participants. Each interview and focus group in this study was audio-taped and transcribed allowing for regular member checks and review by the researcher. Detailed notes of classroom observations, informal conversations, experiences in the schools, and my reflections as the researcher were also kept allowing for critical moments to be captured and recorded.

Limitations

As a qualitative research study, this research is subjective, specific to the context and does not hold as its goal generalizability. Rather, qualitative research is "inquiry that help[s] us to understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible." (Merriam, 1998, p.5) This research is specific to the context of the school in the study and the experiences and narratives of the six teacher participants and me. Together we sought to understand how our perceptions and attitudes may impact our practices as White teachers in classrooms with

African American students. While not generalizable, the research methodology is well articulated here so that others might attempt a similar project or inquiry.

Also in line with characteristics of qualitative research was my decision to serve as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998). As participant observer (Ladson-Billings, 2000) I was immersed in the research context, sometimes more actively than others, but always within and amidst the teachers and students I was studying. With this in mind, it is important to acknowledge subjectivity impacted this work. It is not only important to acknowledge my own subjectivity in the work, but to work throughout the research toward a "reflexivity of discomfort" (Pillow, 2003) and a conscientious engagement through *currere*. This level of reflexivity moves beyond overly simplified notions of reflexivity and urges the researcher to use reflexivity as a means to work both "within and against" the systems that necessarily constrain us. When coupled with currere, curriculum research maintained "through a conscious work with one's self and others," a reflexivity of discomfort allows for truth claims and subjectivities to be interrogated and problematized.

It is also important to note here that my interpretation of the multiple forms of data gathered in the course of this research will be influenced by my lens that is a sum of my own lived experiences, understandings and perceptions. I am a White woman, former teacher, mother, student and activist. I was raised in a family where racist epithets and bigotry were standard forms of address. Distinctions were made based on skin color, language and economic status. Having spent a good portion of my early childhood in a Texas border city, the emphasis on difference and prejudice were real and ever-present.

It was not until my teenage years that I began to realize the harsh effects of these ideas. I chose to become a teacher and continue my studies in education because I believe in its power and potential to transform the lives of children and society. I also realize that my own personal experiences both helped and hindered my being an effective teacher. I believe that schools should be places of personal, academic, and social learning. Central to my professional and personal goals is a deep commitment to equity, social justice, and civic responsibility. All of these experiences and perspectives like those of the participants in this research and their lived experiences, color who I am, how I "see" the world, and the ways I interpret this study.

Conclusions

As in any first attempt at something new, my first attempt at a major research endeavor as a doctoral student proved challenging and overwhelming – not unlike my first year of teaching. Similar to that first year in which I moved and changed in response to my classroom, this research came together in a rather organic way. In the end, it is my hope that this complicated conversation about race and teaching will help all of us to better understand how race (and our perceptions, attitudes and understandings about race) is reflected in all of us in all that we do. We must cease to avoid conversations about race and schooling so that we can acknowledge the power and possibility of a healthy and honest understanding of ourselves not only as teachers to our students, but parents to our children, and neighbors to our community.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONTEXT AND THE TEACHERS

Being a teacher felt so right. But still I didn't know enough.
>Susan Huddleston Edgerton, 1996
>*Translating the Curriculum: Multiculturalism*
>*into Cultural Studies*

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the context of the study – the district and school where the research took place – and the six teacher participants who so graciously shared their time, teaching, and classrooms with me. In this chapter, I will share some of the teachers' responses to questions in the initial interviews conducted prior to my beginning classroom observations.

Neverland Independent School District is located in a small, southeast, Texas city and was declared an independent school district in 1947. The city in which the district resides is just about 25 miles from one of the state's premier research universities and centrally located between three major Texas cities. The city itself is home to about 7,000 residents and boasts its "friendly atmosphere and old-time charm." The district has five traditional schools – two elementary, one intermediate, one junior high, and one high school. In addition to these campuses, Neverland ISD has one campus dedicated to non-traditional learning that serves "at risk students who have fallen behind in the normal classroom environment." The district serves a diverse student population of approximately 3,000. The majority of students in the district are students of color - African American (29.2%) and Hispanic (35.0%). According to the teachers in this study, there has always been a high-population of African Americans in Neverland ISD,

but recently the Hispanic population has been increasing. In the state of Texas, districts and schools are rated based on student performance on the standardized measure of achievement – the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) Test. There are four ratings available to all districts and schools (exemplary, recognized, acceptable, and unacceptable) and each school's rating is determined by evaluating the percentage of students meeting established standards, school completion rates, and drop out rates. According to state accountability ratings, the district is rated as "academically acceptable."

Neverland Elementary, one of two schools in which this study was conducted, is a relatively large elementary school serving 911 students in grades pre-kindergarten to third grade. Nearly 78% of the students in the school are identified as economically disadvantaged. Hispanic students make up the largest group of students at 44.6%; African American students make up 33.6% and White students make up 21.5% of the total student population. In the school, 18.2% of students are identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) and 64.1% are labeled "at risk." The average class size at Neverland Elementary is 16 students. Teachers in the school have a wide range of years of experience. Fifty percent of teachers in the building have over 11 years of teaching experience, while nearly 40 % of teachers have fewer than five years experience. Seventy-six percent of teachers are White while only 17.1% are Hispanic and 7% are African American. Overwhelmingly, the teachers are female (93.4%). The elementary campus is rated "academically acceptable" by the state testing system.

The second school involved in this study, Neverland Intermediate, is a small school serving only 318 students in grades four and five. The campus student population is divided almost equally with regard to race/ethnicity – 31.4% are African American, 37.7% are Hispanic, and 30.8% are White. Similar to the elementary campus, a large percentage of students at this campus are identified as economically disadvantaged (67.9%). Additionally, 6.6% are Limited English Proficient (LEP) and 31.8% are identified as "at risk." The average class size at the Intermediate school is 13 students per teacher. Nearly 80% of the teachers are White, while 16.6% are African American and 4.2% are Hispanic. Also similar to the Elementary campus, the overwhelming majority (91.7%) of all teachers are female. The intermediate campus is rated "academically unacceptable" by the state accountability system.

When I first visited Neverland ISD and the surrounding city, I was taken by how dated the buildings and homes seemed. However, there are small developments of newly built homes away from the "center" of the city to the more eastern portions of the community. I first visited the Intermediate campus which is located just a few feet from one of the major streets in the city. It is surrounded by older homes and there never seemed to be much activity around the building. The building itself is small and has been in use as the Intermediate school since 1997. It is made up of just a few hallways of classes, a few portable buildings, and an auditorium. The hallways are narrow, bulletin boards are neat but unfinished, and it seems most teachers stay in their rooms.

Just a few blocks away, Neverland Elementary school is nestled back in a neighborhood. Having just undergone major renovations that were completed in 2006

(the year this study took place), the elementary school is large, spacious, clean, and bright. In contrast to the intermediate school, this building has a sense of cheeriness when you enter. I recall that I often feel this way when I enter an elementary school as compared to an "upper grades" campus. I also always wonder why it seems we put so much emphasis on the whole child when they are young and then it seems to dwindle as they progress through school. Classrooms line the hallways which are also alive with children's art work, teacher projects and the names of teachers and children in each classroom throughout the building. It is not unusual (as I learned) to hear children, teachers, and parents in the hallways at the elementary school.

It is also important to note that this school district formally ended segregation in the 1968-1969 school year. With the renovation of the elementary school came also a new elementary school. The new elementary school, serving grades pre-K through 5, serves the eastern portion of the district. School attendance boundaries have resulted in de facto segregation in grades pre-kindergarten through fifth between the new elementary school and the older, newly renovated elementary school and its partnering intermediate campus. While Neverland Elementary (described above) serves a student population made up primarily of African American and Hispanic students, the new elementary school serves a student population that is nearly 70% White. While not the primary focus of this study, it is important to note the history and current context of the district with regard to the schools and the students they serve.

Prior to formally beginning the research, I met with several teachers that were interested in participating in my study. I shared with them my thoughts about why this

research was important, explained to them that I felt their participation in this type of research was invaluable and something that I thought could really help the greater educational community and outlined my expectations for how the research would proceed. I felt during the meeting that several teachers were a bit off put by the topic and by the very insinuation that somehow their teaching would be under the microscope. Upon sensing this, I made certain to reassure them that I did not have all the answers, that I too had been in their shoes working with diverse populations, that I knew how challenging their jobs are, and especially, that the nature of this study is to explore, not presuppose, what goes on in classrooms with White teachers and African American students. I wanted them to know what while I would be looking at them and their teaching, that this was not intended to be threatening in any way; rather, my goal was to try to better understand the complex dynamics in classrooms on a daily basis about why so many of us as White teachers seem to not be meeting the needs of our African American children based on the data. I shared with them my teaching experience and what led me to ask questions about teachers' perceptions of themselves, the students they teach, and how these perceptions may be reflected in instructional practices and classroom interactions. I revealed to them stories of my own classroom experience. I told them of how I spent my first year in a classroom really struggling to reach some of my African American students. I opened myself up to them in such a way that I hoped they felt more comfortable and less threatened. It seemed to work. From that meeting with eight teachers, six teachers committed to participating and to taking this journey with me and did so until the research was completed.

Monday, October 16th was my first interview with Mrs. Barton. I had arranged to meet with Mrs. Barton during her conference period at the intermediate school. I was nervous about conducting my first interview but excited to begin my research project. We met that day in the conference room just outside of the principal's office. I began by asking each of my participants to sign a consent form. Immediately, Mrs. Barton seemed defensive and protective. She disagreed with the wording of the consent form, and we amended her form to her satisfaction. I explained to her the confidentiality measures in place that would protect her participation in the study. I knew in an instant, that this initial interview was very important and would set the tone of our relationship for the remainder of the study. I took great care to be as conversational, informal, and caring as I could be.

Each interview with each of the six teachers was different. While guided by the same questions, each interview took interesting twists and turns as I asked them to share about themselves, their upbringing, their early schooling experiences and their interactions with those outside of their own race and culture. In these initial interviews I was seeking an insight into each teacher's racial identity development and their perceptions of themselves as White teachers. I was also looking for initial hints about how they perceived the African American students in their classrooms. I was interested in how they would describe their teaching strategies, talk about working with African American students, and depict themselves as teachers. In the following introductions of each teacher, my comments and questions will be preceded with the letter 'I' to indicate interviewer. It shall be assumed that phrases and excerpts in text that are in quotations or

are block indented are that of the teacher being discussed (or will be preceded with the letter 'T' to indicate teacher talk).

Mrs. Barton is a fourth grade teacher. She teaches mathematics and is one of four teachers on a team that each teaches a different core subject. Students are grouped in teams comprised of four homeroom classes. She has four different classes each day, and the students in her school are grouped by ability. She has two classes in the morning, in which her low-performing students are grouped, including her special education students. The afternoon classes are her more academically advanced classes. Mrs. Barton has been teaching for twenty-nine years; twenty-six of those years have been in the fourth grade teaching mathematics at Neverland Intermediate School.

When asked about her family, her upbringing and her culture, Mrs. Barton told me that she was raised by "blue collar workers" in a family that valued education and where going to college was an "expectation." She has two adult children who both went to college and now work in real-estate. When asked specifically about her experiences with those outside of her race, Mrs. Barton reminds me that having been born in 1939, she grew up in racially segregated times.

> I: You told me about where you grew up and your family, can you tell me about the demographics about where you grew up? For instance, the demographics of your friends, your close social networks…
>
> T: Well, of course back then it was before segregation…so we would have contact, we had contacts with other nationalities but not Blacks or Hispanics for the main part. It would be Polish or German…

I: In your neighborhood?

T: Right. So I was not exposed to that.

She continues to explain that her interactions with those of a different race and culture were very limited until 1963 when she moved back to Neverland with her children.

T: Now when my children were in school, I was still in my 30's, but they were born, being in Neverland we became more involved with the Black community. My husband, especially in his law office and I as manager, I worked there. I got pretty involved. And when they were in little league we have them over. I think we were one of the first to have a suburban. Bobby [her husband] got it so we could haul things around and there were of course Black children on the team and they would come to our house before the game. And, my son always got along with the Black, community, as far as in sports. And we did too. We never really… (pause)

I: It was not a problem?

T: No because, I, uh, no because I just adapt. I am a, what you call that word, I just adapt. One of the best compliments I got as a teacher about four years ago was from a very young teacher who said, uh, they just thought it was amazing that I as an older teacher, I didn't have real fixed ideas on this is the way I was going to teach, that I always was learning from other teachers.

In this excerpt, Mrs. Barton explains that while her interactions were limited with those outside her race, she and her family adapted well to living and working in an integrated community. I asked Mrs. Barton if she could recall any specific events or moments that

she thought were particularly racialized, and she could not recall any specifically but offered comment on the lack of support she receives from Black parents in the school, a trend she sees with more and more parents these days. She said, "…race has never really been an issue. Uh, I get discouraged that I see less support with a lot of Black parents for school children, but on the other hand, we're seeing more and more Whites like that as well." Mrs. Barton shares with me that while her classes have always been diverse there has been a significant increase in the number of children of color in the last ten years. When I ask her what other challenges (outside of parental involvement which she already noted) she has encountered in working with diverse populations, specifically with African American students, she explains:

> Well everyone thinks they're going to be a star, basketball or football, and that comes from the mom, and I think they're often encouraged that way. Our counselor…[says]…that's not possible, in all probability, I mean I don't like when they talk about it, they just don't understand that education is so very important. And I think maybe that mindset, is part of it. Now I don't know, because they all say…I just don't know.

I further inquired asking her if she felt there were different challenges with different racial and/or cultural groups of students, and she continued:

> Well, it used to be more like certain children [who were challenging], now it's more…I'm finding that you have some Black students come in that their parents expect the very same things that these [White or Hispanic] parents do and they're just the same. And some of the problems you have with the Black students you

also have with the White students or with the Hispanics, so it used to be like this

race was this way, this race was this way, but now it's just so intermingled.

Mrs. Barton's responses indicate that she has experienced various challenges with all

groups of students not just with one specific group of students. When asked what she

sees as a foundational issue underlying all of some of the challenges in her classroom,

she notes that testing and management consume more and more teaching time every

year.

> T: I do know that we spend less time teaching now because of the discipline, the
>
> management. And they're [the administration] concerned about more teachers
>
> leaving because they don't want to deal with the management. They come in
>
> wanting to teach, so excited they get to teach and finally be with children and
>
> then in one week they go "I may need to go back and get my degree in
>
> business…"
>
> I: Sure, the paperwork is overwhelming…
>
> T: And, I mean it's, you know, if I wanted to I'd go out and work at Kroger. But
>
> I didn't want to do that, I wanted to work with children.
>
> I: Right.
>
> T: That's our main problem.
>
> I: What is that?
>
> T: It's discipline. Oh yea. And it is the children. We've got the where-with-all,
>
> we've got the manipulatives, we've got the education, it's the discipline we have
>
> to implement or we've lost what we've been taught to do…

I: And so far you've told me that for the most part the challenges are more intermingled, is the discipline more of an issue with a specific group of students?

T: We have more trouble with Black students.

I: Why do you think that is?

T: I don't know. It might be, I don't know…I don't know if it's home life, uh, I know that uh, well we are having discipline issues with Whites and we have Hispanics…uh, but it seems like we are having more trouble settling them [African American students] down. Usually they're either really bad or not. It's not too much in between. And I don't know what that factor is. It's hard to say that.

I: Sure.

T: Except well maybe the fact that they [African Americans] have children early and then they're not really mature and know how to raise them and maybe, a lack of parenting skills. I don't know. And they stay with grandmas or…and you know, I don't know.

In this part of her interview, Mrs. Barton points to the issues she perceives as impacting her teaching her African American students. She notes initially that she doesn't have as much time to teach because of testing, then continues to say that they have all the resources they need but cannot seem to teach because of all the trouble she has with her students – particularly her African American students. Interestingly, however, Mrs. Barton replies in response to my asking her how many children of each race she has in

each of the classes that I'll be observing, "I don't know, I really…just try to see them as children." She insists that they "all need help and they all want to be special."

The final question I asked Mrs. Barton in our first interview together (which had to be cut short as she was being called away by an unexpected meeting with a parent) was concerning her perception about why there was a significant gap in achievement between African American and White students not only in her school, but across the state and the nation. She replied, "Well, one thought could be is, uh, we expect a certain kind of conduct in our school room but I don't think that's expected at home." Her final response was short and pointed again to discipline as being a considerable challenge to teaching and learning with African American students in her experience.

The second interview, with Mrs. Sorrenfield a pre-Kindergarten teacher, was held the very same evening as my interview with Mrs. Barton. I was feeling a bit more confident in my interviewing skills which helped me to be more relaxed. It helped too that Mrs. Sorrenfield seemed very at ease and pleasant. We met a local church where she worked in the evenings cleaning as a part-time job to earn a little extra money. An eleven year veteran teacher of pre-Kindergarten, she was soft-spoken, kind, and told me great stories about her growing up along the Texas coast. I felt an instant connection with Mrs. Sorrenfield as I too grew up in a border town. Our interview lasted over the hour I had planned, but neither of us seemed to mind. I enjoyed hearing about her journey coming to teach young children, her family, and her experiences in the classroom.

Raised by parents who did not attend college, Mrs. Sorrenfield initially did not set out to become a teacher; rather, she went to college off and on before she met her husband and then finally decided to finish her degree after teaching in private, church-based programs for little money and no long-term stability. She graduated from a local university when she was 38 years old, while raising her children and working part-time. Mrs. Sorrenfield is no stranger to multi-tasking.

Of all the teacher participants, it seems Mrs. Sorrenfield had the most diverse schooling experiences as a child. She explains:

It was diverse. I mean, there were White; we had Hispanics, and African Americans, when I grew up, in the schools. I would say the main one [group of people], now there, they've got a lot of Vietnamese there now, Chinese students have gone through high school, Vietnamese – when you first come in from the direction when I go home, you see their village. There is a little village there, the Vietnamese, and they have their own little net shop, its fishing.

I asked her to think about the distribution of racial groups in her community, she continued:

I'm not sure how the Whites were. We had a lot of Hispanics and a lot of Blacks – that's where my dad grew up in a neighborhood that was primarily Black. It seems areas along the coast of Texas seem to be more diverse than some other areas. And I don't know if I would say we were a minority, the White's were, but it could have been more kind of balanced. I don't look at people by color.

Mrs. Sorrenfield described there being several different racial/ethnic groups in her community even today. Interestingly, toward the end of her comment, she claims to not "look at people by color."

After describing several experiences that she had with those of a different race and culture than herself, Mrs. Sorrenfield had difficulty describing her own culture to me.

> My culture, family wise…I don't know…how you would define our culture…(laughs)…I was trying to think of something unique about culture…you know how some families are all really closely knit and they do things together all the time, that's not our family. Our family, I mean our immediate family yes, I mean we'll do things…but like with relatives. Now I'm in a family, my husband's family, they do things all the time with cousins and stuff. And I didn't have cousins my age… So…I don't know how to answer that about culture…as far as, on my dad's side, his people came from Germany, my mother, I asked her the other day where hers came from and she said, somewhere in Texas, I mean that's all she knew. And now our grandmothers have all passed away to ask things like that…so I'm not really sure. But I know my mother's, like my mother's mother's mother was a full blooded Indian, Cherokee Indian. So, German, probably have some Irish somewhere in there, because my mother's redheaded and her sister was redheaded, but culture is a difficult question, I don't know how I would answer that…

Given that Mrs. Sorrenfield had interactions with a diversity of people in her upbringing, it seemed a bit surprising to me that she had difficulty describing her own culture; it seemed that she was really stretching to identify from what country or place her family originated, but in the end, still was at a loss for how to completely respond.

Upon further probing, I learned that Mrs. Sorrenfield, having grown up in a racially diverse setting and while professing to not "look at people by color" never dated anyone outside of her race and was strictly opposed to such interactions even today.

> I had some Black boys that really liked me and wanted to carry my books and everything, but I didn't want them to. I mean, I don't feel like I'm prejudiced but when it comes to mixed relationships I do have a problem with that…I can be honest about that. Because I wouldn't want my daughter dating a Black person, I wouldn't really want her dating a Hispanic person, that's just how I feel. I feel like the cultures of those will clash at some point and I think if it was just the man and the woman and if they decided to get married that would be Ok, but when you start bringing children in there, that's where you're going to see the problems. That is just a feeling that I have and partly, probably because that's how my mom and dad feel, and a lot of their feelings were instilled in me and I don't think that they are wrong feelings. I think I can get along with any race. I just feel like to stay within your own race, or your own culture, when you're getting married, even when you're dating…

In her comments here, after noting she did not see color, Mrs. Sorrenfield makes a glaringly obvious reference to culture in her statement above and how she feels about the

intermingling of those from different racial/ethnic groups. While she claims she can "get along" with any race, there are clear limits to her interpersonal interactions. Mrs. Sorrenfield revealed some contradictions in her thoughts and feelings with regard to those of different racial and cultural backgrounds from herself.

As the interview went on, I asked about her teaching and her experiences at Neverland Elementary in the pre-Kindergarten classroom. Mrs. Sorrenfield explained to me that the students have parents who opted to be in a formal pre-Kindergarten setting as opposed to a less-structured experience in Head Start (housed in the nearby adjacent building to the elementary school). When I asked about the difference between the two programs, she pointed to different expectations with regard to discipline, standards of instruction, and the availability of social programs for families of children attending. I wanted to know how Mrs. Sorrenfield felt about working with diverse populations in the public school setting as compared to the private, church-based programs (which were predominantly White) in which she worked before she was certified. She noted:

> As for discipline, it was a lot easier in the preschool in a church setting than in the public school. I think the children were more behaved. I think the parents worked with them more. And I think the majority of mine now are being raised by older brothers and sisters, parents are working. I think um, they are, I mean I think some of the parents don't know how to help them. Because maybe they finished high school and nothing else, and some of them are working two jobs. They don't have time to work with them so I do think sometimes the teenagers are the ones that are helping them with their homework, probably; I don't know

because I don't give homework very often, we do parent involvement activities.

I'll send home things and I'll say, they're really struggling with this, can you

help them? But, you can't depend on them getting the help at home. I mean some

of them do get it and they really are concerned and then there's just some that,

you know, I send them to school, I've had them remark, "you know that's what

your job is for" – and you can just do so much…

Mrs. Sorrenfield's comments reveal that she feels limited in her ability as a teacher to

reach her students at the elementary school as compared with her students in the private

setting because of a lack of parental involvement and availability of support at home and

discipline issues. She continues:

But I don't think that's the only issue. I think some of it is parental, yeah, but a

lot of them are young parents, somewhere the drugs and the things that people

take when they're pregnant are creating a lot of the problems our children have

and it's not even their fault. They can't sit still. I think they're at a disadvantage

already. But I don't know if any of mine are like that. I just know that some of

them struggle a lot. And some of them, I've had their siblings, and they struggled

too – so sometimes I think it's just the parents own education or they don't

handle their children.

Having begun earlier, her comments continue to express a deeply felt perception that her

students come from homes where there are significant hindrances to their success at

school. I probed a bit more deeply and asked for clarification about any perceived

differences in interactions in the classroom with regard to the race of her students; Mrs.

Sorrenfield lamented:

> I just think the only difference I see is the response I get from the White students
>
> over what I get with the Hispanic or the African American students when you
>
> discipline them. I think they're used to be spoken at loudly, discipline is different
>
> in the household versus how I would want to do it and so sometimes you can't
>
> get their attention because there's…I mean not all Hispanics but I've had some in
>
> summer school that are older, older ones like second and third graders that don't
>
> respect you, but sometimes it's how their parents look at a woman, they don't
>
> have respect for that, a woman. So he didn't have respect for me as a teacher
>
> because I'm a woman…a Hispanic boy. And I know sometimes remarks that the
>
> little African American children will say, it's the result of parents, how they look
>
> at Whites.

As we continue in our interview, Mrs. Sorrenfield reveals more and more complexities

in dealing with her children of color, specifically her African American students. When I

express some surprise at the presence of a racial awareness on the part of the children at

such an early age, she explains that it is a result of the parents imposing these beliefs on

the children – she tells me that "I don't think that children really see a difference in the

color of their skin, I really don't." She notes that this awareness of racial difference on

the part of the children does not impact their interactions with other children, only with

authority figures (i.e. teachers). Mrs. Sorrenfield continues by telling me about

interactions with parents that are problematic with regard to sending home daily conduct reports to further illustrate how the issue is primarily with the parents, not the children.

> Well, I think they take some of your comments that you have to do, like if you do a daily conduct sheet, I do a daily conduct sheet this year. I mean we're doing that daily because I never liked doing them and then one year there was a line of parents, lining up at the door wanting to know what the child did to have their color changed, we have a discipline plan where we have to change their colors, and I would just put what color they had that day or whatever. And then they wanted to know what specifics, then I went to doing the sheets, then they will write things down on the sheet, the African American parents will be more offended by something you would say like, I mean would take up for the child, I mean whatever it was. If they hit somebody or…I've had them say bad words you know, and so you'd have to say, I'm always really careful what I say and I try to be nice about it. But it still needs to be said and they would write some not very nice little comment back and so I think I get more of that. I don't know if it's just they're more…touchy or what, I'm not really sure. I mean I do have other parents that have made comments but I would say they've made more. More than others. I mean it's just amazing to see having so many problems with four year olds and I really do think more discipline problems are with African American than the others.

Her explanation reveals a bit more about how she really does see color in the context of her classroom and in her dealings with parents and children. She holds to the initial

comments about discipline being the major issue with her students of color and tells me that she is currently working on learning a new way to manage her classroom by attending professional development seminars and reading books on a particular method.

We moved on in our interview and I wanted to know, as a pre-Kindergarten teacher having students in her room who are having their first formal schooling experience, what Mrs. Sorrenfield viewed as the underlying factors contributing to the achievement gap between White students and African American students in the upper grades in her district and beyond. She begins:

I think a lot of parents are not pushing education in the African American culture as much as the other cultures. I can see they…a lot of them are more into sports and doing things outside…even the little ones will say they're outside playing basketball with the older kids …and all, so I think more time is spent on those kind of activities more than working on whatever they need for the class. But, on the other hand, you do see some, it is very important to them, they want better for their children than what they had. I mean a lot of them are like that. Some have been….you can see…I think it's just the teachers are so frustrated…working with kids and they're not listening…like I said, when you're in a classroom and you have so many children, you just want to say, oh, well, the next year someone can work on teaching them whatever it is…and a lot of times, I do think part of the gap is, they're in trouble. And they are not getting what they need, and then they're in so much trouble that they end up going to time out and they're supposed to do their work but they're not in there for instruction, so the gap gets

bigger because they're losing their instructional time because of their behavior. I mean I see that in ours…I would say that the majority of the ones that are in the office are the African American. I'm not saying all, but a majority of them. And, if you're in the office or sitting there waiting to talk to the principal, you're sitting there sometimes a very long time…so, I just feel like the gap has a lot to do with the behavior.

She explains that when a student is out of the room, s/he misses instruction time and then you have to work with them in small groups or individually, which she notes is not as effective as having them in the classroom; however, she explains, "if one is causing the other children to lose out on instructional time, then you can't have them there." Overall, Mrs. Sorrenfield feels like she is successful with all of her students at the end of the average day and tries not to differentiate in her interactions with her students based on race. When asked about specific strategies she uses to meet the needs of those students who are struggling she tells me that she uses a lot of "one-on-one" instruction rather than sending things home where the child may not be getting any help. Further, students are grouped by ability based on a specific skill (i.e. letter recognition) for small group instruction in her classroom and she explained that she noticed no trend in the racial distribution of her students in these groups.

As we neared the end of our interview, I asked her about the racial distribution of the students in her classroom – she had nineteen students in her class. She recalls a conversation she had with the Instructional Aide in her classroom (Mrs. Banks, an African American woman) a year or so ago:

Mrs. Sorrenfield: I have more Hispanics this year. This year is different, usually I have mostly Blacks…not sure if they all went to Head Start this year…its interesting…I look at my list, because of how last year was, only a few were African American, and I think I said [to the Instructional Aide], "OH, I'm going to have a good year this year…I have a lot of Hispanics!"

Mrs. Banks: "So, I think you're telling me that you don't want any African American students in your classroom…"

Mrs. Sorrenfield: And I said, "I didn't mean it that way, you know I didn't." Because we're really good friends. And I had her daughter in pre-K. I said, "You know I didn't mean it that way." And so she's giving me a hard time…and she [Mrs. Banks] said, "Yeah, cause they're Hispanics." (laughs). She came back working with me this year, Mrs. Banks, and I'm not sure if it is the children or if it's because she's back in the classroom [they seem to be better behaved].

Mrs. Sorrenfield's comments reveal something about how she initially views her students based on their racial or cultural difference. She also alludes to the fact that her classroom seems to have less behavior issues when there are more Hispanic students than African American as well as when Mrs. Banks (the Instructional Aide) is in her room. Mrs. Sorrenfield remarked about Mrs. Banks, "she believes in discipline, you do it right then and there." She also addressed the importance of being a part of the community of her students with regard to the relationship between the Instructional Aide, Ms. Banks, and her students:

She's [Mrs. Banks] a firm believer in letting them do everything on their own
and she knows many of their parents, because she works at Wal-Mart too…so the
parents come in and they'll ask how the kids are – we have that kind of help. So,
she's telling them, they're hearing what's happening in the classroom and so
they're handling it…and so they know if they don't do well…mama will hear
about it at Wal-Mart. Definitely has an impact.

In my interview with Mrs. Sorrenfield, I felt like she shared very openly with me about how she perceives herself as a White teacher in relation to her students of color, specifically her African American students. There are inherent contradictions in her language and her feelings about working with diverse students especially as it relates to her professing to take a "colorblind" approach and then in the very same instance, articulating quite clearly the difference among racial groups of students in her class with regard to performance, discipline and expectations.

A few days later, I conducted the third interview with Mrs. Slater, a first grade teacher. We agreed to meet in her classroom after school that Thursday, October 19th. I recalled Mrs. Slater being one of the most outspoken teachers at our initial meeting – she was cheerful, pleasant, and seemed willing to share and talk about her experiences as a White teacher. She was one of the first to respond as being interested in participating in the study. It was only a few days after that initial meeting I ran into her in a local nail salon; she reminded me of her name and our meeting. Really, our conversation began there as she already hinted that this was an "interesting" school year. I had been looking forward to our interview.

Mrs. Slater, a Neverland native, has been teaching for twenty-two years. Mrs. Slater attended a small, rural school as a young girl and was one of eighteen students in her senior graduating class. Her father was a cotton farmer, and her mother did not work outside of the home. She shared experiences about raising animals, showing them in 4H clubs and working hard on the farm. Mrs. Slater told me that while neither of her parents went to college, her dad made sure that she and her sisters and brother knew it was important. All four of them attended and graduated college.

In her schooling experiences growing up, she had a few interactions with students of different racial and cultural backgrounds. Mrs. Slater explained,

It was mixed. I was thinking about that last night because I knew you would probably ask that. There were 18 of us and I think was four Blacks in there. Anderson doesn't have near as many blacks as Neverland does, and now today it's even less because they don't have housing, like the apartments, they don't have that there. So, you live out in the country…uh, I would say four. And probably Hispanic, probably about two and the rest were White.

She continued to explain that most of her close friends and social networks were White and that her parents had a significant influence on that. Beyond the few interactions she had with the students in her school/class, Mrs. Slater's primary contact with those of a different race or culture was with the workers on her father's farm and her nanny, all of whom were African American. She explains her perceptions about African Americans as a young girl:

When I was little, I always assumed that the Blacks were working' for my dad. They worked cotton and back then they didn't have the cotton-pickers, so they would pick it by hand and all that were out in the field were Black. And so as a kid I just assumed that's what the Blacks were supposed to do, you know, it was like they were slaves in a sense, but they weren't actually slaves, but it was like that until I learned in school. Then hey…I even asked my mom about it and she said "Oh, no, that was way back in time [slavery]" but almost all of them were Black. That's why I just assumed hey, that's what you're supposed to be doing.

Mrs. Slater told me that it wasn't until she was a teenager that she realized that her understanding was naïve and began having positive interactions with African Americans in school. She noted, "…they [African Americans] were nice."

When we began talking about her career as a teacher, Mrs. Slater told me that she'd always wanted to be a teacher, ever since she was a small child and grew up in a family of teachers. She has always taught in Neverland and shared with me that it has always been a fairly diverse setting; though in recent years, the number of Hispanics has been increasing. I asked Mrs. Slater how she feels about working with diverse populations and she told me that while her husband has tried to get her to move to another district, she "enjoys the challenge" of working in Neverland. I followed up by asking her what she perceived as the biggest challenge in being a teacher. Our exchange follows:

I: Well, that leads nicely into my next question, what are the specific challenges you face as a teacher?

T: Oh, mostly just trying to get them to show respect.

I: Who is "them" – the children?

T: Um, African American and one Hispanic. There is no White in here that has

shown me a lot of disrespect. African Americans and one Hispanic that show no

respect for a person or a thing.

I: Really? Do you feel like that is related to the fact that you are White and

they're not – do you feel like they are aware of that or do you feel like that is just

particular to their background?

T: Home. Because I've heard two of the little African American's actually talk to

the principal, that is Black, she's a Black lady, the assistant principal, the same

way that they talk to me. "No, I'm not going to do it," they told her. They talk to

her just like they talk to me…They are first graders, six years old. And they are

Black and they're talking to her like that. It's very sad.

Mrs. Slater's answers provide some insight into her own classroom as she references

specific students in her class that I will be observing. She feels a lack of respect is a

hindrance in her classroom.

In the next portion of our interview, I asked Mrs. Slater about the achievement

gap. I explained that while I realized they do not formally test in first grade, I wondered

if she might like to share with me what she thought were contributing factors to the

inequity in achievement as she teaches such young children. Mrs. Slater shared,

Its home for one thing. Most of these [African American students], you only

have, one parent. There is no dad there, they just have a mom. And mom's

working or out and about and they're pretty much at home raising themselves.

No one is helping them at home and I don't think they have the education to help

them. I know it's first grade but I've had notes come from home and say, just

come back to school and say "I can't help my child with their 1st grade

homework" and I'm like, hello, wait until they get in 8th grade. You know, but I

think it's the education and they don't put a lot of impact on school. You know,

they go all night run the streets until ten o'clock and the child comes to school

and sleeps during the day. School is not that important to them. And when I was

raised up, school was important. That's the way my dad wanted it to be, I didn't

get it [education], you're going to it… Yeah. I have not seen one White person in

here fall asleep yet. You know. But the Blacks, they're falling asleep, or they are

very cranky, they are irritated because they're tired. They never come back with

their homework, hardly – homework? We don't have time to do it.

In her response, Mrs. Slater seems adamant that this gap in achievement is caused by

lack of support at home and the bad behavior of the students. She notes a distinct

difference between the performance of her White students and her African American

students. As a follow up, I asked her what she thought she might do as a teacher to help

support African American students in her classroom.

T: Well, I do a lot of extra tutoring type stuff…you know what I'm saying, I

know they don't get their homework done I actually run extra sheets off and

when we go over it together, we actually go over it, I give them an extra sheet

because I know that it's not going to get done at home and I did it in the class as

a group and when I pull them over in small group, I actually pull them over and I know they're not getting it at home, or I see problems, and I work one-on-one.

I: What else besides one-on-one, anything else you can think of?

T: Just that…I do a lot of counseling, I guess you could say. I pull them over and talk to them a lot… I actually have to sit with them a lot and talk to them one-on-one.

I: About behavior?

T: Both about behavior and academics. I have to pull them [into small groups or individually], some of them are very, and very low…I have one [African American student] that doesn't know some of his letters and numbers. Yeah, because he was a discipline problem in Kindergarten. So if you didn't behave there and didn't listen, so now I have to pull him aside to help him and I don't have to do that with the other kids. It's mostly the African American's.

As I asked for Mrs. Slater to clarify for me what she saw as her biggest challenge to be – academic issues or behavior problems. She continued to explain that a student's behavior influences her/his ability to be successful in the classroom.

Because they [African American students] are either in time-out, out of this room, or they're, one's already been expelled for three days, you know you're not here; you're not going to learn anything. You're in time-out you're just doing a bunch of paperwork and you're not getting any help from home…you're not going to learn much when you're jumping out or falling out of your seat, or hollering out in the room, throwing paper on the floor like he does, a lot of them.

He didn't learn in Kindergarten so he's already behind and that's why he's really

frustrated in the 1st grade.

While the school has an elaborate discipline management process and policy designed to

give students warnings and opportunity to modify their own behavior, she concedes that

most of the African American students in her class (and school) have already been to

"time-out" – essentially, in school suspension and removal from the classroom.

I changed the focus of our interview to discuss classroom instruction and

strategies that Mrs. Slater uses in her classroom with her students. She explained that

students are not grouped by ability in the general sense, but rather by individual skills

so that she may focus her small group instruction on similar objectives. I probed further

and asked her if she ever used methods of instruction that she would consider culturally

responsive to her students. She shared with me her use of specific books, films and

discussion about experiences that her children may not have coming into the classroom.

I asked her if this makes a difference in her teaching, she replied:

Oh yea. I definitely think so, yeah. We were actually watching a film, at recess

today, there was a little bear making a snowman, well, we don't have any snow,

they probably have never ever seen snow here in Neverland, I know they haven't.

Some of them will never ever see snow even if they go somewhere and a lot of

them will never go to Colorado to see snow, so I actually was telling them. They

were so excited about it. But actually, when we do weather we talk about it, you

know one day, get in the car or in a plane and fly there when you get older. See if

it snows. It's so neat. I told them how we go skiing, we've taken our daughters

skiing, every spring break we go to Colorado skiing, you know. And, we haven't

gone the past two years, but they've been going since they were three years old,

skiing. They're like little ski-bunnies. The kids are like "Oh, skiing"….and I said

it's so much fun. And they're like "oh wow" and so I relay a lot of my travel with

them.

Mrs. Slater seems to understand the importance of relating on a personal level with her

students. However, I felt the presence of arrogance in her comment when she described

how she and her family always went on vacations to ski and that her students, many of

them, would never see snow. While she used her experiences in a sharing way, I was

troubled by how she framed her comments.

As we neared the end of our interview, I asked Mrs. Slater if she felt like she was

successful with all of her students and if she felt she had a good relationship with her

African American students and their families. She commented, "I do. I really do [feel

successful]. I feel like I can see it because I do test them on things and I can see that

there is progress but also some of them, from day one, I see a little bit more respect in

terms of they are listening to me, if they don't learn maybe academically, maybe they'll

learn to show respect to people. But I do see an improvement." And with regard to her

relationship with her African American students and their families, Mrs. Slater says that

it is generally very good with only a few exceptions.

In the final few minutes, I ask her what advice she would offer a novice White

teacher who would be teaching African American students. She quickly replied,

They really do need to treat them [African American students] like the rest. I try to treat them like everyone else. But I do have to say, you're going to have to be strict, don't smile the first nine weeks because they're going to run right over you and you're going to have to deal with some parents that are going to be kind of negative towards you. This is the first year that I've probably seen so much negative being towards me, those two parents, but I'm like, I haven't done anything to them, you know what I'm saying. I would tell them; treat them all equally because if you don't, you're going to open up yourself to a bag of worms. I didn't but you might if you treat them differently.

Mrs. Slater is certain that she treats all her students the same; however, in her responses to my questions, there seems a sharp distinction in her expectations and explanations regarding her African American students when compared with others. After our interview, I was anxious to observe in her room.

The very next day, I met Mrs. Thompson, a kindergarten teacher. Mrs. Thompson and I had exchanged several emails and she was very enthusiastic about participating in the study. She had a student-teacher in her room as well. She is a tall woman with a spunky short hair cut, a great smile, and a warm classroom. When we met, I felt immediately relaxed and our interview became more of a conversation. The student teacher sat with us as we chatted after school.

Mrs. Thompson is one of two teachers in this study who grew up out of state and out of the south. She was raised in a small town in Iowa, she had very limited interactions with African Americans or Hispanics. Immediately in our interview, when I

asked about her upbringing, her family, and her culture, Mrs. Thompson shared a very

unsettling experience with me – it was as if she wanted me to know right away.

> T: So I didn't have a lot of experience [with African Americans or Hispanics]
>
> until I moved to Texas. Um, when I moved here I went to Sam (SHSU) and my
>
> first experience, I lived in the dorm and worked in the cafeteria and the football
>
> players used to come through and say some very inappropriate things to me.
>
> Make little suggestions, little…I was scared to death. I didn't know how to
>
> handle that, I'd never been…
>
> I: These football players were?
>
> T: African American. I'd never been talked to like that before…understanding
>
> the Texas accents, along with the African American lingo, it was really hard for
>
> me to understand, so that was strange. And then one afternoon I worked at the
>
> bakery and I was walking through the back parking lot, and got by a building and
>
> got cornered by a big African American and um, I was scared to death. And I just
>
> really don't know what would have happened um, but the look on my face, a guy
>
> went by and said, "Hey, Jenny, let's go and reached and grabbed me and pulled
>
> me." So, um, it was scary, very scary.

These initial interactions with African Americans in her first few months in Texas were

upsetting to her. I asked her how she thought this impacted her being a teacher, she

replied:

> T: There was the gamut there, of everything, but um. So not a lot of good
>
> experiences at the beginning. When I started working in the classrooms and with

the kids, I didn't see colors. It just changed for me. But, um, it took me a while, but then I just decided , because where I am and this is what I'm going to deal with, and so I've got a make a decision and I don't want it to be, I'm this White teacher and you're…I don't know…

I: Did it happen for you before you came in the classroom? Was there a moment or an event or something that helped get you to that point?

T: I think not until I came in and saw those babies. That's what just changed it for me. It was absolutely, all of that junk, just went out the window. And I was like, oh, because it was what I wanted to do and where I wanted to be so much that it didn't matter. None of that mattered. But school was scary. I just went to [University] for a year, and then transferred to [the local university]. And a whole different group up there…and I was the one not accepted because I was from Iowa. So, I think now that you say that, maybe part of me not being accepted, um, and I noticed it a little bit from Sam, like I would sit down and the girls would say, "Where are you from?" and I said "Iowa" and I had girls get up and move. So, um, maybe a little of that…not being accepted kind of helped me to say "Ok, you can't be judgmental because you know how it feels".

I was initially impressed by Mrs. Thompson's level of self-reflection and disclosure. These experiences were obviously definitive for her, and I was taken by the seemingly uneventful resolution of the turmoil these experiences had imposed. She continued and explained to me that while her interactions in Iowa were limited with those of a different race and culture, they were for the most part, positive. She never returned to my initial

question to tell me about her own culture. I continued by asking her if she felt that these experiences influenced the way she is in the classroom. She replied:

> When I am in here [the classroom], I really don't see color. My babies…my babies are my babies and it doesn't matter what color you are. If you break a rule you move your name. You know, and I try very, very hard to, you know, it's, I'm sure that uh, I guess I'd have to ask Amanda (student teacher) – you tend to have your favorites which you don't want to do but I hope it doesn't show. You know, but I really try very hard to treat everybody the same.

As we shifted our attention to her professional career as an educator, Mrs. Thompson told me she had always wanted to be a teacher and that even as a little girl, "my friends were out playing Barbie and I was playing school." Mrs. Thompson has been teaching kindergarten, in Neverland ISD, in the same hallway since she began teaching eighteen years ago. I asked about the demographics in the district and how they have changed through the years she'd been teaching there. She explained:

> When I began, White used to be the majority, and then it used to be pretty equal, a third, a third, and a third. This was my first year that I had 4 Whites on my roll out of 24. So, it was a lot different. And I think it's because, you know, we got [the new elementary campus], which is out towards Somewhereville, and theirs is totally the other way.

I asked her how this has changed the dynamics in her classroom, if at all; she said it "hasn't really changed. I teach the same, I do the same things…" With this said, I asked

her what challenges she did face as a teacher with the various groups of students in her classroom. She explains,

> Um, a lot of times the Hispanic students aren't as…um…oh, their vocabulary, I would say would be the first thing I notice. It's difficult for some of them. Now usually if they're in our rooms, then they have passed the test and things to be in here, but I've noticed a couple of times in the past, students that I've had, um, you know, would really have to stop and listen to what I said and kind of… would questions sometimes. Vocabulary for the Hispanics, um, they're not always…I can't think of the word that I'm looking for…um, introduced to as much. A lot of times they stay home with mom, they don't go to the daycares, so they're not you know, crayons and that type of thing, letters, and the alphabet and that kind of thing. Um, well….the African Americans…as far as me actually changing anything, I haven't had to modify.

While Mrs. Thompson talks about doing some testing in kindergarten, she notes that she does not see the same trends with regard to the achievement gap. However, she continued later on concerning the performance of some of her African American students:

> …well, now two of my lower ones that I work with, every single day, are African American. Two of my lowest are African American. So, um, the gap, I don't know if it's because, they're not being exposed to as much, or, because one I'm not sure I think he just goes home and doesn't go to a daycare or anything. Um, they just go home after school, there is not a daycare situation and I know that

there is not, there tends to not, I hate to say this, but a lot of time the African

American students don't have as much help, like in the evenings with homework

and that kind of thing like the Hispanic and White homes.

It is interesting that initially in our conversation, she talks about the difference in ability

based on specific skills, but then becomes more focused on racial subgroups in her

description of achievement in her classroom. For instance, she initially describes her

children as being good at letter recognition or colors or not then later she begins to

differentiate between students' perceived ability based on their race. When I ask her,

why even at this early age she sees a discrepancy in the achievement between her

African American students and her White students, she continues:

I hate to, I totally hate to say it, but I know parent involvement, is just a big

thing. Like in this school itself, at home, when they get home with homework, a

lot of them will say there's no one at home when I get home or I'm home with

older brother and sister and they don't help me with my homework or they hide

my homework from me. Um, that's one of my Hispanics…um; but there is no

help at home. Parental involvement just is not there…I feel like that's really big,

a big problem.

While her comment above cites one of her Hispanic students specifically, Mrs.

Thompson is speaking about all of her students of color in this comment as she addresses

a lack of support in the home. I asked Mrs. Thompson what she thought teachers could

do to alleviate the inequity in achievement in the classroom; she notes some of the things

they have tried but in the end seems at a loss for what else she can do.

It is so hard because we have tried so many different things. We have had testing

classes, I've written my phone number down if you have questions about

homework please call, it's just really hard. It's very hard because I don't know

how to get them involved. I don't know what to do…a lot of them I know work,

um, and don't get home until late. Like if I call, and I need something, [they say}

"I work and I'm not at home, I'm not available." So…I don't know how to

answer that.

At this point in the interview, I realized that while Mrs. Thompson wanted to "treat all of

her children the same" that there were some important differences surfacing in her

thoughts with regard to her students of color. I asked her if she felt like she was

successful at the end of every day with all of her students. She replied, "I do. I feel like

as a whole group that I get to everybody, that I try to call on everybody to answer, or to

share their stories." In her classroom, her students are not grouped by overall perceived

ability, but were grouped flexibly during the day to address specific objectives. There

were no specific trends noted in her grouping strategies with regard to the race of her

students and the groupings changed often.

We were almost done with our interview when I asked if there were any

instances in her classroom or in the school where she felt like race played a particularly

important role and if her young students were aware of racial differences in the

classroom. In response, she shared this story:

T: Now at the beginning of school, we talked about me, and the five senses and

that kind of thing, and we did tear paper faces and so I was getting all of the

colors out. I got peach out, I got brown, and I had one of my little African

American's grab the peach and I said, "OK, everybody stop…everybody look at

your skin and hold it against your friend. Nobody has the exact same color skin.

That's what makes us awesome and unique and different. And that's OK." I

said, um…but, I made these, and I know it's really ugly, but I just started

handing them out the correct paper for the correct person to kind of avoid that

whole…

I: You're-different-than-me conversation…

T: We try to talk about how [one student] has glasses, and we talked about that at

the beginning and I wear glasses on the weekend because I take my contacts out

and my hair stands up…(laughs)…and you know, that's OK. We have a song

"We're school family" and we talked about that from day one. I don't care what

color you are, if you're a boy or a girl. I want my boys in the home center; I want

my girls playing with the blocks. We're a family in here and you will work

together and you will play together. That's big and very important to me. And the

"N" word is…just makes the hair on the back of my neck just stand up. I haven't

heard it this year, but a couple of years ago I had a little African American boy

who, just, in fun, it wasn't, but would just say that word. And I was like "That's

not appropriate, you're not going to say that."

Mrs. Thompson, while professing to not "see color" throughout most of her interview,

may of her responses to the questions reflected something quite different. I am not

certain she even realized her own propensity to note these differences with such clarity,

but in her final statement to me, she wanted me to know that she "really tried to treat everyone the same."

As I interviewed each teacher, I began to see some similar trends in their language and in the way they described themselves, the African American students, and their classrooms. I was looking forward to my next interview with Mrs. Lois – a young, fourth grade teacher in her fifth year of teaching. She was, by several years in age and experience, the youngest teacher participating in the study. I was looking forward to hearing her perspectives and experience and could not help but wonder if we might share some commonalities in our experiences as younger White women teaching African American students. We agreed to meet informally at a coffee shop where we could sip our mochas in the chill of the evening air in late October. Mrs. Lois seemed comfortable and open in our conversation; I felt like we would have an easier time making a connection than I did with the other teachers.

Mrs. Lois, the second teacher raised out of state and north of the Mason-Dixon line, spent most of her childhood in a small town in Minnesota. I began by asking her to share with me about herself, her family, and her culture. She began,

> Well, um, I grew up in Minnesota. And, I as far as my family, both of my parents were teachers. And um, I have two sisters both younger than me. School was obviously very important. The idea of doing well was just a given. I mean, I got grounded if I got a B. Uh, except for when I went to college it wasn't that big of a deal. And then my parents moved to Texas, in Houston I went to high school. And as far as my culture…I guess I don't know. Like, I just feel like, like I don't

even know how to answer my own culture. I never really thought about it. I don't know maybe it's part of that, I know we're not supposed to be a melting pot anymore…but I think it more of a melting pot. I don't know…am I missing something? (laughs) I don't know…I never thought about my own culture…I thought about other people's culture, but not my own.

Mrs. Lois told me that moving south from Minnesota she felt as if she needed a passport it was so different. I asked her about her friends, close social networks and the students with whom she went to school.

T: In Minnesota, in small town Minnesota, everyone is White. All my friends were White. I had to travel out of the town to see other than White, because in Minnesota, um, different cities are like different cultures. Like Fredericksburg is German, well that's how like all small towns in Minnesota are. Like the majority of them anyways, And so, all of them, were White…White, White, White.

I: What about your neighborhood, school?

T: All mostly White too. I remember one time growing up; coming to Houston there was one Hispanic in my school and a Black when I came to Houston. I never saw a Black person until I left Minnesota. I'm not exaggerating, everyone was White. So, that's another reason it was like a different country. The first town I was in was only 200 people…when I say small town, I mean small town. We were there for ten years and then we moved to a town, which was 2500. Then I moved to Houston…and so my school was bigger than the town I lived in.

I: Do you remember how you felt the first time you interacted with African American or Hispanic people? Do you remember anything about your senior year of high school?

T: Well, no, I should go back, in Minnesota, because there are so many towns, I should have added, I met many Hispanics because in the summer they would work on farms. I did see them, they did live there, and they just came for the summers. So Black people, it wasn't a big deal, I played basketball and you know how most kids are, you don't even have to speak the same language to get along. And so that wasn't a big deal coming here…African Americans…I can't believe I'm about to say this, because you're going to think "You're an idiot!"…but I guess, I don't know about my own culture.

Given her experiences growing up and her limited interactions with those of different races, I was a bit surprised that Mrs. Lois attended (more than any other teacher) to my question about her own culture. While she could not come up with a definitive response, she worked through it aloud more than any other participant.

As we shifted gears, Mrs. Lois shared with me that she was an unlikely candidate for teaching. Having grown up in a family of teachers, it was the last thing she wanted to do. She declared three different majors in college before deciding to be a teacher. She finally chose to pursue education because she wanted a job that "would be interesting every day. And, I've never come home and thought that was a dull day. (laughs)."

I asked Mrs. Lois to compare her one year of teaching experience in Houston with her four years of teaching in Neverland. She explained that there were fewer White

students in her class there and it was a predominantly African American student

population. She went on to share that sometimes she felt tension with the parents both

because she was a young teacher and because she was White. When I asked her what

challenges she faced on a daily basis, she explained:

> Well, with my last two classes, it is getting their attention and keeping their
>
> attention. And so many different abilities in there and they're all needing help,
>
> and having to be everywhere. But I'm thinking too, well, they're able to do more
>
> than they let on that they can do but they expect you to be there to help them. I
>
> tell them not to get frustrated, too, "I can't do this, I can't do this" I ask them,
>
> "have you thought about it, no" – that's the problem with some of them, you
>
> haven't even thought about. And, uh, I'm sorry…let me gather my thoughts
>
> again before I just ramble. Um, other challenges…get them to settle down…as
>
> far as, as a specific race, the issues I don't believe are race; those aren't. There
>
> are some issues that probably are, because I think that sometimes I would like to
>
> pretend that race isn't an issue, but I know that they go home and hear what their
>
> parents say. And I can't help but think that some of them, some of my Black kids
>
> when they go home may not hear very positive things about White people…and
>
> vice versa.

When I asked Mrs. Lois about the achievement gap and what might be some of the

contributing factors, she cited poverty and lack of support at home.

> I think some of it is the importance at home about education. Because I would
>
> think too, the biggest gap is poverty. Money is the same between White and

Black…honestly I just think when you have money to go to college, then you expect the kids to go to college, and it seems…people don't necessarily want better for their kids than they have, but they want their kids to have what they have, like the same type of lifestyle. At least the same or better. But I feel like, I feel like actually that people that have money and are doing well, want better for their kids. And I feel like, not that the other ones don't want better for their kids, but they don't do anything to help them get better. I guess probably all parents want better for their kids but not….but they don't do anything for them, like help them at home after school so they can do that. And so I think that [poverty] probably has more to do with it.

I asked Mrs. Lois if she felt successful at the end of the day, if she thought she was meeting the needs of all of her students.

I mean I think, I hope I'm being successful, I think that I am. Um, and with my African American students, I think, you know there's always more to learn, but I'm almost as successful as I think I can be. I don't think that I am…I don't know, not meeting one of their needs…I think I'm doing the best I can for all of the kids.

She also shared with me how she works to accommodate various learning styles in her lessons and teaching. Allowing students to work in pairs or small groups she notes is especially helpful with "low-performing" kids in her last two classes of the day. At the intermediate school, students are grouped by ability, so the students who have scored lower on standard measures of achievement are all grouped together. Mrs. Lois also

shares with me that there tends to be more African American students in the "lower" classes than in the other classes on her team. She went on to explain that she even brought this up with the counselor in the school:

> Yes. Because, and even last year it was more obvious [most of the African American students were grouped in low-performing classes]. And I even talked to the counselor about this…Do parents not get upset? If you walked into the GT [gifted and talented] classes, not obviously everyone can be GT, but it was almost all White kids and then you go into my class and it's almost all Black kids and all the parents kept asking. Our principal is even Black and she said, "No". She said because the kids you have [Black children], their parents won't come to school. So, I wonder if any of my parents would actually see this and thought about it…

As we wrapped up our interview, Mrs. Lois told me that she shared her last class which had several special education students, with a co-teacher. She expressed frustration in the relationship with the co-teacher and their inability to coordinate and work together in a way that they both taught all students and shared responsibility equally. From our interview, I felt that Mrs. Lois was working hard to meet the needs of all of her students and while she felt some racial and/or cultural tension between herself and her students, overall, she viewed herself as an effective, caring teacher.

My final interview was held in the library of the elementary school with the second grade teacher, Mrs. Goffert. Her participation in the study was not expected but very welcomed. I had not heard from her to confirm her participation until just a few

days before our interview; of course I was thrilled at her willingness to participate and share her classroom and experiences with me. My initial impressions of Mrs. Goffert were that she was a bit shy and very soft-spoken. A pleasant woman, Mrs. Goffert is a veteran teacher of twenty-two years.

Mrs. Goffert was adopted as a child and grew up with her adoptive parents as an only child. It wasn't until later that a judge ordered her adoption records opened for medical reasons that she learned of her birth-family. She has four half-sisters and her birth father is Sicilian. When I asked about her upbringing and her exposure to people of different racial and cultural backgrounds, she shared the following:

> We were, what I think would be called lower-middle class, I didn't know what
> that meant, but uh, it was all white. And uh there was a Black neighborhood, you
> know, several miles from us. And then our neighborhood and then another
> neighborhood that was Black and at that time people didn't associate at all with
> cultures. My dad would take me to one of the areas and we would buy BBQ, and
> so those people were nice to us. And there was a lady that ironed for my aunt,
> who was Black, and she was pretty old and she was really nice to us. Those were
> my two experiences with Black people. So I just thought all Black people were
> nice and all Black people were like them.

She continued,

> Because that was all my experience. Now, uh, well, I never heard my parents talk
> ugly about other cultures. I know they were…the lady that came to work for us, I
> know they were very kind to her, and they did things for her, but I also knew that

within my family there were people, my uncle, that you know, when she drank

out of a glass, we were not to drink out of that glass. And, you know just a

cultural thing for him. But, uh, I just grew up not knowing that I had to choose.

Now when I was in high school there, they, the children in this area, were bussed

through our area to the next Black area where there was a school and I can

remember standing on the corner wondering why they were on the bus going that

direction. It didn't…I don't think it ever occurred to me that, well, they were

being bused away from my neighborhood. You know what I mean; I don't think I

understood that. I just wondered why they were on a bus going through there.

Mrs. Goffert's upbringing in a very segregated community limited her interactions with

those who were different than her and her family until she was in high school and began

working.

T: Well, um, it was more with Hispanics than with blacks. Because I had

interaction with Hispanics. And, I worked at Six Flags and where I worked, uh,

the girls were mostly White, but the people who worked in the restaurant were

mostly Hispanic because it was a Mexican restaurant. And there, my mother

disapproved me dating them, or, you know, having much of a relationship with

them. And that did cause problems at home.

I: Did she ever tell you why?

T: They're not like us.

Our interview turned from a discussion of her early schooling and family experiences to

focus on her being a teacher. While it was never expected that she would attend college,

she did begin after high school and completed some college. However, it was not until after she met her future husband who was also going to be a teacher that she decided to complete her degree and become a teacher. Neverland Elementary is her third teaching position and is the most diverse setting of all.

> When I worked in my first job, it was very much like this except, at that time there weren't as many Hispanic children. Then I transferred to another school there were Black families there and a few Hispanics but mostly White. And the Black people that lived there were from that community and they knew their place. There was no race problem; it was like that's just the way it was in that place.

When I asked Mrs. Goffert if she enjoyed teaching diverse populations, she said "Yes." I asked her why and she responded, "Well, I don't like people choosing who I will associate with" and laughed. I liked her rebellious spirit.

I continued with the interview and asked Mrs. Goffert what challenges she faced in the classroom.

> Well, um, the, I think a difficulty that I have seen with some of the Black children and not all of them, but some their home life isn't what it should be and, it's very loud, they're loud when they're in the stores, they're loud, VERY loud. And it's really not, sometimes its poverty, but sometimes it isn't. Because I know I talked to one parent, when I first came here, and I said "Well, you know your child is just loud, he's just loud all the time, he needs to settle down." She just laughed and said, "Yeah, we're all loud" – (laughs). So that was just part of it.

> And a lot of times like the Hispanic children, not all the time, but a lot of times, they're so quiet you have to bring them out. So it's trying to get everybody even…not too loud, not too soft, you know, doesn't matter where you come from, we have to all work together.

I went on to ask what she thought might be contributing to the achievement gap in Neverland between the White students and African American students.

> I wish I had some magic answer. Um, I think it's, thinking of it for myself, I can remember when there was one male teacher, or when I had my first male teacher I was scared to death. I didn't behave very well in that class, I was very….and when these children come to school whether its Hispanic or Black, they've got to feel intimidated to a certain extent when there are only White teachers here. I just think some of it's that…it's not just one thing…some of it is probably that, some is you know their home life, not everybody's uh, a lot of families have been here forever and ever and they've gone through really tough times and I think sometimes that gets passed on to their children. Those parent and grandparents don't have a good feeling about school and I think sometimes that gets inflicted on the children too. And then there's poverty, a lot of our children are very poor.

Interestingly, when I asked Mrs. Goffert if she felt like she is successful with her students at the end of the day, she said, "Yes." But when I probed again but asked specifically about her feeling successful with her African American students, she replied, "Not so much." She and I continued:

And you know, I'm trying to think of how to put it, its maybe I just feel more that way, it's not that they particularly have lower grades then the other students, but I do think what should I, what could I have done more? I guess is what it is…

I: You're saying that you feel a "tension" as a White teacher with African American students?

Yes. In that, if I didn't get through to them, why was it? If they're White, I just say well, you know, its poverty or I need to teach differently, but with Black students, I wonder if it's something else. Should I have presented it a different way? You know, should I have made more movement type things which is hard to do, you know what I mean? Should I have been teaching a different way?

When I asked Mrs. Goffert what she thought teachers could do to help alleviate the achievement gap she immediately referenced parental support.

Probably need to get the parents behind us. We need to, um, let the parents know that they are, even though we have their kids here, that they, we can't do it without them. They have to be totally involved in that child's academics. And sometimes um, some of our parents, can't do…they can't. I know with the Hispanic children, we say, if you're parents can't read this, and we tell the parents too, if you can't read this or can't help your child, you send them to someone in the neighborhood that can help. So, we could say that to the Black children, too. There is no language barrier, but there are some other barriers that we know of – where the parents are just not as educated and we could say the same thing to them "find someone in the neighborhood that can help."

I turned my focus to her teaching strategies specifically and asked if she ever explicitly selected certain strategies based on students' racial or cultural backgrounds. She indicated that she did not but rather relied on age and developmental appropriateness to guide her instruction. While Mrs. Goffert states repeatedly that she sees the inequity in achievement and many of the challenges she faces in her classroom to be a result of poverty more than race, when asked if she thinks her students notice that she is White, she replies, "I don't see how they could not see that. I just, they have to be aware of that. If I were a White child, I would be aware that that teacher was Black."

Our interview ended with some discussion of details to follow and when I asked Mrs. Goffert if she had anything else to share with me, she added: "I did want to explain something, back earlier when I said the Black people in this other area "knew their place" that wasn't me saying that, that was that town…that was their, pretty well their attitude." As in much of the interview, Mrs. Goffert continually minimized the importance of race and I believe this final comment was aimed at the same purpose. For her, the issues were not one of racial difference, but of economic disparity.

The purpose of these initial interviews was to meet each teacher, become familiar with the community and the schools, and to build a relationship with the teachers before I entered their classrooms as an observer. I wanted us to share our experiences, I wanted to learn about them, and I wanted them to trust me and feel good about having chosen to participate in this study with me. I was hopeful that I would learn something about each teacher's racial identity development and their perceptions of the African American students in their classrooms.

I felt as if I had accomplished, at least partially, each of my goals. Having visited both schools (the elementary and the intermediate) on several occasions, I had a fairly good sense of the climate in each building and the interactions there between teachers and students. I knew I had connected with each of the teachers in various ways and that our initial interviews would prove to be the beginning of a good relationship for us. I believed that I made them feel more at ease about their participation in the study. Their responses were honest and candid and in many ways, I found myself relating to their stories of growing up and becoming a teacher.

While more complex than can be fully assessed in just one interview, I felt I gained some insight into each teacher's racial identity development. It seemed that all teachers vacillated somewhere between the contact, disintegration, reintegration and pseudo-independence stages of Helms (1990) White Racial Identity model. Most of the teachers had difficulty describing their own culture or racial identity as is common in the contact stage and instead based their identities "on perceptions of their personal traits and their adoption of beliefs and attitudes espoused by family and social group members." (Marshall, 2002, p. 56) In both the disintegration and reintegration stages, "Whites attempt to deal with the harsh realities of racial diversity." Also in these stages, teachers acknowledge "differences in their students yet fail to institute teaching practices and policies that will result in high-quality learning experiences and equitable outcomes for all students." (Marshall, 2002, p. 57-58) Finally, in the pseudo-independence stage, marked by an "intellectualization of racism", Whites espouse equality and profess

colorblindness. Problematically, it is this belief in equality that tends to mask the very inherent inequity in the system – or in this case, the classroom or school.

I expected Mrs. Sorrenfield to be the most advanced in her racial identity because of her early and consistent contact with those of different racial and cultural backgrounds than herself. Yet, in her interview, she expressed adamantly how she did not approve of intimate relationships between people of different races. Moreover, like many of the other teachers, she viewed her students of color as being deficient and did not see how the structure or system of schooling could be impacting their ability to be successful.

Conversely, I expected Mrs. Barton and Mrs. Goffert to be very naive in their racial identity given that they were raised in segregated communities. Both teachers noted differences in their students and attributed these inequities to factors beyond racial issues. Neither of them discussed the use of instructional methods or strategies that might be culturally responsive; rather, they professed to use the same strategies when dealing with all students which is characteristic of reintegration status (Marshall, 2002).

Mrs. Thompson, the kindergarten teacher seemed furthest along in her racial identity. Having grown up in the northern United States, her perspective on racial difference and her own racial identity, considering her negative experiences with African Americans upon moving south, appeared to be more closely aligned in the pseudo-independence stage. She expressed a love for her students, viewing them as family in the classroom and repeatedly professed a colorblind approach.

While unable to define or describe her own culture, Mrs. Lois seemed to think most deeply about how race may be impacting her daily interactions with her students;

specifically, her African American students both in and out of the classroom. She talked about modifying her instruction to meet the needs of different learning styles and discussed openly how the ability grouping in her school seemed problematic, having placed all African American students in lower-performing classes.

Finally, Mrs. Slater's discussion about her African American children revealed "missed opportunities to make connections between the value orientations of the school and the beliefs and attitudes rooted in students' home environments" (Marshall, 2002, p. 57). Even though she is a Neverland native, she seemed to lack an in-depth understanding of the African American's that live in the community and revealed such in her lamenting the lack of respect in the classroom from her students.

After reviewing all transcriptions and reflecting on the interviews, there were in fact similarities and differences. Most striking, was the absence of a sense of culture and racial identity from all teachers. Each of them, when asked to describe their culture had a difficult time doing so – some avoided the question all together. Each of them minimized race as a factor in the classroom, instead focusing on issues of behavior, lack of parental support, respect, poverty, and lack of emphasis on the importance of education. With the exception of Mrs. Sorrenfield, all of the teachers' early schooling experience and close social networks growing up were predominantly White. Many of the teachers had limited and often conflict-ridden interactions with people of color in high-school and/or college. All professed to employing a colorblind approach to their students.

In each of the teacher interviews, there were contradictions and complications. While allegedly colorblind, each teacher could recall or describe events and interactions

that illustrated the importance of race as a salient factor. Moreover, when discussing their African American students, there were few instances where teachers referenced them as successful in their classrooms. Interviews were laden with musings about how African American students are disrespectful, ill-prepared, unsupported, misbehaving, poor, and come from dysfunctional homes. My initial impressions of their perceptions of the African American students whom they teach were not entirely optimistic or positive. It seemed more often than not, these teachers viewed these students as largely deficient, unsuccessful, and difficult.

Following the interviews, I began scheduling my classroom observations with each teacher. I looked forward to seeing them interact with their students, to probing more deeply how they enacted curriculum in their classrooms, and most importantly, I was thrilled to be back in the classrooms with children. A rare opportunity for a researcher, I felt I'd been given a gift by these teachers – a chance to see into a world where most are forbidden. I wanted to know how these teachers perceptions of themselves and of their African American students would play out daily in a classroom. I wanted to glimpse into the busy, chaotic, messy place that it is a school and hopefully glean something that might offer insight into the complex, often contradictory, and complicated relationship between teacher and student.

CHAPTER V

UNDERSTANDING CURRICULUM IN CONTEXT

We must find a way, too, to ground our observations in many dimensions at once: intellectual, cultural, physical, spiritual, emotional. In looking more deeply, we must try to see beyond our own stereotypes and prejudices, beyond some notion of how children ought to behave filtered through smoky, uncritical childhood memory. We must see beyond the unstated assumption driving most schools, the wacky idea that children are puny, inadequate adults and that the job of education is to transport them as quickly as possible from that sorry state. We must look unblinkingly at the way children really are, and struggle to make sense of everything that we see in order to teach them.

William Ayers, 2001
To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher

The differential treatment of children of color created by social inequities can be exacerbated by teacher expectations, attitudes, and perceptions.

Carter and Goodwin, 1994
Racial Identity and Education

This chapter will present data and analysis from classroom observations, the teacher reflection activity and summative interviews in an effort to understand White teachers' perceptions about the relationships between their perceptions of themselves as White educators, their perceptions of the African American students they teach, and their teaching practices. First, I will provide an overview of how classroom observations were conducted, providing a brief description of each classroom setting and my initial impressions of each teacher as I observed her teaching. Secondly, I will outline and present emergent themes from the teacher reflection activity. Third, I will present the four instructional trends evidenced in classroom observations that illuminate the complexities of selected White teachers' perceptions and the relationship of those perceptions to teaching practices with the African American students they teach. In this

section, I will also share examples of the teachers' comments from the final interview in which the teacher participants and I discussed these instructional trends. Finally, I will discuss insights and reflections that emerged from the summative interviews with each of the teachers. I chose to organize this chapter in this way because I think it best tells the story of the research and time spent in the classrooms.

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations took place from November 2006 through February 2007. The teachers and I created a schedule for my visits to their classrooms, but all teachers were open to my visiting whenever time allowed and/or schedules changed. It was my goal to spend at least one day a week with each teacher. However, because of ability grouping at the intermediate school and the criteria outlined for classrooms selected for the research, I divided one day of the week and observed both of the fourth grade teachers – one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Additionally, due to daily schedules in pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten with regard to naptime, lunch, and specials (i.e. Art/Music/PE), I divided my time another day of the week and spent half of the day with one teacher and half with the other. My weekly schedule proceeded as follows:

Monday: OPEN – rotated as needed

Tuesday: Mrs. Barton (4th grade math) and Mrs. Lois (4th grade science)

Wednesday: Mrs. Sorrenfield (Pre-K) and Mrs. Thompson (K)

Thursday: Mrs. Goffert – 2nd grade

Friday: Mrs. Slater – 1st grade

I did my best to get to the school each morning when classes began and remain through the entirety of the school day. This provided me the opportunity to have informal conversations with the teacher when the children were working independently, at lunch, or during conference periods. It also allowed me to get a real sense of the climate of each classroom and the school. Over the course of the study, I made approximately eight visits to each classroom.

I composed detailed field notes while I was in each of the classrooms and researcher reflection notes afterwards. I made the decision early on not to record absolutely everything happening in the classroom; rather, I scripted general goings-on in the room and then took care to note what I thought were "critical moments" in instruction or interaction between the teacher and her African American students. These observations and notes became the foundation for later conversations about how each teacher went about deciding what to teach, how to teach, and to whom.

As participant observer, there were many times that I was actively engaged in the classroom – working with students in small groups or one-on-one, walking the class from PE to lunch or back to the classroom, I chaperoned bathroom breaks, and I attended field trips. It did not take long for me to establish rapport with each class and each teacher and my presence in the room seemed rarely to be a distraction.

I began my first day of observations at Neverland Intermediate. A smallish school, the building was dated and the halls a bit drab. As you entered the school building, the administrative offices were immediately to the left. I was always greeted by

the principal's assistant and the attendance clerk. The classrooms in which I observed were just a few feet from the office. The hallways were neat and clean and every so often a young person would be wandering – usually with some sort of wooden hall pass banging along the wall announcing their presence. Transition times were chaotic – each team, or quad, made up of four homeroom classes, would change classes every hour and twenty minutes. Because the classrooms were so close together, it was like a rush hour traffic jam in the hallway as students hurried to get to the next place and stopped to chat with friends haphazardly. I observed first and second classes with Mrs. Barton in mathematics followed after lunch by third and fourth classes with Mrs. Lois who taught science.

As I entered Mrs. Barton's room for the first time, I was struck by the number of students in the room. It seemed a bit crowded and busy. Students were working, chatting, and mulling about. Mrs. Barton was working with individual students and grading tests. Some students noticed my entrance into the classroom, but most continued working uninterrupted. There was a student intern in the room as well; she was close to ending her semester as a teacher education candidate at a nearby university. Mrs. Barton greeted me and seemed a bit startled. Even though we had communicated and agreed to begin my observations that day, I am almost certain in the midst of tests, homework, and teaching, it slipped her mind. Nonetheless, she was pleasant and invited me to take a seat and begin my observations. I spent the entire morning with her and her two classes that Tuesday – the first of several. The students also went to PE in the morning and that was the fourth grade teachers' conference period. That day during conference, as I learned

was typical, Mrs. Barton graded papers, topped off her coffee, and mingled some with the other teachers.

After lunch, I moved with the students into Mrs. Lois' classroom - fourth grade science. I learned that day that the students I observed in Mrs. Barton's first two classes were the same students I would observe in Mrs. Lois' last two classes of the day. As mentioned before, students at the intermediate school are grouped by ability. Within each quad, or team, there are four classes each one comprised of students with comparable assessment scores on state standardized tests (based on the previous year's assessment). In this case, the classes identified as the lowest and the next to lowest performing were shared by Mrs. Barton and Mrs. Lois and also had the most significant number of African American students (as I have indicated was important for reasons described in Chapter III). Already, I remembered thinking, these were rich cases for study. Mrs. Lois, the youngest teacher in my study, greeted me happily as did a few of the students who were excited to see me again in the afternoon. I got the impression that visitors were welcomed and received often. She taught two classes of science in the afternoon. Her room, like many new teachers, was pretty bare – a few posters from equipment distributors, some plants, and of course, rows of desks. Again, I wondered why, the fourth and fifth grade campus, still technically elementary school age, felt so far removed from the covered-in-color, bright, classrooms of an elementary school.

Wednesday morning of that first week, I began my observation in pre-Kindergarten with Mrs. Sorrenfield. I was eager to be in a classroom with such young children. Having been certified in grades 1-8, it was rare that I spent much time in an

early childhood setting. Being a new mom, I was excited to see what was happening there, what the children were capable of, and how they interacted and played with one another. As a teacher, I wanted to see how even the youngest of children learned and experienced the world of school. I entered the room and was greeted first by the Instructional Aide and then by Mrs. Sorrenfield who helped me get my things situated at one of the small tables at the back of the room. The children were most interested in what I was doing there. They studied me, asked me questions, and a few came over to give me a hug and ask my name. In an instant, I remembered how much I loved being with young children in a school – everything is exciting for them and everyone is there to see them. As I watched circle time, listened to songs about the days of the week and parts of the body, I was curious about what I might learn here. In what ways did Mrs. Sorrenfield's instruction reflect how she felt about her young students? In this, their first experience in a school setting, were there evident "gaps" similar to those we see in the upper grades?

Later that day, I joined Mrs. Thompson's Kindergarten class just around the corner and down the hall. The second I walked into her room, I was part of the class. The kids were busily cutting and pasting things in order from smallest to largest, she was mingling with the children helping some, praising others, the student teacher was also working with students and hurriedly preparing the next lesson – this was a busy place! Mrs. Thompson showed me to a seat where I could observe and then went right back to working with her students. As the individual activity came to a close, she helped organize the children for centers and small group instruction. I sat alongside Mrs.

Thompson as she worked with four students in a small group on letter recognition and phonics. The manipulatives used in the small group she told me were part of a pilot program that the school was testing to see how well they worked with the kids. She said she really enjoyed them; the children seemed to as well. Students in centers worked on reading, listening, dramatic play, and art. The Kindergarten classroom is a place of wonder and challenge.

Thursdays were spent with Mrs. Goffert and her group of second graders. Unlike the younger children I'd seen the day before, second graders were much less apt to just let me blend in. Instead, the second I entered the room, I had the greater part of seventeen pairs of eyes directly on me. They watched me carefully as I took a seat at the back of the room and then attended to Mrs. Goffert as she introduced me. She explained to them that I was there to see them learn and her teach. She told them I was from the university – which I think made them feel important. I spent that first morning noting the daily schedule, watching transitions from one subject to another in this self-contained classroom, and remembering how completely exhausting it was to be responsible for planning, teaching, and assessing an entire class in all of the core subjects and a few additional. Throw in management, school assemblies, recess, lunch, PE, and any number of various pull-out programs which take many of your students at various parts of the day and it is a wonder that teaching and learning have time to occur. Did Mrs. Goffert feel the same way? She was outwardly calm, soft-spoken and kind and the children responded to her well. There was a quiet rhythm to Mrs. Goffert's class and I could sense it had been a long time in the making. Things ran very smoothly in her class.

Finally, it was Friday of my first week of observations and I spent the day with Mrs. Slater and her group of first graders. I recall walking down the long hallway; hers was the next to last door on the right. Each classroom had the name of the teacher and all of the students posted outside. Many of the teachers had their doors open that day so I got to glimpse in on the other rooms full of excitable and eager six year olds. I entered the room and was greeted immediately by one young man, who I later learned was named Derral. Mrs. Slater directed him back to his seat and then told me I could sit wherever I'd like, to make myself at home. I chose to sit closer to the students rather than far away. They were completing their morning seatwork and so I took this time to walk around the room a bit to get a sense of things. I noted the seating chart, examined the word wall, and recalled our conversation from the nail salon. What did she mean this was an "interesting" year? I looked around and wondered if she had implicated particular students in that comment or if it was more broadly stated than that? I wasn't sure immediately, but it did not take me long to come to some of my own conclusions. The children left for PE mid-morning which gave Mrs. Slater and me some time to chat – which we did every Friday thereafter during this time. That hour proved to be an important time for us to talk, teacher to teacher and teacher to researcher.

As I neared the end of the first week of observations having spent the most time each day just taking in the environments, noticing their idiosyncrasies and becoming familiar with the teachers and children, I realized that I needed to know a bit more from each teacher about how she perceived the students she was teaching in her classroom before I could proceed and note significant events and interactions in the classroom.

Teacher Reflection Activity

The "Teacher Reflection Activity" was developed to help me gain a better understanding about how each teacher viewed her students and what came to mind when she thought about instruction for the students. The reflection activity asked teachers to complete a short series of questions about each student. I asked the teachers to list the name of each student, their race/ethnicity, and their gender. Additionally, I asked the teacher to list three strengths and three challenges that she perceived for each student. Finally, I asked the teacher to tell me, if they could, how they thought about instruction with that specific child and to identify a contribution that each student made to the classroom learning environment. This was a written activity and teachers returned their worksheets to me. Again, the purpose of this activity was to gain insight into how the teachers viewed their students. I was particularly interested in how they would describe their African American students in relation to the White students in the classroom. I hoped this would help me to further understand these selected White teachers' perceptions of the African American students in their classroom.

In this section, I will share an overview of each teacher's responses to this activity and present analysis as it helped to inform my observations. I will present them in order by grade level. I will initially speak of trends with regard to students overall contribution to the class and the teachers thoughts on instruction. Next, I will present a short table of each teacher's responses about student strengths and challenges to demonstrate my comparison and illuminate any distinctions. Each of the tables included are a composite of the teachers' responses to the prompts asking them to identify three

strengths and three weaknesses of each student. If a teacher responded more than once with the same descriptor, it is only recorded once. It was not my intention to detail the teachers' responses here for each student, rather it was to provide the reader a more general sense of how each teacher responded with regard to their White students and African American students. Finally, in my analysis, I looked for trends with regard to how they described their students both individually and as a group, specifically comparing teachers' responses for their African American students and their White students.

Mrs. Sorrenfield: Pre-Kindergarten

Mrs. Sorrenfield's pre-Kindergarten class had twenty-two students; nine of them African American, four White, and nine Hispanic. It is important to note that Mrs. Sorrenfield completed a reflection for each student in her class completely. This is significant as I will later note that some teachers had difficulty completing the activity for various reasons. Positively, Mrs. Sorrenfield indicated that most of her students really seemed to enjoy school and get along well with other students. While their were some variations, Mrs. Sorrenfield spoke highly of each students' contribution to the class, noting that one student had a "shining personality and smile" and another "enjoys the interaction of friends."

When asked to list three strengths and three challenges for each student, Mrs. Sorrenfield's comments revealed some interesting differences between her perceptions of her African American students and her White students (See Table 1).

Table 1. Mrs. Sorrenfield's Comments on Teacher Reflection Activity

	White Students	African American Students
Strengths:	skills (i.e. colors, letter recognition, name writing, shape and color recognition)	skills (i.e. colors, letter recognition, name writing, shape and color recognition)
		traces name puts backpack away
Challenges:	skills (i.e. colors, letter recognition, name writing, shape and color recognition)	skills (i.e. colors, letter recognition, name writing, shape and color recognition)
	behavior (i.e. listening, talkative)	communication disruptive irresponsible
	mom not around	off-task behavior does not follow rules does not make good choices

Mrs. Sorrenfield, while listing several similar comments for both her White and African

American students with regard to strengths and weaknesses, seemed to make some

significant distinctions when outlining the challenges of her students. When describing

her White students, her challenges were more skill-based, addressed general behavior,

and noted only one student with issues in the home. In contrast, when describing her

African American students, her description of their challenges, was much more pointed

and seemed to a greater degree more negative.

When asked to share her initial thoughts on instruction, she noted similarly for

both groups that more "one-on-one" instruction was helpful, the computer could be used

for enrichment and extension, and that small group activities would be beneficial. However, she went on to add in the case of her African American students that they needed instruction on "more social skills building desired behavior" and "social skills-responsibility-listening." Again, noting an important difference that at least more of her focus was on behavior and management with her African American students and more on skill development and learning with her White students.

As an insight into the perceptions of her students, I noted her comments about behavior and social skill interaction. I was interested to see how this would play out in her classroom. Would she be more punitive in her approach to redirecting her African American students? Would she attend to them differently in the classroom as she works in circle time, small groups, or individually? How would what seemed to be hints of deficit perceptions be reflected (if at all) in her instruction or interaction in the classroom? I used these responses to help guide my observations in the classroom and attended carefully to issues of redirection, management, and instruction.

Mrs. Thompson

Mrs. Thompson's Kindergarten classroom was host to twenty students – nine African American, five White, and six Hispanic. Mrs. Thompson did not complete the entire worksheet for each child in her class, but instead jotted down a note or two for each one. She did not note a significant contribution for any student and only made a few comments with regard to her thoughts on instruction on a few students that included "needs extra time" and "need to challenge this student." There were no distinctions with regard to the race of the students in these responses.

When responding to the prompt to list three strengths and challenges of each student, Mrs. Thompson's responses were overall similar. There were only one or two instances where her notes seem to indicate an inequitable deficit perspective toward her African American students (See Table 2).

Table 2. Mrs. Thompson's Comments on Teacher Reflection Activity

	White Students	African American Students
Strengths:	friendly caring smart	smart friendly caring quiet
Challenges:	short attention span "all boy" insecure attendance hard to understand retention behavior follows others	slow worker wants to be the teacher attitude of parent tattle-tale skills (i.e. handwriting) grandmother does homework little attitude wants to be first done low no help at home follows bad behavior

With an impression that her perceptions seemed at the outset more balanced than not when comparing the African American and White students she teaches, observations in Mrs. Thompson's class took on a less directed approach; in other words, because she had

not revealed to me any particular trends in her comments regarding instruction or management, I set out to observe her teaching in a less "guided" way. After our initial interview together and the completion of this activity, I had the feeling that Mrs. Thompson's perceptions of herself, her African American students and her instruction would be less obvious as it related to critical moments in the classroom where there seemed to be an evident advantaging of some students over others.

Mrs. Slater

In Mrs. Slater's class, there were a total of twenty students. There were nine African American students, five White students and six Hispanic students. Like Mrs. Thompson, Mrs. Slater did not complete a worksheet for each student in its entirety. There were very few notes on instruction and no responses when asked to comment on the student's contribution to the classroom. The handful of comments on these two items included statements like "loves school" and "works hard" and revealed no patterns of significance.

In contrast, when asked to identify three strengths and weaknesses for each student in her class, some very conspicuous trends emerged (See Table 3). It is also important to note here that in two instances for her African American students Mrs. Slater did not identify any strengths. She remarked when handing me the copies of her activity, that she "couldn't list any strengths if they didn't have any."

Table 3. Mrs. Slater's Comments on Teacher Reflection Activity

	White Students	African American Students
Strengths:	very smart	average student
	stable home life	not a behavior problem
	many friends	sweet
	average student	hard worker
	doing better	good family life
	works well	help at home
	great behavior	
		*two instances, nothing
	help from home	noted
Challenges:	talkative	unstable home life
	lies	behavior/attitude
	behavior can be a problem	needs more help at home
	retention	low to average student
	little help from home	parents work all the time
	unstable home	can't stay still
	slow worker	doesn't follow directions
	shy	doesn't like school

In a closer analysis of Mrs. Slater's comments above with regard to the strengths and weaknesses of her African American and White students, there are some important distinctions to note. First, in her listing of strengths, there is an obvious trend in her noting the stability of home life, parental support and high academic ability of her White students. Conversely, when identifying the strengths of her African American students, Mrs. Slater tended to minimize intellectual ability and rather focus on social/behavioral and management issues. There was no instance when Mrs. Slater noted that any of her children of color were "very smart" as she did with several of her White students. Next,

when comparing the challenges noted between her White and African American students, Mrs. Slater's descriptors were less pessimistic when describing her White students than her African American students. Moreover, her descriptors for her African American students seem firmly entrenched in deficit perspectives; focusing on what the student does *not* have (i.e. "can't stay still" or "can't follow directions"), rather than simply noting as she did in the case of her White students the challenges in more neutral terms (i.e. "behavior can be a problem" or "slow worker"). Given that her African American student population was nearly one-third of her entire class, I wondered how these perceptions may influence her interactions with them and how she might perceive that these strengths and challenges were reflected in her teaching. To this point, Mrs. Slater seemed to offer the most glaring distinctions between her perceptions of African American and White students among all the teachers. It seemed only reasonable to me that these distinctions would be evident as I observed her classroom teaching, though I was not sure just how.

Mrs. Goffert

In her small class of seventeen students, six were African American; six were White and five Hispanic. Mrs. Goffert, while completing most of the reflection activity for each student, did leave many spaces absent of response. Thoughts on her instruction with African American students and White students alike were constructive and focused. For example, she wrote "offer different reading materials" or "use small group instruction" as well as "encourage to take more time" and "share ideas." In almost all of her responses to the contribution of each student, she cited positive class participation in

one form or another. For instance, she wrote of one student "[She] asks questions and participates willingly" and for another "he keeps things lively."

When asked to reflect on each student's strengths and weaknesses, Mrs. Goffert's responses were fairly balanced as well with regard to her African American and White students. Moreover, she was the first and only teacher to indicate no challenges for an African American student while at the same time noting three very positive strengths.

When considering the strengths Mrs. Goffert listed for each of her students, there seemed to be a thoughtful balance between comments made about academic ability, interaction with others, and classroom behavior. In my readings of her responses, Mrs. Goffert was the first teacher to refer to both groups of students in a way that I felt she considered the whole student. In most cases, she noted something about their academic ability, their personality, and their participation in class. Similarly, when viewing her responses with regard to the challenges of her students, her reflections were balanced and resisted any negative or outwardly demeaning deficit perspective (See Table 4).

Table 4. Mrs. Goffert's Comments on Teacher Reflection Activity

	White Students	African American Students
Strengths:	articulate	attentive
	likes to read/reads well	wants to please
	optimistic	capable
	intelligent	enjoys praise
	leadership qualities	likes to work when able
	good ideas	good recall (tests orally)
	very verbal	fluent reader
	likes to share ideas	consistent
	improving	very bright
	eager to learn	mature
	persistent	helpful
		good parental involvement
		improving
Challenges:	likes the "spotlight"	below level
	rushes through work	easily distracted
	careless	poor home environment
	disruptive	talks out
	very quiet	sometimes bored (retained)
	"spaced out"	needs higher level materials
	rarely asks questions	copies others
	poor reader	gives up easily
	slow starter	shy
	likes to visit	inconsistent work
	difficulty with transitions	poor recall
	little help at home	
	poor comprehension	*none

I was looking forward to observing more in Mrs. Goffert's classroom, not only because she seemed to offer the most balanced reflections of any teacher participating in this study but also because I could tell from her initial interview and her responses to this

activity that she was thoughtful and deliberate in her teaching and relationships with her students.

Mrs. Barton

In Mrs. Barton's two morning classes, there were a total of forty students. Among both classes there were eighteen African American students, fourteen Hispanic students, and eight White students. It is important to note here, again, that classes at the intermediate school are grouped by ability and that the same students that I observed in Mrs. Barton's math classes in the morning were the same students I observed in the final two periods of the day in Mrs. Lois' science classes. With this in mind, after a discussion of how each teacher completed her reflection activity, I will make a brief comparison between these two teachers and their perceptions of the same students.

Mrs. Barton took great care in responding almost in full to each question in the reflection activity – which for two classes took a great deal of time and effort. In her responses regarding instruction, most of her focus is on keeping students focused and reinforcing the math skills to meet the district and state standards. She offered comments that included, "I need to constantly reinforce" and "Does she remember the concept from yesterday on which we are building today"? Mrs. Barton also remarked in one of her notes, "I have so many lower ones to deal with" speaking directly to the challenge of her classes and the fact that they are grouped by ability.

When addressing each student's contribution to the class, Mrs. Barton noted something positive in almost every instance – with the exception of only two students who were removed for discipline reasons. She noted concisely that both "hardly contribute to the classroom." Other responses included "has good ideas," "prides herself in knowing how to do a new concept" and "likes to answer in class." From my initial observation and her responses to this reflection activity, I could tell Mrs. Barton's classes were active and her students full of energy.

Mrs. Barton listed several strengths and challenges for most students (See Table 5), but did leave some spaces without a response. One of the most striking aspects of Mrs. Barton's reflection is that she rarely, if only a couple of times, referred to her students as smart or "good in math" in both groups, African American and White students. In listing strengths of her students, Mrs. Barton focused more on personality, social/behavioral traits, and appearance of her students than their academic ability.

Table 5. Mrs. Barton's Comments on Teacher Reflection Activity

	White Students	African American Students
Strengths:	personable	friendly
	wants to be correct	quiet/shy
	attentive	listens well
	above average	calm
	detail oriented	well groomed
	talkative	wants to be successful
	quiet, willing	attentive
	gets along with others	listens well
	knows math	loving/smiles
	parent involved	some "spark" of interest
	tries hard	confident
	smiles a lot	controls behavior
		cooperative
		writes nicely
		willing
		good ideas
		good in math
Challenges:	slow worker	no work/won't work
	OT/talking	aggressive/argumentative
	forgetful	cannot understand
	incomplete HW	unmotivated
	needy	low ability
	not well-liked	talkative
	absenteeism	Lazy/careless
	DAEP placement	low performing
	home life distracting	Off-Task/no HW
	doesn't listen	moody
	rude	rude
	needs confirmation	cries when upset
		lacks self control
		DAEP placement
		lack of social skills

Conversely, when identifying the challenges with her students, she referred more to their inability to be academically successful in a number of ways, which included being "slow," "low performing," "off-task," and "careless". I wondered how this might impact her teaching with these identified, low-performing students. Was having students grouped by ability becoming more of a self-fulfilling prophecy than an effective instructional decision? How were Mrs. Barton's perceptions of her students and their academic inability reflected (if at all) in her teaching of these two classes? Was the implementation of the district curriculum different for these "lower" classes than for her "high" classes in the afternoon? These questions guided my observations of Mrs. Barton's class and made a visit to her "higher" classes a significant event in the observations of her teaching.

Mrs. Lois

In the two classes in which I observed Mrs. Lois, the student population was the same as the two classes I observed with Mrs. Barton - a total of forty students, eighteen African American students, fourteen Hispanic students, and eight White students. Mrs. Lois, like several of the other teachers, did not respond to each prompt completely on the reflection sheet for each child. However, she did list strengths and challenges for each student and commented briefly on her thoughts about instruction.

When noting her thoughts on instruction with these two classes, Mrs. Lois indicated that group work and modifications were essential, which she also shared in her initial interview with me. Because she has the low performing students grouped in these two classes, she indicated in her initial interview that working in groups cooperatively

helps students complete work and better understand the content. In the few instances when she did note a student contribution, she noted that students were "positive" and a few were "great leaders" in the class.

Mrs. Lois identified strengths and weaknesses in her students but did not list three for every student. Similar to Mrs. Barton, she tended to focus primarily on students' personality, social/behavioral traits, and their interactions with others more than she did on their academic ability when listing their strengths. In only two instances, did she identify a student as "intelligent" or "bright." She noted their ability to be "caring" and "thoughtful" as well as their eagerness to "be active in class" and "do their best work". Interestingly however, when listing the challenges for her students, she also shied away from references to academic ability or lack thereof (whereas Mrs. Barton spoke directly to this more often in her list of challenges). Mrs. Lois tended to focus still on the social/behavioral or interactions of the students with only a few references to their capabilities as learners (See Table 6).

Table 6. Mrs. Lois' Comments on Teacher Reflection Activity

	White Students	African American Students
Strengths:	friendly always involved persistent very intelligent happy good in science always does best work works quickly helpful	responds to positive direction always smiling friendly mature wants to be active in class persistence thoughtful responsible artistic bright puts forth good effort great with hands-on projects can be polite quick thinking can be caring concerned about conduct
Challenges:	talkative refuses to work limited contact with father no consequences at home ADHD makes fun of others doubts herself argues with teachers reading difficulty with class work	immature doesn't put forth effort learning difficulties difficulty reading comprehension silly bossy ED/bi-polar/loud gives up easily complains a lot underestimates intelligence talks too loudly difficulty staying in seat emotional/impulsive/ADHD DAEP/fighting talks to self easily distracted interacting with peers diff. w/higher level thinking

I recalled in my initial interview with Mrs. Lois asking if she felt successful with her students, she said "I hope so…there is always more to learn…but I'm almost as successful as I think I can be." Did she feel as if her students' success academically was out of her hands – eclipsed by the social/behavioral aspects of schooling and learning? These were students identified as "low performing" and given that she only identified two of her forty students as "bright" or "intelligent," I again pondered the impact of what might have been a self-fulfilling prophecy. If she did not expect them to do well, were they proving her right? How did she perceive her other classes – those grouped and labeled as "high performing?" Or, conversely, was there a possibility that she did not list academic ineptitude on the part of her students because she really saw them as capable but perceived the other challenges as hindering their success? These questions reinforced, the need to see the two fourth grade teachers in classrooms where they were not teaching the "low" students and further probe their perceptions and practices with students – both White and African American and low and high-performing.

After the initial interviews had been conducted, the teacher reflection activity completed, and my initial impressions of each classroom noted, I felt confident that the data revealed these selected teachers' perceptions of themselves as White educators and their perceptions of the African American students they teach in a way that re-entering the classroom once again would prove productive in seeking an answer to the final research question: In what ways are selected White teachers' perceptions about the relationships between their perceptions of themselves as White educators, their perceptions of the African American students they teach, and their teaching practices?

Classroom Practice and Curriculum in Context

Classroom research is messy, complicated, and very involved. Grounded in phenomenology, qualitative research is an attempt to understand and interpret the meaning of events and interactions of ordinary people in specific environments. Moreover, it is an attempt to understand how participants construct their own realities and make meaning of their every day lives (Bogden and Biklen, 1998). In this study, classroom observations served as a vehicle by which I, as the researcher, sought to uncover unique practices of selected White teachers with the African American students they teach.

After preliminary interviews and initial observations were conducted, I began the task of observing in classrooms to discover in what ways White teachers enact curriculum with the African American students in their classroom. While there are number of practices and interactions that might be of interest to a researcher, I focused my attention on those actions, methods of instruction, strategies and interactions in the classroom that seemed to be unique and idiosyncratic to the relationship between the White teachers I was observing and their African American students. As Merriam (1998) notes, "a researcher's disciplinary orientation often determines how a problem is defined" (p. 96). It is certainly true that my epistemological frame (discussed previously in Chapter III), my own experiences as a teacher, and the data collected to this point, informed my observations and ultimately helped to direct my selection of the four practices that I believe reflect the perceptions of the White teachers involved in this study. My observations were driven by my research questions and guided by my

conceptual framework. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) note that what to observe depends on "the data that begin to emerge as the participant observer interacts in the daily flow of events and activities, and the intuitive reactions and hunches that participant observers experience as all these factors come together" (p. 200). In this research, I was looking specifically for instances where selected White teachers' instruction, management, and interactions with African American students seemed unique to that relationship and diverged from other practices in the room.

In this section, I will present each of four instructional practices and classroom interactions that emerged as significant in my observations. I will note the context surrounding my observation of each of practice as well commentary provided by the teachers when asked to reflect and/or explain their decisions to engage in these practices and interactions. Finally, I will note the research and literature as it relates to each interaction and how it serves to advantage certain students while hindering others.

Four significant and important instructional practices and classroom interactions emerged from my classroom observations. These are: (1) overcorrection and inconsistent (re)direction, (2) failure to engage, (3) isolation and dismissal, and (4) lower expectations and lesser curriculum.

Among the most significant interactions in the classrooms I observed was the predisposition of the selected White teachers to overcorrect and (re) direct their African American students more than any other students in the classroom. More than any other students in my observations, African American students were corrected and reprimanded for any number of classroom offenses, that might have included, but were not limited to:

talking out of turn, getting out of one's seat, disrupting a lesson, or playing during instruction. In several classes, I watched White students proceed with equally disruptive and distracting behavior and remain unnoticed or unacknowledged. It should also be noted that more often than not, the consequences for African American students' redirection and correction were much more harsh and swift. This was not particularly surprising given that many of the selected teachers cited behavior as one of the primary issues when dealing with African American students.

The second instructional practice observed was a failure to engage or acknowledge. In many instances and with more than one teacher, I observed African American students disengaged, unacknowledged, and not participating in classroom activities, lessons, or instruction. At the end of the lesson or classroom practice, the student was often at a loss for how to complete an assignment, had missed important parts of instruction, and had difficulty beginning and/or completing the then assigned task. In a few instances, students remained disengaged and uninvolved for longer than twenty minutes of class time.

The third and possibly the most glaringly inequitable classroom practice was the isolation, removal, or dismissal of an African American student from the instructional area. This practice manifests itself in various ways which include separated and isolated seating, removal from the classroom for poor behavior, or suspension from school all together. If a student is removed from the instructional area and/or is not engaged due to isolation, he is not receiving classroom instruction, in turn impacting his ability to be successful in the classroom and with assigned tasks.

The fourth and final classroom practice that proved significant as a result of my classroom observations was the diluting of the curriculum based on lesser expectations for certain students. Observed primarily at the intermediate school teachers made instructional and curricular decisions based on the perceived ability of their students. More specifically, in the classrooms in which I observed at Neverland Intermediate School, students were grouped in their classrooms by ability (i.e. standardized test performance). While I spent most of my observation days in the "low performing" classes, I did take a day or two to observe in the "high performing" classrooms. The instruction, teacher interactions, and level of engagement in the high classes versus the low classes was terribly unequal – teachers made it a point to extend the lessons with the students labeled as high, made jokes and personal references with them, while much of the instruction with those students identified as low remained basic, rote, and task oriented.

While this purpose of this study is not to attempt any direct link or correlation between classroom practices and student achievement, the above noted practices may certainly work to advantage some students while marginalizing others with regard to success in the classroom. It is not and was never my intention to note only what may be perceived by some as the "negative" practices among White teachers with African American students. With that said, I feel certain that these classroom practices reflect the perceptions of the selected White teachers about themselves and their African American students.

Following my classroom observations, I concluded the research with a summative interview with each teacher. In the course of each interview, I asked a series of similar questions of all teachers and then asked specific questions with regard to practices I observed in each classroom. The field notes presented in this section are excerpts from my observations that were used to prompt conversations and questions with the teacher about her practice and interactions in the classroom. The teacher's insights and reflections about these practices will be presented here followed by a brief noting of the literature as it relates to each practice and its potential influence on classrooms and students.

One of the first and most prevalent practices noted in my observations was the tendency of the selected White teachers to overcorrect and (re) direct African American students more quickly and more harshly than other students in the room; this was particularly true for African American males. This was noted especially when teachers reprimanded or corrected some students while allowing others to continue with very similar behavior left unattended to. References to these interactions and practices are documented in researcher field notes as follows:

> Field notes 11.14.06: Children are somewhat off-task; teacher reprimands
> African American (AA) males more than any other for similar offenses (talking,
> fidgeting, etc) and takes punitive measures (documentation, consequences) –
> teacher responds, this class has trouble because they are "low" (Mrs. Barton, 4th
> grade math)

Field notes 11.16.06: Destiny (African American Female - AAF) redirected for being off-task while Katy (White Female - WF) remains disruptive and off-task; another AAF redirected for leaning back in her chair again Katy (WF) doing the same thing goes uncorrected (Mrs. Goffert, 2nd grade)

Field notes 11.15.06: Teacher consistently redirecting African American male (AAM) while other students continue with the same behaviors (i.e. interrupting teacher, out of seat, etc.) - Chris (AAM) and David (White Male - WM) get into a scuffle; Chris is asked to move his pin (discipline policy) and David is not (Mrs. Thompson, Kindergarten)

Field notes 11.15.06: Students sit on carpet for calendar time; two students are asked to move to the front (AAM and AAF); one AAM corrected and moved while two other students were not for the same off-task behavior; AAF (Francancia) redirected often (Mrs. Sorrenfield, Pre-K)

While the contexts in each grade level were very different, this similar practice emerged almost immediately as significant in my observation of the interactions between teachers and students. When asked about this during the final interviews, a few teachers offered their explanation and rationale for their redirection and corrections of certain students and not others. Mrs. Goffert remarked with specific reference to Katie, the White female student who often continued off-task uncorrected,

Even though Katie appeared not to be listening or not to be doing, the minute I called on her she knew what was going on. And, she appears not to be listening or paying attention, but usually she was, you know, not always, but a lot of times

whereas the other that you mention, they were clueless. I'm sorry, you know, just

clueless.

Mrs. Slater, who many times focused her redirection on two African American boys in

her class, shared with me in reference to her repeated redirection of one of them in

particular:

He was capable. But he had so much bundled up inside of him that if you think

about it, he had a mom and dad both, one, both in prison. And he was so bundled

up but I knew for a fact he had a lot upstairs. He was, he was smart, and I didn't

want him sitting there wasting the day…I knew he could do it. So that's probably

why I spent more time redirecting him.

She continued to note that she would (re)direct the other African American boy more

than other students because he was so disruptive. She even resorted to removing him

away from the other students to sit alone (which will be addressed in more detail in

another theme).

In this case, both teachers recognize their propensity to overcorrect their African

American students and explain it in different ways. Both teachers' actions seem to

reflect their perceptions regarding the capabilities of their students. Mrs. Goffert, the

second grade teacher, did not see a need to redirect Katie because she felt she was a

"capable" while the other students in her room were not and therefore needed to be

corrected to stay on task. She did not see this as problematic, even with regard to how

other students may perceive her redirection or interactions with particular students

and/or how behavior left uncorrected may disrupt the learning of other students. In

contrast, Mrs. Slater's redirection of Derral because she perceived that he "had a lot upstairs," justified her correcting him more often. When looking back at both teachers' initial interviews and their responses to their teacher reflection activity, it is important to note that both revealed a tendency to view their African American children as being more challenging with regard to behavior and conduct. I contend that these perceptions under gird this practice of overcorrecting and (re)directing.

Carter and Goodwin (1994) speak to this trend of overcorrecting and (re)directing students of color more often than their White counterparts. They explain that "differential responses to student behavior…seem to overtly penalize children of color. For example, children of visible racial/ethnic groups are more likely to be punished for offenses White students could commit with little or no consequence" (p. 317). Continuing, Carter and Goodwin (1994) note that when juxtaposed with racial identity, it appears that individuals with lower levels of racial identity tend to interact in patterns that are more likely to benefit White students than African American students. Moreover, Irvine (1991) notes that there is evidence that African American students have fewer favorable interactions with teachers than their White counterparts and that teachers tend to have "more negative attitudes and beliefs about [B]lack children than about [W]hite children in such variables as personality traits and characteristics, ability, language, behavior and potential" (p. 57). While both of these teachers could explain the decisions and rationale for their overcorrection and (re)direction of their African American students, it is important to view these comments in relation to their expressed ideas about themselves and their students and further, how these practices may impact

student learning and interactions in the classroom. Zimmerman (1995) writes that "it is possible that students who perceive that their teachers have negative attitudes toward them feel rejected and this perception, in turn, fosters undesirable classroom behavior" (pp. 193-194). It is quite possible then that even though each teacher did not view her interactions with these particular students as problematic, these practices may serve to privilege some students while disadvantaging others in the classroom and may even serve to further aggravate interactions between teachers and students.

The second practice that emerged from my observations of selected White teachers was the inclination to leave some students unengaged without direction or acknowledgement – not learning, not participating, and off-task. In the previous discussion about overcorrection and (re)direction, I noted teachers' tendency to focus more negative attention on some students, particularly the African American students. In this practice, teachers interact on the opposite end of the instructional spectrum. In my observations of several classrooms, there were instances where African American students remained off-task and academically "tuned out" with respect to the classroom activities. While, overcorrection and (re)direction are problematic, so too is the inclination to leave students unengaged for long periods of time. If a student is disconnected from instruction and practice in the classroom, how will she learn?

Again, while each classroom context is unique, there were several instances where this practice was noted.

Field notes 1.26.07: Spelling test; Cordarius did not complete; rarely does. Mrs. S has begun the next part of the lesson, Cordarius still off task and hanging

upside down – there is no attempt at redirection at this point, Mrs. S moved on

with the lesson. Cordarius calls out to the teacher several times and is not

acknowledged. Note, Cordarius is no longer separated, but remains off task and

not (re)directed. (Mrs. Slater, 1st grade)

Field notes 11.16.06: AAM enters late from another class, is not given a book, is

behaviorally redirected several times and when teacher begins reading aloud

from reading book, he doesn't have one out, is not following along, is off-task

and not engaged; he gets up from his seat and is not redirected/acknowledged

still; teacher finally speaks to him briefly but then continues. The student remains

without a book and disengaged from lesson. (Mrs. Goffert, 2nd grade)

Field notes 12.5.06: Naje (AAF) off task/out of seat; not redirected. Another

AAF off task and does not have division worksheets – no work for at least 20

minutes; as class moves on she remains unengaged and off-task. (Mrs. Barton, 4th

grade math)

Field notes 12.5.06: AAF (SpEd) is off task and not redirected; she obviously

needs help completing task but it not getting it. Another AAM off task in the

back of the room since class began, not acknowledged or redirected. (Mrs. Lois,

4th grade science)

In the notes above, I document several examples and instances that occurred during the

course of my observations that illustrate the second practice of failing to engage and/or

acknowledge African American students. While this interaction was not solely

representative of the teachers' lack of interaction with all or only her African American

students, more often than not, it was the African American students who were left unattended, off-task, and floundering while others worked, participated in class discussion, and were engaged in the lessons. As Marshall (2002) notes, teachers "initiate more frequent and more varied interactions" (p. 267) with middle and upper-class students as well as with those within their racial group. Given the current gap in achievement between African American students and White students, this interaction, or lack thereof in many cases, was particularly disturbing to me as a researcher, observer, and former teacher. How, if children remained unengaged and unattended, were they going to learn? Did the teachers not see how their lack of response to these students could be negatively impacting their learning and success in the classroom?

When asked to reflect upon these interactions in the final interviews, several teachers commented. When asked why some children were left to remain off-task and/or why she did not seek to engage all students during each lesson, Mrs. Barton explained, that she has to "pick and choose her battles because I don't want to stop the lesson that some are getting to help or argue with a child…and that happens so much." It appears that she prioritizes the learning of the entire class rather than dealing with one or two off-task students. She went on to explain when I asked her if she noted any trends in her classroom specifically:

> That's a hard call because I can think of several instances with several children that never are doing anything wrong and it's all three groups. They never do anything wrong. I cannot figure out why singling them out…to stay on task, or get back on task because they're not doing anything wrong. Then some of them

> are just yes, they were, you know they're big black guy, look at me [when I
>
> redirected him] and [went] right on.

Her response seems to reflect a certain amount of frustration and some semblance of

apathy. While a bit jumbled, her words express the frustration of instances where she has

tried to redirect a student who was off-task with no resolution or positive outcome.

Further, her comments seem to put more emphasis on good behavior than learning; in

other words, if the students "never are doing anything wrong" singling them out or

redirecting them would be unnecessary. In some ways, it appears that Mrs. Barton may

equate good (or non-disruptive) behavior with engagement, especially in African

American students.

Mrs. Slater, the first grade teacher, spoke to this as well. When asked to explain

why she would quit redirecting a particular African American student and allow him to

remain off-task unlike others in the room, she said:

> Sometimes there was a purpose. I just think. And then sometimes I thought, you
>
> know, if he doesn't—I can't spend my whole day saying [student] do this do that,
>
> because I have nineteen other kids that are there to learn. And I know that they
>
> have to be—we have to move on so if I keep on spending my whole day
>
> correcting him, those other ones aren't going to learn. So sometimes I just do it
>
> on purpose and sometimes I just say it's time to move on.

Mrs. Slater described a situation all too familiar to teachers – so many students, so little

time. However, she did not see as problematic her leaving an already identified "low"

student as unengaged and off-task. Rather, it was her way of "dealing" with a student who "could care less about what you gave him or what you did for him."

Finally, Mrs. Lois spoke in depth about her tendency to avoid engagement or acknowledgement of off task behavior with some students:

> Some of them, I'll tell you right now and it's just happened with the African-American boys that I wouldn't get on when they would do stuff. That I might, yeah…with someone else not having anything to do with race but just because some of the kids I just know can be very aggressive and get angry. And if they were doing something that really wasn't that big of a deal, I wouldn't stop them. Especially if it's not like leaning back in their chairs—if it's not keeping them from learning or doing their work a lot of time, I wouldn't correct them. Only because if it made this kid angry and chewed me out because that type of person, you know. I could think of two boys in my last class, at least two, who if they got angry, that was it for the rest of the day. I might as well, you know, they might as well leave after they go angry because they're not going to hear anything I say. So you're right. I don't redirect some kids I wouldn't. And it wasn't so much race, as in personalities. Just because if you have a kid that has angry outbursts like that and just tunes you out, yeah, if it's not that big of a deal, I'm just going to let it go.

Interestingly, Mrs. Lois spoke directly to the race of her students initially, and then minimized her reference to the fact that some of the children she left unengaged were

African American. She implied that often her redirecting of students was more distracting than productive.

Irving (1990) cites a research study conducted in 1973 by Rubovits and Maehr in which it was noted that in general, "White teachers gave Blacks less attention, less encouragement, less praise and often more criticism" (p. 56). This speaks directly to the first two instructional interactions noted here. While the selected White teachers were often more quick to correct or (re)direct their African American students behaviorally or for task-related issues, they were less apt to pay attention to them and encourage them to engage in instructional contexts consistently. Marshall (2002) notes that the nature of teacher-to-student interactions has the power to influence students perceptions of the learning environment – whether they be positive and indicate an affirming and inclusive space or are negative making students feel alienated, disaffirmed, and devalued. Further, she speaks to the power of the teacher in classrooms writing, "…teachers themselves set the stage for what students come to view as the acceptable standards for…interactions in schools." In the interactions described here where African American students are more often left unengaged, unacknowledged, and not part of the instructional activities, one is left to speculate about how this influences further engagement in the classroom, success in academic activities, and achievement. The selected White teachers in this study have previous experiences both in and out of the classroom that inform their practices in the classroom with African American students. Exemplified in their responses above is a perception that it is sometimes easier (and more productive) to allow African American students to remain off task and unengaged than it is to work to encourage them to re-

enter the learning activity. This practice seems to reflect the perception that African American students are too challenging, too low or too distracting to the learning environment. Teachers have indicated that it is more effective for them to remain disengaged for the sake of others' learning than it would be to engage them for the sake of their own learning.

A third instructional interaction noted as significant in the classroom observations is the overt practice of isolating, removing, or dismissing African American students from the learning environment – more than any other student group, especially White students. During my time in schools, I observed on more than one occasion an African American student (usually male) either seated apart from the whole group in class, removed from the classroom and placed in the hallway (or another teacher's classroom), or dismissed from school all together for misconduct in the classroom. Given the selected White teachers' perceptions of their African American students and their predisposition to describe them as "aggressive," "difficult," and "impulsive" thus far in the research, this instructional practice was not entirely unexpected. It was during the course of one such interaction that I witnessed the harsh isolation of a student that I was the most disturbed during the research process. The incident was recorded in my field notes as follows:

> Field notes 12.8.06: Back from restroom (RR), Derral continues to act out, teacher physically removed him from the classroom – put him in the hallway and slammed the door in his face; turned back to class (and me) and said "Pathetic."

Mrs. S continuously talks about Derral to the rest of the class in a negative way.

Time for the spelling test. Derral remains out in the hallway.

During RR, Mrs. S explained to me that both of his parents are in prison for drugs. There is no consistent parental figure and he [Derral] moves from one home to another; his aunt is the Asst. Principal in the building. Says Derral acts out because he knows there is no "contact" or consequences. Mrs. S remarks, "It all goes back to home life." Referring to the way Derral and the other AA children act at school.

I notice Derral is peeking through the window in the door as he is out in the hallway. He remains outside through the entire spelling test.

10:00am – spelling test over; snack time begins. Derral remains out in the hallway. Mrs. S begins to taunt him as he is outside as she eats her snack, seemingly trying to make him regret his behavior and the fact that he is missing snack time. He returns to the classroom and continues to be off-task; he is visibly upset and angry. He asks to go to the restroom and does not return before the class leaves for lunch. Mrs. S finds him at the restroom and physically directs him on to PE. (Mrs. Slater, 1st grade)

This event happened during my first visit to Mrs. Slater's first grade classroom. Derral had been having a difficult morning and this interaction was the culmination of approximately twenty minutes of unyielding criticism, correction and attempts at (re)direction by Mrs. Slater. I recall sitting in utter shock and disbelief as I watched this unfold. I was relieved that the observation that day was my final for the week; I needed time to process this as a researcher and a teacher.

While this was the most glaring example of this instructional practice of isolation/removal/dismissal, this interaction presented itself in other, less abusive ways. Also in Mrs. Slater's class, another African American male was seated in an individual desk away from the other students in the classroom. His desk was next to the teacher desk, and he was at least six feet from any other student's desk.

> Field notes 12.8.06: Start of day: Students begin with a math cut-and-paste
> activity at their desks. Some chatting going on, informal, relaxed.
>
> Note seating arrangement: AAM seated away from everyone – isolated near
> teacher's desk in corner of room. He is constantly being redirected and corrected,
> teacher threatens to call mom. (Mrs. Slater, 1st grade)

In another classroom, I noted the seating arrangement at the beginning of each observation; consistently, one of the African American students identified as "low" and having behavior challenges, is located in the back of the room, usually near the door, and is often unengaged in the instructional activities.

As I gathered my thoughts about this particular interaction in classrooms with the selected White teachers and their African American students in preparation for the final

interviews, I was careful to ask each teacher about her rationale and decision-making in these instances in a very non-threatening manner - a manner that did not reflect my own disapproval or shock when witnessing the above events in the classrooms. My exchange with Mrs. Slater is presented, verbatim, below:

> I: When I first walked in, I noticed [student] sitting separately from the group. Most of the time that I observed he was separated, then he was back in at the end, he was with the group. But it was the last week of school, so I'm not sure when you did that. First of all, why he was separated? And secondly, did you find that it helped.
>
> Mrs. Slater: I separate him because of his, uh, he's always bothering the people around him, always talking to those people, disturbing my class so I moved him. Yes, it did help. That's why he was over there. At first, he didn't like the fact that he was over there, and then at the end he sort of liked it. And then he asked if toward the end again, he wanted to be moved back. And I tried it. But again he was, touching everybody, touching everybody's supplies, talking. So, yeah, the best thing for him was to be away from everybody.

Mrs. Slater believed that not only was the separation from the group helpful for this individual student but also for the class. When asked about the other student who she isolated in the hallway after a lengthy exchange in the classroom, she indicated that he was moved to another school, dismissed from Neverland Elementary. I did continue and ask her why she chose to remove him from the class and not the other student, who

instead she chose to move him away from other students – why the distinction in strategies? Mrs. Slater explained,

> Sometimes, it's good. If it's bad enough that they need to be out of the classroom, it's good for me because then I can teach of them [the rest of the class]. They're arguing with and all that.

Mrs. Slater expresses some relief at being able to remove a student from the room. She is able to go on teaching and she does not have to deal with the students' behavior. She continues to explain how this impacts the learning and progress of that student with regard to missing instruction when removed or isolated:

> But when they do go to time out, though, when I do take—send them to time out—you know, there's a certified teacher in there, so he's supposed to be helping them with what I'm giving them. But they are missing the instruction on what they're supposed to be doing. But I really don't like putting them in time out as much because, like you said, they are missing, and who knows what instruction they're receiving in there compared to what I was teaching them.

 While Mrs. Slater realizes the value of being in the classroom for instruction, she remains firm that this is an effective strategy for managing behavior.

In my final interview with Mrs. Goffert, I asked her about the seating arrangements in her classroom and what seemed to be a purposeful and consistent placement of one African American student away from the rest of the class. She explained:

Because, he never would stop talking, and he would disrupt the class the whole

time. I tried putting him by certain people, and it would work for a little while

but not for long. Because he had difficulty getting along with other children. So,

that's why I had him separated a lot.

Like Mrs. Slater, Mrs. Goffert uses seating arrangements to manage behavior issues and

interpersonal situations in the classroom. While this practice at first might seem

innocuous, it seemed hardly so when considered in the context of these classrooms, the

teachers' already expressed perceptions of particular students, and the absence of

apparent long-term effectiveness of these strategies. As it relates to the first two

instructional practices noted in this chapter that emerged as significant in my

observations, it seemed to me that each piece of this puzzle – the overcorrection, the

failure to acknowledge, and now, the isolation – all fit together in such a away that really

marginalizes and casts out African American students.

Noted in the literature on race and education by several researchers (Fine, 1991;

Nieto, 1992; Cardenas & First, 1985; Garibaldi, 1988), children of "visible racial/ethnic

groups are more likely to be punished…and Black students, particularly males, are more

likely to be suspended from school than Whites" (Carter and Goodwin, 1994). While the

African American students noted in the above instances were not "suspended" in the

formal sense of the word, they were suspended from regular interaction with peers in the

classroom by way of isolation with seating, isolated from the classroom learning

environment, and in some cases, dismissed from the school all together. Marshall (2002)

also notes that "Black students are disciplined more often for subjective

infractions…Subjective offenses are based on perceptions of an event and are vulnerable to personal biases such as prejudice and racism" (p. 59). When students are (re)directed for subjective offenses, the consequences also are subjective in many cases.

As a reflection of these selected White teachers' perceptions of themselves and the African American students they teach, this practice seems to illuminate a predisposition to enact harsher, less-constructive behavior modification for African American students when compared to White students. Irvine (1991) notes, "discriminatory disciplinary practices damage Black students' educational progress and life chances. Uneven dispensations of punishment by teachers cause more student misbehavior" (p. 19). More simply put, isolation, removal, and dismissal of a student means that s/he will be less involved in learning, apart from the primary instructional space of the classroom, and left to fall further and further behind.

The final instructional practice that emerged in this study as significant with regard to White teachers' perceptions of themselves as educators and their perceptions of the African American students they teach is the obstinate presence of low expectations that are reflected in a curriculum that is less challenging, more basic, and ultimately, less effective. In the course of my observations, this trend was most prominent at the intermediate school where I had the opportunity to observe students who were grouped by ability and tracked into classes based on their scores on the prior year's standardized test. While most of my observations occurred in the "lower" classes, I did spend a couple of days in the "high" classes in an effort to compare the instruction, curriculum and overall dynamics of the two levels of students. It did not take long to note the differences

– in teacher's interactions with students, in methods of teaching, and in extension and enrichment of the curriculum. The following excerpts from my field notes are from those days when I spent time observing the "high" classes at Neverland Intermediate where I documented observed differences in instruction and classroom interactions.

> Field notes 1.8.06: This class is different and Mrs. Barton's instruction is different; less restricted and more contextualized – she's connecting to "real world" problems and asking open ended questions.

> Field notes 1.8.06: Mrs. Lois tends to call on her AA students more in this class than she does in her "low" classes where there are more AA students. She spends a great deal of time assessing prior knowledge, good questioning, open-ended, and student-directed.

> At lunch, Mrs. Lois commented on the difference between her classes, "this class is more well-behaved…I get so much more done."

> Overall, Mrs. Lois seems more engaged with her students in these morning classes than her afternoon (high vs. low). Mrs. Lois speaks to each student during the warm-up activity; very personable (different from what I usually see in her other classes).

My observations in the classes identified as having the "high performing" students (and consequently fewer African American students) in them lead me to ask questions about

expectations, curriculum modifications, and instructional decisions that Mrs. Barton and Mrs. Lewis made with regard to their perceptions regarding the two groups of students. In my final interview with Mrs. Barton, I asked how ability grouping influenced her teaching when comparing her morning (low) classes with her afternoon (high classes). She explained,

> Oh, I could just move on to a faster pace. Now, surprisingly enough, I did have some student in the last two classes that were low. And, you know, I was wondering why that they should maybe be in other classes. But for the most part, we could cover more and expand it a little bit more, you know, go a bit more or have more partner work or group work. Because they would argue with each other in lower classes, they don't get along with each other that well. They say they want to do a partner, but the next thing we've got one pouting that will not work and the others are complaining and it gets to be... sometimes the lower classes looks for ways to stop the teaching that they're not understanding or don't want to understand so they get things off track so that they are relieved of some that burden of learning and it can stop the class. I tell them they may have to do it. They are very manipulative. They are more manipulative in class in the morning.

Mrs. Barton's response indicates that not only can she and her "high" students progress through the material at a faster rate, but that her lower students are not only not capable of working in groups but they are also manipulative and try to get out of work. While not immediately reflective of her instruction per se, her comments reveal some insight into

her perceptions about the ability and motivation of her low students, mostly African American, when compared with her high students.

When Mrs. Lois, the other fourth grade teacher participating in the research, was asked about the differences in her instruction in the morning and afternoon classes, she commented:

> I hated to go back to the afternoon classes, 'cause I'm tired and you're always, no matter how your kids are grouped, and then to be tired and have more classes, and I got frustrated with them very—my third class more than my fourth class just because they were even lower. No, I felt bad for them being grouped that way just because I had them at the end, and I'm tired and you get frustrated because that I could see that my first two groups could get it and they can't. And I didn't like teaching, and that is something that I think that if you're going to be out of school or that in a school that groups differently and that is something maybe they need to prepare us for more in college…How to vary lessons for different—learning groups—and I know that is something that I'm not very good at and I need to improve at because sometimes I'd have the same expectation for those kids and the lower one's couldn't do that. They weren't capable of doing the same work.

Not only does Mrs. Lois' response indicate some different expectations with regard to her low and her high students, but she also explains that she feels unprepared to teach such low-performing students and that because she has them in the afternoon, she is "tired" and gets "frustrated" with them. After observing and interviewing both fourth

grade teachers, I again questioned the effectiveness of ability grouping students. How did this not serve to keep the low students low and the high students high? Could all students not benefit from being around students of all abilities? Was ability grouping positive for the students? How was ability grouping in this school negatively shaping the educational experiences of African American students and perceptions of their White teachers?

While not the focus of this study, there is an extant body of literature that exists on the effects and consequences of ability grouping students (c.f. Oakes, 1985; Rowan and Miracle, 1983). What is of particular importance to this study, is how ability grouping of students may influence a teachers' perceptions of her African American students and conversely, how a teachers' perceptions may in turn be reflected in varied instructional practices with regard to how students are grouped. Marshall (2002) explains that this practice may be continued because of its perceived success with aligning and implementing appropriate instruction. She continues, that this practice may go uncontested by teachers if they perceive that certain students are "better suited to a curriculum that is less intellectually demanding" (Marshall, 2002, p. 59).

Of particular interest here with regard to this study, is the over-assignment of African American students to the "low" classes in this school and the potential impact that this may have on their ability to be successful in school as a result of perceived lower expectations and a diluted curriculum. As Mrs. Barton's and Mrs. Lois' comments reveal, there are different, if not lower expectations for the students in their lower classes when compared with their "high" classes which in turn seems to result in less engaging,

less personal, and less contextualized curriculum in the "low" classes. In fact, as noted by my observations and supported by Dusek (1985) , it is not unusual for teachers of "low students" to exhibit strikingly different behaviors or instruction that might include: expecting less by teaching less, giving less extended explanations, and providing less meaningful discussion of stories. Most problematic, as Irvine (1991) explains, is that African American students are particularly harmed by this practice because their race and class become associated with low achievement – impacting not only teachers' perceptions and expectations but also the students' views of themselves and their ability to be successful.

The four instructional practices and classroom interactions noted here - (1) overcorrection and inconsistent (re)direction, (2) failure to engage, (3) isolation and dismissal, and (4) lower expectations and lesser curriculum - when viewed alongside the selected White teachers' perceptions of themselves, their African American students, and their reflections on each independently and in relation to the other, reflect the complexity of teaching and learning in classrooms with White teachers and African American students. As Marshall (2002) notes, the value orientations and perceptions of teachers "have a tremendous impact on their interactions with students in school and on their overall approach to the teaching role" (p. 46). Moreover, she notes, "because race assumes an irrefutably prominent position in how people are perceived and received in the United States…personal identities …affect self-perceptions and the worldviews and value orientations they acquire and defend" (p.47). In short, a person's, or in this case, a teacher's race, value-orientations, and racial identity affect her perceptions of herself and

those around her – including her students. Carter and Goodwin (1994) in speaking to just this point, insist that "educators with poorly developed levels of racial identity can marginalize children's cultural differences in subtle, unconscious ways despite well-intentioned behavior. As was evidenced in the teacher's reflections about their practices with African American students, while seemingly well-intentioned and purportedly "colorblind," each of these practices has the potential to interfere with the academic success of their students.

Insights and Reflections

As I drew the observations to a close, I conducted a final interview with each teacher participating in the research study. We met for lunch at a restaurant of their choosing and set out to wrap up. During this interview, I asked several questions regarding their participation in the study, their thoughts about the research, and their insights about race as it relates to their teaching and their students learning. This interview also served as a time for both of us to reflect and chat about the experience as the school year had come to a close. In this final section, I will share a few insights and reflections from each teacher's interview that are particularly relevant to the research and/or this experience for the purpose of demonstrating that this conversation about race and teaching is far from over. I will present some brief closing comments of each teacher in the same order in which I introduced them.

My summative interview with Mrs. Barton was held at a small tea room in the area. I remember wondering as I walked in how we were going to have a conversation

about the research in such a lovely but noisy place. The first question I asked of Mrs.

Barton was about her feelings of participating in the study and what impact she thought

it had on her classroom interactions with her African American students, if any at all.

She replied:

> I think it made me take even a closer look. I know that they struggle so much but
>
> I took an even a closer look [at the African American students'] works… I
>
> thought extra hard [about] some of them this year.

Mrs. Barton noted that her participation in the study made her a little more aware of her

African American students this year and her work with them. I saw this as a positive

outcome. After discussing test scores, trends in skill development and achievement, and

instructional practices I observed, I asked her to share with me the one piece of advice

she would offer a young, White teacher wanting to teach diverse populations like that in

Neverland ISD. Mrs. Barton responded, "Make sure that you want to teach. Because it

is not like it used to be. It's a lot of stress and work, I think. Now some don't do it. But I

don't think they're real effective." Mrs. Barton's comments and final reflections reveal a

real commitment to teaching and her desire to be effective alongside the admonition that

teaching was not for the faint of heart.

In my final interview with Mrs. Sorrenfield, the pre-Kindergarten teacher, I

asked her to reflect on her students and to tell me if she saw similar trends at the pre-

Kindergarten level with respect to achievement as are present in the upper grades (i.e.

the achievement gap between African American and White students). She thought for a

moment and began:

You're saying the achievement gap. I don't know if it's exactly like there are I would say there are a lot of them that are high and low but then you have some that are…it still just depends on the family situation, what's going on because I have had …I don't think about which races achievement because I got all of them… and they're all learning. I mean they're going to learn. And then they come. I mean the only time that you might have had problems with them is when they're doing activity is that they're too busy doing something that they just want to do. And they do even if we are working on those letters over and over. You let them come. It feels good for them to come because they know they are successful. . . and they want to show you again.

I think her response demonstrates a refreshingly, innocent perspective with regard to students and their ability at such a young age. While Mrs. Sorrenfield does notice that some come in with more than others, she notes that "all are learning" and that all of her students can be successful.

I was particularly interested in what Mrs. Sorrenfield's advise to new teachers would be, she thought for a moment and answered:

To develop a rapport for students. I mean that is a big thing. To where they are excited about coming. That's a big thing, I think. And then the other would be just to treat the parents as partners in education for that child.

Mrs. Sorrenfield's classroom and attitude with regard to her students and her teaching was almost at all times, optimistic and caring. She was in so many ways, what I remembered my pre-Kindergarten teacher being.

My third interview with Mrs. Slater lasted much longer than I anticipated – she felt comfortable talking with me, and I was glad for that. Our conversation was convoluted and took several turns and twists through teaching, learning, managing, language, and practice. When I asked Mrs. Slater if she believed that she had the power as a teacher to eliminate the achievement gap in her classroom, she remarked:

> Oh. I think so. Because I can see my scores that they have come up. The grades
> have come up, but, and I have a lot more that I felt like that I didn't think they
> were going to come up but they did. They really improved. Yeah.

She seems surprised at her students' progress this year and it appears that those who met the standard did so against the odds, so-to-speak; at least the odds of her own perceptions of their ability to do so. I continued with my trend to ask each teacher what one piece of advice she would offer to a new White teacher teaching in diverse classrooms, she offered:

> Patience. Have a lot of patience. Seriously. If they're coming there and…the way
> they're [the students] misbehaving and stuff. Got to have patience, because if not,
> you're going to lose it.

Mrs. Slater often seemed like the kind of teacher who worked very hard but often failed to acknowledge the roll she did/could play when things got difficult. While she wanted to be successful with all students, I think in many ways she saw it as beyond her grasp – and thus was surprised when her students did well. Mrs. Slater, of all the teacher participants in this study, I believe had the most troubling relationship with her students

with regard to her perceptions, her teaching, and their interactions. Sometimes, I think she needed to follow her own advice of having patience.

In a crowded, loud, and busy lunch hour, Mrs. Thompson and I met for lunch at a local Mexican restaurant for our final conversation. Throughout the course of the study, she and I developed a good relationship so I had been looking forward to our interview. I asked her several questions, but one of the most striking responses I received from any teacher came in response to my question about how she felt being a White woman teaching diverse students impacted her teaching if at all. She replied:

> It doesn't at all. I don't change how I teach. I don't change how I treat my
>
> students. Like I said I treated them all the same. And I may have to re-teach
>
> some things a little bit more often for some groups of students than others, but as
>
> far as teaching or the way that I teach or the way I do things, it's all the same
>
> across the board.

I understood this statement from Mrs. Thompson more than any other teacher; while her reference again to "treating them all the same" was problematic, Mrs. Thompson was one teacher where I observed very little distinction between her interactions with different students insofar that their interactions were constructive, well-meaning, and productive classroom interactions. With this in mind, I was particularly interested in what advice she would offer a new teacher. After thinking for a moment, she noted:

> But my best advice for a new white teacher would be to have them come in with
>
> a clean slate. Don't have any pre-judged ideas. Get to know those children.
>
> Give them a chance to see themselves and just learn. That's all you can do. And

that's what I told my student teacher. That was the best advice I could give to her. You know, you may know the family, you may know the brothers, but that doesn't mean that that is that child.

Mrs. Thompson's final words of advice not only reflect her optimism and dedication to teaching, but it also reflects something about her own personal story and her ability to move on with a "clean slate" after some less than positive interactions with individuals of a different racial group than herself.

When Mrs. Lois and I met for our final interview, her husband decided to join us. While he didn't say much, it was interesting having an "outsider" sitting in on our conversation. I asked many of the same questions I asked of everyone else, but as usual, Mrs. Lois' responses were unique to her own perspective – I think her perspective differed from the others in that she was the youngest teacher in years of experience and age among the participants. She demonstrated a much different relationship with her students than did the other teachers. It was her nature to see things less simply.

When I asked Mrs. Lois how she felt being a White teacher of diverse students impacts her teaching, she responded:

I don't really think it changes my teaching maybe it should, but it doesn't because I think I'm realizing though, and maybe this isn't well this isn't so much race but I feel like maybe nowadays or maybe it's always been this way. But you have to be part of their life outside of school to even connect with them at all. Cause let me tell you when kids even hear what you're saying like…football

games, basketball games, baseball games…I do not want to go to another game.

I guarantee you. But the kids were better for me after doing that.

Mrs. Lois, as she did in our initial interview talked about the importance of knowing her students, being part of their lives and making connections with them beyond the classroom. More than any other teacher, Mrs. Lois's work extended beyond the school day to include attendance at her students' ball games and activities. She even noted that after attending some of these events that she had less trouble with some students that other teachers on her team were having.

When I asked her for her tidbit of advice that she would pass on to a new teacher, she replied instantly:

> I just wish I could say to all people before they get into education. Do not think it is a job you can sit there at your desk. Teachers who sit at their desk ohmygosh, yes, everyone's going to talk about you for one. No but, you can't be effective at your desk.

Her response again supports Mrs. Lois' perspective that you have to be involved and active with your students. After her response, I remember reflecting back on my observations of her and her classrooms – rarely was she ever at her desk and rarely was her desk ever organized enough to be a workspace; it was clear that she lived her own recommendation – for better or worse!

My final summative interview was with Mrs. Goffert. She and I decided to meet at the same tea room that I met with Mrs. Barton – a delightful little place with great biscotti and noon tea. I was looking forward to my lunch with Mrs. Goffert and hearing

her reflections about having been a part of this study. She had just returned from visiting her son and daughter-in-law and grandchildren in Colorado – we spent a great deal of time during our meeting chatting about children and being a mom. But when I finally got around to asking questions about the research, one of her most poignant responses was to my question about her feeling as if she had the power to eliminate the achievement gap in her classroom. She explained:

> No, I don't. I don't think I have all the answers. I just, you know, and I think, and I think our educational and testing system, it does not recognize the different abilities of people and that these people are perfectly fine—they don't have to be rocket scientist, we don't all have to be basketball players, and it seems like to me that our educational system is just trying to plant everyone into this one world—you know, we're all going to be B students or above—we're all going to read on the same level, and they, that negates the importance of people that are not on this level. And I very much disagree with that.

Mrs. Goffert's response is complex – on one level it seems as if she is advocating for more holistic assessment and education for all students while conversely one might interpret her response to signify that she believes some people are more suited for certain types of education or outcomes than others. In either case, I was particularly struck by her clear assertion that she did not feel that she herself could eliminate the achievement gap.

As we closed our interview, as I did with all the other teachers, I asked Mrs. Goffert what piece of advice she would share with a new White teacher working with diverse student populations. She shared this thought with me:

I think that they have to be tolerant of different people. I think they need to be as fair as possible with all students—not just racially but taking everything into it, and recognize the abilities, you know. I think, you know, and though I'm a firm believer in the parent—when they're—their involvement. I also think that sometimes we should say you're in school, and because you're in school, we're going to reach certain, you know, level where you can learn. And let's all have a sense of humor, and enjoy the children because they're not going to learn well if they don't like you.

Mrs. Goffert's response to this question reflected a belief in allowing young people to be who they are meant to be while at the same time doing all that you can as a teacher to guide them and help them along the way. I found her final comment urging teachers to have a sense of humor was important – far too often we take ourselves much too seriously and miss the small joys and potential in our students.

As the research process came to a close, I reflected back once more on the advice that each teacher offered for future teachers as a collective. Teachers should be patient, have a will to teach, care for their students, begin with a clean slate, be active in their teaching and their student's lives, and be open and fair to all students. From one teacher to another, this seemed like sound advice. Advice these teachers seemed eager to give but less apt to follow.

CHAPTER VI

CURRERE AND CONCLUSIONS

Currere is a reflexive cycle in which thought bends back upon itself and thus recovers its volition.

> Madeline R. Grumet, 1976
> *Toward a Poor Curriculum*

It is to oneself one comes to practice the autobiographics of self-shattering, revelation, confession, and reconfiguration. Self-excavation precedes the self-understanding, which precedes self-mobilization, although any rigidly linear conceptions of self-reflexivity necessarily reify subjectivity.

> William F. Pinar, 2004
> *What Is Curriculum Theory?*

In all stages of this research, its conception, growth and development, and ultimately the birth of this final product, I have been fully present. I have not only been present mentally, but also spiritually and emotionally in such a way that this research was not just a look at the six teacher participants, but also a careful and critical examination of myself – as teacher, as researcher, as a human being. Bruner (1996; as cited in Pinar, 2004) noted that curriculum research conceptualized as *currere* "seeks to understand the contribution academic studies makes to one's understanding of his or her life (and vice versa), and how both are imbricated in society, politics and culture" (p. 36). Pinar (2004) continued:

> The student of education experience takes as hypothesis that at any given moment she or he is in a "biographic situation" (Pinar and Grumet, 1976, p.51), that is to say, that she or he is located in historical time and cultural place, but in a singularly meaningful way, a situation to be expressed in one's autobiographical voice. "Biographic situation" suggests a structure of lived

meaning that follows from past situations, but which contains, perhaps

unarticulated, contradictions of past and present as well as anticipation of

possible futures. (p. 36)

As a student of curriculum studies and educational experience, I too take as my

supposition the understanding that this research was as much about my experiences as a

teacher as it was an exploration and exposition of the perceptions and practices of the

teachers involved. In this chapter, I will discuss my "biographic situation" *vis-à-vis* the

method of currere in its four moments: the regressive, the progressive, the analytical and

the synthetical (Pinar, 2004), with the understanding that this discussion will always

remain unfinished, fragmented and in process as will my subjectivities. It is critically

important to note that this discussion is not an attempt to "escape from the consequences

of our position[s] by talking about them" (Pillow, 2003, p. 177) but rather an endeavor

that "seeks to know while at the same time situat[ing] this knowledge as tenuous"

(Pillow, 2003, p. 188). I want the reader of this research to understand that this

engagement with *currere*, or reflexivity, is not intended to evoke clarity; rather, it is to

reveal the "practices of confounding disruptions" and demonstrate that at all times our

ability to know and be known is complicated, at best. Following the discussion of

currere in the four autobiographic moments, this chapter will offer a more critical

response to the three research questions and a closer look at the four emergent themes

through the lens of *currere*. Finally, this chapter will note both the limitations and

implications of this study for teacher education, practice and future research.

The Regressive Moment

Pinar (2004) explains that the regressive moment is the conception of "one's apparently past "lived" or existential experience as "data source"…One returns to the past, to capture it as it was, and as it hovers over the present" (p. 36). In this step, I will offer a somewhat brief yet complicated picture of my "past" as it colludes with my present and my ways of knowing, being, and both acting in and being acted upon in the world.

As a young woman, I was raised in what most would consider a "traditional" home. While my father worked long often distant hours away from the home, my mother raised my two sisters and me. She was a strong role model for us and always encouraged us to stretch ourselves and our limits. My father was a weekend parent in many ways, home to do the yard work, play with us, and provide monetarily for our family. While it would seem that my mother's presence would have been the dominant, it was in fact my father's that took a more conspicuous position. A staunch conservative, he was raised in a fundamentalist church; his views were anything but inclusive. It was not unusual for there to be racist epithets used in our home along with an overall intolerance for "Others" that appeared to be different, think differently, or lived in a way that we were not. My mother rarely challenged him. Though, when asked today, both my mother and father would vehemently explain that they are not racist or bigoted and did not raise me to be either. There were not many instances in my childhood where we lived in an area that was not predominantly White – teachers, friends, close social networks – even as we lived in a border city of Texas where much of the population was Hispanic.

Coming of age for me brought forth an entirely new set of challenges for my parents and me. When I began to "date" discussions of the inappropriateness of races and cultures intermingling were frequent. It was not acceptable to date outside of my own race and any deviation from that expectation would have brought severe repercussions. I tested this in middle school and was strictly and quickly reprimanded. I think I was aware of different races before this with earlier interactions; however it was this time in my life that began a revolution of sorts for me. I began to question, as many teenagers do, the validity of my parents' views, their reasoning, and their justification for their insistence on certain behaviors and against others.

Through high school and then college, my awareness began to increase of the inequity in our society. As I began my training in a teacher education program and spent many hours of field experiences in schools populated by students of color, things began to shift in my mind. In a sense, I was struggling through the stages in Helmes' (1990) stages of White racial identity. I had come to realize that I was complicit in reconstructing social scripts and living with privilege. However, I was not then ready to accept or decline that privilege. I reveled in the fact that I could complete college, continue on to a Master's degree, and do so with little hindrance. Having completed six years of university training in education, I accepted my first teaching position in a suburban Texas city.

Like the teachers in this study, my past, my perceptions, and my lived experiences with those racially and culturally different than me were impersonal and superficial at best. I had not been allowed to date outside of my race. I had not lived in

racially integrated neighborhoods. The schools I attended were predominantly White. And I was not encouraged to befriend or have close interpersonal relationships with those who were not White. I too had preconceived notions about persons of color, their culture, and their abilities. I too had heard and been nurtured in the ways of "deficit thinking" and racism (Valencia & Solarzano, 1997; Feagin, 2000). All White people are.

In many ways, teaching was my first real immersion experience in a new place with a sustained and conscientious engagement with the racial and cultural "Other" – and I was their teacher. Like the teachers in this study, I wanted to be "colorblind" – to treat all my children the same and with respect. I wanted them to learn and I desperately wanted to be a good teacher. Moreover, I wanted to save my students – from their lives of what I perceived to be impoverished misery. I struggled that year, I struggled often. My students, the majority of them racial and ethnic minorities, were different than I – living different lives, experiencing different things, and deserving of much more than I was prepared to give them. I was the newest teacher and they needed the most experienced teacher.

That year, I did the best I could to teach them the curriculum with which I was charged. I know now that I was not successful, but in looking back, I remember trying as hard as I could – working from sun up to sun down – crying often and feeling terribly frustrated that I was not able to get through to them. I had been trained to be a teacher, I was smart, and I was failing. I too overcorrected and (re)directed my African American students more than any other in my room. I too failed to acknowledge my African American students and engage them when it was easier than confronting them and their

off-task behavior. I too isolated, removed, and shamed my African American students because *I* was out of control. I taught children who had been ability grouped and held different expectations for my lower students than I did for my more academically advanced students and this impacted *how* I taught and *what* I taught every day. My critique of the teachers in this study and their practices would not be possible if I too had not shared similar experiences and was able to recognize what was occurring in their classrooms – because it had also happened in mine.

The Progressive Moment

The progressive moment asks one to "look toward what is not yet the case, what is not yet present…the student of *currere* imagines possible futures" (Pinar, 2004, p. 36). In this moment, I reflected meditatively on what a classroom uninhibited by racism, classism, sexism, and the harsh realities of bigotry might be. How might a White teacher interact with an African American student in her classroom without assuming her superiority racially, culturally, or intellectually? What might a teacher say to her students to let them know that she *does* see them as racial beings, as cultural beings, and human beings that are worthy of respect and love and that she values difference and wants to nurture them to be who they are meant to be? What, in this equitable classroom, would a White teacher do and who would she be with her African American students? *Currere*, as a method of study, suggests that this imagining is a critical step in the process – only after reflecting back on our roots can we look forward to what our future can be. Not only are we called to visualize or dream about a future, it is imperative that we we envision a better place so that our work is focused there – always moving forward.

Several years ago at a conference I was fortunate enough to have a conversation with a critical friend in which we discussed our personal reasons for doing the work that we do. When I shared with him my work on the critical nature of race in education, he asked me why I chose this line of inquiry. I remember giving some Erma Bombeck, feel-good, warm and fuzzy response that resembled something of what I hear from young teachers all the time when asked why they chose to teach. It goes something like this: "Because I love children, because I think they deserve better, and I think it's important for the betterment of society." He replied, "No, I mean really…why do you do this work?" I remember feeling very unprepared to offer an intellectually coherent response. I had no idea to what he was alluding. Finally, after a long silence, he said (and I paraphrase here), "Have you ever considered what or who we might all be without the "isms" acting upon and through us? Have you ever wondered what or who you might be without a society that sees you as a woman through sexist eyes? Or how we might see a Black person if we didn't live in a racist society?" I remember being completely still. And in that moment, it made sense. These biases and "isms" in our world keep us from being our very best selves – not a singular or "authentic" self – but the best selves that we were intended to be. These "isms" had been acting upon and through the teachers in this study in the same way that they were enacted in my teaching and learning.

In the progressive moment, I ponder a world where we are not all the same, but rather that we are not all oppressed (and oppressing others) by and with the social scripts and bias that envelope us today and have for the entirety of our past. I do not seek some utopia where we all "get along," but a dynamic, engaged, society that recognizes its

possibilities and works tirelessly to realize and nurture the potential in all its peoples. In this moment, I see classrooms where White teachers understand, appreciate, and nurture difference both between and among themselves and their students. I envision curriculum that is responsive to *all* students *all* year long not only on celebratory holidays or during a month marked by superficial historical remembrance. In this moment, the content and context of what and how children learn is more important than the teacher.

The Analytical Moment

The analytical stage of currere requires the student to "examine both past and present." It is not "self-scrutiny for the sake of public performance" nor does it seek to establish "and ironic distance from the deadly routine of daily life" – instead, "the point of *currere* is an intensified engagement with daily life, not an ironic detachment from it" (Pinar, 2004, pp. 36-37, emphasis in original). In short, this dissertation *is* the product of my analytic moment.

I set out to find teachers like me - White teachers, teaching in diverse classrooms, who were challenged by the notion of meeting the needs of all students, especially their African American students. I sought to begin a conversation with others like me about their experiences in hopes of gaining a better understanding of my own journey to teaching and in hopes of envisioning a better future for the students being served in our schools. I wanted to explore the daily lives of White teachers teaching African American students. I did not set out to be a distant researcher; rather, I was participant observer. The teacher participants and I talked, laughed, lamented and celebrated the struggles and

celebrations of teaching. Specifically, we turned our focus to our being White teachers of African American students.

What I found were White teachers paralyzed by their own racism and their own fear - fear of being unsuccessful, fear of admitting their own bias, and fear of realizing their complicit involvement in the failure of students in their classroom. Even when asked about their classroom practices, the selected White teachers reverted to rationalized explanations that situated their students as deficient and incapable and them as well-intentioned, committed professionals in the context of a school setting. These teachers wanted to remain "colorblind" believing that acknowledging race and/or the role that race plays in their everyday lives and teaching would have meant admitting that they see difference and possibly their own racism. I knew this feeling all too well, because I too lived it daily as a teacher.

In writing this research, I have had to tend carefully and consciously to my own biases, my own experiences, and my own racism. I also had to be cautious of my wanting to present this research in such a way that honored the relationship I had established with each of these teachers. Would I be too critical and betray their trust? What about my ethical responsibilities to the African American students in their classrooms and in classrooms around the nation? In the end, I hope that my analytic moment, my "intensified engagement with daily life" in schools, is both critical and fair; honoring not only the teachers but also the African American students being taught by these White teachers who desperately need to examine their own life and how it has shaped the curriculum they enact in their classrooms each and every day. My intent was

not to re-center the White teacher, but rather to call into focus how her experiences, perceptions and attitudes may be reflected in her teaching. Moreover, my goal was not to envoke "self-scrutiny for the sake of public performance" (Pinar, 2004, p. 37) but instead to unearth the complexities in my own identity and lived experiences that might prove insightful in my examination of the White teachers in this study. This analytical moment, this dissertation, is my attempt to "create a subjective space of freedom in the present" (Pinar, 2004, p.36) where I, as the researcher, can reflect on the past, imagine the future, and do so in the context of the present to better understand the intricacies of what it is to be a White teacher of African American students.

The Synthetical Moment

In the synthetical moment, "one re-enters the lived present…conscious of one's own breathing, indeed of one's embodied otherness." The question one asks is: "What is the meaning of the present?" (Pinar, 2004, p. 37) With this in mind, in the synthetical moment I ask, what is the meaning of this research? To what end are these finding significant? Having regressed, progressed and analyzed not only myself but the research and data as well, what is the meaning of the present?

The synthetical moment is the culmination of *currere* in the here and now as it reflects the past and hopes for the future. *Currere* is the quest for "self-knowledge and collective witnessing" as symbiotic projects for social reconstruction (Pinar, 2004, p. 37). Pinar (2004) explains:

The method of *currere* reconceptualized curriculum from course objectives to complicated conversation with oneself (as a "private" intellectual), an ongoing

project of self-understanding in which one becomes mobilized for engaged

pedagogical action – as a private-and-public intellectual – with others in the

social reconstruction of the public sphere (p. 37).

In this synthetical moment, I realize my own connectedness with the research and with

the teachers in the study and seek to make sense of my newly acquired self-knowledge

and relationship to others. In this moment, the student of curriculum studies realizes that

it is not enough to have sauntered through the first three moments, but rather this final

step of *currere* becomes the most significant – it is where the purpose and possibilities of

the journey are realized. Without this final step, reflection and imagining "may result in

no measurable change or good to others or oneself" (Boler, 1999, p. 178 as cited in

Pinar, 2004).

In the opening quote of this chapter, Madeleine Grumet (1976) emphasized the

importance of currere being a reflexive cycle in which thought "bends back…and thus

recovers its volition" (p. 130-131). For me, as a private and public intellectual, this

research as an engagement with *currere* has forced me, at times reluctantly, to examine

my own lived experience and subjectivities in ways that I had not before been willing or

able. It has required that I question previously sedimented ideas and challenge the very

presuppositions that underlie my own ways of understanding and being in the world.

Perhaps most importantly, *currere* as a method of study demanded that I be a real,

living, breathing, feeling, human being in the midst of the research process. It pushed me

to acknowledge my own culpability in the mis-education of African American students

while proving that my prior experiences as a White teacher myself made this research

possible – without it my mind would not have been able to see what my eyes observed in classrooms during this study. Now, as I reflect on my coursing through the cycle of *currere* and coming to know more intimately my own thinking, I am once again and even more conscious of the inequity in our schools, the immediate need for change, and the immeasurable power of teachers in schools to bring about good – and bad. I also realized in this moment that I too, as a White teacher, failed my African American students because I knew not from where I came, how my own perceptions were influencing my teaching, and the relationship between them.

The synthetic moment also begs of us to ask: so what? So what do we do with this research? Of what meaning are the findings to teachers, students, and schools? With this in mind, I present in the next section the conclusions, limitations, and implications for this research. My realization that the present moment is problematic and frightfully wrought with contradictions, inequity, and a desperate need for something more – something better for not only our African American students, but for our White teachers as well. We must socially reconstruct what it means to be a teacher (and a student) in our schools today if we are to serve all our students and serve them well.

Conclusions

In the course of this study, I learned that not only do selected White teachers' perceptions of themselves and of the African American students they teach get reflected in instructional practices and classroom interactions, but that these perceptions are deeply embedded, laden with contradiction, and reveal a deep, unawareness about

themselves, the students they serve, and the purposes of education. The selected White teachers perceived themselves to be effective teachers. Each of them shared with me that they believed they had positive relationships with all of their students. None of them could clearly articulate a culture when asked to describe their own and viewed culture as what other people have. Moreover, all teachers wavered within the earlier stages of their racial identity mostly lingering in the contact and reintegration phases (Helms, 1990; 1994). The perceptions the selected White teachers held of the African American students they teach reflected an intense grounding in deficit perspectives (Valencia & Solarzano, 1997). Teachers focused primarily on these students lack of skills, stable home environments, and appropriate behavior. They offered commentary about discipline issues, low-performance abilities, and aggressive or out-of-control behavior expressed particularly by African American students while rarely describing other students in this way. It was clear in their words and actions that the expectations they held of their African American students were very different, often lower and inferior, than those they held for their other students, particularly when compared to their White students.

Emerging from classroom observations and the research were four significant and important instructional practices and classroom interactions: (1) overcorrection and inconsistent (re)direction, (2) failure to engage, (3) isolation and dismissal, and (4) lower expectations and lesser curriculum. More than any other students in my observations, African American students were corrected and reprimanded for any variety of classroom offenses. Additionally, African American students were subjected to more harsh

consequences than their peers for similar offenses. This initial practice, while unsettling, was not particularly surprising considering that many of the teachers cited behavior as one of the primary issues in their dealing with African American students. As Irvine (1990) explains, African American students tend to have fewer positive interactions with White teachers than their white counterparts stemming from teachers' negative attitudes about Black children.

A second instructional practice that appeared during classroom observations was a failure to engage or acknowledge African American students. On several occasions I witnessed students unengaged, off-task, and ignored during instruction and independent work time. Students left to dawdle on their own often had difficulty completing assignments and were visibly frustrated by their lack of understanding of the content and often continued through the day irritated and unengaged. An early study by Rubovits and Maehr (1973) it was noted that African American students often receive less attention, less encouragement and less praise. While teachers in this study indicated that it was often easier for them to allow their African American students to be off-task than to attempt to deal with their lack of participation or engagement. Marshall (2002) explains that the nature of the teacher-to-student interactions (or lack thereof) have the power to influence not only students' perceptions of the learning environment but also of themselves.

The third, and potentially the most disturbing classroom practice that surfaced was the isolation, removal and dismissal of African American students from the instructional area/classroom. Manifesting in various forms, African American students

were separated in seating arrangements, dismissed from the classroom entirely as a consequence of poor behavior, or suspended from school all together. It is critical to note here that a student's removal or isolation from the general instructional area, means she is not receiving instruction from the classroom teacher which may in turn impact her ability to be successful academically. Irvine (1990) speaks directly to this by explaining that this type of disciplinary practice can "damage Black students' educational progress and life chances" (p. 19). If a student is not involved in learning, separated from the general instructional space of the classroom, it is likely that they will be left behind.

The fourth practice that surfaced in the course of classroom observations was the lessening of the curriculum based on the teacher having lower expectations for particular students, in this case their African American students. At the intermediate school, teachers made instructional and curricular decisions based on the perceived ability of their students who were ability grouped. In classrooms with students labeled as "low" achieving, teachers did not extend lessons, offer personal interaction in the same way they did with their "high" achieving students, and held strikingly dissimilar expectations of their students. As Marshall (2002) notes, ability grouping may continue as an educational practice because of its perceived success with planning and implementing instruction; however, this practice, if uncontested, will relegate "low" students to what is almost always a "less intellectually demanding" curriculum (p. 59).

Finally, when asked about the instructional practices or classroom interactions that appeared to be inequitably advantaging some and disadvantaging others in the classroom, the selected White teachers rationalized their decisions as being in the best

interests of the majority of the class and their ability to teach and be effective. Moreover, in almost every case, the selected teachers cited again the inability or refusal to cooperate on the part of the African American students in their classroom thus placing the entire onus for teaching and learning on the student. The teachers in this study believed strongly that they were effective with all students and could not see how their actions (or lack thereof) could be negatively impacting some of their students – many of them African American. They were unable (or unwilling) to consider that their perceptions, classroom interactions, and instructional practices had the potential to harm, disadvantage, and neglect many of their students. Marshall (2002) pointedly explains that the value orientations and perceptions of teachers "have tremendous impact on their [teachers] interactions with students" (p. 46). If left unquestioned and unproblematized, these teachers will continue teaching as they have done and continue only serving well some of their students.

These teachers are not unusual or unlike most White teachers teaching in schools today – they are good people who believe that the work they are doing is beneficial and effective. The discussions we had about their teaching and their interactions with students were not particularly unique; in fact, one could hear them if you enter most any teacher's lounge in any school any day of the week. What is troubling however, because these teachers are not unique or unusual, is that the observed instructional practices and classroom interactions are also not uncharacteristic of the schooling experience for most African American students. As noted by several researchers (e.g. Carter & Goodwin, 1994; Irvine, 1990; Zimmerman, 1995; Marshall, 2002; Fine, 1991; Nieto, 1992) African

American students are often "left behind" in the schooling process – overcorrected, isolated, ignored, and underserved by White teachers. We must do the hard work of unlearning these practices and confronting the inequities that result because of them.

While the research in education has identified similar themes and practices with regard to the educational experiences of African American students (cited above), when viewed in and through the context of *currere*, a greater complexity of teaching and learning in classrooms with White teachers and African American students is exposed. *Currere*, as both as a noun and a verb, suggests that everything we do in and about classrooms is a reflection of our own lived experiences, perceptions, and desires. Moreover, *currere* holds that each of us is a manifestation of our past and that in order to realize any semblance of meaningful, authentic progress in the future, each of us must first examine our past, our perceptions and our ways of knowing and being in the world. *Currere* offers us a method by which to begin this journey – as individuals, as a collective society, and certainly as teachers.

While this research focused on three primary research questions, it was also an exploration in using *currere* to both frame and guide the research process – to better understand how, when operationalized in the context of education research, a researcher might realize a more complicated conversation with oneself and others. With this in mind, I contend that while researchers may have identified any of the above noted classroom interactions and instructional practices, without first exploring teachers' perceptions of themselves and their lived experiences, their perceptions of their students, and the possible relationship between and among them, a researcher may assume that the

noted practices and interactions are less complex and more easily deconstructed – unconnected to any past or future. In contrast, *currere* proposes that researchers, teachers, and individuals seeking any level of meaningful change must engage in a thoughtful critique and examination of "unarticulated contradictions of past and present as well as anticipation of possible futures" (Pinar, 2004, p. 36). In short, we must look into our past to better understand our position in the present and envision and work for change in the future.

The findings and conclusions of this study have implications for teacher education, educational practice, and research. The involved and important work of examining the perceptions of White teachers, their perceptions of the African American students they teach, and the potential influence that each of these may have on instructional decisions and classroom practice must continue. This study is but one glimpse into the complex interactions that take place daily in classrooms between teachers and students. More research is needed to better understand the messy, complex, and challenging spaces that are classrooms. Moreover, we must also resist the tendency in research and practice to oversimplify and reduce findings to a "check-list" or "how-to" manual. In the following sections, I will discuss the implications and limitations of this research and offer my suggestions for future research purposefully keeping in mind the always tentative, unfinished and open nature of *currere*.

Implications and Limitations

The purpose of this final section it to discuss briefly the implications for teacher education, practice and educational research. In keeping with the fourth moment of *currere*, research must offer ways, practical and theoretical, to envision a more meaningful future.

Implications for Teacher Education

The implication of this research for teacher education lies in our needing to problematize current models of teacher preparation that leave much of a young teacher's racial identity, values, and perceptions of themselves (and others) completely unquestioned and unchallenged. In many teacher education programs across the nation, the potential teacher candidate progresses through a series of courses aimed to develop content knowledge, an understanding of pedagogy, and explore the role and expectations of being a teacher in a school setting. What is lacking in most teacher education programs is a conscious and consistent exploration of and engagement with pre-service teacher candidates' lived experiences, their perceptions of themselves and others, and how both of these will likely impact the kind of teacher they will become. This study urges us to consider implementing such a practice from the very beginning of teacher education programs through the culminating practicum experience so that when young teachers do ultimately enter the classroom, they are aware of the ways in which they interact in/upon/through the curriculum and with their students. This type of exploration and self-examination must move beyond the superficial and should not be over

simplified or contained in just one or two courses. The process of coming to know oneself is anything but uncomplicated.

I propose that the method of *currere* and engagement with the autobiographic moment is as essential and useful tool by which to begin this examination with pre-service teacher candidates. This method of study of one's self and others in the context of lived experiences might provide young teacher education students a means by which they may begin the difficult task of coming to an awareness of themselves, their perceptions, their experiences, their biases, and their expectations. I contend as well that we must openly and candidly discuss issues of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and other perspectives that work to advantage some students while marginalizing others, in and outside of the school. Moreover, I believe it especially important for young White teachers to realize their own complicity in inequity in such a way that brings them into a direct conversation about White privilege and racism.

As an example of such an engagement with *currere* in pre-service teacher education, several of my colleagues and I embarked on a study to explore the impact of using autobiography and self-disclosure in a pre-service social foundations of education course in which we were all co-teachers/facilitators. We began the study with core assumption that "experiences of autobiography and self disclosure encourage pre-service teachers to adopt a pedagogy of sharing, listening, caring, and social justice that is reflected over time through their thoughtful interactions with peers" (Milam et al, 2008, p. 5). In this course, we covered a variety of difficult issues that included, but were not limited to racism, classism, sexism, sexual orientation, politics, ethics, religion,

metaphysics, and family life. This research sought to better understand the implications for using self-disclosure and autobiography as pedagogical tools, the potential limits of doing so, and students' perceptions about being taught through and with various levels and dimensions of self-disclosure and autobiography. Findings in this study suggest that students "felt that self-disclosure contributed positively to their experiences in the course, and their personal growth and development as a young professional" (Milam et al, 2008, p. 7). Moreover, students noted that "that taking this course enhanced their personal lives and strengthened their relationships with other people" (p. 8). This point is especially important when responses also indicated that this course urged most students to consider many issues they had never previously. Our research indicates that not only is an engagement with autobiography (in ways similar to *currere* as a method of study) possible but that it is worthwhile and meaningful for students both as they prepare to be teachers and as individuals (See APPENDIX E for full text of this research article in draft form). If we engage our young teachers in self-reflection through *currere* in ways similar to those documented in this research (Milam et al, 2008), it is possible that they could begin teaching with a much different, more responsive, and more equitable disposition than has been documented here.

It is not acceptable that we continue to produce White teachers that lack a conscious understanding of their own racial identity and view others as "less than" or from a deficit perspective. It is time that we interrupt the fallacy that race is something that other people have and that racism is something that other people do.

Implications for Practice

The implications for practicing teachers, those working daily in schools, lie in the realization that each of us has lived experiences that shape who we are with ourselves and others. In this study, I attempted to paint a picture of how classroom interactions and instructional practices came to be as a reflection of the selected White teachers' perceptions of themselves and the African American students they teach. While this is a first step in documenting how White teachers' perceptions influence practice, there is more work to be done. As Ratesic-Koetke (2005) notes, "Rather than viewing practices associated with assumptions about other races as merely circumstantial, White teachers must begin to understand these actions as a reflection of self" (p. 204). Similar to the engagement in teacher education described above, so too would a conscious and candid dialogue about Whiteness, racism, and privilege be of benefit to practicing teachers. Only then, would they be able to see their actions and interactions with students as the reflection of themselves and their own bias and begin the work of un-doing them.

I propose here that principals, university researchers, and others interested in and skilled in this type of work, should be leading these conversations and directing this work. I suggest that these "leaders" must be in classrooms, building relationships and trust, talking with teachers, deconstructing practice, and pointing out inequitable practice. If we are to change the inequitable practices, we must first acknowledge them and name them as such. We must voraciously and actively critique ourselves and our actions. We must unlearn what has been taught. We must come to see our children of color as valuable, indispensable, and worthy of our very best.

Implications for Research

Finally, the implication for research rests in the need to further explore the complex spaces of a classroom so that we may better understand how teachers' perceptions and experiences influence how they enact curriculum with their students. It is important that studies like this one not sit on a shelf and collect dust – they must be seen, heard and replicated in various contexts, at various age levels, and with as many different participants as possible so that we can begin to piece together the varied experiences of teachers and students in schools. The more we understand about how White teachers' racial identity and understanding of themselves and the students they teach influence classroom practice, the better informed we may become to be able to reshape teacher education and professional development opportunities.

One of the most striking limitations of this study is that its focus is entirely on the experience of the teacher in the classroom. While this decision was a purposeful one, it does not imply that the students' perspectives about their relationship with their teacher, the classroom interactions or instructional practices are not important or significant, especially with regard to African American students and White teachers. In fact, the very opposite is true. While this study offers insight into the possible impact of particular practices or interactions on student success and well-being, it did not seek students' perceptions or feelings directly. An important task for researchers, which I contend is very often overlooked, is to speak directly to students. Rather than continuing to assume how students are feeling or are impacted, we need to ask them. Our ability to teach and

teach well would be well-served by actually hearing and understanding the needs, perspective, and desires of our students.

We, as a research community, must continue to document schooling inequity, racism, and unjust practice from all perspectives - its location and its outcomes - until they are ameliorated. The work is not easy, but I remember my father telling me, many times, "Nothing worth having ever comes easy." And so we must work, and we must work hard – together and apart, individually and collectively, from without and within. As Pinar (2004) urges us again:

> Such a "complicated conversation" illustrates a curriculum in which academic knowledge, subjectivity, and society are inextricably linked. It is this link, this promise of education for our private-and-public lives as Americans, which curriculum theory elaborates. If we persist in our cause – the cause of public education – someday the schools and those of us who work in them can deflect displaced and deferred racism. When we do, schools will no longer be knowledge-and-skill factories, not academic businesses but schools: sites of education for creativity, erudition, and interdisciplinary intellectuality. Someday – if we remember the past, study the future, analyze, then mobilize in, the present- education will permit the progressive pursuit of "new modes of life, eroticism, and school relations." … let this someday begin today. (p. 11)

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APPENDIX A

INITIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

NOTE: *I intend for these to be semi-structured interviews; the following questions will serve as a guide for the interview. Other questions might be asked for clarification of points, to extend the discussion, or probe the participant for more information.*

Personal

1. Tell me about yourself – where did you grow up, your family, and your "culture".
2. Can you tell me about the demographics of where you grew up, your friends as a child, and most of your interactions now? Did you/do you live in a racially diverse neighborhood? Have you ever dated outside of your race? Did your parents have any impact on your relationships with others outside of your race?
3. Tell me about your schooling experiences as a child? Public or private? Demographics of schools? Experiences with others outside of your race/ethnicity?
4. If you had limited interactions with those of another race/ethnicity, when were those interactions? Were they voluntary?
5. Do you have any specific memories or events in your growing up were race was a particularly important factor?

Professional

1. How/when did you decide to become a teacher?
2. How many years have you been teaching? Where? Demographics of those schools?
3. How did you come to your current position?
4. Have you always worked with diverse populations? (Elaborate)
5. How do you feel about working with the diverse population in your current position?
6. What are some specific challenges you've faced as a teacher? Are there different challenges when working with different demographics of students? Are any of them in your mind related to your race and/or the race of your students?
7. Given the current achievement gap between African American students and White students, how would you explain this? What are the factors that contribute to the achievement gap?
8. Do you feel like you're successful in meeting the needs of all your students? Specifically, your African American students?
9. What can teachers do in the classroom to help address the achievement gap?
10. What strategies do you use in your classroom to address the needs of African American students specifically?
11. How do you decide what strategies to use and when? Do you think race is ever a factor in this decision?
12. Are students in your classroom grouped by ability? If so, how is this done?
13. Do you use any methods that you would consider "culturally responsive"? If so, please describe them? Do you think this is important?
14. Have there been any events/challenges this year in your classroom and schools that you feel are "racialized"? Can you explain?
15. How would you describe your relationship with your African American students this year? With their families?
16. Are there any other things you'd like to share with me that we haven't discussed that you think is important in your being a White teacher of African American students?

APPENDIX B

FINAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

NOTE: *I intend for these to be semi-structured interviews; the following questions will serve as a guide for the interview. Other questions might be asked for clarification of points, to extend the discussion, or probe the participant for more information.*

1. How do you feel about having participated in this study?
2. Have you noticed doing anything differently in your classroom as we have explicitly focused on race with regard to your African American students during the course of this study?
3. How do you feel being a White woman teaching diverse populations impacts your teaching, if at all?
4. Do you think it's important to acknowledge race as a factor in classroom decisions? Why or why not?
5. Would you call yourself an "effective teacher"? Why or why not?
6. Do you feel like you have the power to eliminate the achievement gap in your classroom?
7. We have talked during the study multiple times about your teaching, classroom management, and your perceptions – do you feel like these things have a greater impact in the way your students perform or do other factors influence this more? (Elaborate)
8. What do you think is the most important thing to teach young White teachers about how to effectively teach African American students?
9. Do you feel like you were adequately prepared to teach diverse populations? Specifically, African American students?
10. As we bring our time together to a close, is there anything you'd like to say, reflect upon, or add about your being a White teacher of African American students?

At the conclusion of each final interview, each teacher was asked questions with regard to specific practices and instructional strategies in their classroom in an effort to address the third research question: *What are selected White teachers' perceptions about the relationships between their perceptions of themselves as White educators, their perceptions of the African American students they teach, and their teaching practices?*

APPENDIX C

TEACHER REFLECTION ACTIVITY

REFLECTION ACTIVITY – Tell me about your students.

Please take a look at your class roster. I'd like for you to tell me (in writing) the following things about EACH student:

1. NAME (first only to protect them)
2. RACE/ETHNICITY
3. GENDER
4. 3 STRENGTHS (can be academic, social, emotional, etc)
5. 3 CHALLENGES (can be academic, social, emotional, etc)
6. The ONE thing (or more than one thing if you'd like) you think I need to know about this student with regard to how you decide how to approach teaching him/her. In other words, what is the first thing you think about when designing a lesson for your students with regard to each student.
7. What is the most important thing/characteristic/trait that this student contributes to your classroom?

_____

NAME:

RACE/ETHNICITY:

GENDER:

3 STRENGTHS:

      1.

      2.

      3.

3 CHALLENGES:

      1.

      2.

      3.

THOUGHT on INSTRUCTION:

STUDENT'S CONTRIBUTION:

APPENDIX D

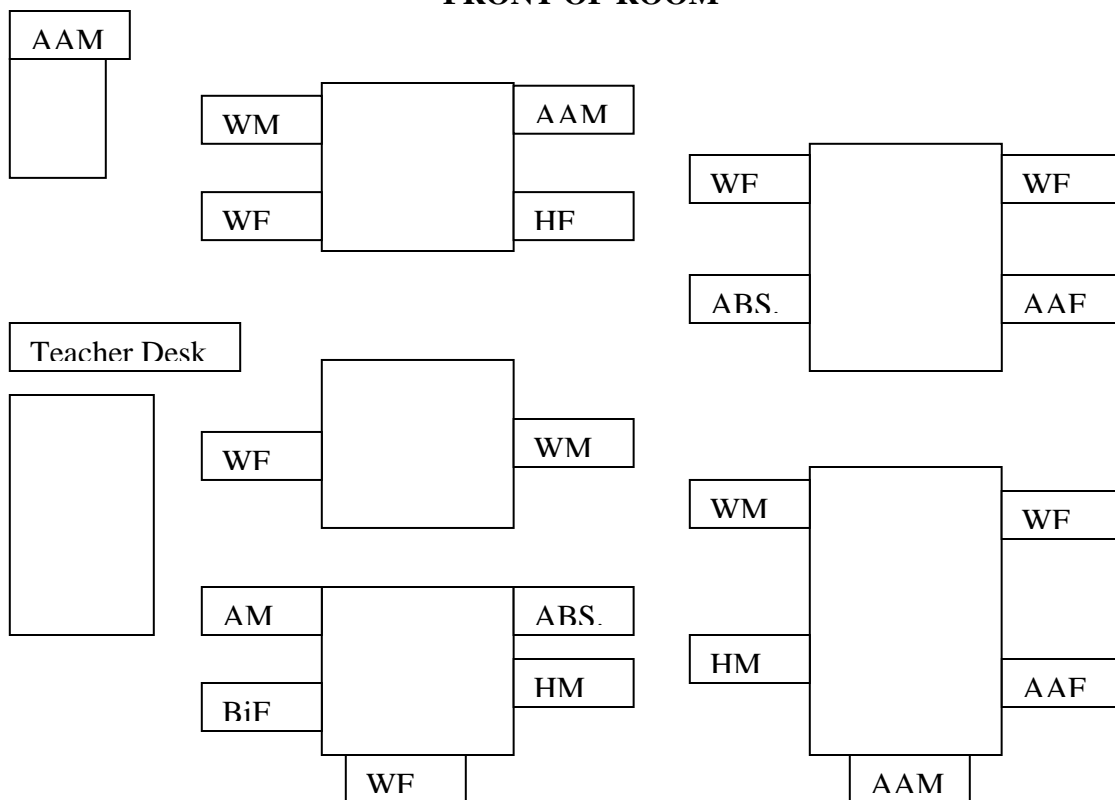**SAMPLE CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FIELD NOTES**

December 8, 2008
Mrs. Slater's Class – 1st grade – Neverland Elementary

Start of day: Students begin with a math cut-and-paste activity at their desks. Some chatting going on, informal, relaxed.

Note seating arrangement: AAM seated away from everyone – isolated near teacher's desk in corner of room. He is constantly being redirected and corrected, teacher threatens to call mom.

FRONT OF ROOM

Derral (AAM) off-task and challenging the teacher; she moves on with the lesson w/out engaging him. He is out of his seat, climbing on his chair; off-task. He is redirected for his behavior but not engaged.

Teacher attempted to call Derral (AAM) parents – could not be reached; moved Derral out of room to another classroom for punishment (did not move colors, work through discipline procedure).

Restroom Break

Back from RR, Derral continues to act out, teacher physically removed him from the classroom – put him in the hallway and slammed the door in his face; turned back to class (and me) and said "Pathetic."

Mrs. S continuously talks about Derral to the rest of the class in a negative way.

Time for the spelling test. Derral remains out in the hallway.

During RRB, Mrs. S explained to me that both of his parents are in prison for drugs. There is no consistent parental figure and he (Derral) moves from one home to another; his aunt is the Asst. Principal in the building. Says Derral acts out because he knows there is no "contact" or consequences.

Mrs. S remarks, "It all goes back to homelife." Referring to the way Derral and the other AA children act at school.

I notice Derral is peeking through the window in the door as he is out in the hallway. He remains outside through the entire spelling test.

10:00am – spelling test over; snack time begins. Derral remains out in the hallway. Mrs. S begins to taunt him as he is outside as she eats her snack, seemingly trying to make him regret his behavior and the fact that he is missing snack time. He returns to the classroom and continues to be off-task. He asks to go to the restroom and does not return before the class leaves for lunch. Mrs. S finds him at the restroom and physically directs him on to PE.

Children return from PE. Darrel is doing better at Center Time.

APPENDIX E

PAPER PRESENTED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE AMERICAN

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION (2008)

(Re)Considering Curriculum as Autobiographical Text:

Implications for Self-Disclosure in a Preservice Teacher Education Program

A paper presented to the
American Educational Research Association
Annual Meeting
New York City
March 23-30, 2008

By

Jennifer L. Milam, Texas A&M University
Mei Wu Hoyt, Texas A&M University
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Introduction: Engaged Pedagogy and Self-Disclosure

To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin.

bell hooks, 1994
Teaching to Transgress

Influenced significantly by Paulo Friere's work on conscientization, bell hooks (1994) posits that education should be an act of coming to a critical awareness on the part of both the student and the teacher. According to hooks, education can be liberating "when everyone claims knowledge as a field in which we can all labor" (p. 14) — this knowledge is personal, intellectual, spiritual, and critical. Engaged pedagogy is that which "emphasizes well-being" and in this way teachers are responsible for the intellectual well-being of their students and for realizing their own well-being "if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students" (hooks, 1994, p. 15).

In her text, hooks (1994) outlines three critical aspects of engaged pedagogy essential to the development of well-being and critical awareness of both the teacher and the student. There must first be a resistance to the objectification of the teacher. Opposition to denigration of this wholeness lends itself to a quest for intellectual union of the mind, body, and spirit necessary for the self-actualization integral to engaged pedagogy. Beyond resistance to objectification, the privileging of the position of teacher must be challenged. In this sense, the teacher becomes an intimately personal being: vulnerable, real, and committed to their well-being in addition to that of their students in such a way that they are not only teacher, but also learner, mentor, guide. As the most critical aspect of her engaged pedagogy, hooks (1994) calls on us to "value student expression" while working consciously toward well-being and self-actualization. Of this commitment, sharing, and interactions in an "engaged" classroom, hooks writes, "When education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess. Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks" (p. 21).

Freire (1970) and hooks (1994) agree that authentic action and reflection are "indissolubly united" and it is here that the foundation for *praxis* exists — "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Crotty, 2003). Inextricably tied to one another, Freire (1970) contends that reflection and action are crucial elements of transformation — praxis depends on temporal, ideological, and practical unity of the two. In realization of these critical elements of engaged pedagogy and praxis, "The

classroom, with all its limitation remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom" (hooks, 1994, p. 207).

Theoretical Framework

Self-disclosure in classrooms, counseling centers, and clinical settings has been investigated extensively in both psychological research, counseling literature, and communication studies since psychologist Sidney Jourard proposed the formal study of self-disclosure in 1958 (Berg and Derlega, 1987; Clare, 2000; Corcoran & Spencer, 2000; Cozby, 1973; Jourard, 1958, 1971b; Jourard and Resnick, 1970; Maddox, 2000; Rubin 1975). Based upon existential phenomenology, Jourard (1971b) explained self-disclosure by asking this question: "Under what conditions will you and I make our mysterious subjectivity available to the perception of others?" (p.20). Jourard (1971b) argued that "to disclose is to show, to make manifest to others who can perceive the disclosure of something, and to help a person receive and make sense of more of the disclosure of the world" (p. 20). One research agenda within clinical and counseling psychological therapeutic practice is "disclosure reciprocity" (Cozby, 1973; Jourard & Resnick, 1970; Rubin, 1975). Disclosure reciprocity increases trust in the discloser and influences social norms in the clinical setting. Self-disclosure is regarded by some researchers as "moral exhortation" (Maddox, 2000) and as "talking cure" (Corcoran, 2000). Self-disclosure, in this sense, is context dependent and carries risks of doing harm to the discloser and the person receiving the disclosure (Corcoran and Spencer, 2000).

In educational settings, self-disclosure has been examined in classrooms across disciplines and within various contexts (Allen, 1995; DeLamater, Hyde, and Allgeier 1994; Downs, Javidi & Nussbaum, 1988; Grauerholz and Copenhaver, 1994; Goldstein and Benassi 1994;; Rosenbloom and Fetner, 2001). Rosenbloom and Fetner (2001) argue that self-disclosure promotes students' sociological imagination and reduces "the gap between sociological issues and students' lived experiences, as well as helping to engage student interest and enrich classroom discussion" (p. 450). Rosenbloom and Fetner also concluded that students who self-disclosed in an educational setting were more concerned about peer pressure and peer responses than grading or the teacher-student relationship. They also examined the timing of classroom self-disclosure and found that it evolves rather than happening spontaneously. From an ethical perspective on self-disclosure in classrooms, Grauerholz and Copenhaver (1994) believe that as an experiential method self-disclosure sometimes becomes problematic. Instructors, although not taking the role of counselor, should be trained to alleviate some of the distress of students who self-disclose or to handle the situation when a student experiences emotional distress or psychological episodes in the classroom or in an office. Despite these concerns, Grauerholz and Copenhaver (1994) argue that engaging in self-disclosure in classrooms can "reinforce the validity of personal experiences" (p.

320) and connect the personal, sociological, and political issues and relate self to the larger world.

For over twenty years, studies that investigate teachers as researchers (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Schon, 1983, 1987, 1991; King & Kitchener, 1994), the social context of education (Kincheloe, Slattery, & Steinberg, 2000), narratives in teacher training (Clandinin & Connolly, 1991, 1992;), autobiography (Pinar & Grumet, 1978; Pinar, 2004; Miller, 2004) and critical action research for social justice (Freire, 1968; Freire and Macedo, 1987) have foreground the importance of the self-reflective dimension of curriculum and teaching. Some studies extend the investigation of the reflective practitioner to include autobiographical narratives and portfolios in pre-service teacher training programs. While this important research has advanced reflective practice, other studies have demonstrated that new teachers often abandon reflective practice in the early socialization process (McIntyre & Byrd, 2000) or avoid narratives and autobiography once they become senior faculty.

We are an eclectic team of seven researchers: three professors, two doctoral candidates, and two masters research assistants. We are black, white, Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Catholic, ecumenical, Buddhist, gay, straight, single, married, and range in age from 23 to 53. We have formally and informally studied the autobiographical dimension of our pre-service teacher education course, "The Social Foundations of Education," in a large research-intensive public university where we have team taught since 2002. In this study we present our methodologies for developing committed reflective practitioners.

Autobiography, ethics, and agency, we believe, remain under-utilized in curriculum practices. In the worst case scenario, professors, program directors, and students remain hostile toward self-reflective explorations of ethics and autobiography. Some studies have found that fear of ethical analysis and misinformation about narrative methodologies creates a climate for the exclusion of autobiography, ethics, and agency in the teaching and learning process (Connolly & Clandinin, 1988, 1990). We challenge both the overt and subliminal rejection of the reflective practitioner in our undergraduate classroom, and we attempt to use the autobiographical process to engender a commitment to individual heightened awareness, ethics, and community social justice. We seek a method that results in agency for students as well as retention and satisfaction of new teachers in the profession (McIntyre & Byrd, 2000; Ellsworth, 1997, 2005). In this paper we describe our approach to curriculum in a Social Foundations of Education" course — both the successes and the failures. We deconstruct several models of teacher preparation, including our own, and point toward current research that may demonstrate improvement in retention and satisfaction for beginning teachers (Slattery & Rapp, 2003; Slattery, 2006). We also document examples of advancements toward social justice among pre-service teachers through our instructional use of films and popular culture.

We believe that self-disclosure testimonials and autobiographical discussions within the context of investigations of history, philosophy, economics, curriculum, and anthropology in our Social Foundations of Education course are an essential dimension of the teaching and learning process – particularly for pre-service teachers. In our

classes we discuss difficult issues such as bullying in schools, teacher-student relationships, gangs, poverty, homelessness, date rape, hate crimes, gay bashing, racism, abortion, sexism, violence, and drug abuse. We investigate the philosophy of ethics and human behavior, the history of immigration and schooling practices, curriculum theories related to race, class, gender, and sexualities, and the cultural and ethnic context of classrooms. Addressing these dimensions of the Social Foundations of Education often involves self disclosure by students, guest speakers, teaching assistants, professors and in film documentaries. We seek to advance agency and empowerment for all participants by recognizing the power, significance, and importance of individual lived experiences – both self and others – within the larger contexts of schooling, curriculum, society, and the world. We use popular culture extensively in our course, especially through films. Many of the films we use are documentaries, and all contain dramatic examples of self-disclosure (e.g., *Vagina Monologues*, *American History X*, *Jim In Bold*, *Bad Education*, *Let's Get Real*, *Advertising and the End of the World*, *Little Secret*, *Super Size Me*, *Fast Food Nation*, *A Lesson Before Dying*, *The Color of Fear*, *Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision*, *Strange Fruit*, *Green*, *Toxic Racism*, *Wrestling with Manhood*, *Killing Us Softly*, *Children in America's Schools*, and many more.) We use the work of Freire and Giroux (1989) and Ellsworth (2004) to guide our thinking about the use of autobiography and film as we discuss the content of these films with students and share our own autobiographical connections. Asher (2007) reported that in her pre-service teacher education classes the use of documentary films and readings on social, racial, political, and gender issues created an environment where students often voluntarily self disclosed. She writes about the challenges of educating teachers to engage, rather than deny or repress, difference that emerge at the dynamic context-specific intersections of race, culture, gender, and sexuality. Asher presents vignettes on issues presented in her social foundations class that evoke complicated autobiographical reflections. Self-disclosure by her students becomes an integral and important dimension of the learning process. We have had similar experiences with undergraduate students in our social foundations course over the past ten years. In our course, self disclosure opens up complicated conversations (Pinar, 2003) and becomes the vehicle for understanding and agency.

We believe these experiences of autobiography and self disclosure encourage pre-service teachers to adopt a pedagogy of sharing, listening, caring, and social justice that is reflected over time through their thoughtful interactions with peers. In the spirit of Bill Ayers analysis (Ayers, 2001), we believe that great teachers not only teach subject matter well, but also educate students and themselves to live fuller lives with a commitment to change the world for the better. Jourard (1971b), an early proponent of self-disclosure argues that "[teachers who self-disclose to students] their views on politics, ethics, religion, metaphysics, and family life, so that students can encounter pluralism in ways of seeing life and living it" (pp. 117-118). We hope that through self-disclosure, all students – those who speak in class and those who do not – develop an awareness of other people's experiences and recognize that a variety of explicit and implicit experiences and narratives are always represented in each classroom. Students and teachers can then relate these narratives to their own autobiography.

Methodology

This study is situated in the literature of curriculum studies, teaching, learning, and cultural foundations, and holds the following as its overarching questions:

1) What are the implications of self-disclosure of personal stories, accounts, and recollections in the classroom?
2) What are the limits of self-disclosure?
3) In what ways might a supportive educational environment that encourages self-disclosure limit some students from providing important narratives about themselves?
4) Who participates in self-disclosure and who does not? When and why do some students self-disclose while others do not?
5) What factors in the classroom encourage or suppress self-disclosure? That is, how much information is too much?
6) What boundaries exist to such an approach to teaching and learning, and how are these boundaries identified and negotiated?

In this interpretive, critical study, we employed multiple strategies for data collection. As noted by Bogden and Biklen (1998), not all methods "exhibit traits to an equal degree" and Shultz (2005) suggests using "multiple modes of inquiry" to gain a richer understanding of the essence of the experience or phenomena being studied. With this in mind, we used surveys (with both Likert scale and open-response items), semi-structured interviews, and researcher observations of classroom discourse and interaction to gather data to address our research questions. Our decision to approach our research with a sequential mixed methods design (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998) was a direct reflection of the complexities of our guiding questions and our understanding that both methods offered valuable insight into our research. In this "two-phase design" we began with our quantitative methods and moved later to our qualitative (Creswell, 1995).

Our initial phase of data collection (quantitative) began with the dissemination of an electronic e-mail survey to all students who had enrolled in the class within the past six years (2000-2006). Students responded voluntarily to the study and at their own discretion via a secure e-mail server at the university. In addition to several Likert scale response items (see Appendix One), the survey asked students to respond to the following open-ended questions:

1. Did you ever share a personal narrative or life experience in class or on the WebCT discussion board? Why or Why not? If you did share your autobiography, how do you feel about it now? Are you glad that you shared or do you with that you had not?
2. How did you feel when a professor, guest speaker, or graduate assistant self-disclosed personal information or autobiography in class?
3. How did you feel when a classmate self-disclosed information of a personal nature in class?

4. Please tell us about a particular event, film, reading, or topic in class that had a particularly powerful impact on you?

Each of these questions was analyzed using basic quantitative analysis (Likert items) as well as constant comparative method for emergent themes, patterns, and convergent responses (open-ended items). We present these findings more thoroughly in the following section of this paper.

In the next phase of our data collection, we conducted several one hour semi-structured interviews with survey respondents who agreed to be interviewed about their experiences in this course. This type of purposive sampling (self-selection) allowed students who had previously taken the course to be interviewed voluntarily. Initially, these interviews were conducted with individual students and were later conducted with pairs of students by one or two members of our research team. As Merriam (1998) notes, "the design of a qualitative study is emergent and flexible, responsive to the changing conditions of the study in progress" (p. 8). The research team chose to move from individual to partnered interviews in an effort to gather richer data. Our impression was that some of the events, critical moments, or important ideas were lost as some students were further beyond the course (in time/semesters) than others. These partnered interviews enabled the participants to interact with one another about their experiences in the course as well as with members of our research team. By being responsive to the needs of the study and of our participants, we gathered a more thorough understanding of students' experiences and perspectives on the course.

We employed narrative/discourse analysis to examine the data from these interviews and identified emergent themes from student responses. Finally, our personal reflections and participant observations of the course as professors, graduate assistants, student/researcher played an important role in our data collection and research. In keeping with our focus on lived experience and autobiography, we believe that our reflections and understandings of the experiences in the class are significant in the study.

Self Disclosure Survey Data Summary

Analysis of survey responses indicates that overall, students felt that self-disclosure contributed positively to their experiences in the course, and their personal growth and development as a young professional. Specifically, a summary of the Likert scale items revealed that the majority of students who responded felt that the classroom environment was "safe, open and affirming of all persons" and that the autobiographical narratives shared by instructors and guest speakers were beneficial to their learning and growth. More often than not, students felt that the personal narratives explored in class helped them to make the materials more personally relevant in addition to being important for their individual development as a teacher.

When asked about their level of comfort with self-disclosure and/or sharing of personal narratives, students indicated that this aspect of the course was not discomforting. Perhaps most poignant, students indicated in their responses that taking this course enhanced their personal lives and strengthened their relationships with other

people. This point is especially important when responses also indicate that this course urged most students to consider many issues they had never previously. When asked about their own future teaching, many students indicated that they would consider using autobiography in their own classrooms and sharing their own personal narratives with students.

Similarly, our analysis of open-ended response items indicates primarily positive dispositions about the use of autobiography, personal narrative, and self-disclosure in the course. Many students shared their own personal stories in the course and did so for various reasons. One student wrote, "Yes, I did share experiences because I believe people need to understand that issues don't just affect a small percentage of people, but they affect our world as a whole." In support of using and sharing personal narrative, another student responded, "It was always more interesting to me to hear how issues have directly affected a person's life than to just read about it or hear that it 'could' happen. I thought it was helpful." Both of these students speak to the powerful impact of using self-disclosure in the classroom.

While the number of students who responded to the survey represents only a small number of the students who completed the course over the seven-year span from which we collected data, their responses suggest a strikingly positive and supportive view of the use of self-disclosure and autobiography in this undergraduate course. Engaged with films, literature, music, and personal narrative, the students expressed very positive feelings about their experiences with instructors and peers vis-à-vis self-disclosure. While these responses demonstrate the potential of engaging curriculum as autobiographical text, we are careful to note that that students who felt less favorably about the course and/or self-disclosure may have chosen not to respond.

Self Disclosure Interview Data Analysis

After conducting interviews with students who agreed to participate, we analyzed transcriptions and identified recurring topics/themes. The topics/themes we identified are not mutually exclusive and content within one informs and seeps into others. These topics/themes emerged during the course of our analysis and merely offer a means to view the content of the responses we collected from the former students we interviewed. Within each subheading that follows, we introduce each topic/theme with a brief discussion, present student response data, and offer our analysis of how these responses support and respond to our research questions.

Film

The use of film played an important role in this course overall and students were engaged with media texts in most class meetings. We selected films based on their appropriateness for the audience, applicability to the topic being discussed, and the potential impact of their story. More often than not, the films we used in the course dealt explicitly with very difficult topics including racism, rape, war, and sexuality. The

instructor and facilitators believe strongly that using films to engage students in dialogue is a powerful pedagogical tool.

American History X, *Vukovar*, *Jim in Bold* and *A Lesson Before Dying* are films that use self-disclosure as a means of moving forward the storyline, but also serve as inspiration for students to share their own personal stories of racism, rape, prejudice, and other important course topics. Liz mentions *Jim in Bold* and *Vukovar* as important films in this respect.

> "I definitely remember sometimes talking with girls in my row more than necessarily the whole class so……definitely after *Vukovar* because I've been through a rape, and I talked about that with them cause one of them was like "well how could that and so on?" and I was like "well, until you go through it, you really don't know how you are going to react," and she was like "well, you can't say that" and I was like "yes, I can." (Liz, p. 2)

As she recalls, in *Jim in Bold*,

> "……I think they traveled across America and were interviewing umm, students and younger people who were homosexuals, and gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and they were getting a different perspective and bringing that in. It traced it through a guy named Jim, and I think he committed suicide, and umm they were reading a letter that he had written throughout the different stops, and it really opened a lot of people's eyes to some of the trials that homosexual people face in the public schools and private school systems in big towns and small towns." (Liz, p. 2)

This film made an impression on Liz and her future as a teacher. In her interview, Liz recalled some of her classmates'' statements in response to the film.

> "…oh well I'm going to be teaching in this little town and there's no people of alternative lifestyles, and there's no ethnic minorities," you know none of that. So seeing those films and seeing the background really inspired a lot of people too and myself obviously to consider, so this is how I'm going to teach and how am I going to approach this problem because you really have no idea what's coming at you in the public schools." (Liz, p. 2)

Liz continued,

> "…I didn't have a problem watching the film. But a lot of the students coming through seemed very taken aback, because this is such a conservative Christian school. So when you're an educator, you can't let your personal feelings control your educational bias towards those students, so I think that film was very effective in showing……and I think some of the self disclosure helps people say, "maybe I should rethink this". (Liz, p. 3)

Liz's narrative demonstrates both the personal and interpersonal impact of viewing films and engaging with self-disclosure in this course. Viewing these films helped Liz to

articulate clearly her own experiences to and for others as well as expanding her own notions of the students she might teach one day. In Liz's response, we detect a sense of what she believes her classmates might be struggling with and some insight into her own thought processes with regard to teaching.

Students' Personal Backgrounds, Communities and Hometown Experiences

Some students like Brittany, offered information about their personal backgrounds and hometown experiences as a foundation for their comments and the worldviews they held prior to taking the course. Brittany shared her experience living as a Morman who grew up in Utah and later moved to Texas in the eighth grade. Not unlike many of our students, Brittany and Tommi share their struggle of reconciling their past experiences with their present and future.

> "So many people come from small towns or they just come from a very conservative area, and not everything in there was about being more liberal or open minded, but it just gives people more perspective and background that it wouldn't have before, and it gave me additional background that people didn't have before……(Tommi, p. 3)

In some cases, students shared aspects of their own personal life stories that they had not previously been able to communicate to other people in other contexts.

> "I told (in class) the one thing that I really hadn't told anyone in years, about how I got raped; talked about that in class. That was the hardest thing I'd done in a long time." (Zolreiss, p. 1)

Students in this course are often working to confront many of their long-held beliefs with new and often uncomfortable information. In the words of the students above, we evidence of this struggle and about how this class provided a forum for exploring this struggle, both personally and professionally as well as implicitly and explicitly, in a safe, nurturing, but critical environment.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Most participants recalled sexual and gender identity as important topics of discussion. In our interview with Brittany, she discussed gay and lesbian issues as one of the "big issues" that she and her classmates had to confront and consider as part of the course.

> "…so that also was a big issue that I kind of had to come to terms with how I felt, cause then I think I've kind of been sheltered. Cause everyone says everyone gets along kind of thing and we weren't really exposed to that sort of thing…It just opened my eyes…" (Brittany, p. 2)

Similarly, Tommi noted that the discussions about sexual identity and gender identity in his class were based on revealing and uncovering misconceptions, particularly when they discussed "ambiguously gendered" people.

"…I'm going back to the ambiguously gendered thing because I've been thinking a lot about that for another class and been reflecting on it. I know a lot of people voiced their misconceptions about that or umm, also on homosexual parents, uhh, they disclosed their own prejudices, umm, and uhh, I think is really brave because, you know, saying you have something against that was hard to do especially in the class. (Tommi, pp. 1-2).

At the conservative institution in the southern United States where we teach and conducted this research, issues of gender identity and sexual orientation are "hot button" issues. Students very often have strong ideas and opinions regarding these topics/themes; nonetheless, Tommi and Brittany reveal that their (and their classmates) preconceptions were brought to the forefront of the conversation and addressed. It is likely that this is one of very few opportunities where this kind of active challenging of ideas and preconceptions occurs for our young teacher candidates.

Race

Some of the comments from our interview participants reveal implicitly how they are perhaps engaging critically with issues such as race and ethnicity for the first time. For example, in their reflections that include comments about race and ethnicity, the interview participants seem to struggle to find suitable terms to describe who they are talking about and the content of what they seek to share. Taylor explained:

"I remember one day, I mean we talked about race all through the class but that day, this one girl in the class had talked bout, basically how her family, she's black or African American, whatever you want to call it, she talked about her family kind of something I don't remember the word for, not really cheated people out of money, but they just did what they did to send her to college, and they did what they did to get by, and we talked about that and welfare and the government, I mean how parents do, and how her family did what they did to get her to college, and she's here, and how its not wrong, it's not right, but she's here and she's going to college, so. (Taylor, p. 2-3)

In response to *American History X*, Taylor also noted,

"…I just remember leaving that day and just crying and being so emotionally exhausted from those days of watching that film. I just felt like it would never get better. I mean, there's all these different races and prejudices, and it's just hate. And I just felt like giving up that day, but then that's exactly what everyone wants you to do is to give up and not have any hope. (Taylor, p. 5)

With a predominantly White student body reflective of the national trends in teacher demographics, our discussions of race and racism in class often became contentious. Students shared experiences of racism, discrimination and struggles with trying to understand the systemic nature of racism and its history in our country and educational system. Taylor expressed his frustration, sadness, and optimism about issues of race –

trying to understand the intricacies of race and culture and the impact that they have on teaching and learning.

Religion

As part of the course, we discuss religion, spirituality and faith in the context of what these topics/themes offer education, what role they play or should play in teaching, and how they impact each individual's outlook and future teaching. One participant, Brittany, shared information about her own religious background during our interview with her but noted that in class, "I don't think we gave it [religion] as much time as the other issues." (p. 11) During our interview with Brittany, she talked about her "Christian faith" and how the course required students to consider issues central to the course based on their religious beliefs.

> "Assuming a lot of girls in there and the fact that most teachers are women that are middle class and Christian. I think it was just kind of an understood thing being in the class. But, I think it's hard because Christianity looks at homosexuality as a sin, and so you kind of have to step back…and a lot of Christians…this is stereotyping…but, you know they just think it's a sin, so they judge the person instead of following their beliefs and just accepting everyone. So I think that was…that's something to me that opened my eyes. Cause you grow up a certain way in which homosexuality is wrong, cause that's what you're taught. But when you're like "well, they're people too," so it opened my eyes to that." (Brittany, p. 3)

One participant, Liz, recalled some students talking about the Bible.

> "I think the biggest one that stuck with me was the girls who were talking about sharing the Bible, sharing their love of Christ, and how this is such a great ministry, and the whole class she was sharing I was thinking, "Well not everyone's Christian, not everyone wants to be Christian, and if your're going to do that in the public schools you're going to alienate a good chunk of your students." (Liz, p. 3)

Liz and Brittany addressed some of the contradictions that many students face when trying to reconcile their religious/spiritual views with ideas/issues presented in the class. Given that the university where we conducted this study is overwhelmingly openly-Christian, these struggles tend to present themselves consistently. Francisca explains below how the class urged her to continue her own personal journey for religious and spiritual knowledge and understanding.

> "I think that most of my disclosure was about my religions confusion, in a way, and how I was trying to discover everything I could about every religion I could so that I could find something that I still haven't found, but that class assisted me in ways to research what I really do believe inside myself and just be honest I guess." (p. 1)

It is important to note here that the goal of the course is not to change student's religious or spiritual beliefs. Our goal is to present students with information that we feel will be valuable for their learning and growth as people and prospective teachers. We are aware that it is natural for new ideas to clash with students preconceptions/ideas about the way the world is and should be. We intend for this class to provide a space for such clashes to happen safely and to be resolved in such a way that students gain a better understanding of how their religion and spirituality may impact their teaching and future students.

Reconsidering Previous Beliefs

Brittany said that she observed several students in class, as well as herself, reconsider their previous beliefs. She specifically pointed to one student, a member of the Corps of Cadets engaged in military training—who changed during the course of the semester.

> …watching him from the beginning of the semester to the end of the semester…and he didn't wear Corps clothes as much, unless he had to. And he was a senior I think…it was just the way that his demeanor was different, and it seemed he was more accepting of the issues. At first he was kind of like, "well no" and all this stuff, and then I kind of think he opened his eyes. (Brittany, pp. 3-4)

Participants shared how the course helped them reconsider their previous beliefs about issues and how they would address these same issues with peers and their students differently as a result of this course.

> …take the issue of homosexuality and sexual orientation. If a kid came to me, I'd be all "you know, let me try to help you" kind of thing, instead of, but…the whole issue of understanding…I would like to think, "I can help you," "why can't I help you." But after this class, I kind of understand that I don't know exactly what they're going through …cause I think that's more of where I thought of a good teacher would be, someone that would just listen, and then "ok, thanks for talking, have a good day." (Brittany, p. 10)

Tommi noted his reflection on previously held beliefs in this way,

> I hate to say this because my dad would hate it……it's [the class] made me even more of a moderate than I was before. Cause I think before this class I learned more conservative, umm, but I'm definitely right between you know left and right, and my dad is more right and so, he's really serious that I'm turning into a Democrat. I don't know, its made me see the world, in as much as I thought of the world, in a much broader context, there was so much I didn't know, and it just shed some light on some topics I had no clue about……(Tommi, p. 2).

Brittany and Tommi's comments reflect the honest and difficult inner dialogues students face as a result of encountering the various issues and topics covered in the course. Their reflections on the course suggest a learning environment in which they were able to entertain other, perhaps new, ideas and views on social issues without fear of having to

relinquish their own long-standing beliefs. That said, Tommi's self-reflection points to the degree to which such in-class experiences can have larger influence on preconceptions and impact strongly held personal and family beliefs.

Teachers Talking About Issues with Students

Brittany noted that she learned how to talk to students about personal issues and situations that the teacher might not know about first hand. For example, in one film about AIDS, students take a field trip to a river and talk about living with the disease. Brittany commented that one of the students in the film points out that teachers should not say "I completely understand what you're going through" when the teacher has not gone through a similar experience. This brief moment in the film was enough for Brittany to realize the challenge of talking with students about personal issues. What might be equally important for pre-service teachers to learn is how to listen to students.

> So, you need to be able to provide a listening ear to your students so that they would be comfortable coming to you and talking about it. (Zolreiss, p. 2)

The daily routine for most teachers includes many non-instructional tasks and challenges, among which includes listening to students. Zolreiss and Brittany remind us of how little time in teacher preparation courses is spent on helping pre-service teachers to do just that—listen to students.

Class Climate

The survey participants made connections between the class climate and their comfort level to self-disclose. Participants recall the environment as conducive for sharing personal information and functioned as a space that allowed them to become emotional, either as a result of their own self-disclosure or the personal stories disclosed by other students. Brittany, Tommi, and Zolreiss, among others, provided comments in the interviews that support our perceptions of the positive and comfortable class climeate.

> So, cause I know there was a lot of people in there that did not talk in the very beginning, and then they started opening up and they felt very comfortable. And that……comfort was a big, big thing in there, and we were always very comfortable. It was very non-judgmental I felt. (Brittany, p. 6)

> Oh gosh, I talked a lot, so, I self disclosed all the time……I think we talked about tragedies and how it affects schools and stuff, I don't know, I pretty much talked about every topic we had. I probably said some things that, we did a lot of emotional stuff, I know one day I started crying in class, not because I was upset, but because it was an emotional topic. (Tommi, p. 1)

> I think it was everything, you guys being there, you sharing your stories, then we would all share our stories, and we all built a little family, I mean, it was like therapy two times a week, and we'd go and get together and talk and swap stories and it was like good friends getting together, and we just built trust with each other. (Zolreiss, p. 2)

Sometimes a comfortable class climate encourages the uncomfortable, necessary, and difficult topics and moments to surface.

> And you know it won't leave the room, because everyone says something that is so personal, and you know it was really hard for them to say it. And, so you just given the question and trying not to tell anyone about, because it's something you want to trust you with. It just taught me a huge lesson in human connection, in how you put a part of yourself in somebody else, and want to keep it there, and I helps you grow as well. (Franscisca, p. 1)

Tommi, among other students, noted that he did not have any regrets about what he either said or did not say in the class. Such an admission speaks highly of the comfortable classroom climate for the class.

> I basically disclosed a lot about, how past relationships, romantic relationships really kind of effect your umm, outlook on yourself and how you physically look at yourself and how it is hurtful or beneficial. I also disclosed on having friends with eating disorders and people who committed suicide and, people like, knowing homosexuals or lesbians and people who were bisexual. (Taylor, p. 1)

Based on these and other student comments, we are confident that the class offered students a comfortable, safe, and respectful context in which to self-disclose personal stories. Perhaps when these students become teachers they will work toward establishing a comfortable learning environment for their students.

On-line Discussion Board

The course provided an on-line discussion board (WebCT) for students to share their responses outside of class among a smaller group of classmates. The on-line discussion board offered some students a safe space in which to share personal information in a supportive setting. As we stated above, some participants noted that the university classroom was a comfortable environment in which to share personal information. As a complement to the in-class experience, this on-line context offered some students, like Brittany, an even more comfortable environment in which to self-disclose.

> Well, anything I would not have said in class I would have said on the discussion board. So……I don't really regret anything……like not saying anything at all. (Brittany, p. 6)

Although some students believed that the online discussion groups were too large they offered students a space and time for reflection outside of class. Brittany noted,

> …and then you could go to the discussion board after you had thought about things, because sometimes it takes a while to you know……or what we talked about on Monday, you could think about it for a couple of days and then you might talk about it on Wednesday. And I really think that sometimes two hours of time was not enough, and that you had to talk about it… one of the girls in our group shared a very, very personal issue, and something that you wouldn't want

to share with sixty people, even though it was very personal, you wouldn't want to do that, and so she talked about that on the discussion board. See, the class brought the issue up, but she didn't want to talk about it, but she needed support. So the discussion on the board gave her that. (Brittany, p. 8).

Whether intentional or not, the on-line discussion board offered students space and time for reflection about the issues and topics in the course. While such on-line discussion boards might not become part of these pre-service teachers' instructional experiences as K-12 educators, the use of them in this course should encourage these students to allow their students time to think about important issues within their own lives.

Overall Impact of the Class on Students and Their Future as a Teacher and Person

Students seemed to find value for the present and future in the information that their classmates self-disclosed. For example, Brittany noted,

> …I think that the whole class affected me to not just what I felt, but what other people thought legit. Every single day you would be opened up to something completely new, and you would either take from it what you feel……everyday you would just assess what I believe, and what did I learn? How could I take this with me? So I think not just what I said, but other people said, but just every issue in the class I keep a little bit with me, and I try to apply it. (Brittany, p. 5)

> So I'm still, six months later after the class, still assessing things. I think that this class makes you think, I just think it makes you think. So, I think ''m still assessing things because of this class… (Brittany p. 7)

In response to whether she thought self-disclosure was helpful, Brittany responded,

> …this class taught me to think before I talk, but still talk……I think that before I could say…… whatever was on my mind, but this class taught me to evaluate what was on my mind, and then say what was on my mind. (Brittany, pp. 8-9)

Taylor noted,

> I think umm, I still remember passing by people who were in my class and I'll know things about them, and I don't look down on them, but I'm just so thankful that they shared that with us and it just helps me along with understanding others better, and helping me being able to effectively communicate with others and, especially with people of different races and ethnicities and just different walks of life, because you're going to have to do that everywhere, be able to communicate and also like, I definitely think self disclosure helps within the class... So it just helps in building relationships and growing and helps in keeping open minds to different things and just understanding that people go through a log of crap and just like, it might just be somebody who's having a really crappy

> day, and maybe just cut them some slack cause you have no idea what''s going on in their lives. (Taylor, p. 2)

Through the process of listening to the personal self-disclosed stories of their classmates, pre-service teachers gain valuable insights into how to relate to other people. Zolreiss and Franscisca testify to the importance of developing strong relationships with other people and learning about the personal lives of others.

> And I've seen other people's stories and I can relate to other people on a more personal level, which has helped me grow up. I mean, I was immature when I went into the class, and now I'm more rounded, and kind of feel like a renaissance man. (Zolreiss, p. 5)

> Umm, I think without self disclosure I wouldn't have been as challenged as much in the course as I would have been, whether it be religiously, political beliefs, I mean even different things that I'd never thought about, and I just really wish that everyone … had to take this class, because I know how much I grew. (Taylor, p. 4)

> It makes my relationships with other people so much more productive and meaningful overall and I think that's the biggest thing I got out of this class……(Franscisca, p. 5)

This course provides a safe context for pre-service teachers to explore issues and broaden their preconceptions about a variety of issues. In short, the use of self disclosure in this course helps students to grow. The comments from Zolreiss, Taylor, Franscisca and many other similar comments from student interviews underscore the positive influence that the use of autobiography and self-disclosure have on the personal and professional growth and development of these pre-service teachers.

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