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Critical Literacy: Negotiating New Terrain with Teachers

by

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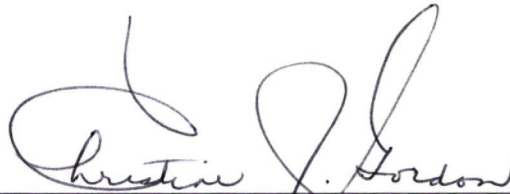

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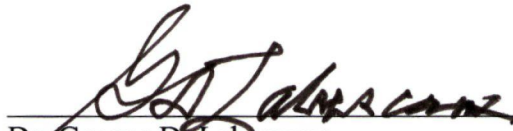

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate

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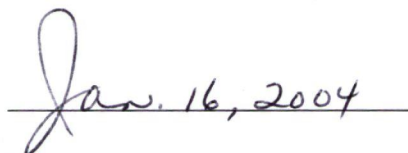
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ABSTRACT

This naturalistic study explores the understandings and practice of four classroom teachers in critical literacy and its constructs. It also seeks to identify possible barriers to enacting critical literacy in the classroom. Data include fieldnotes and audiotapes drawn from classroom observations, interviews, and a focus group discussion with the participants.

One of the major findings was that the four teachers were unaware of the concept of critical literacy itself at the beginning of the study. As the investigation progressed, their understanding and awareness began to deepen, leading to an increased receptivity and interest. Still, their comprehension did not tend to extend into the realm of taking on social issues through social justice.

Although the teachers began gaining an emerging appreciation of critical literacy, consistent with a review of the literature, this did not readily translate into practice. Those instances of critical literacy that occurred in the classroom seemed to be tentative and exploratory in nature. This suggests that, if even in small increments, space is beginning to be made available for the enactment of a critical literacy.

Finally, there were many obstacles to enacting a critical literacy in the classroom which were identified by the participants. Although they became more fluent in their understandings of the merits of critical literacy, they identified such obstacles as a lack of resources, time, and support; a fear of a loss of teacher authority; student ability to take a critical stance; their own inexperience and understanding of the concept; and a simple cynicism.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis with love to my father, John Graham, who passed away before its completion. It was from him that I learned about the value of hard work and the pride to be found in our accomplishments. Happy trails to you...

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To live is to be impelled towards something, or at very least to progress toward a goal. The goal is not my progress, it is not just my life by itself; it is something I set for my life, so that it is something outside me, beyond me, further on. If I resolve simply to walk about within my own existence, egotistically, I make no progress, I go nowhere; I go round and about in the same spot. This is the labyrinth, a road that leads nowhere, which loses itself in itself because it is no more than an internal wandering.

Jose Ortega Y Gasset, Revolt of the Masses

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it's the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In the critical perspective, no text can be seen as neutral. Particular interests are represented that structure "how a particular story is told through the organization of knowledge, social relations, and values..." (Giroux, 1992, p. 18). "Even the simplest of children's stories," Hanzle (2001) declares, "carry messages of various kinds, reflecting in conscious and unconscious ways the background, biases and culture of the author and the illustrator. This has always been so, and cannot be otherwise as no one exists in a cultural vacuum, including authors and illustrators" (p.84).

I first became aware of the concept of critical literacy while enrolled in graduate level courses while working toward my master's degree. I remember wondering how it was that I had never before come across these ideas in my undergraduate courses nor during my teaching. The more I talked to and observed other teachers, the more it seemed that the notion of critical literacy had not found its way into the classroom. This led me to wonder if teachers were aware of critical literacy and what their understandings were of the concept.

Bee (1987) has articulated that the written word can "subdue, deceive, pacify, and lull, or it can arouse, enlighten, stimulate and awaken depending on the ideology and practice employed. In short, education can be for domestication or liberation" (p. 47). My belief is that in order to create teachers whose pedagogical goal is one of liberation, we must first discover the existing landscape before we can move forward.

Purpose of the Study

Although the notion of critical literacy is not a new one, it seems that theory has not readily translated into practice for many teachers. The concept appears to be "somewhere out there", a pedagogy not yet well understood by all classroom teachers. The purpose of this qualitative study, then, was to explore teachers' knowledge of and instructional practice in critical literacy. I intended to determine teachers' emerging awareness and understanding of critical literacy. I also hoped to highlight teachers' strategies to promote critical literacy in students and to identify possible obstacles that might inhibit teachers from enacting a critical pedagogy in the classroom.

Guiding Questions

In my search to illustrate teacher understandings and practices in critical literacy, I kept the following questions in mind. These questions served to frame and to guide my inquiry.

1. What do teachers initially understand by critical literacy and how does this change upon exposure to the concept?

2. What are teachers doing in the classroom to promote critical literacy in students?

3. What are the barriers to critical literacy?

Limitations of the Study

Given that this investigation occurred in one school in rural Alberta with four teachers, it may not be possible to generalize results to other teachers in other schools. Since participants were Division II teachers, transferability of results to teachers in the lower elementary, and junior and senior high levels may not be possible. Additionally, since participation in the investigation was voluntary, volunteers may not be representative of the teacher population.

Data were drawn, in large part, from two interviews of less than one hour with each participant as well as a group discussion with all the participants. I am aware that this method relied on the honesty of participants as well as their ability to articulate their perceptions. It is also possible that the interview questions may have served to limit, to some degree, the depth of the participants' responses since it was oftentimes difficult to truly get to the essence of many of the concepts inherent in the questions.

Data collection also relied on three-40 minute periods per teacher of participant observation in the classroom. It is recognized that the investigator's presence in the classroom may have affected the participants, their teaching, and the lesson content.

Finally, since there was some instruction provided to the participants as a result of the interviews and conversations I had with them regarding critical literacy, it is possible that my role was a more active and less neutral one than I had originally anticipated. This could potentially affect the accuracy of both the data and the findings.

Significance of the Study

By observing and interviewing, I hoped to illuminate participant teachers' insights and practice. This would allow me to increase my own comprehension of critical pedagogy. I could also acknowledge what teachers were already doing in the classroom, allowing them to build upon this knowledge and practice. I anticipated, too, that the participants would gain a better understanding of their own professional decision-making regarding the concept and that their knowledge of critical literacy might broaden.

I was optimistic that this research project could provide a baseline from which to approach future critical literacy teacher education. This could, conceivably, impact the research community, trickling down to beginning teachers and helping to (re)form schooling by creating emancipatory educators.

Methodological Framework

In undertaking this study, I attempted to describe the participant teachers' understandings of critical literacy. I wanted to document the strategies they might employ to enhance critical literacy in their students, as well as to document the barriers to critical literacy as identified by the teachers. It seemed that the most fitting way to accomplish this would be through conducting a qualitative study that was naturalistic with some ethnographic techniques. This might allow me to map the internal landscape for teachers. Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman (1993) explain that in qualitative research, attention is given to the participants' perceptions, experiences, feelings and

explanations, which are treated as important realities.

Further, naturalistic inquiry is, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) state, "doing what comes naturally" (p. 187). Naturalistic inquiry, they explain, always occurs in a natural setting since context is heavily connected to meaning. "Such a contextual inquiry *demands* a human instrument, one fully adaptive to the indeterminate situation that will be encountered" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 187). Given that my investigation would be carried out in the participant teachers' natural school setting, and that my data collection would include those participant teachers, I concluded that the naturalistic paradigm would be most appropriate for my investigation.

I also determined that data collection would include participant observation in the classroom setting as well as a semi-structured interview with those teachers who responded positively to my request for participants. Additionally, I decided to involve the participants together in a focus group for a discussion that would allow them to articulate their evolving comprehension of the topic as well as to build upon each other's knowledge.

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

This study proposed to explore teachers' comprehension of and instructional practice in critical literacy. Since the intention of this inquiry was to describe what *is*, in a natural setting, a naturalistic paradigm using ethnographic techniques was most fitting. Data collection included participant observation, which afforded me a glimpse into the classroom life of the teacher as s/he made her/his daily decisions related to critical literacy and both led and facilitated learning with her/his students. Additionally, the semi-structured interview, another important source of data collection, provided "here-and-now experience in depth" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 273). A focus group discussion involving all the participants served to help them conceptualize their ideas through talk as well as to build upon each other's thoughts.

In this chapter, I will describe the methodology of the study in depth. I will discuss how the topic "came to me", I will explain my choice of naturalistic inquiry, and describe the recruitment method as well as the participants and the site. Further, I will discuss my data collection and data analysis strategies in detail.

Finding a Fit

In retrospect, it was not so much that I found the topic, but that it found me. During my graduate courses, I became engaged with and very interested in critical theory, and later with critical literacy. As I read and sought to increase my understanding, I recall thinking that this way of thinking about pedagogy that was so

new to me just seemed to make so much sense. Increasingly, it seemed that my work in graduate courses inevitably took on critical overtones, even if I wasn't always explicitly aware of it.

When considering just what topic I would explore for my thesis, it seemed natural, then, to focus on critical literacy. I began thinking about my own pedagogy and wondering how it was that I had never before crossed paths with this important literacy. This further led me to speculate that critical literacy did not seem to have found its way into the classroom.

With these thoughts in mind, and committed to expanding my understanding of critical literacy, I set out to determine whether teachers' constructions of literacy included critical overtones given that there are a multitude of competing educational discourses available (Comber, 2001). Since my belief was that critical literacy has not readily translated into practice, I was greatly concerned, for as Luke and Elkins (2002) underline,

> There is a need now as much as ever for critical literacy education that generates visions of new worlds, that encourages our students to transform the intellectual disciplinary fields and everyday texts that they encounter, and that engenders complex, critical, and thoughtful analyses of the events, contexts, institutions, and worlds that we live in (p. 672).

Leggo (1992) laments "what kind of education can prepare people to live in a world tilting on the keen edge of chaos" (p. 13). Critical literacy just may be the kind of education for which Leggo yearns. Through this study, then, I would attempt to contribute to the "song of hope that celebrates transformation and freedom and meaningful living" (Leggo, 1992) by providing a baseline that might grant teachers and

teacher educators a starting point from which to approach critical literacy education (p. 16). This in turn could foster "educational experiences that nurture in students and teachers spirits fortified in courage and brains generated by wisdom and hearts steeled with love" (Leggo, 1992, p. 13).

The Research Paradigm

Locke et al. (1993) describe qualitative research as a "systematic, empirical strategy for answering questions about people in a bounded social context....It is a means for describing and attempting to understand the observed regularities in what people do, say, and report as their experience" (p. 99). Within qualitative research, according to Locke et al. (1993), there is no verifiable and absolute truth because it is assumed that people create their own reality through making sense out of their experiences. By understanding these multiple realities, we can attempt to answer the question, "What's going on here?" (Locke et al., 1993, p. 99). According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), qualitative research refers to research that does not use statistical procedures or any other means of quantification to arrive at findings.

Creswell (1998) explains that qualitative research is undertaken in a natural setting. The researcher gathers data such as words or pictures, inductively analyzes that data, concentrates on the participants' meaning, and describes the process both expressively and descriptively. "Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes

words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15).

Creswell (1998) relates a number of reasons why the researcher would undertake a qualitative inquiry. The research question often asks how or what and seeks to describe what is going on with a topic that needs to be explored. There may be a need for a detailed view of the topic where participants are studied within the context of their natural setting. The investigator may have an interest in writing in a literary style and may have ample time and resources to devote to extensive data collection and analysis. Finally, audiences may be receptive to qualitative research and support the researcher's role as an active learner. Strauss and Corbin (1998), too, maintain that there are many reasons to undertake qualitative research: the preferences, experiences, or philosophical orientations of the researcher; the nature of the research problem; and the phenomena under study cannot be extracted through more conventional research methods.

Creswell (1998) notes that qualitative researchers overlay their investigation with a tradition of inquiry. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to the naturalistic paradigm which is always carried out in a natural setting and demands a human instrument since the "phenomena of study...*take their meaning as much from their contexts as they do from themselves*" (p. 189). Lincoln and Guba (1985) also maintain that the human is uniquely qualified as the instrument of choice for a number of reasons. Included among them are that the human is responsive, adaptable, has a holistic emphasis that can grasp all the nuances of the phenomenon under study, can function both in the domains of

propositional and tacit knowledge, can process data as soon as they become available, can summarize and ask for clarification on the spot, and can explore atypical responses.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) concur that naturalism demands that the researcher not disturb the social world that is being studied, leaving it in its natural state. Therefore, natural settings, which respect and are sensitive to the nature of the social world, should be the primary source of data collection (Hammersley and Atkinson,1983).

An ethnography is described by Creswell (1998) as "a description and interpretation of a cultural or social group or system. The researcher examines the group's observable and learned patterns of behavior, customs, and ways of life" (p. 58). Additionally, ethnography involves sustained group observation as well as one-to-one interviews with members of the group (Creswell, 1998). For Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), the ethnographer, over a period of time, participates in people's daily lives, either overtly or covertly, to better understand some issue. The ethnography, Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) explain, helps us make sense of the everyday world.

Given that my purpose was to learn about teacher understandings and perceptions of critical literacy while observing and interviewing them in their school setting, I chose, then, the qualitative method of inquiry which would be naturalistic in nature using some ethnographic techniques.

The Research Site

From the outset, I was hopeful that I would be able to conduct my research in the school at which I had worked as a teacher. I was very familiar both with the teachers and with the school culture. This, I believed, would facilitate my access to teachers and to the site. As well, since I resided in rural Alberta, I could more easily visit the site as often as necessary without commuting to another center. Finally, this was a Division II school, grade levels which interested me greatly since I have been a Division II teacher.

With this in mind, I approached the principal of the school about the possibility of conducting my research there. After I explained my proposal, he seemed very receptive and informed me that he would be amenable to the idea.

I then spoke with the division superintendent about my investigation. He, too, seemed very enthusiastic about the prospect and stated that he encouraged research within the school division. He asked, though, that once I had obtained all the necessary approvals, I send him a letter updating him on the details of the project. Upon ethical clearance of my research proposal from the University of Calgary, I was granted permission to conduct my research in this rural school division.

The school, then, is a grades 4 to 6 school of approximately 200 students situated in a rural community of approximately 7,000 in south-central Alberta. It is a red brick, 1970s style, two-storey structure which sits in a residential area of the community, just off the main route through town. It was originally a junior high school and attempts have been made to adapt it to the younger students, though it still has the

feel of a junior high school: narrower corridors, lockers, and square, austere classrooms.

The community may be typical of rural Alberta although it may be unique in many ways. Today, although farming is its backbone and the oil industry its heart, it is a tourist center and a great number of visitors make it their destination throughout the year. It is a growing community that is not exactly prosperous and newer, upscale neighborhoods can be found among older, wearier ones.

Selection of Participants

With the aim of obtaining participants, I attended the regular monthly school staff meeting in December, 2002. I had previously spoken with the principal and he had agreed to allot me time at the meeting in which to speak to the school staff about my investigation. At the meeting, I explained the purpose and process of the investigation. I indicated that I was looking for three to four classroom teachers who would volunteer to participate in three observation periods, two interviews and a group discussion with the other participants. I answered questions and distributed an invitation to participate which included a form that would allow teachers to indicate their ability to participate. I asked that it be returned to the school secretary by the following week.

A few teachers returned to me their completed invitation before the end of the meeting and I found that I had obtained three positive responses. One volunteer was due to go on maternity leave within the month, so I spoke to her and informed her that I

would regrettably be unable to include her as a participant. Hopeful that I would receive more volunteers, I waited until the following week. A few responses were left with the school secretary but none were in the affirmative.

With the idea of four participants in mind, I approached a first year teacher, who had not turned in a response, about the possibility of her/him participating in the investigation. S/he was very eager and informed me that s/he would happily participate. Additionally, another teacher who had been on leave and was due back after Christmas vacation contacted me and notified me that s/he, too, was eager to participate. I now had four participants.

The Participants

In age, the four participants ranged from 25 to 53 years. Included were three females and one male teacher. In teaching experience, the teachers ranged from first year to 32 years and they taught grades four and five while one participant was a teacher in the Learning Assistance Center.

In order to assure the anonymity of the participants, the pseudonyms Ashley, Brett, Chris, and Darcy were used throughout the data collection and analysis stages of the investigation. Further, in writing the findings, these unisex pseudonyms were also used since participants included three females and one male teacher. Additionally, I made use of the pronouns her/him, her/his, and s/he, further assuring the anonymity of the participants.

Setting the Tone

Since I was very familiar with both the school and three of the teachers, it seemed natural that the tone would be informal. After the Christmas break, I spoke with each participant by telephone in order to arrange a group meeting where I would review the consent forms and answer any questions they had about the investigation.

As we sat at a round table in the school library on the agreed-upon date in early January, I gave to each participant a copy of the Teacher Consent Form. I read over the form with the group and elaborated on the pertinent details as I read along. I also encouraged the participants to stop me as I read if they had any questions. I attempted to reassure the participants that this was a descriptive study and that my purpose was not to make any judgments about what I saw or heard. I also explained that confidentiality would be maintained throughout the investigation as pseudonyms would be used, and that, in addition, there would be no identifying information in the final thesis.

I also asked the participants to avoid sharing with each other what had transpired during observations and interviews since I wanted to obtain datum that was as true as possible. I then asked each to sign their consent form and to witness one other consent form. When all forms were signed and witnessed and all queries answered, I proceeded to set up the first observation time with each participant.

For the sake of continuity and organization, I decided to begin by observing each participant teaching a 40 minute period of science. I would then interview each participant before I again observed, this time in social studies. Next, I would bring

together the participants for the focus group discussion before observing one final time in language arts. Finally, I would conclude data collection with a final interview session. Since one of the participants was responsible for the Learning Assistance Center, it was possible to only observe her/him within the language arts.

Setting up observation and interview times was also an informal arrangement. I often arranged interviews or observations at the end of a period of observation or an interview. As well, I would see a teacher in the staffroom or the hallway and would set up a convenient time in this manner as well as contact through telephone. Similarly, when arranged times did not work out for participants, they approached me at the school or telephoned me in order to set up alternate times. When this happened, I reassured them that I would willingly work around their schedules since I appreciated their willingness to share and to invite me into their classrooms.

When observing teachers in their classrooms, I attempted to be as unobtrusive as possible. Generally, I knocked softly on the door to alert them to my presence. I would then enter and find an out-of-the-way spot at the back of the room. Although I attempted not to disrupt the classroom proceedings, students often called out excitedly that I was there and many would greet me since I had been their classroom teacher the previous year.

Since I wanted the participants to relax during interviews, immediately preceding the observations, I asked them to decide where they would like to hold these sessions. Generally, they decided either on their own classroom or the school library. Once comfortably seated, I gave the participants an overview of the interview

procedure. Generally, I explained that I would ask a series of questions to which they would be asked to give their response. They might also be asked to react to various statements.

I again reassured the participants that there were no "correct" answers since I wanted to uncover teachers' thoughts and understandings of certain aspects of literacy. I also reassured the teachers that there would be no judgments made but that I would only attempt to describe what I observed and understand. I also informed participants that they could read my understanding before the final editing and the oral examination.

Data Collection

In a naturalistic study using ethnographic techniques, primary methods of data collection from human sources include descriptions of behavior where interviewing and observing seem to be the most widely used (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Lincoln and Guba,1985; Corbin and Strauss, 1990). "Commonsense knowledge," Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) explain, "constitutes the social world: it must be appreciated and described" (p. 105).

In this investigation, then, I utilized three methods of data collection which included the interview, the observation, and the focus group discussion. Further, I determined that data collection would proceed in a particular order to aid with .continuity.

The Interview

As Dexter (1970) suggests, the interview is a two-person relationship, a conversation with a purpose. One of those purposes, among others, is obtaining *"here-and-now constructions* of persons, events...feelings, motivations, claims, concerns..." (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 268).

Further, the interview situation can be placed upon a continuum depending upon the degree of control the interviewer attempts to exercise over the responses of the informants (Bernard, 1994). Put another way, Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that this continuum is based on a degree of overtness/covertness ranging from the respondent being completely unaware that he or she is being interviewed to the respondent being fully informed of all details of the interview.

Since the purpose of these interviews was to elicit teachers' perceptions and understandings of critical literacy, I decided that an interview format falling somewhere between the two ends of the continuum would be most fitting. It seemed, then, that the semistructured interview would best serve my purposes. Bernard (1994) explains that the semistructured interview "has much of the freewheeling quality of unstructured interviewing" which is "based on a clear plan that you keep constantly in mind, but is also characterized by a minimum of control over the informant's responses" (p. 209). In the unstructured interview, Bernard (1994) remarks, the goal is to get people to open up and express themselves in their own terms.

However, in a semistructured interview, Bernard (1994) observes, an interview guide is used which lists questions and topics that need to be covered in a particular

order. The interviewer can still follow leads, but has a clear set of instructions

(Bernard, 1994). "It demonstrates that you are fully in control of what you *want* from

an interview....It shows that you are prepared and competent but that you are not trying

to exercise excessive control over the informant" (Bernard, 1994, p. 210).

Once I had decided on an interview format, it was time to create a list of

interview questions. I first considered what sort of information I wanted to elicit from

the respondents. I decided that simply asking the respondents what they knew about

critical literacy had the potential to cull some rich information. Before moving on to

the topic of critical literacy, however, I felt that I needed to uncover what the teachers'

beliefs were about literacy and the power of text. The interview questions were created,

then, to prompt the teachers to consider the political nature of the classroom, the

curriculum, and power inherent in text interpretation. They were also asked to reflect

on how critical literacy could be applied in the classroom.

For the first stage of data collection I decided that I would conduct an initial

interview with the teachers which would elicit their "first thoughts" about critical

literacy. (see Appendix A). This would allow me to get an idea of their initial

understandings and impressions of the topic. As the final phase of data collection, I

would hold a second interview session with the participants which would allow me to

see how their understanding had developed over the course of the investigation (see

Appendix B).

During the interviews, I attempted to engender a calm and relaxed atmosphere

(Novak and Gowin, 1984). I waited for the respondents to seat themselves before I

settled in for the interviews. Once we were comfortably seated with the recording device on the table between us, we engaged in casual, light conversation. I then eased the conversation to the interview, where I explained the purpose of the interview and reassured the interviewees that I was not searching for "correct" answers but rather, what their thoughts and reactions were to the questions and statements.

I then turned on the recording equipment and began the interviews. Each interview took on its own rhythm and pace, depending, it seemed, on the personality of the teacher involved. Some teachers, I discovered, seemed to think aloud as they formulated their responses while others answered quickly and concisely (Novak and Gowin, 1984).

As well, I found that the interviews took on the tone of a two way conversation, rather than a question and answer format, with me asking questions, then the respondent and I discussing the ideas in the question. Massarik (1981) characterizes the quality of this sort of relationship between the interviewer and the respondent as the "depth interview," where the interviewer and the respondent are peers who share an elevated level of rapport (p. 203).

Since the interviews tended to take place immediately after school, I was aware that the teachers were anxious to be wrapping up their day at the school. Having set for myself a one hour time limit, I attempted to keep the interviews flowing smoothly although we often wandered down related literacy paths. Since many of the ideas were new for some of the respondents, I found it fascinating to see them work through their understanding as they attempted to come to some conclusions about the concepts

presented. I also found it a delicate balance in deciding when to further probe in order to "stimulate the informant to produce more information without injecting yourself so much into the interaction that you only get a reflection of yourself in the data" (Bernard, 1994, p. 215).

I found it a challenge to keep the conversation focused as we worked our way through the ideas in the questions (Novak and Gowin, 1984). I felt the "constant tension between permitting and encouraging free cognitive expression and, at the same time, attempting to get interviewees to reveal what they know and how they think..." (Novak and Gowin, 1984, p. 131). Throughout, I attempted to focus on the teachers and their thought processes since I was aware that "it is easy not to 'hear' a response because one is already preoccupied with the next question, or because the answer is different from what one expected to hear" (Novak and Gowin, 1984, p. 131).

Oftentimes, I felt it necessary to check my understanding of the teachers' ideas through reflective listening. I made active use of the interview guide and often gave the teachers some context for the questions or rephrased them to enable probing in areas which the respondents were not sufficiently clear or confident enough to "permit the formation of specific propositional statements" (Novak and Gowin, 1984, p. 132). Too, I attempted always to be conscious of the need to respect the opinions and thoughts of the respondents, attempting to not force my own logic upon the teachers (Novak and Gowin, 1984).

Finally, I attempted to end the interviews on a positive note, thanking the teachers for their help and their time and "commenting favorably on their cooperation,

manner, and so on" (Novak and Gowin, 1984, p. 133).

I endeavored to transcribe each interview as soon as possible after the interview while it was still fresh in my mind and before I conducted the next interview. In this way, I could capture as closely as I could the original conversation and its nuances. Since each interview was tape recorded, I was afforded the opportunity to review as often as necessary to assure my understanding of the conversations. As well, I could also be assured that my transcription was complete (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

I learned a valuable lesson as I attempted to replay and transcribe the first interview, which was with Ashley. I discovered that the recording device had failed and that I was faced with a blank tape and no data. Henceforth, then, I took care always to record each interview using two recording machines and to perform a test recording at the interview site to assure that each was working. In this way, I was assured that a backup tape was always available should a failure again occur. I then found it necessary, though, to re-interview Ashley. This, assuredly, affected Ashley's responses since she was already familiar with the interview questions and had had time to perhaps formulate in a different way her thoughts.

The Observation

As with the interview, participant observation falls on a continuum from the researcher being a complete outsider to being a complete insider (Creswell, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1985) concur that the observer may act as either a nonparticipant, or a participant, where the observer also plays the role of legitimate and committed

member of the group.

Since the purpose of these observations was to capture the participants teaching in their natural setting, I decided that I would take the role of nonparticipant observer. This would permit me an outsider perspective through which to observe and record events without becoming an active participant (Creswell, 1998).

Aware that there are a variety of methods available for data recording, it was now time to choose which particular ones would best serve my purposes. I determined that I would use three primary sources of data recording: running notes, context maps, and entries according to categories I had established that comprised critical literacy (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

It seemed that running notes would best allow me to record what I observed while leaving me some flexibility in which to account for unexpected happenings or new thoughts as I recorded. Quite simply, I recorded what I saw and heard as it occurred, keeping a kind of narrative of the observation. I also decided to draw a context map of each classroom in order to place the observations within a setting. Finally, I determined that I needed to decide specifically what I was looking for that would constitute critical literacy in the classroom. Based on the literature and as the investigation progressed, five categories emerged that, for the purposes of this study, would embrace critical literacy. I therefore paid particular attention to: classroom talk, tasks, artifacts used, classroom procedures, and text interpretation.

Moreover, I found that the observations tended to be less structured early on. This permitted me to develop some idea of what was important (Lincoln and Guba,

1985). Later, the observations became more focused as I grew more comfortable in the role of observer and as my insights grew.

As with the interview, immediately following the observations, I attempted to transcribe my fieldnotes into a final draft form before I conducted the next observation. This included transforming the notes from handwritten to typed form and filling in the blanks. Additionally, at the end of each final draft, I included a section that would allow me to keep track of my reflections and conclusions.

Generally, I found that the role of observer was an enriching one. I felt privileged to be allowed the opportunity to see other teachers "in action" but I found that the role required that I be constantly vigilant to what was happening around me. I often had that "fly on the wall" feeling, but I still felt that the challenge was in learning how to funnel from broad observations to narrow ones (Creswell, 1998) and to learn how to develop that sense of what was salient.   I also found the task of interpreting and contextualizing events a powerful one.

The Discussion

Focus groups, Bernard (1994) comments, are recruited to discuss a particular topic and are now widely used in research. The objective of the focus group is to get people talking about whatever topic is under discussion. In the focus group, the leader works at getting members to feel comfortable enough to join in and impart information about themselves (Bernard, 1994).

Focus groups also produce insights on why people feel as they do about a

particular issue or behavior (Bernard, 1994). Bernard (1994) posits that the real power to be found in focus groups is the resulting ethnographically rich data. Creswell (1998) agrees that focus groups are advantageous when there is interaction among the participants that will yield the best information and when interviewees are similar and cooperative with each other.

With this in mind, I decided that a focus group discussion with all the participants would enrich my data. I determined that this discussion would allow the participants to interact with each other and to build upon each others' understandings and reactions to critical literacy as well as to answer each other's questions.

A week before the discussion took place, I gave to each teacher two journal articles, Critical Literacy: Enlarging the Space of the Possible, by Jerome Harste and Christine Leland (2000), and Rethinking the Literacy Curriculum: The Bailey's Elementary School Reading Initiative Study Group, by Vivian Vasquez and Kathy Egawa (2002). In order to provide a focus for the discussion, I requested that each teacher read and reflect on the two articles and be ready to discuss their reactions and thoughts about the articles.

On the day of the discussion, I was seated with the four participants at a round table in the school library. The school day was concluded and I anticipated that there would be no interruptions. We began with casual conversation as I set up the tape recorder that would enable me to capture the richness of the conversation.

The teachers were eager to begin so I opened the conversation by explaining that my role would be that of observer since I wanted the conversation to flow where it

would as they explored the concept of critical literacy. I endeavored to follow the advice of Bernard (1994) to not lead nor to put words in people's mouth. I also asked the participants to speak loudly to enable me to capture the conversation on the tape recorder and to address each other by name when responding or commenting. Since I was aware that people are more open in supportive, nonjudgmental groups (Bernard, 1994), I again reassured the participants that there were no right or wrong answers and that the goal of the conversation was to capture their thoughts and understandings after having had some time to consider the topic.

With that, the conversation commenced as the teachers began discussing their reactions to and thoughts about the two journal articles and the notion of critical literacy. The participants tended to direct their comments toward me, and there were occasional lags in the conversation which I found myself attempting to fill. The focus group experience was a learning one and I joined the conversation more than I had originally anticipated although I attempted to redirect questions and comments that were addressed to me to another group member. I found, too, that it was necessary to encourage more shy participants to join the discussion and to monitor individuals who tended to dominate (Creswell, 1998).

After about an hour, the conversation began to wane so I thanked the teachers for their time and for sharing their thoughts so openly. I asked the participants if they had any further questions and, none forthcoming, ended the discussion.

Again, I aimed to transcribe the tape recordings of the discussion as soon after as possible and before the next stage of data collection, knowing this would allow me to

capture more closely the essence of the conversation.

Building Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers, Creswell (1998) affirms, attempt to understand "that

deep structure of knowledge that comes from visiting personally with informants,

spending extensive time in the field, and probing to obtain detailed meanings" (p.193).

Qualitative researchers are concerned with whether they got it right and whether they

published an inaccurate account (Creswell, 1998).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this as building trustworthiness where the

basic issue is

> How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of? What arguments can be mounted, what criteria invoked, what questions asked, that would be persuasive on this issue? (p. 290).

In establishing trustworthiness, the central question, Creswell (1998) asks, is: "How do

we know that the qualitative study is believable, accurate, and 'right'?"(p. 193).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss four means whereby trustworthiness criteria

may be established. They use the terms credibility, transferability, dependability, and

confirmability, which, they contend, support the naturalistic paradigm. To determine

the credibility of a study, they propose activities such as prolonged engagement in the

field, persistent observation, triangulation of data sources, peer debriefing, negative

case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checking.

In order to establish the transferability of the findings to other settings,

populations, or times, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the naturalist employ thick

description, which will "enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility" (p. 316).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) further posit that an inquiry audit, which allows the auditor to examine the process of the inquiry, aids to affirm its dependability. Moreover, the inquiry auditor examines the product of the inquiry, "and attests that it is supported by data and is internally coherent so that the 'bottom line' may be accepted" (p. 318). Examining the product of the inquiry, Lincoln and Guba (1985) attest, aids to establish the confirmability or the value of the data.

Similarly, Creswell (1998) refers to eight verification procedures whereby trustworthiness may be operationalized: prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation, peer review, negative case analysis, clarifying researcher bias, member checks, rich, thick description, and external audits. Furthermore, Creswell (1998) recommends that the qualitative researcher engage in at least two of these procedures in any given study. I planned, then, to engage in the verification procedures of prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation, clarifying researcher bias, member checks, rich, thick description, and the external audit. Corbin and Strauss (1990) explain that "every mode of discovery develops its own standards....What is important is that all of these are made explicit" (p. 5). In the following pages, I will discuss in detail the measures taken that aid in establishing the trustworthiness of this study.

Credibility

In order to ensure the credibility of data and interpretations, I engaged in a number of verification procedures. Since I conducted my investigation in the school where I had previously taught, I was familiar with the culture and I felt that I was already perceived as trustworthy by the participants. Further, during the data collection phase of my investigation, I often found myself visiting the school as many as four days a week over a period of almost three months. This allowed me to better "blend in" with the school community, helping the teachers feel more comfortable with my visits and act more naturally. Additionally, this prolonged engagement granted me time to build a deeper rapport with each participant that would develop into a freer exchange of ideas and thoughts.

In order to ensure that the observations and interviews added a "dimension of *salience* toward what might otherwise appear to be little more than a mindless immersion," I attempted to identity and focus on those details of each observation or interview that would add to my understanding of critical literacy (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 304). In addition, this persistent observation allowed me to create categories into which I could place these details, so I could "engage in tentative labeling of what are taken as salient factors and then explore them in detail" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 304).

To further enhance the credibility of my investigation, I planned to engage in a triangulation of multiple data methods (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Through comparing the transcripts of the interviews, the observations, and the focus group discussion, I felt

I would be able to confirm evidence from various sources (Creswell, 1998) to shed light on the critical literacy theme. Although I proposed to triangulate the multiple data sources, I found that, as the investigation progressed and I began analyzing the data, this method of verification did not lend itself to the investigation. As I further immersed myself in the data, it seemed that each should be treated as a discrete unit from which I could extract different types of information since the teachers' understandings and practice evolved over the course of the investigation. For example, I used the initial interviews to elicit the participant teachers' beginning understandings of critical literacy while I made use of the observations to uncover what teachers were doing in the classroom to support a critical pedagogy.

Upon reflection, it seemed that clarifying researcher bias would also serve an important verification purpose that would lend itself to establishing credibility. While considering this facet of verification, it was incumbent upon me, then, to establish that before beginning the study, my premise was that critical literacy seemed not to have found its way into the classroom and that teachers were not aware of this important literacy. This supposition, I decided, could potentially influence the collection and interpretation of data.

I also encouraged the participants to read and discuss with me my understandings and interpretations of the data I collected. The participants' views on the credibility of the findings were solicited to allow me feedback on the accuracy of my recounting. This member checking allowed me to increase the integrity of my interpretations and conclusions.

Transferability

According to Creswell (1998), rich, thick description permits the reader to make decisions regarding transferability. Providing detailed description of the context of the research setting enables readers to transfer information to other settings and to decide whether the working hypotheses as set out by the naturalist are found to hold in other contexts (Creswell, 1998).

With this rich, thick description in mind, I described in detail the teachers who participated in the investigation as well as how they came to participate in the study. I also provided information about the research setting along with the interview, observation and focus group discussion processes. Further, I discussed the informal tone I took with the participants.

Dependability and Confirmability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that a single audit, if properly administered, can aid in determining both the dependability and confirmability of an investigation. Too, allowing others to scrutinize one's analysis helps guard against bias and can lead to new insights (Corbin and Stauss, 1990). An external audit, then, was performed by a retired principal who is also a Master of Education candidate. He is knowledgeable in the area of qualitative research and appeared to be interested in the notion of critical theory. The auditor examined the process of the inquiry to determine its dependability. As well, findings, interpretations, and conclusions were also assessed to determine whether they were supported by the data (Creswell, 1998).

In this process, the auditor was asked to examine my interpretations of the data and compare them with his own in order to determine the degree of inter-rater reliability. Based on a comparison of the auditor's interpretations with my own, there was a degree of 94% reliability between these two interpretations. This procedure was completed on approximately 20% of the data.

Analyzing the Data

The Constant Comparative Method

Viewed through the naturalistic paradigm, Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain that data are derived from an interaction between the investigator and the data sources. "Data are, so to speak, the *constructions* offered by or in the sources; data analysis leads to a *reconstruction* of those constructions" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 332). These facts must be viewed through the lens of the investigator's values and language and similarly, the respondent's values and language also affect and give shape to the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

In this way, data analysis is a process whereby constructions which have been shaped by interactions between the investigator and the respondents are reconstructed into significant wholes (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). "Data analysis is thus not a matter of data *reduction*, as is frequently claimed, but of *induction*" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 333).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) further contend that naturalistic inquiry can be characterized as inductive, generative, constructive, and subjective. Within this

description, Lincoln and Guba posit that the constant comparison technique of data analysis provides the best fit. Corbin and Strauss (1990) explain that making comparisons aids in ensuring against bias and that such comparisons help to achieve better precision and consistency.

The first stage of the constant comparison method is comparing incidents applicable to each category (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This stage involves deriving descriptive or explanatory categories into which are placed incidences of those categories (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

The second stage of the constant comparison method is integrating categories and their properties (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This step comprises a working back and forth to judge whether a new incident exhibits the tentatively identified properties of that category (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This process involves making category properties explicit and is therefore more rule-oriented than the first stage (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Relationships become more evident and naming of categories begins to take on "the attributes of an explanatory theory, or at least...a particular construction of the situation at hand" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 343).

The third stage is beginning data interpretation. As a larger amount of data are processed, fewer changes will be required (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The categories become saturated, or so well defined, that there is no longer a need to add more incidents to them (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

The final stage is writing the findings where the study can be said to be terminated (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Inductive Analysis

Data analysis for this study, then, was inductive. Furthermore, it occurred in two phases: during data collection, and after data collection was completed. I decided that this would best allow me to make sense of the data I collected since I was not working with theory. Raw units of data accumulated in the field were analyzed, giving rise to hypotheses and questions that could be followed up (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). As I transcribed and revisited the interviews and conversations, I searched for commonalities in the teachers' beliefs and understandings about critical literacy. During observations, I sought to accurately capture moments of critical literacy taking place, and endeavored to convey as closely as I could the context in which they occurred. This, I felt, would assist in the hypothesizing and questioning that was to follow.

Ongoing analysis

Additionally, data analysis was ongoing. I understood that data analysis does not occur at some singular time during the inquiry but must begin from the very first stage of data collection, helping to give shape to the emerging study and later data collection phases. (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). As I collected more and more data, I transcribed immediately following the collection. This permitted me to relisten to conversations and fill in the blanks of observations.

During data collection, I formulated and reformulated categories that constituted critical literacy, feeling that this would provide a focus. Five categories emerged as I

further immersed myself in the literature and as my study progressed: classroom talk, tasks, artifacts used, classroom procedures, and text interpretation. These categories also served me well during the data analysis process. As I transcribed, I paid particular attention to them and began to consider how data could be placed, making notes of incidents that could apply to the categories, revising and either accepting or rejecting tentative incidents.

At the end of each transcription, I also made note of any questions or comments I had. This provided a direction for later observations and allowed me to clarify emerging questions.

As I transcribed and reviewed more and more interviews and observations, I began to see patterns of behavior and commonalities in teacher beliefs about literacy in the classroom emerge. I revised categories as new ones seemed to evolve from the data. As well, observations became more focused as ongoing data analysis continued, in many ways, to inform the direction of the study.

Follow-up Analysis

Following data collection, the more concentrated portion of data analysis occurred. During this phase of data analysis, I gathered together all sources of data and reread each more thoroughly. With Lincoln and Guba's (1985) data analysis process in mind, I coded units of categories that I had created or that had previously emerged, comparing incidents that seemed to fall into specific categories and either placing them in that category or moving them to another.

As I moved back and forth between sources, categories seemed to become more coherent and relationships between units became more evident (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Patterns became more explicit as I compared and contrasted information and constructions of critical literacy began to develop (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Summary

In summary, then, I have described the design of this qualitative study. Utilizing the naturalistic approach enabled me to best capture the phenomenon under study in its natural setting. I have discussed how participants were recruited as well as why the particular school was chosen. I have related how I planned for trustworthiness, helping to establish the credibility, transferability, dependability and the confirmability of this investigation. I recounted in detail the three methods of data collection which led to a well rounded "snapshot" of critical literacy practices and understandings in this particular school. The data analysis technique of the constant comparative method assisted me in winnowing through data in order to find a focus for the study as well as to test and retest hypotheses as they came to light.

CHAPTER THREE

The Dimensions of Critical Literacy: Initial Perspectives

The intention of this chapter is to develop an understanding of terminology as well as to illuminate participant teachers' initial conceptions of these notions. Therefore, a discussion of the topic of critical literacy will be undertaken. Any attempt to clearly illustrate the topic of critical literacy must also include a delineation of its progenitor, critical theory, and its kin, critical pedagogy. Further, in order to clearly elucidate the term, I will also discuss the related concepts of postmodernism, literacy, multiple literacies, and text.

As well, participant teacher perceptions of the concept of critical literacy and its related constructs will be discussed. This represents teacher's beginning perspectives gleaned from the first interviews which occurred at the beginning of the study. During these conversations, I put a series of questions to the participants which dealt with different aspects of critical literacy. I then asked the teachers to either respond to these questions or to share with me their views. This allowed me to uncover the teachers' "first thoughts" and reactions as together we worked our way through the sometimes complex territory of critical literacy.

Postmodernism

It is virtually impossible, Biesta (1995) states, to exactly define postmodernism or to discover its essence. The term postmodern has no fixed position since its meaning is "imprecise and highly contested" (Bloland, 1995 p. 3). This obscurity is

primarily due to postmodernism's central motif --"the affirmation of the ultimate

fragmentedness of existence" (Biesta, 1995, p. 162). The term postmodern, Biesta

(1995) observes, describes both a real life situation or condition, and a position or a

theoretical analysis of that situation. Postmodernism can be understood as "not only a

diagnosis of the current spirit of the age, but also as a *reaction to* certain trends in

contemporary society" (Biesta, 1995, p. 163).

Therefore, both critical and emancipatory potential can be found within

postmodernism since its primary effect has been to "disarticulate dominant narratives,

traditions and ideologies" (Brooker, 1992, p. 25). Through abandoning universality, the

postmodern contention is that any suggested unity invariably causes exclusion,

injustice, repression, and violence (Lyotard as cited in Biesta, 1995). Through

questioning "universalising assumptions," postmodernism has helped bring "the

marginal, the repressed and unvoiced into view and into hearing" (Brooker, 1992, p.

25).

In the postmodern society, any knowledge claims "must be set within the

conditions of the world today and in the multiple perspectives of class, race, gender,

and other group affiliations" (Creswell, 1998, p. 79). These conditions are negative and

become apparent through the presence of "hierarchies, power and control by individuals

in these hierarchies, and the multiple meanings of language" (Creswell, 1998, p. 79).

Postmodernism focuses on these hierarchies and makes problematic the major

assumptions of our modern culture (Bloland, 1995). Postmodernism "interrogates the

modern system, which is built on continuing, persistent efforts to totalize or unify,

pointing out that totalization hides contradictions, ambiguities, and oppositions and is a means for generating power and control" (Bloland, 1995, p. 5). This postmodern condition, Steinberg and Kincheloe (1995) state, "demands a new angle of approach, a new grammar of subjectivity and political agency to produce critical encounters and pedagogical engagement" (p. 3).

Critical Theory

Critical theory's preoccupation with unequal power distribution is based on the notion that we live in an increasingly multilayered, postmodern society. Where postmodernism focuses on changing ways of thinking, critical theory provides for action based on these changes (Creswell, 1998).

Historically, the German research institute called the Frankfurt School, established in the 1920s, is most closely associated with the notion of critical theory (Morrow and Brown, 1994). This tradition proposes an alternative representation of social science, one that could "grasp the nature of society as a historical totality, rather than as an aggregate of mechanical determinants or abstract functions" (Morrow and Brown, 1994, p. 14). Further, the Frankfurt group argued that social reality could not be contemplated in an indifferent, value-free way but must be deliberately engaged with the process of its transformation (Morrow and Brown, 1994). Central themes include: studying and transforming social institutions through interpreting the meanings of social life; the historical problems of domination, alienation, and social struggles; and a critique of society through envisioning new possibilities (Morrow & Brown, 1994).

For the Frankfurt School theorists, emancipation could be attained by critically conscious persons through critique and social action (Boyce, 1996). "As persons become aware of how social and political systems work and become conscious of themselves as agents, they can identify and critique domination" (Boyce, 1996, p. 2).

Critical Pedagogy

There seems to be a strong, even natural bond between the realm of education, and modernism (Biesta, 1995). Apparently, Biesta (1995) continues, education and postmodernism share the same basic value of "radical plurality" (p. 176). The way in which we construct our world is changing, (Creighton, 1997) insists, and that shift has been termed critical pedagogy. This makes it possible for the dominated to find spaces or sites such as feminist theory, the social sciences, and cultural studies (Morrow and Brown, 1994; Boyce, 1996). These spaces allow the dominated to locate practices and solidarity that are counter-hegemonic (Boyce, 1996). Schools and universities, too, can be such spaces where a critique can be developed and where values of dominated groups can be articulated (Boyce, 1996).

Boyce (1996) contends that there are three assumptions surrounding critical pedagogy: "(1) Education is not neutral; (2) Society can be transformed by the engagement of critically conscious persons; and (3) Praxis connects liberatory education with social transformation" (p. 2).

Freire (1998) expresses that educators are not only teachers but are "political

militants" for the very reason that we are teachers (p. 58). While it is true that we must

teach with "sobriety and competence," we must also become involved with and

dedicated to overcoming social injustice (Freire, 1998, p. 58).

In the second assumption, we must realize that "how things are" occurs

purposefully and serves some group (Boyce, 1996). We can choose to see systems and

structures, or we can choose to see how we can become actors in the universes we have

begun to analyze (Boyce, 1996).

In the third assumption, praxis is an iterative, reflective approach to taking

action that represents an on-going process (Boyce, 1996). Teachers and students who

are involved in critical pedagogy closely examine the values, assumptions, ideologies,

and interests apparent in knowledge (Leistyna and Woodrum, 1999). They then

examine their own experiences in order to find a common link that will allow them to

question and make new meaning through the development of critical, transformative,

and liberatory cultural practices (Leistyna and Woodrum, 1999). "This ongoing process

of reflection and action is referred to in critical pedagogy as praxis" (Leistyna and

Woodrum, 1999, p. 5).

The development of critical consciousness is the focus of critical pedagogy,

which involves recognizing how individual problems and the social context within

which they are embedded are connected (Boyce, 1996). This basic tenet of critical

pedagogy proclaims a need to give voice to both the teachers and the students in the

learning process (Leistyna and Woodrum, 1999). This creates self-empowering

pedagogical conditions "within which both teachers and students can better make sense

of the world and their interactions therein - to engage and thus interact as participants (shapers) of history, rather than simply objects (passive recipients) to be acted upon, manipulated, and controlled" (Leistyna and Woodrum, 1999, p. 6). Teachers and students, consequently, become capable of taking responsibility for their beliefs and actions through becoming aware of the spaces they inhabit as well as the locations from which they speak (Leistyna and Woodrum, 1999).

Shor (1992) posits that there are four qualities to critical consciousness. Power awareness refers to a knowledge that there are contending forces which make up society and that society can be transformed since it is unfinished (Shor, 1992). Permanent desocialization refers to "understanding and challenging the artificial, political limits on human development" and questioning the status quo (Shor, 1992, p. 129). In self-education/organization, individuals develop critical thought and cooperative action through self-organized transformative education (Shor, 1992). The final quality is critical literacy, which, Shor (1992) theorizes, refers to "habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning...to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse..." (p. 129). Critical literacy, then, may provide the foundation for critical consciousness.

Critical Literacy

During the initial interview stage of this investigation, my interest was in the ways participant teachers constructed understandings of critical literacy and its related notions. During the first interview with each teacher, I asked the question, "Have you heard the term critical literacy? What does this term mean to you?" Before launching further into the investigation, I wanted to determine what the teachers understood initially by the term.

The data that emerged from my conversations with teachers suggested that critical literacy, as a pedagogical construct, was not known. When I first put forward the term critical literacy in the initial interviews, each teacher seemed genuinely puzzled. Indeed, Chris commented "and that is a real term that's defined? At present?" (Interview, 04/02/03). S/he further wondered whether I was asking about "critical elements of literacy" and whether it was a benchmark of some sort that I was referring to (Interview, 04/02/03). Both Ashley and Brett stated that they had not heard of critical literacy before this time, neither had Darcy.

I was very interested to see the teachers attempting to make sense of a term with which they were not familiar. I discovered that, in attempting to define this new term, the teachers made use of their existing schema for the words critical and literacy, as separate entities. They then attempted to place these two schemata together to define critical literacy. According to Ruddell and Ruddell (1995), schema theory explains how knowledge is stored in our memory, and how it is organized and used to construct meaning.

All seemed somewhat hesitant to try to define what the term could mean. Three of the teachers equated the term with critical thinking skills. Ashley posited that it "had something to do with critical thinking. I seriously thought it was something with critical thinking, about having those critical thinking skills in social studies" (Interview 10/02/03).

Brett, too, mentioned that s/he knew about critical thinking. "I'm assuming critical literacy is taking a text and being able to analyze it and looking at the point of view...making judgments on it whether or not it's from a pure source, so that type of thing, face value" (Interview, 28/01/03).

Chris wondered if critical literacy could be related to elements that are essential to reading and writing.

> Well, I think it would be things like phonological awareness and reading strategies and vocabulary and those things that come together to take you from being, if you're missing one of those parts, you will not be a fluent reader....It's either that or it's either say here's the critical level and beyond that you're considered literate and below that you're considered non-literate (Interview, 04/02/03).

Darcy speculated that critical literacy had something to do with being critical, "sounds like finding fault and it would sort of be assessing something and the ability to clarify what the points are that you are discussing" (Interview, 07/02/03).

A review of the literature showed that while there are definitions of critical literacy, there seems not to be agreement on what constitutes critical literacy. The educational literature abounds with "slogans attesting to the many splendoured powers of this thing called literacy" (Comber, 1993, p. 112). However, Comber (1993) cautions, we cannot assume that literacy has a common meaning since there is "no one

state that can be achieved and described as literacy" (p. 112). Certainly, Comber

(1993) explains, proponents of many different and contradictory agendas seem to have

appropriated literacy. The sources of critical literacy come from different

theoretical positions since the stance taken depends on the kinds of questions asked

(Green, 2001). Too, each orientation has its own principles that guide how critical

literacy is approached (Green, 2001). Although critical literacy is a complex notion,

there are some commonalities to be found among the theoretical positions and

definitions. "The notions of text, literacy as social practice, and discourse, which have

been discussed within cultural literacy, are also integral to critical literacy" (Green,

2001, p. 8).

Powell, Chambers, Cantrell, and Adams (2001), suggest that there are three

basic assumptions of critical literacy: teaching literacy is never a neutral endeavor,

critical literacy supports a strong democratic government, and literacy instruction is

empowering and leads to transformative action.

Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) synthesize the range of definitions to include

four interrelated dimensions to critical literacy: "(1) disrupting the commonplace; (2)

interrogating multiple viewpoints; (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues; and (4) taking

action and promoting social justice" (p. 382). They emphasize that none of these

dimensions stand alone and that indeed, there may be some overlap.

For the purposes of this discussion, I will rely on the four interrelated

dimensions as posited by Lewison et al. (2002). In the following section, I will

consider in greater detail the four dimensions of critical literacy. These four

dimensions will also serve to frame the participant teachers' views on various related topics.

Disrupting the Commonplace

Through disrupting the commonplace, the everyday is seen through new lenses, allowing consideration of new ways to understand practice (Lewison et al., 2002). Language and other sign systems are used to recognize implicit modes of perception (Lewison et al., 2002). Where critical pedagogy engenders an awareness of the structure of cultural systems and positions of power, and of ways in which they can affect people, critical literacy goes one step further by helping us critically analyze texts for such things as author's point of view, intended audience, and elements of inclusion or bias (Creighton, 1997). According to Creighton (1997), this brings together the duality of empowerment and marginalization.

Rogers (2002) asserts that in the critical approach, language is a non-neutral tool that is "shot through with power--social, cultural, and ideological--that constructs and is constructed by daily interactions"(p. 774).

There were occasions during the interviews that afforded the opportunity to "disrupt the commonplace" in order to allow the teachers to "consider new frames from which to understand experience" (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 383). In the following discussion, I will relate some exchanges which occurred during the initial interviews regarding the participant teachers' conceptions of literacy and text. These exchanges began, perhaps, to open up spaces for disrupting the commonplace and will be

examined through the literature on the subject.

Literacy.

During the initial interview, I posed the question to the teachers, "There is a lot of talk today about literacy and there are many definitions. What does literacy mean to you?" I was not surprised to find that the participant teachers' views of literacy were generally those that could be considered "mainstream" or "neutral" within the realm of pedagogy. That is, their definitions highlighted, in many regards, the instrumental aspects of literacy; none dealt with its sociocultural and political aspects. As well, all the teachers held a view of literacy that showed some understanding of content area literacy and multiple literacies. Indeed, Ashley felt that literacy referred to more than just reading and writing on paper. "It's also mathematical skills, it's reading a newspaper, it's reading, commercials" (Interview, 27/01/03).

For Brett, literacy was a very global term that is not necessarily restricted to reading because, s/he said, to be a good reader, you must have a grasp of such things as vocabulary and terminology. As well, s/he knows that there are different types of literacy such as numeracy, and literacy in science and "that's knowing the terms and being able to communicate your ideas clearly and be able to respond to things with meaning. You have to be able to interpret things..." (Interview 28/01/03). It seemed that it was difficult for Brett to find the adequate words to express her/his conception of literacy. S/he finished off by stating that the concept was "too vague to explain" (Interview 28/01/03).

When asked about literacy, Chris stated that it is a broad term that refers to a child's ability to deal with both language and print. "I think literacy expands to include all the disciplines like science, social studies and mathematics. I think literacy also can refer to things like graphs and pictorial forms of expressing ideas and literacy refers to being able to interpret some of those different forms" (Interview 04/02/03).

Darcy said s/he believes that literacy refers to the ability to "work within a particular field and to demonstrate understanding of how things...relate to each other within that area and understand how these work...together and how they connect" (Interview, 07/02/03). For Darcy, the ability to understand and explain, either verbally or through writing, the concepts in a given domain in order to engender understanding, is an important aspect of literacy. As well, literacy does not only refer to the language arts, but rather, "literacy is your ability to communicate ideas to other people" in any area (Interview, 07/02/03).

"There is a pervasive folk wisdom about literacy," declare Lankshear and Lawler (1987), that assumes that "we *all* know what it is and why it is so valuable and important" (p. 37). Just what literacy is and what it means to be literate has been regarded as unproblematic (Lankshear and Lawler, 1987). It is often seen as something we either have or we lack; if we have it, the world is open to us (Lankshear and Lawler, 1987). This view of literacy assumes that literacy is unitary, that is, it is a single thing, and that thing is the same for everyone (Lankshear and Lawler, 1987). This view also assumes that literacy is a neutral process or tool that is detached from the social agenda (Lankshear and Lawler, 1987). Finally, this view assumes that literacy is an

independent variable; while it is not a consequence of outside influence, it produces important outcomes in its own right. (Lankshear and Lawler, 1987). "The general assumption behind this model is that literacy has autonomy from the particular social contexts in which it is employed. Its character is not determined by setting" (Lankshear and Lawler, 1987, p. 43).

Green (2001) uses the metaphor of the double-edged sword to describe the two-sided nature of literacy, which may be exploitative and not necessarily liberating. There is a duality within the school context, which can limit students, such as when "textbooks are selected that portray a mainstream view of the world, and when traditional literacy practices, which often reduce literacy to copying and the completion of worksheets or assignment questions, are used, literacy is far from liberating" (Green, 2001, p. 8).

Although literacy has the potential to empower or liberate, many factors come into play in deciding whether or not this is realized (Green, 2001). "Thus, although being literate, and in particular adopting a critical stance with respect to literacy, may be seen as liberating or empowering, it does not afford any guarantees" (Green, 2001, p. 9).

Street (1995) maintains that much of the thinking about literacy in the past "has assumed that literacy with a big 'L' and a single 'y' was a single autonomous thing that had consequences for personal and social development" (p. 132). This autonomous model, which has been dominant in educational and development theory, traditionally positions itself as a neutral object, ideologically free, as though it is just natural (Street,

1995).

From this functional perspective, the term literacy is often used as if it were synonymous with education, or at least as if it were the ability to negotiate all the challenges of life (Cunningham, 2000). However, most definitions share three commonalities: "(a) the ability to engage in some of the unique aspects of reading and writing, (b) contextualization to some extent within the broad demands of the society, and (c) some minimal level of practical proficiency" (Cunningham, 2000, p. 64).

Definitions of literacy tend to evolve through the consensus of members of society (McCarthey and Raphael, 1992). In the 17th and 18th centuries, the literate were required only to decode words aloud while comprehension and application of information were not considered, and in the 1920s, literacy referred to the ability to silently read passages and answer comprehension questions (McCarthey and Raphael, 1992). According to Many (2000), today's definition of basic literacy assumes that students should be able to make some inferences about text. Accordingly, Carver (2000) notes that in the past, literacy has been defined as knowing how to read with the ability to write as a secondary requirement.

Up until the 1970s, reading, and not literacy, was the object of study (Siegel and Fernandez, 2000). Reading, therefore, was constructed as an autonomous "psychological process unrelated to any of the social, political, cultural, and economic patterns that shape schooling, and thus treated science, schooling, and language unproblematically as neutral, rational activities unaffected by power and ideology" (Siegel and Fernandez, 2000, p. 142). Once the vocabulary expanded to include

literacy, however, a sociopolitical dimension was added onto the psychological

dimension (Siegel and Fernandez, 2000). "Yet, the meaning of *sociopolitical* remained

largely unexamined, as evidenced by the field's uncritical acceptance of the "literacy

myth," that is, the belief that literacy leads to economic and political progress" (Siegel

and Fernandez, 2000, p. 142). Siegel and Fernandez conclude that although the study

of reading is no longer decontextualized, "the meaning of context had not yet been

expanded to include the political and economic contexts" (p. 142).

According to de Castell and Luke (1988), literacy has always referred to "having

mastery over the processes by means of which culturally significant information is

coded. The criterion of significance has varied historically with changes in the kind of

information from which power and authority could be derived" (p. 159). There has

been a reluctance to analyze the concept of literacy ideologically, effectively concealing

the need to address its subjective and social dimensions (de Castell and Luke 1988).

"This encourages a view of literacy as a context-neutral, content-free, skill-specific

competence which can be imparted to children with almost scientific precision" (de

Castell and Luke, 1988, p. 159).

Glass (2000) states that reading theory, and hence literacy, is a value laden

endeavour which "produces particular sets of relations among teachers, students, and

their wider social, historical, and cultural contexts" (p. 295). Literacy and reading

instruction, then, are "ethical and political practices permeated by ideology and

implicated in the degree to which schooling contributes to oppression or liberation"

(Glass, 2000, p. 295). O'Brien and Comber (2001) assert that teaching literacy as

"cognitive processes, linguistic knowledges, or skilled behaviours are suspect for what they *don't* say about the texts and institutions taught" (p. 113). The interests of the cultural and economic order are served through the loaded decisions that are made about what one learns to be functional at, where, how, and to what ends these decisions are made (Lankshear and Lawler, 1987).

I put the question to the teachers, "If your students only knew about literacy from being in your classroom, what would they think it was for?" (Comber, 2001). Initially, two of the teachers thought that their students would not know what literacy was because they would never have heard the term. Brett stated that s/he generally uses the term language arts with her students.

> I don't usually chop it up and say, ok, now we're doing writing, this is a writing class, and now we're doing a reading class...the exception would be a little bit of spelling and grammar separate but overall, I just like to blend it all together into a thematic thing. And so, if we like...we can explore...I like the exploratory notion of literacy....I don't think they know what literacy is about. I don't think they can identify it, no (Interview, 28/01/03).

Similarly, Chris related that as a classroom teacher, s/he would not use the term literacy. "I think it's a little bit more of a pedagogical term than it is a term that's used with kids....so, if you would have asked one of my...students what is literacy, I'm not sure they would have had an answer for that" (Interview, 04/02/03).

The assumption that the children would not be able to discuss literacy because they are not familiar with the label presumes that we must have the language in order to talk about a particular construct. Further, this assumption goes hand in hand with the notion of literacy as power. If we do not have the language neither do we have the power; if we cannot name it, it does not belong to us. Gee (1990) refers to this

language as a "Discourse," which is "a socioculturally accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role'" (p. 143). According to Gee (1990), these historically and socially defined discourses speak to each other through individuals; it is not the individuals who speak and act.

Therefore, by denying students' ability to comprehend the *concept* of literacy, which may be one of the dominant discourses (Gee, 1990) within the school setting, it could be that teachers also deny their students identities as members in this particular discourse group. Or, conversely, the teachers, as the dominant group, by not labelling literacy as such for their students, deny those same students a full and deeper understanding of the concept. In either situation, empowerment, which might have been placed in the hands of the students, may be withheld.

In addition to their own functional views of literacy, I found that the teachers believed that their students held a utilitarian view of literacy as well. Ashley related that s/he believed that her/his students would think literacy was reading and writing. S/he was certain that her/his students would not know about other forms of literacy such as reading pictures or cartoons. "So for my students, I'm guessing they would consider literacy as just reading and writing...books and things like that" (Interview, 10/02/03).

Brett thought that her/his students would think that literacy in her/his classroom served a creativity purpose. "I think they think...some of them like the creative aspect

of things so they channel it into...this is a way for me to develop, you know, for personal growth. Some are at that level in my room and some are at, well, this is what the teacher said so I have to do it that way" (Interview, 28/01/03).

Chris posited that, since in her/his classroom, s/he was predominantly responsible for language arts,

> I think my kids would think that literacy had to do with reading, writing, spelling, reading fluency. I talk about with my kids about, well, we do a lot of organizers and thinking skills, methods of organizing ideas and webbing and generating language activities, vocabulary (Interview, 04/02/03).

Further, Chris explained, s/he also works with literature so s/he believes her/his students would also think literacy referred to literature selections as well as analyzing characters. "Comprehension, kids might say, we're going to work on our reading comprehension or we're going to work on our spelling" (Interview, 04/02/03).

Darcy thought that her/his students would think that literacy was "probably to think about, probably about expressing themselves clearly, understanding of the topic" (Interview, 07/02/03). The sense of being literate, Heath (1991) explains, goes beyond having literacy skills to exhibiting literate behaviors which allow the individual to respond to text. Further, Heath (1991) maintains, the literate tend to create "opportunities to organize themselves into communities of literates and to talk within these groups about what they learned from what they have read..." (p. 4).

The verbal display of knowledge is seen to be equated with an individual's ability to think critically and schools, Heath (1991) explains, tend to link literacy skills with the ability to be a critical thinker. In measurements of critical thinking skills, the critical thinker is an individualist who is "a reflective skeptic, a questioner, a doubter,

an arguer, and an observing bystander" (Heath, 1991, p. 12). Individuals who perform

critical thinking are socialized toward certain social roles and learn attitudes and

language uses that "value individualism; combative, information-based rhetoric

exchanged among individuals; and acceptance of attention by participants to something

more than their own immediate and direct sensory experiences" (Heath, 1991, p. 12).

I then suggested to the teachers Green's (2001) notion that literacy can be

enlightening or liberating but may also be restrictive or dominating, that it is not

necessarily liberating and may be exploitative. I asked the teachers to think about this

idea and to tell me what the goal of literacy should be.

I found that the teachers held on to Siegel and Fernandez's (2000) notion of the

literacy myth and Street's (1995) idea of literacy with a big 'L' and a single 'y', as

previously discussed. That is, none believed that literacy could be exploitative and all

saw it as being liberating. For example, Ashley relayed that teachers should use more

than just worksheets and basal readers in the classroom. S/he felt that there should be a

variety of different literature available to allow the students a cross cultural look at

various areas of society. Ashley was concerned, though, about new teachers, who tend

to have difficulty finding resources. Additionally, s/he felt that for beginning teachers,

it is important to stay with the "tried and true" methods because "you want to make sure

you have everything on the program of studies completed...just for the fact that you

want to make sure that the kids learn everything that they're supposed to learn"

(Interview, 27/01/03).

S/he then moved on to what s/he felt the goal of literacy should be. S/he said

s/he believed that the goal of literacy should be enlightenment "in and of itself". S/he thought that there is much that can be learned from literature and "you can see a lot of the world from literature." Ashley cautioned, though, that the students must learn how to read fluently and with comprehension as well but that "literature can take you to so many places and enlighten your life in so many different ways" (Interview, 10/02/03).

Literacy can be restricting, Brett agreed, in certain ways. S/he felt that schooling today is so content driven, and teachers have timelines that must be met. Therefore, teachers are so busy teaching content that it's hard to get the students "to the mastery, internalizing it, and to, for the kids to say, ok, now let's see if you can apply it. I do agree on that" (Interview, 28/01/03). In discussing content, Brett stated that content could be restrictive in terms of points of view presented. But, "some of the things are getting a little more, are shying away from that" (Interview, 28/01/03).

The goal of literacy, according to Brett, is to establish meaningful communication, whether it's establishing a purpose for reading, or discussing, or being able to write down your ideas. "It's to communicate your ideas so you can relate to the character in your book or that kind of thing so I think literacy is to have meaningful, effective communication" (Interview, 28/01/03).

It would seem that Chris, as well, viewed the concept of literacy with Street's (1995) big 'L' and single 'y'. "I think it is enlightening and liberating for sure," related Chris, "A person who is not literate is usually restricted in their life because the doors have not opened for them. You are restricted in what your employment would be, in all kinds of ways....I don't see it as being restrictive and dominating" (Interview,

04/02/03).

The goal of literacy, for Chris, is integration of the disciplines. "So the challenge for teachers is to say, where does the language arts connect with the social studies and what skills do we need in both and where can I reinforce concepts from one in the other discipline. Where are we crossing those boundaries, to not keep those subjects so separate" (Interview, 04/02/03).

For Darcy, literacy can be restricting in that "you can be in a very literate society of your own but you can be so restricted by the fact that you're so literate at something that you can only relate to people who have the same literacy as you" (Interview, 07/02/03).

Certainly, according to Macedo (1994), it is quite common in specializations, to "divorce science from the general culture within which it exists" (p. 20). Disciplinary boundaries serve to delineate false dichotomies which leads to a fragmentation of knowledge (Macedo, 1994). This approach removes methodological issues from their ideological contexts, and "consequently ignores the interrelationship between the sociopolitical structures of a society and the act of reading and learning" (Macedo, 1994, p. 21). This removal of the social, cultural, and political dimensions from literacy practices cultivates a sort of "cultural reproduction that produces semiliterates" (Macedo, 1994, p. 21).

Macedo (1994) refers to this as the highest level of instrumental literacy, achieved via specialization, which produces the "semiliterate who is able to read the text of his or her specialization but is ignorant of all other bodies of knowledge that

constitute the world of knowledge" (p. 21). For Ortega y Gasset (1985), this semiliterate specialist is characterized as the "learned ignoramus" (p. 98). "He is not learned, for he is formally ignorant of all that does not enter into his speciality; but neither is he ignorant, for he is a "man of science," a scientist, and he knows his own sliver of the universe quite well"(Ortega y Gasset, 1985, p. 98).

Text.

In discussing literacy, it is also necessary to discuss the notion of text. Generally, I found that the teachers viewed text in the traditional sense. That is, they thought of text in the modernist way as the printed word. Ashley thought of text as synonymous with textbook or something that you read. For her/him, texts are "the original textbooks that you have in the library. But then there's also other types of texts that the students can read such as the newspaper" (Interview, 10/02/03). When I asked Ashley if s/he thought that there could be many different types of text, s/he agreed that there are a variety of different *textbooks*. The issue for her/him, though, was trying to find the time to locate all the textbooks that would be required for teaching.

During my discussion with Brett, I asked what her/his thoughts were on the expanded notion of text. Brett differentiated between textbook and text. For Brett, a textbook is "a hard or soft cover book, could be a reader or anything. That's a textbook." (Interview, 28/01/03). Text, however, includes such things as the Internet, encyclopedias, and articles from periodicals. As we delved further into the concept, s/he affirmed that an interview could also be considered text since, when s/he had

previously taught grade four, some of her/his students had chosen to interview their grandparents about the Great Depression. "But," s/he underlined, "it has to be relevant to the topic" (Interview, 28/01/03). Following several clarifications in the interview, Brett also stated that graphs, magazines, and comic books could also be considered text.

When I put this question to Chris, I stated that the expanded notion of text could include a picture or a graph as well as a book or a piece of paper. Chris agreed with this statement, elaborating that "all of those things comprise the broader term of text that's used today....a newspaper is text or graphs is one that you mentioned for sure, charts, pictures" (Interview, 04/02/03).

When I suggested to Darcy that text could include pictorial forms of representation, s/he seemed to be taken aback. "Well, I thought of text as being the written word. But, a picture is worth a thousand words" (Interview, 07/02/03). S/he then continued that illustrations help with interpretation of the written text, either through confirming, illustrating, enhancing, or explaining, but "I never heard of text illustrated before....so, I guess I never thought of it that way that illustrations can be considered text" (Interview, 07/02/03). When I checked my understanding with Brett, too, that text referred to the traditional written word, s/he responded, "Well, it has been, I've associated it with that" (Interview, 07/02/03).

In the traditional sense, text has referred to the written word. Today, though, there is an expanded, postmodern notion of text that goes beyond the printed word to include signs, symbols, and images (Stevens, 2001). According to Gordon, Sheridan

and Paul (1998), text can be read in some way.

>It can be a soup can label or a chart posted in a high-school classroom. A person speaking can be a text. Text can also be a lecture, a piece of music, or any oral presentation, such as the text of a film. Text can be a picture, a drawing, or a mural. Text can be the mountain scenes you are studying as you drive through the Rockies (Gordon et al., 1998, p. 7).

"Text refers to a particular concrete manifestation of practices organized within a particular discourse" (Lewis and Simon, 1999, p. 254). Meaning making does not occur in isolation, but "forms complexes that are organized contingently through time and space" (Lewis and Simon, 1999, p. 254). Text could include, then, verbal and non verbal communication such as body movement, written selections, as well as visual forms such as paintings (Lewis and Simon, 1999). A text, as defined by Leistyna, Woodrum, and Sherblom (1999), is "any aspect of reality that transfers meaning. This may include, but is not limited to, aural, visual, and printed materials" (p. 344).

According to the Alberta Learning English Language Arts Program of Studies (K-9) (2000), texts refer "not only to print but also to oral and visual forms that can be discussed, studied and analyzed" (p. 3). Oral texts "include storytelling, dialogues, speeches and conversations" while visual texts include "pictures, diagrams, tableaux, mime and nonverbal communication" and combinations of oral, print or visual texts include "videos, film, cartoons, drama and drum dancing" (p. 3). Additionally, the Program (2000) explains, texts are influenced and affected by the method of transmission which includes computer, television, radio or book.

Texts, as stated by Wade and Moje (2000) are "organized networks that people generate or use to make meaning either for themselves or for others" (p. 610). They can

be formal and permanent, such as books and speeches and they can be sold as commodities (Wade and Moje, 2000). Conversely, they can be informal and fleeting such as when we write a list or quickly scribble a note that is thrown away (Wade and Moje, 2000). They can also include conversations and performances that can only be made permanent by being written down, recorded, or conveyed orally to others (Wade and Moje, 2000). "The level of formality or permanence of a text does not diminish its potential as a way of making meaning or its potential to be linked consciously or unconsciously to other, more less formal types of text" (Wade and Moje, 2000, p. 610).

In our discussion regarding text, we also talked about the kinds of text used in the classroom. I asked the teachers to think about whether they would consider bringing popular culture texts into the classroom.

Ashley said she thought this would be a very good idea but,

I think that...for one teacher to do it would be very, very brave. I think that you'd have to have a lot of parental information about what exactly you're doing, about why you're bringing popular culture into the classroom...because I could see a lot of parental resistance...some people would look at it with suspicion because, of course, it's new (Interview, 27/01/03).

Ashley's concern was that parents would perceive the use of popular culture as not real teaching. "But, if it was a whole school working together on that goal, that would be really exciting. Definitely" (Interview, 27/01/03).

"I think," Brett commented, "we should go away from the trendy stuff. I think it's good to go into timeless literature...with timeless themes because then it applies to any day situations...so it's easy for the kids to relate to" (Interview, 28/01/03). S/he related to me that s/he does a fairytale unit with her/his class because s/he considers the

themes timeless. Brett remarked that current events, which reflect the time period, also have a place in the classroom. "I think sometimes some teachers think, well, we've got to go into the trendy stuff and we're going to read all about Harry Potter because Harry Potter is the thing and the kids are really into Harry Potter, which is true, which is good, you know....But, I don't think you have to be one or the other" (Interview, 28/01/03). Therefore, s/he insisted, there must be a balance.

For Chris, the use of popular culture in the classroom has proven useful in the past. S/he related to me an incident when she/he taught some "resistant" grade six boys "who were poor readers to boot. But the only thing they were interested in was cars" (Interview, 04/02/03). So, Chris went to various car dealerships and collected car and truck brochures to use in her/his classroom with the boys. They then examined the descriptions in the brochures and discussed the message the brochures were trying to convey through the pictures.

> So, we looked at that part and then we looked at some of the names and some of
> the descriptive vocabulary and how the truck vocabulary was all about power
> and all that masculine stuff and then the car ones were all kinds of words that
> were sleek and often referring to the animal's speed or very female kinds of
> attributes (Interview, 04/02/03).

Finally, Chris related, they wrote poetry about the cars. As well, Chris related that s/he had magazines available in her/his classroom, but these were not used in lessons.

Darcy's response to this question was that popular culture may be trendy but it may not teach the students anything. "My answer to that would be only if it serves to help illustrate some kind of point or some kind of topic..." (Interview, 07/02/03). Darcy referred to these types of texts as "high interest, low level." "It might serve a purpose,

for example, helping a child understand something that is contemporary and they can relate to and have difficulty reading....Other than that, I wouldn't use it" (Interview, 07/02/03).

Popular culture, Morrell (2002) explains, is a landscape of ideological struggle that finds expression in "music, film, mass media artifacts, language, customs, and values" (p. 73). Text, both in school and popular culture, presents many uses for students (Morrell, 2000). This, Stevens (2001) maintains, carries implications for the educator which have expanded and are continuing to unfold rapidly. To teach using only traditional text "not only denies the dynamic multiliteracies that students engage in regularly outside of school, but also shirks our overall responsibility to prepare our students for their future worlds, as difficult as it may be for us to conceive of these worlds" (Stevens, 2001, p. 549).

The critical educator, Morrell (2002) asserts, sees the opportunity provided by popular culture to link the "lived experiences and the school culture" of urban youth (p. 73). According to Morrell (2002), "the arguments for incorporating popular culture into traditional curricula are quite compelling..." (p. 73). This has generated excitement, intermingled with confusion and anxiety caused by a lack of understanding, among educators (Morrell, 2002). In teaching popular culture, "students and teachers learn from and with one another while engaging in authentic dialogue that is centered on the experience of urban youth as participants in and creators of popular culture" (Morrell, 2002, p. 73). Therefore, the interests of members of marginalized groups are served (Morrell, 2002).

Further, using popular culture in the classroom allows a critical media literacy approach to teaching and learning "that is built through consistency in practices and beliefs about power relationships present in various forms of text" (Stevens, 2001, p. 554). Our students, Stevens (2001) insists, deserve such practices that "support them in their negotiation of text" (p. 554).

Contrasted with this notion of popular culture text is the notion of the literary tradition or canon of major works which is found in classroom texts and anthologies (Wald, 1989). This canon is "neither a scientifically determined nor an arbitrary phenomenon" (Wald, 1989, p. 3). According to Wald (1989), this subjective tradition serves the interests of the dominant, contributing to the maintenance of a class society.

> This means that the...literary 'tradition' is actually a *selective* tradition that ratifies certain works as important and excludes others, not according to any measurable standard of quality but in response to the national self-consciousness as registered among, and interpreted by, privileged social layers, within the limitations of a certain world view at different historical junctures (Wald, 1989, p. 3).

The mediating factors that help produce the formation of the canon are "subordinate to deep-rooted cultural prejudices and prevailing social trends" (Wald, 1989, p. 3). The literary tradition, thus, is an ideology that serves to organize, monitor and transform power in society (Wald, 1989).

Further, we must recognize that there are alternative traditions belonging to the cultures that are excluded from the canon. These traditions are completely apart from or interact in a complicated way with the dominant tradition (Wald, 1989).

> The point is that the ideology of the Euro-American literary tradition does not operate merely to shut out the specific literary achievements of the colonized minorities and other groups; it is that these groups have diverse and internally

complex cultural traditions of their own that are suppressed or not understood (Wald, 1989, p. 11).

It just may be that marginalized groups are granted a voice through popular culture and that their interests are served. However, popular culture, too, operates with its own set of traditions which might suppress the voices of certain groups while celebrating others. Therefore, the world view advanced by popular culture may not, in fact, support all marginalized groups, again, reinforcing their suppression. Furthermore, popular culture, with its inherent discourses, may not include the rural child, marginalizing, perhaps, that particular group.

After discussing the use of popular culture in the classroom, I then asked the teachers whether they believed we can take a critical stance on content area texts. Again, the issue of parental expectations arose, with many of the teachers stating that parents may not be in agreement with this approach to teaching. Further, it was intriguing to see all four teachers interpret the word text as if it were synonymous with textbook.

Ashley stated that the content of a text would determine whether a critical reading is possible. With some content area texts, s/he observed, her/his students would need guidance. "It really depends on the exact situation that you're looking at. So, with some content texts, I don't think that we should say, well, what do you think about this and why would you think that" (Interview, 10/02/03). However, in an area like science, s/he said s/he thought that perhaps teachers could let their students begin growing and seeing results for themselves. Parents, though, would cause teachers to be very careful about decisions made and how they are implemented.

Although Brett said s/he believed that we could take a critical stance with content area texts, s/he said that s/he felt that the realities of the classroom situation impinge upon this assertion. We rely on the "standard tried and true," s/he stated, because it's easier and because teachers are under pressure from time constraints and achievement tests. "I find that there's so much curriculum that you don't have time to explore. And you're so worried and then you have to write your achievement tests and the cycle goes on....And heaven forbid, they publish the achievement tests...and parents are shocked by the results and so that's a lot of pressure" (Interview, 28/01/03). As well, s/he asserted that s/he finds that students are generally not critical toward text. It is usually the teacher who must point out areas that perhaps are not accurate. "I am the one that usually points things out. It's funny how kids are so afraid to say..." (Interview, 28/01/03).

For Chris, the issue of taking a critical stance with content area text was straightforward. "I think we need to teach the kids to question" (Interview, 04/02/03). S/he gave as an example the textbook <u>Changing China</u>, written by Trudie Bon Bernard (1987), used as part of the grade six social studies unit on China. This textbook, s/he explained, portrays the positive side of China.

> This book is going to be telling us about their new buildings and their modernization because, don't you think that's what they're going to want us to know about China? They're not going to want us to know about the human rights aspects there or lack thereof (Interview, 04/02/03).

S/he posited that this was perhaps a political avenue that is open to teaching. "Depending, maybe it is and maybe it isn't. Depends, like in this public school...would you get any flack? I'm not sure" (Interview, 04/02/03).

Some texts, Chris explained, are dated. For example, there might be a textbook that portrays the polar bear in an appealing fashion without touching on the fact that the polar bear is struggling due to global warming.

> So, I don't know if I'm saying criticize the text as much as I'm saying, well, I guess so, because that text may have been written 15 years ago when that was not an issue for polar bears. So, you need to be bringing in the other side saying that's just not the way it is (Interview, 04/02/03).

In Darcy's view, taking a stance on content area textbooks is not an issue because content is not as relevant at the elementary level as it is at the high school level. S/he asserted that the elementary level is more skills oriented and that teachers attempt to develop such understandings as how to use a textbook or how to use the scientific method. However, at the elementary level, social studies presents the most changeable content.

> But I think as far as math or as far as science is concerned...I really don't think there's going to be much change there. Over the years, I think it's pretty well going to stay the same all the time because what you apply in science is generally kind of an observational kind of activity where you see something happen (Interview, 07/02/03).

Indeed, Apple (1990) views this conception of scientific work as a "positivist ideal" (p. 88). In our schools, Apple (1990) maintains, this work is always tacitly connected with standards of validity that are deemed acceptable by the scientific community and are therefore seen as being outside of political influence. Children are presented with a "consensus theory of science" (Apple, 1990) where schools of thought do not exist and where "objective criteria" are used for empirical verification (p. 89). This implied consensus does not permit students to see the controversy and disagreement that has allowed science to progress (Apple, 1990). Further, Apple

(1990) asserts, "the standard of 'objectivity' (one is tempted to say 'vulgar objectivity') being exhibited and taught in school may often lead to a detachment from political commitment" (p. 89). This emphasis on neutrality, with the passive, rational student objectively performing experiments, eliminates the "political dimensions of the process by which one alternative theory's proponents win out over their competitors. Nor can such a presentation of science do more than systematically neglect the power dimension involved in scientific argumentation" (Apple, 1990, p. 89).

The textbook as authority is a privileged notion in the classroom. Apple (1989) affirms that "legitimate" knowledge is made available in schools through the textbook. The curriculum in schools, Apple (1989) attests, is defined by the "standardized, grade-level-specific text in mathematics, reading, social studies, science...and so on" (p. 157). Textbooks, Baker and Freebody (1989) agree, are central to the organization and practice of teaching and learning. Since they "present school knowledge (content) within a school technology (literacy), it is not surprising that textbooks are treated as 'authoritative' sources of content and method" (p. 263).

Olson (1989) concurs that the textbook has authority since it is "taken as the authorized version of a society's valid knowledge" (p. 238). Mastery of the content of the textbook is the student's primary responsibility. Children do not have the right to disagree with this official knowledge, "they have to master and be prepared to defend" the authorized textbooks (Olson, 1989, p. 239). According to Olson (1989), then, there is an inequality that becomes evident between the textbook and the child.

The question arises, in discussing the authority of the written text, whether they

are "self-authorizing or whether they are authorized in the course of specific instructional practices..." (Baker and Freebody, 1989, p. 264). According to Olson (1989), the genesis of the authority of textbook can be found in "representation collectives," which surfaced through participation in rituals, that appeared as "powerful, sacred and originating somewhere other than the current speaker" (p. 239). In ritual conditions, the speaker speaks the "words of his elders," which are adopted through a special "voice" (Olson, 1989, p. 239). This allows the speaker an authority that may not have been otherwise present (Olson, 1989). In a textbook, the language originates from a transcendental source since written text separates speech from the speaker (Olson, 1989). This speech is impersonal and objective, and is therefore above criticism (Olson, 1989).

Although it would seem that textual discourse is more open to criticism than speech since it is permanent and allows more than one reading, this is not the case in the classroom (Olson, 1989). In fact, Olson (1989) explains that in order to criticize or to dissent, you must have the right through belonging to some relevant social group. These social relations "required for the free offering of requests and assertions and their equally free criticism/rejection may be called peer relations" (Olson, 1989, p. 240). However, since the teachers and students are the author's subordinates, they lack the right to criticism "because the words are neither their own nor originate with a known member of their own peer group" (Olson, 1989, p. 241).

The claims found in the written text appear to have an independent truth value that is detached from any human sources (Olson, 1989). Olson (1989) sees the

authority of text, then, "in the structure of the texts themselves" (p. 262). The textbook, as a highly explicit artifact which uses conventionalized language, is granted an objectivity and autonomy that makes it appear above criticism (Olson, 1989).

Where Olson sees the authority of textbooks as being intrinsic and found in the structure of the texts themselves, Luke, de Castell, and Luke (1989) focus on the extrinsic factors which are inherent to the social structure of schools. "The power of the word of the textbook is premised on the social rules governing the environment of the reader, as much as on the intrinsic structural and linguistic features of the text" (p. 258). Luke et al. (1989) argue that the textual authority

> is contingent on the interaction between the reader's prior knowledge, the institutional setting within which the reading task is situated, the teacher who teaches the text and the distinctive features of the textbook per se. This relationship...is delimited and constrained by the rules of schooling which position teacher, text and student in hierarchical levels of power and authority (p. 258).

Luke et al. (1989) further assert that it is the text that is subordinated to the teacher's authority since it is the teacher who explains the text and directs the conversations surrounding the text. It is also the teacher who "in this sense, embodies and reconstitutes the text in use....Thus teachers are in fact, and by status, in command of textual knowledge" (p. 258). The teacher and text together co-comprise the authority and the domain of knowledge (Luke et al, 1989).

The danger of granting classroom materials absolute authority, Allen (1997) advises, is that children begin to internalize the values found therein so that their world is understood only through one particular lens. They come to passively accept the status quo that includes the social meanings found in the texts (Allen, 1997). "Children

also learn not to question the authority behind these materials: an established social

order that supports poverty, sexism, racism, and other forms of institutional bias"

(Allen, 1997, p. 523).

Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints

By interrogating multiple viewpoints, we are asked to consider experience and

texts from our own perspective as well as that of others, and to consider these various

viewpoints concurrently (Lewison et al., 2002). Lesley (2001) defines critical literacy

as literacy that begets an awareness that language has the power to both silence and to

give voice to oppression where there are socially determined issues of inequality. For

Leland and Harste (2000), taking a critical stance means becoming aware that "all texts

are told from a particular point of view and are undeniably colored by this perspective"

(p. 3). Leland and Harste (2000) refer to the important, though often neglected, goal of

encouraging children to think critically about what they read as "enlarging the space of

the possible" (p. 3).

For Simpson (1996) questioning text and making it problematic is at the heart of

critical literacy. "My primary intention in leading students toward critical

understandings...is to open up issues for debate -- to make them explicit and make it

possible for readers to then decide whether or not to accept the values and positioning

of the text" (Simpson, 1996, p. 119). Shor (1999) asserts that critical literacy means

using language that questions the social construction of self. "When we are critically

literate, we examine our ongoing development, to reveal the subjective positions from

which we make sense of the world and act in it. All of us grow up and live in local contexts where multiple discourses shape us" (Shor, 1999, p. 2). Lohrey (1998) sees critical literacy as being able to "talk back to the text" (p. 8) so we can look below the surface to discover how we are influenced. We can then consider other points of view by examining our values and attitudes (Lohrey, 1998).

Through interrogating multiple viewpoints, it seemed that places for multiple literacies and text interpretation might be found and enlarged. Following will be a exploration of participant teachers' thoughts about the notions of multiple literacies and text interpretation. These notions will then be examined in light of the literature on this topic.

Multiple literacies.

In asking the teachers what the term multiple literacies meant, I found that all were familiar with the term. For example, Ashley felt that multiple literacies implied incorporating the multiple intelligences, "so that you have a variety of literature that you are familiar with, that you are able to integrate them all together" (Interview, 27/01/03).

Brett's notion of multiple literacies was more developed. S/he thought that multiple literacies referred to fluency in different subject areas. These different subject areas require different strategies, skills, and language. "I think the whole point of being literate is being functional in that language" (Interview, 28/01/03). However, s/he continued,

I think you need to have a good strong basis of language to be able to be literate in other subjects. For example, students who are weak in reading and writing really have a tendency to struggle with being literate in science because they have a hard time with the reading and the writing and expressing themselves (Interview, 28/01/03).

For Chris, multiple literacies and literacy are linked together. S/he observed that there is a crossover between the two. Since literacy meant, to Darcy, the ability to communicate ideas to other people, multiple literacies meant the ability to do so in many different ways. "For example, if you could do it by means of writing, by means of, I suppose, art..." (Interview, 07/02/03).

According to Crawford, Crowell, Kauffman, Peterson, Phillips, and Schroeder (1995), discussions of literacy are often limited to written language. There are many other literacies that form an important part of the lives of children and their families. "These other ways of knowing include different forms of written language, oral traditions and stories, music, mathematics, and visual image" (p. 600). Educators can build on these literacies, Crawford et al. (1995) continue, making important connections to the understandings and histories of their students and creating new potentials for learning. There are many ways of coming to know the world, Crawford et al. (1995) urge, and "children need multiple literacies to create meaning about the world and to share their thinking with others" (p. 606).

Similarly, Piro (2002) concurs that literacy has been seen as a behavior connected only to the written and spoken word. The definition needs to be expanded to include "the ability to encode or decode meaning in any of the forms of representation used in the culture to convey or express meaning" (Eisner, 1994, p. x). Literacy and

culture, then, must in some way connect (Piro, 2002). According to Hobbs (1997), a changing cultural environment has "extended and reshaped the role of language and the written word" (p. 166). It is increasingly recognized, therefore, that "literacy is not simply a matter of acquiring de-contextualized decoding, comprehension and production skills, but that literacy must be connected to the culture and contexts in which reading and writing are used" (p. 166). For Eisner (1994), one of the primary roles of education is to develop multiple forms of literacy. What educators should cultivate, Eisner (1994) avows, is "the student's ability to access meaning within the variety of forms of representation that humans use to represent the contents of their consciousness" (p. x).

The notion of multiple literacies is important, Street (1995) asserts, in challenging the autonomous model of literacy. Street indicates that the idea of a single literacy "is only one subculture's view and there are varieties of literacy practices" (p. 134). Street (1995) discusses various forms of literacy such as reading, writing and numeracy, document processing, emotional, and film.

However, Street (1995) asserts that "the further these usages get away from the social practices of reading and writing, the more evident it is that the term 'literacy' is being used in a narrow, moral and functional sense to mean cultural competence or skills" (p. 135). The danger, Street (1995) cautions, is collusion through "the imposition of specific cultural meanings on to the literacy practices of other people for whom these meanings are quite inappropriate. The extensions and metaphors serve to disguise the ideological underpinnings of our own meanings and uses of literacy" (p.

135). In order to avoid these pitfalls, Street (1995) has developed the notion of dominant literacies, where the inverse would be marginalized literacies.

Gallego and Hollingsworth (1992) view multiple literacies as pushing the concept of school literacy beyond its "traditional disciplinary-specific boundaries" (p. 207). For Gallego and Hollingsworth (1992), multiple literacies can be seen as the interaction of three types of literacy: Community literacy refers to an integration of "individual ways of knowing, believing, and communicating with those of a larger community" (p. 207). School literacy involves "the interpretive and communicative processes needed to adapt socially to school settings, maintain a good sense of self, and gain a conceptual understanding of school subjects" (p. 207). Finally, personal literacy refers to "ways of knowing and beliefs about self and personal communication norms arising from historical or experiential and gender-specific backgrounds. It reflects the ways students believe they 'should' interact socially in the world" (p. 207). It has been noted that if there is not a match between personal and community literacy with standard school literacy, students will not perform well on achievement measures (Gallego and Hollingsworth, 1992).

Hamilton (2002), refers to this approach as the "New Literacy Studies" (Introducing The New Literacy Studies section, para. 1). Here, the focus on literacy shifts to "vernacular practices and informal learning...learning does not just take place in classrooms and is not just concerned with methods" (Hamilton, 2002, Introducing The New Literacy Studies section, para. 3). There are many different literacies, Hamilton (2002) asserts, and new literacies are always being developed. The

implication for teachers, Hamilton (2002) asserts, is that we must examine our own assumptions about literacy since there is no one standard that is, for all time, valid for everyone. "The New Literacy Studies encourages us to be reflective about the everyday practices that we are all part of, to ask questions, rather than to assume that we already know what literacy is" (Hamilton, 2002, Introducing The New Literacy Studies section, para. 7).

Text interpretation.

If interrogating multiple viewpoints involves understanding "experience and texts from our own perspectives and the viewpoints of others..." (Lewison et al, 2002, p. 383), it was seemly that I also broach the topic of text interpretation with the teachers. I asked, then, that the teachers respond to Gilbert's (2001) assertion that by tying text to a single meaning, teachers are serving the interests of the powerful who rely upon a tightly controlled set of social practices to give them legitimacy and authority.

Generally, I found that three of the teachers expressed concern about students' reading abilities and how this would affect their competence in making meaning of text. All the teachers, it seemed, had difficulty imagining the release of control to their students. It seemed that although they agreed with the idea of allowing students to interpret text on their own, they were reserved in their agreement. There was some amount of reluctance on the teachers' part, I believe, since they could not conceive of reading instruction that was not "traditional" in nature, that is, that did not include

reading together with the class, having the teacher explain what the text meant, and answering questions about the text.

As well, it was noted that, when discussing text interpretation, with the exception of one teacher, the conversations tended to center on the language arts, but not the content areas. In addressing content area literacy, Gordon et al. (1998) explain that being literate in any subject means being able to read, write, and talk about the area, using reading, writing, talking, listening, and viewing. Students best learn about any given subject if these skills become part of the subject area curriculum (Gordon et al, 1998). As well, the affective and the cognitive dimensions of learning cannot be separated (Gordon et al, 1998). Given that we live in a print-oriented society, students must learn to become active, independent learners in order to become literate in a subject area (Gordon et al., 1998). "To encourage independence," Gordon et al (1998) maintain, "content area literacy instruction should focus on developing self-guided strategic readers and writers" (p. 5).

According to Bean (2000), the teaching focus in the content areas has now expanded to include reading, writing, and discussion. This expansion is reflected in the use of the more inclusive term content area literacy, which is now anchored in text and reader-based research (Bean, 2000). As young readers begin to encounter content area texts, many also begin to struggle. This struggle paints a picture of "social stratification based on access and ability to handle the demands of technical writing" (Bean, 2000, p. 630).

The teachers in the study discussed attending to higher level comprehension

skills with their students such as inference, but they did not discuss critical discourse analysis. An exploration of how language and power are related is the major goal of critical discourse analysis (Bloome and Talwalkar, 1997). This represents an approach to language that explores power relations and how they are comprised (Bloome and Talwalkar, 1997). Within the classroom, critical discourse analysis can be used to "raise questions about how classroom conversations affect students' identities as readers, their related interpretation of written texts, and their overall reading and writing development" (Bloome and Talwalkar, 1997, p. 109). Further, critical discourse analysis can provide insights into how texts position readers (Bloome and Talwalkar, 1997) The importance of critical language awareness, Bloome and Talwalkar (1997) assert, is that it provides a "theory-practice link" to aid in promoting awareness about language and power (Bloome and Talwalkar, 1997, p. 105).

In Ashley's view, it is often difficult for students to interpret text because their reading ability may not coincide with the reading level of a text. S/he therefore often helps with interpretation "because it's too high for some of my students..." (Interview, 10/02/03). S/he maintained that when it comes to very technical kinds of text, such as those encountered in social studies, interpretation by the teacher is necessary. S/he differentiated between content area text and novels. When s/he is reading a novel with her class, Ashley stated that s/he plans for more differentiation for students of different reading abilities. "For students who are at a high level of reading, I've created different types of questions for different readers so that the high level readers have a lot of evaluation questions and a lot of synthesis questions" (Interview, 10/02/03).

Still, Ashley said, when s/he first began presenting the more capable readers with higher level questions, "they were very standoffish with the whole idea of evaluating and thinking, now if I was a character in the story, what would you have done, things like that where there was no right and wrong answer" (Interview, 10/02/03). In fact, Ashley related, some of her/his students were "moved to tears at first and then after a while they got accustomed to it" (Interview, 10/02/03). This demonstrates, Ashley concluded, that students are not encouraged to think for themselves so that when they are asked to do so, they are unsure how to respond. "But, I think that if you continually give them that opportunity, they become much more comfortable with it in time" (Interview, 10/02/03).

Although Brett agreed that it is important that students interpret text on their own, s/he avowed that it is a very difficult thing to do. "I find the kids have a hard time thinking for themselves and getting into the meanings and they want to please you so they always want to know what the right answer is" (Interview, 28/01/03). Further, s/he added that for many students, text interpretation presents a challenge "so you end up coaching them along" to try to get them to think about the story they are reading (Interview, 28/01/03).

Additionally, Brett stated that time constraints faced by the teacher also inhibit this practice. "You know, you're so busy planning, you rely on premade, manufactured kits...and novel studies with the premade questions..." (Interview, 28/01/03), which do not focus on critical literacy. As well, allowing students to interpret text can be time consuming. "I find what happens is that the lessons and things get so slow because you

can hear the gears turning but they're at a very slow rate so that you get down time in your room" (Interview, 28/01/03).

Too, allowing interpretation of text by students requires that the teacher give up some degree of control in the classroom. "It's a hard thing I think for teachers. I think all teachers have some degree of control issues in the classroom" (Interview, 28/01/03).

For these reasons, Brett explained that s/he approaches novels through a thematic perspective. Many novels, such as Shel Silverstein's The Giving Tree (1964), are timeless and can be related to in any era because the themes are eternal. "Sometimes, some kids need to know what the theme is and they do sometimes know, but I think it's good to put it in general terms and for them to be able to explore it" (Interview, 28/01/03).

When I put to Brett that perhaps, through pointing out certain themes, the teacher is directing the students' thinking, s/he agreed but asserted that "I know I am and I know I have to, but it's because sometimes the kids have a hard time going there" (Interview, 28/01/03). Brett mentioned that conversations about novels generally occur during classroom discussions with her/his students. The teacher might ask the students what their thoughts were "but I have to lead the questions, I find I lead the questions and sometimes, yes, I might have a purpose, an outcome I want of certain questions..." (Interview, 28/01/03).

Brett's stipulation, though, is that her/his students provide evidence for assertions made about novels they are reading. Her/his students must give examples

and write some kind of evidence "to back up something they say....they have to show me evidence to prove that point" (Interview, 28/01/03). S/he observes, though, that this, too, presents difficulties for the students.

> Sometimes, they have a hard time articulating that, well, I think she's a really nice person as a character study....and then I'm thinking, well, nice is a good word, let's think of some other words for nice and brainstorm and then we say, why do you think she's nice? Well, she's just nice. They know she's nice but for them to really say... (Interview, 28/01/03).

Chris, too, felt that students' reading ability plays an important role in text interpretation. It is necessary to be aware of the level of the students that you're working with. If you choose material that the children are proficient at being able to interpret, Chris stated that "it is liberating for them to be interpreting it on their own without necessarily any preconceptions of the teacher" (Interview, 04/02/03).

Still, when working with students who need more support, s/he asserted this would be akin to "throwing them out to drown to just say just do this on your own and interpret it however" (Interview, 04/02/03). In the classroom, s/he said, the teacher must find ways to allow the students to interpret text while at the same time, provide direction without including your own bias.

> I have to make sure that my kids are reading independently, material that is at their level of decoding and comprehension. On the other hand, for some of these kids who have learning disabilities, you have to also make sure that they are dealing with ideas that are at their cognitive and intellectual level. So, that's the balance (Interview, 04/02/03).

Moreover, Chris suggested that teachers have a responsibility to teach text interpretation strategies, such as inference.

> If you were to just let the kids get whatever they would from that text, then

some kids would never necessarily be able to go deeper than beyond telling you what color of shoes the guy is wearing. You need to coach...but some of those things can be learned (Interview, 04/02/03).

Darcy held a somewhat different view of text interpretation. S/he suggested that no matter what the meaning is that the teacher conveys to the students, they will override that meaning with their own because of their own prior experience.

> If we were talking about, say, a child that had lost a dog...well, if a kid's lost a dog, they've already put themselves in that position already, ok, and a lot of stories relate to what experiences the kids have already had (Interview, 07/02/03).

Creative, imaginative or emotional students will place themselves into a story, Darcy continued, and the teacher's representation may change some students' interpretation to some degree but for others, there will be no change.

Darcy conveyed that teachers are perhaps making an erroneous assumption that children arrive at school as empty slates. They are not, s/he insisted, since they all arrive with their own background information that they relate to their reading. "If you try to convince students to take a certain attitude toward a certain type of situation, they will sometimes agree with you and sometimes they won't agree with you" (Interview, 07/02/03) depending on their own background knowledge.

> Darcy advised, though, that it is also necessary to teach skills to the students.

> You can't give someone ultimate freedom...if you're trying to teach certain skills. You have to try to teach for these certain skills before you go to another level and I think that's another level of literacy which I think you need to acquire... (Interview, 07/02/03).

As well, Darcy affirmed that even though children should be encouraged to interpret text on their own, this is dependent upon the type of text. If it is a text that

presents a "moral type" of situation, Darcy explained that s/he might tend to be moralistic in her/his approach. "You know, I wouldn't necessarily want to leave that up to them because I might want to moralize certain situations where they say, well, you know, to beat up somebody else in the playground isn't necessarily a good thing" (Interview, 07/02/03). But, s/he continued, many students have their own view on how things work and "they take that with them no matter where they go and what they do. It's an automatic thing" (Interview, 07/02/03).

In recent years, Kempe (2001) explains, the notion of a "single predetermined meaning of the text..." has been challenged by literary theorists (p.40). As a result, concepts such as reader response criticism have tended to dominate classroom theory. However, these alternate theories are not without problems in practice, "not least the paradox created by regarding any personal response to the text as legitimate when in reality some responses are more highly valued than others" (Kempe, 2001, p. 40).

Edelsky (1999) points out that theories such as reader-response can "as easily support *avoiding* looking at white privilege...as they support looking *at* it" (p. 15). Theories such as this are not incorrect, Edelsky (1999) explains, they just do not go far enough to actively "tie language to power, tie text interpretation to societal structures, or tie reading and writing to perpetuating or resisting" (p. 15). While these "theories-in-practice" do weave critical components into their frameworks, "the role of language in perpetuating or constituting systems of domination" are not the central pivot for all the rest (Edelsky, 1999, p. 16). These theories, then, could 'just as well be a softer way of maintaining systems of dominance" (Edelsky, 1999, p. 16).

Edelsky (1999), in discussing the need to re-theorize whole language to make it live up to its liberatory potential, confirms that the relationship between language and power must be highlighted. Perhaps, Edelsky (1999) imagines, the guiding image of whole language as "a young child learning language at home" could be changed to the more provocative one of "a child learning to use language in a multilingual day-care center. Or perhaps it would be better to put the child nearer the edge and the community in the center" to reflect the whole language educators' concerns for the classroom community (p. 18).

Assumptions that view literature as an "unproblematic corpus of texts which mirror reality" are seldom challenged or made explicit, "encourage students to ignore the social and ideological nature of their responses" (Kempe, 2001, p. 40). Students, therefore, are not able to consider how their responses are positioned by "the text, by classroom reading and writing practices and by the wider society and culture" (Kempe, 2001, p. 40). Through not being able to produce and analyze different readings, they tend to passively accept the text and the dominant culture (Kempe, 2001). "Yet in a world characterized by conflict, oppression and inequality," Kemp (2001) continues, "students must be given access to a more powerful literacy (or literacies) which requires them to resist textual ideologies and to construct socially critical readings of their texts and their culture" (p. 41).

Children should be made aware that "there can be no single meaning of the text put there by the author, because the values and beliefs reflected in texts are a product of different historical, social and textual contexts" (Kempe, 2001, p. 50). Kempe (2001)

asserts that alternative approaches tend to challenge existing power structures and are therefore not easily accepted. In this light, it is difficult to know "the extent to which students will continue to read the teacher as opposed to constructing their own readings" (Kempe, 2001, p. 41). It is important, then, to find ways to decrease the teacher's role as the source of authoritative knowledge in order to build a community of learners "engaged in the pursuit of knowledge, while holding knowledge up to constant critical reflection" (Kempe, 2001, p. 55).

Gilbert (2001) agrees that if literacy is fundamentally about "having access to the practices involved in the making and re-making of textual meaning..." then it follows that critical literacy is about exploring those practices through the social meanings "such practices implicitly (and perhaps explicitly) authorize or silence" (p. 76).

Gilbert (2001) further avows that text must be loosened from its "authorized, legitimated meaning" if we are to investigate the conditions of possibility for that authorized meaning (p. 79). Reading must be unbound from the onerous task of retrieving a single, sanctioned meaning (Gilbert, 2001). This can permit us to concentrate on how we make meaning, how different groups of people can make different readings, for different purposes (Gilbert, 2001). Luke, O'Brien and Comber (2001), too, affirm that texts "play major parts in building and reproducing social structures" if left uninterrupted (p. 113).

Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues

Teachers focusing on sociopolitical issues understand that teaching is never neutral (Lewison et al., 2002). They give attention to how sociopolitical systems, power relationships, and language cannot be separated from teaching (Lewison et al., 2002). Siegel and Fernandez (2000) insist that school literacy practices come up against students' positioning in the larger society. This serves to silence the students and construct them as school failures rather than literate persons (Siegel and Fernandez, 2000). Scribner (1984), too, uses the metaphor of power as one way to describe literacy. Historically, she maintains, literacy has been "an important tool in maintaining the hegemony of elites and dominant classes in certain societies, while laying the basis for increased social and political participation in others" (p. 12). Yoon (2002) observes that students in the first world seem to experience literacy as "one-dimensional and framed as neutral and objective--irrelevant of the cultural, political, and ideological contexts of their societies" (p. 292).

Willis and Harris (2000) assert that critical approaches to literacy would suggest that literacy and politics have been strong barriers to non-Caucasians, the poor and females throughout the 20th century. From the beginning, reading, by becoming a political endeavour, has served to support the status quo and to keep out nonmainstream groups (Willis and Harris, 2000). The world is seen as being unequal in power and resource distribution and ethnicity, race, gender, and social class determine who will receive the systematic privileged (Moje et al., 2000).

Luke (2000) asserts that who gets access to the economies of education, who

can manipulate, construct, critique, and refute them, is one of "the key educational issues of the next century" (Luke, 2000, p. 449). Luke (2000) concludes that literacy education is about access and discrimination, about inclusion and exclusion. "It is about setting the conditions for students to engage in textual relationships of power" (Luke, 2000, p. 449).

For Hamilton (2002), literacy competence and skill are relational notions that are defined by "the social and communicative practices with which individuals engage in the various domains of their life world" (Introducing the New Literacy Studies section, para. 1). Absolute levels of skill cannot be used to understand literacy competence and need; we must look beyond texts to the ways in which texts are socially regulated and used (Hamilton, 2002). Hamilton (2002) champions the "vernacular literacies," which are not "regulated or systematised by the formal rules and procedures of social institutions but have their origin in the purposes of everyday life" (Developing notions of "vernacular" and institutional literacies section, para. 3). The vernacular, Hamilton (2002) maintains, is devalued by the institutions that privilege certain kinds of knowledge.

According to Rogers (2002), critical literacy learning is a set of processes that is socioculturally situated. Therefore, language is not a neutral tool since it is "shot through with power--social, cultural, and ideological--that constructs and is constructed by daily interactions" (Rogers, 2002, p. 774).

Curriculum.

In my conversation with the teachers, I suggested that curriculum is a politically loaded construct. What we teach in school is always selective since it represents some interests and excludes others. I indicated that "rather than a single, universal Truth, the practice of curriculum and schooling follow lines of social division and is structured according to the prevailing principles of social organisation and power" (Durrant and Green, 2001, p. 154). I asked the teachers to respond to this statement.

I found that teachers' responses varied greatly. Two of the teachers said they believe that there is some room for movement in the curriculum since the particulars are often not explicitly stated within. None of the teachers unequivocally agreed with the statement. Indeed, one felt that the thinking behind the contention was paranoiac. Another teacher called for an overhaul of the current emphasis on a prescriptive, narrow curriculum. Generally, I found that the teachers tended to display a fatalistic attitude toward control of the curriculum.

Ashley said she believes that decisions about curriculum are made at the "high bureaucracy" but s/he didn't believe that "anyone means anything ill will by the decision" (Interview, 10/02/03). Ashley suggested that there must be a curriculum in place that will guide and restrict teachers or else "I don't think that you'd be feeling very comfortable in the classroom. There wouldn't be any type of consistency" (Interview, 10/02/03).   Although Ashley stated that curriculum presents restrictions for the teacher, she declared that curriculum also allows the teacher some flexibility in content areas such as social studies. S/he gave as an example the study of

renewable and non-renewable resources. Which particular resources the students study is up to the discretion of the classroom teacher. "That can be influenced by the society that you're in or the community that you're in, or by the other teachers and how they're teaching" (Interview, 10/02/03).

I then suggested to Ashley that while it is true that guidelines are necessary, those who generally receive representation are the empowered while the voice of the disempowered seems to be missing. "What about their representation, where does that come into all of it?" I asked.

Ashley responded that it is difficult for people who are part of the dominant Caucasian, middle class group to understand the inequalities, making it "hard to position yourself in another person's point of view" (Interview, 10/02/03). She stated that if you belong to the dominant group, "as long as you're aware of it, that's the best you can do because you can't change who you are" (Interview, 10/02/03). Therefore, it would be helpful, Ashley suggested, to have an outsider join the classroom in order to give suggestions and point out areas where "we can change and be more multicultural or culturally sensitive" (Interview, 10/02/03).

Still, Ashley conceded that although teachers have a tremendous impact on their students, these same teachers are often unaware of the many ways they affect their students.

> You do things in the classroom that you're not even aware of. You know, you can have huge impacts and yet at the same time you do some things and you just think naturally to do and there probably are a lot of biases going on that you're not even aware of....You think, oh, I'm not doing anything (Interview, 10/02/03).

In Brett's view, curriculum is a reflection of what is acceptable in society. And it is largely the government who decides what is acceptable. I inquired whether Brett truly believed that it was the government who decided on the body of knowledge that the children would learn. I asked Brett under whose direction these decisions would be made. Brett stated that, since education is administered by the government, it is the department of the Minister of Learning who directs curriculum, "so there is *some* political stuff" (Interview, 28/01/03).

In addition, parents play a large role in curricular decisions. Because parents have their own ideas of what is acceptable in the classroom, teachers must demonstrate some caution.

> You have to be careful, you can't start talking about, say, in Grade five, maybe the subject of the holocaust comes up and you have to be very careful because kids make their own interpretations and they go home and, it's like, mom, pass the mashed potatoes, oh, and by the way, we're talking about the Nazis (Interview, 28/01/03).

Parents have a stake in what happens in their child's classroom so they want to be current about what occurs there. "But, they don't necessarily control the texts and the media and all that but I think teachers subconsciously are very aware of it" (Interview, 28/01/03). Further, the belief systems in place in the home are brought into the classroom by students, also affecting what is taught in the classroom.

Brett, similar to Ashley, surmised that the official curriculum affords teachers some freedom to be selective in how they present certain topics or objectives. The curriculum does not prescribe when topics must be covered, nor does it dictate sequencing of topics. "They leave a lot to the professional judgment" of the teacher

(Interview, 28/01/03).

The idea of school reform, Chris responded when I presented the idea of a curriculum that represents the interests of the dominant, has brought some of the "bigger gurus" of education today to challenge the notion of a narrow curriculum.

> We need to be allowing for more wide open aspects of learning, less restriction in the curriculum, more emphasis on the application of skill when they are working in topic areas of choice, more opportunities for choice to do skill development and less top-down or teacher-directed activities, which I would definitely concur with (Interview, 04/02/03).

This is, Chris acknowledged, a daunting task since teachers need support if they choose to "go in those directions". As well, achievement exams restrict learning because "you will be judged on the results of said test in said topic and if you had a kid who did a whole different topic than China, that would be detrimental to the school" (Interview, 04/02/03).

When I suggested Durrant and Green's (2001) conception of curriculum to Darcy, her/his initial response was that this was a fearful, paranoiac question. S/he was concerned because prior to discussing the topic of curriculum, we had been conversing about having students interpret text on their own, "bringing their own ideas and their own questions....now we're talking about having a very restrictive kind of curriculum...that we're almost robotic in some of the ways we think..." (Interview, 07/02/03). S/he said s/he felt, too, that this was a cynical approach because of the implication that "many of us are teaching the kids only a certain amount of information and that whatever is left out is very important" (Interview, 04/02/03).

Upon reflection, though, Darcy acknowledged that perhaps this assertion did

hold some truth inasmuch as things tend to change over time. Political correctness has in many ways colored the way people view the world. We have become more sympathetic and sensitive to the needs of others and the treatment they have received in the past. Louis Riel, for example, "is now recognized more as a hero than a ...criminal" (Interview, 04/02/03).

Still, Darcy considered, although there is much that is kept from our view, the media makes us very aware of what is happening in our world. Therefore, perhaps what is included in the curriculum is not as crucial as we believe. "I think there's so many things that go on in our society nowadays outside of this that mitigate whatever we try to teach in school that by the time these kids get to high school, a lot of this stuff is null and void anyway" (Interview, 04/02/03).

In contemplating what has been omitted, Darcy suggested that the curriculum has changed over the years so that

> basic knowledge, which probably identifies the qualities that people should have...that were used to develop this country, have not been stressed enough to the extent that we're lacking a lot of background as far as our own Canadian society. We don't have the stories about Canada, we don't have the stories about our heroes. We see a lot of stories about American heroes and that sort of thing
> (Interview, 04/02/03).

I indicated to Darcy that critical theorists would be suspicious of the idea of a universal value system, questioning who would decide which values would be privileged, why those values would be deemed important, and what those values would be. Darcy suggested that the important values would be the "types of values that mean to be human in the proper, the truest sense" (Interview, 04/02/03). These would include

values that keep the family together or that keep people honest. As well, values that "allow people to keep their doors open or help other people out when there's an accident" would also be included (Interview, 04/02/03).

Darcy concluded that although s/he can see that curriculum is selective, this cannot be avoided. "I think that we're going to always be at the whim of whoever decides to control whatever's going on. The fact is, somebody has to be in control, somewhere" (Interview, 04/02/03). This is the lesser of two evils, the larger being no control, or anarchy.

Critical pedagogue Henry Giroux's (1992) question "how can we as educators make learning meaningful in order to make it critical and how can we make it critical in order to make it emancipatory?"(p.15) is a salient one. It originates from the contention that schools are cultural sites that appear to relay a common culture to the students (Giroux, 1992). However, schools are not uniform institutions that provide democratically for the needs of different students since "they, in fact, more often than not, legitimate what can be called a dominant culture" (Giroux, 1992, p. 16). And, as part of the wider culture, schools "often function to marginalize, disconfirm, and delegitimate the experiences, histories, and categories that students use in mediating their lives" (Giroux, 1992, p. 17). In this way, students are actively silenced through the formal and hidden curricula of the schooling experience (Giroux, 1992). For the ruling class who have the power, reproduction of the dominant ideology is the main task for systematic education (Freire in Shor, 1987).

According to Apple (1987), education is not neutral, somehow above the

ideological struggles of society. "Rather, it is deeply implicated in the formation of the unequal cultural, economic, and political issues that dominate our society" (Apple, 1987, p. vii). Reality must be made opaque, Freire explains, to "prevent the people from gaining critical awareness, from 'reading' critically their reality, from grasping the *raison d'etre* of the facts they discover" (in Shor, 1987, p. 36). Indeed, Leland and Harste (2000) affirm that teaching can never be a neutral practice. They maintain that "different approaches to teaching represent cultural positions and ideologies" (p. 4).

Curriculum, in the critical orientation, must be understood as a form of cultural politics where school life is seen as a place "characterized by a plurality of conflicting languages and struggles, a site where dominant and subordinate cultures collide..." (Giroux, 1988, p. 69). How a certain story is told is decided by the fundamental interests that structure the organization of knowledge, social relations, values, and forms of assessment (Giroux, 1988). Indeed, it represents a multilayered and contradictory narrative that is situated within relations of power (Giroux, 1992). Typically, these relations favour white, middle-class, English-speaking students (Giroux, 1992).

This suggests that "curriculum must be seen in the most fundamental sense as a battle-ground over whose forms of knowledge, history, visions, language, culture, and authority will prevail as a legitimate object of learning and analysis" (Giroux, 1992, p.18). Leistyna and Woodrum (1999) concur that "pedagogy and curricula are thus not only composed of particular experiences and interests, but also represent a site of struggle over whose values and versions of authority and history will be central to the

educational process" (p. 4).

Particular social and historical conditions function to produce educational practices and knowledge. Education, then, plays an important role in the socialization process (Leistyna and Woodrum, 1999). "The questions posed by critical pedagogues are, Whose values, interpretations, and goals constitute the foundation of public education--the 'official' curriculum - and how is this body of knowledge, which is often falsely presented as being objective and universal, imposed on the greater society?" (Leistyna and Woodrum, 1999, p. 4).

However, merely asking these questions is not enough since these probes must be linked to competing notions of social and economic power and ideologies (Apple, 1990). Only then can we get a more complete idea of "the linkages between economic and political power and the knowledge *made available* (and *not* made available) to students (Apple, 1990, p. 7).

Critical pedagogy argues that the knowledge that is taught in education systems is chosen from a larger possibility of knowledge and principles. In fact, Apple (1990, p. 8) concurs that it becomes "a form of cultural capital that comes from somewhere, that often reflects the perspectives and beliefs of powerful segments of our social collectivity." It is the schools, Apple (1990) says, which disburse this capital.

By perpetuating the white, middle-class culture, schools effectively marginalize the less powerful. Schools, as microcosms of the larger society, preserve in a very direct way the dominant belief systems of that larger society through particular bodies of knowledge and curricula, and pedagogical practices (Leistyna and Woodrum, 1999).

For example, power relations are set up in the school which mimic those in the larger society; the principal has authority over the teachers, usually female, who dominate the students.

Both the students and their teachers, as members of the society, "create and recreate forms of consciousness that enable social control to be maintained without the necessity of dominant groups having to resort to overt mechanisms of domination" (Apple, 1990, p. 3). All this leads to a hegemonic system which serves to "saturate" our very consciousness, so that the "educational, economic and social world we see and interact with, and the commonsense interpretations we put on it, become the world *tout court*, the only world" (Apple, 1990, p. 5). The implication is that tacit ideological assumptions are necessary to hold together the fundamental patterns in society; these rules are not usually conscious and work to maintain economic control and power (Apple, 1990).

The politics of teaching.

The whole concept of schooling, proponents of critical theory would argue, is closely aligned with issues of power. Teaching, critical theorists further contend, is a political endeavor whose aim is one of reproduction of the status quo. Through perpetuating dominant ideologies, teachers help to create uncritical, passive tools of production and consumption.

Alfie Kohn (in Koshewa, 2001) has said that teachers are uneasy about becoming political because they think it is someone else's job. However, he continues,

"if students are circling vowels instead of reading good stories, it's already political" (p. 7).

When I suggested this view that teaching is a political endeavor, the teachers were all in concordance. One theme that emerged was the suggestion that teaching is political because it is a very public activity; everyone seems to have a vested interest. Moreover, this public scrutiny has made teachers unduly cautious about decisions made regarding their students. I would further suggest that this caution is an inhibiting factor in the enacting of a critical pedagogy.

In addition, achievement testing and its accompanying interpretation of curriculum has further constrained teachers through becoming more prescriptive and politically correct. This has further politicized the classroom situation.

Ashley, for example, agreed with this statement. She asserted, though, that all the teacher can do is be aware of the influence s/he can have on students, and try to make her/himself as multicultural as possible. "I mean, you can't change who you are, but yeah, I agree that there are wide political issues going on in the classroom" (Interview, 10/02/03).

Brett, too, agreed that "teachers don't like to be political. They don't like to get involved" (Interview, 28/01/03). Although teachers do not like to get involved, s/he maintained that the profession is still political since what happens in the classroom depends upon the judgment of the teacher. "I think there's always conflict, you know. I see it as political because there's always these expectations...and there's media. It's very political, but I think we don't try to show it" (Interview, 28/01/03).

Further, s/he stated that teachers have a tendency to teach to the group rather than the individual because there is an acceptable norm that functions in society. Teachers are wary, s/he commented, because society expects that students, as citizens of the future, will become functioning members of society who are able to correctly use the language conventions in their work world. As well, parents have the same surface level expectations that do not allow teachers to go below the superficial in their teaching.

Teachers fear, Brett posited, that students will enter the work world and their future employer will question the education system because their employees cannot spell. "And so, I think there's a burden, teachers feel that we need to cross the t's and dot the i's" (Interview, 28/01/03).

Finally, Brett speculated that since curriculum dictates what is taught in the classroom, many teachers do not attempt to go outside of that. "Even in today's current events...what we fail to do is talk about current events, what's happening in the world...because you're not sure if it's acceptable or not in the classroom" (Interview, 28/01/03).

Chris discussed teaching and political action. "Yeah, it is political and I think there are teachers who are being political," s/he responded, "I mean, teachers are attending those kinds of things and teachers are trying to speak out" (Interview, 04/02/03). Chris further insisted that teaching is changing because teachers no longer closet themselves in their classrooms, working on their own. There is more collaboration occurring.

Further, Chris avowed, the ATA is "the only body in Alberta who speaks out against achievement testing and continues to speak out against achievement testing and the ATA position is solid on that, it's not wishywashy at all....we don't believe in it. So that is, you know, political action" (Interview, 04/02/03).

As well, associations such as the ATA, which sponsor guest speakers, and international conferences, afford people the opportunity to hear new ideas. Consequently, there are "a lot of people who are challenging that 'sit in the desk and complete this worksheet' methodology" (Interview, 04/02/03).

In Darcy's view, too, teaching is political. This is unavoidable, though, since "...anytime you have people together and you have somebody in authority..." that activity becomes political. So, Darcy continued, "if you try to avoid being political, then you have to go off into a corner and not have anything to do with anybody" (Interview, 07/02/03).

Because of the choices teachers must make during their day, teaching is political because these choices may be political. They cannot, however, be fearful of making those choices because "then all you do is basically bow down to what everybody else is (doing), whatever is happening there" (Interview, 07/02/03). In making these choices, Darcy maintained, the teachers must find a balance between appeasing the parents, the administration, and the provincial government through the achievement tests. "So, we're constantly being political" (Interview, 07/02/03).

Darcy drew a distinction between being political and being politically active. S/he stated that being politically active referred to the larger political scene. That, s/he

clarified, depends on the individual teacher. "I think teachers can be political if they feel that certain elements or aspects of their jobs are going to be affected by outside forces" (Interview, 07/02/03). Darcy gave the ATA as an example where people have been brought together in an "active way to bring attention to certain issues that they felt they needed to address" (Interview, 07/02/03).

Taking Action and Promoting Social Justice

Taking action and promoting social justice "is often perceived as *the* definition of critical literacy" though the other three dimensions must be understood before one can take informed action (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 383).

Flint (2000) suggests that through engaging in critical literacy, teachers and students are invited to bring socially relevant issues into the classroom. Students are asked to do more than respond to texts; they are also asked to participate in projects that help create communities in which they would want to live (Flint, 2000). "Social action projects become a central focus" (Flint, 2000, p. 30). Further, Cadiero-Kaplan (2002) maintains that critical literacy moves "literacy beyond text to social action" (p. 378). This, Cadiero-Kaplan says, empowers us to "actively participate in a democracy" (p. 378).

Critical literacy entails more than critical thinking, according to Leland, Harste, Ociepka, Lewison, and Vasquez, (1999). It means taking social action through understanding that literacy serves some more than others through how we are positioned (Leland et al., 1999).

As literate beings, it behooves us not only to know how to decode and make meaning but also to understand how language works and to what ends, so that we can better see ourselves in light of the kind of world we wish to create and the kind of people we wish to become (Leland et al., 1999, p. 71).

For Freire (1998) taking a critical perspective means "reading of a previous reading of the world. Here, 'reading of the world' should be understood as the 'reading' that precedes the reading of the word and that, equally concerned with the comprehension of objects, takes place in the domain of day-to-day life" (p. 19). Literacy, hence, becomes an "emancipatory political project" (Giroux, 1988, p. 64). Thus, for Freire, Giroux (1988) explains, literacy is about becoming self-critical about the "historically constructed nature of one's experience" (p. 64). Reading the world means being able to name one's experience in order to begin understanding the political nature of society (Giroux, 1988). Language and power cannot be separated for both are fundamental facets of agency and social reformation (Giroux, 1988).

Enacting critical literacy in the classroom.

After the initial probing of the teachers about what they thought critical literacy could be, I explained the concept to them. In our conversations, we worked our way through the theme, taking twists and turns as the teachers attempted to come to an understanding. As the final question of the interview, I queried the teachers as to whether they believed that teachers could or should develop critical literacy in their students. I also asked them to consider what instructional techniques could be used to help develop this literacy.

All teachers seemed to agree wholeheartedly that taking a critical stance in the classroom was a worthy pedagogical goal. All suggested that the language arts would be the most appropriate subject matter. Activities that require students to extend their thinking, such as comparing and contrasting, as well as reading stories, were possible instructional techniques suggested. Through the participant teachers' suggestions, it became apparent that their understanding of the construct of critical was in the exploration stage and that their appreciation of the topic was elementary; none delved beneath the surface to truly get at the essence of what critical literacy might look like in the classroom.

"Yeah, I think that would be wonderful," Ashley responded to this question. Nonetheless, s/he elaborated the enactment should be a school-wide effort which begins in the primary grades so that the students could grow with critical literacy. "It would be a shame if somebody started it and then it didn't continue for that person. It might even be a little confusing for a student who started in critical literacy...to go to a teacher that perhaps prefers to have the tried and true method" (Interview, 10/02/03).

Ashley suggested bringing more culturally related events into the classroom as one technique that could help develop critical literacy. Creating an awareness of cultural holidays and celebrating them in the classroom could validate students' cultural identities. As well, having students participate in decision making activities in their learning was another idea Ashley suggested.

Although cultural awareness can be a significant element of critical literacy, there are other "systems of privilege or systems of domination--corporatism, classism,

racism, sexism" that "impede democracy because democracy is supposed to work without system-derived privilege" (Edelsky, 1999, p. 12). Furthermore, if we again consider Lewison et al.'s (2002) four dimensions of critical literacy, we can see that cultural awareness, which falls under the "interrogating multiple viewpoints" perspective, is but one facet of critical literacy pedagogy (p. 383).

Brett, too, responded that critical literacy should be brought into the classroom. S/he held that it would not be difficult to enact and s/he felt that language arts was "just perfect because you can just do so much exploring" through such activities as creative writing (Interview, 28/01/03). Additionally, in the language arts, exploring fairytales could present critical literacy opportunities, Brett stated.

Social studies, s/he said s/he believes, presents more difficulties since it is very "heavy on content" (Interview, 28/01/03). Still, critical literacy could be approached through studying topics such as the explorers and Canada's geography. As well, the uncovering of injustices perpetuated in the past could also be undertaken.

Brett suggested using Venn diagrams to compare different texts or perspectives as one way to approach critical literacy in the classroom. In mathematics, problem solving also presents an opportunity for critical literacy since there are many ways the problems can be interpreted. As well, the students can be encouraged to solve the problem in their own way and even make up their own problems. Lastly, textbooks can be examined critically as well as the Internet and technology.

Chris, too, agreed with the idea of critical literacy in the classroom. S/he stated that there are perhaps aspects that teachers already tacitly approach. Chris speculated

that it would be interesting to access literature with the view of finding places that could lend themselves to going outside the "regular" types of assignments. S/he speculated that critical literacy would be more apparent at the senior high school level than at the elementary level.

Chris suggested that comparison types of activities using a multitude of sources might be one critical literacy technique. Venn diagrams, organizers, or webbing could be used to look at differing opinions. Finally, media units could also be designed.

Although Darcy agreed that there is room in the classroom for critical literacy, s/he elaborated that it should not be mandated. "I think they should be aware that there is a possibility of doing it when it presents itself" (Interview, 07/02/03). S/he continued that students should be taught to make decisions on their own, the most important being "responsibility of consequence" (Interview, 07/02/03).

Darcy suggested examining literature to find assumptions as one way to bring critical literacy into the classroom. "We've taken stories that we've looked at in the reader and tried to see something in the story that's really not there or that nobody else would have noticed" (Interview, 07/02/03). Oftentimes, Darcy commented, students will make assumptions because "kids put themselves into a position where they can be the hero and they automatically put themselves into that position" (Interview, 07/02/03). Darcy underlined, though, that if we attempt to create critically literate students, it is also necessary to give them the knowledge to be so. "Sometimes we go at things from the wrong end. We assume way too much and then we try to make them critical but they have to have a certain amount of knowledge to be critical...you've got

to have information to be able to do that" (Interview, 07/02/03).

Within the literature, there are varying conceptions of critical literacy and the form it takes in the classroom, but all seem to suggest using literature as one powerful way to approach critical literacy.

Allen's (1997) technique requires that teachers examine their own "positional frames of references with respect to their power, social class, access, and privilege and how these might sometimes contrast or be in conflict with the frames of their students" (p. 520). By becoming aware of how they perceive their students both culturally and in a class-bound way, they can better understand how their students understand their schooling experiences when they do not respond in the ways teachers expect (Allen, 1997).

This educational approach, which Allen (1997) terms anti-racist/anti-bias, includes helping students "identify and name bias in classroom learning materials, allowing time for discussions and taking-up social issues...and encouraging students to respond to inequities and validating the voices and perspectives of each student" (p. 521). This involves discussions that help identify biases, identifying our perspectives, modeling, and studying books to locate "patterns of omission and exaggeration, and encouraging students to respond through journals" (Allen, 1997, p. 521).

In the critical teacher's classroom, Cadiero-Kaplan (2002) articulates, student voice and experience is valued. Their histories form part of the course content and classroom activities are engaged in which help students feel safe. Teachers in the critical classroom also promote engagement with text.

Leland et al. (1999) suggest using a framework that includes a text set "which focuses on building students' awareness of how systems of meaning and power affect people and the lives they lead" (p. 70). This text set encompasses books which invite conversations about "fairness and justice; they encourage children to ask why some groups of people are positioned as 'others'" (p. 70). The students are then encouraged to take social action that is "built upon an understanding that literacy positions individuals and, in so doing, serves some more than others" (Leland et al., 1999, p. 71).

According to Flint (2000), teachers enacting a critical literacy curriculum bring socially relevant issues into the classroom. In a critical classroom, the curriculum "moves to the personal," through introducing and discussing social issues made available by way of books and texts that address concerns such as "poverty, violence, environmental issues, homelessness, class, and race" (Flint, 2000, p. 30). Social action projects then become the central focus (Flint, 2000).

Heffernan and Lewison (2000) advocate using storybooks that deal with social issues in implementing a critical literacy curriculum. Books that raise issues such as racism and gender provide "beginning places for critical inquiry" (Davis and Sumara, 1999, p. 199). Students then engage in discussions surrounding the issues raised in the books, permitting the "real world" to enter classroom events (Heffernan and Lewison, 2000, p. 15). Students also respond to their reading through letter writing and other events, which can then provide a political tool which can help students see that they are capable of bringing about community change (Heffernan and Lewison, 2000).

Vasquez (2000) envisions seeking out "critical incidents" in the classroom

which "reflect an issue of social justice and equity, defined as any issue that results in the marginalization, disenfranchisement, disadvantage, or oppression of individuals, groups, or communities" (p. 9). These critical incidents make openings for conversation that could lead to social action. These incidents also help both the student and the teacher see an issue from other perspectives (Vasquez, 2000).

Creighton (1997) suggests that a critical literacy must begin at the elementary level. "If we avoid texts that challenge or disrupt, or even alter their original context in any way," Creighton insists, "then we miss opportunities to enlighten and educate our students and ourselves" (p. 444). Creighton (1997) suggests that as a first step, teachers examine their assumptions and how easily they were made since each individual sees the world through their own lens.

Creighton (1997) proposes that teachers should then explore how those assumptions may affect their students. Books should then be selected that reflect their students' culture and gender and teachers should be aware of and sensitive to the different voices in the classroom and encourage those voices in a non-threatening environment (Creighton, 1997). These voices can then find places to articulate their personal response through a variety of media and can express their displeasure or discomfort after having read or heard a text (Creighton, 1997).

Summary

Through examining data collected from the initial interviews with the participant teachers, it is apparent that critical literacy is uncharted territory. While the

teachers were familiar with many of critical literacy's constructs such as multiple

literacies, they were generally unfamiliar with many of the deeper notions that make

critical literacy critical; the political nature of teaching, power structures inherent in the

classroom situation, and curriculum as an ideological object.

However, as we began exploring the critical literacy landscape and its

accompanying ideas in our conversations, the teachers began to gain an appreciation of

the potential that critical literacy holds. This allowed them to consider embarking on

the sometimes difficult critical literacy journey as they grappled to come to some

understanding. This also allowed the teachers to begin considering what critical

literacy might look like in their own classrooms as they began thinking about opening

up spaces in their classrooms for this important pedagogy.

A review of the literature suggests that, although there are many dimensions to

critical literacy, they all involve an approach to literacy that is active and challenging

(Green, 2001). As Comber (1999) succinctly reiterates, although critical literacy has

many different origins and perspectives,

> these starting points come with visions of a different world and of particular
> kinds of young people with specific discursive and ethical resources. They are
> about shaping young people who can analyse what is going on; who will ask
> why things are the way they are; who will question who benefits from the way
> things are and who can imagine how things might be different and who can act
> to make things more equitable (p. 4).

Assuredly, Comber (1999) asks, "the development of such literacies would be the goal

of most educators?" (p. 4).

CHAPTER FOUR

Critical Literacy as Classroom Practice

In the preceding chapter, teachers' initial perceptions of the notion of critical literacy were discussed. I attempted, in essence, to elicit participant teachers' thoughts on the various elements of critical literacy.

In the following chapter, I will discuss critical literacy as it translates into practice within the participant teachers' classrooms. This discussion will occur around observations which transpired between January and March, 2003. Data collection for this stage of the investigation involved three forty minute periods in each participant's classroom which included one period of science, one period of social studies, and one period of language arts. During these 40 minute observations, I kept running notes highlighting instances of critical literacy. Within the Learning Assistance Center, though, observations involved only the language arts.

Meanwhile, I continued reading about the topic of critical literacy. As I further immersed myself in the subject and as I collected more and more data, it became apparent that there were five ways that critical literacy could manifest itself in the classroom. The focus of my observations evolved, then, to include classroom talk, tasks, artifacts used, classroom procedures, and text interpretation. For the purposes of this discussion, these five components will be couched within Lewison et al.'s (2002) four interrelated dimensions of critical literacy. In order to best capture the tone in the classroom and to lend a sense of immediacy, I will relay my observations in the present tense.

Classroom Talk

Brett has been looking at fairytales with her/his class as part of the language arts program. They have been reading differing versions of Cinderella from various countries and today, Brett reads an Egyptian rendering aloud to the class. In this account, the Cinderella character is kidnapped and sold as a slave. "Do you agree that people should be sold as slaves?" Brett asks after having read the story. Hands are raised and a short discussion ensues as various students take turns answering Brett's question. Finally, they seem to concur that this should not occur. Brett then asks the class why they do not agree and the students decide that people should not be slaves because they are all human beings and so, should be respected. Brett then asks why people need to be respected and a student replies that if you are not respected, you lose confidence. (Observation, 06/03/03).

Similarly, Chris is reading a non-fiction piece from a basal reader with her/his students. This piece is an interview with an Inuit artist and in the text is an explanation that the word for Eskimo is now Inuit. So, Chris asks, "Do we call them Eskimos?" After the students reply that we do not, Chris explains that since the Inuit wish to be called by this name, we must do so out of respect for them because "you have to respect others" (Observation, 19/02/03).

In both instances, these two teachers took advantage of a classroom moment to begin to "get a feel" for critical literacy in their classrooms through conversation that might begin to focus on disrupting the commonplace through opening up racial issues (Lewison et al., 2002). Although their first forays did not deeply penetrate the critical

literacy opportunities inherent in classroom talk, they demonstrated that, for Brett and Chris, a critical classroom is within the realm of the possible.

According to Wilkinson and Silliman (2000), what is learned in the classroom as well as how learning takes place is largely determined by the language used within the classroom. The classroom presents a particular context for learning and "exerts a profound effect on students' development of language and literacy skills, particularly in the early years" (Wilkinson and Silliman, 2000, p. 337).

Gordon et al. (1998) further explain that talk makes learning active. Students must be engaged in classroom talk to enable them to "formulate for themselves their understanding" (Gordon et al., 1998, p. 14). Talk also allows students to understand new ideas and feelings and to communicate in order to tell "what they think or feel or what they have learned" (Gordon et al., 1998, p. 15).

This view of talk is at the heart of the constructivist paradigm, which holds that we impose socially constructed meanings on the real world (Cambourne, 2002). In the classroom, this is made possible through social interaction (Cambourne, 2002).

Boozer, Maras and Brummett (1999) discuss the role of conversation in critical literacy. They state that they "recognize the role of conversation for understanding, critiquing, and transforming the systems which we help create and in which we live" (p. 74). Social action cannot occur without conversation for "it is the means by which we identify injustice, explore the roots and consequences of that injustice, and determine how we might attempt to alter ourselves and our society to rectify that injustice" (Boozer et al., 1999, p. 75).

Conversation must be a primary element in the critical classroom since our own positions limit us when there is no free exchange of ideas (Boozer et al., 1999). We are then "unable to imagine possibilities. Without possibilities, there is no change, and freedom remains an abstract concept rather than a closer reality" (Boozer et al., 1999, p. 75).

Conversation, then, can play a primary role in curriculum development, Boozer et al. (1999) maintain, because it allows educators to make curricular decisions based on what is seen and heard. Students are invited to discuss these decisions with their teachers, Boozer et al. (1999), explain, "so that they are not mere recipients of a curriculum we devise, but rather are the co-creators of the curriculum" (p. 74). Conversation and community then lead the way to a shared authority. (Boozer et al., 1999, p. 75).

Simpson (1996) relates the use of discussion and questioning for teaching children to challenge texts. Discussion provides an excellent background for opening up multiple meanings of text and expanding the children's understandings (Simpson, 1996). This leads children to "deepen their awareness, appreciation, and critical insights into texts" (Simpson, 1996, p. 126).

Applebee (1997) discusses the concept of "education as conversation." (p. 27). Curriculum, Applebee (1997) states, is about "constructing domains for conversations" which contain sets of issues that can be explored in reading, writing, and discussion (p. 27). These domains gain their educational power "because they take place in a context shaped by the larger discourse communities of which they are a part" (Applebee, 1997,

p. 27).

Comber and Kamler (1997), though, state that we need more than a set of critical questions around text production and interpretation to develop critical literacies. Comber and Kamler (1997) call these important starting points. What goes unexamined, Comber and Kamler (1997) argue, is "how critical literacies are negotiated and constructed in everyday classroom talk" (p. 3).

Artifacts Used

Back in Brett's classroom, the students are silently reading another version of the Egyptian Cinderella, entitled Rhodopis and Her Golden Sandals, taken from a teacher resource entitled Multicultural Fables and Fairytales, written by Tara McCarthy (1993). Brett asks the class to compare this account with the more widely recognized "traditional" Cinderella to see if they can tell where each originated from based on the details found in the story. While they are reading, they are directed to think about the details that convey where this version originated. After the students have finished reading, a discussion ensues as Brett asks the students to share what they have read that demonstrates that this is an Egyptian story.

After the discussion, Brett asks the class to compare this version of Cinderella with the "traditional" version. The children take out their pencils and begin filling in a chart that has been placed on their desks (Observation, 06/03/03).

In this anecdote, we can see that, although the fairytale is a widely accepted literary genre in the classroom, Brett was willing, even if in small increments, to go

beyond the accepted. This willingness to bring "alternate" fairytales into the classroom may begin to open up spaces for her/his class to embark on disrupting the commonplace and interrogating multiple viewpoints (Lewison et al., 2002).

There is a challenge, though, as Creighton (1997) points out, for critical literacy teachers in selecting and presenting materials to students. With today's budget restraints, teachers tend to snap up any available materials and it is increasingly difficult for schools to purchase new materials (Creighton, 1997). However, "teachers must determine which is more important, the quantity of materials or the pedagogical quality and relevance of the materials to the students" (Creighton, 1997, p. 441).

Texts used in mainstream education, according to Alford (2001), tend to represent "canonical Western literature" (p. 239). Flint (2000) advises, though, that children should be placed in control of their learning. The implications are that "we must take a closer look at the choices and options" that are presented to them (Flint, 2000, p. 32). By increasing the types of text used in the classroom, "new possibilities and a reimagined curriculum" are possible (Flint, 2000, p. 32). Durrant and Green (2001) reiterate that the "importance of the word and the printed page remains" (p. 149). However, they add, "new technologies, new cultures, and new forms of life" are transforming this importance (p. 149).

Barriers to Critical Literacy

It would seem that there were a few examples of critical literacy being enacted in the participant teachers' classrooms during the course of these observations. Those

instances that arose seemed to be exploratory in nature. That is, the teachers seemed to be tentatively "checking out" the critical literacy terrain, stepping lightly as they began to think about how it might look and feel for them to navigate their way through new pedagogical territory.

Although all the participant teachers agreed in principle with the concept of critical literacy and its enactment in the classroom, I found during the course of this study that this did not readily translate into practice. During the interviews and group discussion, a number of reasons came to light which help illuminate possible barriers to critical literacy. It should be noted that these barriers could be seen to inhibit the enactment of many effective teaching strategies within the classroom, and so are not unique to critical literacy. Following will be a discussion of these obstacles in greater detail.

Experience and Understanding

Quite simply, I discovered that the primary reason that critical literacy had not initially been effected in the participant teachers' classrooms was that they simply were not aware of the concept. As discussed in Chapter Three, they all expressed surprise and puzzlement when I initially suggested the term to them. When I later offered an explanation, it seemed to take some time for them to synthesize the concept.

Leggo (1992) underscores that there are many educators who are blinded by "a blindness so devious that the blind not only fail to see but do not even know they fail to see" (p. 13). Our youth, Leggo (1992) says, are patterned "into shapes that can be fitted

into appropriate pigeonholes, thereby guaranteeing the preservation of society's status quo" (p. 13).

This lack of awareness can be traced back to the traditional view of schooling, which is dominated by a rationality rooted

> in the narrow concerns for effectiveness, behavioral objectives, and principles of learning that treat knowledge as something to be consumed and schools as merely instructional sites designed to pass onto students a 'common' culture and set of skills that will enable them to operate effectively in the wider society (Giroux, 1988, p. 6).

According to Giroux (1988), how we make meaning becomes secondary to how "people can master someone else's meaning" (Giroux, 1988, p. 6). This limiting, crippling rationality, Giroux (1988) continues, "ignores the dreams, histories, and visions that people bring to schools" while concerning itself with a false objectivity that attempts to find universal principles of education (p. 6).

Powell et al., (2001), too, state that literacy instruction has not traditionally been seen as having democratic aims. Contrarily, economic ends have been associated with literacy in order to produce "efficient and productive workers who can help to maintain a nation's competitive edge" (Powell et al., 2001, p. 772).

A lack of confidence that stems either from a lack of understanding of the topic of critical literacy or a lack of experience with teaching itself was another reason identified as a restriction to critical literacy. Ashley touched on the difficulties encountered by inexperienced teachers who might also be new to a community. "It always comes to, do I have the courage to do it, do I want to do it" (Discussion, 27/02/03).

For Brett, many teachers could be overwhelmed by the topic of critical literacy. "People just don't know where to start...you look at so many different issues...and you think, well, where do I start. And then you think well, which issue is more important than the other issue and there's all that that goes through your head. So, then you use it as an excuse not to do anything" (Discussion, 27/02/03).

Lewison et al. (2002) explain that as most teachers move toward enacting critical literacy, they are faced with a "continuing examination and revision of long-held beliefs" (p. 390). Hesitations and uncertainties overshadow their initial forays toward implementation of critical literacy as they decide "what is appropriate for elementary classrooms in terms of materials, texts, and discussions" (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 390).

In a case study of teachers enrolled in a Master's level course in the supervision of reading that interrogated teachers' literacy beliefs, King, Danforth, Perez, and Stahl (1993) found that the teachers enrolled in the course "systematically resisted the use of critical theories" (p. 4). King et al. (1993) identify a need for personal comfort as one reason teachers separate their teaching from critical theory. "We saw the teachers drawing personal boundaries around their self-constructed roles as teachers. Once circumscribed, they were more able to articulate what lay outside the circle than what was contained within" (King et al., 1993, p. 8).

Time

A lack of time was another reason the participant teachers identified as a barrier to opening up critical literacy in the classroom. Indeed, Ashley stated that although s/he had been considering how to bring differing points of view into the classroom, a lack of time presents problems. "I just don't feel like I have the time to go through everything and, I'm trying to make it as exciting as I possibly can, but right now, I'd just like to get through it" (Interview, 17/03/03).

Brett, too, identified time restraints as an obstacle to critical literacy. "I know myself, I always have this curriculum overhanging my head that dictates my timelines and timeframes and so sometimes it's hard to deviate off the task because you're thinking, well, I have all this content to cover..." (Interview, 28/01/03). These time restraints create pressure on teachers, compelling them to rely on teacher-proof materials. "I think we rely on it because it's easier, I'll be honest. Because you're so packed up...you just rely on the standard tried and true" (Interview, 28/01/03). Furthermore, these time restraints inhibit discussion in the classroom, Brett said, since allowing students to explore a topic takes up time and "you could go on forever...And there's so much curriculum that you don't have time to explore" (Interview, 28/01/03).

As well, achievement tests, Brett conveyed, are very restrictive since they cause the curriculum to be very content based.

> Yes...there's always a time issue....You want to have more discussion, you want to be able to link and integrate more different topics...sometimes it's nice to wander off the path a little bit depending on the kids...then you have this little voice inside you that says, achievement tests, they're coming up, and that's very restrictive. I think that's a barrier against literacy (Interview, 17/03/03).

Darcy, too, identified lack of time as an inhibiting factor in critical literacy enactment. S/he explained that although teachers might like to look at content area textbooks from an alternate point of view with their students, it is not truly featured enough. "Again, we're under the gun to get things done quickly" (Interview, 10/03/03).

This lack of time, Brett explained, does not allow for critically examining content area textbooks in the classroom. "Because you're so pressed for time, you just sit there and say, ok, let's read this and this is the bible, this is the word, this is the textbook, and then you go from there" (Discussion, 27/02/03). Content becomes so consuming that "you forget to really teach people to use reasoning and their intellect above that content. So, sometimes the teachers need to pull back so that their kids can pull back and examine things a little more intently" (Discussion, 27/02/03).

Allen (1997) maintains that the greatest challenge to enacting a critical literacy is "trying to negotiate and manage the time to take up these discussions within the context of an already overburdened curriculum" (p. 524). Miller (2002), too, talks about the difficulty of finding time in an already demanding curriculum to introduce critical literacy. Miller (2002) states that giving it "guest speaker" or "visitor" status is not enough; teachers must find a permanent home for it in their classrooms. Opportunities are available, though, in the everyday classroom through "the children's stories from home, in their conversations and quarrels with friends, in playground games and school assemblies, in our favorite picture books, in the hallways and cafeteria, and in the already demanding curriculum" (Miller, 2002, p. 5)

Support

Some participant teachers also expressed a concern about having the support of the wider community if they were to approach critical literacy in the classroom.

Ashley discussed critical literacy as being an initiative that should be school-wide. In this way, Ashley explained, parents might understand that this was not just one teacher's philosophy. "I think that if everyone did it the parents would be much more accepting of it....Definitely, you'd have to have the parents on board, they'd have to be" (Interview, 17/03/03).

As well, Brett discussed the role of parental support. S/he asserted that parents are stakeholders in their children's education. Teachers are subconsciously very aware of the control parents wield since education is a public business. Therefore, teachers must be cognizant of what they teach in the classroom and they must consider what is acceptable to the parents. "The kids might come with their own baggage of knowledge from at home...and they bring their own beliefs into the classroom" (Interview, 28/01/03).

In terms of parental support, Darcy expressed concern that parents might not understand the concept of critical literacy. "The parents themselves might be afraid that...the kids might start demonstrating at home, and undermine their authority" (Interview, 07/02/03).

Chris touched on community support in initiating a critical literacy in the classroom. S/he discussed the possibility of teaching social action but stated that "it is something I feel I've more shied away from in the public school environment because

I'm not sure of the community feeling about that" (Discussion, 27/02/03). Brett stated

that s/he tends to avoid issues that might be controversial because of parental censure.

> I know I personally tend to shy away from things because I'm afraid of...a parent coming saying what are you teaching my child, what's going on, how does this fit in the curriculum...and this is how we think and how dare...so you run that little interference so it's just safer just to go, just to do the safe route (Discussion, 27/02/03).

Darcy discussed the role of administrative support as well. S/he alleged that it

would be difficult to gain the support of administration regarding controversial issues.

S/he wondered how many administrators would attend sessions at conventions or other

venues that deal with curriculum in terms of contentious issues, particularly in rural

Alberta. "I think that a lot of people would feel uncomfortable, if the parents or the

community feels uncomfortable, they wouldn't have gone to it" (Discussion, 27/02/03).

Some educators, Murphy (2001) explains, become immobilized by the idea of

participating in movements toward a more just society that might occur on the societal

level. "While some may be troubled by the events or situations in which they are

immersed, others worry about the additional troubles that may visit them if they are

seen as "troublemakers" because they are "taking up causes"" (Murphy, 2001, p. 4).

Murphy (2001) muses that it is ironic that this fear of speaking and acting freely might

occur in a democracy.

Flint (2000), too, articulates that taking on social issues in the classroom is a

"somewhat risky endeavor for many teachers" (p. 31). Issues such as violence, poverty,

race and gender "have the potential to disrupt one's world view and bring controversy

to the forefront of the curriculum" (Flint, 2000, p. 31).

Further, Flint (2000) states that "rethinking what is appropriate and acceptable as curriculum" may be the greatest challenge faced by teachers (p. 31). Through interrupting our existing notions of what is appropriate, many are left feeling very uncomfortable (Flint, 2000). This is so since teachers are then obliged to rethink their current practice (Flint, 2000).

King et al. (1993) found in their case study of teachers enrolled in a Master's level course that there is a "social construction" of what is "appropriate" in educational contexts (p. 9). Teachers operate within a well-defined domain that does not accept any topic that suggests conflict since it is not acceptable discourse for teachers. In the course of King et al.'s study (1993) the "teachers explained the boundaries of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors as way [sic] of keeping themselves out of trouble" (p. 9). Parents were identified as the "ax" and principals were identified by the teachers in King et al.'s (1993) study as "ax wielders" who could cause the teachers to lose their jobs, to be reassigned, or to be harassed.

Through enacting a critical literacy, Comber and Kamler (1997) state that teachers and their students can engage in "a number of uncertain conversations" (p. 16). This can "produce precarious scenarios where teacher' institutional locations and personal histories result in ambivalence and ambiguity" (Comber and Kamler, 1997, p. 16). However, Comber and Kamler (1997) assert, although there are demands for accountability in the "production of students with particular sets of enhanced competencies, it is both more difficult and more urgent that we continue to make space

and time for critical literacy" (p. 26).

Furthermore, Heffernan and Lewison (2000) relate that, while there is a fear that parents may not support teachers who engage their students in controversial issues, their experience is that parents are "actually discussing these topics at home with their kids, causing us to rethink assumptions about parental expectations" (p. 20).

Student Ability

Another possible obstacle to critical literacy is the perception that students are not capable of the kind thought required to be critically literate. Following this way of thinking is the notion that children should be left with their simple view of the world.

"I think," Brett elucidated, "that there's an assumption that kids can't handle it, they're very fragile....I think teachers have a tendency to shelter kids" (Interview, 28/01/03).

According to Darcy, not all students are capable of critical literacy.

> I know of kids in my classroom that I could probably say that could think critically and we've talked about things, but there are many others who would not understand, that don't have the background knowledge, that don't have the maturity or the ability to do that (Interview, 07/02/03).

Brett, too, posited that students do not tend to question the teacher or think for themselves because of a lack of maturity. "I have some more mature students who are more confident students who are able to do that but I think it takes a lot of confidence and a lot of maturity on their part and a lot of eagerness" (Interview, 17/03/03).

Taking this one step further, Brett articulated that children today seem to look

for the right answer. It is difficult for them to question independently because they do not want to be seen as being a failure. "So, when you try to do a discussion, I find some discussions just go dead in the water because you have those lulls because they don't want to question" (Interview, 27/02/03).

Furthermore, Brett stated, if the teacher encourages students to more deeply question readings they have done in the classroom, "they just don't want to know. Maybe they just don't want to know, they're too busy in their Nintendo world" (Discussion, 27/02/03). The students, Brett avowed, tend to "read things blindly, they won't question it. I have to almost red flag it to say, well, what do you think" (Discussion, 27.02/03).

Darcy, too, felt that questioning text is a "pretty high level thing to do." The teachers, then, would be required to summarize a text in order to elicit the background information required by the students because "you would certainly not be able to do that with your students, I don't think you could anyway" (Interview, 10/03/03).

Brett declared that the students are not really aware of the world around them because they are "too worried about their own intrigues and lives" (Discussion, 27/02/03). Darcy, though, contended that childhood is a period in life that is buffered from the outside world. "It's nice to have kids be kids, it's nice to be in a zone where you're a kid, where the world doesn't really matter. Then there's a time in your life where it does matter and I don't like to necessarily have this changed" (Discussion, 27/02/03). It's good, Darcy avowed, that children can enjoy this state of being "til they get to that point in their lives where they start questioning things, and hormones take

over and the world becomes more complicated and homework becomes more

complicated" (Discussion, 27/02/03).

Flint (2000) states that many teachers might be uncomfortable with allowing

conversations to occur in the classroom around controversial issues. Many teachers,

Flint (2000) observes "are more inclined to 'protect the innocence of childhood' and

steer away from such conversations, in spite of knowing what many urban and

suburban children see on TV and in their communities" (p. 31).

Heffernan and Lewison (2000) address the issue of bringing emotionally

charged text into the classroom that might seem "too upsetting" for young students (p.

15). However, Heffernan and Lewison (2000) continue, books that address social issues

"enrich our understanding of history and life by giving voice to those who have

traditionally been silenced or marginalized. They make visible the social systems that

attempt to maintain economic inequities" (p. 16). Heffernan and Lewison (2000)

found, after having discussed a selection of social issues books with their grade three

students, that "it became clear that students could discuss this powerful story without

the roof caving in. Not only did they show no signs of being traumatized, but they

displayed an amazing eagerness to talk about the book" (p. 17).

Allen (1997), too, asserts that a sense of "social and political justice" develops

in many children "earlier than I had come to expect" (p. 518). Teachers, then, must

take into account the "unique perspectives and cognitive development" of their students

through an "intentional, developmentally appropriate approach to teaching" (Allen,

1997, p. 518). "Such an approach involves careful observations of where students are

in their learning and understanding of these issues and how they bring these issues into the classroom" (Allen, 1997, p. 518). Creighton (1997) concurs that "while critical literacy brings to the classroom some demanding expectations of both teachers and students, I believe that practice can and must begin at the elementary level" (p. 440).

Loss of Teacher Authority

A concern for loss of teacher control in the classroom was another inhibiting factor in bringing critical literacy into the classroom. In fact, Brett hit upon the issue squarely when s/he proclaimed that it is difficult for teachers to relinquish some control in the classroom. "Yeah, I think all teachers have some degree of control issues in the classroom" (Interview, 28/01/03).

Moreover, Brett asserted, teachers might be afraid to approach critical literacy because they could lose their authority in the classroom. "So, it's a classroom management issue. If you have the kids start questioning everything you say, then you're afraid of losing control" (Discussion, 27/02/03).

For Allen (1997), control of the curriculum should be shared between students and their teachers. "I believe that teachers and students are co-interpreters, translators, and creators of curriculum..." (p. 524). However, Allen (1997) regrets that the current factory model of education makes it difficult for teachers to do so. The accompanying emphasis on commercial learning materials, Allen (1997) continues, "is creating a curriculum devoid of passion and spontaneity" (p. 524).

Resources

A concern about a lack of resources was another issue that came to the foreground. Brett commented that it is difficult to find textbooks that are "valid and up to date and current" (Interview, 17/03/03). The government of Alberta, through Alberta Learning, approves texts but some of those, Brett observed, are outdated. For example, in Grade five social studies, Topic A is Canada's Geography. "The climate is changing and landscapes change and the textbook doesn't reflect the change. People, they talk about people and their lifestyles but how can you narrow down the lifestyles of the Cordillera, so there's a generalization" (Interview, 17/03/03).

Chris maintained that textbooks used in the classroom can be one-sided in their portrayals. For example, the approved textbook on the Grade six social studies topic of China portrays only the good side of China. "This book is going to be telling us about their new buildings and their modernization because, don't you think that's what they're going to want us to know about China? They're not going to want us to know about the human rights aspects there or the lack thereof" (Interview, 04/02/03). The curriculum, then, for Chris is not so restrictive as the resources available in schools.

Critical literacy, Creighton (1997) agrees, creates a challenge for teachers to select and present materials to students. In teacher training programs, background is given in the various aspects of language instruction (Creighton, 1997). Additionally, elementary teachers are aware that environmental print is important and stock their classrooms accordingly (Creighton, 1997). However, the selection of classroom books is not generally addressed in teacher preparation programs (Creighton, 1997). Budget

restraints make it difficult for schools to make new purchases and teachers tend to stock

their classroom libraries with any available resources (Creighton, 1997). "Given these

factors, teachers must determine which is more important, the quantity of materials or

the pedagogical quality and relevance of the materials to the students" (Creighton,

1997, p. 441).

Cynicism

Rather straightforwardly, there was some degree of skepticism regarding the

whole concept of critical literacy. Darcy maintained that to a certain extent, people

must accept what happens in society in order to maintain order. "I don't agree with the

fact that this is some kind of subversive type of activity..." (Interview, 07/02/03). We

live in an interconnected world, Darcy insisted, and there are many variables that occur

at any given time which force us to simply go along with what happens. So, Darcy

asserted, despite what happens in the classroom, "we cannot possibly have that kind of

control" (Interview, 07/02/03). Furthermore, Darcy stated, you cannot change people.

"Just because it's 2003 doesn't necessarily mean we are any more advanced than we

were a thousand years ago in some senses because we're still people" (Interview,

07/02/03).

Additionally, Darcy wondered about the danger of students becoming cynical

through approaching critical literacy.

> At what point do you create a spark of enthusiasm and at what point does it sort
> of fizzle out and you suddenly realize, you know, I can't really change a lot of
> other things and then, what's the point, cynicism sets in. In kids, there's not

much cynicism because everything is pretty black and white (Discussion, 27/02/03).

Therefore, there must be some acceptance of what happens in society, Darcy further stated, "because you have to feel comfortable with what's going on because skeptics are not comfortable within themselves. They're always questioning what's going on and they're not happy. Why would you want a group of unhappy people? Ignorance is bliss" (Interview, 10/03/03).

Instead of positioning students as "helpless victims," Leland and Harste (2000) affirm that teachers should position them as "social activists who are challenging the status quo and asking for change" (p. 6). According to this idea of change that is so integral to a conception of democracy, "there is no fixed standard, but an evolving set of fluid relationships among people over time" (Leland and Harste, 2000, p. 5). This view of democracy, Leland and Harste (2000) further avow, is "complex and messy" and "doesn't lend itself to tidy categorization" (p. 5). In this view, teachers are never neutral and "no one is totally innocent of his or her actions" (Leland and Harste, 2000, p. 5). "In other words," Leland and Harste (2000) illustrate, "we all have our fingers in the cookie jar whether we want to admit it or not" (p. 5).

Allen (1997), maintains that "teachers can help to enable and encourage or disable and discourage critical thinking or awareness skills at a very young age" (p. 523). Teachers cannot assume that students are unaware of bias in learning materials because if there is no discussion around the issue "then students will probably learn to ignore or deny the existence of bias in the materials and to accept passively the social

meanings in these materials (that is, the status quo is the way it is and the way it should be)" (Allen, 1997, p. 523). Children then learn not to question the established social order (Allen, 1997).

Summary

Although the teachers who participated in this study acknowledged that there are important places for critical literacy in their teaching, data collected from classroom observations indicate that this belief was apparent on only a few occasions in their classrooms. Those instances that occurred were tentative and cautious, providing an important starting point for the teachers from which to venture into the critical literacy realm.

In addressing just why space might not be available to enact a critical literacy in the classroom, I examined a number of potential reasons as identified in my conversations with the participant teachers. These reasons included a perceived lack of time, support, confidence, and resources; a fear of loss of teacher authority; and a perception that children must be protected from the realities of the world. A certain cynicism and an acceptance of the status quo were also possible reasons identified by some participant teachers.

If the goal of schooling is to create critically conscious students, those same students will "ask questions and struggle toward answers..." (Leggo, 1992, p. 13). However, Leggo cautions, these answers "will not always be pleasant to their teachers and principals and parents and pastors and politicians for whom criticism must be

maintained within 'productive' parameters" (p. 13). Needed, then, Leggo (1992)

insists, are teachers who are "devoted to questioning and critique and discovery, who

are risk-takers willing to be challenged, willing to enter into relationships founded on

dialogue, willing to create unique educational environments for unique educational

experiences" (p. 16).

CHAPTER FIVE

The Dimensions of Critical Literacy: Concluding Perspectives

Through data collected during observations of the participant teachers' classrooms, I proposed, in the previous chapter, that critical literacy is new terrain which participant teachers have only now begun tentatively exploring.

The objective of this chapter is to document instances of participant teachers' growing awareness and understanding of critical literacy over the course of this study. I will therefore target areas of growth from the initial to the final interviews, which occurred at the end of this study. Findings will be based on the focus group discussion which occurred toward the end of the study, as well as the final interviews, which comprised the last stage of data collection. I will focus on instances where participant teachers exhibited a developing awareness, understanding, interest, or receptivity to critical literacy.

Awareness and Understanding

Over the course of the study, I found that the participant teachers demonstrated a growing awareness and understanding of critical literacy which seemed to evolve in meaningful ways. From the initial interviews, where none were aware of the concept, to the final interviews and the discussion, where they considered and were able to articulate it in a deeper way, they conveyed their emerging comprehension and appreciation.

Ashley, for example, went from being unaware of the political nature of literacy

to discussing the dominating influence of literacy. "Literacy can try to influence and manipulate how you think in certain passages so you always have to read with a critical thinking style" (Interview, 17/03/03). Further, s/he stated, it is always necessary to read carefully. Being exposed to this investigation, s/he revealed, "has allowed me to see how literature can really influence your life and how you think" (Interview, 17/03/03)

Darcy, too, spoke about how literacy can be a dominating influence. "If you have only one point of view then it's going to dominate and that's going to make everything appear status quo" (Interview, 10/03/03). Literacy should be enlightening, Darcy stated, because it "should enable people to have a broader perspective on things rather than just one perspective. It shouldn't just be one particular individual's point of view" (Interview, 10/03/03).

In this final interview, Ashley highlighted that the goal of literacy should be enlightenment to help the reader think in new ways. This would "enlighten you to become a stronger person, intellectually or emotionally or spiritually or wherever you're going, whatever the reading material is" (Interview, 17/03/03).

Literature is not, as Kempe (2001) comments, "an unproblematic corpus of texts which mirror reality" (p. 40). An author's language, Moje et al. (2000) insist, supports certain social and political institutions through its implicit and explicit meanings. Similarly, how readers respond to text is based on their past experience as determined by their "gender, race, ethnicity, age, and social class" (Moje et al., 2000, p. 407). Comber (1993) points out that texts serve to create the worlds in which students live since texts advance certain ideologies and constructions of reality. By taking on a

critical literacy perspective, students can begin to apply the question, "Why are things the way they are?" to texts (Comber, 1993, p. 121). Cultural contexts construct students' responses to text (Kempe 2001) and so need to be brought out into the open.

Without empowerment, students become silenced (Shor, 1999). Shor (1999) queries whether language and literacy can be innocent in this war of words since language and education are partisan, and words and schooling are political. Lack of empowerment creates a "gap of despair," Lesley (1997) bemoans, that abides between language and power, and can be the cause of silent lapses in the classroom, causing words to get stuck and hide "like a shame-faced child" (p. 424).

Literacy is a social and cultural phenomenon which has as its purpose communication with others (Powell et al., 2001). Notwithstanding, within the school, it often serves to control, marginalize, and silence (Powell et al., 2001). Texts, as educational artifacts, serve to convey underlying assumptions and contain hidden biases (Powell et al., 2001). The ideologies advanced in texts, and the reading of them, are never common sense or natural (Kempe, 2001). They are "key moments where social identity and power relations are established and negotiated" (O'Brien and Comber, 2001, p. 113). Students, then, should be taught to question texts for their underlying relations of power (O'Brien and Comber, 2001). As well, whose interests are being served and whose are being marginalized, and what images are being advanced are also worthy questions to consider (O'Brien and Comber, 2001).

Ashley also addressed the idea of school textbooks, particularly those used as part of the social studies curriculum. These texts, s/he maintained, serve the interests of

the government since the perspective advanced is the Caucasian, European point of view (Interview, 17/03/03). Brett, too, talked about textbooks. Although Brett shared that being political is not within her/his personality, s/he stated that textbook publishing is a lucrative business. "They want to promote their publications and it's all money based...so, yes of course, there's power behind it. I think it's promoting companies and money and all that kind of thing" (Interview, 17/03/03).

The commercial value of children has become identified by corporations and recently, these same corporations have begun exploiting this opportunity (Shaker, 2000). Because children must attend school everyday, the classroom has been identified as "one of the most effective locations in which to market to kids" (Shaker, 2000, p. 16). In the classroom, we learn the information and skills required to be considered educated and the trusted school environment "reinforces the legitimacy of the messages taught within"(Shaker, 2000, p. 16). Therefore, any organization or content associated with the educational environment gains a certain legitimacy (Shaker, 2000).

Literacy has always been a commercial endeavor since, from the start, public schools have been a market for companies selling books and other educational materials (Shannon, in Albers, 2002). Today, though, the market is even more profitable because of the accompanying materials such as worksheets, test prep kits, and bulletin board borders (Shannon, in Albers, 2002). Schools, and the children in them, have become a source of profit for corporations (Kohn, 2002). The corporate agenda often becomes the official curriculum where "math problems plug a particular

brand of sneakers or candy and chemical companies distribute slick curriculum packages to ensure that environmental science will be taught with their slant" (Kohn, 2002, p. 114). Shannon (in Albers, 2002) terms this the commodification of literacy.

Curriculum, too, represents an area where understanding and awareness broadened. Ashley stated that curriculum, as manifested in what we teach, serves certain groups while others are excluded. The ethnic minorities and the feminist viewpoint would not be represented. However, "who would be served would be the people who are in the power right now, such as the Anglophone, white type of European aspect"(Interview, 17/03/03).

Brett, too, agreed that teaching is political

> but I don't think teachers want to acknowledge that it is political because it's a team profession but it's a very isolating profession. I think teachers prefer to be in the classroom working with their students and I think that's how they feel connected to the profession, you know, because it's something real and I think it all has to do with control and authority (Interview, 17/03/03).

The teacher, Brett stated, by deciding what to teach, is a very powerful figure in the classroom. It is the teacher who selects the texts that s/he believes will fit into the curriculum, which, of course, is dictated by Alberta Learning. Chris observed that social studies teachers at the higher levels

> are in positions of tremendous, tremendous influence...I think that there's a line that you have to walk there because you have to, I think, teach the kids that this may be my philosophy and you have the philosophy of your parents and you may not choose to actually reveal your personal philosophy by being the devil's advocate and teaching the kids to try and weigh what are the different positions or issues (Interview, 11/03/03).

Everyone sees the world through her or his own cultural and gender

experiences, Creighton (1997) explains. Teachers must recognize that many students come from environments where ideologies different from their own are firmly instilled (Kempe, 2001). "There is a very real risk that these students will feel alienated and patronized if we allow our own ideological investments to remain unexamined" (Kempe, 2001, p. 54). Comber and Kamler (1997 affirm that in opening up the classroom as a site for social critique, "teachers' institutional locations and personal histories result in ambivalence and ambiguity" (p. 16).

Lewison et al. (2002) discuss the difficulty in knowing how to respond to the complex questions which can arise when students are positioned differently than the teacher. In discussing her experiences, Vasquez (2000) interrogates the "acts of censorship" she has imposed on her students when they take up issues in different ways than those envisioned by her (p. 10). There is a need, Vasquez (2000) reveals, to put our own agendas aside and truly listen to our students in a new way. If we indeed want to create space for issues of social justice and equity as they arise from the students, then we must let students' questions and the artifacts they bring into the classroom have a place there (Vasquez, 2000).

Brett also discussed the fact that it is the government, who is, incidentally, the teachers' employer, that dictates the curriculum. "Social studies, for example, Grade six, you learn about the government and the government you learn about is the parliamentary system, and of course they promote the parliamentary system as being equal and best" (Interview, 17/03/03). Canada's government should be the topic, Brett insisted, because other types of government are not discussed within the curriculum.

Chris conveyed that newspapers in Alberta serve the interests of the provincial government.

> That kind of stems from what we read about critical literacy and, I think that that is definitely evident in the newspapers, particularly in this province where our newspapers are heavily slanted toward the philosophy of the provincial government and their right wing agenda. I would say that's true, (it) can be very restrictive and it can be in the hands of the powerful (Interview, 11/03/03).

In discussing the term critical literacy itself, the teachers also conveyed a deepening understanding when I asked them to define the concept. Lewison et al.(2002) found that newcomers to the ideas and pedagogy of critical literacy tend to focus on disrupting the commonplace through initiating conversations around books and encouraging students to question everyday beliefs and practices that do not move beyond personal connections. Consistent with these findings, the participant teachers' views on critical literacy generally stayed within the realm of disrupting the commonplace, with some understanding of interrogating multiple viewpoints.

I would anticipate, though, that as the teachers moved from newcomers to novices to experienced teachers within the domain of critical literacy, they would begin challenging their students to move beyond personal connections to understanding the larger sociopolitical structures in the world and taking informed action against those structures (Lewison et al., 2002).

Ashley conveyed that "critical literacy is the ability of reading a passage and seeing it from a variety of aspects, a variety of different points of view and being able to decipher not only what the author is trying to write down, but what you feel from that reading" (Interview, 17/03/03). As well, critical literacy also includes forming your

own opinion "something that isn't enforced by the teacher, something that is actually from your perspective" (Interview, 17/03/03).

Brett mentioned that the whole notion of critical literacy is now more clear since the investigation began. S/he discussed the role of social justice and looking at moral issues and ethics (Discussion, 27/02/03). Critical literacy, for Brett, meant being able to step back and analyze, evaluate, and question. "It's being able to question and being able to not take a word as verbatim, being able to make inferences and being able to deduce and question" (Interview, 17/03/03).

Chris, too, talked about her/his developing understanding of critical literacy.

My understanding now would lead towards being able to interpret a text and determining what is the underlying message of the author, if there is in fact one, or what is the slant that is put on that literature, teaching kids to look beyond just the words to the feeling and the philosophy of the person who wrote it (Interview, 11/03/03).

Darcy displayed her/his deepening comprehension of critical literacy as well. Darcy conveyed that "I guess now it means the ability to be aware of what you're reading and being able to identify the writer's viewpoint." This includes the assumption that the author's viewpoint is not the only information available on the topic but that "there are other sources of information out there on that topic that might provide a better background to the reader" (Interview, 10/03/03). Darcy suggested that author's viewpoint could be seen as only a shade of color since there are always different points of view.

Critical literacy is relevant in the classroom, Ashley expressed, to create responsible citizens with higher thinking skills that allow them to see other points of

view. For the ethnic minorities, the ability to see that your perspective counts is important as is having a sense of identity. "So, I think that having critical literacy in school would be extremely beneficial, almost essential. Hopefully, we can start moving towards that in the future" (Interview, 17/03/03).

According to Brett, teachers like to believe that they are very neutral. However, there is a need to teach critical literacy in order to make the students aware that teachers are not neutral. Even when teaching through a critical lens, Brett explained, "you still have this need to seek for the right answer, you still have a need to guide the kids in the direction you're thinking" (Discussion 27/02/03).

In Chris' view, critical literacy is relevant in the classroom to develop people who are more critical, "people who are doing a little bit more thinking rather than just buying into whatever they read" (Interview, 11/03/03). For Chris, the challenge, though, is to get students to act on what they believe, even if it is different than what they've read.

Darcy agreed as well that critical literacy has a place in the classroom. "I think it would make students more apt to question information that is available....to accept different ideas than saying that this is the gospel, that there are other possible answers out there" (Interview, 10/03/03). Darcy declared that s/he would want the students to understand that there are other sides to the story, or other answers to the question.

Interest and Receptivity

Once the participant teachers began to gain an understanding and appreciation of the concept of critical literacy, their interest and receptivity, too, began to develop.

Ashley related that since becoming involved with this investigation, s/he has been considering ways to implement critical literacy in the classroom. Social studies is one area where s/he has considered "how can I have different points of view and different ways of critical thinking or critical literacy?" (Interview, 17/03/03).

In Brett's view, technology and the Internet are areas where critical literacy could be implemented. "Social issues are another one and you could tie that in to social studies" (Interview, 17/03/03). For example, Brett explained, if the class is studying Ancient Greece, the teacher could discuss with the class the rightness or wrongness of a class system. As well, textbooks and novels could also be examined and the students could be asked to journal through reader response.

Further, in studying the Natives in social studies, a class could examine the arrival of the Europeans to Canada and how the Natives were adversely affected. We tend to focus on the past, Brett said, but we could also look at the effects on the Natives today and "see how Canada has changed and has it changed that much since then because we still have immigrants coming to Canada today" (Interview, 17/03/03).

Another social studies unit that could be examined critically, according to Brett, is Canada's links with the world, where issues such as free trade, as well as Canada's political and historical links with other countries could be opened up.

Further, Brett talked about a social issue that has arisen in her classroom. S/he

related that the issue of cliques, which involves exclusion and inclusion, has manifested itself in her/his classroom. "I think that would probably be a good issue to talk about critically, let's find a story or writing or try to make a link with it" (Interview, 17/03/03).

Chris, too, discussed her/his receptivity to the notion of critical literacy. "I'm not uncomfortable, I guess, doing it. I just haven't made a point of searching out an issue and planning around an issue to say, I want this issue to be raised. But I don't find I'm uncomfortable in letting discussion go in those directions" (Discussion, 27/02/03).

Chris further declared that "we have a responsibility to teach the kids to be critical when reading something and to be looking at...why did the author say that or why would someone say that" (Interview, 11/03/03). "But, I think that we like to think we live in a free country...but that doesn't mean that there still isn't a slant to a lot of the things out there..." (Interview, 11/03/03).

Chris reported that having the chance to read the two journal articles about critical literacy that I gave to the group was good for her/him since s/he will now approach novel studies in a more critical manner. Chris related that s/he will have the class consider why the author wrote a particular book and why they would have wanted someone to read it. "What is their message, what are they trying to do by writing it. Did they only write this book just to make money?" (Discussion, 27/02/03). Perhaps, Chris suggested, s/he could take her/his students on "some other journey with it that we didn't know before" (Interview, 11/03/03).

Furthermore, Chris declared that expository text is under utilized in the classroom, but that it is an area that could be open to critical literacy. Newspapers, too, could be examined critically. Nevertheless, Chris did not see critical literacy as a unit of study. "I see it as an umbrella that you try and say, ok, how does critical literacy fit in to this particular story or this particular text in social, how can I get my kids to go a little beyond just reading it and gleaning the basic information" (Discussion, 27/02/030).

Finally, Chris suggested that the topic of critical literacy could be approached through the community of learners project which the school has taken on where the teachers are given time in the school day to gather together in order to discuss teaching and student learning. "So, I think I personally would be interested in other articles...or I might watch for that should I go to a conference or something like that" (Interview, 11/03/03). Moreover, critical literacy could also be infused in the upcoming AISI projects since the teachers in the school have been searching for new areas to approach in reading and literacy.

Darcy, too, demonstrated a receptivity and interest in the topic of critical literacy. S/he conveyed that s/he would consider addressing critical literacy "as much as I can" (Interview, 10/03/03). Darcy related that s/he has done so "a few times in the past without realizing I was doing it" (Interview, 10/03/03). Now, though, Darcy reported that s/he might focus on the critical aspect. "I guess one way of looking at it would be if...there's three witnesses to a car accident, each person would probably see something different...it might be a good way of finding out that all those people saw

things differently" (Interview, 10/03/03).

Within the classroom, Darcy suggested that the social studies curriculum presents possibilities for approaching critical literacy, as do stories in the basal readers. You could "kind of steer them in a direction and say is there anything in here that might not be quite right, according to the way the author has presented this particular story or is there something that, in the social studies, might not be accurate" (Interview, 10/03/03). Further, children could be made aware of various authors in order to question "if you look at the name of the person who wrote it, do you think that people who write things sometimes might have their own point of view. Do you think this might be exactly the way it happened? (Interview, 10/03/03).

Summary

Based on data collected from the group discussion and the final interview, it seems that critical literacy is new territory for the participant teachers. Although they tended to focus on disrupting the commonplace, still, it is now ground that is open for inquiry. As the participant teachers' awareness and understanding began to take shape during the passage of this inquiry, their interest and receptivity, too, began to develop. This developing appreciation enabled the participant teachers to begin considering just how the concept of critical literacy and its accompanying components could be actualized in the classroom.

CHAPTER SIX

Findings, Implications, and Recommendations

In this chapter, a summary of the study will be found along with a discussion of the findings. Finally, implications for practice and recommendations for further research will also be addressed.

<u>Summary of the Study</u>

This research study sought to elicit teachers' initial understandings of critical literacy as well as how their comprehension changed upon exposure to the topic over a period of time. Additionally, I set out to describe strategies employed by teachers as they attempted to enact a critical literacy in their classrooms as well as the possible obstacles faced by teachers which prohibited them from making room in their classroom for critical literacy.

Since the purpose of the study was to explore teachers' knowledge of and instructional practice in critical literacy, it seemed appropriate that a qualitative study that was naturalistic in tone be undertaken which might allow me to chart the critical literacy terrain as it pertained to the participant teachers.

The four teachers involved in this study ranged in age from 25 to 53 years of age and their years of teaching experience ranged from first year teacher to 32 years. Teaching assignments included grades four and five as well as the Learning Assistance Center.

Data collection included three 40 minute periods of observation in each of the

four teachers' classrooms where my role was one of nonparticipant observer. Data recording for the observational portion of data collection included running notes, context maps, and entries according to my own predetermined categories.

Additionally, each participant teacher was involved in two semi-structured interviews. The initial interview allowed me to get a feel for the teachers' beginning perspectives about critical literacy. The second interview, as the final stage of data collection, afforded me a glimpse at how the teachers' perceptions changed over the course of the investigation. These interviews took on the tone of a two way conversation where each teacher and I established a relationship as peers, rather than interviewer and interviewee. The data source for this stage of collection was the typed transcription of each interview.

The final stage of data collection was the focus group discussion, which occurred toward the end of the investigation. This allowed for interaction among the participants which I felt would enrich my data. Each participant was given two journal articles to read and reflect upon before the discussion which might allow a focus for the conversation. Again, data source was a typed transcription of the conversation.

Data analysis for this inquiry was inductive, involving use of the constant comparative method where explanatory categories were established into which incidences of those categories were placed until each category became saturated. Data were then interpreted and findings will now be discussed.

<u>Findings</u>

After having analyzed and interpreted the data collected over the course of this

inquiry, it is possible to advance some responses to the questions that guided this study.

A number of conclusions came to light which will be addressed under the broad

headings of the three guiding questions.

1. What do teachers understand initially by critical literacy and how does this

change upon exposure to the concept?

According to Nagy and Scott (2000), we must recognize the complexity of word

knowledge. Gordon et al. (1998) posit that "knowledge of a word is seen in terms of

the extent or degree of knowledge a person has of the possible meanings of the word"

(p. 171). Word knowledge is not a know or not know proposition, Gordon et al. (1998)

insist, since the question "Do you know this word?" is not a legitimate one because

"No, I don't know this word" and "Yes, I know this word" cannot be given as answers

(p. 173). The question, "How do you know this word" might be the more appropriate

question, Gordon et al. (1998) conclude (p.173). Nagy and Scott (2000) postulate that

there are five aspects to this word complexity:

> (a) incrementality--"knowing a word is a matter of degrees, not all-or-nothing;
> (b) multidimensionality -- word knowledge consists of several qualitatively
> different types of knowledge; (c) polysemy -- words often have multiple
> meanings; (d) interrelatedness --one's knowledge of any given word is not
> independent of one's knowledge of other words; and (e) heterogeneity -- what it
> means to know a word differs substantially depending on the kind of word (p.
> 270).

Nagy and Scott (2000) declare that, in examining the aspect of incrementality,

"one's knowledge of a word can grow on the basis of almost infinitesimally small

steps" (p. 271). Further, Dale (as cited in Graves and Watts-Taffe 2002), proposes four

levels of word knowledge "(1) never having seen it before; (2) knowing there is such a

word, but not knowing what it means; (3) having a vague and context-bound meaning

for the word; and (4) knowing and remembering the word" (p. 156)

In examining the incremental nature of the participant teachers' knowledge of

the concept of critical literacy, based on the initial interviews, I found that, without

exception, all the participant teachers' knowledge fell into Dale's first level. That is,

none of the participant teachers had ever seen the term before. Indeed, as previously

stated, they all expressed some degree of puzzlement and hesitancy when they first

encountered the word.

However, upon exposure to the topic through this study, I saw their knowledge

of the word grow, moving through Dale's second and third stages, to the fourth. Dale

(as cited in Graves and Watts-Taffe, 2002) further breaks down the fourth level into

having a full and precise meaning versus having a general meaning. I would advance

that the participant teachers, through exposure to this inquiry, achieved the fourth level

of word knowledge, displaying Dale's general meaning of the word.

Regarding the multidimensional nature of their knowledge of the concept, I

found that, as the teachers became more immersed in the term critical literacy, the

concept, for them, became increasingly multidimensional. Their understanding of the

term began expanding to include both a cognitive and an affective component (Graves

and Watts-Taffe, 2002) that manifested itself both in our discussions and their

classrooms. By and large, they became increasingly able to express the term orally and

they began to apply what they knew of the word both to their classrooms and in our group discussion. Further, they were increasingly able to articulate their understandings of the term, including their ability to associate the word with other related concepts.

Discussing the polysemy of their knowledge of the term critical literacy brings me back to my comment after the initial interview with the participants. That is, after hearing me ask what the term critical literacy could mean, all attempted to dissect the word into its parts through looking at the word critical and the word literacy, as separate entities. After being exposed to the concept, though, they began thinking of the term as a *concept*. While it is true that the term critical literacy is not a fixed entity with one single meaning, it seems that the participant teachers knowledge initially fell largely in the dimension of Lewison et al.'s (2002) disrupting the commonplace, with some tentative explorations of the interrogating multiple viewpoints dimension. Toward the end of the investigation, though, I saw them begin, if even in a small way, to mull the ideas of focusing on sociopolitical issues as well as taking action and promoting social justice (Lewison et al., 2002).

According to Graves and Watts-Taffe (2002), context virtually always lends meaning to words, giving the meanings many different nuances. For the participant teachers, further exposure to the concept of critical literacy in more and varied contexts, such as our interviews, the journal articles, and from one another during the discussion, allowed them to begin understanding and manipulating the political and emancipatory nuances of the concept.

Graves and Watts-Taffe (2002) explain that knowledge of one word is

connected to knowledge of other words. In examining the interrelated view of the concept of critical literacy, I found that the teachers displayed a deeper knowledge of the accompanying facets of critical literacy and that our discussions of these features were rich and informative. For example, our conversations brought us around to discussing the expanded view of literacy, text, multiple literacies, popular culture, as well as the related notions of unequal power relations, curriculum, and multiple meanings of text. This leads me to postulate that the teachers knew more about the term critical literacy than they thought they did for, as Nagy and Scott (2000) explain, "How well a person knows the meaning of *whale* depends in part on their understanding of *mammal*. A person who already knows the words *hot, cold,* and *cool* has already acquired some of the components of the word *warm*, even if the word *warm* has not yet been encountered" (p. 272).

Finally, in looking at the heterogeneity of the participant teachers' knowledge of the term critical literacy, it becomes apparent that, as the inquiry progressed, their knowledge, too, progressed. Graves and Watts-Taffe (2002) underline that "different word users require different sorts of word knowledge" (p. 157). Further, Nagy and Scott (2000) explain that "word knowledge is applied knowledge" (p. 273). As professional educators and teachers who were beginning to consider ways they could open up spaces for critical literacy in their classrooms, they also began displaying a richer and quite different knowledge toward the end of the investigation than was evident at the beginning. This was made visible as they discussed their thoughts about critical literacy both in the group discussion and in the final interview, conversing about

critical literacy's possibilities and its components.

2. What are teachers doing in the classroom to promote critical literacy in students?

The teachers who participated in this particular investigation held critical literacy to be a worthwhile endeavor to bring into the classroom. They could all see the utility of creating children who hold a critical view of the world. However, as Lesley (1997) underscores, critical literacy is a difficult philosophy to execute and the first challenge is "determining the best translation of such theory into practice" (p. 421). Moreover, Lesley (1997) says, critical literacy cannot be expected to occur in a "predictable, orderly fashion" (p. 423).

For the teachers in this exploration, critical literacy represented new pedagogical territory which demands that "teachers examine their own positional frames of references with respect to their power, social class, access, and privilege..." (Allen, 1997, p. 520). After having been introduced to the concept of critical literacy, then, a few participant teachers attempted to bring the "difficult dance of critical literacy"(Lesley, 1997, p. 420) into their classrooms . These initial attempts represented tentative, almost timid explorations into the world of critical literacy.

From Brett's classroom discussion about alternate versions of the Cinderella fairytale, to Chris mentioning the importance of respecting other cultures through the story Pitseolak, critical literacy was brought into the realm of the possible. These introductory forays tended to fall in the dimension of disrupting the commonplace and interrogating multiple viewpoints, consistent with Lewison et al.'s (2002) findings.

Since the teachers in this investigation could be categorized as newcomers to critical literacy theory, conversations and practices that focused on examining sociopolitical issues, and taking social action were less visible (Lewison et al., 2002).

3. What are the barriers to critical literacy?

For the teachers in this investigation, the opening up of a critical literacy curriculum was unchartered terrain. Lewison et al. (2002) articulate that teachers' initial efforts in moving toward a critical literacy curriculum are "often shadowed by hesitations and uncertainties of what critical literacy looks like in classrooms and what is appropriate for elementary classrooms..." (p. 390). The educators in this inquiry raised a number of "questions, fears and doubts"(Comber, 1999, p. 6) about critical literacy as they worked their way through this theory that was so new to them.

Among those hesitancies were concerns about time constraints in tackling "one more thing" in an already full curriculum. Some teachers also were concerned that they might not gain the support of the parents, the community and the administration should they choose to bring critical literacy into their classrooms. Too, they cited a lack of appropriate resources and a worry about a loss of their authority in the classroom as other barriers to critical literacy. Since some teachers were beginners to the realm of education itself and all were newcomers to critical literacy theory, this also presented a barrier to the enactment of critical literacy in their classrooms. Finally, a sort of cynicism that we are powerless in a world that will continue as it always has no matter what we do, also became apparent. Related to this notion was the idea that children must be protected from the harsh realities of this world since we do not want to

disillusion them with their powerlessness.

Implications

The findings of this inquiry suggest that the notion of critical literacy has not found its way into the classroom. As I proposed at the onset of this investigation, it is still "somewhere out there," a theory not well understood by all classroom teachers. In order to move forward, this must be acknowledged. We must also recognize the significance of creating emancipatory teachers whose pedagogical goal is one of liberation. For this to occur, I make a number of recommendations.

First, there is a need for pre-service teachers to experience wide and varied encounters with critical literacy in their teacher preparation programs. This would entail entire courses or blocks of time devoted to critical literacy as well as having the concept infused into all aspects of their program. Here, the objective would be developing new teachers with a clear pedagogical vision open to all the critical literacy possibilities.

Second, I envision an endeavor that would bring about critical literacy as a system-wide philosophy which would trickle down into the classroom. This would occur through a focus on critical literacy at the system level where the philosophy would be shared by everyone from district superintendents to teachers to support staff. Professional development would be devoted to deepening an understanding of critical literacy. I envisage a critical literacy expert visiting district schools on a regular basis, conducting workshops, providing support, and answering teachers' questions.

Teachers would be involved in monthly meetings and discussion groups as they explored critical literacy together.

Teachers would be encouraged to bring a critical literacy curriculum into their classrooms and they would feel confident that this system-wide initiative had the support of parents and the community, who would also receive information and support on an ongoing basis. Critical literacy would not be a haphazard initiative but would be infused into the daily curriculum in not only the language arts but in all the disciplines. At its best, critical conversations, which would permeate the fabric of school life, could be heard on playgrounds as well as in staffrooms and the hallways.

Last, learning materials would be purchased which would lend themselves to critical conversations in the classroom and students would be encouraged to question and to wonder why.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings of this study provide a basis for further research in the area of critical literacy.

First, I fear that critical literacy education could be appropriated by the mainstream "establishment," making it just another trendy approach to literacy education. The irony of critical literacy is that it is "prickly"; it is *supposed* to make people feel uncomfortable with their view of the world. Because of its very nature, many teachers view critical literacy as being unapproachable and disruptive, causing them to be wary of entering the critical literacy terrain. It behooves the research

community, then, to continue to find ways to effectively deliver an emancipatory critical literacy education while at the same time making it accessible to teachers. Too, an inquiry into how opening up spaces for critical literacy affects the teachers, the students, the school culture, and the community could also be undertaken.

Second, a continuation of this investigation, which follows the participant teachers as they continue to learn about critical literacy, is suggested. We need to better understand how a deeper appreciation of critical literacy can affect teacher practice.

Third, an inquiry into how students' perceptions and understandings of critical literacy grow and change is a largely unexplored research area that could be investigated. Within this investigation, conversations and personal responses to sociopolitical issues surrounding text might be examined to discover the internal landscape for students.

Finally, this study raised many questions about how teachers, through opening up spaces in their classrooms for critical inquiry, might respond to issues with which they are not comfortable. While a review of the literature suggests that critical teachers must examine their own biases in order to make their classrooms safe for all points of view, there is no suggestion of how teachers might deal with opinions and situations that stand in opposition to their own.

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APPENDIX A: Initial Interview Guide

1. There is a lot of talk today about literacy and there are many definitions. What does literacy mean to you? Are there any other kinds of literacy that you are aware of?

2. What does multiple literacies mean to you?

3. If your students only knew about literacy from being in your classroom what would they think it was for?

4. Literacy can be enlightening or liberating but also may be restrictive or dominating such as when we choose textbooks that portray a mainstream view of the world, or when we teach literacy using copying, worksheets or assignment questions. What do you think the goal of literacy should be?

5. Today there is an expanded notion of text. What does this mean to you?

6. Attempts to tie text to a single meaning usually serve the interests of powerful social institutions who rely upon a tightly controlled set of social practices to give them legitimacy and authority. What is your response?

7. What we teach in school is always selective because it represents some interests rather than others. Curriculum and schooling follow lines of social division and are structured according to the prevailing principles of social organization and power. What is your response?

8. Alfie Kohn has said that teachers do not want to be political because they think it's someone else's job. But, if students are circling vowels instead of reading good stories, he says, it's already political. Do you agree or disagree and why?

9. Have you heard of the term Critical Literacy? What does this term mean to you?

10. We've discussed the notion of critical literacy. Understanding that the translation of theory into practice is not always a simple task, do you believe that teachers could or should develop critical literacy in students? Why or why not?

11. Upon what kinds of text should we focus when developing critical literacy in our students? Would you consider bringing popular culture texts (video, magazines, advertisements, movies, etc.) into the classroom? Do you think we can take a critical stance on content area texts?

12. What instructional techniques could you use to help develop critical literacy?

APPENDIX B: Final Interview Guide

1. There is a lot of talk today about literacy and there are many definitions. What does literacy mean to you?

2. If your students only knew about literacy from being in your classroom, what would they think it was for?

3. Literacy can be enlightening or liberating but it may also be restrictive or dominating. What do you think the goal of literacy should be?

4. If I said to you that attempts to tie text t a single meaning usually serve the interests of power social institutions, what would be your response?

5. Some would say that what we teach in school is always selective because it represents some interests and excludes others. What do you think about this?

6. If I said to you that teaching is a political endeavor, what would be your response?

7. What does Critical Literacy mean to you?

8. In future, would you consider addressing this literacy in your teaching? What would be the relevance of teaching Critical Literacy?

9. What kinds of text should we focus on when developing critical literacy in students? Do you think we can take a critical stance on content area texts?

10. Since we've been discussing Critical Literacy, have you thought of some ways you could see its application in your classroom?

Main Identity

From: <gordonc@ucalgary.ca>
To: "S. Graham/M. Meuchel" <sandmark@telusplanet.net>
Cc: <gordonc@ucalgary.ca>
Sent: January 5, 2004 3:37 PM
Subject: Re: meeting date?

"S. Graham/M. Meuchel" <sandmark@telusplanet.net> said:

> Good morning and a happy new year. I hope you got some rest over the holiday and are ready for the new year. I am wondering when we could get together to look at the changes to my thesis. Early afternoon would probably work for me. Please let me know.
>
> sandy

Hello and a Happy NEW YEAR TO ALL. Yes, I have been thinking about you. I went thru George's and Jon Kerter's copies of the thesis and there was nothing of real direction that I could find from all the underlining but no comments anywhere.So upon reflection on the underlining and the discussion post-oral, I can give you some direction on what you can focus on revisiting (and revising with a tweek here and there) even before you arrive for the meeting. At our meeting we can then look at the changes you made, firm them up and you should be ready for all the administrivia required by Grad Studies.The memories below stem from Jon's remarks:

1.Anyplace you referred to the study as an ethnography, change to a naturalistic (or qualitative) study with some ethnographic techniques.

2.Revisit your chapters on methodology to delete some backup especially of truly uncontroversial statements. (Remember how he did not like Lincoln and Guba because he felt some of what they said was common sense !!!) He found some statements in chapter 2 confusing (I didn't) and he did point out one or two in the oral exam -- take a run at reading it again to see if you note some statements that could be stated more simply and clearly. Or ask yourself -- how can I make this argument more effectively?

3.Revisit your thesis with an eye to be more critical of what other scholars wrote -- remember yours is a thesis on critical literacy, so are you critical enough with what other scholars have written? What do you object to? Why? Or...what is a consequence for the classroom of this understanding from scholars?

4.Revisit your thesis to delete repetitions that may have resulted from the amount of "careful backup".

5.Address the issue of whether you are a neutral observer or an active participant in light of the amount of instruction provided to teachers as a result of your interview questions and conversations with them. Address whether this affects the accuracy of your study. (I remember you spoke eloquently to this concern of Jon's during the exam.)

6.Mention in Chapter 4 that the barriers you found to development of critical literacy also apply to any effective teaching and not to critical literacy per se.

7.In the discussion chapter, along with your hopefulness to promote critical literacy, speak to how potentially socially disruptive is treading in such territory. We know from your work that teachers are wary of entering such a terrain, so you need to address the "dangers inherent" in actually doing so -- how might it affect the kids themselves, the school culture, the community?

[Handwritten annotations in right margin:]
(1) naturalistic teth.
(2) methodology section. to delete backup
(3) more critical
(4) repetitions from careful backup
(5) neutral observer -> limitations.
(6) barriers
(7) discussion

Impression

Nothing earth shattering, just some points Jon made that might change your tone to a more "critical" one.
From George's copy, I picked up only 2 verb tense changes --
p.60, line 15, should read 'were' and not 'are'
p.129, line 1, should read "need to be brought"

When you have revisited your thesis in this way (I don't know the amount of time this will take and when you will have it), e-mail for an appointment and we can go over the changes to see whether it has a somewhat more 'critical tone'. I believe changes in words, phrases, sentences and... here and there adding a short paragraph will do it !! This is NOT to be a major rewriting task.
If you have any questions, please phone and we can sort out a thing or two over the phone. It would be good if, after our meeting, you could go to Grad Studies and hand it in "straight a way" as say the Australians.
I hope you, husband and babies are well and have had a good Christmas. Stay in touch. chris gordon
---

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- forms there

At Earth Sci   by MathSci
7th Floor 720B.

Main Identity

From: <gordonc@ucalgary.ca>
To: "S. Graham/M. Meuchel" <sandmark@telusplanet.net>
Cc: <gordonc@ucalgary.ca>
Sent: January 7, 2004 7:37 PM
Subject: Re: meeting date

"S. Graham/M. Meuchel" <sandmark@telusplanet.net> said:

> Hi, sounds good. I'll just go through your points to clarify
>
> 1. No problem.
> 2. I'll go through the methodology section and see what I can see and do.
> 3. Ironically, it would seem, I am not exactly sure what I should do here.
> Are you saying that I should critique the assertions made by the scholars
> when I do not agree with them right within the thesis? If so, do I state
> that I disagree and state my reasons why?
> 4. Can do.
> 5. I can deal with this in the Limitations of the Study section.
> 6. No problem.
> 7. Can do.
>
> I will get on this work ASAP. Depending on childcare arrangements I can
> make, I would like to work on Thursday, Friday, Saturday and plan on being
> finished on Sunday. In this case, could we set up an appointment for the
> following week? Perhaps mid-week. I need to be completely finished with
> permission to bind by the 23rd, so if I need to revise again after I meet
> with you, I will have time to do so. Although, it certainly would be good
> if I could take the thing to Grad Studies after we meet.
>
> Yes, we had a good Christmas. We travelled to Calgary then to Saskatchewan
> to spend some time with Mark's family over the holiday. Nothing like
> getting home, though, into our own routine and beds. The babies are well,
> and Averie is getting sassier as her language skills develop, she seems to
> be a sponge, soaking up so many new things every day. It really is a
> wonderous thing to behold, the development and growth of your own child.
> She is always telling her brother that she loves him "too much." Auberon is
> very tolerant of his sister, calm little man that he is.
>
> I hope you and your family had a good holiday and I hope you didn't work too
> hard. Welcome back to a new year. Talk to you soon.
>
> sandy
>
> ----- Original Message -----
> From: <gordonc@ucalgary.ca>
> To: "S. Graham/M. Meuchel" <sandmark@telusplanet.net>
> Cc: <gordonc@ucalgary.ca>
> Sent: Monday, January 05, 2004 3:37 PM
> Subject: Re: meeting date?
>
>
> > "S. Graham/M. Meuchel" <sandmark@telusplanet.net> said:

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate

Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Critical Literacy: Negotiating New Terrain with

Teachers" submitted by Lori Sandra Graham in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts.

_____

Supervisor, Dr. Christine J. Gordon

Graduate Division of Educational Research

_____

Dr. George D. Labercane

Graduate Division of Educational Research

_____

Dr. Jonathan Kertzer

Department of English

_____

>>
>>> Good morning and a happy new year. I hope you got some rest over the
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>> thru George's and Jon Kerter's copies of the thesis and there was nothing
> of
>> real direction that I could find from all the underlining but no comments
>> anywhere.So upon reflection on the underlining and the discussion
> post-oral, I
>> can give you some direction on what you can focus on revisiting (and
> revising
>> with a tweek here and there) even before you arrive for the meeting. At
> our
>> meeting we can then look at the changes you made, firm them up and you
> should
>> be ready for all the administrivia required by Grad Studies.The memories
> below
>> stem from Jon's remarks:
>> 1.Anyplace you referred to the study as an ethnographty, change to a
>> naturalistic (or qualitative) study with some ethnographic techniques.
>> 2.Revisit your chapters on methodology to delete some backup especially of
>> truly uncontroversial statements. (Remember how he did not like Lincoln
> and
>> Guba because he felt some of what they said was common sense !!!) He found
> some
>> statements in chapter 2 confusing (I didn't) and he did point out one or
> two in
>> the oral exam -- take a run at reading it again to see if you note some
>> statements that could be stated more simply and clearly. Or ask
> yourself -- how
>> can I make this argument more effectively?
>> 3. Revisit your thesis with an eye to be more critical of what other
> scholars
>> wrote -- remember yours is a thesis on critical literacy, so are you
> critical
>> enough with what other scholars have written? What do you object to? Why?
>> Or...what is a consequence for the classroom of this understanding from
>> scholars?
>> 4.Revisit your thesis to delete repetitions that may have resulted from
> the
>> amount of "careful backup".
>> 5.Address the issue of whether you are a neutral observer or an active
>> participant in light of the amount of instruction provided to teachers as
> a
>> result of your interview questions and conversations with them. Address
> whether
>> this affects the accuracy of your study. (I remember you spoke eloquently
> to

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Critical Literacy: Negotiating New Terrain with Teachers" submitted by Lori Sandra Graham in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

_____

Supervisor, Dr. Christine J. Gordon

Graduate Division of Educational Research

_____

Dr. George D. Labercane

Graduate Division of Educational Research

_____

Dr. Jonathan Kertzer

Department of English

_____

Date

ii

>> this concern of Jon's during the exam.)
>> 6.Mention in Chapter 4 that the barriers you found to development of
> critical
>> literacy also apply to any effective teaching and not to critical literacy
> per
>> se.
>> 7.In the discussion chapter, along with your hopefulness to promote
> critical
>> literacy, speak to how potentially socially disruptive is treading in
> such
>> territory. We know from your work that teachers are wary of entering such
> a
>> terrain, so you need to address the "dangers inherent" in actually doing
> so --
>> how might it affect the kids themselves, the school culture, the
> community?
>>
>> Nothing earth shattering, just some points Jon made that might change your
> tone
>> to a more "critical" one.
>> From George's copy, I picked up only 2 verb tense changes --
>> p.60, line 15, should read 'were' and not 'are'
>> p.129, line 1, should read "need to be brought"
>>
>> When you have revisited your thesis in this way (I don't know the amount
> of
>> time this will take and when you will have it), e-mail for an appointment
> and
>> we can go over the changes to see whether it has a somewhat more 'critical
>> tone'. I believe changes in words, phrases, sentences and... here and
> there
>> adding a short paragraph will do it !! This is NOT to be a major rewriting
>> task.
>> If you have any questions, please phone and we can sort out a thing or two
> over
>> the phone. It would be good if, after our meeting, you could go to Grad
>> Studies and hand it in "straight a way" as say the Australians.
>> I hope you, husband and babies are well and have had a good Christmas.
> Stay in
>> touch. chris gordon
>> --
>>
>>
>>HI, I guess if there is an instance where you legitimately do not agree with a scholar's assertions, perhaps because your classroom experience or your teaching philosophy would differ, then you could assert that. I would not go looking to try to counter or disagree with all or many scholarly statements. One or two instances in the whole thing could show that you did read the literature with a critical stance especially if you can counter with your classroom experience or experience within a school culture or a community. OK?

I, too, would like to see you head to Grad Studies with the thesis. To save us both time, you should arrive with the changed sections clearly highlighted in one copy so we can work our way thru without hunting for changed spots -- and another copy, hopefully to hand in. Bring a disk with the thesis on it, so if

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_____
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Graduate Division of Educational Research

_____
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Department of English

_____
Date

minor changes (a word here or there that will not change page numbers but might temper tone) need to be made, you can go to the Doucette Library, make the change, print the page and insert it.

Ok -- How about Wednesday, January 14th, at 11:00 am? If the weather becomes too inclement, keep in touch and we can change the date and time. chris gordon

> >

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>

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Graduate Division of Educational Research

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Dr. George D. Labercane

Graduate Division of Educational Research

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Dr. Jonathan Kertzer

Department of English

N

• Varsity Courts

Weather Station •

Grounds Building •

Grounds Greenhouse •

General Services

• Physical Plant

PLAYING FIELDS

Collegiate Road

Collegiate Blvd

32nd Avenue N.W.

L56
L53
L49
L52
L48
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L32

• Heating Plant
Cascade Hall
• Glacier Hall
• Olympus Hall
• Kananaskis Hall
• Norquay Hall
Brewster Hall
• Rundle Hall
• Castle Hall
• Dining Centre

Olympic Oval

• Kinesiology Complex

CCIT Building
• Engineering
• Trailers D-H
ICT Building •
• The Nickle Arts Museum
Trailer C •
• MacEwan Student Centre
• Earth Sciences
• Trailer B
Bookstore •
• MacEwan Hall
• Science B
• Math Sciences
• Science A
• The Rozsa Centre
• MacKimmie Library Block
• Social Sciences
• University Theatre
• MacKimmie Library Tower
• Science Theatres
Reeve Theatre •
• Craigie Hall
SWANN MALL
• Biological Sciences
• Art Parkade
• Murray Fraser Hall
• Administration
• Professional Faculties Building
• Education Tower
• Education Block
• Chinook Arch
• Trailer A
• Scurfield Hall
• University Child Care
• Haskayne Place

University Gate
24th Avenue N.W.
University Drive N.W.
Campus Gate
Campus Drive
Campus Dr.
Crowchild Trail N.W.

• Mechanical Engineering

University Station (LRT)

To: Parking Services, Olympic Volunteer Centre McMahon Stadium

Legend:
- Bus Stop
- Meter Parking
- Wheelchair Access
- Assigned Parking
- Paylots/Meters

University of Calgary Faculty of Medicine

South Tower
Foothills Hospital
Tom Baker Centre
Health Sciences Centre
Heritage Medical Research Building
Foothills Hospital Emergency
Grace Women's Health Centre
29th Street N.W.

McMahon Stadium/Olympic Volunteer Centre

University Drive N.W.
Olympic Volunteer Centre
McMahon Stadium

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MO·SHÙILE·TOGAM·SÙAS