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CULTURE AT THE CORE:
THE IMPACT OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ON
TEACHER BELIEFS AND PRACTICE
A CQNNGEVKQP QHSEJ QNCTN| PCRGTU

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B.S., University of Louisville, 2005
M.ED., University of Louisville, 2008

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Education and Human Development of the
University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction

Department of Teaching and Learning
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May, 2015

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A Dissertation Approved on

April 14th, 2015

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Dr. Shelley Thomas

DEDICATION

To the many mothers and grandmothers that shaped me, too many to number: I love you
and I thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make his deeds known to all people!”
(1 Chronicles 16:8). I am so thankful for the grace, wisdom, and strength of God. This is His doing.

I am so grateful to my dear husband, Gary Overstreet, for all of his love and support, coaching and encouragement, comfort and pushing during this process. Additionally, I am thankful to the friends and loved ones who have supported me, commiserated with me, and distracted me along the way. I am especially indebted to my beloved Wama: Soon-to-be Dr. Lynn Reynolds; my besties: Brittainy Washington and Celiese Jackson; my support group: Soon-to-be Dr. Amy Vujaklija, Soon-to-be Dr. Lindsay Hughes, Soon-to-be Dr. Janey Andris, Dr. Kate Grindon, and Dr. Tammi Davis; my Frankfort crew: Kelly Clark, Teresa Rogers, Jackie Rogers, Sandra Hamon, Karen Kidwell, Christine Boatwright, the rest of my KDE family, and everyone I am forgetting.

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ABSTRACT

CULTURE AT THE CORE:

A COLLECTION OF SCHOLARLY PAPERS

Mikkaka Hardaway Overstreet

May 8, 2015

As the United States invests billions of dollars into teacher professional development, the underlying assumption is that learning leads to change and improvement in classroom practice. In truth, however, the process is not so simple. In this collection I explore what happens between new learning and application of that learning. This dissertation is a collection of scholarly papers examining teacher lives, culture, and learning from professional learning through implementation of learning in instructional practice. It examines the tensions between teacher beliefs, teacher learning and teacher practice and makes suggestions for systemic change. Within it, I contend that a focus on culture—of teachers and of students—is essential to improving the field of education. To that end, I present a new model of teacher learning that privileges culture and considers the complexities of teacher life and growth.

This dissertation is divided into five sections, including three papers intended for publication. The first section introduces the study and the format of the collection, providing an overarching scholarship including the shift from professional development to professional learning and from culturally relevant pedagogy to culturally sustaining

pedagogy, as well as an explanation of the qualitative methodology of the study. The second section is the first published paper, which uses auto-ethnography to examine the researcher's own beliefs, learning and practices through the lens of critical literacy and establishes the researcher's stance as a positive critical ethnographer. This piece introduces the reader to the multigenre essay and its usefulness for illuminating the complexities of teacher lives and perspectives. The third section examines one professional learning experience in the form of a summer university course. I analyze what made the experience an example of effective professional learning and its implications for designers, facilitators, and consumers of teacher professional development. This analysis leads to my posing a new model for teacher learning that takes into consideration the realities of teacher life, including the barriers they face within school communities and the factors that contribute to their ultimate acceptance or rejection of new learning. The third independently publishable paper comprises section four and follows one of the teachers from the summer learning experience; it is an ethnographic case study of her experience of learning and subsequent implementation while navigating the tensions between her new knowledge and the social conventions of schools and schooling—illustrating my model of teacher change. The fifth section closes the dissertation with a summary statement reflecting on all three works and how they address the research questions posed by this study.

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INTRODUCTION

How could they think six hours could prepare you to have a culturally diverse class? Like that just doesn't seem possible at all. Like I still feel like I've had- just a couple kids though, you know, that are from different types of cultures I still feel- I don't feel like I'm fully, you know, prepared. I think it takes a long time to get ready for something like that.

–Study Participant Leslie Miller, Interview 12/18/14

The United States of America is a rich and diverse nation. Students in the U.S. come from a wide range of ethnic, religious, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. According to U.S. Census Bureau 2010 data, the country's Hispanic population increased 43% between 2000 and 2010, while the White population increased a mere 1.2%. In that same time frame the American Indian and Alaska Native population increased by 8.6%, the Black population increased by 11%, the Asian population by 42.9%, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders by 29.6%, and people considering themselves two or more races increased by 29% (Bureau, 2010). In light of these changing demographics, teachers in the U.S. are faced with the challenges of supporting student achievement across cultural and language barriers and a multiplicity of perspectives. Though multicultural awareness has become a required component of most teacher preparation programs, there remains a gap between teacher knowledge and classroom practice (Dantas, 2007).

To meet the needs of such a diverse body of students, educators have to navigate delicate terrain to consider and value the sociocultural backgrounds, unique experiences, and varied perceptions of the families represented in their classrooms. Together, parents

and teachers create an interactive social system that affects children's attitudes, behaviors and achievement (Porter DeCusati & Johnson, 2004). When the school environment connects with the literacy practices of students' home lives, students from underrepresented populations may find themselves better able to create academically literate identities without feeling as if they must sacrifice their cultural identities to do so (Bloome, Katz, & Solsken, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1992).

Right now, "schools are being asked to educate the most diverse student body in our history to higher academic standards than ever before" (Darling-Hammond, 2008, p. 91). This is arguably one of the most scrutinized and reform-focused eras in the history of American education. In the 2010 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the U.S. Department of Education called for "challenging state-developed, college- and career-ready standards" (p.1), specifically mentioning the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English/language arts and mathematics, which were under development at that time (USDOE, 2010). (Hereafter the *common Core state Standards* will be referred to as "the CCSS", "the Common Core" or simply "the Standards".) For the first time the education community has developed a national set of standards in the two most emphasized content areas (English/language arts and mathematics) and the majority of states have adopted them. In many states, including mine, legislation has called for new standards in all subject areas, leading to developments such as the *Next Generation Science Standards* (States, 2013), the recently completed *National Core Arts Standards* (SEADAE, 2014), and the *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards* (NCSS, 2013). Politicians, national and state agencies, educational foundations and organizations, educators and

parents are all focused on preparing college-and-career ready students, equipped to meet the rigorous demands of our 21st century society (USDOE, 2010).

With such close attention on the educational advancement of our students, teachers are under a great deal of scrutiny. Many states are developing or redesigning teacher evaluations and, somewhat controversially, many are including student growth measures in these evaluations of teacher effectiveness (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010). In some cases, legislatures are considering linking evaluations to teacher pay or putting procedures into place for the removal of teachers identified as ineffective. Despite the fact that for most teachers the desire to be better at their craft is enough to motivate their continued professional growth, current trends are providing additional positive and negative incentives for engaging in professional learning.

Problem to be Studied/Purpose of the Project

Barriers have been placed between teachers and parents by tense political climates, a cycle of blame and a series of negative experiences on both sides. When parents are from cultural backgrounds that differ from the dominant culture, the barriers are fortified by tensions unique to the historical backgrounds of those involved. For example, historically oppressed peoples might resist what they see as assimilating to the dominant culture of their former oppressors (Bloome et al., 2000; Finn, 2009). Mending the partnership between schools and historically oppressed populations will require many measures, such as fostering respect for family and community literacy practices among teachers and administrators (Bloome et al., 2000), including more successful literacy models in teacher education programs and teacher professional learning experiences (Linek, Rasinski, & Harkins, 1997), encouraging and supporting collaborative networks

of teachers and parents across sociocultural backgrounds (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Moll, 1992), and shifting perceptions of parent roles among teachers, parents, administrators and the educational community at large (Pushor, 2012).

Many teachers do not feel equipped to meet the needs of diverse learners (Banks et al., 2005). To begin with, the U.S. teaching force is largely homogenous, with only about 16% of practicing teachers being people of color; conversely, over 40% of the student population is non-White. The majority of America's teachers are White, middle-class, and speak only English (Banks et al., 2005). Regardless of color, no teacher can share the cultural background of every student in her class. To be effective, teachers must develop sociocultural consciousness—an understanding that their perspectives, while neither “right” nor “wrong”, are not shared by others and that they must strive to see the world from the perspectives of students (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). As they grow in sociocultural consciousness, they must adjust their teaching practice accordingly and embrace culturally sustaining pedagogical practices (Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Paris, 2012; Sleeter, 2012). Accepting such consciousness and relevant practices requires teachers to be learners; they must approach their professional learning and growth with intention and dedication.

Consequently, teachers will need to learn to recognize what Luis Moll (1992) calls the “funds of knowledge” present in the families of diverse learners. This concept posits that “people are competent and have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge” (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, p. x). This knowledge and experience, as it concerns children from culturally and linguistically diverse

backgrounds, is not traditionally valued by schools. In order to meet the needs of *all* students, schools will have to change.

Teachers will need opportunities to continuously grow and learn in order to best serve our students and families. More importantly, they will need to apply their learning to their instructional practice. Overall, our teachers are not prepared for this challenge and our system of professional learning is not constructed to support their preparation. We need to educate our educators, but we are still learning what makes professional learning effective. Though teacher professional learning has been a topic of interest since at least the second half of the twentieth century, there are considerable gaps and flaws in the body of related research. Blank (2013) points out that “the field lacks well-designed, scientific studies of the relationship between teacher professional learning and the degree of improvement in subsequent student learning” (p. 51). The studies that exist mostly point out what is not effective, rely on limited or the wrong types of evidence, fail to connect teacher learning to student results, or are limited by brief duration and other mitigating factors (Blank, 2013; Borko, 2004; Guskey, 1997). In light of current widespread reform efforts, an emphasis on teacher professional learning is logical and necessary. This is an opportune time to study professional learning, particularly as it relates to such a crucial and enduring topic as culturally sustaining pedagogy. This study explores how teachers move from a professional learning experience centered on culturally sustaining teaching to implementing such teaching in their classrooms.

Research Questions

1. How can targeted professional learning focused on family literacy and culturally sustaining teaching impact teacher practice?

2. How can teachers design classroom practice that values the home environments of students?

Dissertation Structure: The Three-Paper Model

This dissertation utilizes a three-paper model. This model includes an introduction to the dissertation—complete with literature review and methodology—followed by three related but independently publishable academic papers, and concluded with a summary statement. The first paper is an autoethnographic essay examining the experience of the researcher through multiple lenses and simultaneously establishing the basis for her unique role and positionality. The second paper addresses the current shift in education from teacher professional development to professional learning, using an ethnographic case study of a professional learning experience to illustrate implications for effective teacher learning. The final paper delves more deeply into teacher implementation of new learning through an ethnographic case study of one teacher attempting to change her practice amid the tensions of the school environment.

Definition of Important Terms

Literacy

On their website, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) calls literacy a “human right, a tool of personal empowerment and a means for social and human development”, but has recognized the challenge of defining literacy, acknowledging that the definition of literacy is shrouded in political, social and economic theories (UNESCO, 2005). At its most basic level, literacy can be defined as the ability to read and write (and, perhaps, to speak and listen), but these skills

cannot be separated from the larger contexts of society that require individuals to use literacy as a means to communicate, interact, learn, and acquire power (Keefe & Copeland, 2011; Perry, 2012; UNESCO, 2005). Literacy can be seen as having four levels: (1) basal – the ability to sound out words and sentences and turn informal speech into writing; (2) functional – the ability to meet average daily reading and writing demands such as understanding the directions on household products or leaving a note for someone; (3) informational – the ability to use reading and writing as one does in school to understand information and relate it to others; and (4) powerful – the ability to evaluate, analyze, and synthesize what is read—the type of literacy that involves creativity and reason (Finn, 2009). Powerful literacy enables people to attain individual freedoms and a better understanding of the world (UNESCO, 2005). It is this level of literacy that we ultimately want for our students, particularly in the current climate, as I discuss further in subsequent sections.

Literacy is not limited to reading or writing in the traditional sense. Literacy in the 21st century reflects the social and technological advances of an increasingly digital age. Literacy is now multimodal, including diverse media such as gaming, podcasting, blogging, text messaging and the manipulation and consumption of images, sound, and other forms of language through our array of “real” and virtual social networks (Wohlwend, 2008). With today’s technology even our youngest learners can create digital texts replete with sounds, images and other powerful communicative tools (Husbye, Buchholz, Coggin, Powell, & Wohlwend, 2012). Today’s academic standards call for students to communicate effectively in written and oral formats, and to do so using diverse media including digital and visual tools (National Governors Association

Center for Best Practices [NGA Center] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010).

Family Literacy

Family literacy involves studying the diverse body of literacy practices in which our students and their families engage. These everyday practices are meaningful because they are rooted in the day-to-day realities and authentic purposes of life. This includes, but is not limited to, “direct parent-child interactions around literacy tasks: reading with and/or listening to children; talking about and giving and receiving support for homework and school concerns; engaging in other activities with children that involve literacy (such as cooking, writing notes, and so on)”, as well as parents reading and writing independently, families using literacy to solve problems within their homes and communities, families navigating the school system, and the development of home language and culture (Auerbach, 1989, p. 178). The term “parent” is used throughout this paper, but represents the diversity of caregivers who may be responsible for the lives of students. This might include grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings, step and/or foster families. “Family literacy” must be as diverse as the families of America, thus must include more than mothers and children (Compton-Lilly, Rogers, & Lewis, 2012).

Culturally Responsive Teaching/Culturally Relevant Pedagogy/Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

I often mistakenly refer to family literacy and culturally responsive teaching as if they are the same. While they are not, culturally responsive teaching does encompass family literacy. They are intertwined. You cannot have culturally responsive teaching without attending to the literate lives and home literacy practices of students. Family

defines much of the culture of a person, thus if you are going to be responsive to a person's culture in your literacy instruction, you must have an awareness of, respect for, and understanding of the literacy practices of their family (Auerbach, 1989). Culturally responsive teaching is bigger than family literacy; however family literacy is at the heart of such teaching.

Culturally responsive teaching involves creating a space in which school and home spaces overlap meaningfully and learning is connected to the real lives of students. Students' home languages, cultures and ways of knowing are authenticated and valued alongside school practices. Such teaching "utilize[s] students' culture as a vehicle for learning", capitalizing on the skills, knowledge and interests of the students as a bridge to school learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 161). As in critical literacy, the goal is one of empowerment and of questioning, analyzing and opposing inequities maintained by the status quo.

I have chosen to move beyond culturally responsive or culturally relevant teaching to new terminology introduced by Paris (2012). Paris sought to encompass the invaluable foundational work thus far in this area, but to propose language that explicitly moved beyond an attitude of tolerance or sensitivity, to one of active perpetuity and promotion. In his words,

Culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling. In the face of current policies and practices that have the explicit goal of creating a monocultural and monolingual society, research and practice need equally explicit resistances that embrace cultural pluralism and cultural equality. (Paris, 2012, p. 93)

Professional Learning

Previously called “staff development” or “professional development”, the idea of teacher learning has evolved from the notion of top-down, one-time, delivery of information to teachers, into the idea of professional learning—a new name that reflects new thinking on how and why teachers learn. My state department of education defines professional learning (PL) on its website as “a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to increase student achievement that strengthens and improves educators’ effectiveness in meeting individual, team, school, school district, and state goals” (KDE, 2014b). According to the National Staff Development Council,

Effective professional development is intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice; focuses on the teaching and learning of specific academic content; is connected to other school initiatives; and builds strong working relationships among teachers (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009, p. 5).

Basic Assumptions

This study is grounded in several complimentary theories including critical theory. Further discussion is to follow, but a few other points must be made prior to this discussion:

1. I do not position myself above or below practicing teachers, but embrace the need for a unified corps of educators with a common goal of providing a high-quality educational experience for all students. This positionality requires that I consider myself actively involved in, and accountable for, facilitating change in this profession. This work is further personalized by my use of ethnographic methods, which so heavily emphasize narrative as a form of discovery and expression. I reject that the conventions of academic writing must serve as “the bars of a prison which force users into a mindless, robotic conformity” (Hyland, 2012, p. 196).

Consequently, I employ the first-person pronoun throughout to remind myself and my readers of my constantly stepping in and out of the research, negotiating my identity, and intentionally pushing against barriers that separate research and practice (Hyland, 2012). (For more on the use of the first-person pronoun in academic writing see Tang & John (1999), Hyland (2002), and Williams (2006).)

2. I believe that teaching is a political act. Therefore, educators must recognize how minority and impoverished populations have historically been placed at a disadvantage and how those systems of inequality have fundamentally shaped the nature of our society, including our schools. We must be aware of the implications of what and how we teach and seek to counteract systemic disparities.
3. I reject deficit perspectives of families, but in so doing I have to be intentional in not projecting deficits onto teachers. Though realistic, I am an optimist and thrive on the belief that education is a gift that holds promise and, together, we can make the profession live up to its promise for each child. I have the audacity to hope (Obama, 2006). I was an “at-risk” child who, with the help of amazing teachers, has become a successful adult. I believe in the power of teachers. I believe in the power of relationships.
4. I believe that professional learning is essential. Teachers are professionals and should both behave and be treated as such. They should be trusted to make decisions in their classrooms, be consulted on educational matters, and be respected by those they work with and by society as a whole (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002). They must be

transparent in sharing their craft with all stakeholders—meaning they must know why they do what they do in the classroom. They should view themselves as lifelong learners and take to heart the responsibilities that such learning entails. This includes continued study, seeking professional reading and learning opportunities, and bridging the divide between research and practice. Serious attention to professional learning will ensure teachers can explain and defend their teaching choices, as well as share their practice with colleagues. Teachers learn and grow through collaboration with other professionals (Borko, 2004; Garet, Porter, & Desimone, 2001; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). The world changes daily and—as we prepare students for success in an ever-changing world—we must, ourselves, be willing to change, to grow, to continuously improve our practice.

5. My personal and professional journey has instilled in me a belief in the necessity of culturally relevant pedagogy, and more so, culturally sustaining pedagogy. (For more on my positionality see Overstreet (2014), section two of this dissertation.) Ladson-Billings (1995) defines culturally relevant pedagogy as “pedagogy of opposition” that is built on collective empowerment (p. 160). Culturally relevant pedagogy requires that students experience academic successes, develop cultural competence and “develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 160). Students build self-esteem and engage in personally meaningful learning, but are still held to rigorous academic standards (in this case the CCSS). They do not just feel good about who they are, they learn and they think critically.

6. I believe the CCSS is an opportunity for this kind of learning. Teachers can use culturally sustaining pedagogy to inspire the kind of students the authors of the Standards describe:

Students are engaged and open-minded—but discerning—readers and listeners. They work diligently to understand precisely what an author or speaker is saying, but they also question an author’s or speaker’s assumptions and premises and assess the veracity of claims and the soundness of reasoning.

Students appreciate that the twenty-first-century classroom and workplace are settings in which people from often widely divergent cultures and who represent diverse experiences and perspectives must learn and work together. Students actively seek to understand other perspectives and cultures through reading and listening, and they are able to communicate effectively with people of varied backgrounds. They evaluate other points of view critically and constructively. Through reading great classic and contemporary works of literature representative of a variety of periods, cultures, and worldviews, students can vicariously inhabit worlds and have experiences much different than their own. (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA Center] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010)

7. I recognize the seeming irony of my position as an educator advocating for pedagogical practices that value diversity, while supporting the implementation of a common set of standards that have been widely criticized by respected members of my field. It is my contention, however, that the standards provide rigorous expectations for students that will prepare them for future success, but allow for teachers to meet the needs of a diverse student body. Though this is not always explicitly apparent in the body of the CCSS, I argue that it is implicit and even encouraged. I position myself as a positive critical theorist; I believe we can support all of our students within the parameters defined for us by our standards.

If teachers are going to create these 21st century classrooms that prepare students to meet the rigorous standards of a diverse workplace and world, they will need opportunities for deep professional learning and growth. Changes in teacher beliefs and practice will require changes in teacher learning. According to Darling-Hammond (2008),

Acquiring this sophisticated knowledge and developing a practice that is different from what teachers themselves experienced as students requires learning opportunities for teachers that are more powerful than simply reading and talking about new pedagogical ideas (Ball & Cohen, 1999). Teachers learn best by studying, doing, and reflecting; by collaborating with other teachers; by looking closely at students and their work; and by sharing what they see. (Darling-Hammond, 2008, p. 93)

The teachers selected for this study had such an opportunity. In phase one of this study, as a part of a graduate literacy course, eleven practicing or pre-service teachers had the opportunity to wrestle with new ideas and old assumptions, to read and reflect on relevant literature, to engage in deep discussions of culture with people different from themselves, to work with their colleagues on multiple related projects and to openly share their learning. Two of these teachers went further, inviting me as a researcher into their classrooms after the summer learning experience. They attempted to apply their learning, reflected with me, and studied their practice. Their stories, though few, shed light on aspects of professional learning and teacher practice that cannot be captured by generalized facts and figures. Their experiences give us a unique and much-needed look at the intricacies and complexities of teacher learning and practice, offering us invaluable insight into how we can design and implement professional learning and systemic change that transforms teacher beliefs and practices for better student learning experiences.

Review of the Literature

Historical Background

In recent years, one of the most talked about topics in education has been the adoption and implementation of the country's first attempt at national standards—the CCSS. The CCSS were developed through a “state-led” process starting in 2009, were completed in June of 2010, and began to be adopted by states in 2011 (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). Kentucky was the first state to adopt the Standards and, later, the first to assess them through statewide standardized testing. Today, 44 states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) have adopted the Common Core (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). With such widespread adoption it is particularly crucial that teachers understand how to best meet their students' needs in the era of the Common Core.

The Standards are named to represent their inclusion of the “core” of what all students in America must know in order to be “college-and-career ready”. The United States Department of Education (2010) asserts that all students should graduate from high school fully prepared for the opportunities before them, whether they choose to proceed to a two or four-year institution or to move directly into careers. In the 2010 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the U.S. DOE called for “challenging state-developed, college- and career-ready standards” (p.1), specifically mentioning the CCSS, which were under development at that time (USDOE, 2010). The CCSS include college-and-career anchor standards, which “define general, cross-disciplinary literacy expectations that must be met for students to be prepared to enter college and workforce training programs ready to succeed” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010).

Mastery of these standards would indicate a student had attained the minimum skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college or on a career pathway.

The Standards continue to be a major source of controversy. Debates on the Common Core center around many issues such as their authorship, their purpose, and what is (and is not) included (McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013; Toscano, 2013; Wexler, 2014). With legal and testing pressures, regardless of which side they stand on related to this issue, teachers must learn to coexist with the CCSS. So how can they meet the varied needs of a culturally and linguistically diverse population using one common set of standards? Debates around the Standards will undoubtedly rage on for years to come—especially as we attempt to assess attainment of these lofty new standards—but no matter how long and loud the debates rage, teachers are still first and foremost responsible for their students’ success. Educators must learn to teach *all* students within the parameters of these new standards (Brooks & Dietz, 2013).

Teachers generally work hard and try their best to educate students while dealing with multiple outside entities that question the teachers’ intelligence, commitment, and motives (Finn, 2009). Media and political attacks on education abound; headlines on failing test scores and tougher standards for teachers get front page attention, but positive stories on good teachers rarely even make the feature page (Zemelman, Daniels, & Bizar, 1999). Teaching in the 21st century is a very top-down profession; teachers often must operate within mandated curricula, prescribed texts and basal programs, and on a school or district-wide schedule as mandated by pacing guides. Their students are heavily tested and evaluated by standardized assessments that are publicly used to rate their schools. Schools are making irrational and misguided decisions in the name of the Common Core

(many of them not even supported by the Standards), such as banning the reading of novels or requiring that English teachers use only informational texts (Brooks & Dietz, 2013; Vecellio, 2013). Teachers are often almost powerless to do anything but comply with decisions that simply are not instructionally sound. Under such extreme pressure and tight restrictions, how are teachers to make decisions that deviate from the prescribed curriculum in order to meet the needs of a diverse student body?

Some teachers attribute this to the public's general lack of faith in schools and feel that their creativity, professionalism and choice as teachers is restricted by testing and other bureaucratic intervention (Finn, 2009). Likewise, parents in contemporary society have been mistakenly portrayed as indifferent to or uninvolved in literacy practices when, in reality, there is abundant literacy activity taking place in family and community settings (Auerbach, 1989; Bauman & Wasserman, 2010; Bloome et al., 2000; Rogers, 2002). Many parents express that they want better lives for their children than the lives they themselves have led and they see education as the key to ensuring their children realize these dreams (Auerbach, 1989; Neuman, Caperelli, & Kee, 1998). Despite the fact that both teachers and parents generally want what is best for children, the cycle of blame sometimes perpetuated by negative media attention, varied perceptions of roles and responsibilities, and undesirable experiences on both sides can place barriers between parents and teachers that make building positive partnerships a difficult task (Finn, 2009; Horvat et al., 2003; Linek et al., 1997; Zemelman et al., 1999).

Critical Literacy

Literacy cannot be separated from its historical and political contexts, from the ways it has been and is used to give and take away power from individuals and groups

(Finn, 2009; Keefe & Copeland, 2011; Perry, 2012; UNESCO, 2005). Teaching literacy is a political act— whether teachers choose to view themselves as conservative, liberal or even neutral (Finn, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1992). Historically and across international contexts, literacy has been essential to developing nations as a vehicle for raising consciousness and liberating peoples (Ladson-Billings, 1992). Paulo Freire defined literacy as “a process of consciousness, which means taking the printed word, connecting it to the world, and then using that for purposes of empowerment” (Freire, Freire, & Macedo, 2000). UNESCO (2005) goes so far as to tout the motto “Literacy as Freedom”, embracing the social aspect of literacy and asserting that creating literate environments is the key to eradicating poverty and ensuring sustainable development, peace, and democracy.

Impacted largely by Paulo Freire’s work with the poor and uneducated faction of the Brazilian population, Critical Literacy Theory contends that traditional schooling perpetuates inequity (Freire & Macedo, 2004). Freire (2000) maintains that there exists a “pedagogy of the oppressed”—a system in which lower class learners are given inadequate educational opportunities, leaving them ill-prepared for careers that would allow them to rise up and join the ranks of the middle class (Auerbach, 1989; Freire, 2000; Morrow & Tracey, 2012). In essence, this mirrors the familiar construct of the haves and the have-nots; the system operates in such a way that the status quo is maintained (Finn, 2009). Critical Literacy Theory does not accuse teachers of consciously dooming their students to failure; however it suggests that educators recognize how minority and impoverished populations have historically been placed at a disadvantage (Compton-Lilly et al., 2012; Finn, 2009; Morrow & Tracey, 2012) and contends that those systems of inequality have

fundamentally shaped the nature of our society, including our schools (Auerbach, 1989; Morrow & Tracey, 2012). According to Freire, education is never neutral; it either liberates or domesticates (Finn, 2009; Freire, 2000). Thus, teaching is a political act. Culturally responsive teachers must recognize themselves as political beings (Ladson-Billings, 1992).

Disadvantaged families engage in regular literacy practices, but these practices are often mismatched with the nature of literacy in traditional school settings, which tend to be more aligned to middle class families (Auerbach, 1989; Bauman & Wasserman, 2010; Duke & Purcell-Gates, 2003; Finn, 2009; Horvat et al., 2003; Rogers, 2002). Mainstream classrooms are not typically designed to showcase or validate the knowledge and skills that children from lower income families do possess—an omission that marginalizes them and decreases their likelihood of success (Auerbach, 1989; Compton-Lilly et al., 2012; Dudley-Marling, 2009; Horvat et al., 2003; Morrow & Tracey, 2012). In Critical Literacy Theory, literacy is viewed as power and, thus, an unequal distribution of educational opportunity is an unequal distribution of power (Finn, 2009; Morrow & Tracey, 2012). Critical Literacy Theory seeks to empower families from disadvantaged populations with the “cultural capital” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) that their middle class counterparts already possess (Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Rogers, 2002). The concept of cultural capital draws on the previously discussed idea that traditional schooling is not designed in such a way that it encompasses the social and cultural practices of lower class families. Instead, schools draw more on the cultural and social resources—including linguistic structures, authority patterns, and types of curricula—of the middle class, meaning that children from middle class families come to school at an

advantage as they are already more familiar with the social structures (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Morrow & Tracey, 2012; Rogers, 2002). A Critical Literacy perspective requires questioning and changing such structures, making learners and their families aware of these structures and the power of literacy, encouraging home-school partnerships, and valuing the funds of knowledge inherent in their social and cultural practices (Auerbach, 1989; Compton-Lilly et al., 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Lareau, 1987; Morrow & Tracey, 2012; Rogers, 2002).

Family Literacy and Parent-Teacher Relationships

From the ideal point of view, parents and teachers have much in common, in that both, supposedly, wish things to occur for the best interests of the child; but, in fact, parents and teachers usually live in a condition of mutual distrust and enmity. Both wish the child well but it is such a different kind of well that conflict must inevitably arise over it. The fact seems to be that parents and teachers are natural enemies, predestined each for the discomfiture of the other. The chasm is frequently covered over, for neither parents nor teachers wish to admit to themselves the uncomfortable implications of their animosity, but on occasion it can make itself clear enough. (Waller, 1961, p. 68), *as quoted in the course syllabus*

Family literacy programs have been established, in many cases, to combat poverty, reduce unemployment, and address discrepancies in achievement between minority children and their counterparts in the majority population; unfortunately, researchers have often failed to consider the underlying epistemologies that shape these goals and related programs (Auerbach, 1989; Compton-Lilly et al., 2012). Approaches to family literacy, especially as related to families from diverse backgrounds, have frequently been plagued by dichotomies such as literate vs. illiterate, strengths vs. deficits, and matches vs. mismatches between home and school when, in truth, family

literacy is much more complex than such narrow perspectives allow (Compton-Lilly et al., 2012). Further, these programs are often established with a perspective of pity in which participants are seen as victims rather than intellectual beings capable of empowerment despite historical and political disadvantages (Auerbach, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1992). Such approaches overlook the complexities that accompany home-school relationships and limit the production of solutions and strategies to best serve schools and families (Compton-Lilly et al., 2012).

Parent involvement increases student literacy achievement, yet educators struggle to bridge the gap between home and school (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Linek et al., 1997). Parents from minority backgrounds and parents from low socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to be involved in education and have nonexistent or difficult relationships with schools (Horvat et al., 2003; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Further, teachers and parents have varied perspectives of the roles of parents in education (Linek et al., 1997; Pushor, 2012) and educators tend to operate from what Auerbach (1989) calls a “deficit hypothesis” in dealing with families, which assumes that parents lack the skills needed to promote school success in their children and that schools must “fix” them (Auerbach, 1989; Compton-Lilly et al., 2012; Dudley-Marling, 2009; Edwards, 1992). This perspective, however, places the burden of fostering literacy on schools alone—a daunting task. The best classroom with the best teacher cannot counteract an intergenerational cycle of schooled literacy challenges without support (Auerbach, 1989; Morrow, Paratore, Gaber, Harrison, & Tracey, 1993; Porter, 2008). Valuing the contributions of students’ culture and literacy practices, as well as empowering parents as partners leads to increased parent involvement and greater student achievement (Bauman

& Wasserman, 2010; Dudley-Marling, 2009; Duke & Purcell-Gates, 2003; Edwards, 1992; Graham, McNamara, & VanLankveld, 2011; Horvat et al., 2003; Moll, 1992).

Arguments for and against the deficit model approach to family literacy may, like many arguments about education, stem from differing views on the purpose and role of education (Zemelman et al., 1999). These beliefs, like most in education, are based in political perspectives (although the positions are not as dichotomized as we believe, with most people somewhere on the spectrum between “liberal” and “conservative”). While more conservative perspectives view school as a place to create a competent labor force with common understandings that prepare students to be productive members of society socialized to the status quo, more liberal perspectives view school as a place to foster creative, analytical, and individual thinkers and problem-solvers that *question* the status quo (Lazar, Edwards, & McMillion, 2012; Zemelman et al., 1999). Educating students to be productive members of society is an important goal of schools, but society is an ever-changing entity that is more diverse than it once was; in a pluralistic society such as this, we must carefully consider the purpose of schooling (Paris, 2012). Whichever perspective teachers hold—conservative, liberal, or somewhere in between—they still must teach *all* of the students in their classrooms and, based on the persistence of achievement gaps in our country, they are not reaching students from racially and economically diverse backgrounds (Buehl, 2011). In overlooking the “funds of knowledge”—as Moll (1992) calls the ample resources connected to the real lives of families from diverse backgrounds—and focusing on deficits, educators privilege the knowledge of families from middle class backgrounds, marginalizing groups of students that may, as a result,

disengage from school and fail to attain the literacy skills they need to succeed (Buehl, 2011; Lazar et al., 2012; Moll, 1992).

While educators have begun to value multiculturalism and move away from a deficit model in approaches to family literacy, we must still work to redefine our middle class views of rightness if we are truly to build partnerships with all families (Linek et al., 1997). Teachers, who often feel that they are a part of a system over which they have no control (Finn, 2009), must recognize the flaws in the system and take control of what aspects they can, namely how they relate to the families represented in their own classrooms. By connecting to family and community in the classroom, teachers can open up opportunities for students to meld home and school literacy practices into a hybrid set of practices that allow students acceptance in both their home and school environments (Bloome et al., 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1992).

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Ladson-Billings (1995) asserts *that culturally relevant or culturally responsive pedagogy is “just good teaching”* and so much more. It aims to empower diverse students through “academic success, cultural affiliation, and personal efficacy” (Gay, 2010, p. 127). Backed by sociocultural theory, culturally relevant pedagogy is a “pedagogy of opposition” that counteracts deficit perspectives often applied to diverse cultures, offering guidance to teachers who seek to improve the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic backgrounds. As acknowledged by sociocultural theory, the disjointedness between home and school cultures for impoverished students and students of color greatly contributes to the lower

achievement of these groups; thus, culturally responsive teaching should recognize and reduce such barriers by better aligning the home and school lives of students. It is “a means for unleashing the higher learning potentials of ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their academic and psychosocial abilities (Gay, 2010, p. 21).

Paris (2012) encompasses the research on culturally responsive or relevant teaching into his idea of culturally sustaining pedagogy, but goes beyond it to advocate for the active maintenance of varied cultures and heritages. Rather than embracing the idea of students being successful by assimilating into the patterns of mainstream cultures, culturally sustaining teaching requires that we “support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (Paris, 2012, p. 95). This paradigm rejects the old adage of the American melting pot in favor of a salad—each ingredient retains its own independent flavor, but together provides a meal rich in taste and nutrients. The whole is better because of the richness and uniqueness of each part.

Similar to critical pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy is committed to collective empowerment, which includes developing and maintaining cultural competence, ensuring that students from marginalized populations experience academic success, and promoting a critical engagement with the world and others that enables students and teachers to challenge the status quo (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Minority students are classroom leaders, but also part of a community unified in its aim to effect change and promote equity in school and the world at large. Culturally sustaining pedagogy extends beyond incorporating holidays or colloquialisms into perfunctory lessons; it requires intentional and explicit attention across grade levels and subject areas,

characterizing student learning experiences at all times (Gay, 2010; Irvine, 2010). In such classrooms, students do not feel as though they have to reject who they are and assimilate into the school culture in order to be successful because their teachers connect to family and community in the classroom, legitimating students' real-life experience into the official curriculum and opening up opportunities for students to meld home and school literacy practices into a hybrid set of practices that allow them acceptance in both their home and school environments (Bloome et al., 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1992).

Critical Theory and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in the Era of the Common Core State Standards

Despite my critical stance, I (in contrast to most critical theorists) do not oppose the Common Core State Standards. I recognize within them great educational opportunities—opportunities for teacher voice and choice, for student voice and choice, for deeper thinking and analysis, for culturally sustaining teaching and critical literacy, and opportunities to showcase teacher effectiveness. These standards provide teachers a chance to use our professional expertise in novel ways to meet the needs of a new generation of learners.

While the Standards define the basics of what students need to know, they do not tell teachers *how* to teach (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). The introduction to the Standards explain,

By emphasizing required achievements, the Standards leave room for teachers, curriculum developers, and states to determine how those goals should be reached and what additional topics should be addressed. Thus, the Standards do not mandate such things as a particular writing process or the full range of metacognitive strategies that students may need to monitor and direct their

thinking and learning. Teachers are thus free to provide students with whatever tools and knowledge their professional judgment and experience identify as most helpful for meeting the goals set out in the Standards. (p.4)

The Standards are the floor, not the ceiling. However, often what is printed on the page of policy and curriculum documents is what is privileged; thus, teachers will have to be intentional in their instructional decisions if the literate lives of all children are to be valued. The goals of the Standards can be met using culturally relevant content; students can “master the Standards within a framework of critical, empowering, and engaging lessons” (Grindon, 2014, p. 251). Within such a framework, students read the world in addition to reading the word (Freire, 2004). Grindon (2014) explains practically:

When students read closely (Standard 1), analyze a text (Standard 1), analyze an author’s word choice (Standard 4), and determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text (Standard 6), they acknowledge that these words, choices, and positions are not neutral. When critical literacy is a “way of being” (Vasquez, 2010) in a classroom, these Standards allow students to read the world (Freire, 2004). The Standards do not demand a teaching framework of critical literacy, nor do they prohibit one. Rather, they are an opportunity for teachers to explore how literacy can engage and empower students. (p. 253)

The CCSS call for students to think about the things they read and hear, to analyze the intent of the authors and speakers, and to argue their own ideas while considering the viewpoints of others. Students are expected to read widely and to conduct research for a variety of purposes. They are asked to express themselves orally, in writing, and through multimedia formats. Under these lofty expectations and with the guidance of a thoughtful teacher, our students are set to achieve in exciting new ways.

In this study teachers explored how to integrate the literate lives of students into their instruction while meeting the goals of the CCSS. They sought to find ways to allow students to coexist between their home and school literacy practices—to create a “third space” (Bhabha, 1990) in which they can dwell with their students, combining good teacher judgment with the funds of knowledge that they bring with them in ways congruent with the accepted practices of school (Bhabha, 1990; Moll, 1992). They engaged critically with the CCSS and made intentional decisions about how to address them, as well as how to invite students to “read the world” while they read, write, speak and listen in their classrooms (Freire, 2004). Participating teachers were encouraged to question their instructional decisions—from the texts they chose to the skills and strategies they emphasized—through the lens of critical literacy theory.

Professional Learning

Research on professional learning has more often focused on what does not work, rather than offering examples and suggestions for what *does* positively impact teacher, and consequently, student learning (Guskey, 1997). Further, the research on professional learning indicates that teachers receive widely varied professional learning experiences with equally varied outcomes. Across the literature, descriptions of high-quality professional learning include common characteristics such as teacher collaboration and leadership, a focus on content and how students learn, connections to high standards, and extended duration and follow-up (Desimone et al., 2002). Too often, however, the “support and training [teachers] receive is episodic, myopic, and often meaningless” and further “the time and opportunities essential to intense, sustained professional

development with regular follow-up and reinforcement are simply not in place in most contexts” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, pp. 2, 27).

Nonetheless, the research that we do have indicates investment in teacher professional learning is worthwhile. A 2008 study of professional learning communities (PLCs) indicated that well-developed PLCs have a positive impact on both teaching practice and student achievement (Vescio et al., 2008). Guskey (1986) found that teachers themselves related becoming “better teachers” to improved student outcomes. Many studies do show significant positive effects of high-quality professional development on teacher learning and student outcomes (Blank, 2013).

The reform-driven climate of education is perfect for studying the profession and the professionals within it. As we seek to meet the lofty goals set forth today, it is essential that we study teacher learning and practice and ensure that each hour and each dime dedicated to teacher professional learning is well spent. We must be careful, however, to bridge the gap between research and practice and promote professional learning that is effective, rather than striving to meet superficial criteria (e.g. a certain number of hours or a certain number of meetings each week). If we keep our focus on student outcomes and plan accordingly, this era can turn into one of profound evolution in teacher and student learning.

Today’s teachers face an exceptional combination of challenges. In this era of teacher evaluation, media scrutiny, rigorous standards and vigorous testing, it is easy to lose sight of the larger purposes of education. It is easy to lose sight of the children and, moreover, the child—the unique individual with his own experiences, wonderings, needs, and dreams. It is easy to do, but we cannot do it. This is an opportunity to remember him.

This is an opportunity to recognize the gifts and trials, the promise and the obstacles, the hope and destruction that is in our hands each day. This is an opportunity to remember why we do what we do.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

–Nelson Mandela

Methodology

Restatement of Purpose

The goal of this research is to strengthen teacher learning experiences and to foster classroom communities in which the home lives of children are valued and utilized to strengthen literacy learning across contexts: home, school, and community. This study consists of two phases. In phase one, I observed practicing and pre-service teachers throughout a professional learning experience (a university course) focused on understanding a community different from their own, or understanding their own students more deeply, and making instructional connections. After the course was complete, I initiated phase two, during which I followed two teachers into their classrooms to observe the impact of their learning on their instructional practice.

Using qualitative tools such as observations, interviews, reflection, and artifact collection, this study employs ethnographic methods to focus on teacher perspectives and practices at the beginning of, during, and after the professional learning experience. Moreover, a primary focus is on gathering examples of *how* teacher learning is integrated into instructional practice. Teacher lives are the primary focus of this study, but through their shared experiences and other data, I explore the intersection of teacher lives and

practice within the context of new standards, new guidelines for professional learning, and an ever-changing student population.

Description of Participants

Participants for this study were selected via purposive sampling, as it required teachers who would engage in a professional learning experience related to culturally relevant pedagogy. Participants in this study included practicing and pre-service teachers enrolled in a graduate literacy course in the summer of 2014. Teachers in the course were all graduate students, though some progressed from their bachelor's to master's degree programs without obtaining teaching jobs first (thus, they were still termed pre-service). Of the eleven teachers enrolled in the course, five were practitioners, one had just been hired and would start teaching in the 2014-15 school year, one served in a district-level technology resource role, one had classroom experience but was taking a break from teaching while pursuing her PhD, and three had no teaching experience nor had they yet been offered teaching positions (of those last three, two had experience as substitute teachers). All eleven teachers were women, ranging in experience from zero to sixteen years, and all but one was White. (Coincidentally, the single Black teacher did not return after the first night of the course. She never officially dropped the class, but no longer participated in any way, citing lack of childcare as a hindrance to completion.)

Teachers selected for the second phase of the study had to have classrooms of their own in the fall of 2014. Though four volunteered to participate, two were selected based on their availability, their expressed eagerness to continue with the study, and the enthusiasm and seriousness with which they approached the professional learning experience. I considered two the maximum number of participants to yield noteworthy

findings while being true to the depth of investigation necessary to engage in ethnographic research. Selected teachers included a first grade and a fourth grade teacher who were the primary instructors in general classroom settings.

Research Design

	Research Questions	Data to Be Collected
Phase 1: Professional Learning Experience (Summer 2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does targeted professional learning focused on family literacy and culturally responsive teaching impact teacher practice? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course documents (syllabus, assignments, PowerPoint presentations, required readings, etc.) • Observations • Student work (assignments, Blackboard discussion posts, etc.)
Phase 2: Study of Teacher Lives and Practice (Fall 2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does targeted professional learning focused on family literacy and culturally responsive teaching impact teacher practice? • How can teachers design classroom practice that values the home environments of students? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher interviews • Classroom observations • Teacher reflections • Classroom artifacts (lesson plans, student work, etc.)
Data Analysis and Writing (Spring 2015)		
Dissertation Completion and Defense (Summer 2015)		

Figure 1. Timeline and Data Sources by Research Question

Using ethnographic methods I studied the impact of a professional learning experience centered on culturally responsive pedagogy on teacher practice. I did so through the lens of culture—the culture of the professional learning experience, the culture of the teacher participants, the culture of the students they serve and the culture I, as the researcher, bring to the research. Culture is central to the work; to be an ethnographic study the lens of culture must be used (Merriam, 2009, p. 29).

To gather data, I immersed myself in the sites as a participant observer (Merriam, 2009). I observed teachers during a graduate literacy course, analyzing not only their beliefs and perspectives, but the quality and design of the professional learning experience. The course met face-to-face twice a week and once a week online throughout the month of July and its purpose (according to the syllabus) is as follows:

This course explores the current knowledge base and theoretical frameworks used to explain differential achievement rates between students of diverse backgrounds (ethnic, racial, socio-economic, and linguistic) and students of the mainstream culture. In doing so, students will examine their own assumptions considering students' race, class, and culture and students will study major concepts (racism, classism, etc.) to explore multiple perspectives. The course will extend the principles of teaching and learning to include a new perspective on teaching students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. A major focus of the course will be to prepare P-12 classroom teachers for working effectively with diverse student populations in literacy learning using culturally responsive instructional practices.

Teachers' thinking throughout the course was assessed using multiple measures including observations, reflections and other classroom documents (assignments, discussion board posts, etc.), and interviews. Teachers who expressed a desire to study their practice and agreed to participate in this study were interviewed further about how and why their beliefs evolved and were followed into their classrooms during the fall semester to see how they implemented new learning in their classrooms. I studied their practice using teacher reflections (after each observation), observations (several times per month yielding 4-6 observations per teacher), and teacher interviews. Relevant artifacts were also collected including lesson plans, photographs, discussion board posts, classroom artifacts, and summer course documents.

Observations

Initial observations were conducted during each class throughout the summer course. During this time I built preliminary understandings on the mindsets of the group of teachers and the nature of the professional learning experience offered by the course. Observations were rarely recorded, but I took extensive fieldnotes. These notes, in tandem with other artifacts, provided insight into teacher beliefs and perspectives.

In the fall, to move beyond teacher beliefs into teacher practice, I used artifacts, observations, and the guidance of the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE) Five Standards for Effective Pedagogy and Learning (Appendix D). Participating teachers were observed in their classrooms several times a month from October through December. These observations were guided by the CREDE Standards, which

represent recommendations on which the literature is in agreement, across all cultural, racial, and linguistic groups in the United States, all age levels, and all subject matters. Thus, they express the principles of effective pedagogy for all students. Even for mainstream students, the Standards describe the ideal conditions for instruction; but for students at-risk of educational failure, effective classroom implementation of the Standards is vital.

Using the indicators provided in the CREDE Standards, I looked for implementation of culturally sustaining pedagogical practices. The indicators include joint productive activity, language development, contextualization, challenging activities and instructional conversation. (See Appendix D for further information on each indicator.) After the observation, the teacher was asked to reflect on the observation and my notes using an observation/reflection protocol (Appendix A). This built-in member checking allowed for teachers to present their own perspectives on the observed

instruction. Further, as Howard (2003) asserts, such critical reflection on their own practice is essential to the development of culturally relevant teaching and teachers. The teacher and I often engaged in a follow-up discussion of the observation as well, again reinforcing the partnership between all involved and the respect I have professed to believe teachers deserve.

Interviews

After the course and prior to initial observations, phase two participants were interviewed about their practice and their learning in the course (see Appendix C). Teachers were interviewed again mid-semester in the form of a “classroom walk” (a guided tour of their classrooms during which they explained their thinking and decision-making process surrounding the classroom setup). I interviewed the teachers a final time in December at the conclusion of my data collection period. During this closing interview, teachers were given copies of their own collected quotes from the summer discussion board and asked to reflect on their thinking now that time had passed and they were back in the classroom (see Appendices E and F). Informal interviews often took place in the form of discussions after each month’s observations/reflections. Though these informal conversations were not recorded or transcribed, I added notes to my research journal as soon as possible afterwards in an attempt to capture the most pertinent information to the study. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and one-on-one with each teacher, though there were often interruptions by other school personnel. Limitations of time and instructional demands must be considered as these were often conducted before and after school.

Role of the Researcher

“We are complicit in the world we study. Being in this world, we need to remake ourselves as well as offer up research understandings that could lead to a better world” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 61). Embedded in this methodology is the notion of contextualized perception of the researchers, participants, and audience. I cannot separate myself from the research, nor can I pretend my presence has no impact (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In accordance with the research presented in the literature review herein, I view my role from an advocacy/participatory lens. Much as I seek to ultimately empower parents, rather than “fix” them, I seek to empower teachers. Just as parents, teachers have broad funds of knowledge that can and should inform educational research. To seek to fix teachers or to tell them how to teach is as presumptuous and flawed as the deficit model thinking I reject. It is my belief that any community has within it the capacity to solve its own problems. It is my goal in this study to collaborate *with* teachers to discover the answers to my research questions. My knowledge of research methodology and practice will aid them in this discovery as their pedagogical knowledge and experience will inform and push my work forward. Though I will be careful of any bias and threats to validity posed by such close work with participants, the traditional clinical distance between researcher and subject cannot be maintained. I reject structures that put one in a position of holding power and knowledge over others, thus I cannot further marginalize my participants by conducting research *on* them rather than *with* them. I hope to be a voice for teachers as much as a voice for diverse families. With these teachers I attempted to forge partnerships such as those I seek to help foster between teachers and the families they serve.

Data Analysis

In order to fully understand this professional learning experience and analyze its results, I used qualitative methods, including grounded theory. Grounded theory uses procedures for data collection and analysis that include continual data sampling, coding, categorizing and comparing in order to generate theory about social phenomena (Glesne, 2011, p. 21). Using methods from grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), I looked for emergent themes across data sets. Recurring themes were analyzed and compared across various data sources in order to triangulate my findings and locate confirming and disconfirming evidence for any conclusions. NVivo software was used to code qualitative data.

During phase one, observation notes and artifacts were analyzed for teacher beliefs and perspectives as well as for the quality of the professional learning experience. In addition to identifying themes as they emerged, codes were identified based on the literature on teacher professional learning including, but not limited to: teacher collaboration and leadership, a focus on content and how students learn, connections to high standards, and extended duration and follow-up (Desimone et al., 2002). Further, since the instructor of the summer course identified chapter one of *Reframing Sociocultural Research on Literacy: Identity, Agency, and Power* by Lewis, Enciso and Moje (2007) as crucial to her teaching philosophy, codes were pulled from the text to clarify alignment between her teaching philosophy and teaching practice. These codes included 1) bridge between everyday knowledge and content learning, 2) skills for navigating cultural and discursive communities and 3) challenging and reshaping curriculum. Though I had a great deal of information at that point, it was still disorganized and unclear, prompting me to return to my research questions for guidance.

During this process, I decided that phase one of my study would best serve to answer my first research question: How can targeted professional learning focused on family literacy and culturally sustaining teaching impact practice? Thus, I returned to my analysis seeking to discover what these data could tell me about teacher learning. By reassessing my analysis through the lens of this question, I was able to narrow the codes and categorize them into three main themes: 1) how teachers learn, 2) how teachers learn to work with diverse learners, and 3) barriers to learning or application of learning.

Open coding was also employed during the first layer of analysis of the phase two data. Emergent codes discovered during that time included over thirty codes related to teacher beliefs and practices in the classroom. Also during phase two, codes to gauge teacher perceptions, beliefs, and practices related to culture included, but were not limited to the CREDE standards: joint productive activity, language development, contextualization, challenging activities and instructional conversation. (Definitions of each theme can be found in Appendix D.) Most noticeable during analysis was a tension between expressed beliefs and observable practices. It was this tension that led to the multigenre essay approach used in the section four paper written about phase two.

Ethnography is a methodology that uses observation, interview, and extended stays “in the field” in an attempt to analyze the experiences of people—to tell their stories (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). “Ethnography means learning from people”, while constantly questioning your own assumptions and perceptions (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 67). Ethnography takes us beyond the numbers, to the story of what is happening in a given setting and situation. It is characterized by “thick description”; “what the ethnographer is in fact faced with... is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures,

many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render” (Geertz, 1994, p. 217). Ethnography holds great promise for furthering research on the complexities of teacher professional learning, which has heretofore been dominated by quantitative methodologies (Guskey, 1997). Stories represent one view of the truth; because each person brings different experience into a new situation, the lived reality varies (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Universal truth perhaps lies not in one story but in how they hang together. So, stories are reasoned knowledge, but no one story holds the whole truth. Further, we live in a society that has perpetuated and advocated some truths and stories at the expense of others. This study seeks to add to this collective truth, carefully including stories that may have previously been marginalized.

The research that informs PL policy is nearly completely quantitative, presumably in an effort to gather generalizable evidence of effective PL experiences (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Guskey (1997) argues that this approach involves averaging across cases, causing valuable information to be thrown out and variables to be greatly simplified, resulting in a loss of key factors that might contribute to student learning. He suggests combining quantitative and qualitative measures to more clearly understand the factors that make PL effective.

Guskey’s methodological assertions are supported by other studies, such as Vescio, Ross and Adams’ 2008 review of the literature on the impact of professional learning communities (PLCs). Though they found that PLCs appeared to have a positive impact on teacher practice, the authors lamented that many of the studies reviewed “failed to describe specific changes in pedagogy” or move beyond “self-reports of

positive impact” (Vescio et al., 2008, p. 84). Here again is an area in which the “thick description” characteristic of ethnography could contribute to our understanding of how PL impacts teacher practice and student learning.

The recursive nature of ethnography also would seemingly complement the cyclical nature of effective PL. According to Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999), “ethnographers need to engage in several layers of analysis as they go along, because doing so helps them to make sense of what they are observing” (p. 149). This approach to research allows us to consider variables that we may not initially anticipate, to be open to collecting additional applicable data sources and to allow our research to be shaped by the phenomena we seek to study, rather than vice versa. This is imperative since teacher change is a cyclical process (Guskey, 2002) and since effective PL is not an event, but a continuous and ongoing process of learning, applying that learning, and assessing outcomes and subsequent needs (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Though qualitative methodologies like ethnography involve difficult and time-consuming work (Guskey, 1997), the information yielded by their use could fill some of the many gaps in the literature on teacher professional learning.

Learning cannot be called learning at all if it does not affect how we think, act and feel (Bain, 2004). If we cannot practice our learning and apply it to our own lives and schema, we do not internalize new learning (Piaget, 1976). Since changes in teacher attitudes and beliefs, and thus long-term changes in practice, are contingent on their opportunities to implement the practices in their classrooms and see student results, the professional learning experience would not be complete without follow-up coaching and support (Blank, 2013; Bolster, 1983; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Guskey, 1986,

2002). Further, the majority of studies evaluating the effectiveness of professional learning experiences identify a longer duration as a key element of the most effective PL events (Blank, 2013; Desimone et al., 2002; Garet et al., 2001). Thus, my spending extended time with the teachers in the fall having them reflect on and discuss my observations of their practice likely increased the impact of the professional learning experience and the retention of related knowledge and skills. Teacher reflection is a critical element of effective professional learning and has been touted as a means for incorporating issues of equity and social justice into teacher thinking and practice (Howard, 2003).

Having teachers consider their own classrooms was an intentional decision; research suggests that teachers' own classrooms are powerful contexts for their learning (Borko, 2004). According to Darling-Hammond (2008), "teachers learn best by studying, doing, and reflecting". This study follows that model: teachers studied culturally relevant pedagogy over the summer and "did" culturally relevant teaching in the fall, reflecting on that teaching with me throughout. They simultaneously engaged in training and practice, learning by doing in such a way that knowledge and praxis reinforced one another (Gay, 2010).

FROM AT-RISK TO ADVOCATE: ONE TEACHER'S JOURNEY

An Auto-Ethnography

Overview

The first paper in this collection is an auto-ethnography that was first published in volume 1, number 2 of the *Journal of Family Diversity in Education*. Using ethnographic methods, I studied my experiences as a child, teacher and a scholar through the lens of critical literacy. In doing so, I confronted challenges that students, families, and teachers face in the spaces where their worlds overlap. I explored the implications of my experience as it relates to teaching and learning, family literacy, and the current political climate. Audiences for this paper include state, district and school administrators, and the teachers working each day to reach the diverse needs of students and families. Reprinted with permission.

The Scholar

“I want to earn my doctorate for reasons that are both personal and professional. I grew up in an environment with which many of our students can connect. My home life was inconsistent at best, but terrifying and painful at its worst points. However, school was nothing like home. I loved the consistency of it, the safety of it, and the hope I found there. It quickly became my refuge. Thanks to the support of many quality educators I was able to beat the odds and grow into a successful adult. They are the reason I was the first in my family to graduate college and the only to attempt a master’s degree. They are the reason I am here today.”

–Excerpt from my admissions essay for the PhD program

When I started my PhD program, I was fresh out of the classroom. I’d taught in a political climate (that still endures today), in which teachers were often the target of blame for the failures of our educational system. This experience, coupled with those of my childhood, brought me into the program with an idea of studying family literacy. I soon learned, however, that my aims were grounded in a “deficit perspective” of families and a chip on my shoulder.

Current trends, societal expectations and political moves have placed teachers in a difficult situation without respect for their efforts and with misguided and inappropriate pressures and expectations. Media and political attacks on education abound: headlines on failing test scores and tougher standards for teachers get front page attention, but positive stories on good teachers rarely even make the feature page (Zemelman et al., 1999). Some teachers attribute this to the public’s general lack of faith in schools and feel that their creativity, professionalism, and choice as teachers is restricted by testing and other bureaucratic intervention (Finn, 2009).

I was one of these teachers, and I was angry. I didn't know how deeply that anger lived, but I felt it. On the surface, I was outraged as a teacher. I had busted my butt for five years—staying late, lugging work home, spending my own money, waking up at 2 a.m. worried about other people's children—and I was angry that efforts like mine were so unappreciated by the general public. It certainly wasn't like I'd gone into teaching for the prestige and because I thought I'd have hordes of adoring fans; few of us become teachers for any other reason than we are called to do it. So it wasn't that I needed a public pat on the back, or an award, or any sort of recognition. What I needed, what we all needed, was a break! We needed a break from the politicians using Michelle-Rhee-like tough tactics to show their constituents that they care about education. We needed a break from administrators making decisions driven by test scores and not kids. We needed a break from the constant media onslaught focusing on our failing schools, our bad teachers, and our system that can't compete with the rest of the world.

I found my anger directed at the only people I could reach: parents. Why wasn't the media lamenting poor parenting? Why weren't politicians threatening mass revocation of parental rights? Why was nobody holding the parents accountable for their part in this situation? I came face-to-face with the results of poor parenting everyday (or so I thought). I saw students underfed, uncleaned, and seemingly unloved. I saw students who lived in front of the television and video games, whose parents changed phone numbers more than I changed clothes, who wore new Jordans and other name brand clothes, but who could barely read. Where were their parents' priorities, and how was I supposed to "fix" the messes their parents were making?

I realize now that my surface anger as a teacher was influenced by my own experiences as a child. I viewed my own upbringing from what Auerbach (1989) deems a deficit perspective. The deficit model assumes that since low-income families often do not engage in the literacy practices most valued by schools that they are somehow “lacking,” and it is the necessity of schools to fill those voids, often without consideration of the families’ particular cultural values, needs, and experiences (Auerbach, 1989; Compton-Lilly et al., 2012; Dudley-Marling, 2009; Edwards, 1992; Morrow & Tracey, 2012). As the only child of a young, single mother, I was at one time or another every child I described above—hungry, poorly dressed, well-dressed but neglected and on and on. I saw myself reflected in these children, and I was as angry at their parents as I was at my own.

As a scholar stepping outside myself, however, I recognize that this approach is not fair. If my mother was so horrible and my childhood was so lacking, how am I here? I sit in my home office facing a wall containing four college degrees (a Bachelor’s and a Master’s each for my husband and I), constructing this essay on one of our four computers. I own this home. I have a rewarding and well-paying career. I am pursuing my PhD and will have completed all criteria for completion short of the dissertation within the next few months—less than six months after my thirtieth birthday. Should an at-risk child, with hardly a chance of graduating high school (Britner, Balcazar, Blechman, Blinn-Pike, & Larose, 2006), have achieved all of this? Again, if my childhood was so lacking, *how am I here?*

Glesne (2011) suggests that researchers must not try and suppress their feelings, but must use them to re-examine their own perceptions and to generate new questions.

Contradictions like the ones mentioned above provide opportunities to challenge our individual and collective thinking. As I struggle to reconcile societal perceptions with my personal, professional, and scholarly experiences, I am led to ask myself the following questions:

- What does my experience tell us about students and families?
- What lessons can teachers and researchers take away from my story?

Methodology

Looking at my own experience required me to be able to move in and out of myself to examine what time and acquired knowledge has taught me about the events in my life. I found that the best way to do so was to divide into multiple selves: my child self, my teacher self, and my scholarly self. The resulting format is a multigenre research paper, which “meld[s] facts, interpretation and imagination” (Romano, 1991). Separately, each piece reads as its own genre (Romano, 1995)—the child and the teacher somewhat like memoirs and the scholar like a traditional research paper—but once interwoven, they collectively tell of a journey to my particular positionality.

Many scholars have used autoethnography as a method of exploring complex issues through the lens of their own experience. Ethnography is a methodology that uses observation, interview, and extended stays “in the field” in an attempt to analyze the experiences of people—to tell their stories (Stephen L. Schensul, Jean J. Schensul, & Margaret Diane LeCompte, 1999). Ethnography requires constantly questioning your own assumptions and perceptions (Glesne, 2011). Autoethnography refocuses the direction of traditional ethnography so that the researcher is looking inward, exploring a

research question through the lens of her own experience, "prob[ing] the tensions that arise in the interaction between educational research and lived experience" (Majors, 2001, p. 129). An author might consider how instances reaching back as far as childhood affect their interpretations (Cintron, 1997; Majors, 2001), or might analyze how experiences related to one topic (e.g., teaching children from impoverished backgrounds) shape their current practice. Majors explains how autoethnographic approaches force the researcher to recognize the dominance of experience over our perceptions:

Through it, the researcher comes to realize (1) that she is shaped by that which begins long before she ever even enters the field and (2) that she is altered by self-interrogations that persist long after mental pictures fade. What I discovered was that to this initial site I brought to my gaze my own life history and personal experiences which directly affected the research. (p. 116-117)

Embedded in this methodology is the notion of contextualized perception of researchers, participants, and audience. I cannot separate myself from my research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). At the very least, most researchers routinely acknowledge their role in the research—confronting their biases and assumptions in an attempt to honestly present their interpretations of the data (Glesne, 2011). The researcher's experience cannot be silenced; "it is impossible (or if not impossible, then deliberately self-deceptive) as researcher to stay silent or to present a kind of perfect, ideological, inquiring, moralizing self" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 61-62). Autoethnography, then, is an outgrowth of this necessity. Since the researcher cannot remove herself from the research, then she must include herself in the analysis and interpretation. There is no universally correct way of seeing the world (Van Maanen, 1988). I contend this applies to the world of the self—my interpretation of the experiences as I lived them differs from the

way I see things in retrospect, as this narrative will show (Cintron, 1997; Spradley, 1979). Distance and new knowledge allow me to problematize my experiences and make meaning in ways I have heretofore been unable to. Neither interpretation is wrong. Nor is it wrong that I make meaning through the lens of my own perspectives and beliefs. The truth is shaped by the teller or, as Cintron (1997) asserts, “Knowledge is autobiographical”(p.8).

“We are complicit in the world we study. Being in this world, we need to remake ourselves as well as offer up research understandings that could lead to a better world” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 61). I consider myself a *critical ethnographer*, which I loosely define as an ethnographer who considers the world, as Merriam (2009) defines a critical stance, “in terms of conflict and oppression” while seeking to “critique and change society.” A critical ethnographer must be altruistic in nature, possessing a desire to “change the world by helping others” (Stephen L. Schensul et al., 1999). Scrutinizing my own experience through autoethnographic methods allows me to remake myself as a part of the better world I seek to help create.

This desire, coupled with my own experience, has led me to reject deficit perspectives of families, children, and teachers. I believe in education. I believe in children and families. I believe in teachers. As a critical ethnographer, however, believing is not enough; thus, analyzing and redefining my own experience is my first step in attempting to change society (Merriam, 2009; Winn & Behizadeh, 2011). Winn and Behizadeh contend that critical literacy is “essential to the redefining of the self and the transformation of oppressive social structures” (p. 149). In this paper I explore my experiences as a child, a teacher, and a researcher, combing these happenings for the

connections that have brought me to this time and place. I redefine my childhood, rejecting society's perceptions of me and children like me. I add to that what I discovered as a teacher and how my experience shaped my practice. Perhaps what I have learned, what I have seen and done, will empower other educators to reject the status quo by thinking and seeing their work, their students, and their communities in new ways. Though this seems a lofty goal, and ethnographic work will undoubtedly be flawed (Van Maanen, 1988), it is worth the attempt for, as Cintron (1997) says,

This way of imagining ethnography—as something that tries so hard to be exact and complete but remains always a failed expectation and a target for the sweetness of critique—is very humbling, yet it contains, finally, so very much that is worthwhile. (p. 232)

The Child

When I was in elementary school my mother, undoubtedly perplexed by what she considered non-childlike behavior, would constantly force me to “go outside and play”. Obediently, I would put on my play shoes and leave the house. Once outside, however, I would find a quiet place and retrieve a book from its hiding place under my shirt or stuffed down my pants. I read voraciously amidst the distant sounds of other children laughing as they chased one another, squealing as they raced their bicycles down the street.

My friends were in Terabithia, Narnia, and Middle Earth. Unlike the Black faces all around me, the other girls in my babysitter's club were White and Asian with interests beyond our block and, like me, they dressed and talked funny. And if they were ever hungry or cold or painfully abused, it was usually for some greater cause and would all be okay in the end.

The Teacher

I started my teaching career in January of 2006, a fresh December graduate who had expected to continue my job with an educational theatre company until at least the fall when schools would be hiring in droves. To my surprise, however, my college advisor knew the principal at a "good school" in my city's affluent East End of town. A 2nd grade teacher was retiring over the Christmas break and the principal was hoping for a replacement rather than a long-term substitute.

This principal—who I'll just call Principal K—was a shrewd businesswoman who knew how to get her way. If she hired someone mid-year, she could avoid the list of tenured transfers that would come her way in the fall and, thus, have control over her school's hiring. How she avoided the "last hired, first fired" rule in the fall when she did receive that list, I'll never know. Regardless, I started my career at Stepford Elementary, excited and hopeful and as green as could be.

I took over halfway through a school year for Ms. M—a teacher who had been in the same classroom for twenty years, and in the school itself for her entire career. They threw her a parade, put her name out on their marquee (the first time any teacher's name appeared there), and generally made a big to-do about saying goodbye to her. I certainly had big shoes to fill.

Here I was, quite literally fresh out of college, and I was walking into one of the best elementary schools in the state (according to test score rankings) as a replacement for one of its oldest and most beloved teachers. The children had spent the first half of the school year becoming accustomed to the way she did things and their parents were watching me closely. Would they expect me to keep things the way they were? Was I supposed to try and emulate Ms. M's teaching style?

We couldn't have been more opposite. Besides the considerable difference in age and experience, Ms. M just fit the East End in a way I didn't. Middle class and blonde with adorable blonde grandchildren, Ms. M was from the community and could talk home improvement projects and Bunco. I was young and Black, with an afro and a newly rented one bedroom apartment nearby. I'd grown up in the parts of town these people avoided completely and I had never even heard of Bunco. I felt out of place and fraudulent.

It wasn't just because I didn't fit that I felt uncomfortable; it was also because I didn't feel as though I should have been trying to fit. I had gotten into education to help kids like me—poor, minority, classified as “at-risk”—yet here I was in the center of WASP country, working with children whose mothers visited them at lunch wearing stiletto heels and cardigans and bearing fresh sushi. Unlike my colleagues in poorer neighborhoods, I had no shortage of volunteers to help with parties, come on field trips, or to just come in a few days a week to help out with whatever I needed. Though most of my kids had no trouble buying everything on the lengthy second grade supply list, I still had a triple digit annual allowance from the PTA for additional classroom expenses, while other teachers spent their own money to buy the most basic supplies like pencils and copy paper.

I felt like a sellout.

The Scholar

The start of my teaching career was not an easy one. I felt so out of place in the affluent, predominately White school that my first-year teacher anxiety was exponentially compounded. I'd harbored lofty goals of helping children like me—children who were “at-risk” or, in other words, poor, possibly mistreated or abused, and from a minority background. Yet, here I was, far away from the part of town where those children were concentrated.

Back then I didn't have the language to discuss critical literacy, but the theory was at the heart of who I was as a teacher. I knew that children like me came to school at a disadvantage, but I couldn't quite articulate the factors involved in that condition. I knew it was my job to help the students overcome that disadvantage, but again, I didn't know what doing so would entail. I did know, however, that the majority of students I worked with were the opposite of me and the other at-risk kids. The very structure of school was designed for the success of most of my students (Lareau, 1987).

I was supposed to be helping students who, by dint of their cultural background and socioeconomic status, lacked power. In Critical Literacy Theory, literacy is viewed as power, and, thus, an unequal distribution of educational opportunity is an unequal distribution of power (Finn, 2009; Morrow & Tracey, 2012). Through what Ladson-Billings (1995) calls “culturally relevant teaching” students are empowered “intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 382). Critical Literacy Theory seeks to empower families from disadvantaged populations with the “cultural capital” that their middle class counterparts already possess (Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Rogers, 2002). The concept of cultural capital draws on the idea that traditional schooling is not designed in

such a way that it encompasses the social and cultural practices of lower class families. Instead, schools draw more on the cultural and social resources—including linguistic structures, authority patterns, and types of curricula—of the middle class, meaning that children from middle class families come to school at an advantage as they are already more familiar with the social structures (Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Morrow & Tracey, 2012; Rogers, 2002). A Critical Literacy perspective requires questioning and changing such structures, making learners and their families aware of these structures and the power of literacy, encouraging home-school partnerships, and valuing the funds of knowledge inherent in their social and cultural practices (Auerbach, 1989; Compton-Lilly et al., 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Lareau, 1987; Morrow & Tracey, 2012; Rogers, 2002).

Despite the hopelessness that society would have assigned to my position, there were people in my life who did not hold to that perception of my future. These caring adults pushed me, encouraged me, supported me, guided me, and believed in me. These caring adults included my mother, grandmothers, aunts and uncles, friends' parents and, most often, teachers. In spite of the weight of poverty and neglect in my life, the influence of a caring adult was still able to break down barriers. Their support strengthened my resilience—my ability to “achiev[e] positive outcomes despite risk” (J. E. Brooks, 2006, p. 69). This is in keeping with resiliency literature which suggests that caring adult relationships can serve as protective factors for at-risk youths (Brooks, 2006; Laursen & Birmingham, 2003). In a study of middle-school students, researchers found that “perceived caring from teachers predicted motivational outcomes, even when students' current levels of psychological distress and beliefs about personal control, as

well as previous (6th grade) motivation and performance, were taken into account” (Wentzel, 1997). I met my most caring teacher in sixth grade and she changed my life. Her name was Ms. Cissell.

She is who I wanted to be when I grew up. She is why I became a teacher. I feared that by teaching in an affluent school, I'd betrayed those intentions.

The Child

I entered sixth grade an awkward runt of a girl with bad hair and poor fashion sense. Even the required uniforms couldn't hide the fact that I was poor and clearly behind the times. At what would typically be called a “rough” middle school, I was soon heartily bullied and afraid to go to gym class.

My knight in shining armor soon intervened. Miss Cissell, my English teacher, noticed that I was often ill on Mondays (coincidentally, the day I had gym). Miss Cissell noticed a lot of things. She noticed when I was haggard from staying up all night hoping my mother would finally come home or when I was reluctant to leave school at the end of the day to return to an empty house and its empty refrigerator. Though she didn't know the reasons behind the feelings she sensed, she took a particular interest in me. Soon, I was out of gym and serving as her aide during that

period—a treat usually reserved for eighth graders. I spent these periods writing, mostly—a practice she nurtured and encouraged. She even paired me up with local author Roberta Simpson Brown (of *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark*), who gave me feedback on my work and my newfound love of short scary stories.

Sometimes, Miss Cissell would take me home with her. I remember marveling at the seeming miles and miles of open land around her home. There I touched a horse for the first time, read her my stories, and ate my weight in spaghetti. I loved this sweet little blonde pixie of a woman. I love her still.

Soon, I cashed in on these stories. I got a reputation for being smart and, by doing the homework of the more popular kids, I was spared further persecution. I was even somewhat cool by association.

The Teacher

It seemed that unlike Miss Cissell, I had chosen the easy route. As I looked across my classroom of well-cared for, mostly White students, I thought of all the children out there like me. Children who needed me to understand them, to push them, to show them it could all be overcome. However, it didn't take long for me to realize that, as usual, God placed me exactly where I needed to be. These children needed to see me as well. They needed to experience what I had to offer. And I

needed to experience the challenges of working at the opposite end of the spectrum. I needed to see the full picture of our educational system to truly understand the disparities and contradictions that would drive me to continue my education and to push back against a system that is fundamentally flawed. Had I been in a classroom of children like me, would I ever have fully known what the system was denying us? Would I have ever been able to pull myself away from the immediate needs in front of me in order to look at things on a larger scale? Would I now be working to change things beyond the world of my classroom?

Stepford Elementary also housed a small group of children who were more like me. These children, especially, made me feel more like I was where I was supposed to be. Because our city itself is still very much racially segregated, the school system created a bussing system to integrate our schools. What that meant at Stepford was that a small contingent of poor Black kids was bussed in from the other side of town—most from the same housing projects. A long, sleepy bus ride each morning brought them to a school many of their parents had never seen or heard of. Due to lack of reliable transportation, many of the parents never would see the school, or even know where it was until a member of the school staff picked them up for parent-teacher conferences. (And since some parents didn't take that opportunity, the mystery often remained.)

These kids tumbled into the school, bringing their rambunctious personalities and neighborhood rivalries with them, and most of the teachers—despite their best efforts and intentions—just couldn't identify with them. The children got into trouble regularly, struggled academically, and stuck together as a raucous and sassy clique. Teachers tried in vain to keep them apart because of the trouble they usually got into together, but when I looked into classrooms full of White faces with one or two brown faces planted here and there, I couldn't blame them for seeking one another out on every opportunity.

I certainly don't believe that my blackness inherently made me more equipped to teach or support these children. I do think, however, that seeing themselves in the teaching staff made a difference. Further, there were simply aspects of their lives with which I was more familiar than my White counterparts because of my life experiences as a Black woman.

When the only Black boy in my class got in trouble on the playground for referring to a White classmate as "my nigga", I understood the use of the phrase in certain parts of the Black community when referring to one's circle of friends. More importantly, I wasn't made so uncomfortable by the forbidden word that I was afraid to discuss it frankly with the boys, as my politically correct colleagues feared to do. Rather than fussing at Kevin for using a "bad word" and sending him the message that his primary discourse was wrong or bad, I could talk about the differences between the language and behaviors we use at home in informal settings and what was more appropriate to school settings. Just like we didn't, for instance, kiss and hug freely at school, we addressed one another differently.

When Malcolm was on the verge of getting a referral for refusing to remove his hood in class, I was able to discover his embarrassment that his mother hadn't finished his hair and his fear that his schoolmates would ridicule his half-Afro, half-twisted 'do. More importantly than that, because his teacher was kindly sympathetic, I could offer a solution. I spent my planning period twisting the rest of Malcolm's hair. The ease and familiarity of him sitting on the floor between my legs as I twisted and talked felt like home to both of us, and a lasting relationship was formed with a child I'd hardly talked to before.

I remember a candid conversation with a Black mother during my first full school year. Shelley wasn't one of the students bussed in, rather she was more of a rarity—a Black student with affluent parents. Her mother was one of the active PTA moms who were always helping around the

school. The spring when I took over for Ms. M, I would often see Shelly's mom hovering in the doorway watching me teach. Parent scrutiny wasn't unusual at Stepford, so I'd smile and continue teaching, sometimes inviting her in if I could do so without interrupting my instruction. It wasn't until the following year when I actually had Shelley in my class that I realized she was collecting evidence to assist her in making a difficult decision. Late in the school year (which went very well for Shelley, despite the challenges of my first year) her mother confided in me. She explained that she would soon be moving Shelley to a local private school. She understood the numerous educational opportunities their family's wealth could offer Shelley, but she knew that would come with a price. She said that this might be Shelley's last chance to have a Black teacher and she wanted her to experience a positive relationship with a teacher who shared her background. She explained that so many of Shelley's friends and neighbors were White and that this would likely continue once she began private school. She had worried about my inexperience but had watched me enough to be confident in my abilities and to conclude that this was best for her daughter. Again, I realized how important it was for me to be at Stepford.

I combed a lot of heads (goodness, those biracial children with White mamas needed help!) and mediated between primary and secondary discourses often, but I know I was no savior and certainly not the only one making a difference in the lives of impoverished and minority students at Stepford. The Stepford teachers were doing their best to reach all of our students. They stayed late and came in early. They offered parents rides and made home visits. They bought clothes and books and Christmas gifts. They loved our kids. I was surrounded by Miss Cissells and that, more than anything, assured me that I was where I was supposed to be.

The Scholar

Ms. Cissell recognized the intelligence and potential behind my dark skin, secondhand clothes, and awkward demeanor. She obviously knew of my challenges and did what she could to meet my basic needs, but she didn't focus on those "deficits"; she didn't let my troubles define me. She knew that the complexities of my life couldn't be reduced to a narrow perception of strengths and deficits (Compton-Lilly et al., 2012). Moreover, she took the time to get to know me—to learn my strengths and interests—and used what she learned to support my academic development (Bloome et al., 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995b).

Rather than trying to force me to fit into the school's curriculum, Ms. Cissell molded the curriculum to meet my needs. She didn't completely deviate from the school's expectations—few teachers have the power to make broad curriculum decisions—but she found a way to allow me to coexist between my home and school literacy practices. She essentially created a "third space" (Bhabha, 1990) in which I was able to thrive and be my true self, combining the funds of knowledge that I brought with me in ways congruent with the accepted practices of school, and thus creating some new and confident hybrid of school and home (Bhabha, 1990; Moll, 1992). She creatively circumvented the rules, taking away something I strongly disliked and replacing it with something I loved, felt good about, and *wanted* to learn. She used her community resources, placing me with a great mentor, to provide me with expertise perhaps beyond her time or abilities. The result of her venture was far more valuable than making me trudge through physical education as an act of compliance. I learned to be a better writer and to love it more—gifts I still carry and use today that have made me very successful.

More importantly, I learned that I had something to offer the world, that I was valuable and smart.

It is not my intention to paint Ms. Cissell as a savior—a benevolent White woman who swooped in to rescue a poor, disadvantaged Black child from certain doom. Ms. Cissell could not help her Whiteness or that she came into my life at a time when I needed a particular sort of person to help me through the awkwardness of adolescence exacerbated by my own challenges. Nor do I attribute all of my success to her. Many hands touched my life—my mother and grandmothers, my aunts and uncles, the families of friends and neighbors, and many others. This story, however, is about teachers, about what I learned from teachers and as a teacher, and what other teachers can learn from my experiences. Ms. Cissell is the person in my life who epitomizes the impact teachers can have.

The larger problem is that it is highly unlikely that a Black child in American schools will have the opportunity to find herself in a relationship with a teacher that is *not* White, because she is highly unlikely to have non-White teachers. Our teaching force is largely homogenous, with only about 16% of practicing teachers being people of color; conversely, over 40% of the student population is non-White. The majority of America's teachers is White, middle-class, and speaks only English (Banks et al., 2005). Perhaps a Black teacher could have served Ms. Cissell's role in my development, but in our flawed system I had less than a one in five chance of encountering such a person.

In my own practice, I was able to help students from poor and certain minority backgrounds to navigate the space between their home and school discourses (Bloome et

al., 2000; Gee, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1992). As in the story of the “n word” on the playground, I understood some of the complexities of those primary discourses because they were my own. I knew what it was like to acutely feel my “otherness,” and how difficult it was to reconcile home and school selves without feeling like a fraud or sellout (Majors, 2001). In a school full of White faces (most of whom were from middle class or even affluent families), being poor, Brown, or Black was definitely an othering experience. Majors explains the necessity of my presence in that place well: “Trying to hang on to that sense of self is hard when self has no mirror of affirmation” (p. 129).

The Child

With Miss Cissell’s encouragement, I applied to a “better” school. Consequently, I left her in seventh grade and went to a traditional school. There, I continued to write and flourish as a “smart kid.” I wrote stories featuring my classmates; these were circulated throughout the day and then returned to me after last period to take home and add to at night. I wrote love poems and sold them to boys, who then gave them to girls. I wrote period pieces, tales of gangs (we were all fascinated with Crips and Bloods at that time), poetry, and still the occasional scary story.

I didn’t, however, connect to these teachers. I lost interest in school under the more traditional instruction. My mother was happy to

have me stay home and play video games with her all day. She taught me to forge her signature so I'd always have an excuse note on hand. I went to school maybe twice a week to turn in and collect more make-up work. Finally, I got my first and only "C" ever. I'd missed too many science labs. I sat my mother down and told her I'd have to go to school more. She was disappointed, but acquiesced.

My mother was like this. She thought education was important and always encouraged me to do well in school, but she never pushed me or worried about my grades. She made sure I did my homework every evening before playing, but she didn't check it or do it with me. On the rare occasions that I had issues with teachers she stepped in on my behalf, but otherwise stayed away from the school. She seemed to take my academic success for granted and spent most of her school-related energy on curbing my perfectionism and getting me to relax. I remember vividly the day she ran back and forth past my door making lots of noise until I lifted my tear-stained face from some frustrating assignment and saw her, stark naked and grinning broadly. I couldn't help but laugh. She was always doing things like that.

Our silliness around schooling started when I was quite young. One of my favorite literacy memories is of my little typewriter. In preschool, I had a Fisher Price typewriter that I absolutely loved. The bright orange keys were not individual, but rather big chunks that all moved together when you pressed one. It showed a word for each letter of the alphabet and, as you “typed”, the carriage slid over like a real typewriter. When I was about four years old my mother had a new boyfriend over to meet me for the first time. I sat on the floor with my little orange typewriter, “typing” quite diligently and announced, “Elephant. E-L-E-P-H-A-N-T. Elephant.” The typewriter dinged and his mouth fell open. My mom and I exchanged a conspiratorial grin. We played this trick a lot.

My mother spent lots of what little money we had on books for me. She bought me every single book in the *Shivers* series (Spenser, 1997)—a dollar knockoff version of the popular *Goosebumps* series (Stine, 1992). She watched scary movies with me and let me read her my scary stories. I didn’t always recognize it, but she let me be my quirky, creative self. Though I often felt alone and ignored, she never tried to make me into something I wasn’t.

My grandmothers were another source of academic support. My grandmothers were the epitome of all that grandmothers should be. Grandma H worked and fussed and cooked and fussed and wrote poetry and fussed and read books and fussed and watched soap operas and fussed. Because I could be quiet, I could spend time on the couch with her during her lunch break, while she watched the soaps she had recorded the previous day. She took me to the library every week, but my insatiable consumption of books had me raiding her bookshelves as well. I must've read something like 200 Harlequin romance novels over those summers.

I blame those novels for my childhood daydreams of being a tortured author someday. I dreamed of living in a cabin in the woods with my cats and strings of lovers, sitting in my papasan chair furiously pecking at my typewriter and staring moodily out of my library's glass wall. I wasn't quite certain about the purpose of the string of lovers, but they seemed an important part of the persona.

Grandma J was sweet with a southern accent that I loved and a vocabulary sprinkled with words like "reckon" and "yonder." She cooked and sang hymns, and I listened through the window as I played in the

backyard in the shade of the weeping willows. She was the only person who took me to church as a child. I'd listen joyfully to the singing and then fall asleep in her soft lap during the sermons. After church we always went out to eat.

Both of my grandmothers loved to listen to the stories I wrote or to me talking about the books I read. Grandma H shared her poetry with me and seemed to enjoy my attempts to write my own. Grandma J let me gather the neighborhood children into her garage for "school" and would even make us treats for lunch time. Both of my grandmothers delighted in my intellectual pursuits and validated me in ways I craved. I loved the summer.

But I always missed my mother dreadfully.

I loved the long drives from Texas to Michigan. I'd navigate while she drove. It was just the two of us. We'd laugh and play I Spy and stop at rundown motels to sleep and we'd jump on the beds and eat junk food. We'd count license plates and cows and horses and get truck drivers to honk their horns. And when she dropped me off at Grandma's and left, I'd always cry. No matter how happy I was to be there, I'd always ache for her when she left. She was my best friend.

The Teacher

My first full year of teaching introduced me to two students who really made me consider the influence and importance of students' home lives in the classroom. Despite the fact that I had students with extremely involved parents—sometimes to the point of being overbearing—it took Liam and Tyree's unique experiences to impress upon me the magnitude of the influence of families. They were two very different situations, but pretty equally challenging for a neophyte still trying to navigate the mysteries of teaching.

Liam had been at Stepford for his entire school career and had earned a reputation for being a behavior problem. Liam was small for his age, with dark curly hair and big eyes framed in long lashes. Born of a White mother and Black father, his skin was golden brown and lovely. During good moments, Liam could be downright charming. He was witty, with a sense of humor beyond his years and a knack for sarcasm that eluded most second graders.

Unfortunately, his good moments were rare. Liam's emotional issues remain beyond my comprehension. His mother was very responsive to my concerns and would come to the school often. Somewhat selfishly, however, I found her attempts to help to be superficial. It seemed to me she was trying to find some cause, some excuse, something out of her control on which she could blame Liam's issues. He was already on medication for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and during his year in my class he was subjected to extensive testing. I remember her bringing him to school one day after an absence and explaining that he hadn't slept in over 24 hours because he'd participated in a sleep study to assess the cause of his poor sleeping habits. Needless to say, he did not have a good day that day.

In retrospect, I wonder how fair I was to Liam's mother. She had another son (who was as opposite from Liam as wet from dry) and a new husband. She was quite young—early twenties at the

most. How could she know what to do with a boy like Liam? I only had him for six hours a day, and he kept me at my wit's end. He would lie in the floor of my classroom and scream for hours that he hated me, that he hated himself, that he wished he was dead. For fire drills I would have to physically carry him out, kicking and screaming that he wanted to burn and I should let him die. My students soon learned to at least to pretend to ignore him, but I imagine their nerves were frazzled as well. He had trouble making friends with them, and I couldn't really blame them for being confused by his mercurial nature. I was just as confused when, after a day of obstinate refusals to work and endless screams expressing his hatred for me, he would beg me not to put him on the bus and would cling to me saying he loved me and wanted to come home and live with me.

Tyree was different. Where Liam was more whiny and pitiful, Tyree was all fire and rage. He transferred into our school mid-year with a spotty record that told of a transient family, new to Kentucky and not likely planning to settle. Tall and thin and dark, he was also Liam's physical opposite, though equally lovely physically.

Tyree rarely smiled. Though he seemed to enjoy some of our activities, anything challenging would send him into a teary, paper-crumpling, desk-tipping fit. He was completely unpredictable—the proverbial ticking time bomb that could unexpectedly explode at any minute into a furious cloud of swinging fists and barreling body. As he was bigger than the other students, these outbursts were extremely dangerous and nerve-wrecking. Not surprisingly, the other children kept their distance—except for Liam.

I was terrified that one of these children would cause me to lose my job—would hurt another student or frighten a visiting parent who would have me reported. By what some would call luck or chance and I call the grace of God, this never happened. When Tyree threw my heavy tape dispenser across the room in a fit of anger, miraculously it missed the group of children reading and collided with

the book shelf. (Even more miraculously, the visiting Stepford mom offered me nothing but sympathy and even took some time with him to try and help him cool off.) When he heatedly ran from the building, we managed to catch him before he reached the busy street. Again and again, his fists missed the other children. And each day I held my breath, hoping that today wouldn't be the day that changed.

Liam's (and Tyree's) behavior showed me a different side of Principal K, who was suddenly stern and insistent that I handle my own classroom and not pester her for assistance. She concluded that she could "bitch" at the boys until she was blue in the face and it wouldn't make any difference, so I would have to figure it out. I was all but forbidden to seek her or the counselor for help during their outbursts. (Later she smiled and told me that she knew I could do it, I just needed to realize that for myself. Apparently she'd been teaching me a valuable life lesson for which I should be grateful.) Despite her so-called faith in me, I didn't feel I had any allies. I was on my own.

But I wasn't. There were people who wouldn't—couldn't—wash their hands of Tyree and Liam: their families.

I reached out to Liam and Tyree's families and was surprised that they responded positively to my advances. There were difficulties, frustrations, and near-arguments, but the benefits far outweighed the difficulties of maintaining the relationships. I learned a lot about the boys from their families; for instance, Tyree loved children. I found that pairing him with younger students—whether as a reading buddy or to help out for a while in a kindergarten classroom—served as a great incentive for him. Not only did it motivate him to good behavior to earn the reward, working with the younger students calmed him, built his confidence and helped me and other teachers to see him in a positive light for a change.

When I started to look at this whole child, my compassion was able to overcome my frustration more and more often. His mother told me heartbreaking stories of abuse, bringing back my own childhood memories. I wondered if that anger bubbling just beneath the surface of this boy's stoic façade was a result of holding in pain and confusion about what had been done to him. I was able to remember that his misbehavior was not about me, not a reflection on my teaching. I was able to regard him as his teacher should—as another child who needed me.

The five of us (me, Liam, Tyree, and their mothers) survived that year. Because of our collective effort, both Tyree and Liam were eventually placed in our self-contained Emotional and Behavioral Disorder (EBD) unit where they remained through the rest of elementary school. They got the attention and support they desperately craved and began to transform. They both made enough progress to be mainstreamed for parts of the day. When I saw them each week in the Arts and Humanities class I was teaching when they reached fifth grade, they were completely different boys. They were calm and composed, thoughtful and engaged. Tyree laughed and smiled. Liam brought me kind, hand-written cards. They grew into the kind, hard-working boys they always wanted to be.

*(*In middle school, Liam is no longer in a self-contained room. I've lost track of Tyree.)*

The Scholar

Like Tyree and Liam, my family certainly did not reflect the middle class ideals valued in schools. Schools, including those I attended and taught for, draw more on the cultural and social resources—including linguistic structures, authority patterns, and types of curricula—of the middle class, meaning that children from middle class families come to school at an advantage, as they are already more familiar with the social structures (Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Morrow & Tracey, 2012; Rogers, 2002). How,

then, was I successful? A deficit perspective of families would suggest that my troubled home life should have made it all but impossible for me to achieve. I could've easily been shuffled along through school, overlooked, while teachers blamed my poor performance on my family. I could've been pitied, given lower expectations, and been an example of the statistics that scare young teachers (Britner et al., 2006). This would not have been a true depiction of my family or an adequate portrayal of my ability. In truth, I possessed many skills that would lend to school success, as Ms. Cissell demonstrated, and something more: a resilience and perseverance that grew out of my difficult home life and was nurtured in the third spaces I shared with my caring adults and their high expectations for me (Benard, 1995; Bhabha, 1990).

I've heard well-meaning teachers who, still operating from a place of pity, talk of students' homes in sad and hushed voices. One such teacher mentioned to me that she was distraught about a student who struggled to sit still and eat lunch. She'd learned that at home his family never ate at a table together and she thought it was *such* a tragedy. Through the lens of her experience, she simply could not see the different lifestyles of her students as anything but deprived, deficit, and less than her own.

I can imagine how my story would sound to her. How irresponsible my mother must seem to encourage me to skip school and play Nintendo or run errands and window shop with her! Still, I can't help but remember this with a pang of nostalgia. During this period we achieved a closeness that wouldn't reappear until many years later—only a few years before the moment at which I type this paper. It was during one of these video game days that I first plucked up the courage to tell my mother about the sexual abuse I'd endured at the hands of my babysitter of many years before. We'd moved from Killeen,

Texas and I was far out of her reach and much older by now, but I still remembered and struggled with conflicting emotions about the teenager who earned extra money staying with me while my mom worked third shift. In these moments together, when we were doing something my mother understood instead of something as intimidating as school work (which is, according to many researchers, intimidating for many parents), we were able to have difficult conversations and share a closeness for which we didn't always have time or energy (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Handel, 1992). Is that experience less true, less wonderful, less right because we weren't sitting around a dining room table?

Pushor links the position teachers often take toward families to the concept of a protectorate (Memmi, 1965 in Pushor, 2012). Within this structure, those in power take it upon themselves to protect those they see as having little or no strength. Pushor posits that within our educational system, teachers play the role of protector, believing their professional knowledge and experience qualify them as the sole decision-makers in schooling. They do this with the best of intentions and with the best interests of children at heart, but in doing so they further marginalize parents and position them as periphery elements in student learning (Pushor, 2012).

In all that she did for me, did Ms. Cissell ever engage my mother in my learning in meaningful ways? The child in me does not recall, but I can only imagine that the role my mother had was that of many parents—that of volunteer, spectator, and homework helper (Pushor, 2012). I imagine that my teachers explained to her how I was doing without soliciting her input on my learning and growth, my strengths and weaknesses, my hopes and dreams. Like Mikkaka the Teacher, I imagine that Ms. Cissell had my best interests at heart; but, like me, she likely sought a “partnership” that served to support

school needs, rather than one in which there was reciprocal gain for parents (Pushor, 2012). If she and I accomplished so much with our students despite our unknown shortcomings with their parents, how much could we have attained if true parent engagement was at the heart of our practice?

The truth of the matter was that my home life wasn't all bad any more than any one person is all good or all bad. My mother, despite her shortcomings, was still my mother and my best friend. Dichotomies such as "good home" and "bad home" are artificial (Compton-Lilly et al., 2012). We are complex beings interacting within complex systems. My home was my home, my experience was my own, and I am shaped by the good and the bad. The author of my favorite book series says it best in the film adaptation of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*: "We've all got both light and dark inside us. What matters is the part we choose to act on. That's who we really are" (Rowling, 2007). I wouldn't want to be anyone else than me—this child of dark and light.

Conclusion

The Woman-Child

I walk into the school building surrounded by a Chattering throng of soon-to-be kindergarteners and their parents. Little hands are clenched tightly in larger ones and the buzz engulfing us all is a combination of nervous excitement, wistfulness and eager anticipation. The lobby is welcoming and warm, full of smiling volunteers holding maps, paperwork, nametags and directions.

Beside me, my brother holds my hand firmly in his and clings to my mother with his other. 16 years my junior, my brother is my baby boy. He's lived a life very different from mine—he has always lived in a house with two parents, plenty to eat and all the video games, movies and entertainment his heart could desire—but he is not without his own problems. Everything has come slowly for him; he was late to talk, to potty train, to learn his alphabet and colors. I am concerned that he may have something more serious wrong with him, but my mother brushes off my concerns, assuring me boys are different. She doesn't listen to my teacher judgment and so I just worry on, silently.

I am worried now. He is a year late starting kindergarten and I know he is still far behind the children surrounding us. It is still difficult to understand what he says if you're not around him as much as we are. He rarely speaks in complete sentences. He still has potty training accidents.

But he's the most tenderhearted child I've ever met. He thrives on physical contact—often silently entering a room just to give me a hug, a kiss, or simply lay his head against me for a few minutes. He loves to go to the zoo and to the park and to church with me. Every night he spends

with me at my apartment, he insists I read *Where the Wild Things Are*, even though he knows every word.

He is my baby. How will I release him to these people who cannot possibly understand him? How can I trust that they will do what's best for him? I know how much patience it will require to teach him; I know he is another poor Black male who will struggle academically. How can I leave him here?

Then I see her. She stands in the lobby, smiling and greeting parents. She looks exactly as I remember her: blonde, petite, and beautiful. Ms. Cissell.

I've searched for her ever since I became a teacher to no avail, yet here she is standing in the lobby of my baby brother's new elementary school. When I say her name she looks at me for a moment, then calls me by name, hugs me, and leads me into her office. On her desk, she shows me a picture of little me sitting astride one of her horses. I can't believe she remembers me. I can't believe she has kept this picture. I can't believe she is my brother's principal.

But I can believe he's going to be alright now.

The Teacher

I soon learned that building relationships with families affected not only me, but my class as a whole. My Stepford moms (and dads) were always in my classroom and happy to do whatever I asked. They shared their stories and hobbies, bringing in interesting artifacts—like the dad who dressed up and shared objects from his Revolutionary War reenactment group. They read with kids and helped them with assignments. They helped with parties and field trips. They'd even make copies and do filing. Some of them had regular hours each week that I could count on them to be there. It was amazing and my students were reaping the benefits of individualized attention and varied expertise.

Amazingly, the parents began to know and build relationships with one another. A prime example is the story of Alexis. Alexis was admittedly one of my favorite students. She excelled academically, worked hard, was kind to others, and had a smile that just lit up the classroom. She was also bussed to Stepford and, since they didn't own a car, her family never came to school. Her mother kept in touch via notes and occasional phone calls, but she'd never even seen the actual school.

One day, one of our mothers overheard Alexis and I talking about our upcoming holiday party. Alexis mentioned that she wished her mom could come, but that they didn't have a car. Later, when the children went to Art class, the other mother approached me with a plan. Tillie's mother was as fond of Alexis as I was, and she wanted to help. All I had to do was give Alexis' mother her phone number and ask her to call. On the day of the holiday party, the two mothers walked in together, beaming. Alexis' answering smile was all we needed in return. After that, I started setting up parent phone trees and email lists at the start of the year in an attempt to keep fostering such relationships.

When I look back over my teaching career, I remember some of the parents as vividly as the children. I remember Nate's Nana (which is what we always called her) coming in every week and becoming so familiar that the children seemed to forget she wasn't all of their nanas and mine too. I

remember picking up Rhianna's mom for conferences and how proud Rhianna was to tell everyone that the teacher had been to her house. There are parents I still talk to now, who still check on me and are ecstatic when we run into one another. These relationships are what education is about—what life is about. They taught me that, when children are your business, you have got to know your clients intimately.

The Scholar

So, once again:

- *What does my experience tell us about students and families?*
- *What lessons can teachers and researchers take away from my story?*

I began to recognize the truth and power of my experiences as I started studying family literacy in my PhD program. It wasn't long before my reading, and the experiences they brought to my memory, led me to reject the deficit perspectives I unknowingly harbored. I was able to recognize that the blame did not belong on the parents or the teachers, but that *doing right by our children would require a collective effort* (Auerbach, 1989; Morrow et al., 1993; Porter, 2008). This truth must be embraced by all who are involved in the education of our children, which means *all of us*. This greater lesson from my experience also requires accepting a few supporting ideas:

1. We must accept that it won't just happen, nor will it be accomplished without great effort.

Making parents feel a welcome part of the educational process is essential to promoting involvement. As parents construct their beliefs about their roles, one of the

largest factors in their decision to be involved in their children's education is their perceptions of being specifically invited to participate (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Porter DeCusati & Johnson, 2004). This may be especially true for low-income parents. Policies and practices that create an atmosphere of acceptance such as an "open-door" policy, transportation assistance, and flexible scheduling can counteract barriers to involvement and offset negative feelings parents may have toward schools based on their past experiences (Auerbach, 1989; Neuman et al., 1998; Porter DeCusati & Johnson, 2004). Another way to create a welcoming atmosphere is through personal contact, such as friendly phone calls and individual notes, rather than traditional one-way communication like newsletters (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Auerbach, 1989; Linek et al., 1997). Parents seem to appreciate communication from teachers that is "good news"- not about a behavior issue or problem with their child (Handel, 1992). This relationship must be maintained beyond that initial contact (Biggam, 2003; Neuman et al., 1998; Porter DeCusati & Johnson, 2004).

Building these relationships certainly wasn't easy. Alexis' personality made the communication between home and school simpler than in many situations. She could be relied on to carry information to and from school. In many cases, students (especially younger students) aren't as reliable as Alexis. It complicates matters more when notes home often carry bad news-who would want to share information that would get them in trouble? It's so much to require of a small child. Some of my students didn't see their parents regular due to conflicting work schedules; I had to talk to them about establishing a safe place to leave things that needed to be signed and then remember to retrieve them when they got themselves ready for school. It seemed a lot of responsibility, but these

students took on a lot in their little lives and often surprised me with their resilience and abilities.

Not every relationship flourished. I had parents I never managed to talk to or those too angry or hurt or intimidated by past experience to trust me (Bloome et al., 2000; Rogers, 2002). With time constraints and the demands of 26 students and families, *maintaining* contact was difficult. I learned firsthand that one-way communication did not make for two-way relationships. I had to be very intentional about creating a welcoming environment and contacting parents more often than the times when there was trouble; with students like Liam and Tyree this was a particular struggle. I had to carefully pick my battles and approach our interactions with the intention of finding positives to share. I didn't want to pester parents with constant contact, so finding the balance of good news and challenges was essential. There was a lot of trial and error, some hurt feelings, and a fair few tears. But, more importantly, there were bridges built and children who benefited from the effort.

2. We are not doing enough to engage parents.

This is a hard truth to swallow when you are stretched thin and working tirelessly. I think back with pride on the amount of time and effort I dedicated to working with my families, but through the lens of my researcher knowledge I recognize the limitations of my exertions. I still saw myself as the expert, still often only provided parents with a superficial role in student learning. We must redirect our efforts toward more meaningful interaction with parents. We must stop perpetuating the myth of school as protectorate, as authority on all things educational and as the sole center of learning (Pushor, 2012).

Parents not only are the experts on their children, but are their children's first teachers. Literacy development begins with exposure to reading, writing and language in the home (Bauman & Wasserman, 2010; Dudley-Marling, 2009; Morrow et al., 1993; Morrow & Tracey, 2012; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines view literacy learning as "part of the very fabric of family life" (p. 87). Parents are models of literacy behaviors that children seek to emulate, suggesting that even children's earliest experiences of being spoken and read to are crucial to their development of literacy skills (Dudley-Marling, 2009; Haynes, 2010; Morrow & Tracey, 2012). Though often lower income families do not have the time (due to inflexible work schedules, childcare needs, etc.) or resources (such as money, materials or transportation) to create the literacy experiences educators deem ideal (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Bauman & Wasserman, 2010; Biggam, 2003; Dudley-Marling, 2009; Porter DeCusati & Johnson, 2004), these families still engage in regular literacy practices (Auerbach, 1989; Biggam, 2003; Compton-Lilly et al., 2012; Duke & Purcell-Gates, 2003; Morrow et al., 1993; Rogers, 2002).

Educators must empower and involve parents in order to reach the goal of greater student achievement. This requires sensitivity to cultural and social factors, and understanding and respect for the strengths of families, and an examination of beliefs and perceptions of both parents and teachers (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Auerbach, 1989; Handel, 1992; Linek et al., 1997; Lynch, Anderson, Anderson, & Shapiro, 2006). Pushor (2012) contends that most efforts to involve parents keep them on the periphery of their children's education, asking them to complete only the tasks the school deems worthy (e.g., helping with homework and volunteering for parties), limiting conversation to

fifteen minute conferences twice a year, and providing programming intended to bring them into line with the school's ways of thinking, rather than soliciting actual ideas and feedback from them. What do these actions communicate to parents about their role, their value, and the ownership of student learning? As parents and educators begin to question underlying epistemologies, challenge the status quo, and value and build upon the funds of knowledge intrinsic to the home environments of students, they can begin to counteract the barriers to effective home-school relationships that plague the school system and can discover and implement practices that benefit all students.

3. We have to make the time because our children are worth the effort.

In my career with the my state's Department of Education I often encounter schools and districts looking for magic bullets and quick fixes to increase test scores. In the era of the *Common Core State Standards* (NGA & CCSSO, 2010) so many educators are missing the potential of such high ideals and narrowing the scope of their curricula in attempts to pour as much knowledge as possible into the heads of their students. They don't have time for the complexities of an "at-risk" child like me sitting in their classroom, let alone time for her family. In the face of these misguided efforts I, through the lens of my experience, see the necessity of what I have learned and what I must add to the field. There will never be more time. As we do for all we value, we must *make* the time to holistically educate our students. There is no better time than right now to change for the better.

Partnership with parents is critical in supporting children's literacy development (Biggam, 2003; Lareau, 1987). Parent involvement has been associated with a multitude

of desirable outcomes including higher grade point averages, better attendance, lower dropout rates, fewer retentions and special education placements, higher levels of social skills, and increased ability to self-regulate behavior (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Porter DeCusati & Johnson, 2004). Considering that each of those areas is of major concern to a system focused on college-and-career ready students, how could we possibly ignore the importance of families?

After taking this opportunity as a scholar to truly analyze my own experience, it is evident to me that to deny children a similar opportunity to reflect on and connect to their own experiences as they learn is doing them a great injustice. Over a hundred years ago, John Dewey wrote about the necessity of connecting subject matter and personal experience (Dewey, 1911). There can be no one-size-fits-all curriculum, no disconnected dissemination of facts and figures if we hope to reach the 21st century learners in our classrooms. To truly meet the needs of our students we have to care about them and to care enough to learn who they are; this will require the collective effort of schools and families. Hopefully, we are finally ready to integrate school and life in ways that facilitate learning, instead of clinging to the artificial barriers between school and the real world. When we do so, we will find our children waiting for us in this new space, ready to see themselves and to be truly seen.

When nature and society can live in the schoolroom, when the forms and tools of learning are subordinated to the substance of experience, then shall there be an opportunity for this identification, and culture shall be the democratic password.

-John Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum* (p. 25)

CULTURE AT THE CORE:
MOVING FROM PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO PROFESSIONAL
LEARNING

Overview

This article explores the recent shift in educational scholarship from “professional development” to “professional learning”. Though we spend billions of dollars on such learning in the United States, we are still discovering what makes such learning effective and what types of learning lead to actual change in teacher practice. Based on a perusal of the literature and the analysis of an ethnographic case study of a teacher learning experience during a university course, I examine the implications and the shortcomings of the literature on this shift. I call for a naming and privileging of culture in this conversation; if we are to meet the needs of teacher learners, our professional learning experiences must be culturally relevant—it must be considerate of the multifaceted lives of teachers. I investigate the complexities of teacher learning and attempt to capture the voices and perspectives of actual teachers as I do so. I conclude with several suggestions for consumers, developers, and facilitators of teacher professional learning, including a new model of teacher learning—Reality Andragogy— and practical suggestions for design.

In other words, staff development programs are a systematic attempt to bring about change—change in the classroom practices of teachers, change in their beliefs and attitudes, and change in the learning outcomes of students. However, it could be hypothesized that the majority of programs fail because they do not take into account two critical factors: what motivates teachers to engage in staff development, and the process by which change in teachers typically takes place.

—Thomas Guskey, “Professional Development and Teacher Change”

While teacher learning has been studied for many years, there has recently been a resurgence of interest in the topic. A climate of new standards, high-stakes testing, new methods of teacher evaluation and debates over linking teacher pay to student performance has made the discussion all the more relevant. The question of how to improve student performance leads naturally to the question of how to improve teacher performance, which in turn requires a thoughtful analysis of how teachers learn and grow in the profession. All of this has led to the dominance of so-called “professional learning communities” which, though they share a name, often vary widely in their implementation and effectiveness (DuFour, 2004; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). Moreover, it has led to a broad discussion of *professional development* versus *professional learning* (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Stewart, 2014).

While attempting to answer research questions about teacher implementation of knowledge and skills acquired through a professional learning experience, it became apparent that I must embark on an exploration of what makes effective professional learning. Consequently, I engaged in a review of relevant literature and compared that literature to my analysis of the experience under study. Among my findings were several key tenets:

1. We cannot move from *professional development* to *professional learning* without a focus on culture (Stewart, 2014). Education must stop treating culture, be it of students or teachers, as a separate entity. We cannot simply teach culturally responsive practices, we must employ them at every level of education, including teacher professional learning (Gay, 2005; Sleeter, 2012).
2. Teacher learning and implementation of that learning is rife with complexities. In order to truly maximize the effectiveness of professional learning, we will have to deal with the myriad of barriers to teacher learning and instructional change.

This study of teacher learning and subsequent implementation took place over the course of two semesters—a summer university course and a fall return to classrooms and students. For the sake of simplicity I have divided the study into two phases, but the findings of the two phases are interrelated as I will make evident in the following discussion.

Overview

Role of the Researcher

Though it may appear a peculiar place to start I deem it imperative to address my role as researcher as early as possible in order to clarify any misconceptions or misgivings the reader may be experiencing. First as a former practitioner, alumnus and proponent of public education, I position myself alongside teachers as a fellow educator and an active participant in the evolutionary processes of education in the United States. I seek to cross the lines drawn between researchers and practitioners and I recognize the invaluable insight we can offer one another when we collaborate as equals. To remind

myself and readers of this positionality and its centrality to my stance as a researcher, I employ the first-person pronoun throughout this paper. (The use of the first-person pronoun in academic writing is not without precedence. See Tang & John (1999), Hyland (2002), and Williams (2006).)

Throughout the data collection process I stepped in and out of multiple roles. The course at the focus of this study was taught by a favorite professor, whom I also consider a mentor and a friend. In addition to navigating the nuances of that relationship, several of the students in the course were previous students of mine as I am also a part-time instructor at the university. My full-time job at the time was at the state department of education, giving me yet another role in relation to the students who were practicing teachers in the state. Finally, my best friend was also in the course and often gave me insider information as a student, but also forced me to navigate the intersection of my formal and informal selves in ways I had not previously attempted.

Phase One

The University's main campus covers nearly 300 acres situated in a large metropolitan area, minutes from the city's downtown. It serves over 20,000 students and employs more than 6000 faculty members. The student population is over 70% White, similar to the population of its home city, according to the latest census data (U.S. Census, 2010). The main campus is one of three and is home to the majority of the University's twelve schools, including the school of education.

The course I studied is situated within the literacy education program for those seeking a Master's degree in literacy, literacy leadership, or pursuing an endorsement in

English as a Second Language (ESL). According to the syllabus, the purpose of the course is as follows:

This course explores the current knowledge base and theoretical frameworks used to explain differential achievement rates between students of diverse backgrounds (ethnic, racial, socio-economic, and linguistic) and students of the mainstream culture. In doing so, students will examine their own assumptions considering students, race, class, and culture and students will study major concepts (racism, classism, etc.) to explore multiple perspectives. The course will extend the principles of teaching and learning to include a new perspective on teaching students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. A major focus of the course will be to prepare P-12 classroom teachers for working effectively with diverse student populations in literacy learning using culturally responsive instructional practices.

In accordance with this purpose, students are required to read and discuss a variety of texts, including Catherine Compton-Lilly's (2008) *Breaking the Silence: Recognizing the Social and Cultural Resources Students Bring to the Classroom*, the students' choice of several pieces of fiction/memoir/children's and adolescent literature, their choice of selected professional texts, and several other relevant articles. Additionally, students are expected to complete written responses to the reading, critique multicultural children's literature, present to the class on their readings, and complete a culminating task (CT) requiring them to do a home/community study centered on a different culture than their own. After studying their chosen culture, the syllabus explains that students are expected to "design a five-day lesson sequence in [their] curricular area, including content [they] are expected to teach, materials [they] are expected to learn, but enhanced through culturally relevant pedagogy learned in class and lessons learned through [their] home community study."

This section of the course was designed and taught by the head of the school of education's literacy department, a tenured professor with over fifteen years of experience teaching at the collegiate level and holding a PhD in Language, Literacy and Culture and Early Childhood/ Elementary Education. The summer 2014 section represented her fifth time teaching the class over the course of the last four years. Professor N also serves as an academic advisor to many students, adding a layer of complication to this study and requiring that we step in and out of multiple roles (e.g. participant/researcher, mentor/mentee and even our personal roles as friends and colleagues at the university).

Teachers in the course were all graduate students, though some progressed from their bachelor's to master's degree programs without obtaining teaching jobs first (thus, they were still termed pre-service). Of the eleven teachers enrolled in the course, five were practitioners, one had just been hired and would start teaching in the 2014-15 school year, one served in a district-level technology resource role, one had experience but was taking a break from teaching while pursuing her PhD, and three had no teaching experience nor had they yet been offered teaching positions (of those last three, two had experience as substitute teachers). All eleven teachers were women, ranging in experience from zero to 16 years, and all but one was White. (The sole Black teacher did not return after the first night of the course, leaving the class with ten teachers, all White.)

Phase Two

Teachers selected for the second phase of the study had to have classrooms of their own in the fall of 2014. Though four people volunteered to participate, only two were selected in order to allow for the more in-depth study required by ethnographic

methods. Both participants in this study teach in a large urban school district in the Midwestern United States. River City Public Schools (RCPS) includes over 150 schools, with nearly two-thirds of those schools serving elementary students. RCPS serves over 100,000 students and employs over 6,400 teachers. Over 80% of RCPS teachers hold master's degrees and they average 10.8 years of teaching experience. The district struggles to reach academic benchmarks, resulting in scrutiny from its state department.

The RCPS student population is nearly 50% White, about 36% Black, 8% Hispanic, 3% Asian, and less than .01% identifying with other races. The teaching population is incongruous, with 84% of RCPS teachers identifying as White, 14% Black, less than .01% Hispanic or Asian, and .001% American Indian or Alaskan. According to district reports, their schools serve over 10,000 homeless students, nearly 14,000 students with special needs and over 7,000 English Language Learners (ELLs) representing 100 different spoken languages.

Case 1: Mrs. Nichols' First Grade Class, Rainbow Elementary School

Rainbow Elementary is a Title I school as identified by the U.S. Department of Education, meaning it receives federal financial assistance because it serves high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families. The school has been identified by its state agency as struggling to meet academic benchmarks, with scores below the 70th percentile in the state. It serves nearly 300 students in preschool through grade 5; nearly 10% of that population is ELLs. Rainbow's student population is 49% White, 25% Black, 20% Hispanic, and 2% Asian, while its teaching population is 85% White and 15% Black.

Lilly Nichols is a White female in her early thirties. She has taught for four years at Rainbow Elementary school. During the summer course, Lilly was one of the first to approach me. She expressed a strong desire to participate in this study, explaining to me that she was planning to center her professional growth goal for the following school year on parent involvement. When I reconnected with Lilly in the fall of 2014, her plans had changed some from the summer. She no longer intended to study parent involvement, having decided it would be too much to do on top of her home life, classroom duties, and other studies. Still, she was welcoming and happy to have me in her classroom.

Lilly, however, missed the last four classes of the course as she gave birth to her first child on July 22nd, meaning she missed more than half of the seven face-to-face meetings of the course. Though Professor N sought to include her through online avenues and continued communication, it must be considered that her experience of the course was limited and, thus, her learning is not likely representative of the average student in the course. Though she did return to the online forums and complete several more assignments, Lilly took an incomplete in the course, with plans to complete her remaining assignments in the fall semester (which she did successfully).

The summer course was one of several Lilly took to complete her ESL endorsement, a certification she sought due to the demographics of the student population at her school. According to Lilly, each year she has five to six ELLs in her classroom, despite the fact the Rainbow Elementary does not offer an ELL program and parents of ELLs must opt out of the program in order to enroll their child in the school. This appears to be a common practice throughout River City Public Schools. According to the most

recent district report (2010-11) there are 5,255 ELLs in Rainbow's district and only 3,563 participate in ELL programs. The district offers ELL programs in 64 schools.

Case 2: Ms. Miller's Fourth Grade Classroom, Legacy Traditional Elementary School

Legacy Traditional Elementary School is, like Rainbow, a federally assisted Title I school. It has been identified by its state education agency as struggling to meet academic benchmarks, with scores below the 70th percentile in the state and its achievement gap student populations in the bottom 10% of the state. Legacy serves a preschool through fifth grade student population of over 650, with 10% of that population being ELLS. Legacy's student population is approximately 31% White, 54% Black, 6% Hispanic, 3% Asian, and 5% two or more races, while its teaching population is 68% White and 32% Black.

Leslie Miller is a White female in her late twenties. She has taught for six years at Legacy, after initially considering a career in veterinary studies or business, and pursuing a career in nursing. During the summer course, Leslie was hesitant to participate in this study. She expressed anxiety at having people in her classroom and concerns over the behavior of her third grade students the year before who, since her team "looped" with students, she would have again in the fall as fourth graders. Leslie avoided giving a direct answer when I approached her about participating, but I held on to the idea of her as a possible participant nonetheless. In the fall, I visited another class at the university to speak with a participant I had been having trouble contacting. Leslie was in the classroom and heard that teacher telling me that she needed to back out of the study. Hearing this,

Leslie kindly volunteered to participate. She seemed much more relaxed about the whole idea and explained that she was having a great year and would not mind visitors now.

Study Overview	
Phase One: Summer 2014 Graduate Literacy Course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 teachers (5 current practitioners, 1 district level resource, 1 on educational leave, 3 with no teaching experience) • 7 face-to-face meetings in July; 2 additional online meetings per week • Data Sources: observations, online discussions, course documents
Phase Two: Fall 2014 Follow-up/Implementation of Summer Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 classroom teachers (first grade and fourth grade) • Researcher presence October through December • Data Sources: observations, interviews, teacher reflections

Figure 2. Study Overview

Review of Relevant Literature

The literature on professional development has evolved in both name and nature since such study first became popular in the 1980s. Findings are complex, considering the challenges of relating a professional development experience to actual teacher learning, then that learning to change in teacher practice, and further that change in practice to student results. Not surprisingly in light of so many variables, defining what makes professional development “effective” has proven difficult (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). Despite these difficulties, some common elements prevail across the existing literature. Most scholars agree that effective professional learning is job-embedded, linked to school or district goals and high standards, relevant to participants, ongoing, promotes teacher

empowerment and collaboration, and focuses on content and student learning (Blank, 2013; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Vescio, 2008).

Moving from Professional Development to Professional Learning

As mentioned previously, as views on teacher learning have evolved, so has its moniker. In current literature *professional development* typically refers to the more passive, one-time, “sit and get” teacher learning of yesteryear. *Professional learning*, conversely, is the sort of teacher learning reflective of the previously discussed tenets of effectiveness (KDE, 2014; Stewart, 2014). Such learning often occurs within communities of teachers in the same environment, committed to common goals and to collaborating to achieve those goals. Generally referred to as Professional Learning Communities or PLCs, when well-developed these groups lead to a more student-centered focus, improved teacher culture, and positive impacts on student achievement (Stewart, 2014; Vescio, 2008). Knight’s (2011) *Partnership Principles*, which have become key precepts of many PLCs, provide seven principles to promote a healthy and effective learning environment:

1. Equality—Teachers have input in the planning of the professional learning activities, not simply required to attend PD
2. Choice—Teachers choose what and how they learn
3. Voice—Professional learning empowers and respects teacher voices
4. Reflection—Reflection is recognized as an integral part of learning
5. Dialogue—Authentic dialogue is enabled

6. Praxis–Learning is applied to real-life practice
7. Reciprocity–Participation is an expectation: all offer and receive feedback

A shift from the top-down nature of professional development to teacher-and-student-centered professional learning requires a shift in thinking, power, and beliefs related to the goals, delivery and designs of teacher learning.

Rejecting the Marginalization of Culture

Ultimately, what all of this suggests is a necessary change in *culture*—a focus on culture. At the very core of this shift is recognition and privileging of culture, in this case that of teachers. These calls for professional learning are not being explicit enough, are not going far enough to recognize that we are moving away from prescriptive instruction to instruction that is more culturally responsive for teachers. In tailoring the learning to the goals and needs of the learners, in situating it within their own environments, in valuing the expertise they bring to the learning and empowering them to drive and shape the learning, we are following a model of instruction that has long been promoted by advocates for culturally responsive/relevant/sustaining pedagogical practices. (This is another area of research in which the name has evolved over time. For more on culturally relevant pedagogy by various names, see the broad literature base in this field including the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings, Geneva Gay, and Django Paris.) Through what Ladson-Billings (1992) calls “culturally relevant teaching” students are empowered “intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 382). Valuing the contributions of students’ culture and home practices leads to greater student achievement (Bauman & Wasserman, 2010;

Dudley-Marling, 2009; Duke & Purcell-Gates, 2003; Graham, McNamara, & VanLankveld, 2011; Horvat et al., 2003; Moll, 1992). Such teaching acknowledges students' cultures as a major social and intellectual resource, as students' homes and social networks contain funds of knowledge that have the potential to benefit the learning of all students in the classroom (Moll, 1992). Cognition works in tandem with the value and belief systems that are shaped by our social, historical, and cultural experiences (Morrow & Tracey, 2012; Rogers, 2002), thus separating learning and culture is not only foolish, but impossible.

During a follow-up interview, Professor N introduced a powerful adaptation of the literature on culturally relevant teaching: Reality Pedagogy. Emdin (2013) says that this approach posits that all teaching and learning must start with students' realities. Often those realities are rooted in socioeconomic, ethnic and racial differences that have resulted in similar experiences or understandings among groups that share such spaces. Emdin suggests that previous approaches such as culturally relevant pedagogy, while important, do not supply teachers with the necessary tools to practically apply culturally responsive practices (Emdin, 2011). Contrariwise, Reality Pedagogy offers five tangible tools, Emdin's "5 C's": cogenerative dialogues, coteaching, cosmopolitanism, context, and content. (For more information on the 5 C's of Reality Pedagogy, see Emdin (2011) and Emdin (2013).) Though Professor N had only just discovered Emdin's work in this area and was thus still processing and exploring, she saw immediate applications to her teaching process, as well as evidence of Reality Pedagogy in her current practice.

In short, we are taking a model that research encourages us to use with K-12 and postsecondary students, and applying it to the way we work with their teachers. This shift should be applauded. As Gay (2005) contends,

Professional preparation and practice for teachers needs to be reexamined thoroughly within these racially, ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse contexts... Because race and culture count in significant ways in the teaching-learning process, they should play a central role in the professional preparations and performance assessment of teachers. (p. 222)

I find it problematic, however, that the professional learning literature fails to name these practices as such, following the long-standing trend of marginalizing culture, culturally relevant teaching, and the related area of multicultural education. The *Partnership Principles*, for instance, call for the culturally sustaining practice of giving learners access to mainstream and valued knowledge while valuing and recognizing the funds of knowledge they possess, but do not call it by its name. This failure to recognize the importance of culture is driven by a variety of political motives and is not uncommon at all levels of the education sector (Gay, 2005; Sleeter, 2012).

Within the professional learning experience featured in this study, I was able to see in action the design and delivery of teacher learning in which the facilitator openly recognized the prominence of culture in her own practice. Professor N cited Moje's theory of socially just pedagogy as central to her philosophy of teaching (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007). According to her own reflections, Professor N acknowledges the underlying goal of disrupting the deficit narrative and "examining discourse patterns and pedagogical moves that cause pre-service and practicing teachers to question deficit assumptions and transform their teaching decisions related to children and youth,

language and literacy, texts and technology, families and teachers.” This coincides with her incorporation of Moje’s theory of socially just pedagogy, which encompasses culturally responsive pedagogy, seeking not only to provide learners with access to knowledge, but to provide them opportunities to challenge, critique, and reshape that knowledge as well.

Methods

The majority of the literature on professional learning employs quantitative methods. Conversely, and perhaps consequently, I have chosen a qualitative approach to this study. Guskey (1997) notes that qualitative work in this area is difficult and time-consuming, but the neglect of the quality issues of professional learning has left a significant gap in the field—a lack of descriptive data related to what is and is not effective. As such, I sought to provide rich and detailed examples, employing ethnographic methods to capture, analyze, and relate the story of this professional learning experience. Through observations, interviews, and analysis of discussions, teacher reflections, and course documents I attempted to answer two questions.

1. How can targeted professional learning focused on family literacy and culturally sustaining teaching impact teacher practice?
2. How can teachers design classroom practice that values the home environments of students?

With this goal I pieced together an ethnographic case study of the lived experiences of these ten teachers, delving more deeply into the teaching lives of two of them by joining them in their classrooms after the summer learning. The analysis of this

data led me to deconstruct my questions and to recognize the necessity of examining the very nature of professional learning before attempting to answer the more complex questions related to implementation. This paper is the fruit of that preliminary exploration.

Data Sources

Various data were collected for this analysis. Sources included:

- 1) Observations- Observations within the natural setting served to provide firsthand insight into the topic of study and to add robustness to the information related in interviews and other sources (Merriam, 2009). I observed and took fieldnotes during each face-to-face meeting of the summer course. Additionally, in the fall I conducted 3-6 observations in the classrooms of Lilly Nichols and Leslie Miller. (All names are pseudonyms.)
- 2) Online discussions- Regular online discussions were built into the structure of the course. Students used the virtual space to converse about the readings and assignments. To collect these samples of teachers' voices, I downloaded their discussions in PDF format and analyzed them using Nvivo software. (Nvivo was used for all qualitative analysis.)
- 3) Course documents- I collected various documents relevant to the course, including the syllabus, handouts, and student work samples.
- 4) Interviews- Interviews are employed by qualitative researchers as a means of gaining access to knowledge and perspectives not readily observable. They allow the researcher insight into the mind of the participants, though the researcher must

carefully check these ascribed beliefs against other sources of data. I confess myself to be what Merriam (2009) refers to as a “romantic” interviewer, in that I do not present myself as unbiased or objective, rather I explicitly pursue conversation that is intimate and revealing of subjectivities. Having a prior relationship with me and knowledge of my research interests, participants were at least somewhat aware of my biases, perhaps impacting the nature of their responses. Still, I considered interviews as a necessary element to ensure the acquisition of authentic teacher voices. Mrs. Nichols and Ms. Miller were interviewed after the course, midway through my observations in their classrooms, and at the end of the data collection period. The number of interviews conducted was but a fraction of what would be necessary for a true ethnographic analysis, but were nonetheless insightful. I recorded and transcribed each interview independently soon after conducting them.

- 5) Teacher Reflections- After each observation in the fall, Mrs. Nichols and Ms. Miller were provided with a copy of my field notes and asked to reflect on my observations, making connections to the summer learning. Such critical reflection has been suggested by education researchers as a means of incorporating issues of equity and social justice (and ultimately culturally relevant teaching methods) into teacher thinking and practice (Howard, 2003).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Nvivo Qualitative Software. Using tenets of grounded theory, which requires developing theories from data rather than testing hypotheses from existing theories, I employed open coding techniques to discover any

themes (Charmaz, 2014). During open coding many themes emerged, ranging from topics such as teacher beliefs about student learning and families to deficit thinking and strengths perspective. Considering my familiarity with the literature on professional learning, some theoretical codes were identified at this point as well. Despite the large number of codes that emerged, three main themes were readily apparent: how teachers learn, how teachers learn to work with diverse learners, and barriers to learning or application of learning. I began to organize and categorize the codes by those themes. As I did so, a loose model began to form, spurred by the realization that there were nearly as many instances of barriers to learning as there were instances of said learning. Moreover, as teachers took this opportunity to share how they did (and did not) learn, the frequency of certain codes (e.g. “building community”, “negotiation between facilitator and participants”, and “multiple and varied learning methods used”) showed how important it was that their learning be relevant and meaningful—or culturally responsive—to their needs.

I then implemented an additional round of coding, this time applying theories as codes. From the literature on what constitutes effective professional learning, I gathered the following codes: teacher collaboration and leadership, a focus on content and how students learn, connections to high standards, extended duration and follow-up, and Knight’s *Partnership Principles*. From Professor N’s driving theory of socially just pedagogy, I pulled three additional codes: bridge between everyday knowledge and content learning, skills for navigating cultural and discursive communities, and challenging and reshaping curriculum. I was able to further narrow at this point as several codes could be merged; for example, my original code of “negotiation and flexibility

between facilitators and participants” was now merged into the theoretical code of “Voice” or “Choice” from Knight’s *Partnership Principles*.

As previously alluded to, the number of interviews and observations conducted would not be sufficient to write a true ethnography (Merriam, 2009); however, I employed ethnographic methods in my attempt to relate this story of professional learning. Consider it a snippet—an ethnographic case study, if you will—of the larger narrative surrounding teacher learning. I believe this snippet to be important, for in it I have attempted to represent the voices of the teachers themselves, rather than the voices of those who often have the platform to present what professional learning should be. Teacher voice is an essential piece of the national conversation since “accumulating evidence shows professional development is best done *with*, not *to*, teachers” (Neill, 2009, p. 8). Like students, in order to best learn teachers need voice and choice.

Additional Limitations

Considering this a professional learning experience presents some noteworthy limitations. First, as a course, this experience offered motivators beyond those traditionally associated with PD or PL. This includes the assignment of a grade, the financial losses at stake if the course is not completed satisfactorily and the potential for economic and professional gain (in the form of additional rank or certification and potential salary increases associated with those achievements). This, however, does not necessarily increase the impact this experience is likely to have on classroom practice since a teacher could complete the requirements of the course satisfactorily without having to demonstrate any implementation of their learning. Further, professional

learning literature suggests that many factors contribute to teacher motivation, such as the intrinsic desire to become a better teacher, the likelihood of successful implementation of learning, teacher choice, autonomy and authority during the learning experience and the relevance of the learning to school/district, personal and professional goals (Abrami, Poulsen, & Chambers, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Guskey, 1986, 2002; Stewart, 2014).

Secondly, a college course such as this one does not precisely fit the definition of traditional professional development or the definition of professional learning as my state currently defines it. It contains elements of each, pairing what my state's *Model Curriculum Framework* defines as the "sharing or dissemination of information, skills and strategies without the intentionality or accountability for implementation, data-based focus or expected results" of professional development with the "opportunities for individual and collaborative professional study, analysis, application and reflection" (p. 82) characteristic of professional learning (KDE, 2014). The term professional learning will be used throughout this paper, with the reader's understanding that this experience does not fully meet the criteria described in the definition above. I will discuss lessons learned through this experience that could be beneficially applied to school-based professional learning.

Finally, though there are limitations, it should be noted that learning and practicing that learning simultaneously is respected as a method for the supporting the iterative relationship between knowledge and praxis (Gay, 2010). Further, though the course itself lacks some elements of effective professional learning, the teachers selected for phase two received several additional necessary components, such as regular follow-

up and reinforcement of learning (Desimone et al., 2002). These teachers also benefited from being able to reflect on and study their own practice within their classroom setting, which has been identified as the most powerful context for teacher professional learning (Borko, 2004).

Findings

The codes that emerged during analysis nearly all fell into three categories: how teachers learn, how teachers learn to work with diverse learners, and barriers to learning or application of learning. Within the over thirty pieces of data analyzed were well over a hundred instances of each category. Each of these categories adds to what we know about professional learning, particularly the barriers—as I will explore further later in this paper. A summary of the frequency with which each category appeared is found in figure three below.

Category	How Teachers Learn	How Teachers Learn to Work with Diverse Learners	Barriers to Learning or Implementation of Learning
Number of Instances	191	148	131

Figure 3. Code Frequency

Discussion

A Socially Just Professional Learning Framework

A model of true professional learning (as opposed to professional development) requires a cultural shift—that is, a shift from culture as a peripheral consideration to placing it at the heart of the design, facilitation and implementation of learning. In light of this, we will look at this study through the lens of Knight’s (2011) Partnership

Principles and Moje's theory of socially just pedagogy (Lewis et. al, 2007). I will present examples of each principle as exemplified in the two phases of my study (though many examples could apply to multiple principles), supplement it with the literature on culturally relevant pedagogy and Moje's research where appropriate, and provide implications for school-based professional learning practices.

Equality—Teachers have input in the planning of the professional learning activities, not simply required to attend PD.

Though the course syllabus laid out the goals for the course, there was a great deal of leeway as to how the goals would be reached. Like the *Common Core State Standards* for K-12 teachers, this syllabus provided Professor N with guidelines for *what* was to be learned but not *how* to learn it (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). Consequently, she was able to design activities *with* the teachers, as well as in response to their needs and interests as they emerged throughout the course. The teachers were required to lead some of the learning, leaving it to them to design the activities. Additionally, instruction was rarely delivered via lecture; instead the course was dominated with small group and partner work, class discussions, and shared experiences. Professor N made this principle evident on the first night of class while discussing the syllabus, as noted in my fieldnotes:

[Professor N] then negotiates various modifications to regular syllabus due to time restrictions of the summer. For instance, the multicultural book critiques can be done socially rather than alone (which often begins to feel like a checklist). There is no form for analyzing multicultural literature. They will create it. [Professor N] goes on to share anecdotes about how classes modified their approaches to different assignments last summer. (fieldnotes, 07/10/14)

As the class continued, Professor N continued to negotiate and modify class activities based on the teachers' needs, even relating her ideals on tailored instruction to K-12 classroom practice:

[Professor N] brings everyone back together. She says they've asked about structure for the assignment. She reminds them that she's flexible. She says lesson planning is like keeping a calendar, everyone has a different way. She shares anecdotes about how she bucked the system as a new teacher wanting to use post its and write the plans after. She says you can only do so much before the kids are there and you see what they do with it. If you don't meet your goals then tomorrow might change. Or perhaps they take it farther and they have different outcomes than intended. So no KTIP format for their CT. Perhaps some sort of table, including some basic info that'll be consistent (these guidelines posted to blackboard). But the lesson itself can be formatted however you teach, how you plan. She wants the assignment to be something they can use and is useful to them. (fielnotes, 07/29/14)

The teachers in this course were no strangers to bad professional development. During a particularly candid online discussion, the teachers shared memories of a "cultural competence" training they were all required to attend. Aside from the obvious structural issues and the marginalization of culture implied by so short a training, it was clear from the teachers' responses that being forced to attend such training did little to change their mindsets or practice:

I was one of those teachers about 10 years ago that was forced to attend Ruby Payne seminars all the while thinking, "this really paints poverty in broad strokes." I went with an African American colleague and remember being embarrassed by what appeared to be a simplistic approach to teaching children living in poverty because race and culture was generalized to the point of stereotype. I bring this up because school districts prescribe programs, although with good intentions, that are band-aid fixes to very large and complex problems. CRP needs to be a systematic process in every school district. The problem that I see with RCPS is that the teachers that attend Professional Development for enhancing knowledge of cultural diversity and best practices to assist culturally diverse students aren't the ones that need it. Diversity training

should be mandatory in EVERY school. To create more teachers like Ms. Ellis (in the text) teachers need cultural sensitivity training and professional development to teach strategies for assisting multicultural students. (Kerry, online discussion board post)

The chapter kept stating that there was no "quick fix" to becoming a Culturally Relevant Teacher. I immediately thought of the Cultural Competence training that River City required teachers to participate in a couple of years ago. Those of you that teach in RCPS will remember this training. It was a 6 hour training given at the schools, led by the principal, and consisted of videos and PowerPoints. After reading this chapter I am so critical of this training. There is no way that 6 hours of information can transform the pedagogy of teachers in RCPS. It's funny to think that the district thought it would. I think instead it was just another box to check off a list in efforts to improve our student success. Rather than participate in professional developments that teach us to be culturally relevant, I like that the chapter said it's up to us to continue on a "journey of becoming culturally relevant". (Lilly, online discussion board post)

Lilly, I agree with you on the quick fix initiative that is prevalent across this district and I bet most others. I remember this specific one you are referencing and I remember the general reaction to it as well. Most were completely caught up in other distractions during this presentation and those who did pay attention were more combative than anything. The way in which they went about it seemed to do less in encouraging CRT practices and more putting people on the offensive. A very frustrating situation all around... I can't even list the number of professional developments I have been to that have attempted this quick fix idea and none really work or even take hold. I understand that resources and time play into creating such quick fix PDs but there's got to be a better way. Even something as simple as explaining in these PDs that it's not expected for someone to be competent in the area addressed but that it's a continuous learning process would be a first step in the right direction. (Lisa, online discussion board post)

This training was an example of what Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) lament as the "episodic, myopic, and often meaningless" (p. 2) learning experiences teachers often receive. It is obvious that were schools to include teachers like Lilly, Lisa and Kerry in their decision-making, professional learning would be more relevant and impactful. If

true equality were practiced, teacher learning would undoubtedly be “available in a variety of ways, “just in time” and geared toward individual needs” (KDE, 2014).

Blanket, cookie-cutter, mandated trainings do not reflect the ideals of true professional learning.

Choice—Teachers choose what and how they learn.

In the broadest sense, teachers exercised choice in selecting a course of study that led them to this class. However, there were many examples of students being able to choose what and how they learned. The professional learning literature, like the literature on culturally relevant practices, suggests that teachers learn best through multiple activities and active learning methods (Blank, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995). In addition to the constant negotiation of course particulars discussed in the preceding section, Professor N built opportunities for choice into the structure of the course. The syllabus explained that in addition to a required text, students would read a professional text, an adolescent text, and multicultural literature all of their own choosing. Students also chose between various articles online, decided the form of all of their assignments, and the nature of their presentations to the class. Professor N often proposed changes to the agenda or schedule, which students could modify, agree to, or reject. They were comfortable doing so as I witnessed all three outcomes over the course of the class.

Voice—Professional learning empowers and respects teacher voices.

As the previous sections make apparent, Professor N valued the voice of the teachers and encouraged them to exercise those voices frequently. Their expertise and

interests were consulted in everything from class content to assigning grades, as exemplified in the syllabus:

Evaluation in this course is a negotiated process. We will explore issues of evaluation with children as well as for ourselves as learners. We will not assign separate grades for each assignment, but rather, we will demonstrate a variety of assessment strategies with each event. I hope you will learn for the sake of learning and come to value your growth and development as becoming part of a professional community. All assignments and course expectations must be completed or a grade of incomplete will be given until all work is completed. Each student will also complete at least two self-evaluation reflections, have a midterm and final conference with Professor N, and determine his or her own grade (with documented support) at the end of the semester (40% of the final grade will be determined by self-evaluation and 60% by Professor N).

Such approaches to learning enact a shift in power called for throughout the literature on socially just pedagogical practice and allow for true partnership between the facilitator and learner; “they become jointly responsible for a process in which they all grow” (Freire, 2000, p. 80). When learners are empowered to take ownership over their own learning, to question and reshape curriculum, and to create knowledge within relevant contexts, they are engaging in the kind of learning that liberates rather than domesticates (Finn, 2009; Freire, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1992). My state’s model curriculum framework sums up this idea:

The shift from professional development to professional learning signals a transition from educators as passive recipients of information to educators as active partners with peers in determining and addressing their learning needs based on student learning goals and their own professional goals. (KDE, 2014, p. 82)

Reflection–Reflection is recognized as an integral part of learning.

A unique aspect of the reflections embedded in this course is that teachers could hardly avoid recognizing their own culture and how it might impact their instruction. Despite the invisibility of Whiteness, the White teachers in this class came to recognize that while they belonged to the majority culture and rarely had to think of themselves as a part of a cultural group, they indeed belonged to one and it impacted their teaching lives. Lilly openly discussed this on the online discussion board:

Just as the author, I too felt that Ms. Ellis exemplified a culturally relevant teacher. This led to a couple of uncertainties on my part, however. Ms. Ellis is African American and has a different cultural background than myself. I can't identify with many of the experiences she brings to her teaching that helps her connect to African American students. For example, "As an African American woman, she believes that African American girls have specific needs that African American women teachers can address." Does this leave me lacking as a white woman in a classroom that is predominantly African American? Or does this mean that I will simply be bringing a different set of experiences to the classroom? How can my white, middle class, upbringing help build a relationship with students of low socioeconomic status or children of different ethnicities?

The comfort of the group engaging in authentic dialogue was evident in the candid responses that followed Lilly's questions:

I had some of the same feelings being white. I have been in several classrooms where an AA teacher has made a remark to a student. I know if I would have said the same thing I would have been reprimanded. How do we level the field? I treated my students like I treated my own children but I did have to watch at times how I said something so it would not be taken wrong. (Charlotte, discussion board post)

I sometimes feel that teachers of color have an easier time relating to minority students than I do. I think sometimes when white people try these things, that they can come off as fake, like Ms. Hosford. I hope that by getting to know my students and showing them that I truly care about their success in my classroom, that I can come close to a Ms. Ellis. (Madeline, discussion board post)

Another positive outcome of reflection is that it presents learners with the opportunity to question and reshape the accepted knowledge and status quo. Moje & Hinchman (2004) suggested that one of several ways socially just pedagogy could be constructed was “as a way to teach students how to challenge and reshape the academic content knowledge of the curriculum” (p. 323). The teachers in this course began to question their own practice as they reflected on their new learning:

If we contextualize learning in a way that is appropriate to the students in our classroom, learning will most likely reach a maximum. Instead of blaming the student's background, we need to point the finger at ourselves....what aren't WE doing to meet their learning needs??? (Lilly, discussion board post)

Chapter 9 was a very interesting read! I loved all of the wonderful ways teachers can connect with parents and families. There have been so many times, at my school, where teachers feel like parents are disconnected from their child's learning. It's difficult to get most families to come to school, except for when we host our yearly Fall Festival. I admit I was one of those teachers that said, "They must not care about their child's education." After reading this chapter, I realize that I haven't done enough to reach out to the families of my students to learn more about them and make them feel comfortable and connected. (Leslie, discussion board post)

The reflection was even more powerful in the fall when placed within meaningful contexts. Leslie and Lilly were given my fieldnotes after observations in their classrooms and asked to think about them through the lens of their summer learning. Their responses exhibited the importance of this reinforcement of the professional learning and the necessity of reflecting on their practice. Though the subsequent action taken may vary, reflecting on their learning, their practice, and their students could be a first step in changing mindsets and beliefs for the betterment of instruction and, ultimately, students. This potential is apparent in these excerpts from Lilly and Leslie's written reflections:

Shew! This day seemed like a struggle! I try to have a calm demeanor with my students. Lottie, in particular, has some emotional issues that she is working through and I keep in mind that she is working through the loss of her father. I want my students to feel comfortable asking me things and sharing in class, but after this day, it's apparent we need to work on our discourse. (Leslie, written reflection)

It's interesting that you mention that the character Meg is a white girl. After taking the Cultural Literacy class this summer, I began to evaluate our guided reading book systems. We have 2 guided reading systems in our classrooms (Fountas and Pinnell, Leveled Literacy). I have used them for 4 years now and I know the various books VERY well. I can only think of ONE book that contains a character that is of a different race than white. Interesting. Guided reading books are tough to find though because they must be leveled for the various groups... The biggest "reflection piece" at this point is evaluating the books I have in my classroom. Could it be that some of our readers are struggling to make progress because the leveled books we are using in instruction are so culturally irrelevant? Do they not have the background knowledge needed to make connections? What guided reading systems are out there that have more culturally diverse characters? This would be something to research. Then of course that would cost money. (Lilly, written reflection)

Regular reflection is essential in this shift to professional learning (KDE, 2014).

Vescio (2008) holds that reflection is another aspect of PLCs that hold such power. Reflecting on day-to-day practices with others of shared experiences leads to positive instructional change. In these follow-up activities, I provided Lilly and Leslie with just such an opportunity. As a facilitator, Professor N also kept a journal of teaching reflections. Whether teaching in a K-12 setting or providing professional learning experiences for teachers, it is not possible to maintain the necessary cultural consciousness to critique texts and activities, reshape and remake the curriculum, and best meet the needs of the learners in our care without engaging in regular reflection (KDE, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Dialogue—Authentic dialogue is enabled.

According to Paulo Freire (2000) in his seminal work *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, “without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (p. 93). It is imperative, then, that we create learning environments in which learners are free to engage in authentic dialogue. In the facilitation of the course, Professor N spent time building community between the teachers. They participated in activities intended to assist them in getting to know each other, including sharing a shoebox of items that described them and writing “literacy stories” about themselves that varied as much in form as in content. There were multiple avenues for communication, enabling both the most and least vocal of students to participate in discussions. They were expected to respond, to give feedback and to push back against the ideas presented in course texts and by their colleagues. Professor N’s constant negotiation of content and requirements made it clear that it was a safe environment to advocate for one’s needs and that their words were valued and could lead to change.

In this way, Professor N created a professional learning community. Research suggests that though building true PLCs is difficult and time-consuming, strong professional learning communities can foster teacher learning and instructional improvement (Borko, 2004; Vescio, 2008). Professor N’s skillful community building ensured that the teachers felt safe not only discussing their ideas, but in disagreeing with the ideas of others, including the expert authors of required readings. Moje believes that instruction emphasizing the relationship interaction between reader and text “supports efforts to teach subject matter in socially just ways... [such] strategies, while not explicitly attentive to cultural difference and responsiveness, are based in reading theories

that recognize—and indeed highlight—the role of the reader and, to a lesser extent, the context of the reading situation” (Lewis et. al, 2007, p. 16). This interaction (and occasional disagreement) between readers and text was often evident in online discussion board posts:

This is a hard issue from the text for me. I wish I knew more about the other students. I feel like this issue crosses racial lines. In school as a young child, I remember associating good behavior with learning. I remember always getting in trouble for playing and talking when in school when I should have been working. As an adult, I do think poor, inattentive behavior does interfere with learning. Of course, then a teacher has to help guide the student back on track to learn. (Lana, discussion board post)

While most of the ideas were applicable, one caught me off guard. “A great place for teachers and parents to start is by reading and sharing memoirs...” This may work if parents are literate in English, but seems a bit much. Even with a translator I feel there is so much pressure on teachers already that getting to know parents on such a deep level would be ideal, but is it realistic? What did others think of this particular recommendation? (Violet, discussion board post)

Too often, disagreement is not comfortable or even possible in school-based professional learning. Top-down approaches can give such experiences the feel of authority, of being endorsed and expected by those in leadership positions and, consequently, unable to be disagreed with, argued against or even modified. In such a situation, teachers are often resigned to accept programmatic or curricular decisions with which they do not agree. This disheartening situation is not ideal for either the teachers or the students, the former struggling or resigned to such confinement and the latter potentially receiving misguided, halfhearted or even detrimental instruction.

Praxis–Learning is applied to real-life practice.

The Culminating Task (CT), which was the final assignment of the course, was a prime example of this principle in action.

[Professor N] goes on to talk about the culturally relevant lesson sequence can be something different that works for and will be meaningful for the students (e.g. a PD for teachers.)

Kerry: Can the lesson plan be tied to the adolescent literature?

Professor N: Yes!

Professor N wants to talk to each person individually about their needs related to the CT. (fieldnotes, 07/10/14)

Professor N wanted the class' assignments to apply to the real work lives of these teachers. Rather than having students complete meaningless lesson plans, she allowed them to tailor the assignment—enabling, for example, the PhD student without a classroom to gather data for presentation or the technology resource teacher to create a professional development plan to share with her colleagues. Had this been a school-based professional learning experience, teachers would likely gain even deeper buy-in of the learning. Guskey (2002) contends that “evidence of improvement or positive change in the learning outcomes of students generally precedes, and may be a pre-requisite to, significant change in the attitudes and beliefs of most teachers” (p. 384), suggesting that the principle of praxis is what truly leads to change in teacher practice. Lilly made this clear in her enthusiastic reflections on her Cinderella unit:

I feel like in so many grad school classes you just like do the work to turn in and you might get a few ideas or a couple few more strategies, but I truly feel like I got actual activities that I will use and repeat but I also feel like my whole perspective on things has changed. And it's like the book says that you have to start somewhere and I think there are so many big issues that need to be tackled. But, I will say you know like a silly little cultural relevance training that RCPS puts on will do nothing. Like it has

to start within the teacher and it has to be baby steps like the Cinderella unit, um, getting kids to share their home stories, little things like that- tiny little things like that kind of filtrate throughout the curriculum and a cultural relevance training will do nothing. It isn't giving the teachers anything that they can use and it's not changing the attitude or the heart of the teacher. (Lilly, interview 12/10/14)

A major barrier to implementation of any new learning is the existing curriculum, pacing guides, standards, and assessments that teachers must adhere to in their teaching lives. The teachers in this course were aware of the tensions between creating classrooms that valued the funds of knowledge of their various learners and meeting the expectations set forth by their schools, districts, and state:

How do we teach all of the standards and mandated curriculum and still address the needs of our students and honor their narratives? (Kerry, discussion board post)

Kerry's question is regularly echoed by teachers of all levels of education and experience. Standardized measures of learning, common standards, and programmatic issues are often in direct opposition to the needs and interests of the students they target (Gay, 2005). Teachers remain at the mercy of top-down decision making, external evaluators, and even penalties that make compliance necessary (USDOE, 2010). However, the teachers in this study found that meeting standards and providing culturally relevant instruction did not have to be mutually exclusive. In her final interview, Lilly reviewed her ambitious plans for incorporating her new learning into her classroom. She realized that she had not done all that she planned, but saw that the attempts she had made still allowed her to meet required standards:

Um, this is so tricky and I love reading all of this but it's like we're so bound by, um, the *Common Core Standards* and we literally have like if you knew how little wiggle room we had- like it's so sad. Um, but, I think with this- and I feel like I keep going back to this Cinderella unit but I feel like that's the first time that I've really tried to consider cultures in my classroom in instruction. I feel like I've always been sensitive to what's going on in their homes, but I've never actually like made curriculum decisions because of that.

MO: And you were still able to meet standards?

LN: Yes! Exactly. Like, multiple standards. And it worked. It was effective and they were so captivated. It was awesome. And the fact that they could- this was amazing- I had some people in here observing and I had a map up there and I was putting stars on the map for where all the different versions were from and they could sit there and tell you Cindrillon- Caribbean, Yeh Shen-China, The Golden Sandal-Iraq, you know? And I was like 'oh my gosh'. These are countries they probably never- unless the kids that were from there- they had never heard of before... I was amazed- I gave them a Venn diagram to compare two of the stories and both of us were amazed at the- just the- for a six and seven year old to be able to compare and contrast that's a hard skill and they were incredible at it. And they did it independently. And, you know, I think that goes to show that they were- you know, they were- the texts were meaningful to them. (Lilly, interview 12/10/14)

Despite that discovery, Lilly was still apt to recite standards, curriculum and lack of resources as barriers to her implementing more of such instruction. Though the Cinderella unit is likely to reappear in future years, it would be hyperbolic to suggest her practice was drastically changed. However, as the teachers in the summer literacy course discussed again and again on the discussion board, she has found a place to start. "Furthermore, the process of teacher change is probably more cyclical than linear...changes in attitudes and beliefs are likely to spur additional changes in practice that bring further change in student learning, and so on (Guskey 2002, p. 385-386). Lilly and her classmates have taken the first step in the long and uncertain process of teacher change (Borko, 2004; Guskey, 2002).

Reciprocity–Participation is an expectation: all offer and receive feedback.

The continuous encouragement of dialogue, the necessity of collaborating with others on assignments, and the regular sharing of work and ideas with classmates within a community of mutual respect provided the necessary structure for all students to offer and receive feedback. Professor N repeatedly and explicitly stated her expectations regarding reciprocity in the syllabus:

The underlying philosophy of this class is one of social interaction. The experiences each person brings to the class contribute to the body of knowledge learned. It is difficult, if not impossible, to make up experiences missed by not being in class. We all learn from others, and your thoughts and questions are an important part of the learning process...A second part of this reading response requirement will be for each student to critique and write a review of FIVE pieces of multicultural literature and respond to 5 other critiques written by other class members. The format for these critiques will be discussed and negotiated in class. The format will take the format of a blog to encourage discussion and response.

The teachers certainly embraced this opportunity to collaborate, showing little reluctance to share and discuss their ideas and work either face-to-face or online. I saw this in action during my observations, as noted in my fieldnotes:

The students jot down ideas [for their literacy story assignment] and then share within the groups. Group members give them feedback on their ideas, pointing out those they think are most promising, suggesting genres and directions to take. Ideas include writing songs, poems, photo collages, etc...Violet and Kerry give Lana positive feedback about the sincerity and flow of the letter. Lana says she was very detailed [in her letter] because she won't remember all that when [her niece] is ready to receive it in 8th grade. (fieldnotes, 07/15/14)

Charlotte shows Leslie her story, proudly telling her that she took her advice. Leslie reads and praises it. (fieldnotes, 07/24/14)

As in any learning experience, not all teachers participated or progressed equally. Variations in interests, habits, disposition, dedication, and effort can be barriers to learning in any situation. This course, though an excellent professional learning experience, was no exception. For example, the discussion board was not always a place of rich dialogue: Leslie tended to say very little, most often given straightforward “answers” from the texts. Octavia often posed questions rather than offered any responses or new ideas. Leslie surprised me with a CT assignment focused on a culture that was completely unrepresented in her classroom—a missed opportunity for true praxis it seemed at the time—and Octavia resisted Professor N’s efforts to push her beyond a generalized exploration of the culture of her new city. Even the literacy story assignment, a seemingly easy task that gave the students complete autonomy in its execution, was met with resistance: Lisa, the course’s lone doctoral student (and thus the one theoretically more accustomed to rigorous academic expectations), had to be repeatedly pressed to turn in her work yet still waited until after the deadline to do so.

There were many possible explanations for such examples of variation. As a pre-service teacher, the principle of praxis could not be fully achieved for Octavia—she had no context in which to apply her learning. Lisa, too, was currently away from the classroom and navigating the very different role of PhD student. Teachers crave practical application of learning as students do. Decontextualized skills and ideas rarely stick. In a school-based situation, teachers like Octavia and Lisa could potentially be more motivated considering the direct proximity to their daily work, but that is not necessarily the case. Leslie and Madeline, both noticeably quiet in the larger group setting, perhaps

processed or learned in a different way or at a different pace than other more extroverted types. Research indicates that meaningful learning is a slow and uncertain process for teachers, resulting in varying degrees of change through participation in professional development (Borko, 2004).

A New Model of Professional Learning: Reality Andragogy

Within this summer course, Professor N created an environment in which teachers were able to discuss, reflect on, and question their practice. Many professional learning experiences lack the necessary elements to reach the level of effectiveness demonstrated by this course and thus can and should be informed by this model. A larger problem and one not solved by this example, however, is not creating such an environment but in maintaining it after the conclusion of the professional learning experience. When teachers returned to their schools and were faced with the pressures of day-to-day teacher life, what was there to stoke the fires of change ignited over the summer? It is here that a university course falls short. To maintain a spirit of inquiry in the face of the tensions surrounding classroom instruction, teachers need learning communities within their schools that push them, challenge them, remind them, and grow with them.

The 5 C's of Reality Andragogy

Christopher Emdin's Reality Pedagogy offers tangible ways of engaging diverse learners by immersing instruction within the multiple ways of knowing that characterize the students' lives (Emdin, 2011). Likewise, my model of Reality Andragogy situates learning within the complex realities of teachers' lives. Reality Andragogy builds on the rich literature of culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogy, as well as critical

theory and the research on professional learning (including the Partnership Principles) and tailors it to the unique nature of working with adult learners. As I viewed my own research through these complementary lenses, it became evident that teachers' lives are as complex as the lives of the students they serve. Thus, I offer a model for teacher learning that recognizes this: the 5 C's of Reality Andragogy—competency recognition, collaboration, continuous disruption, calibration, and contextualization.

Competency Recognition

The first tenet of this approach to professional learning is that teachers are respected as professionals. Their expertise is valued and their wisdom consulted in educational matters. In a professional learning setting, that means teachers have voice and choice in what and how they learn. They are not passive recipients of information, but active participants in the learning process. As in Reality Pedagogy, they should be utilized as co-teachers, deciding the best methods for the delivery of information, facilitating their own learning, adding to the overall conversation, and thereby internalizing the content more deeply (Emdin, 2011). Each professional learning experience should be unique since each experience draws on the skills and knowledge of a different group of teachers at a different point in time.

Collaboration

Collaboration is an essential outgrowth of the respect that is central to competency recognition. Teaching must cease to exist in bubbles, silos, and behind closed doors. We must be transparent in sharing our craft with all stakeholders—meaning we must know why we do what we do. Regular and honest dialogue with colleagues

ensures we can explain and defend our teaching choices, as well as share our expertise with peers. Though this conversation with like-minded individuals allows us to speak with others who possess a common knowledge base, the goal is not to hear our own ideas echoed, but to have our thinking questioned and pushed farther by knowledgeable others. Knowledge is socially constructed; we learn and grow through collaboration with other professionals (Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers must work together to learn, grow and improve the profession. Teachers need opportunities to come together with an attitude of responsibility to make decisions in the best interests of children.

Continuous Disruption

This study revealed the essentiality of continuous disruption to solidify learning. When we learn new information we experience cognitive dissonance as we decide how to incorporate that new knowledge into our current schema. We have the option of either adapting the new knowledge to fit what we already believe, or to shift or own thinking to fit the new knowledge—accommodation or assimilation (Piaget, 1976). I contend that in teacher learning, the initial disruption is not enough to induce true change in practice. Rather, the teacher's beliefs must be challenged repeatedly, be this through conversation with others, through self-reflection and analysis, or through additional learning experiences. In the Reality Andragogy model (see Figure 3) this disruption occurs whenever there is tension and it nourishes the seeds of change planted by the new learning, ultimately driving the learning forward. Within this study, I provided that disruption on several occasions for Lilly by reminding her of her intentions and ideas from the summer course. Though, as the model demonstrates, she still found ways to rationalize and accommodate based on the pressures of her day-to-day realities, this

continued disruption ensured that the seeds planted over the summer were not lost entirely, but waited beneath the surface to be revisited when another suitable disruption presented itself.

Calibration

The idea of calibration in this model is one of “checking in”. It is here that teachers reflect, self-assess, question their practices and beliefs, and compare their current actions to their knowledge and goals. Leslie and Lilly had opportunities for calibration when they reflected on my observations during the fall. Whether they modified their practice accordingly or simply rationalized their behavior, they still acknowledged discrepancies between their learning, their intent, and their practice.

Contextualization

Contextualization is necessary for teachers to truly enact change. This “C” considers the professional learning environment, as well as the opportunities to apply the learning. The best professional learning occurs within the context of the teacher’s school setting where it is valued and reinforced by colleagues, by administration, by school and district goals, and possibly by positive student outcomes. Without opportunities to apply new learning in context, teachers will be unable to incorporate that learning into their practice.

Reality Andragogy and the Process of Teacher Learning

Making changes to teaching practice is not a simple process (see Figure 4). As the teachers in this study demonstrated, there are many barriers to learning and subsequent

implementation and teachers respond differently to those barriers depending on a variety of circumstances. Change in teacher practice requires a negotiation between the way things are and the way they could or should be. It is scary and fraught with risk. Consequently, teachers need learning experiences that respect and recognize their realities. Instead of ignoring the tensions created when intent meets reality, Reality Andragogy seeks to spur teachers past the challenges they face. This model recognizes that not all learning will lead immediately to a change in practice, but contends that all new learning plants seeds for future change. Notice that even if accommodation occurs (either in response to the tensions created by the new learning or in response to the realities of day-to-day teaching life), a seed of change has already been planted. Another learning experience, another disruption, another opportunity to reflect and question could still lead to the nourishment of those seeds and the continuation through the model.

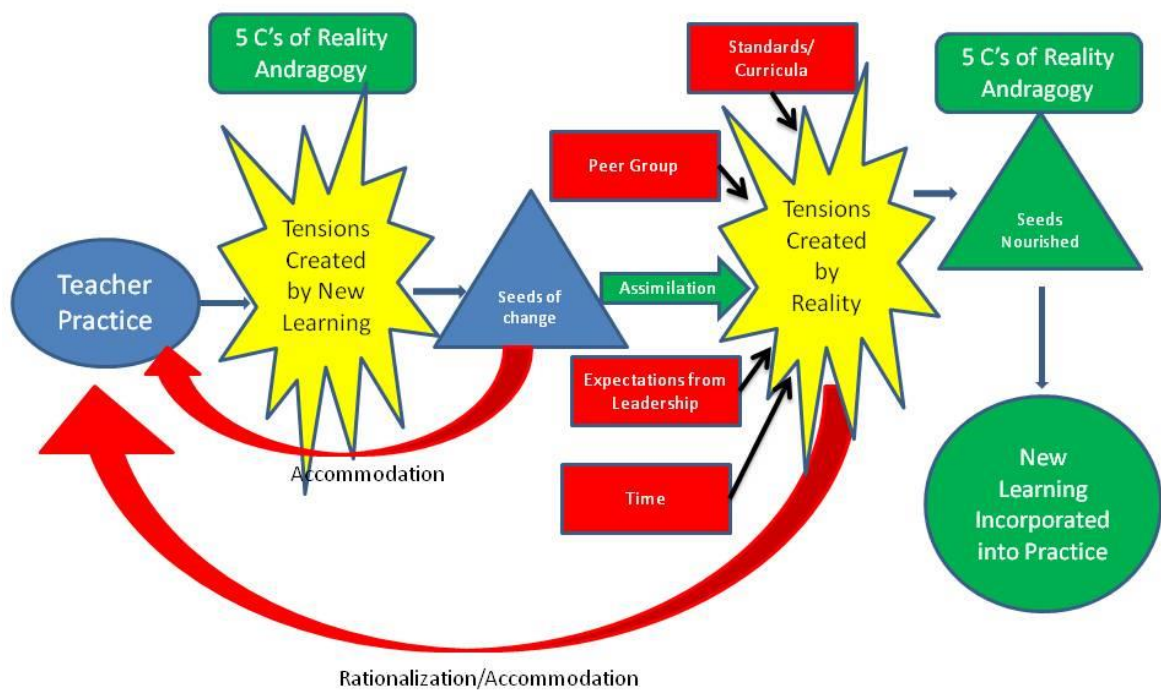


Figure 4. Teacher Learning Processes in the Reality Andragogy Model

This model has implications for further study. What happens after the incorporation into practice? Professional learning literature suggests that teacher change does not truly occur until new practices are affirmed by student results (Guskey, 2002). Would positive student results nourish the seeds further, encourage additional changes, or lead to further study and/or reflection? Would negative student results cause the seeds to wither and the teacher to return to old practices, or would the strength of the nourished seeds withstand the winds of doubt and lead the teacher into further study and reflection? There is certainly much more research to be done in this area.

Conclusion: Culture at the Core

Title I schools, like Lilly's and Leslie's, have for many years been required to allocate ten percent of their allotted funds to schoolwide professional development; additionally, Title II funding has added an additional three billion dollars to PD efforts (Darling-Hammond et. al, 2009). State statute KRS 160.345 requires that "included in the school council formula shall be an allocation for professional development that is at least sixty-five percent (65%) of the district's per pupil state allocation for professional development for each student in average daily attendance in the school." This translates to a tremendous amount of money being used for PD across the country, not to mention a great deal of teachers' precious time. With the scarcity of resources so often lamented in our field, it is imperative that we use them wisely. That means investing them in truly effective professional learning practices.

This course is one example of a structure that aligns more closely to professional learning than the outdated professional development still too often employed in schools.

Though this would be difficult to duplicate in a school setting, there remain implications for schools and districts.

- Teachers should be collaborating and sharing ideas around common goals. Could teachers be urged to take courses together? Online learning opportunities such as massive online open courses (MOOCs), webinars, and state-supplied resources are often inexpensive or free. Such experiences would require time regularly to return to same content, opportunities to apply the learning between sessions and perhaps engaging in other “homework.” Teachers should be empowered to lead the learning themselves, making it relevant and meaningful to them.
- Teachers should be tailoring learning to fit their needs—in plainer terms, professional learning should be culturally sustaining. PLCs are often too prescriptive; in this course the teachers were able to negotiate with the facilitator and meet expectations for the course while simultaneously engaging in work that was meaningful to them individually.
- Teachers should be having opportunities to apply, reflect on, and refine learning—this is what was missing from the summer course, but would have made it more powerful according to the literature. Schools have the capabilities to allow teachers to actually try out their learning in their classrooms, where not only will it become more real but, according to Guskey (2002), is the way to change teacher beliefs and give them confidence and enthusiasm for what they learned.
- Teachers should be given adequate time and repeated opportunities to engage with the content. As a course, rather than this being a one-time, six hour experience, teachers had time to wrestle with and dig deeply into the material.

Typical professional development involves little follow-up, accountability, or repeated practice. If teachers and administrators approached professional learning in schools the same way they approach learning at universities, it would be more impactful.

In an era when much of our scarcest resources—time and money—are being invested in teacher professional development, it is essential that we dedicate our efforts to providing the most effective experiences possible. At the heart of true professional learning is culture. If we are truly going to make a shift that empowers teachers, helps them to grow, and positively impacts students, we are going to have to actively and explicitly embrace culturally sustaining pedagogical practices in our staff rooms and classrooms.

DRAWN AND QUARTERED: EXAMINING THE TEACHING LIFE OF A FIRST GRADE TEACHER

Overview

In this article, the teaching life of one teacher is examined through multiple lenses—lenses that reflect the different and somewhat contradictory entities that exercise power over her practice. After participating in a summer course centered on culturally relevant pedagogical practices, Lilly Nichols returned to her own school for a new year with plans to integrate her summer learning experiences into her practice. Despite her intentions, Lilly found herself facing demands from curricula, standards, colleagues, and administrators that affected her ability to move forward as planned. This paper explores these tensions and the implications for consumers, designers, and facilitators of professional learning for educators.

I think I try to give my 100% day in and day out. It is the hardest job in the world...just with everything we have to balance with behavior and all the kids that are below level trying to get them up where they need to be. And when you don't have parental support and then everything we have to turn in paperwork-wise for administrators. I mean it's just like- I feel like it is the hardest job in the world. But I say that to say that I feel very fulfilled doing it every day. There are some days I go home and I'm ready to quit... how am I going to be a new mom and still be a wife and still...be a mom to twenty of these kids, you know? But I love teaching because it feels like...despite it being so challenging and...going home at night and wanting to quit, every day is a new day with teaching. And I love that, you know, you can greet kids every morning and pretend whatever happened yesterday is over and just start fresh and I love that about teaching.

–Lilly Nichols, Interview 10/07/14

I met Lilly Nichols in the summer of 2014. As a part of my dissertation, I was observing a graduate literacy course to study teacher learning. I planned to follow several teachers back into their classrooms in the fall to examine the ways in which they implemented their new learning. Lilly immediately presented herself as someone I would want as a participant. Dark-haired and petite, she surprised you when she turned to face you and revealed the evidence of her nearly full-term pregnancy. Her eagerness to learn and participate did not wane when, halfway through the course, she gave birth to her first child. Lilly continued to join in online discussions, turn in assignments, and keep up with the readings. Though she took an incomplete in the course, she decided to do so only because she viewed the class content as truly meaningful and wanted to do quality work. She finished all necessary requirements during the fall semester.

The summer literacy course was offered as a part of a Master's degree program at the largest university in Lilly's city. Teachers in the course might also be pursuing an endorsement in teaching English language learners (ELLs). Lilly, believing herself ill-equipped to meet the needs of the large ELL population at her school, was pursuing this

endorsement. Throughout the course, Lilly expressed grand plans to change her classroom practice. She embraced many of the ideas shared and planned to incorporate many of the activities into her instruction. Her excitement led her to eagerly seek me out to volunteer for my study. She wanted to focus her professional growth goal for the school year on strengthening parent engagement and thought that would align nicely with my research.

When I followed up with Lilly in the fall, her plans for her professional growth goal had changed. She intended to do something a little simpler, feeling that she had a lot on her plate as a new mom and in adjusting to returning to work after missing the first weeks of school. I soon discovered that some of Lilly's other plans had changed as well, both through her own doing and in response to a myriad of pressures. Soon the exploration of these pressures captured my attention. Suddenly there was a real and complex layer added to my research questions:

- 1) How can targeted professional learning focused on family literacy and culturally sustaining teaching impact teacher practice?
- 2) How can teachers design classroom practice that values the home environments of students?

In attempting to answer these questions, I was faced with the challenges that Lilly and all teachers face every day, how to do what is best for kids while still meeting the expectations of all other stakeholders.

Methodology

To tell Lilly's story, I employed qualitative methods; from interviews, observations, course documents, and discussion board posts, I stitched together the following narrative. Though the number of interviews and observations conducted would be insufficient for a true ethnography (Merriam, 2009), I was able to construct an ethnographic case study—a snapshot of the complex teaching life of Lilly Nichols.

The very complexity of that life led to the structure of this narrative. The multigenre essay “meld[s] facts, interpretation and imagination” (Romano, 1991). Separately, each thread of this story reads as its own genre (Romano, 1995) but they collectively allow us a glimpse into the multifaceted life of this teacher. After using Nvivo Qualitative Software to code the data and identify recurring themes, the necessity of using the multigenre essay approach became apparent. Again and again, Lilly expressed varied and sometimes contradictory views, reflecting the varied and sometimes contradictory forces making demands of her as a teacher. In this paper I have ascribed them each a voice and a turn to speak (signified by a change in font), following their threads with my own analysis and interpretation.

From the Mind of the Scholar

Kamille: Rule number one?

Class: Follow directions quickly!

Kamille: Rule number two?

Class: Raise your hand for permission to speak!

Kamille: Rule number three?

Class: Raise your hand for permission to leave your seat!

Kamille: Rule number four?

Class: Make smart choices!

Kamille: Rule number five?

Class: Keep your dear teacher happy!

Mrs. Nichols sets the tone for the day by calling Kamille to the front of the carpet to lead the class in their recitation of the rules. Each response is well-rehearsed and complete with corresponding movements. In response to rule number five, the children frame their little faces with their hands and sway from side to side in rhythm with the singsong lilt of their voices. Such oft-repeated procedures are heard throughout the day. Mrs. Nichols has carefully cultivated their routines and the class knows them well. They know her expectations and they know what they can expect from her.

Still, they are first graders and they make mistakes. Luckily, Mrs. Nichols is generous with second chances. “My favorite thing about teaching is that every day is a new day,” she tells me. Unlike some of her colleagues, Mrs. Nichols ensures that students in her class always start each day with positive Class Dojo points. It bothers her that in some classrooms, students who moved into negative point values in the school behavior system carry those negatives with them into the next day. She believes they should start fresh, rather than having to work their way out of a hole before the day has even begun.

As I watch Mrs. Nichols teach, I see this belief underlying her interactions with the students. In one instance, a boy named Caleel is sent back to his seat after several

reminders and redirections related to his carpet behavior. He stomps back to his seat and knocks his papers off of his desk, then puts his head down. Mrs. Nichols does not acknowledge the outburst, but a few minutes later she calls to him to ask if he saw the illustration she was showing the class on the document camera. Her voice is gentle as she points out elements of the image she knows he will like. Caleel looks at the picture and nods then, as Mrs. Nichols continues to read the book to the class, he quietly picks up the papers he knocked to the floor and sits back in his seat to listen to the story.

Lilly Nichols is a caring teacher. She, like everyone else, is not perfect, but she loves her children and works hard to ensure their learning. Over the months of visiting Lilly's classroom I was interested to see how she would enact her learning from the summer course we shared. I remembered her excitement and her eagerness to try new things in the classroom; this was my opportunity to see those big ideas in practice. What I saw in the fall both encouraged and discouraged me in turns. Though Lilly displayed unarguable teaching prowess, the fire for change that had been ignited over the summer lost some of its heat and brightness when she returned to the real world.

Suddenly Lilly was not in a space of questioning and exploration, but within a system of rigid expectations and accountability. She was not answering only to herself or to the children in her classroom, but also to her colleagues, to administrators, to curriculum and standards and tests. These sometimes warring factions appeared to be pulling Lilly in different directions, like a puppet with too many puppeteers. In this paper I explore Lilly's navigation of these tensions and the implications of her decisions by analyzing several critical events or stories.

Story One: The Materials

Thus Sayeth the Curriculum

Lilly's state was among the first to adopt the *Common Core State Standards*. These standards provide a baseline for what students need to know and be able to do in reading, writing, listening, speaking, language, and mathematics in order to be ready to attend college or pursue a career (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). These standards tell teachers *what* to teach, but not *how* to teach it. In Lilly's local-control state, each district makes its own curricular decisions. So while Lilly must, for instance, teach her students the necessary skills to "ask and answer questions about key details in a text" (NGA & CCSSO, 2010), the standards do not mandate particular texts, questions, or methods for doing so.

As in many schools, Lilly and her colleagues use a basal reader series to teach students the skills needed to meet literacy expectations. Lilly's class uses Houghton-Mifflin's *Literacy by Design*, Heinemann's *Fountas and Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention System*, and Scholastic's *Guided Reading Non-Fiction Focus*, series of leveled texts designed to provide materials her multilevel first graders can work their way through as their reading ability increases. Such programs often provide scripted

lessons to accompany the texts, which provide questions and activities for teachers to use with students. Though all of these series claim alignment with the *Common Core State Standards*, it should be noted that none are produced, distributed, or endorsed by the writers of the standards.

Through the Eyes of the Teacher

During our interviews, Lilly repeatedly highlighted her materials as an area of concern. She supplemented her instruction with online texts from Reading A-Z (readinga-z.com) and informed me that her school would be buying her a subscription to the website, as well as an additional set of guided reading texts. The summer course caused her to think critically about the materials she used. Though she recognized that there were issues with the texts, she struggled with the difficulties of obtaining resources:

*It's interesting that you mention that the character Meg is a white girl. After taking the Cultural Literacy class this summer, I began to evaluate our guided reading book systems. We have 2 guided reading systems in our classrooms (Fountas and Pinnell, *Leveled Literacy*). I have used them for 4 years now and I know the various books VERY well. I can only think of ONE book that contains a character that is of a different race than white. Interesting. Guided reading books are tough to find though because they must be leveled for the various groups... The biggest "reflection piece" at*

this point is evaluating the books I have in my classroom. Could it be that some of our readers are struggling to make progress because the leveled books we are using in instruction are so culturally irrelevant? Do they not have the background knowledge needed to make connections? What guided reading systems are out there that have more culturally diverse characters? This would be something to research. Then of course that would cost money. (Lilly Nichols, Observation Reflection)

Despite these limitations, Lilly taught a unit she designed during the summer course. According to Lilly it was the first time she had considered the students' cultures when planning instruction. During the unit, the class explored multicultural variations of the Cinderella story. They compared and contrasted the stories, studied the countries they hailed from, and wrote about what they learned. The results were exciting:

I was amazed at- I gave them a Venn diagram to compare two of the stories and both of us were amazed at the- just the... for a six and seven year old to be able to compare and contrast that's a hard skill and they were incredible at it. And they did it independently. And, you know, I think that goes to show that they were- you know, they were- the texts were meaningful to them. (Lilly Nichols, Interview)

The students, too, seemed to find value in the unit. They not only performed academically, but appeared to benefit socially and emotionally:

They have been absolutely enthralled. Because they're- you know they're- we read books from Emmanuel's culture and Nameera's culture and they're just- you know and Nameera even told me like three times that day... she told me like five times that she loved the book, okay? And then the next day even though she's not of the age yet she wore her- her head wrap? You know, I'm wondering if she was just, you know, very proud... I asked her and she said "well, I don't have to wear it until I'm eight".

In writing right now we're writing an opinion piece. And they get to choose which country [from the Cinderella unit] they want to go to and then they get to choose reasons for why they want to go. And talking about enriching our classroom community- so Nameera speaks Arabic. She wanted to travel to Egypt because in Egypt she can talk to the people in Arabic. Well, two other girls in our class [laughs] this is so cute. One of their reasons was that they wanted to go to Egypt to listen to Nameera speak Arabic to the people [laughter]... That's such a good example. They're truly valuing, you know, what she can do. (Lilly Nichols, Interview)

In the same interview, Lilly talked about how she had not been able to do as many things from the summer course as she planned due to being "so bound by the common core standards". However, when asked if she had managed to meet standards

during the Cinderella unit she responded that they not only met multiple standards, but performed above what she had previously seen first graders do. She added, "It was effective and they were so captivated."

The Voice of the Child

Each morning, the children gather around the table to read with their teacher in groups of threes and fours. In these ability groups, Mrs. Nichols can focus on the specific needs of her students in ways she cannot during whole group instruction. The basal readers used for this guided reading instruction are the leveled texts purchased by the school for each classroom. Her emergent readers are working through short books with lots of pictures and predictive text, while other groups are reading longer and increasingly complex texts depending on their assessed abilities.

One morning, the first group at her table consists of four students: two girls and two boys. A tousle-haired Hispanic boy named Alfonso sits at her elbow. On her other side is the often-sassy Kamille, with her mahogany skin and carefully arranged braids. Across from Mrs. Nichols Ariana, an intelligent but often emotional biracial child, has

already begun to pout in anticipation of having to read the text independently at first since she did not move quickly enough to snag a seat beside the teacher. Next to Ariana, Caleel has to be reminded of appropriate reading group behaviors before they can begin.

Once the group talks about the previous book they read and share who they read to at home, they review a few sight words that will be in their new text. They even locate the words on a few pages as they preview the book. Finally they begin to read as Mrs. Nichols moves from student to student to listen in. Quietly, one Hispanic, one Biracial, and two Black children read the story of a White girl named Meg and her cat that will not come down from a tree.

Another day Mrs. Nichols calls a group of only two students to her table. Mrs. Nichols spends a lot of time talking about the text before they begin because both boys are English Language Learners who struggle in reading. Tiny, smiling Caden is Vietnamese. Quiet, dark-haired Emmanuel is Mexican. They read about two White boys named Sam and Jesse and their day at the park.

From the Mind of the Scholar

Lilly is ahead of many of her colleagues in that she recognizes the discrepancies between the demographics of her classroom and the populations represented in her reading materials *and* acknowledges these discrepancies as a problem. More often, teachers profess to be “color-blind” and refuse to accept race as an issue worthy of consideration in instruction. Whether this is a result of deeply ingrained beliefs or simply of understandable racial discomfort, this refusal to “see color” does a disservice to the children in the classroom (Stevenson, 2013). Further, many educators use terms such as “at-risk”, “urban”, “those kids”, and “inner city” as educational code words that imply deficiencies. This is especially problematic since “the combination of claiming not to see skin color and then expecting students of color to be inferior prevents schools from providing the culturally responsive teaching that students need” (Winn & Behizadeh, p. 153). Instead, as Winn & Behizadeh suggest in their review of the related literature, these students receive a “watered-down”, remedial, test-driven and skill-based education.

Though Lilly acknowledges her materials as problematic, she does not completely address the issue. Lilly talked to me about the importance of “getting to know” her students, but admitted to never having considered their cultures as she planned instruction. Considering all the research indicating that learning takes place when the content and delivery are meaningful and relevant to the life of the learner, this disconnect between culture and instruction seems negligent. The curriculum is meaningless if the child is unable to connect to it—he may go through the motions for the sake of compliance, but he will not grow (Dewey, 1911). Pellegrino, Bransford, & Donovan (1999) put it simply: “schools and classrooms must be learner centered” (p. 19). Students come to the classroom with preconceptions, knowledge and experiences that teachers

must access. “If their initial understanding is not engaged, they may fail to grasp the new concepts and information that are taught, or they may learn them for purposes of a test but revert to their preconceptions outside the classroom” (Pellegrino, Bransford, & Donovan, 1999, p. 10). How could Lilly consider herself having a “student-centered” classroom without considering the lives of her students? In 1911, John Dewey admonished educators not to think of the child and the curriculum as mutually exclusive, yet in 2015 teachers still plan instruction without considering the life of the child. The push to cover copious amounts of content is often what drives instruction, without attention to the recipients of said instruction. Ever-insightful and before his time, Dewey (1911) writes:

The source of whatever is dead, mechanical, and formal in schools is found precisely in the subordination of the life and experience of the child to the curriculum. (p. 9)

Abandon the notion of subject matter as something fixed and ready made in itself, outside the child's experience; cease thinking of the child's experience as also something hard and fast; see it as something fluent, embryonic, vital; and we realize that the child and the curriculum are simply two limits which define a single process. (p. 11)

Directly across the street from Rainbow Elementary is a branch of the local public library. This particular branch’s catalogue caters to the demographics of the neighborhood well—the children’s book section opens with a huge welcome banner in multiple languages, hanging above a shelf brimming with multicultural and dual-language texts. Additionally, the library has a large selection of audiobooks, DVDs and other instructional materials. The library will ship materials from other branches to a patron’s preferred branch for free. With a free library card, a patron can check out up to 99 items at a time for three weeks and can even renew these items online several times.

With such rich and convenient access right at her fingertips, Lilly could alleviate some of her concerns about her materials quite easily.

Lilly's Cinderella unit was a good example of her attempting to address the discrepancy. She purchased many of the books herself and was careful to supplement the books with informational texts and additional research. The results were remarkable: Lilly noticed the students meeting the *Common Core State Standards* and exceeding her expectations for first grade performance and even saw the students succeeding socially and emotionally in unexpected ways, as with Nameera. Lilly was able to reinforce her beliefs about the effectiveness of culturally sustaining teaching practices by seeing it work in her classroom, a necessary step in teacher change according to professional learning research (Guskey, 2002). After seeing its success, this unit will probably reappear each year in Lilly's classroom, but will it be built upon? Lilly quoted a text from the summer course as a reminder that while there is a lot to be done, you have to find a place to start. She found her starting place, but without school support and the encouragement of a researcher present, will she continue this journey into culturally sustaining practices? With so many more pressing demands from colleagues, administrators, and the general public, how is she to continue the critical reflection and study that led her to this place in her practice?

It is not my intention to place blame on Lilly alone. According to Au (2007), high-stakes testing and the environment it fosters leads to truncated curriculum, fractured knowledge, and teacher-centered pedagogy. The tests given to students, and consequently the curriculum, are often not reflective of their true cognitive and communicative abilities because they do not (and cannot in their current form) reflect the complexities of

students' lives and abilities (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). This is even worse for students from poverty or students of color, who are more often victims of a curriculum that focuses on basic skills, remediation, and overzealous test preparation (Apple, 2001; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Winn & Behizadeh, 2011). Unless assessments cease to focus on surface information, it is unlikely that approaches to teaching will improve (Bransford, & Donovan, 1999) and students who do not possess mastery of the White, middle-class communication patterns that drive the tasks, texts, and tests in mainstream classrooms will continue to be at a disadvantage (Gee, 2013).

Additionally, compiling text sets from the library and other resources would require time of Lilly outside of her workday. With a life and family of her own, why should Lilly be expected to spend her personal time working? Why does this responsibility fall on the teacher alone?

74% of teachers use basal readers, despite the fact that they are not necessarily research-based, most often are inferior to the wealth of high-quality children's literature available in other forms, and are market-driven. Basal programs are designed to be generic and marketable to as large an audience as possible; they cannot differentiate instruction because doing so would require knowledge of individual students (Dewitz & Jones, 2013). Over 40% of our student population is non-White; why then are major booksellers, companies that produce hundreds of thousands of texts designed specifically for use in daily classroom instruction, profiting off of text sets that grossly misrepresent our population? Why is the educational community as a whole still investing in such materials, rather than demanding better products? When selecting the materials for the school to purchase, were teachers involved in the decision-making? Was the focus on the

children in the classroom, rather than on the “aligned with the Common Core” sticker on the box? If there is to be change in the creation and selection of materials for use in classrooms, educators will have to become critical and informed consumers.

Story Two: Personal Narratives

Thus Sayeth the Curriculum

The *Common Core State Standards* require students have opportunities to communicate across the various modes of writing; this includes composing narrative, argumentative and informational texts in various forms and genres and over different periods of time. Within narrative writing, students are to gain experience writing both real and imagined narratives—forms teachers generally interpret as personal narratives and short stories. In first grade, students must “write narratives in which they recount two or more appropriately sequenced events, include some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide some sense of closure” (NGSS & CCSSO, 2010). The two types of narrative require different skill sets: one calls for the ability to relate an event that really happened in such a way as to make it clear and engaging for a reader, the other necessitates creativity in inventing characters and events.

Through the Eyes of the Teacher

In November, Lilly's students began work on their personal narratives. This was not easy, as Lilly explained in an interview, telling me that many students could not think of a single thing to write about. She found it sad that to some of them going to the grocery store with their mother was the only experience they could come up with. "I know that some of their parents work two or more jobs, but it's still so sad that the children don't have experiences."

Caleel was one such student. After trying to help him think of an event to write about, Lilly eventually changed the assignment for him:

*[Caleel] couldn't think of anything to write about but by golly, he wanted to write about riding on the back of a jaguar and I said 'go for it'. Because he actually gave me a story and it had a beginning, a middle, and an end...But at that point it's going in his portfolio, but I'm going to call it an imagined narrative because it is. So you know what, that's okay. He worked so hard on it. So you gotta- sometimes they have to dictate what we [do].
(Lilly Nichols, Interview)*

Lilly often struggled with Caleel. She worried about how to motivate him and how to connect with his home life. She thought

about her own child and how she and her husband, a surgeon, bathed and doted on their baby every morning. Caleel and his twin brother (a student in the class next door) often came to school with crusty morning faces and clothes full of holes and dirt. While Lilly and her husband worried excessively over a lingering cold their baby had, Caleel came to school with a runny nose and a racking cough that shook his entire frame. Lilly's concerns about Caleel led her to sending her father to visit the family over Thanksgiving:

I don't know if I've told you this but I found out he lives with twelve [her emphasis] brothers and sisters in his house so he shares a room with six to eight other kids. Um, anyway, so instead of having like a fixed mindset a growth mindset that, you know, he still can do it and maybe he won't have, you know, the parental support but still having those high expectations for him. I took- my dad took a Thanksgiving basket cause she has [Caleel's brother] Leonardo [referencing the teacher next door] and I have Caleel. And my dad was like "you know how many kids live in that house?" Twelve...the mom works night shift so I'm sure that the older siblings are taking care of the younger siblings. (Lilly Nichols, interview)

The View from Next Door

Often times, teachers of the same grade level work together in teams. Sometimes, this consists of shared assignments, common assessments, and collaborative lesson

planning. Less formally, the teacher team serves as a support system. Teachers can commiserate over similar experiences and challenges and supply one another with encouragement and ideas.

Lilly's neighboring teachers shared many of her experiences. Also new mothers, they constantly interrupted our interviews to talk about their babies and their husbands. They were good friends outside of school, taking their babies on outings and doing craft projects together. They also chimed in on their frustrations and challenges with teaching, as in the case of Lilly and my conversation about personal narratives:

Writing's the worst because you have some kids that are great writers and they finish in like five minutes and then you have others that just sit there and can't do anything- like they're not capable or they're a space cadet and it takes them six weeks to do one piece...I have one...if I let her do the piece herself I would literally just get random strings of letters that make no sense at all and she'll tell me that like a line of, like, twenty letters is multiple words but there are no spaces. They're all smushed together...Well I taught kindergarten last year and at the end of the year we do personal narratives. And I let my kids publish those pieces- I let them type, which they thought was the coolest thing ever but I got to the point where I pulled my high kids to conference with them and really make their pieces better. Because they could sit there and have a conference and do the work themselves. My low kids, I was like 'if I conference with you then it'll be my piece'. I could stretch it for you- I could stretch every

word to be like- but at that point it's my writing not yours so I was just like 'oh yeah yours looks great go type'. (First Grade Teacher, Interview)

This teacher also expressed her concerns with Caleel and Leonardo's family, comparing her own child to them. "I just want to take him home and give him a bath," she says, adding that Leonardo is the worse of the two because he is defiant and lower functioning academically than Caleel. After relating her annoyance with the students' insatiable desire to color ("If one more person asks me can I color I am going to snap their crayons in half") and asking Lilly about several upcoming assessments, the teacher next door smiles and shows me a picture of her baby. She then chats happily with Lilly about a painting of their babies' feet they planned to work on over the weekend.

From the Mind of the Scholar

Lilly's interactions with Caleel illuminated her beliefs about students like him—students with very different lives than her own. Though Lilly acknowledged her struggle to reject deficit perspectives of her students and families, she was unable to view Caleel through any other lens than that of her own values and culture. To the adult child of a doctor and a teacher, students whose life experiences consisted of trips to the grocery store are pitiable in comparison to her own upbringing. When contrasting her adult home, centered on one child with two attentive parents, with Caleel's home of twelve led by a

single mom, such a life is difficult for her to fathom. Most anyone with a compassionate spirit would be moved by Caleel's situation; however, it is Lilly's actions and not her feelings that were most important.

Though Lilly sought to understand and consider Caleel's home life, she was unable to view him from anything but a deficit perspective. Though she appeared to feel sorry for his mother, it was clear that she expected nothing from her as it related to Caleel's schooling or even his daily care, which she assumed was left to the older children. As she and her colleague discussed the twins' lack of cleanliness, it was obvious that they could not avoid the human tendency of judgement. All of this perpetuated the roles society often prescribes to homes and schools: the home is expected to support school practices and defer to the school in all matters of learning, while the school (especially when the home is lacking in its assigned role) is the protectorate (Pushor, 2012), the savior for the poor students from these negligent homes.

Lilly's feelings of pity toward Caleel reflected in her treatment of him in the classroom. Though she claimed to strive to hold all of her students to high standards, when Caleel struggled with the personal narrative assignment Lilly changed her expectations. He was no longer expected to meet the standard and, consequently, was denied access to valued mainstream knowledge (Lewis et. al, 2007). Further, his own life experience was devalued; he was considered to have no experiences worthy of being written about or shared with others. The personal narrative is one of the few assignments that obviously lends itself to culturally relevant teaching—the assignment centers on the student (Ladson-Billings, 1995). If Lilly was unable to coach him through his own memories, why then did she not remind him of shared experiences? In first grade alone

he had dealt with the uncertainty of the first day of school, been on field trips, and attended class parties. In writing about these, Caleel could have met expectations while still seeing himself as a valued part of the curriculum.

Lilly, like all of us, was influenced by the perspectives and attitudes of her peers. With her similar home life and shared cultural background, the teacher next door reinforced Lilly's views and expectations of what a child's home life should be. With their friendship outside of school adding weight to her opinions and their teamwork within school keeping Lilly accountable to her, the teacher next door exercises a powerful influence on Lilly's beliefs and actions. Having not participated in the summer course and seemingly harboring very negative beliefs about students who struggle academically, the teacher next door provided a very different learning environment for Lilly than the teachers she regularly spoke to over the summer. The summer provided a means of disrupting the deficit narrative, but once again exposed to people and situations that perpetuate that narrative, what was there to *keep* disrupting it? With such influences around her, how was Lilly to maintain her summer enthusiasm and interest in culturally sustaining teaching?

Conclusion– From the Mind of the Scholar

Lilly Nichols is not a bad teacher. The teacher next door may not be a bad teacher. Society must reject unrealistic perceptions and expectations of teachers; we must reject false dichotomies. A teacher is not good because she uses her own money to buy supplies, sacrifices her personal time and health for the good of her students, and neglects her own family. A teacher is not bad because she is human and flawed and is still

learning. Society and popular culture have created caricatures of good teachers and bad teachers that we too often perpetuate when dealing with their real-life counterparts. Until we learn that teachers are humans worthy of compassion and professionals worthy of respect, we will continue to do our educators injustice.

In an as-yet-unpublished paper on Lilly's summer learning experience, I introduce a model of professional learning that I dubbed the 5 C's of Reality Andragogy. This model contends that for professional learning to effectively change teacher practice, each of the C's must be in place: competency recognition, collaboration, continuous disruption, calibration, and contextualization. *Competency Recognition* requires that the professional learning experience is developed and facilitated under the assumption that the participating teachers are experts worthy of respect; consequently, their voices are honored, their leadership courted, and their needs considered at every stage of the process. *Collaboration* emphasizes the importance of teachers working together, sharing expertise, and challenging one another. *Continuous Disruption* is an essential element that is often missing from professional learning experiences—it is the idea that a teacher's way of doing and thinking is not simply challenged once with the initial learning, but repeatedly disrupted until change is cemented. *Calibration* is the process of self-evaluation during which teachers reflect on their practice, sometimes alone and sometimes with knowledgeable others. Finally, *Contextualization* considers the importance of the learning both taking place within a meaningful space for the teachers and for them to be able to practice their learning within the context of their classrooms.

Lilly is what all educators, all people should be—a lifelong learner. As such, she seeks new information and then figures out how to assimilate or accommodate this new

knowledge (Piaget, 1976). It is not a linear process; it is messy and cyclical, and fraught with uncertainty. There are tensions between what she learns, what she believes, and what others around her believe. Below, I present my model of teacher learning that captures Lilly’s experience (see Figure 5). For Lilly, the summer course created a space in which she could continually question her practice. However, social conventions continue to put pressure on Lilly and create tensions between that space of questioning and her day-to-day teaching life.

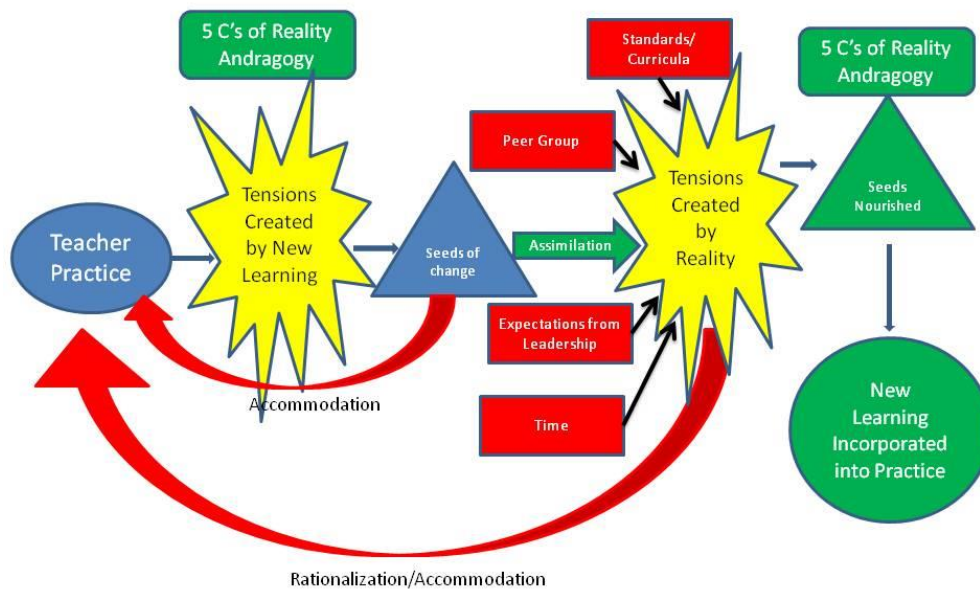


Figure 5. Teacher Learning Processes in the Reality Andragogy Model

There were times when, though her new learning had planted seeds of change, Lilly was able to accommodate her new learning into her current schema and return to her same practices despite knowing better. For example, after the summer course Lilly was concerned about her classroom materials and their lack of cultural diversity. Yet she was able to come up with many reasons to continue to use them—lack of money to buy materials, lack of availability of such texts in the form of leveled readers, etc. Other

times, my presence continued the 5 C's and Lilly was forced to calibrate and reflect because my presence provided continuous disruption. In those cases, as with the Cinderella unit, Lilly and I nourished those seeds of change and she was able to move past the tensions created by reality and truly incorporate her learning into practice.

The real challenge for professional learning facilitators, and for the field of education as a whole, is not simply to *create* spaces in which teachers can continually question their practice, but to *maintain* spaces in which teachers can do so. In order to encourage continued growth and effectiveness, teachers will need a space to discuss, to reflect, to disagree and challenge, to be reminded of their own big ideas and dreams, to return again and again to problems of practice and to propose and attempt solutions. They need spaces to explore their stories and the stories of their students; “to engage in conversations where stories can be told, reflected upon, heard in different ways, retold and relived in new ways in the safety and secrecy of the classroom” (Cooner & Tochtermann, 2004, p. 185). These spaces need to exist within schools and with the support of administrators therein. Teachers need a place to begin, as Lilly explains:

I feel like in so many grad school classes you just like do the work to turn in and you might get a few ideas or a couple few more strategies, but I truly feel like I got actual activities that I will use and repeat but I also feel like my whole perspective on things has changed. And it's like the book says that **you have to start somewhere and I think there are so many big issues that need to be tackled**. But, I will say you know like a silly little cultural relevance training that RCPS puts on will do nothing. **Like it has to start within the teacher and it has to be baby steps** like the Cinderella unit, um, getting kids to share their home stories, little things like that- tiny little things like that kind of filtrate throughout the curriculum and a cultural relevance training will do nothing. It isn't giving the teachers anything that they can use and it's not **changing the attitude**

or the heart of the teacher. So that's kind of my closing statement. (Lilly Nichols, interview—emphasis added)

SUMMARY STATEMENT

This collection of scholarly papers is the culmination of three years of post-graduate work that drastically reshaped who I am as an educator and as a person. The Mikkaka Hardaway that enrolled in the PhD program in the summer of 2012 is not the same person completing it in 2015. This collection illustrates many of the lessons learned on this journey.

My PhD experience has been rich in both deep study and in practical research opportunities. It was this intersection of research and practice that brought me to my current positionality, as detailed in paper one of this collection. *From At-Risk to Advocate: One Teacher's Journey* is my first scholarly publication and the only work in this collection published at the time of my dissertation defense. This piece evolved from an assignment for comprehensive exams that required me to apply what I had learned of ethnographic methods. I consider this a key piece of my scholarship, as it presents the stance and perspectives that I bring to any research experience. Unlike the other two pieces, this piece preceded my dissertation study and has been revised to meet the specific demands of the journal in which it was published.

Throughout my PhD career I have been interested in family literacy, critical literacy, culturally relevant teaching, and other areas of scholarship related to the equitable education of children from impoverished and/or minority and historically underrepresented populations. Simultaneously, my full-time job at the state education

department required that I regularly study and facilitate teacher professional learning. As my state embarked on implementation of a new evaluation system for its teachers amidst nationwide pushes for educator accountability and improvement, this topic seemed all the more important. The final two papers in this collection represent a marriage of those two “selves”—the daytime work self and the evening/weekend student self. In *Culture at the Core: Moving from Professional Development to Professional Learning*, I looked at a university course as a model of effective professional learning. I was able to explore the strengths and limitations of that model, as well as the factors that determine the varying degrees of teacher learning and change.

Drawn and Quartered: Examining the Teaching Life of a First Grade Teacher allowed me to delve even more deeply into the findings from paper two. After following one participant from the summer course back into her classroom, I was able to observe the myriad of factors that contributed to varying levels of implementation of new learning. In the current educational climate, professional learning as a means for increasing educator effectiveness is considered a sound investment. To that end, we are spending abundant time and money—two resources that are lamentably scarce in education. Consequently, it is imperative that we invest in professional learning experiences that are truly effective and meaningful. I believe that the papers in this collection will provide much-needed insight for this ongoing conversation.



Three-Paper Format

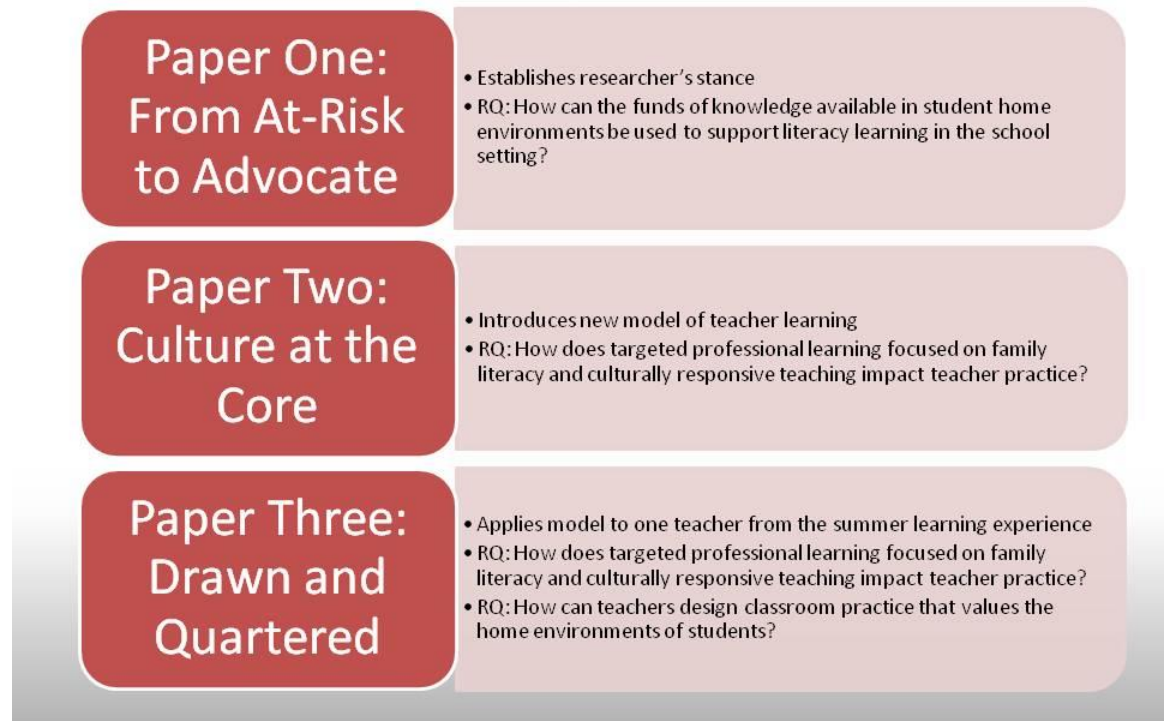


Figure 6. *Summary of Three Papers by Research Question*

From the Proposal to the Dissertation

There were a few changes that had to be made to this study as it evolved from a proposal to an actual living study. Much like the teachers I researched, I had grand ideas that could not withstand the pressures of reality. My initial proposal underwent several revisions in response to feedback from my committee. We did away with what seemed a perfunctory nod to parents in the form of a survey (deciding that true parent engagement was beyond the scope of this study) and narrowed down the number of teachers for phase two to allow for more depth of understanding, as required by the ethnographic nature of the work.

Additional unforeseen changes were made to this revised plan as the study took shape. Most notable is the reduction in observations conducted during phase two. It had been my plan with only two participants to conduct around eight observations in each setting; however, between initial difficulty reconnecting with my teachers and scheduling conflicts (particularly with the frequent testing schedule at Leslie Miller's school) I was unable to visit as often as I hoped. In the end, I was able to conduct three interviews with each teacher, but six observations with Lilly and only three with Leslie. Lilly was also more thorough and completed more of her reflections on these observations, resulting in my choosing to focus on her classroom in paper three.

Structural Decisions

The three-paper format of this dissertation provided me an opportunity to present my data in a meaningful and powerful way, while allowing me some unique structural decisions. Most would be made evident through a complete reading of the document, but I believe it necessary to explain a few decisions I made in regard to the overall structure.

An overarching literature review is present in the first section of the document. This lays the groundwork for the three papers and presents the scholarship that ties them all together. Since each is supposed to stand alone, however, each contains its own brief and more specific literature review. This is least obvious in papers one and three, in which the multigenre essay is used. In those cases, the literature review is embedded, primarily through the voice of the scholar. Each of these will likely undergo more changes since, except the first piece, they have yet to be published and will need to be modified to meet the demands of the journals to which they are submitted. Though no journals have yet been decided on, I intend for paper three to be accessible to a broader

audience than paper two which is why it uses less jargon and highly contextualized language.

There is also a methodological overview in the first section that I believe is more consistent with traditional dissertation methodologies. It provides a level of detail absent in the three papers. Each paper also contains a brief methodology section. The first paper is different again in this case, as it was written prior to the commencement of my dissertation phase. It is imperative that it be included, however, as it provides a foundation for my scholarship. It was a challenge to include the necessary information in each section without being redundant or repetitive, so the reader must shift between viewing this as a cohesive document while recognizing each paper as complete in itself.

The dissertation concludes with a comprehensive reference section, followed by all referenced appendices.

Back to the Literature

Culture is central to the way we learn. The experiences studied herein demonstrate the power of learning experiences that truly privilege the culture of the learners. When culture is seen as an asset, as demanded by Paris' (2012) idea of culturally sustaining pedagogy, we can develop effective learning experiences for our teachers and students. Resources like the 5 C's of Reality Pedagogy and the CREDE standards provide practical guidance for K-12 instruction; I believe what I have presented here can serve the same purpose for professional learning and teacher education.

The complex nature of teacher learning, as demonstrated in the model I have presented, strengthens Gay's (2005) argument for culture to play a central role in the

preparation and performance assessments of teachers. As the 5 C's of Reality Andragogy indicate, this cannot be done through isolated professional development experiences; this shift in focus must permeate all levels of education from teacher preparation to K-12 instruction. The 5 C's cannot be achieved within the system as we know it. The teachers I studied had a well-designed professional learning experience, but lacked the contextual and structural supports within their schools to continue that learning. If teachers like Lilly are to overcome the myriad of barriers presented within the school setting, they will need a system in which culture is at the core of decisions from the national, state, district and school levels.

Implications for Future Research

There is still much to be done in this area. I would like to study professional learning communities within schools and apply my model to those structures. Further, I would like to explore what happens after the new learning is implemented. Guskey (2002) suggests that when teachers see positive outcomes, they are more committed to change and more open to further learning; this idea suggests my model might become more cyclical than linear if I were to extend it beyond implementation of new learning. Finally, there is a great interest in linking professional learning to student outcomes, but few studies have actually attempted to do so. Eventually, I would like to address that gap in the literature.

The scope of this study did not reach nearly as far as my passions. For the sake of time, resources, and reality this study had to be narrowed a great deal from my original vision. A major piece that was lost was the role of families in classroom instruction. I plan to pursue research in that area in the future.

A World of My Own Creation

Like Lewis Carroll's Alice, I can't go back to yesterday. "I was a different person then" (Carroll, 1865, p. 55). My PhD journey has shaped me into a person more driven than ever to change the world of education. By simultaneously advocating for students, families, and teachers it is my goal to disrupt deficit narratives and help create a world where the funds of knowledge carried by all three groups are valued. In this new world teachers will be dedicated to lifelong learning and will be respected as professionals, families will be empowered as partners in their children's education, and students will reap the benefits of socially just educational experiences. This dissertation is a mere first step, but as Catherine Compton-Lilly (2008) stated and the brilliant teachers I studied reiterated, we must all find our own place to start: "Certainly, no one will be able to do everything, but finding a place to start is the beginning" (p. 153).

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APPENDIX A: OBSERVATION/REFLECTION PROTOCOL

Observation/Teacher Reflection

Researcher Observation Notes	Teacher Reflection
How was your summer learning evidenced in this observation?	

APPENDIX B: EXCERPTS FROM SUMMER COURSE SYLLABUS

Graduate Literacy Course

Syllabus - - Summer 2014

Some quotes for consideration:

Everyone has a story to tell . . . if only someone would listen, if only someone would care. (Zimmerman, 1998)

From the ideal point of view, parents and teachers have much in common, in that both, supposedly, wish things to occur for the best interests of the child; but, in fact, parents and teachers usually live in a condition of mutual distrust and enmity. Both wish the child well but it is such a different kind of well that conflict must inevitably arise over it. The fact seems to be that parents and teachers are natural enemies, predestined each for the discomfiture of the other. The chasm is frequently covered over, for neither parents nor teachers wish to admit to themselves the uncomfortable implications of their animosity, but on occasion it can make itself clear enough. (Waller, 1932, p. 68)

Those of us who have been outsiders understand the need to be seen exactly as we are and to be accepted and valued. Our safety lies in schools and societies in which faces with many shapes and colors can feel an equal sense of belonging. Our children must grow up knowing and liking those who look and speak in different ways, or they will live as strangers in a hostile land. Vivian Paley (1979) in *White Teacher*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. p. 139

I came to kindergarten so excited and ready to learn. I came prepared with my *maleta* (suitcase) full of so many wonderful things, my Spanish language, my beautiful culture, and many other treasures. When I got there, though, not only did they not let me use anything from my *maleta*, they did not even let me bring it into the classroom. (Gutiérrez, K., & Larson, J. (1994). Language borders: Recitation as hegemonic discourse. *International Journal of Education Reform*, 3(1), 22-36. [p. 33])

Catalog Description

Explores the current knowledge base and theoretical frameworks used to explain differential achievement rates between students of diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds.

Course Purpose

This course explores the current knowledge base and theoretical frameworks used to explain differential achievement rates between students of diverse backgrounds (ethnic, racial, socio-economic, and linguistic) and students of the mainstream culture. In doing so, students will examine their own assumptions considering students, race, class, and culture and students will study major concepts (racism, classism, etc.) to explore multiple perspectives. The course will extend the principles of teaching and learning to include a new perspective on teaching students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. A major focus of the course will be to prepare P-12 classroom teachers for working effectively with diverse student populations in literacy learning using culturally responsive instructional practices.

Required and Choice Texts

ALL STUDENTS WILL READ THIS TEXT:

Compton-Lilly, C. (Ed.) (2008). *Breaking the silence: Recognizing the social and cultural resources students bring to the classroom*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

STUDENTS WILL BE ASKED TO CHOOSE ONE BOOK FROM EACH GROUP.

BOOK GROUP #1 - Group choices: Fiction/Memoir/Children's & Adolescent Literature

Alexie, S. (2009). *The absolutely true diary of a part-time Indian*. NY: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers (Kindle edition available).

Hoffman, E. (1989). *Lost in translation: A life in a new language*. NY: Penguin Books. (Kindle edition available).

Jimenez, F. (1998). *The circuit: Stories from the life of a migrant child*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico. (Kindle edition available)

Na, A. (2001). *A step from heaven*. Asheville, NC: Front Street. (Kindle edition available)

Woodson, J. (2010). *From the notebooks of Melanin Sun*. NY: Puffin Books. (Kindle edition available).

BOOK GROUP # 2 – Professional Literature

Christiansen, L. (2009). *Teaching for Joy and Social Justice*. Rethinking Schools.

Compton-Lilly, C. (2002). *Reading Families: The Literate Lives of Urban Children*. NY: Teachers College Press.

Evans, J. (2005). *Literacy Moves On: Popular Culture, New Technologies, and Critical Literacy in the Elementary Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Gallagher, K. (2009). *Readicide: How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do About It*. Stenhouse Publishers.

- Gee, J. P. (2007). *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jones, S. (2006). *Girls, Social Class, and Literacy: What Teachers Can Do to Make a Difference*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Morrell, E. (2004). *Becoming critical researchers: Literacy and empowerment for urban youth*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Smith, M.W. & Wilhelm, J.D. (2002). *“Reading don’t fix no Chevys”: Literacy in the lives of young men*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Smith, D. & Whitmore, K.F. (2006). *Literacy and advocacy in adolescent family, gang, school, and juvenile court communities: CRIP4LIFE*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Van Sluys, K. (2008). *What if and Why? Literacy Invitations for Multilingual Classrooms*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

OTHER READINGS WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE ON BLACKBOARD

Course Objectives

Students in this course will:

1. Develop an understanding of the literacy learning needs of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and the importance of addressing them;
2. Begin to develop an understanding of some of the major theories used to explain why American public school programs have been largely unsuccessful in helping these students reach their full academic potential;
3. Examine personal assumptions about race, class, and culture.
4. Develop deeper (and broader) understandings of racism, classism, literacy, and diversity.
5. Develop an understanding of identity development and how it relates to literacy.
6. Develop an expanded definition of literacy learning (e.g. visual, media, technological) as related to issues of cultural diversity;
7. Develop a beginning understanding of second language learning and the needs of students who are limited English proficient.
8. Explore research on literacy learning and begin to understand some of the guiding principles in using culturally responsive practices;
9. Learn how to analyze and evaluate classroom discourse patterns that may and may not reflect the cultural and linguistics patterns of some students;
10. Develop instructional strategies intended to meet the needs of students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds; and
11. Develop an instructional unit that includes pedagogy and content appropriate for a diverse population of students.

Content of Course

- Examining self-assumptions about race, class, culture, and education

- Racism, classism; social construction of race
- Literacy and cultural identity
- Dialect and other language issues
- Definitions of literacy (visual, technological, media, text) and its roles on instruction for diverse populations
- Pedagogical standards for teaching diverse populations
- Strategies and principles for teaching diverse populations
- Strategies for teaching Limited English Proficient students
- Using and choosing multicultural literature and other text sources based on the principles of culturally relevant pedagogy

Course Requirements

The underlying philosophy of this class is one of social interaction. The experiences each person brings to the class contribute to the body of knowledge learned. It is difficult, if not impossible, to make up experiences missed by not being in class. We all learn from others, and your thoughts and questions are an important part of the learning process. Likewise, a professional attitude and demeanor are vital to success as a teacher.

Course Assignments

1. **Reading Responses** - For each class period's assigned reading, you are asked to post a response to Blackboard (word-processed following guidelines in "Policies and Procedures" section). The objective is for you to think critically as you read and respond not by summarizing, but by writing what you think about as you read, questions you have, and connections you are making to the text. How does this topic apply to your own context or your future plans? These written reflections will become the basis for our class discussions. **A second part of this reading response requirement will be for each student to critique and write a review of FIVE pieces of multicultural literature and respond to 5 other critiques written by other class members.** The format for these critiques will be discussed and negotiated in class. The format will take the format of a blog to encourage discussion and response.
2. **Literature Book Participation and Presentation** - Each student will participate in two literature study groups (1. adolescent novel & 2. professional literature) and be responsible for presenting the ideas to the rest of the class. This will be a group endeavor and this "sharing" may take the form of modeling an idea presented in the chapter, using video clips, creating a power point presentation, referencing other articles or books to support or refute ideas with the ultimate goal being to facilitate discussion in a creative way. Students will also be asked to present their Home/Community studies on the last day of class.
3. **In-class Participation and Assignments** – There will be several assignments given in class. Attendance is necessary. These assignments assist in meeting the learning

objectives on a per class basis. There will be no opportunities for making up these assignments. One of these assignments will be to create a literacy reflection based on your own family literacy practices. More details about these assignments will be provided daily in class.

4. **Designing and Analyzing Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Culminating Task) Part 1 - Home/Community study** - For this assignment, you will choose one of three pathways to understanding a community different from your own and making instructional connections or understanding your own students more deeply and making instructional connections. More details about this assignment will be shared in class.

Part 2 – Culturally Relevant Lesson Sequence. You will design a five-day lesson sequence in your curricular area, including content you are expected to teach, materials you are expected to learn, but *enhanced* through culturally relevant pedagogy you learned in class and lessons you learned through your home community study. The plan must include at least three of the CREDE standards for pedagogy, preferably all five.

CT RUBRIC

	Exceeds Standard (5 pts)	Meets Standard (4 pts)	Does Not Meet Standard (3 pts)
The Lessons (1, 16%)	The lessons you planned include content appropriate for the students you teach (or will teach) and at least three of the CREDE standards for pedagogy.	The lessons you teach may be only marginally appropriate for the students you teach (or will teach) and include fewer than three of the CREDE standards for pedagogy.	The lessons are not appropriate for the students you teach (or will teach) and It may or may not include one of the CREDE standards.
The Analysis (3, 50%)	The analysis is based on class readings, activities, and discussions. The analysis includes appropriate “next steps” for improving if appropriate.	It attempts to explain patterns of discourse that may or may not be equitable, but it lacks sophisticated thoughts on this. The analysis is somewhat based on class readings, activities, and discussions. The analysis includes appropriate “next steps” for improving if appropriate, but it may not reflect best practices.	The explanations for the classroom discourse patterns are weak or not reflective class readings, activities, and discussions. The analysis may or may not include appropriate “next steps” for improving classroom.

The Writing (2, 33%)	The paper is well-written. It is well-organized, clear, concise, and interesting to read.	The paper is somewhat well-written. It is mostly organized well, and mostly clear.	The paper is poorly written.
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Course Assessment

Criteria for Determination of Grades

Reading Responses & Book Reviews	25 % of grade
Home/Community Study & Teaching Plan (Culminating Task)	25 % of grade
Book Talk, Literature Group, and Project Presentations	25 % of grade
In-class/Online Participation and Assignments	25 % of grade
TOTAL	100 % total grade

Evaluation in this course is a **negotiated** process. We will explore issues of evaluation with children as well as for ourselves as learners. We will not assign separate grades for each assignment, but rather, we will demonstrate a variety of assessment strategies with each event. I hope you will learn for the sake of learning and come to value your growth and development as becoming part of a professional community. All assignments and course expectations must be completed or a grade of incomplete will be given until all work is completed. Each student will also complete at least two self-evaluation reflections, have a midterm and final conference with Lori, and determine his or her own grade (with documented support) at the end of the semester (40% of the final grade will be determined by self-evaluation and 60% by Professor N). Guidelines for our discussions about assessment will be as follows for each grade:

- A** Students demonstrate clear articulation of the required concepts/content of the course. Discussions and readings are **synthesized and interpreted** in assignments to show analytical relationships between research, theory and practice. Connections are made between classrooms, personal experiences, and this course. Professional development is indicated from the beginning to the end of the course at an individual level, including increased accurate use of literacy **terminology, references** to professional readings in writing and discussion, and observable **change in knowledge** over time. Consistent, **timely** preparation and attendance, **thoughtful** contributions

regularly made to discussions (large and/or small group) and **observable** engagement in ideas and activities.

- B** Students are inconsistently able to demonstrate understanding of required course concepts/content. Reflections and writing assignments **cover** a topic, **report** data without interpretation, connection or synthesis. In other words, readings are **summarized**, rather than responded to and assignments are completed but not extended. There is less indication of change, growth, and development throughout the semester. Attendance is consistent and preparation is usually evident however **attendance and participation alone do not indicate an “A.”** Contributions are occasionally made to large and small group discussions.
- C** Students are unable to demonstrate understanding of required course concepts/content in writing or discussion. **Minimal** reflection and thin writing are evident in assignments, both in length and quality. **Lack** of professional change occurs over the course of the semester. Preparation and attendance are **inconsistent**, few contributions are made to small and large group discussions, and engagement in the ideas and activities of the course is **not observable**.

Course Sequence – Summer 2014

(Hybrid Version-combination of online and face-to-face meetings)

Week - Date	TOPIC	Whole Group Reading	Choice Reading	Small group reading	Project
PART 1 – Self					
1 July 10	Getting started: Everyone has a story to tell.	Discussion of the whole group text - CCL	Overview of choice readings on Blackboard	Look at your adolescent literature choices	Overview of projects for this course – discuss gaining access
2 Online Field	Examining assumptions on race, class, culture, and	McIntosh (on Blackboard)	Choose one article on Blackboard	Adolescent Literature	- Interview your family member. *Identify

Trip	education	CCL – Ch. 1			family for your case study – first meeting
3 July 15	Literacy and identity	1. Williams (“Face in the Mirror”); 2. (“Truth in the Tale”)	- Choose one other article by Williams on Blackboard - Bring one MC book to review.	Adolescent Literature *Select professional literature book in class	Timeline Literacy Shoebox Autobiography
PART 2 – Others					
4 July 17	Dialect and language issues Teaching English learners	CCL – Ch. 2 & 6	Choose one Blackboard article -Bring one MC book to review.	Adolescent Literature Share Begin Professional Literature	First Draft
5 Online	Home/community issues	CCL - Ch. 9	- Norton-Meier, on Blackboard - Other choice articles available	Professional Literature	Revised draft Field Trip - > Community Walk
Sign up for a Midterm Conference					
6 July 22	Theories about the relationship between literacy & culture	Article on Blackboard by Meyer CCL – Ch. 3-5	Choose one article from Blackboard -Bring one MC book to review	Professional Literature	Final draft Interview case study family
7 July 24	Visual literacy, popular culture, and technology	CCL - Ch. 10	Choose one Blackboard article -Bring one MC book to review.	Professional Literature	Interview case study family
PART 3 – Teaching & Learning					

8 Online Field Trip	Principles for Instruction -- Multicultural Children's Literature	CCL - Ch. 7 CREDE Five Standards	Choose from several articles on Blackboard	Professional Literature	Experience or family activity
9 July 29	Reading instruction and culture	CCL Ch. 8 CREDE Five Standards	Choose one Blackboard article -Bring final MC book to review.	Professional Literature – Planning for presentation	Prepare family presentation
10 July 31	Writing instruction and culture	Conclusion of CCL text. CREDE Five Standards	Choose from several articles on Blackboard	Professional Literature Book Presentations	Give presentation on your case study family tonight in class.
Wrapping up our learning					
11 Online	Project work week – Putting our knowledge to work in the classroom	Podcast of your choice	Blackboard Choice Article	Completed.	Analysis and Writing of Teaching Plan
Post your final project by August 11th and have a final conference in August.					

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Diversity Statement

Diversity is a shared vision for our efforts in preparing teachers, administrators, school counselors, and other professionals. Students will be encouraged to investigate and gain a current perspective of diversity issues (race, ethnicity, language, religion, culture, SES, gender, sexual identity, disability, ability, age, national origin, geographic location, etc.) related to their chosen fields. Students will also have the opportunity to examine critically how diversity issues apply to and affect philosophical positions, sociological issues, and current events in a variety of areas. Students will examine their belief systems and be encouraged to reexamine and develop more grounded beliefs and practices regarding diversity.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Questions

(after course for those who choose to continue in the study)

1. Tell me a little about yourself.
2. Tell me about you as a teacher.
3. What is your philosophy of teaching?
4. Have your beliefs changed since the beginning of the summer course? How so?
5. How do you plan to implement your new learning this school year?

(follow-up questions for later interviews)

1. How is your school year progressing?
2. Tell me about your students.
3. Tell me about your students' families.
4. Have you noticed any differences in your teaching this year?
5. How are you implementing your learning from this summer?

APPENDIX D: CREDE STANDARDS



The CREDE Five Standards for Effective Pedagogy and Learning

The Standards for Effective Pedagogy and Learning were established through CREDE research, and through an extensive analysis of the research and development literature in education and diversity. The Standards represent recommendations on which the literature is in agreement, across all cultural, racial, and linguistic groups in the United States, all age levels, and all subject matters. Thus, they express the principles of effective pedagogy for all students. Even for mainstream students, the Standards describe the ideal conditions for instruction; but for students at-risk of educational failure, effective classroom implementation of the Standards is vital. The research consensus can be expressed as five standards.

Joint Productive Activity

Teacher and Students Producing Together Facilitate learning through joint productive activity among teacher and students.

Learning occurs most effectively when experts and novices work together for a common product or goal, and are therefore motivated to assist one another. "Providing assistance" is the general definition of teaching; thus, joint productive activity (JPA) maximizes teaching and learning. Working together allows conversation, which teaches language, meaning, and values in the context of immediate issues. Teaching and learning through "joint productive activity" is cross-cultural, typically human, and probably "hard-wired." This kind of "mentoring" and "learning in action" is characteristic of parents with very young children; of pre-school, graduate school, adult learning, school-to-work and service learning, on-the-job training -- of all education, except the common K-12 tradition. In schools, there is ordinarily little joint activity from which common experiences emerge, and therefore no common context that allows students to develop common systems of understanding with the teacher and with one another. Joint activity between teacher and students helps create such a common context of experience within the school itself. This is especially important when the teacher and the students are not of the same background.

Joint activity and discourse allow the highest level of academic achievement: using formal, "schooled," or "scientific" ideas to solve practical, real world problems. The constant connection of schooled concepts and everyday concepts is basic to the process by which mature schooled thinkers understand the world. These joint activities should be shared by both students and teachers. Only when the teacher also shares the experiences can the kind of discourse take place that builds basic schooled competencies.

Indicators of Joint Productive Activity

The teacher:

1. designs instructional activities requiring student collaboration to accomplish a joint product.
2. matches the demands of the joint productive activity to the time available for accomplishing them.
3. arranges classroom seating to accommodate students' individual and group needs to communicate and work jointly.
4. participates with students in joint productive activity.
5. organizes students in a variety of groupings, such as by friendship, mixed academic ability, language, project, or interests, to promote interaction.
6. plans with students how to work in groups and move from one activity to another, such as from large group introduction to small group activity, for clean-up, dismissal, and the like.
7. manages student and teacher access to materials and technology to facilitate joint productive activity.
8. monitors and supports student collaboration in positive ways.

Language Development

Developing Language Across the Curriculum Develop competence in the language and literacy of instruction across the curriculum.

Developing competence in the language(s) of instruction should be a metagoal of all educational activity throughout the school day. Whether instruction is bilingual or monolingual, literacy is the most fundamental competency necessary for school success. School knowledge, and thinking itself, are inseparable from language. Everyday social language, formal academic language, and subject matter lexicons are all critical for school success.

Language development at all levels -- informal, problem-solving, and academic -- should be fostered through use and through purposeful, deliberate conversation between teacher and students, not through drills and decontextualized rules. Reading and writing must be taught both as specific curricula and integrated into each content area.

The ways of using language that prevail in school discourse, such as ways of asking and answering questions, challenging claims, and using representations, are frequently unfamiliar to English language learners and other students at risk of educational failure. However, their own culturally based ways of talking can be effectively linked to the language used for academic disciplines by building learning contexts that evoke and build upon children's language strengths.

The development of language and literacy as a metagoal also applies to the specialized language genres required for the study of science, mathematics, history, art, and literature. Effective

mathematics learning is based on the ability to “speak mathematics,” just as the overall ability to achieve across the curriculum is dependent on mastery of the language of instruction. Reading, writing, speaking, listening, and lexicons can be taught and learned in every subject matter, and indeed all the subject matters can be taught as though they were a second language. Joint Productive Activity provides an ideal venue for developing the language of the activity's domain.

Indicators of Language Development

The teacher:

1. listens to student talk about familiar topics such as home and community.
2. responds to students' talk and questions, making 'in-flight' changes during conversation that directly relate to students' comments.
3. assists written and oral language development through modeling, eliciting, probing, restating, clarifying, questioning, praising, etc., in purposeful conversation and writing.
4. interacts with students in ways that respect students' preferences for speaking that may be different from the teacher's, such as wait-time, eye contact, turn-taking, or spotlighting.
5. connects student language with literacy and content area knowledge through speaking, listening, reading, and writing activities.
6. encourages students to use content vocabulary to express their understanding.
7. provides frequent opportunity for students to interact with each other and the teacher during instructional activities.
8. encourages students' use of first and second languages in instructional activities.

Contextualization

Making Meaning: Connecting School to Students' Lives

Connect teaching and curriculum to students' experiences and skills of home and community.

The high literacy goals of schools are best achieved in everyday, culturally meaningful contexts. This contextualization utilizes students' funds of knowledge and skills as a foundation for new knowledge. This approach fosters pride and confidence as well as greater school achievement.

Increase in contextualized instruction is a consistent recommendation of education researchers. Schools typically teach rules, abstractions, and verbal descriptions, and they teach by means of rules, abstractions, and verbal descriptions. Schools need to assist at-risk students by providing experiences that show abstract concepts are drawn from and applied to the everyday world.

“Understanding” means connecting new learning to previous knowledge. Assisting students make these connections strengthens newly acquired knowledge and increases student

engagement with learning activities. Schema theorists, cognitive scientists, behaviorists, and psychological anthropologists agree that school learning is made meaningful by connecting it to students' personal, family, and community experiences. Effective education teaches how school abstractions are drawn from and applied to the everyday world. Collaboration with parents and communities can reveal appropriate patterns of participation, conversation, knowledge, and interests that will make literacy, numeracy, and science meaningful to all students.

Indicators of Contextualization

The teacher:

1. begins activities with what students already know from home, community, and school.
2. designs instructional activities that are meaningful to students in terms of local community norms and knowledge.
3. acquires knowledge of local norms and knowledge by talking to students, parents or family members, community members, and by reading pertinent documents.
4. assists students to connect and apply their learning to home and community.
5. plans jointly with students to design community-based learning activities
6. provides opportunities for parents or families to participate in classroom instructional activities.
7. varies activities to include students' preferences, from collective and cooperative to individual and competitive.
8. varies styles of conversation and participation to include students' cultural preferences, such as co-narration, call-and-response, and choral, among others.

Challenging Activities

Teaching Complex Thinking

Challenge students toward cognitive complexity.

Students at risk of educational failure, particularly those of limited standard English proficiency, are often forgiven any academic challenges on the assumption that they are of limited ability, or they are forgiven any genuine assessment of progress because the assessment tools are inadequate. Thus, both standards and feedback are weakened, with the predictable result that achievement is impeded. While such policies may often be the result of benign motives, the effect is to deny many diverse students the basic requirements of progress -- high academic standards and meaningful assessment that allows feedback and responsive assistance.

There is a clear consensus among education researchers that students at risk of educational failure require instruction that is cognitively challenging; that is, instruction that requires thinking and analysis, not only rote, repetitive, detail-level drills. This does not mean ignoring phonics rules, or not memorizing the multiplication tables, but it does mean going beyond that

level of curriculum into the exploration of the deepest possible reaches of interesting and meaningful materials. There are many ways in which cognitive complexity has been introduced into the teaching of students at risk of educational failure. There is good reason to believe, for instance, that a bilingual curriculum itself provides cognitive challenges that make it superior to a monolingual approach.

Working with a cognitively challenging curriculum requires careful leveling of tasks, so that students are motivated to stretch. It does not mean drill-and-kill exercises, nor it does not mean overwhelming challenges that discourage effort. Getting the correct balance and providing appropriate assistance is, for the teacher, a truly cognitively challenging task.

Indicators of Challenging Activities

The teacher:

1. assures that students - for each instructional topic - see the whole picture as a basis for understanding the parts.
2. presents challenging standards for student performance.
3. designs instructional tasks that advance student understanding to more complex levels.
4. assists students to accomplish more complex understanding by building from their previous success.
5. gives clear, direct feedback about how student performance compares with the challenging standards.

Instructional Conversation

Teaching Through Conversation

Engage students through dialogue, especially the Instructional Conversation.

Thinking, and the abilities to form, express, and exchange ideas are best taught through dialogue, through questioning and sharing ideas and knowledge. In the Instructional Conversation (IC), the teacher listens carefully, makes guesses about intended meaning, and adjusts responses to assist students' efforts--just as in graduate seminars, or between mothers and toddlers. Here the teacher relates formal, school knowledge to the student's individual, family, and community knowledge. The IC provides opportunities for the development of the languages of instruction and subject matter. IC is a supportive and collaborative event that builds intersubjectivity and a sense of community. IC achieves individualization of instruction; is best practiced during joint productive activity; is an ideal setting for language development; and allows sensitive contextualization, and precise, stimulating cognitive challenge.

This concept may appear to be a paradox; instruction implies authority and planning, while conversation implies equality and responsiveness. But the instructional conversation is based on assumptions that are fundamentally different from those of traditional lessons. Teachers who use it, like parents in natural teaching, assume that the student has something to say beyond

the known answers in the head of the adult. The adult listens carefully, makes guesses about the intended meaning, and adjusts responses to assist the student's efforts - in other words, engages in conversation. Such conversation reveals the knowledge, skills, and values - the culture - of the learner, enabling the teacher to contextualize teaching to fit the learner's experience base.

In U.S. schools the instructional conversation is rare. More often, teaching is through the recitation script, in which the teacher repeatedly assigns and assesses. Classrooms and schools are transformed into communities of learners through such dialogic teaching, and when teachers reduce the distance between themselves and their students by constructing lessons from common understanding of each others' experience and ideas and make teaching a warm, interpersonal and collaborative activity.

Indicators of Challenging Activities

The teacher:

1. arranges the classroom to accommodate conversation between the teacher and a small group of students on a regular and frequent basis.
2. has a clear academic goal that guides conversation with students.
3. ensures that student talk occurs at higher rates than teacher talk.
4. guides conversation to include students' views, judgments, and rationales using text evidence and other substantive support.
5. ensures that all students are included in the conversation according to their preferences.
6. listens carefully to assess levels of students' understanding.
7. assists students' learning throughout the conversation by questioning, restating, praising, encouraging, etc.
8. guides the students to prepare a product that indicates the Instructional Conversation's goal was achieved.

APPENDIX E: LILLY NICHOLS SUMMER QUOTES

- I think teachers are very quick to blame "poverty" and "home-life" on their students' lack of success in the classroom. While we know that coming from a low-income home can and does become an obstacle of learning for students, that can't be an EXCUSE for why our students aren't succeeding.
- How often do we use curriculum or ask students to participate in classroom activities that are culturally insignificant or meaningless to them? If we contextualize learning in a way that is appropriate to the students in our classroom, learning will most likely reach a maximum. Instead of blaming the student's background, we need to point the finger at ourselves....what aren't WE doing to meet their learning needs???
- Using critical literacy could encourage my students to think beyond the text. It would really sharpen their critical thinking skills AND give them the opportunity to speak out and form opinions about social issues.
- I believe that my students are capable of succeeding regardless of their home situation or background. Because almost all of my students come from homes in which academic success is not a priority, I have failed to involve and "coach" them. This year, my professional growth plan is to increase parental/family involvement. I need to move into that "coaching" role and see if it can really take my students to the next level.
- I love the gray box on page 118 that gives the characteristics of a Culturally Relevant Teacher. My favorite point was "See themselves in the eyes of their students". I interpret that as: How do my students see me? What do they think of me? What would they say about how I treat them? Would they say I respect them? Do they trust me? What would they say about my classroom instruction?
- I completely agree that curriculum could be so much richer and more meaningful to the students if we allowed them to "drive the curriculum" with their backgrounds and experiences.
- "By not allowing these students to bring their home identities to the classroom, we attempt to assimilate them instead of embracing opportunities to enrich the school communities" This is so powerful. What if we looked at all our students, no matter how different their backgrounds, as opportunities to enrich our classroom communities? I think it would REALLY change our schools. We as teachers can foster this enrichment if accept our students, and their names, just

as they come to us. In addition, we need to teach our other students to value and the different cultures and background of their classrooms. I definitely plan on reading multicultural books such as *The Name Jar* this upcoming school year. I imagine that there are so many things I can learn about my students just by asking them to explore the history and meaning of their name.

- If my students are a part of the video-gaming literacy club, then I should be attempting to teach content and literacy skills within the context of the digital world. According to the article, students can remain engaged for hours on challenging tasks when presented to them in the form of technology. If I have difficulty engaging my students in a lesson or activity, maybe it's because I am not considering the video-game aspect that is so closely intertwined with their culture.
- I am so guilty of teaching literacy as a set of skills! In first grade we focus so much on the rules of decoding and reading strategies. That skill set is important, however, I wonder how much more successful my students would be, and how much more they would LOVE reading and writing, if I made an effort to connect it to their lives and cultures.
- Chapter 9 was my choice as well to begin implementing this year! I love the suggestion of the family-student-teacher journal that is sent between home and school. I definitely want to try that strategy this year. Also, my professional growth plan for the upcoming school year is to increase family involvement. Chapter 9 will be a great resource as a tackle this goal.
- One part of the website that I could use in my classroom is Radio Latino. It is a collection of Latino music that students could listen too. Additionally, the website has several art, science, and humanities bilingual educational resources. This would be SO cool to use in the classroom. Even though I do not speak Spanish, I could possibly read some of the phrases and questions as I'm teaching. Also - I'm thinking it would be a great way to have a Latino student's parent or family member to come in and help teach!
- I guess overall I had a hard time thinking that some of these "white power" notions still exist. Which ones do you all see as still being true in our society? Maybe I am just a naive white girl :)

APPENDIX F: LESLIE MILLER SUMMER QUOTES

- To learn, "ELLs must not only encounter new language and concepts, but they also must encounter them in authentic contexts and have the chance to explore them and try them through interactions with others." It is also important to understand what ELLs bring to the table and not view them as deficient. Their knowledge and culture must be valued in the curriculum, classroom, and school environment. It is also important to involve families in the learning process.
- I remember the training we had for that and how many videos we were required to watch. I agree that it's funny how they could think 6 hours would transform us and prepare us to teach a culturally diverse class.
- It is very important to honor the cultures of all the students in your class and let them share about their home and life experiences. It is also important to pronounce names correctly and ask the student if you are unsure. I have witnessed teachers mispronouncing names, which causes the other students to mispronounce them as well. Most of the time the child does not correct them and becomes embarrassed of the name they were given. I completely agree when the author states, "Renaming, shortening, or mispronouncing children's names also affects the identities of the other children in the classroom. It affirms that theirs is the more desirable culture, and it limits opportunities for understanding cultures beyond their own."
- I think it is such a positive/effective way of assessing students and providing them with a tool they can use to code-switch. It's important to not label some of your students as behind just because they use the dialect of their home community. It was such an eye-opener and caused me to take a look at how I assess my students and ways I can approach situations like the one in the article.
- I agree with Violet that it sometimes, teachers have too much input and guide ELL students to the answer. I think it's important to have high expectations for them and allow them to think critically. I agree when they said to use familiar experiences and honor home cultures. That will help the student feel more connected to the class and create a sense of family.
- CCL states that the strategies listed in the text are not solutions that will last forever, that they are a starting point for change. She hit the nail on the head when she said, "As you read this book, you might have found yourself wondering, 'How can I do all that'" I was saying that exact thing to myself when reading some of the chapters. The instructional practices are great, but I think it's important to remember that not all of them have to be put into place all at once. CCL says to pick a starting point and move on from there.

- I think it's important how she said parents and teachers need to step back and look at the visual imagery and meaning put into the drawings our students/children make. I've done what a lot of teachers have done, look at the drawings my students give me, only for a moment, before hanging it up. I haven't taken them time to ask why they do things a certain way or why they use certain colors.
- I took several years of Spanish growing up but only remember basic vocabulary. I could pick up on colors, numbers, and a few of the items located in the room. The illustrations helped with some of my understanding. It was still difficult to follow the story some of the time because I needed time to process what she was saying before she went on to the next page. It really opened my eyes to how difficult it can be for my ELL students.
- When thinking about white privilege, I never considered my daily life to be a part of it. I had never attributed my success in life to my race. However, after having read this article, I realize that white privilege may have had a significant impact on my life.
- I admit I was one of those teachers that said, "They must not care about their child's education." After reading this chapter, I realize that I haven't done enough to reach out to the families of my students to learn more about them and make them feel comfortable and connected. I love the idea of the home journal, photographing what's important at home, and oral and written family stories.

APPENDIX G: ANIMAL AND HUMAN STUDIES APPROVAL



Human Subjects Protection Program Office
MedCenter One – Suite 200
501 E. Broadway
Louisville, KY 40202-1798
Office: 502.852.5188 Fax: 502.852.2164

DATE: November 03, 2014
TO: Lori A Norton Meier
FROM: The University of Louisville Institutional Review Board
IRB NUMBER: 14.0582
STUDY TITLE: Culture at the Core: Culturally Conscious Professional Learning and Teacher Practice
REFERENCE #: 340578
DATE OF REVIEW: 11/03/2014
IRB STAFF CONTACT: Name: Jacqueline S. Powell
Phone: 852-4101
Email: jspowe01@Louisville.edu

The following item(s) submitted for this study have been received by the Human Subjects Protection Program Office and were reviewed by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

Submission Components			
Informed Consent	Version 1.0	10/29/2014	Approved

The modifications include: The investigator has requested to eliminate the first research question, which eliminates the need for the parent survey. Research questions would now be:

1. How can targeted professional learning focused on family literacy and culturally sustaining teaching impact teacher practice?
2. How can teachers design classroom practice that values the home environments of students?

Additionally, in order to reach the depth necessary for ethnographic research, the investigator wishes to decrease the number of participants from 4 to 2, and increase the number of observations with each of the remaining participants from no more than 5 to approximately 8-12.

This information has been determined by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) not to change the exempt status of this study. Since the study is Exempt, documents do not contain the IRB approval stamp.

If you have any questions, please contact the HSPPO at (502) 852-5188 or hspgofc@louisville.edu

Thank you for your submission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter M. Shroeder".

APPENDIX H: PERMISSION TO REPRINT

From: "Miller-marsh, Monica"
Date: 03/23/2015 9:38 PM (GMT-05:00)
To: MK Overstreet
Cc: TATVORBECK@aol.com, Ilfa Zhulamanova
Subject: RE: Permission to reprint- time sensitive

Mikkaka Hardaway Overstreet has our permission to reprint her article, *From At-Risk to Advocate: One Teacher's Journey: An Auto-Ethnography*, published in the fall 2014 issue of the *Journal of Family Diversity in Education*.

Monica Miller Marsh & Tammy Turner-Vorbeck
Co-Editors, *Journal of Family Diversity in Education*

CURRICULUM VITA

Mikkaka Hardaway Overstreet

Mailing Address: PO Box 581492, Louisville, KY 40268

Email: mkoverstreet@gmail.com

Education

Ph.D.

University of Louisville, 2015

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction

Research Focus: Critical Literacy, Family and Community Literacy, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Dissertation Title: *Culture at the Core: The Impact of Culturally Relevant Professional Learning on Teacher Beliefs and Practice, A Collection of Scholarly Papers*

M.Ed.

University of Louisville, 2008

Literacy

Degree: Master of Education

Emphasis:

B.S.

University of Louisville, 2005

Degree: Bachelor of Science in Early Elementary Education/ LBD, Magna Cum Laude

Major: Elementary Education/learning and behavior disorders

Minor: Pan-African Studies

Professional Experience

2014- Present Part-time Instructor

Literacy Education Department, University of Louisville

2014- Present Teacher-in-Residence

Cochran Elementary School, Louisville, KY

2011- 2014 Literacy Consultant

Kentucky Department of Education, Division of Program Standards

Office of Next Generation Learners, Frankfort, KY

2006- 2011 Teacher

Jefferson County Public Schools, Louisville, KY

2004-2006 Teaching Assistant

Blue Apple Players Theater Education Company, Louisville, KY

Research

Principal Investigator. Culture at the Core: Culturally Conscious Professional Learning and Teacher Practice (Dissertation Study. 2014-2015).

The goal of this research is to foster classroom communities in which the home lives of children are valued and utilized to strengthen literacy learning across contexts: home, school, and community. In this study, the researcher will observe practicing teachers throughout a professional learning experience (during a university course) focused on understanding a community different from their own, or understanding their own students more deeply, and making instructional connections. After the course is complete, the researcher will follow 4-6 selected teachers into their classrooms to observe the impact of their learning on their instructional practice. Using ethnographic tools including observations, interviews, survey and artifact collection, this study will focus on teacher perspectives and practices at the beginning of, during, and after the professional learning experience. Moreover, a primary focus will be on gathering examples of how students' families and their cultures are valued and integrated into instructional practice. Researcher, teacher, student and parent perspectives will be studied.

Research Assistant. Composing Stories Project. 2013-2014.

The Composing Stories Project has two components. First, it is a critical ethnography of a residential community of low-income, single-parent, first-generation college students and their children called, Parent and Children Academy (PCA). Second, the project provides parents with research tools and arts-based digital storytelling devices to support their roles as advocates in their children's literacy development. These initiatives are built on a theoretical frame that values the existing resources and strengths in families and the transformative potential of storymaking to increase agency.

Research Assistant. Investigating the Influence of Dramatic Arts on Young Children's Social and Academic Development: An evaluation study of the Jack and the Beanstalk Residency. 2013.

This evaluation of the Blue Apple Players' (BAP) Jack and the Beanstalk (Jack) residency curriculum at Oldham County Preschool (OCP) occurred from January – June 2013. It was a collaborative effort between the Early Childhood Research Center (ECRC) at the University of Louisville (UL) and the BAP, to examine the effectiveness of the BAP Jack residency program for young children.

Publications/ Presentations

Journal Articles

Overstreet, M. H. (2014). From At-Risk to Advocate: One Teacher's Journey. *Journal of Family Diversity in Education*, 1(2), 1-23.

Presentations

Co-presenter. Descriptive Feedback, Louisville Writing Project Mini Conference, 2012.

Presenter. Shifting Schooling: A Critical Review of Family Literacy Scholarship, National Conference for Teachers of English Assembly for Research Conference, 2013.

Co-presenter. Parents as Researchers and Storytellers: The Composing Stories Project, National Conference for Teachers of English Assembly for Research Conference, 2014.

Professional Resources

Editor. KDE Literacy Link newsletter, 2011-2015. (available: <http://education.ky.gov/curriculum/lit/Pages/Literacy-Link-Newsletter.aspx>)

Co-author. Addressing Three Modes of Writing in the Kentucky Core Academic Standards, 2012. (available: <http://education.ky.gov/curriculum/lit/wri/Documents/Three%20Modes%20of%20Writing%20in%20KCAS.pdf>)