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Latino Middle School Students Read to Learn Critical Literacy: Social Justice through Action Research

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Latino Middle School Students Read to Learn Critical Literacy:

Social Justice through Action Research

by

Jennifer Grenardo

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

Loyola Marymount University,

in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

2008

Latino Middle School Students Read to Learn Critical Literacy:

Social Justice through Action Research

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This dissertation written by Jennifer Grenardo, under the direction of the Dissertation
Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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To my family, thank you for making me the person I am today. To my parents, Gary and Geraldine Trujillo, thank you for teaching me to take advantage of the gifts God has given me to help others.

I am mostly sincerely grateful to my husband, my life, David Grenardo. Thank you for believing in me, supporting me, and encouraging me to enter the field of education.

DEDICATION

To my husband, David Grenardo,

for teaching me to live according to God's standards alone.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my Latino community.

May you always speak our language,

Take pride in our culture, and know that

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthen me."

Philippians 4:13

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS, continued

TABLE OF CONTENTS, continued

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

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Education

Loyola Marymount University; Los Angeles, CA
Ed.D. in Education for Social Justice, August 2008, Cumulative G.P.A. 3.61
Grand Canyon University; Phoenix, AZ
M.A., Reading, December 2004, Cumulative G.P.A. 3.8
University of Colorado School of Medicine; Denver, CO
September 2001-December 2002
Colorado College
B.A., Biology, May 2000, G.P.A. 3.2

Employment

Catholic Elementary School, Los Angeles, CA
Principal, July 2005 – June 2008

- Finances – Wrote and received grants and accessed public Title funds totaling over $200,000; Completed projected and adjusted yearly budgets; Successfully oversaw and completed plant management projects
- Curriculum – Improved ITBS and ACRE test scores; Created the Student/Parent Handbook and Faculty Handbook; Created and implemented Teacher Peer Observation Program; Implemented new language arts program; Departmentalized upper grades; Implemented School-wide Learning Expectations; Instituted monthly and quarterly awards for students, teachers, and parents; Completed WASC accreditation and served on two WASC/WCEA accreditation committees
- Community Involvement – Designed and led monthly bilingual parent meetings; Authored weekly bilingual parent newsletter; Presented Frostig strategies at St. Agnes Elementary School; Utilized and supervised volunteer Loyola High School students for tutoring; Painted school as a community project
- Extra-Curricular Activities – Coached St. Monica's Learning Fair Team – 2nd place overall; Created, implemented, and taught St. Paul School High School Preparation Program; Coached volleyball; Implemented weekly mass in school families

Loyola Marymount University PLACE Corps On-Site Supervisor, May 2006 – June 2008

- Mentored, evaluated, and developed teachers; coordinated payment of salaries; verified AmeriCorp requirements

Catholic Elementary School, Venice, CA
Vice Principal, 8th Grade Teacher, Religion and Language Arts Curriculum Coordinator; Aug. 2004 – June 2005

5th Grade Teacher; Aug. 2003 – May 2005

Completed subject in-depth studies for Religion and Language Arts; Taught 8th grade language arts, 7th and 8th grade math, 8th grade religion, 8th grade Spanish, and 5th grade subjects; Led weekly faculty meetings; Administered student discipline; Choreographed school musical

Boys and Girls Club of Pueblo, Pueblo, CO

Career Coordinator, Aug. 2000 – June 2001

Designed and implemented career program for students in grades K-12; Organized and facilitated Ski Club; Organized college visitations; Taught Junior Achievement

Training

Internal Board Review Certification; Riordan Foundation Training – Literacy Grants, Wireless Laptop recipient, Kidtype; Archdiocese of Los Angeles Marketing Training; 21st Century Technology Symposium; Reading First Training

Activities & Honors

Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Deanery Chair – Chaired meetings for deanery comprised of 10 inner city schools; Participated in monthly meetings with the Superintendent; Created and implemented Student Council Symposium, Aug. 2007-June 2008

Catholic Youth Organization, Board Member – Sports League for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Sept. 2007-May 2008

St. Paul's Church, Los Angeles, CA – Parish Financial Council, July 2005-June 2008

Keynote Speaker – Korean Language School Matriculation at St. Paul Parish, July 2006

Keynote Speaker – Pueblo Police Breakfast, Aug. 2001; Motivational Speaker for youths exiting juvenile probations

Prem Sewa Clinic, Rupadiah, India, Medical Missions Assistant – Diagnosed ailments such as tuberculosis and malaria; prescribed medications; traveled to neighboring villages to administer prenatal shots and examinations; June 1998 – Aug. 1998

Loyola Marymount University: Educational Leadership for Social Justice Doctoral Program

Dissertation Topic – Latino Middle School Students Read to Learn Critical Literacy: Social Justice through Action Research

Authored policy briefs; Met with Sacramento Senate committee members and lobbyists; Participated in Educational Forums

Colorado College

El Pomar Scholar – Full scholarship for academic excellence and community service – 1996-2000; 2000 President of the Multicultural Glass House; Dean's List – 1996-

2000; 1999 Innovative Leadership Award: Founder and Co-Chair of the Doherty Enrichment Program – after school program providing culturally enriching activities for high school students and tutoring; 1999 Co-Chair of Gorman Middle School Mentoring Program; 1998 Co-Chair of MEChA; 1996 Coca-Cola Scholar; 1996 Colorado State Fair Fiesta Queen

ABSTRACT

Latino Middle School Students Read to Learn Critical Literacy: Social Justice in Action

by

Jennifer Grenardo

This action research study explored if changes in the reading curriculum, specifically implementation of critical literacy approaches that acknowledge bicultural students, increase student learning as perceived by teachers and students in a Catholic elementary school, where students have been chronically performing at the lowest level in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. By using critical pedagogy (Darder, 1991; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1983; Macedo, 1994; McLaren, 1988) as a theoretical framework, this action research project investigated the effective elements of critical literacy (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004; Shor & Pari, 1999) that promote academic learning for Latino middle school students in a low-income Catholic elementary school.

This study explored the approaches and perceptions of novel studies, as a form of literacy, to increase student learning in reading at a low-income, urban, Catholic elementary school. Classroom observations, teacher interviews, teacher lesson plans,

student work, student focus groups, and a teacher focus group validated the findings that critical literacy approaches positively impacted student learning in reading.

Changes in the school and reading curriculum, specifically the implementation of literacy approaches that acknowledge bicultural students, increased learning for Latino middle school students as perceived by teachers and students in this low-income, urban Catholic elementary school. Teachers implemented effective elements of critical literacy, including direct vocabulary and grammar instruction, analysis of literary tools, incorporation of Spanish, varying forms of assessment, and inclusion of student voice, through the use of novel studies. The school and classroom environments further promoted academic learning for Latino middle school students with high expectations, strict humor, and predictability where teachers, who viewed their students with promising futures, taught as a form of service. Although the school and teachers incorporated literacy practices, teachers fell short of practicing critical literacy because they failed to examine the underlying social ramifications of hegemonic forces.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Introduction

Informed by critical pedagogy, this action research project analyzed effective

educational reading practices that promote student literacy for low-income Latino middle

school students in an inner-city, Catholic elementary school. Catholic schools are

traditionally known to promote social justice for students of color (Greeley, 1984), but

when they operate in inner-city communities – such as in this case study – their students'

achievements radically lag behind other Catholic schools located in wealthy

neighborhoods. This prompted the questions of whether the Catholic school's mission of

social justice has been fulfilled in inner-city Catholic schools for displaced and

marginalized populations, or whether academic achievement, specifically literacy, has

been neglected under the guise of faith-based education. In the attempt to promote

student learning through literacy, this case study investigated whether, in this Catholic

school, efforts have been made to create academic success and social experiences that

recognize students' language and cultural identity.

In particular, this study investigated whether changes in reading practices of an

underperforming inner-city, Catholic school increase middle school students' academic

1

engagement by validating the language and culture of the all-Latino student population. Grounded on the tenets of critical pedagogy, critical literacy, Catholic social doctrine, and the principles of social justice, this action research project documented reading instruction practices taking place at this school. This study aimed to demonstrate that culturally sensitive, critical literacy practices can increase motivation and learning in underperforming Catholic schools composed of students of color.

Purpose of the Study

This action research study explored critical literacy practices that promote student literacy for low-income Latino middle school students in an inner-city, Catholic elementary school, where students have been chronically performing at the lowest level in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. By using critical pedagogy (Darder, 1991; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1983; Macedo, 1994; McLaren, 1988) as a theoretical framework, this action research project investigated the effective elements of critical literacy (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004; Shor & Pari, 1999) that promote academic learning for Latino middle school students in a low-income Catholic elementary school.

Statement of the Problem

For many years, the school site lacked strategies to help students achieve. This low-income, inner-city Catholic school in Los Angeles, California served a student population composed of 90% Latino, 5% African-American, and 5% of other ethnicities. Eight teachers, in eight different classrooms, taught 195 students. Students scored stanines of two (2) and three (3), with one (1) being the lowest score and 10 the highest,

for all subjects and all grade levels on yearly standardized tests. Teachers lacked training

to read the scores or use them to direct instruction. Teachers utilized worksheets requiring

minimal rote memorization in alignment with teacher-centered lessons. Teachers further

worked in individual classrooms with minimal evaluation or accountability. The

administration only spoke English to a majority Spanish-speaking student population.

Parents were not allowed on school grounds to help or participate in school events. As a

result, graduating eighth graders lacked the necessary skills to face the rigor of a Catholic

high school education and, thus, the Catholic high schools required students to attend

summer school preparation classes before they were allowed to enter in the fall. The

principal mandated teachers to promote students, regardless of whether a child was ill

prepared to deal with the next grade emotionally or academically. The school failed to

promote student learning or academic excellence.

The school dictated policies and procedures that proved to be detrimental to

student achievement. For example, the school omitted recognition for academic

accomplishments and only identified poor behavior. School practices lacked renovation

and flexibility to improve current procedures. For example, when a program such as

after-school sports experienced difficulties, the school terminated its existence. Thus, the

school needed change, improvement, and growth.

On a larger scale, lack of funding and declining test scores moved Catholic

schools to new directions in Los Angeles. The majority of inner-city Catholic schools

lack sufficient funds to meet their students' needs. Unfortunately, the Archdiocese

succumbed to secular academic standards because Catholic schools are being forced to

compete with public education. In an effort to access public funding, the Archdiocese adopted scripted reading programs for inner-city Catholic schools, choosing to participate without thought or merit given to the implications of these actions. This type of scripted curriculum presents students with the basic knowledge to complete a job application and other menial tasks. By only teaching students functional reading skills, Catholic schools prepare low-income students to take only subordinate positions in society. How are students receiving an adequate education when schools fail to prepare students to compete in our current society?

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the critical literacy approaches that middle school teachers perceive increase student learning in reading for Latino middle school students in a low-income, urban, Catholic elementary school?

2. How do middle school teachers perceive critical literacy practices impacting student learning in reading for Latino students in a low-income, urban, Catholic elementary school?

3. How do Latino middle school students perceive critical literacy practices impacting their learning in reading in a low-income, urban, Catholic elementary school?

Theoretical Framework

Critical pedagogy (Apple, 1995; Darder, 1991; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 1988) provided the lens for analysis of the research questions. Each question was analyzed through the foundations of critical pedagogy, which include hegemony and counter-hegemony, resistance, ideology, economy, historicity of knowledge, dialogue and conscientization, and cultural politics (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2002). These foundations served as a guide to analyze critical literacy practices.

This study viewed critical literacy based on Cadiero-Kaplan's (2004) and Shor and Pari's (1999) theories which acknowledge the power of the written and spoken word as a political, social, and economic leverage to compete in society. Through novel studies, teachers implement critical literacy approaches. Research-based evidence for the success of this higher level reading program in a low-income community is scarce. The majority of low-income Catholic elementary schools in Los Angeles use a scripted reading program. A scripted reading program mandates teachers to teach a particular lesson on a particular day regardless of their students' interest, ideology, or ability, which places the power in the hands of the publisher. In novel studies, teachers develop the curriculum based on standards, which places power in the hands of the people.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy provides an alternative view of schooling and it opposes the traditional humanist vision of education. Critical pedagogy, founded in the tradition of critical theory, is grounded in the work of Paulo Freire (1970), and it served as the theoretical framework for this action research. Henry Giroux (1983), Peter McLaren

(1988), Michael Apple (1995), Antonia Darder (1991), Donaldo Macedo (1994), (Shor, & Pari, 1999) and many others who have made significant contributions to the understanding of a critical theory of liberation developed critical pedagogy. Principles of critical pedagogy include: hegemony and counter-hegemony, resistance, ideology, economy, historicity of knowledge, dialogue and conscientization, cultural politics, and critical literacy (Darder et al., 2002). Critical pedagogy argues that by developing these principles in the classroom, students can become cultural and political agents of change. Critical pedagogy calls for the analysis and critique of the hegemonic practices of the dominant class. These practices have significant value in education.

Hegemony and counter-hegemony. The dominant class teaches students to maintain hegemonic norms. Schools become arenas of "social reproduction" (McLaren, 1988) in which the ideals, attitudes, and relationships are reproduced by students in efforts to maintain the domination of the existing ruling class. McLaren (1988) further posited that critical pedagogy works to promote student and teacher learning with a direct purpose in order to counter hegemonic practices. "The dialectical nature of critical theory enables the education researcher to see the school not simply as an arena of indoctrination or socialization or a site of instruction, but also as a cultural terrain that promotes student empowerment and self-transformation" (McLaren, 1988, p. 70). Students learn "emancipatory knowledge" (McLaren, 1988) to analyze the underlying social and political structures of society. This knowledge changes social forms of oppression.

Resistance. Critical pedagogy also offers an explanation for student failure of marginalized groups as a form of resistance. Schools teach students a "hidden curriculum" that functions in American society to "perpetuate values and social relations that produce and legitimate the dominant worldview at the expense of a vast number of citizens" (Darder, 1991, p. 19). Many students of subordinate classes resist this curriculum and reproduction. As a result, these students fail to submit to their oppression.

Ideology. Students and teachers must question society and continually analyze, critique, and evaluate social structures in order to overcome dominating powers. Giroux (1983) stated that students must realize how society imposed ideological and material forces and utilize this realization "to affirm and reject [in] their own histories in order to begin the process of struggling for the conditions that will give them opportunities to lead a self-managed existence" (p. 52). This process can only take place when the teacher-center model has been eradicated and learning becomes the focus.

Economy. Critical pedagogy challenges the relationship between schools and society. Schools deceptively perpetuate racial inequalities between culture and class. According to Darder et al., (2002), "Critical education contends that, contrary to the traditional view, schools actually work against the class interests of those students who are not politically and economically vulnerable within society" (p. 11). Schools reproduce the social classes, both politically and economically.

Historicity of knowledge. Freire and Macedo (1987) dispelled the teacher-oriented model of teaching as the "banking" concept. When teachers are viewed as the authoritarians and the only possessors of knowledge, students are forced to sit quietly,

receive the information, and deposit it until they are full of erroneous facts. This banking approach, a form of domination, ignores students' experiences and views students merely as objects to fill. Critical pedagogy calls for both students and teachers to take part in the learning process. "The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teaches. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow" (Freire, 1970, p. 67). Knowledge is not static, nor is learning. Learning, a dynamic process, changes over time.

Dialogue and conscientization. Antonia Darder (1991) viewed critical pedagogy living in an arena where "students develop the critical capacities to reflect, critique and act to transform the conditions under which they live" (p. xvii). Through this framework, Darder (1991) called educators to be transformative leaders. Education, as a dialogue, becomes emancipatory because it is "committed to the empowerment of students through challenging the dominant education discourse and illuminating the right and freedom of students to become subjects of their world" (Darder et al., 2002, p. 15). Through dialogue, students develop a conscious understanding of the world around them. "Conscientization is defined as the process by which students, as empowered subjects, achieve a deepening awareness of the social realities that shape their lives and discover their own capacities to re-create them" (Darder et al., 2002, p. 15). Critical pedagogy challenges the current traditional American educational system, which perpetuates and reproduces the underachievement of bicultural students.

Cultural politics. Critical pedagogy "provides educators with the basis for understanding not only how the seeds of domination are produced, but also how they can

be challenged and overcome through resistance, critique, and social action" (Darder, 1995, p. 332). Culturally and politically, critical pedagogy calls educators to analyze critically the current curricular practices that perpetuate racial and social inequalities of subordinate populations.

Critical Literacy

Critical literacy encompasses the components of critical pedagogy. Critical literacy is learning to read and write while simultaneously becoming aware of personal experiences based on historical power relations (Anderson & Irvine, 1993). According to Shor and Pari (1999), "Critical literacy involves questioning received knowledge and immediate experience with the goal of challenging inequality and developing an activist citizenry" (p. 10). It is both reflective and reflexive. Literacy becomes a social practice that can be utilized to study other social practices. Critical literacy, more specifically, studies language use and education as a social practice. Education is not neutral; it is embedded with social, political, and economic constructions.

Cadiero-Kaplan (2004) identified four literacy practices implemented in schools – functional, cultural, progressive, and critical. Functional literacy works at the most basic level to teach students to read to the fourth- or sixth-grade level. Examples of this curriculum include widely used scripted reading programs, such as Open Court. This program provides students with the basic knowledge to complete a job application and other menial tasks. Schools prepare bicultural students to take only subordinate positions in society by only teaching students the basics.

9

Cultural literacy, the second approach, "places priority on the information readers bring to discourse and text" (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004, p. 7). This literacy theory values cultural capital in order for students to learn the values and morals of the dominant society. Although this approach may seem to be preparing marginalized students, "such literacies are linked to positions of power" (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004, p. 8). This approach seeks to teach the etiquette of the business world; however, students lacking the requisite cultural knowledge are often placed in functional literacy classrooms.

Progressive literacy begins to acknowledge student voice through a student-centered curriculum. Teachers encourage students to explore and discover knowledge by reading to learn (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004). Furthermore, "progressive forms of literacy support a process of reading to learn" (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004, p. 11). Although this third form of literacy may take into account students' experiences, it does not address the social and political ramifications of the dominant class. "It fails, as the other ideologies have, to examine questions of culture, power, and politics" (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004, p. 11).

Finally, critical literacy embarks on a process where both student and teacher learn. Both learners analyze and question the content of the curriculum through "sociopolitical and sociocultural realities" (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004, p. 13). Through this model, students learn to read through analyzing the cultural capital of the dominant society, while maintaining and appreciating their own life experiences. This model requires critical thinking. Students are taught to be agents of change.

Critical literacy is founded upon the concept of emancipatory literacy. The purpose of critical literacy seeks to make students "become literate about their histories, experiences, and the culture of their immediate environment. On the other hand, they must also appropriate those codes and cultures of the dominant spheres so they can transcend their own environments" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 47). Bartolome (cited in Darder et al., 2002) further explained the nature and process of critical literacy: "I believe that by taking a sociohistorical view of present-day conditions and concerns that inform the lived experiences of socially perceived minority students, prospective teachers are better able to comprehend the quasi-colonial nature of minority education" (p. 410). Critical literacy calls teachers to become learners with the students, analyze the social and political structures of our society, and acknowledge and appreciate the students' own experiences and cultural capital.

Effective literacy practices. Teachers subscribe to effective literacy practices by utilizing various methodologies. Au (1993) identified five elements of effective literacy practices: diverse texts, instruction centered on meaning, writing based on students' experiences, culturally responsive instruction, and critical literacy. Conversely, Hadaway, Vardell, and Young (2002) identified four ways to acquire a language: focus on the ability to communicate, comprehension precedes production, production emerges in stages, and lower the affective filter of students. Whether selecting whole-class instruction, literature circles, response groups, cooperative learning, guided reading, or another organizational strategy, "the idea is to provide multiple opportunities for encountering diverse language experiences and text types and for expressing ideas,

thoughts, and feelings by talking about texts" (Hadaway et al., 2002, p. 51). Integrating these aspects into the curriculum requires teacher and student ownership of their own learning to enhance reading comprehension, oral communication, and written comprehension (Au, 1993).

Students develop reading comprehension through a variety of approaches. A strong focus on vocabulary knowledge, word reading strategies that enhance students' understanding of the text, and voluntary reading provide students with the opportunity to explore learning on their own (Au, 1993). Teachers further enhance comprehension by rearranging reading instruction where the teacher first reads the text aloud, reviews the plot, and then conducts a classroom discussion. This form of instruction scaffolds students' learning by teaching students to dissect, comprehend, and analyze various aspects of the text (Au, 1993).

Teachers also facilitate the reading process with "prereading, during-reading, and postreading" activities (Hadaway et al., 2002). Prior to reading a text, teachers enhance comprehension by building language background, vocabulary, and word knowledge through structural analysis, semantic mapping, categorization activities, and role playing. Teachers also include conceptually related reading, anticipation guides, and focus on prediction of events in the story. While reading the text, students and teachers may move through the text with the "page and paragraph" method when the teacher reads a paragraph, then a student, and then the entire classes discusses the events (Hadaway et al., 2002). Classes may also read silently where students ask for support from other students when encountering an unfamiliar word. Through choral reading, everyone reads

the same text aloud to ensure total class participation. Teachers may also choose to incorporate repeated reading where the teacher reads aloud, the students read the same section silently, and then the entire class reads the same section aloud again. After reading, teachers solidify understanding through journaling, questioning, sequencing, book reporting, or creative activities such as classroom skits and plays.

Literacy also includes direct instruction in writing. Au (1993) encouraged writing about topics with personal meaning utilizing the "process approach," which includes time, choice, response, structure, and community. In the essence of time, teachers encourage students to write four to five times a week while providing them with the opportunity to choose their own topic. Teachers respond to students' work through positive constructive feedback with suggestions on how to improve the structure and organization of the content. Lastly, students share their writings with others in a supportive, as opposed to competitive, learning community.

Students also learn to create coherent compositions through a structured writing process (Hadaway et al., 2002). Prewriting activities such as brainstorming, clustering, observing, dramatizing, imagining, detailing, experiencing, and watching films provide students with the ability to organize and formulate their thoughts and ideas. Students then create a draft of their composition utilizing rhetorical stances and observing linguistic choices. After completing the first draft, students revise their work to further develop ideas and concepts in the draft. Lastly, teachers help edit the draft by proofreading and polishing the work for the student to then publish.

Teachers enhance student interest in writing by providing multiple writing activities (Hadaway et al., 2002). Students may co-author works through collaborative writing. Writing letters allows students the opportunity to communicate their ideas while anticipating a personal response. Students may also record personal thoughts and ideas through daily journals read only by the teacher. Teachers may further use literature to promote writing by allowing students to create question-and-answer books that lead to the creation of a newspaper article. Students may also respond to literature by assuming the role of a character, responding to a prompt, or writing a descriptive essay of the scenery and events that take place in the novel. All these methods may be utilized in the development and implementation of novel studies.

Novel studies. Teachers may promote critical literacy through novel studies by implementing critical awareness and action. Teachers grounded in critical pedagogy may teach literacy critically by utilizing novel studies as a vehicle for social, political, and economic awareness. Teachers may use novel studies to teach based on students' experiences where students learn to read the words and the world around them (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

"A novel study is a collection of activities written to accompany a novel" (Brewer, 2007, p. 2). Activities include the incorporation of vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, writing, and research. Teachers utilize a novel as the primary text, while teaching skills as a component of appreciating a novel. Accompanying literature guides provide teachers with ideas on how to incorporate skills into the novel while focusing on higher level thinking skills.

Novel study activities enhance knowledge and understanding, as opposed to detracting from the joy of reading and learning (Brewer, 2007). Busching and Slesinger (2002) stated,

> We believe that our role was to create opportunities for students to
> consider new ideas and experiences, not to promote our own beliefs, so we
> worked to surround the core novel, *Roll of Thunder*, with materials that
> reflected multiple perspectives, different voices from the times,
> information, contrasting stories, and commentary. We wanted each item in
> a text to hold a special value or validity that would help students see the
> topic in a different way (p. 136).

Accompanying novels, which are novels that enhance cross-curricular material, allow students to also read at different levels and use their own experiences to draw upon the times and regions of the stories. Students analyze literature and identify themes. "Recognizing underlying themes requires higher levels of thinking from the students and was essential to addressing social implications of the books" (Busching & Slesinger, 2002, p. 144).

Unfortunately, use of novel studies has only been documented in affluent communities. "Literature allowed these most affluent, suburban students to get inside the lives of others, including those whose lives were most threatened by social and economic conditions" (Busching & Slesinger, 2002, p. 159). Busching and Slesinger (2002) affirmed that students need to see their own lives interpreted and validated through the books they read. Without critical literacy, schools maintain tradition and privilege (Shor

& Pari, 1999). Critical pedagogy argues that all students, not just affluent students, need validation, especially Latino students.

Research Methods

This study explored the approaches and perceptions of critical literacy practices, including novel studies, to increase student learning in reading at a low-income, urban, Catholic elementary school through action research. "In action research, researchers do research on themselves in company with other people, and those others are doing the same" (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, p. 15). The researcher is a member of the school site. All parties partake in reflection and meditation to produce a plan for improvement, a plan of action.

The process of conducting action research includes various steps. McNiff with Whitehead (2002) described the process as reviewing the current practice, identifying an aspect to improve, imagining a way forward, trying it out, taking stock of the events, modifying the plan, evaluating the modification, and continuing to evaluate and modify until satisfied. The methodology of this dissertation followed Johnson's (2002) nine-step approach to action research. Those nine steps include: identify the research topic, provide a theoretical context, plan data collection, analyze the data, allow questions to change, organize the data, report the data, record conclusions, and create a plan of action.

After identifying the research topic and providing a theoretical context, data were obtained through various methods from seventh- and eighth-grade classrooms. I observed classrooms and conducted interviews and focus groups with seventh- and eighth-grade teachers and students. Additional data included analysis of teacher lesson plans and

16

student work, such as homework, tests, portfolios, and projects. Attention was paid to issues of validity and reliability. Throughout the process, I recorded and analyzed data while allowing the questions to change. Then, I conducted a final focus group with the teachers to share my findings and obtain an additional set of data based on their feedback and create a joint plan of action. All the methods utilized led to discovering whether critical literacy approaches are impacting student achievement in reading for Latino students in a low-income, urban, Catholic elementary school.

Significance of the Study

Throughout the United States, the majority of inner-city Catholic elementary schools serve low-income, Latino students who are failing academically. This study reveals that Catholic education was not meeting the academic needs of students of color in working class communities. However, with specific and strategic changes in the reading and literacy curriculum, Catholic education can be empowering for Latino students. This action project suggests that Catholic education must create deliberate changes if it wants to fulfill its mission for social justice. Lastly, this study serves as a platform by documenting critical literacy approaches for Latino students in Catholic schools across the nation. This study also demonstrates that critical literacy practices may serve as an alternative to scripted reading programs in inner-city Catholic schools.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, this case study only analyzed practices at one Catholic elementary school. Because it involved action research, the

practices and methods may only be effective for this particular site. Second, because of

the scope of this study, the issues addressed were evaluated on a surface level. Further

probing of each area of critical literacy would be recommended for future studies.

Finally, the researcher is the administrator of the school. Answers may be slightly biased

when speaking with an authority figure. Teachers and students may have felt the need to

appease the researcher with only positive responses.

Delimitations

The study aimed to address the issues of low-income, inner-city Catholic Latino

students. Thus, rural populations are excluded. Lastly, there is no distinction between

first- and second-generation immigrant students. Therefore, generation factors were not

considered.

Definition of Key Terms

This study defines key terms to clarify the context in which they are being used:

Academic Probation. Academic probation was created at the school site in the fall of

2006. Students failing two or more classes received a notice that had to be signed by a

parent or guardian and returned to the school stating that the student was unable to

participate in after-school activities until all grades were raised to a pass level, which is

determined at the following grade check.

Bicultural. Bicultural is an emancipatory word coined by Antonia Darder (1991). This

term is used instead of "minority" to reflect the equality among people of ethnicities other

than Anglo-American and to identify the cultural conflicts and disparities between

Anglo-Americans and people of color who may live within two cultures. For the purposes of this study, the term bicultural was used synonymously with the term Latino.

Climate. "Climate refers to perceptions of persons in the organization that reflect those norms, assumptions, and beliefs" (Owens, 2004, p. 183).

Critical literacy. Critical literacy provides alternative forms of social and self-development by challenging hegemonic forces. "This kind of literacy – words rethinking worlds, self dissenting in society – connect the political and the personal, the public and the private, the global and the local, the economic and the pedagogical, for reinventing our lives and for promoting justice in a place of inequity" (Shor & Pari, 1999, p. 1).

Critical pedagogy. The principles of critical pedagogy include the "liberation of oppressed populations" (Darder, 1991).

Cultural hegemony. This study also utilized Gramsci's (1971) theory of "cultural hegemony," which manifests itself in two ways: "as domination and as intellectual and moral leadership" (Darder, 1991, p. 33). Hegemony thus refers to the perpetuation of values of the dominating class.

Culture. The definition of "culture" is based on Giroux's (1983) idea that culture is a combination of structures, practices, and lived relations, based on the dominant and subordinate groups (Giroux, 1983, p. 163). Furthermore, the dominant culture is based on the practices and relations of those in control of material wealth, while the subordinate culture exists subordinately to the dominant (McLaren, 1988). "Culture refers to the behavioral norms, assumptions, and beliefs of an organization" (Owens, 2004, p. 183).

Heteroglossia. Heteroglossia refers to bilingualism at differentiated levels. For example, "Spanish is associated with music, with affect, with the diacritical of construction of self. English, as evidenced in the sound tapes of family interactions, is the medium of informational exchange and of functional subsistence within the community" (Gonzales, 2001, p. 66).

Hispanic. The term Hispanic refers to people with descendants predominately from Spanish-speaking countries. "The term ignores, for example, the distinct and diverse experiences of descendants of U.S. conquest, as such the Chicanos and those of the Puerto Rican populations, colonized by the United States at the turn of the century" (Oboler, 1995, p. 1).

Latino. Latino is a political term "that is the main unifying factor among the people of Latin American descent in the United States. . . By suggesting the conscious choice of the term Latino they differentiate it from the imposed label Hispanic" (Oboler, 1995, p. 4).

Literacy. Langer (1991) took this notion of interaction of reader with text a step further, contrasting "literacy as the act of reading and writing and literacy as *ways* of thinking" (p. 13).

Literature/Novel Studies. Teachers utilize a novel (authentic literature) as the primary reading text to teach literacy through generative themes. "With authentic literature, teachers are helping to build emotional, social, and intellectual response to the natural language of engaging stories linked with attractive illustrations" (Smallwood, 2002, p. 4)

Multicultural education. According to Nieto (2002), multicultural education is "antiracist, basic, important for all students, pervasive, education for social justice, a process, and critical pedagogy" (p. 30).

Novel studies. "A novel study is a collection of activities written to accompany a novel" (Brewer, 2007, p. 2).

SLEs. SLEs are School-wide Learning Expectations created and implemented by the community of the school. The SLEs of the school site are to be a "Faithful Christian," "Academically Successful," Responsible Member," and "Self-Motivated." Each grade determines what each SLE means to them.

Student Learning. Student learning is defined as the perceived gained knowledge and increase in comprehension of literacy.

Student Planners. Every student is given a student planner at the beginning of the year in which he/she writes his/her nightly homework. The teacher records a daily conduct grade in the planner. In addition, parents sign the planner on a nightly basis to ensure that homework assignments are complete and to acknowledge the conduct grade.

Thinking Maps. Thinking Maps are visual teaching tools that foster and encourage lifelong learning (Hyerle, 1998).

Writing Process. The entire school follows the same process for writing: I. Brainstorm II. Select a Topic, III. Outline, IV. Rough Draft, V. Edit, VI. Final Draft.

Organization of the Study

The study analyzed and evaluated effective educational reading practices that promote student literacy for low-income Latino middle school students in an inner-city,

Catholic elementary. Through a review of the literature, the school implemented effective literacy practices for students of color in the research site. This study identified problems at the site, implemented changes, evaluated the changes, provided conclusions, and offers recommendations.

Chapter 1 introduced the study and the background of the research problem. Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical framework through a review of the literature on critical pedagogy, critical literacy, effective literacy practices for Latino students including novel studies, and Catholic education. Each of these theories serves as a lens to analyze this dissertation research. Chapter 3 explains the methodology of the research. The action research process addresses issues of positionality, validity, and reliability through a spiraling method whereby data are collected and inductively analyzed. Chapter 4 shares the findings of the study. With a thorough identification of the problem, the findings reveal themes leading to larger contexts. Lastly, Chapter 5 shares the conclusions of the study and provides topics for future study. This chapter explores the possibility of uncovering and unmasking hidden truths.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This study explored the critical literacy practices that improve student learning in reading for Latino middle school students as perceived by teachers and students in a low-income, urban, Catholic elementary school. Critical pedagogy served as the theoretical foundation for this study. Critical literacy, encompassed through critical pedagogy, increases student learning in reading. These theories were studied in a Catholic school environment. The study focused on Latino students because they are the majority of the population being served at the school site. Through the analysis of these various topics, recurring themes emerged to identify key aspects of critical literacy that promote student learning in reading for Latino middle school students at a low-income, urban, Catholic elementary school.

Critical pedagogy serves as the umbrella for implementing change to increase student learning for Latino students. Critical pedagogy explains the hegemonic forces in the current education system that perpetuate the reproduction of social, political, and economic disparities in society. The understanding and implementation of critical pedagogy advocates social justice.

Implementation of the foundations of critical pedagogy creates critical literacy. The larger socio-historic view of the world and its construction found in critical pedagogy focus specifically on literacy. Teachers implement critical literacy approaches in the classroom to help students access, analyze, and synthesize understanding based on students' culture, languages, and histories. Critical literacy also includes critique, dialogue, political awareness, and praxis. This form of learning and teaching validates students' knowledge and experiences while providing them with the opportunity to be agents of change.

Critical literacy practices took place in this study in a Catholic school setting. The mission, history, and current practices of Catholic schools play a major role in conducting critical pedagogical practices through critical literacy. Catholic schools reveal their initial beginnings, their shift in paradigm, and their current goals of social justice. This leads to the examination of the Catholic school curriculum and the environment of Catholic schools. In line with their mission of social justice, inner-city Catholic schools prove to cater to bicultural students (Greeley, 1984). The conversation on Catholic schools ends with a discussion on the formation of identity for Latino students within Catholic schools and how this identity serves to inhibit or increase student learning.

The educational system traditionally oppresses to maintain cultural hegemony, thus alienating Latino students. However, a few schools recorded strategies that proved effective for Latino students. Researchers also recorded language acquisition strategies for Latino students (Ochoa & Rhodes, 2005). The effective language acquisition

strategies for Latino students contain critical literacy practices. Thus, critical literacy

practices improve student learning in reading for Latino students.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy questions societal norms. It is the practice of liberating

oppressed populations through agents of change. Critical pedagogy questions knowledge.

The components of critical pedagogy address various aspects of society such as:

hegemony and counter-hegemony, resistance, ideology, economy, historicity of

knowledge, dialogue and conscientization, cultural politics, and critical literacy (Darder

et al., 2002).

The social, cultural, and political interactions that take place between teacher and

student make pedagogy critical. Nieto (2002) described pedagogy as questioning why and

how the curriculum is determined. Education becomes more than learning subjects. It

becomes an interaction between the teacher and the student.

Hegemony

Currently, traditional educational practices of a traditional classroom fail to

provide an environment for bicultural students who do not conform to the dominant

society to be successful. Darder (1991) offered five forms of domination that all function

to maintain the status quo. The first explanation places the blame on the individual.

Through "meritocracy," students who are advanced move ahead and those who are

struggling are having difficulty as a result of their inability to learn. All responsibility is

placed on the student; there is no recognition of institutional, school, or teacher practices.

Schools also group students based on Intelligence Testing. IQ Testing is problematic because a discriminatory cultural system solely determines the criteria (Darder, 1991, p. 14). Schools test students based on norms and values that serve as gatekeepers to allow entrance only to those who are able to subject themselves to hegemonic practices.

Lastly, schools may sort students according to ability "tracking." A school places students in remedial classes based on tests scores. Cadiero-Kaplan (2004) stated, "We, as teacher and educators, owe it to our students and society to acknowledge that practices such as ability testing and tracking are a form of social control and a systematic way of sorting children along ethnic, racial, class, and gender lines" (p. 87). This practice also deserves critique because the majority of students placed in these classes are students of subordinate classes and cultures, which further enables their confined placement in society as a group and as individuals. These three institutional practices all recognize the individual as the culprit of his/her own demise.

Institutional practices also play a key role in student domination. Teacher expectations often dictate the fate of bicultural students. Persell (1977) wrote of the "genesis of teacher expectations," which includes social context, pedagogical frameworks, teachers' personal experiences, and student characteristics. If a teacher has negative expectations of a student, the student will be negatively affected, which is more likely the case for bicultural students. As a result of these negative expectations on bicultural students, teachers deject the academic achievement of these students, while simultaneously supporting the success of students of the dominant culture (Darder, 1991).

Traditional American schooling further expands the disparity gap for bicultural students in a number of ways. First, education is currently used as a colonizing device to maintain the status quo by limiting students' choices through the exploitation of cognitive and socials skills (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1976; Bowles & Gintes, 1976). Students must think according to the dominant societal norms and accept their position in society by only learning basic skills if they belong to a subordinate class. Second, schools often operate under the "banking" system of education where teaching is a static process that becomes "completely alien to [the] existential experience of the student" (Freire, 1970, p. 57). Lastly, schools teach the "hidden curriculum," which excludes the history of people of color, the working class, and women in order to continue to perpetuate the ideals of the dominant culture (Arnowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 147). Through these perpetuated and reproduced means, the traditional American educational system remains an institution of oppression for bicultural students.

Resistance and Counter-hegemony

Bicultural students operate in a system of two opposing cultures. However, the idea of "biculturalism" serves as a tool of resistance against hegemonic forces (Solis, 1980). Bicultural students respond to the dominant culture through alienation, where they reject their primary culture, or through cultural dualism, where students code switch between two separate and opposed cultures. Both of these responses place the power in the hands of the dominant culture. However, students may also respond in a separatist manner, where they reside primarily within their primary culture and reject the dominant culture, or they may respond through cultural negotiation, where they mediate and

integrate both cultures as a form of survival. The last two responses are a form of

resistance (Darder, 1991). Bicultural students succeed in American society when they

respond through cultural negotiation. By negotiating their primary culture and the

dominant culture, bicultural students resist the dominant while still maintaining the

ability to operate successfully, but critically, within the confines of the dominant

structure.

Ideology

Ideology is the beliefs that guide an individual through social movement based on

his/her interpretation and understanding of the political, social, and economic

perceptions. Teachers create perceptions of students, and thus students begin to perceive

the world around them through different eyes. The teachers' ideology includes

interrogated contradictions between mainstream culture and lived experiences.

Unfortunately, many of their perceptions negatively perpetuate the dominant ideology.

> Part of the reason lies in the fact that the teachers, who like most
>
> specialists, have accepted the dominant ideology, are technicians who, by
>
> virtue of the specialized training they receive in an assembly line of ideas
>
> and aided by the mystification of this transferred knowledge, seldom reach
>
> the critical capacity of analysis to develop a coherent comprehension of
>
> the world. (Macedo, 1994, p. 23)

Teachers, thus, are victims and ideological agents of the educational system.

Education as critical pedagogy means realizing that knowledge is neither neutral

nor apolitical. Student voice becomes central to radical reformation of the curriculum

(Ruiz, as cited in Darder, Torres, & Gutierrez, 1997). Students and teachers learn simultaneously that there is more than one way to understand the world. Critical pedagogy accepts cultural and linguistic diversity (Nieto, 2002). Teachers and students must think critically, reflect, and then take action. Learning becomes more than just a process, it includes action.

Economy

Critical pedagogy identifies and names the culprits of social and political disparities. Structural discrimination starts in the economic realm and then extends to social systems such as political institutions and schools (Barrera, as cited in Darder et al., 1997). These institutional disparities affect American society as a whole. For Latinos, economic discrimination significantly impacted their position in the labor market, leading to low wages and unstable work. As a result, Latinos suffered with "disproportionately high rates of individual and family poverty" (Perez & Salazar, as cited in Darder et al., 1997, p. 49). Latino poverty further affects the national economy because of their large population and youth, leading to long-term social and economic consequences.

Historicity of Knowledge

Traditionally, educators determine what is important to know. As Martin and Litton (2004) stated, "Knowledge is not neutral" (p. 44). They identified five types of knowledge. Personal/cultural knowledge comes from lived experiences. Popular knowledge is received through radio and television. Mainstream/academic knowledge acknowledges Western theories and ideologies. Yet, transformative/academic knowledge challenges the aforementioned mainstream ideologies. Lastly, school knowledge is a

combination of the previous four. Critical pedagogy calls educators to acknowledge the various forms of knowledge and act upon them (Martin & Litton, 2004). Schooling becomes a political process in which knowledge is power. Because of this power, students face educational inequality.

Many educators teach material and use methods that are comfortable to them. Teachers become the specialists and students are receptacles of deposited knowledge. Freire (1998) called this the "banking model." Through this model, students merely receive and regurgitate information. Students' background knowledge, experience, and thoughts are omitted from the learning process. To remedy this model, Freire (1998) invented the "problem posing method." Through this model, both students and teacher learn and become responsible for the education process. Unfortunately, not all stakeholders accept their role.

Dialogue and Conscientization

Students and teachers develop critical thought through dialogue. By posing problems and discussing issues of power, education becomes emancipatory by challenging the dominant discourse (Darder et al., 2002). Through dialogue, teachers present students with the opportunity to reflect and ultimately take action.

As an educational strategy, constituents contribute to a reciprocal interaction. Both parties explore and learn throughout the process from one another. The teacher no longer solely possesses knowledge. Students take ownership in the discussion where their lived experiences become central to the process. As students and teachers discuss, they gain a deeper awareness of the world around them. Thus, dialogue begets consciousness.

Cultural Politics

Cultural politics acknowledge the political interactions of dominant and subordinate groups that take place between students and teachers (McLaren, as cited in Darder et al., 1997). Curriculum collides with students' lived experiences, creating great inequalities. "Educational inequality is repugnant in a society that has pledged to provide an equal education for all students regardless of circumstance. . . It continues to be the case that far too many students are shortchanged because educational policies and practices favor students from backgrounds that are more privileged in social class, race, language, or other differences" (Nieto, 2002, p. xvi). Critical pedagogy seeks to remedy these differences.

"Critical pedagogy acknowledges that education is a political act and educational practices are not neutral" (Martin & Litton, 2004, p. 42). The disparities among bilingual and bicultural students are social and political constructions of the United States. Perez and Salazar (cited in Darder et al., 1997) summarized the myriad factors that contribute to the low level of education impacting Latinos: "Poverty, low-quality schools, enrollment below grade level, nonacademic tracking, and lack of Hispanic personnel in schools have an impact on the status of Latino education – and play a critical role in the future employability and productivity of the growing Hispanic population" (p. 61). Schools are political and cultural arenas.

Theory of Biculturalism

How do bicultural students negotiate their identity to learn in a social community? The theoretical frameworks for this discussion are grounded in Darder's (1991) axis

relationship of culture and power. Darder (1991) created a social model in regards to culture and power. The binary axis includes the dominant and subordinate cultures on the vertical axis, with domination and resistance on the horizontal axis (see Figure 1). The axis further develops to include cultural alienation, cultural negotiation, cultural dualism, and cultural separatism as ways of affirming the bicultural identity (Darder, 1991, p. 57).

Figure 1. Darder's Sphere of Biculturalism

Dominant Culture

Cultural Alienation

Cultural Negotiation

Bicultural Affirmation

Cultural Dualism

Cultural Separatism

Domination

Resistance

Subordinate Culture
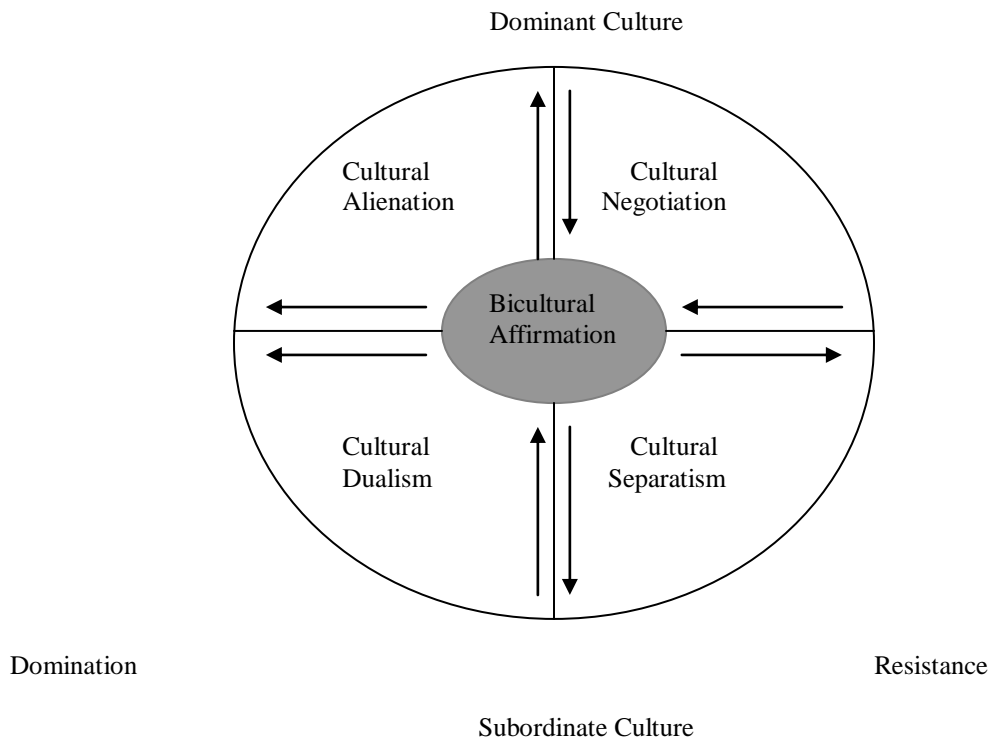
Note: Darder, 1991, p. 55; p. 57.

Taking Darder's sphere of biculturalism into account, bicultural students attending a traditional American school that adheres to a curriculum of the dominant culture encounter four options within an academic setting. First, a bicultural student can choose to conform to the practices of the dominant culture and thus be alienated from his/her primary culture. In this situation, a bicultural student will totally put aside the

primary culture in exchange for the dominant. Students may often develop a self-hatred for their culture and background. These students will do anything and everything within their power to act, dress, speak, and think according to the dominant culture.

Second, a bicultural student can choose to resist the curriculum and social structure of the dominant culture and culturally negotiate power by working within the system while still resisting the dominant culture. This example was seen in the late 1960s with the Chicano Power Movement. Chicanos realized that they were not going to be able to change the system from the outside. As a form of resistance, hundreds of Latinos enrolled in colleges and universities across the nation to become leaders in order to help their friends and family members still living within the confines of the subordinate culture and change the system from within social structures.

The other two options for bicultural students include living within the subordinate culture through a marginalized experience. Thus, the third option involves a student who decides to practice the dominant culture while living within the subordinate culture. This student code-switches, living in a world of duality, and keep the two cultures separate. For example, a student will only speak English at school and only speak Spanish at home. The difference with this student is that he/she makes a conscience choice to separate the two worlds. He/she is often ashamed to speak Spanish in an English environment, and vice versa. Many bicultural students live in this world and experience great anxiety and embarrassment at parent-teacher conferences.

The final option for bicultural students is to live entirely separate from the dominant culture without conforming to any of the practices in American schooling.

These students are the second-language learners who never learn or practice English. Whether a choice or an inability, society places second-language learners in a subordinate position where they choose to not accept the rules of the dominant culture as a form of resistance. These students often fall through the cracks and never graduate from high school.

Bicultural Latino students live on an axis of self-confidence, self-hatred, alienation, and assimilation. The knowledge of positionality on that axis determines a probable course of action. Educators have the ability to move and direct the location of bicultural students' identity. Understanding the power of controlling positionality creates change that mobilizes the theories of critical pedagogy.

There have been many attempts to explain the underachievement of bicultural students. The idea of "nature vs. nurture" of the 1960s attempted to explain the disparities among bicultural students and their Anglo-American counterparts through genetics and the environment (Coleman, 1966; Jensen 1969). At the same time, liberal theorists saw the root of the cause as environmental factors, such as poverty and cultural deprivation (Bloom, 1964; Cohen, Frankel, & Brewer, 1968). Both of these explanations have proven unsuccessful because both place the blame on students and their families.

Critical Literacy

Critical literacy implements critical pedagogical practices through various working definitions. According to Anderson and Irvine (1993), critical literacy is "learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one's experience as historically constructed within specific power relations" (p. 82). Shor and

Pari (1999) further explained critical literacy as "language use that questions the social construction of the 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" (p.1).

John Dewey and Paulo Freire (Shor & Pari, 1999) further explored critical literacy. Dewey argued that education should be democratic. He proposed that all curricula must have a social ethic. "Dewey thus saw the new mass curriculum of his time (the three R's and job-training) deriving from class inequities, where the study of abstract liberal arts remained a leisure class privilege while basic skills and occupationalism were relegated to society's subordinates" (Shor & Pari, 1999, p 5). He acknowledged and recognized the power of personal experience as critical for learning, yet saw how curricula perpetuated the status quo.

Freire proposed critical literacy as the central element of empowering education. The education of illiterate peasants began with acknowledging and discussing social injustices. After disparities were acknowledged, literacy began with a purpose. He taught in "generative themes" from daily life experiences encountered by his students. By using these examples, Freire's goal was to bring about justice in a life full of inhumanity (Shor & Pari, 1999).

Schools prescribe to various types of literacy. However, all agree that literacy is key to student success. Langer (1991) viewed reading and writing as a separate act, whereas literacy is a way of thinking. Nieto (2002) defined literacy as being more than learning to read and write words. "The educators in this study were adamant in their

belief that preparing Mexicano/Latino students for academic success required not only that students encode and decode 'words' but that they also develop the ability to read a variety of 'worlds'" (Nieto, 2002, p. 50). Literacy includes critical thinking and understanding.

Critical literacy is taught through critical teaching. Teachers provide critical instruction by starting with student-generated themes that then connect to the local community and global world (Shor & Pari, 1999). The link created by the teacher based on his/her knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and culture determine the success or failure of the student (Nieto, 2002).

However, the change in student perception must also take place on a school level. "It is of paramount importance that teachers understand that the adoption of a progressive methodology will not necessarily accomplish anything if the dominant ideology within the school is diametrically opposed to the principles and values of the chosen progressive methodology" (Macedo, 1994, p. 155). This often leaves teachers responsible for creating and implementing their own pedagogical practices. Macedo (as cited in Darder et al., 1997) called for educators to develop critical pedagogical methods in which students utilize their own reality as a basis for literacy.

Many teachers are forced to adhere to the current pedagogies of the literacy curriculum, or they are unwilling to challenge to these pedagogies. Macedo (1994) argued that "the instrumentalist approach to literacy does not only refer to the goal of producing readers who meet the basic requirements of contemporary society but also includes the highest level of literacy found in disciplinary specialism and

hyperspecialization" (p. 15). The instrumentalist approach to literacy includes a competency skills-based approach. This approach hinders critical thinking and "sets a stage for the anesthetization of the mind" (Macedo, 1994, p. 16). Students' learning is fragmented into sections that hamper the ability to connect meaning within a sociopolitical context. This approach aims to produce skilled workers who are only able to complete a job application, thus perpetuating the current hegemonic system.

Paramount to the instrumentalist approach, which is an under-serving literacy curriculum, is the glorification of Western civilization. Macedo (1994) posited, "Central to this cultural reproductive mechanism is the over celebration of myths that inculcate us with beliefs about the supremacy of Western heritage at the same time as the dominant ideology create other instruments that degrade and devalue other cultural narrative along the lines of race, ethnicity, language, and gender" (p. 37). Literacy is cultural. It must reflect the true historical experience of all peoples.

The implications of the instrumentalist approach to literacy are at best dangerous to poor students. Henry Giroux stated (in Macedo, 1994):

Literacy within this perspective is geared to make adults more productive workers and citizens within a given society. In spite of its appeal to economic mobility, functional literacy reduces the concept of literacy and the pedagogy in which it is suited to the pragmatic requirements of capital; consequently, the notions of critical thinking, culture and power disappear under the imperatives of the labor process and the need of capital accumulation (p. 18).

In this form of literacy, students are educated to fill a job instead of learning a profession. Macedo (1994) referred to the production of "semiliterates," those individuals able to fulfill a specialized task but are ignorant of the world of knowledge.

Literacy serves as an instrument to allow students to be agents of change. Through literacy:

> The reading of the world must precede the reading of the word. That is to say, to access the true and total meaning of an entity, we must resort to the cultural practices that mediate our access to the world's semantic field and its interaction with the word's semantic features (Macedo, 1994, p. 27).

The literacy curriculum must change to produce critical thinkers. For teachers, the need is immediate. "Our challenge, then, becomes to organize the teaching-learning process to the potential and not the perceived developmental level of our children" (Nieto, 2002, p. 31). Teachers must partake in a paradigm shift in which they realize the social and political ramifications of their actions.

Learning among student and teacher is collaborative and conflicting. Shor and Pari (1999) identified "the third idiom," which is "a local critical discourse synthesized in the immediate setting for the purposes undertaken there, different from the everyday language of students and from the academic language of the teacher" (p. 11). In this setting, students generate themes and ideas and discuss them through foreign reflection in order to connect them to society. Yet, teachers must be aware of their positionality.

Teachers, by nature, represent figures of authority. Freire (1970, 1973) believed in rigor, structure, and relation to the global community. He cautioned that teachers

maintain a structured two-way dialogue, without presenting a soliloquy. He also cautioned that a classroom free of structure would lack the structure to maintain an on-going, critical dialogue. For a class to be critical, power must be shared by all constituents. "In sum, identity differences in an unequal society mean that teachers possess uneven authority when they address students and students possess uneven and unequal authority when they encounter a critical process" (Shor & Pari, 1999, p. 18).

Shor and Pari (1999) discussed six approaches to encourage critical literacy:

1. Structure the class around "safe houses" (group caucuses within the larger class where marginalized "others" can develop their positions).

2. Offer exercises in oral and written storytelling and in identifying with the ideas, interests, histories, and attitudes of "others."

3. Give special attention to the rhetorical techniques of parody, comparison, and critique so as to strengthen students' abilities to speak back to their immersion in the literate products of the dominant culture.

4. Explore suppressed aspects of history (what Foucault referred to as "disqualified" or "unqualified" narratives relating popular resistance).

5. Define ground rules for communication across differences and in the midst of existing hierarchies of authority.

6. Do systematic studies of cultural mediation, or how cultural

    material is produced, distributed, received, and used (p.10).

Through these rules, teachers establish a democratic environment for critical literacy to

pursue. Freire (1970) also offered the bidialectal approach in which "standard usage,

rhetorical forms, and academic discourse make democratic sense only when taught in a

critical curriculum explicitly posing problems about the status quo based in themes from

the students' lives" (found in Shor & Pari, 1999, p. 12). Students use language as a form

of power to create a democratic society. Darder (1991) concurred with the bidialectal

approach, in addition to standard usage, bilingualism, and contrastive translations of texts

from community language into academic discourse. She argued that students create

meaning through their language of choice and then learn to voice their opinion through

critical language. Understanding and meaning must first take place in the realm of the

student in order for literacy to be critical.

    Although the critical literacy classroom adheres to democratic practices, students

living in the United States should master the English language to gain the tools necessary

to be agents of political and social change. Macedo (1994) concurred, "This means that

educators should understand the value of mastering the Standard English language of the

wider society. It is through the full appropriation of the standard English language that

linguistic-minority students find themselves linguistically empowered to engage in

dialogue with various sectors of the wider society" (p. 128). Ruiz (in Darder et al., 1997)

supported the proposition that bilingual skills go beyond economic and social advantage

– they provide a platform for social stratification. Freire (1993) resounded, "The need to

master the dominant language is not only to survive but also better to fight for the transformation of an unjust and cruel society where the subordinate groups are rejected, insulted, and humiliated" (p. 153). He further stated, "Finally, teachers have to say to students, look, in spite of being beautiful, this way you speak also includes the question of *power*. Because of the political problem of power, you need to learn how to command the dominant language, in order for you to survive in the struggle to transform society" (Freire, 1993, p. 73). Although a critical classroom may aim to operate in a democratic society, students leaving the safe haven of the classroom do not. However, what makes literacy critical?

Critical literacy is a social practice that begins with a question, continues through democratic dialogue, and concludes in political practice. The beginning question challenges hegemonic forces in an attempt to connect "the political and the personal, the public and the private, the global and the local, the economic and the pedagogical, for rethinking our lives and for promoting justice in place of inequity" (Shor & Pari, 1999, p. 1). The question invites students to participate in a co-governed dialogue.

Teachers and students share and take full responsibility for this dialogue. Power is shared and the curriculum is negotiated. "By inviting students to develop critical thought and action on various subject matters, the teacher herself develops as a critical-democratic educator who becomes more informed of the needs, conditions, speech habits, and perceptions of the students, from which knowledge she designs activities and into which she integrates her special expertise. Besides learning in-process how to design a course *for* the students, the critical teacher also learns how to design the course *with* the

41

students (co-governance)" (Shor & Pari, 1999, p. 17). Teachers relinquish power so that students might learn; students gain power so that society may change:

> Critical literacy is action. Kretovics (1985) defined critical literacy as:
> Providing students not merely with functional skills, but with the
> conceptual tools necessary to critique and engage society along with its
> inequalities and injustices. Furthermore, critical literacy can stress the
> need for students to develop a collective vision of what it might be like to
> live in the best of all societies and how such a vision might be made
> practical (p. 51).

Through critical literacy, social justice prevails through democratic education (Shor & Pari, 1999).

Effective Literacy Practices

Thelen (1995) compared and contrasted three methods of literacy instruction: the traditional basal, whole language, and literature-based instruction (see Figure 2). All methods include the common goal of teaching children to read. The traditional basal focused on teacher-centered instruction of pre-selected texts dictated by a manual based on standardized testing. Through the whole language approach, students select literature to read while teachers assess learning through authentic teacher evaluations. In literature-based instruction, teachers select the texts and create assessments based on student need. Teachers may incorporate worksheets and direction instruction as needed. Classes further explore themes in a single text or novel.

Figure 2. Thelen's Venn Diagram: Whole Language, Literature Based, and

Traditional Basal

Whole Language
Students complete authentic tasks.
Teachers use authentic evaluation.
Response to literature chosen by students.
Explicit demonstrations (mini-lessons) as needed.
Broad themes built around the total curriculum.
Students self-select reading and writing activities within certain parameters.

Goal: to teach children to read
Skills taught.
Groups used.

Scope and sequence charts.

Response to literature often includes worksheets.
Direct instruction as needed.
Narrow themes often built around topics and single books.
Teachers may use tests.
Teachers select much of they feel students should read and write about.
Literature Based

Worksheets are used.
Response to literature dictated by the manual.
Basal authors select what they feel the students should read.
Direct instruction dictated by scope and sequence charts.
End-of-unit tests fashioned after standardized tests.
Other subject areas taught separately.
Traditional Basal

Note: Thelen, 1995, p. 87.

Whole language is the belief that "children learn not merely by imitation or rote, but by construction their own meanings from the world around them" (Chew, 1997, p. 1). It is the idea that learning to read and write takes place simultaneously through natural and complete text. Teachers provide "mini-lessons" to teach skills within the context of

understanding the text. Students learn all of the elements of language arts – reading, writing, listening, and speaking –through the interaction with books, alone, and in groups (Chamot & O'Malley, cited in Spangenberg-Urbschat & Pritchard, 1994). The process includes journal writing, learning vocabulary from the text, writing books, and creating projects based around a thematic unit. In whole language, students are able to take risks because they set the pace (Moll, 1992). Teachers assess students through self-reflection with evidence in student portfolios.

Holistic instruction has proven to be beneficial for students. Brophy (1992) prescribed reading as a process of construction meaning of the text. Decoding and blending should not be taught by isolated worksheet and basal readers. Teachers should challenge students to learn skills through literature. Whole language serves as a powerful curriculum framework as it supports the "development of both language and literacy and the self-esteem and dignity of all students" (Altwerger & Ivener. cited in Spangenberg-Urbschat & Pritchard, 1994, p. 72). The practice also remedies discipline issues because teachers are able to teach literature and novels filled with prevalent issues that relate to students' everyday lives.

Literature-based instruction also allows teachers to select content and determine instruction based on students' experiences. Through this model, teachers provide direct instruction in specific areas as needed for students to master literacy. Teachers enhance and enrich instruction based on students' prior knowledge by selecting three or four texts read as a class in order to scaffold, interpret, and analyze themes in the text based on student response.

Hurren (1993) examined a collaborative planning literature-based model to meet the needs of English Language Learners (ELL) in a fifth-grade classroom. Three teachers (a homeroom teacher, a librarian, and a language specialist) worked together to select literature and provide activities that accessed students' prior knowledge and allowed them to learn vocabulary in themes. The language specialist commented, "The students should learn the language that goes with that, for expressing those ideas" (Hurren, 1993, p. 9). Studying one novel and learning vocabulary from that novel proved to be extremely beneficial for students and teachers.

Smallwood (2002) also supported literature-based, thematic, content-based units for English Language Learners (ELL). "With authentic literature, teachers are helping to build emotional, social, and intellectual response to the natural language of engaging stories linked with attractive illustrations" (Smallwood, 2002, p. 4). By reading literature, students were able to hear, speak, and interact with thematic and story concepts.

Recent research on language acquisition includes a study at five elementary schools in the Los Angeles area (CREDE, 1999). English Language Learners (ELL) study literature related to their personal experiences. Students learn to read, write, and discuss literature through themes. By focusing on one novel, students are able to comprehend the text by making connections with their everyday lives (CREDE, 1999). "In terms of English acquisition, the literature units provide substantial comprehensible language input-language that includes slightly more sophisticated structures or vocabulary than learners can produce on their own, but is understandable within the context in which it is used" (CREDE, 1999, p. 3). The paper also identified four

strategies that proved to increase student learning in combination with the study of literature. Teachers need to build students' background knowledge and draw upon students' personal experiences. Teachers who also extended discourse through discussion and writing and revisited critical points in the text also improved student learning. By implementing these four strategies and literature studies, ELL students were able to increase student achievement. The study of literature was not solely sufficient to have a lasting impact on student achievement. Students needed tools to access prior knowledge and analyze key points of the story. By acknowledging students' experiences and voices, literature studies help students connect knowledge and meaning.

Shor and Pari (1999) further described various examples of critical literacy practices. Practitioners developed alternatives to basic skill drills, such as "writing-across-the-curriculum, ethnography-as-syllabus, writing process methods, service learning, journal writing, community literacy approaches, literacy narratives, mainstreaming basic writers, portfolio assessment, and collaborative learning, with many classrooms redesigned as writing workshops" (p. 11). Auerbach (in Shor & Pari, 1999) also discussed various tools to produce a critical literacy classroom including: "charts, pictures and photos, key words, language experience stories, published materials, code, role plays, student-generated writing, and photostories" (p. 34). These methods provide alternatives to traditional forms of literacy.

Novel Studies

Novel studies are a literature-based approached to literacy. It is a combination of whole language and basal reader approaches. In novel studies, teachers select three of

four novels to be studied over the course of the year. Every student possesses a copy of the novel, which is used as the primary text. Teachers develop lessons based on themes drawn from the novel while tapping students' prior knowledge. Novel studies incorporate the basal approach because teachers determine the novel and lessons taught, and they provide direct instruction to students as needed. Novel studies incorporate the whole language approach by allowing teachers the autonomy to drive instruction through various methodologies and by focusing on specific themes in a novel based on students' experiences. Teachers also create authentic assessments to determine student learning (Thelen, 1995).

The implementation of novel studies requires environmental key factors (Au, 1993). First, teachers and students foster respect for one another through the establishment of a classroom community. Through a systemic approach, teachers provide consistency and routine for students while making connections to the real world. As a result, students develop connections through group-sanctioned learning because of the structured classroom environment.

Through novel studies, teachers improve literacy through various "instructional actions" (Block, 2003). First, teachers remove physical and mental distance between themselves and their students to facilitate class discussions that provide a means for students to develop ideas and reflect on their understanding. Teachers better identify students' strengths and areas for growth because teachers adapt the curriculum to meet students' needs.

Teachers also employ effective literacy practices in regards to reading and writing to guide instruction (Hadaway et al., 2002). Teachers begin a chapter with pre-reading activities that include direct vocabulary instruction and accessing students' prior knowledge in order to provide a foundation for student learning. Students may read the text aloud, through guided reading, independent reading, silent reading, or shared reading.

While reading the text, teachers provide various activities to enhance oral language development, student comprehension, and writing. Students may work in groups as "study buddies." In "think-pair-share-groupings," students listen to a question, think about their response, then share their ideas with a fellow student creating a pair (Block, 2003). Teachers may also allow time for "story-telling," where students share how their own personal experiences relate to the novel (Au, 1993). Teachers afford students with the opportunities to share their ideas orally and through written communication.

Teachers also provide an avenue for students to continuously write. Whether students write through daily journals or in response to formal writing prompts, teachers create an arena for students to create compositions (Au, 1993). For formal essays, students follow a writing process that includes brainstorming, organizing ideas, creating a draft, editing and revising, and publishing a final draft (Block, 2003). Teachers then assess each piece based on standardized or teacher-developed rubrics. The use of rubrics requires teachers and students to look for content and meaning in addition to grammar, spelling, and mechanics (Hadaway et al., 2002).

In addition, teachers utilize various forms of assessment to determine student learning. Teachers incorporate the use of portfolios, anecdotal records, narrative report cards, anchored grading, self-assessment, and holistic grading (Block, 2003). Use of these various forms of assessment allows teachers to gain a fuller view of student progress.

Novel studies share many commonalities with literature circles and contrast in two distinct areas. Moss (1994) referred to literature circles as "Focus Units," where teachers utilize various authentic literature texts to explore themes. First, novel studies differ in that the class reads one text simultaneously and explores themes within the text. Second, in novel studies, the text drives instruction whereas in literature circles, the theme drives instruction. Despite these two distinctions, novel studies and literature circles possess common traits.

Both practices, novel studies and literature circles, explore authentic literature. Selection of the texts relies on the teachers' background. Yet, students learn about themselves and create meaning by sharing responses initiated by the teacher but formulated through the collaboration of fellow classmates. Students respond to open-ended questions through oral and written form to generate "cumulative learning" (Moss, 1994). Lastly, novel studies and literature circles aim to provide enjoyment in learning for both the teacher and students.

In determining which form of instruction to adopt, teachers must assess the needs of their students. Hadaway et al. (2002) specifically addressed the needs of English language learners. "Perhaps then, the real answer is not to avoid reading literature and talking about books with English language learners, but to begin with a more structure

approach to literature circles that supports literacy development" (p. 93). Novel studies provide a more structured approach to literacy development that meets the needs of bilingual students.

Latino Students

Public schools often look at the student population as a whole, the majority of which is a White, middle-class population. According to these standards, Owens (2004) posited five criteria for effective schools. First, the purpose of schools is to teach. Thus, a school must provide an environment where teaching and learning can occur. Improvements must be made to unify the school, and teachers and staff must reflect the mission and philosophy of the school. Lastly, the school must accept accountability for the achievement of the school. Effective schools clearly demonstrated these elements. The question remains, is this applicable to minority and diverse students?

Some public schools utilized specific strategies to help Latino students. Knowing and respecting Latino students within their family unity was instrumental to increase Latino parent involvement (Rolon, 2005). Unfortunately, school culture may often be uninviting to Latino parents, especially for monolingual Spanish-speakers (Tinkler, 2002). Schools must provide bilingual materials for all parents. The Spanish language should be embraced as an asset through dual-language programs for Spanish and English speakers alike (Rolon, 2005). When Latino parents are given guidance and instruction on how to help their children academically, many rise to the challenge and improve their child's academic achievement (Gilliam, Gerla, & Wright, 2004). Inclusion of Latino parents and families is key to providing academic achievement.

Within the school, strategies of teaching, curriculum, and celebration of Latino culture must be integrated to meet the needs of Latino students. Schools can better serve Latino students by providing teaching pedagogy that coincides with Hispanic values (Tinkler, 2002). By celebrating cultural events and festivities that are key components of Latino culture, schools can increase students' self-awareness and pride (Jesse, Davis, & Pokorny, 2004).

In a study on two Latino community based schools, Antrop-Gonzales and De Jesus (2006) attributed student success to high expectations, interpersonal relationships with teachers, student safety, curriculum that affirms student identity, and community support. Rolon (2005) further suggested implementation of teacher training, a variety of literacy programs, and various forms of student assessment. Salinas (2002) further proposed that the ethnicity of a teacher of color can positively affect Latino student achievement because their teachers serve as role-models and have faced the same challenges and difficulties Latino students are experiencing. Thus, the school must be a place where Latino students feel safe, acknowledged, and respected for their attributes.

At the core of successful schools for Latino students is school leadership. Principals who demonstrate a strong, visible presence in the school; work with community leaders; and provide a unified school vision lead students along the path to academic success (Jesse et al., 2004). Principals who work collaboratively with students, parents, teachers, and community members provide a sense of unity and coherence, which allow for the successful growth of Latino students.

Language

For Latinos, language acquisition is an integral part in the formation of self. Language is not only a form of communication, but also an extension of their self. Gonzales (2001) said, "To speak of language is to speak of our 'selves.' Language is at the heart, literally and metaphorically, of who we are, how we present ourselves, and how others see us" (p. xix).

Latinos, as a group, are very diverse. They come from different backgrounds and different cultures. Language is the thread that binds them. As Latinos enter the United States, they face many challenges. These challenges may include socio-economic hardships, family separations, and cultural disconnect. However, all Spanish-speaking people face the challenge of language acquisition. Numerous people do not acquire English as a second language, yet many do. In studies conducted by Gonzales (2001), Latinos in the United States have an incredible ability to be resilient in the face of adversity. Therefore, even though learning English may be challenging, Latinos can and will succeed.

The manner in which Latinos learn English also varies. Many learn English through formal schooling. Some may attend special bilingual programs. However, the majority attend English-only schools. Although many parents appreciate bilingual programs, numerous parents of English language learners prefer that their children attend an English-only school. Parents may select English-only schools because they want their children to master English while they provide instruction in Spanish at home (Ochoa & Rhodes, 2005). Regardless, parents want the best for their children. As Latinos speaking

Spanish from another country, parents want for their children to be able to communicate effectively in English, which may provide further opportunities for advancement in the United States.

Once in an English-only school, teachers may utilize many techniques to meet the needs of second language learners. In regards to classroom practices, Peregoy and Boyle (2000) stated:

By definition, English learners are still learning English. Classroom instruction often consists of oral language interactions between teachers and students. When using English as the language of instruction, teachers need to use sheltering strategies to assure that students will be able to understand and participate successfully in learning activities. Pairing nonverbal cues (e.g., pictures, demonstrations, and gestures) with verbal instruction helps make lessons comprehensible for students. Paraphrasing and defining important vocabulary in context also aid comprehension. As lessons are made more comprehensible for students, instruction simultaneously promotes language acquisition and content learning.

(p. 244)

Teachers educating second language learners should implement these techniques to support English development.

Moreover, learning English is not just about learning letters and words, it is about learning concepts. Peregoy and Boyle (2000) stated, "Interestingly, the comprehension challenges imposed by limited English proficiency are alleviated when the text concerns

content with which the second language reader is familiar" (p. 239). Teachers best meet the needs of second language learners when they present information with which the students are familiar. In addition, teachers support student learning by utilizing methodologies that are common to the student's cultural background. For example, Flores-Duenas (2005) conducted a study on a productive first-grade teacher educating Spanish-speaking students. This teacher made a profound impact in her students' acquisition of English because she continually had her students create a sense of community by verbally sharing all ideas and experiences while completing every activity. Because students were able to speak and articulate their ideas, they felt a part of the class and enhanced their English-speaking skills.

Lastly, the study of language always returns to the reflection of the self. Gonzales (2001) stated, "Language use is not merely cognitive, but it is deeply social, ideological, and political, and resonate in children's emotional development" (p. 190). As Latinos continue to learn and speak both English and Spanish, they are pulled and conform to the framework of "heteroglossia" (Gonzales, 2001, p. 66). These bilingual Latinos continue to speak both languages; Spanish is for emotion and English is for communication. It is the duality in language and self that allows Latinos in the United States to remain complex individuals.

Catholic Schools

History of Catholic Schools

Catholic schools were founded during the colonial period of the United States of America. College seminaries led the way for secondary boys' schools and primary parochial schools (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993). With the large migration of Protestants, Catholics became "America's first minority group" (Bryk et al., 1993, p. 22). Thus, Catholic schools were created as safe havens for Catholic parents to educate their children.

Early in the 19th century, ideas of Nescholsticism (i.e., new scholarship) emerged with prominent scholars, such as Jacques Maritain, who offered new viewpoints on the Catholic faith (Bryk et al., 1993). This new scholarship looked to science and faith with the ultimate end as "the kingdom of God" rejecting ideas of individualism, relativism, and subjectivism (Bryk et al., 1993). Maritain developed two principles from this theory. First, Maritain claimed that society should work for the betterment of the "common good." The purpose of schools should be to educate students so they can help others and ultimately produce the most good for our society. His second premise was the supremacy of the meditative over the sensible life. Maritain called leaders to question critically institutions and their place in the kingdom of God. From these two principles emerged the second purpose of Catholic schools, the formation of the whole person (Maritain, 1943). These ideas helped shape the writings of the Vatican II literature.

Catholic schools slightly modified their purpose over the years. Due to the vast Irish immigrant population attending Catholic schools, the primary function of the school

was to preserve the Catholic faith and transform immigrants to be successful in American culture (Veverka, 1984). However, Irish-immigrant, Catholic teachers guised the manner in which the education was taught, both socially and academically. "The children in the Catholic schools were 'Americanized' – but by teachers of their own race and religion, who clung in great part to the old ways, only slowly adapting to the new" (Ryan, 1963, p. 37). This assimilation of students proved to be fruitful with accumulation of wealth and status in American society. By the 1960s, as demonstrated by the first Catholic President of the United States, Catholics surpassed Protestant social status (Greeley & Rossi, 1966), and Catholic schools succeeded in their function to assimilate immigrant populations.

Prior to the 1960s, Catholic schooling operated under the dogmatic authority of the Church. The Roman Catholic Church adhered to two key "truths" that affected its schools as stated in the Vatican I document of Pius IX. The first decree declared that "the Pope cannot and should not be reconciled and come to terms with progress, liberalism, and modern civilization" (McBrien, 1994, p. 643). The proceeding commandment "espoused at the third Baltimore Council, (stated) that every Catholic child should attend a Catholic school" (Bryk et al, 1993, p. 36). These two requirements served as the foundation for enrollment in Catholic schools.

From 1962 through 1965, Pope John Paul XXIII brought together an ecumenical council, Vatican II, which entirely changed the view of the Catholic faith. This council came together for two years in order to create new authority in the Catholic Church. Its writings commanded the end of the Latin mass, granted permission for priests to come

down from the pulpits, and authorized religious orders to dress in modern attire (Abbott, 1966). These efforts implemented in the Catholic faith made Catholics feel that God was more accessible to them. The documents written by the ecumenical council sprouted a rebirth of writings offering new guidance and direction to the Catholic Church. As opposed to previously being an institution of infallibility and complete authority, the Church aimed to grow closer and be more accessible to the people. This paradigm shift led to the revolution of Catholic schools that is seen today.

Catholic Schools Today

Today, Catholic schools face many challenges. In 2005, 95% of the teachers were lay people and only 5% were religious (Hunt, 2005). The high number of laity is problematic for Catholic schools because lay teachers must earn a decent wage in order to sustain a livelihood. As a result, Catholic schools are forced to increase tuition in order to pay lay teachers. Lay teachers may also change the faith component of the ministry because they may not be Catholic. Areas of growing concern include issues of teaching the Catholic faith, financial sustainability, and other school choice. With the steady increase in tuition, some Catholic schools are becoming schools for the upper class, as opposed to the poor and immigrants.

Yet, Catholic schools possess many positive elements. Catholic schools implement diverse curriculums because of their autonomy. Catholic schools are unique in that they all vary in the approaches to teaching curriculum (Buetow, 2002). Thus, Catholic schools possess the autonomy to add or delete material from state standards. Moreover, Catholic schools do in fact share the common goal of teaching all students that

they are made in God's image. This approach proved to be fruitful; Catholic schooling was reported to be superior to public schooling (Greeley, 1984; Hofman, Hofman, & Guldemond, 2002). Catholic schools traditionally aimed to reach all students, which is why they have purposely remained in inner cities to help minority populations (Buetow, 2002). Therefore, Catholic schools have strived to provide academic excellence that serves all students.

Catholic schools attribute many factors to their excellence and student achievement. Catholic schools promote community participation and a teaching methodology to reach every student through a unique decentralized model (Hofman et al., 2002). The Archdiocese allows administrators in Catholic schools to select curricula and teaching methodologies that best work for their students. Catholic schools promote a school culture of high expectations. These expectations are met with the support of the community, parents, students, and teachers. Teachers also aid the learning process by motivating students, supporting students in crucial learning moments, and providing immediate feedback (Hofman et al., 2002). Catholic schools enjoy excellence because they function in a collaborative manner, not because of their status as private schools.

Critics of Catholic schools argue that their academic excellence is due to the student-selection process. However, Sander (1996) proved that student selection is not a factor in academic excellence. Overall, students who attended Catholic schools in grades kindergarten through eighth score higher in math, vocabulary, and reading.

Curriculum of Catholic Schools

The key component of Catholic schools curriculum teaches religious values. Based on a mandate by the Catholic Church, Catholic schools "instill values into the curriculum of the school and work with parents to create a community that fosters the acquisition of values within the child" (Innes, 1998, p. 141). Each school develops their own philosophy; family, church, state/nation; global vision/world view; policies, guidelines, goals, and objectives; instructional strategies that apply appropriate learning theory; staff development; content; instructional materials; systematic and periodic assessment/evaluation; and ongoing curriculum assessment (Innes, 1998). The Archdiocese ensures that all of these areas are determined and implemented at each Catholic school site.

The responsibilities of the principal to guide and develop curriculum and instruction include seven domains (Robinson, Innes, Barton, & Ciriello, 1998). Catholic school principals must know religious content standards and the developmental stages of which each child learns these standards. He/she recognizes cultural and religious differences. Key aspects of the curriculum also include curriculum development, education and pedagogical skills, and accommodating students with specials needs. Lastly, the principal supervises instruction, evaluates students' learning, and evaluates the overall effectiveness of the curriculum. Principals create, implement, and develop the curriculum based on the talents and needs of the school community.

Part of the curriculum includes the implementation of various teaching methodologies. Teachers help students construct meaning. Principals encourage Catholic school teachers to study fewer topics in-depth:

> Teachers who want to teach for understanding and higher-order applications of subject-matter will have to both: (1) limit what they teach by focusing on the most important content and omitting or skimming over the rest, and (2) structure what they do teach around important ideas, elaborating it considerably beyond what is in the text (Brophy, 1992, p. 218).

Catholic schools also promote holistic instruction where teachers teach for meaning and understanding, as opposed to rote memorization, worksheets, and the isolated practice of basic skills. These teaching practices allow Catholic students to excel.

Each Catholic school creates its own curriculum as a result of its unique autonomy. Seven characteristics define Catholic schools (Kealey, 1985). The faith community sponsors Catholic schools. Community-shared beliefs in the gospel dictate the philosophy of the school. The curriculum is goal-oriented. Catholic schools also teach the whole child, mind, body, and soul. Evaluation sustains high academic quality. Christian values are also embedded throughout the curriculum. Lastly, Catholic teachers are not just teachers; they view their profession as a ministry, as a vocation. These values separate Catholic schools and make them distinctive.

The process of creating the curriculum is collaborative. The continual multi-step process involves the entire community (Kealey, 1985). The principal works with a

committee of teachers, parents, and parishioners to create a school philosophy and goals. This philosophy is then implemented in a manner that addresses the needs and talents of the student population. The school then develops goals by writing specific learning objectives. The staff then executes learning activities to meet the objectives. Lastly, the process is continually evaluated and assessed for continual growth and improvement.

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles adheres to a triangular Student Centered Curriculum Model. The school's mission statement and school-wide learning expectations (SLEs), archdiocesan guidelines, and teachings of the Catholic Church guide the principles of the school model. The first part of the triangle focuses on the "what" of student learning. The "what" includes "what teachers should teach and what students should know, understand, and be able to do" (Student centered curriculum model, 2007). The second prong of the triangle addresses the "how" of learning. "The teacher selects effective methodologies to help students learn the prescribed 'what'" (Student centered curriculum model, 2007). The final aspect of the triangle focuses on assessment. "The teacher selects multiple indicators of learning to evaluate the effectiveness of the methodologies unused in light of the degree of student proficiency" (Student centered curriculum model, 2007). The triangle Student Centered Curriculum Model guides the implementation of archdiocesan standards.

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles publishes curriculum standards for students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Curriculum guidelines are available for language arts, math, science, social studies, and health. Each subject address the what, how, and assessment of student learning through benchmarks. Time allotments are prescribed for

61

each subject. All students in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles take the Iowa Test of Basic Skills as a standardized assessment. This standards-based curriculum allows for some uniformity throughout the diocese.

The language arts curriculum of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles includes reading, writing, speaking, and listening. All students are held accountable for the standards. "The standards must not be lowered for the nearly 25% of California students for whom English is not their first language. Specialized education programs, such as Title I, must be well aligned with the Content Standards and must offer the appropriate support to help these students reach the same language arts proficiency as their native English speaking peers" (Student centered curriculum model, 2007). The Archdiocese of Los Angeles identifies the need of second language learners. Supplementary programs, such as Title I, which is not available to all Catholic schools, offer support for learners with special needs. All students are still held accountable to be proficient in reading, writing, speaking, and listening in English.

The curriculum in Catholic schools is unified with room for variation. Teachers adhere to the same guidelines. However, individual classrooms and schools mold learning to meet the needs of students in the what, how, and assessment of student learning. All Catholic schools share the same guiding principle, yet their cultural environment and mission are all unique.

Goals of Catholic Schools

The teachings of Vatican II led to the creation of further documents on Catholic education. In 1972, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops published *To Teach As*

Jesus Did, which stated three goals for Catholic education. These goals included the following: "(1) to teach the message of hope contained in the gospel; (2) to build community, not simply as a concept to be taught, but as a reality to be lived; and (3) serve to all mankind which flows from a sense of Christian community" (NCCB, 1972). These ideals serve as the foundation for social justice for the entire Catholic community.

The Catholic Church's response to justice includes three criteria. Social teachings are rooted in "(1) the inviolable dignity of the human person, (2) the essentially social nature of human beings, and (3) the belief that the abundance of nature and of social living is given for all people" (Lebacqz, 1986, p. 67). Similarly, Gale and Densmore (2002) believed in the concept of recognitive justice, which includes "the fostering of respect for different social groups through their self-identification; opportunities for their self-development and self-expression; and the participation of groups in making decisions that directly concern them, through their representation on determining bodies" (p. 19). By applying these attributes in Catholic schools, recognitive justice can be achieved and, thus, education based on critical pedagogy may ensue.

According to the Archdiocese of Los Angeles (Student centered curriculum model, 2007), the goals of Catholic schools are to "enrich the Catholic community, and invite everyone to become active disciples of Jesus Christ." The Catholic community aims to educate and serve all people, including students, parents, and the community at large. If Catholic education is for each individual student, it is imperative to reach and educate all students. However, how are students taught? What are students taught in terms of culture? In a diverse society, are the needs of students who speak a language

other than English or who are from a different background included in the idea of a Catholic education? How are parents from various ethnicities treated in the school environment? Finally, are critically responsive leaders meeting the goals of Catholic education?

To answer the aforementioned questions, it is incumbent to address the process of identity formation for bicultural Latino students. Catholic schools in Los Angeles serve a large Latino population. It is imperative to understand how Latino students view themselves, and thus the world around them. The complete comprehension of the self leads to confidence, which enables the ability to learn and change.

Bicultural Students in Urban Catholic Schools

Although Catholic schools are known to be schools of excellence, are they excellent schools for inner-city students of color? According to Clotfelter (2004), private Catholic schools served as havens for Whites in the southern states who were escaping integration with the African American population. Catholic schools served as a divider to separate the poor Blacks in public schools and the affluent Whites in Catholic schools. This problem has proven to continue to as late as the 1999-2000. However, Ilg, Massucci, and Cattaro (2004) disagreed with this evaluation of Catholic schools. According to their research, Catholic schools prove to be the best option for integrating students of all colors since public schools have failed in this department. Ilg et al. (2004) promoted the continuation and further development of Catholic schools, especially in urban areas. Neal (1997) further stated that Catholic schools are most successful in areas where public schools have failed. The majority of public schools have failed in inner cities with large

minority student populations. It is in these areas where students from Catholic schools thrive most. Therefore, Catholic schools are safer places of learning for students of color.

The Greeley analysis of the Coleman report further supports that Catholic high schools have proven to be successful for Hispanic and Black students (Hall & Reck, 1987). Greeley (1984), in his research on Catholic schools, found that Catholic schools were better for bicultural students in comparison to public schools in regards to graduation, cognitive achievement, and they were less racially segregated. Greeley (1984) researched demography and aspiration, discipline, academics, religion, upward mobility, effect of academic tracking, and finances of Catholic schools for minority students. Seventy percent of Hispanic students and 77% of Black students who attended Catholic school reported that their parents expected them to graduate from college (Greeley, 1984). Academically, this is possible because the students have to do more homework, have high quality instruction, and prepare for college. Students of color are able to attain these goals because Catholic schools provide a disciplined environment with vested parent interest. Socioeconomic status may have a small impact at the onset for students of color; however, by junior and senior years, students are on college-preparatory track. Catholic schools may be expensive, especially to low-income families. However, the investment is viewed as a great reward. Catholic education proves to be beneficial for students of color.

Other factors contribute to the success of Latino students in Catholic high schools. The National Assessment of Education Process (NAEP) acknowledged six strengths of Catholic schools for students of color: "Evidence of person caring; sensitivity to different

cultures; respect for the student as an individual person; deliberate building of a youngster's self-esteem, special dimension of the religious community setting; and ability to integrate religious values with in the curriculum" (Hall & Reck, 1987, p. 212). Hall and Reck (1987) referred to the work of Ogbu (cited in Hall & Reck, 1987) who emphasized the need to build self-esteem in Latino students because of the oppression of the dominant society.

Catholic schools can create climates that are welcoming to Latino students. By providing an environment for Latino students to grow and develop identities, Latino students can become active participants and no longer live on the margins of society. By welcoming Latino parents, schools can become communities that do not conform to social power structures. This organizational climate of Catholic schools will allow the door to be opened for learning to occur.

Conclusion

Education is a political force. Critical pedagogy encourages practices in which students and teachers learn to become agents of change. Change begins with critical literacy practices taking place at the classroom level. It is through students' experiences and prior knowledge that they learn to read the world around them. By reading society, they become literate. This form of critical literacy increases student learning in reading for middle-school Latino students as perceived by teachers and students in a low-income, urban, Catholic elementary school.

Catholic elementary schools were founded as safe havens for immigrants. From the strict doctrine of Vatican I to the formation of personal relationships of Vatican II,

Catholic schools have maintained their mission to teach the values of the Catholic Church. This hospitable system has proven to be welcoming to bicultural students. Although Catholic schools today face economic hardships, the standards-based curriculum allows teachers the autonomy to reach and teach the populations they serve, which sustains their viability. The social system and culture of Catholic schools promote the formation of personal identity for Latino students.

Latino students face many challenges. Public schools have attempted various strategies to increase learning for Latino students. Language acquisition is still of the utmost concern for Latino students. By implementing new instruction strategies such as critical literacy approaches, Latino students in a low-income, urban, Catholic elementary school can and will learn.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

Introduction

This action research project analyzed and evaluated the effectiveness of

educational reading practices that promote student literacy among low-income Latino

middle school students in an inner-city, Catholic elementary school. By addressing the

needs of Latino middle school students through an action research approach, the principal

documented middle school teachers' and middle school students' experience of

implementing novel studies as a critical literacy approach to increase student learning as

perceived by teachers and students. Through the lens of the Catholic faith formation,

bicultural Latino identity formation, and critical literacy, the study documented critical

literacy for Latino students at a low-income, urban, Catholic elementary school.

Action Research

Action research is a systematic process of studying a real life situation in order to

improve and understand a practice with the creation of an action plan (Johnson, 2002).

The action plan often leads to the creation of a new theory. However, "in action research

'theories' are not validated independently and then applied to practice. They are validated

through practice" (Elliot, 1991, p. 69). Action research, a systematic study, searches for themes and solutions as recurring events.

Kurt Lewin coined the term 'action research' as a cyclical event (Elliot, 1991). The event commenced with planning, then acting, observing, and then reflecting. After completing the cycle, the events began again in a new cycle, as shown in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3. Lewin's Sequences of Action-Reflection Cycles
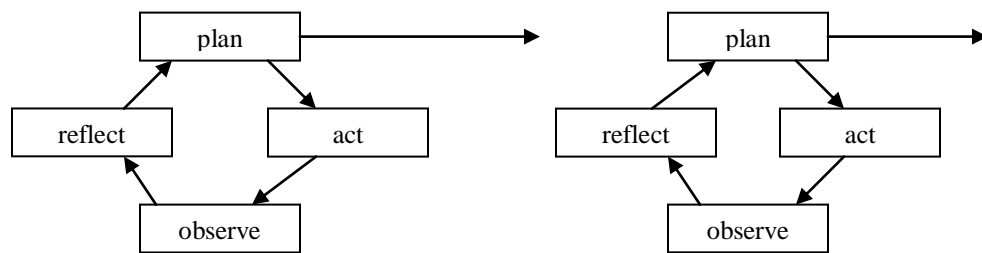
Note: Johnson, 2002, p. 41.

Elliot (1991) utilized Lewin's theory to create seven steps. First, identify an idea. Fact finding and analysis, known as reconnaissance, takes place continually throughout the process. Next, general planning must take place. This leads to the development of the first action plan. The researcher then implements and evaluates the first plan. Lastly, the researcher revises the plan and the process begins again. Other researchers modified these steps over the years.

Johnson (2002) subscribed to a similar cyclical process involving five parts. First, identify a problem. Second, the researcher must decide what data should be collected, how it should be collected, and how often. Third, collect and analyze data. Fourth, analyze the findings for application. Finally, the researcher creates a plan of action to report and share the findings of the study. This process is depicted in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4. Johnson's Steps of the Action Research Process
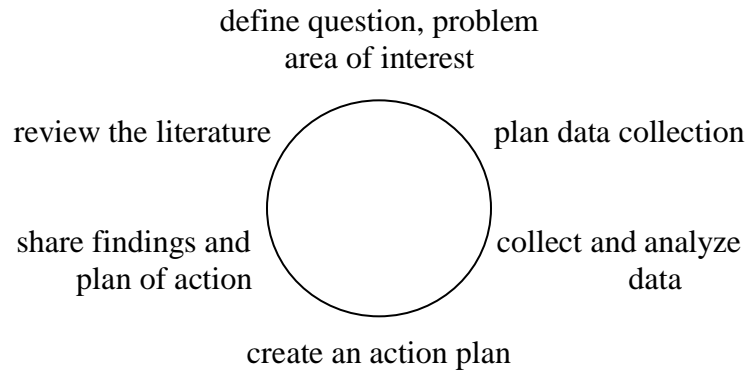
Note: Johnson, 2002, p. 14.

Johnson (2002) expanded the process further into nine steps: identify the research topic, provide a theoretical context, plan data collection, analyze the data, allow questions to change, organize the data, report the data, record conclusions, and create a plan of action.

In the 1960s, teachers started using this methodology in England in response to curriculum reform (Elliot, 1991) because teachers did not approve of the curriculum reform or the methodology as it was being used. Teachers yearned for improved education. They began to rely on their own experiences to guide instruction. "The 'theories' of learning, teaching, and evaluation we articulated in staffroom gatherings and meetings derived from our attempts to bring about change in a particular set of circumstances, rather than from our professional training in universities and colleges of education" (Elliot, 1991, p. 5). Teachers became the researchers, drawing upon their own ideas and experiences to analyze a problem and create a solution. In doing so, teachers

fulfill the fundamental aim of action research, which is to improve practice, not produce knowledge (Elliot, 1991).

Action research demonstrates power because it produces new knowledge. Elliot (1991) stated, "But action research is not simply a reactionary and defensive response to technocratically controlled change. It constitutes a form of creative resistance because it transforms rather than simply preserves the old professional craft culture of teachers" (p. 49). Herr and Anderson (2005) further confirmed that "action research is inquiry that is done by or with insiders to an organization or community, but never to or on them" (p. 3). Action research transforms researchers into agents of change through a valid, systematic approach.

The idea of reflexivity ensures the interrogation of perceptions of improvement according to who benefits from the actions (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Action research addresses the needs of a group in a particular setting. In addressing the needs of the under-served, action researchers often experience resistance from above (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Larger institutional systems may oppose nonconforming findings that may implicate inappropriate actions of the ruling class. Therefore, the action research process seeks to address issues of positionality.

Researcher Positionality

Organizational insiders often partake in action research as a way to deepen their own reflective practice on solving a particular problem. "The research and the practitioner may be one and the same" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 29). The position of

the researcher, as an insider or outsider, determines how the epistemological, methodological, and ethical issues are framed.

Herr and Anderson (2005) identified six levels on the continuum of action research positionality. First, the outermost position is the outsider who studies the insider. This research contributes to a knowledge base usually at a university-based level. The second level is the outsider in collaboration with insiders. This knowledge base is utilized to improve practice by organizational consultants or through community empowerment. Third, reciprocal collaboration works through insider-outsider teams to produce a knowledge base that improves practice through a collaborative form to achieve equitable power relations. The fourth level, insider in collaboration with outsider, also improves practice through inquiry and study groups. The insider can also be collaboration with other insiders to improve practice again through inquiry and study groups. On the fifth level, the researcher may be an insider who studies his/her own practice to improve through narrative research or self-study. This final level of positionality is the most dangerous. "A flawed and deceptive version of this is when an insider studies his or her own site but fails to position himself or herself as an insider to the setting (outsider within)" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 31).

The Insider

It is deceptive to separate one's self and practice from the study of action initiated in a setting. The researcher becomes a reflective practitioner to improve personal practice. "It is an account of how one practitioner went about learning his or her craft and what was learned in the process" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 34). The temptation is to

put a positive spin on the data. When an insider also works in collaboration with other insiders, the researcher must acknowledge positions of power. To remedy this bias, the researcher must acknowledge his or her presence in the study and build in self-reflection (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

This level of positionality offers various benefits. It provides a rare emic perspective, while incorporating rigorous ethnographic methods and data analysis. When working in collaboration with other insiders, the group becomes a collaborative community. Parties are engaged in learning while working toward organizational change. Collaborating members are afforded the opportunity for personal, professional, and institutional transformation (Herr & Anderson, 2005). The inside researcher also gains a sense of self-discovery and social advocacy for the group with which they are working. However, Herr and Anderson (2005) cautioned researchers against taking some aspects of the setting for granted and the need to make the apparently familiar setting seem strange because of the insider perspective. The action researcher remedies these flaws through valid action research approaches.

Action Research Validity

There are five goals of action research. Action research generates new knowledge, achieves action-oriented outcomes, educates both researcher and participant, produces results that are relevant to the setting, and partakes in a sound methodology (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Action research assures validity, reliability, and trustworthiness. Action researchers accomplish these goals through a rigorous and systematic approach.

Anderson and Herr (2005) directly related the goals of action research to quality and validity criteria.

Table 1

Anderson and Herr's Goals of Action Research and Validity Criteria

Goals of Action Research	Quality/Validity Criteria
1. The generation of new knowledge	Dialogic and process validity
2. The achievement of action-oriented outcomes	Outcome validity
3. The education of both researcher and participants	Catalytic validity
4. Results that are relevant to the local setting	Democratic validity
5. A sound and appropriate research methodology	Process validity

Note: Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 55.

Skeptics of action research doubt the process. They claim that action research is "practice-driven rather than theory-driven" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 52). Academics find it difficult to understand and analyze the positionality of an insider without losing the outsider perspective. Action researchers dispel these myths by adhering to quality criteria.

The quality criteria for action research include five forms of validity: (a) dialogic and process validity, (b) outcome validity, (c) catalytic validity, (d) democratic validity, and (e) process validity (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Dialogic validity seeks critical and reflective dialogue with other action researchers to provide an alternative view for exploration. Peers review the research while critically analyzing and providing feedback

to the researcher in efforts to provide an alternative perspective. Outcome validity ensures the rigor of action research through the spiraling dynamic of reframing the problem in a more complex manner to lead to a new set of questions and/or problems as opposed to simply regurgitating answers. The successful resolution of the initial problem determines validity based on the outcome.

The next two forms of validity appeal to critical pedagogy practitioners (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Catalytic validity calls researchers to monitor their own change throughout the process by reorienting their view of reality and their role. This form of validity draws attention to the transformative nature of action research which makes action research appealing to subscribers of critical pedagogy. Democratic validity of action research aligns itself with critical pedagogy in that problems that emerge from a particular site are addressed with appropriate solutions as an ethical and social justice issue. It assures that all parties collaborate to address the research problem and solution.

Process validity accounts for the reexamination and reflection of sound evidence through a notion of triangulation. The researcher searches for themes based on evidence to dispel underlying assumptions. The five types of validity ensure the academic rigor and standing of action research as a valid and transformational research method.

Methodology

This study explored approaches and perceptions of critical literacy practices, including novel studies, to increase student learning in reading at a low-income, urban, Catholic elementary school through action research. The methodology followed Johnson's (2002) nine-step approach to action research. Those nine steps include:

1. Identify the research topic.

2. Provide a theoretical context.

3. Plan data collection.

4. Analyze the data.

5. Allow questions to change.

6. Organize the data.

7. Report the data.

8. Record conclusions.

9. Create a plan of action.

Each of the three research questions in this study were addressed qualitatively.

I collected and analyzed data utilizing a qualitative approach. Data on teachers' critical literacy approaches and perceptions were collected through classroom observations, interviews, student work, and focus groups. Data were inductively analyzed based on the foundations of critical pedagogy, critical literacy, and Catholic faith formation. I shared results with teachers to collaboratively create a final action plan.

Restatement of the Research Questions

1. What are the critical literacy approaches that middle school teachers perceive increase student learning in reading for Latino middle school students in a low-income, urban, Catholic elementary school?

2. How do middle school teachers perceive critical literacy practices impacting student learning in reading for Latino students in a low-income, urban, Catholic elementary school?

3. How do Latino middle school students perceive critical literacy practices impacting their learning in reading in a low-income, urban, Catholic elementary school?

Setting

The area, known as Arlington Heights, is one of the older districts in the Mid-Wilshire area of Los Angeles (Arlington Heights, 2008). This highly populated area serves as a home to 16,393 people per square mile (90018 Zip Code Detailed Profile, 2008). The majority of the homes in the area were built prior to 1939 and from 1940-1959 (90018 Demographic, 2008). Of the 16,303 houses and condos and the 10,524 renter-occupied apartments, 70% of the people rent their dwelling because of the low household income. The average household income for the state of California is $53,629. The average household income for the area lags significantly behind at $27,676 (90018 Zip Code Detailed Profile, 2008).

Demographics of this urban setting change frequently. Previously, upper-middle class African Americans resided in the area (Arlington Heights, 2008). Within the last five years, Latino families moved into the community and compose the majority of the population in the area. The primary language of the area is Spanish. Of the 47,127 people living in the area, 23,205 are Latino, 9,920 are of Mexican descent, and the remaining are of Latin American descent. Thirty-five percent of the people living in the area immigrated to the United States. The majority of the people not born in the United States came from Latin American countries; 26% of people living in this area are not citizens of the United States (90018 Demographic 2008).

The public schools in the area dramatically lag behind the California statewide target Academic Performance Index (API) score of 800. Elementary schools in the area score 640 for their API, middle schools score 558, and high schools score 541 (Census 2000 Demographic Profile Highlights, 2008). Of the students who do attend high school, 54.1% graduate from high school and only 10.2% attain a bachelor's degree or higher (90018 Demographic, 2008).

Crime permeates the area. The Crime Index for the area is 27, which is 50% higher than the Los Angeles County average. The safety score for the area is 1.5 out of 10. The reported crimes in 2000 include 22 homicides, 47 cases of rape, 1,622 robberies, and 1,045 cases of aggravated assault (Census 2000 Demographic Profile Highlights, 2008). According to 2007 public records, 142 registered sex offenders live in the area (90018 Zip Code Detailed Profile, 2008).

The School

The school resides off of two major streets and is a few blocks from a major freeway. Locally owned businesses surround the school on one side with a residential neighborhood on the other. Across the street is a public library and public middle school. Two public elementary schools are located within a six block radius. The school building shares a parking lot with the church.

The bi-level school building holds eight classrooms, one computer lab that also serves as a lunch room, one library, two upper level bathrooms, and two lower level bathrooms. The office, which is adjacent to the school building, consists of two small offices for the secretary and principal, and a small area for teacher mailboxes, a

refrigerator, and one small restroom. Students eat lunch on benches under a shelter next to the office.

The school maintained one class per grade level with increasing enrollment. Ninety percent of the students are Latino, 5% are African American, and 5% are of a mixed ethnicity. In 2005-2006, 168 students attended the school. In 2006-2007, the school taught 184 students. In 2007-2008, 194 students attended the school. Over these three years, tuition only increased $5 per month from $260 for one child per month to $265. A family with two children pays $385 per month. However, the majority of students received financial assistance from the Catholic Education Foundation, Children Scholarship Fund, or the Fannie English Fund. Families also received assistance through the Title I government food program; 95% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch and breakfast. Students also received supplemental instruction from a part-time Title I teacher employed through public funding.

The school employed minimal faculty and staff to maintain operational functions due to lack of financial resources. The school received governmental assistance in the form of services, such as the Title I teacher and government food program. Income from tuition supplemented the majority of the school budget with salaries and insurance as the largest expense. According to the Archdiocese scale, the school ranked as a level 7, with one being the most affluent and 10 being the least. Only schools ranked 8, 9, or10 received financial assistance to help pay for insurance through funds from Together in Mission. The school autonomously sought out additional funding through grants from the Doheny Foundation, the Riordan Foundation, and E-rate to displace operational costs.

Faculty

Faculty consisted of one Latina principal with a bachelor of arts, masters degree, and pending doctorate; one Latina immigrant secretary; nine teachers (one teacher per grade level and a religion teacher); an after-school Latina supervisor with a high school diploma; one Latina immigrant maintenance worker; and a one-day-a-week Latina accountant with a bachelor's degree. In 2005-2006, the school employed six out of nine teachers who failed to possess a masters or teaching credential. Of these teachers, four were Latino, four were African American, and one of mixed Latino and African American descent. In 2006-2007, three teachers replaced others who retired, left for personal reasons, or were asked to leave due to poor teaching performance. Two teachers enrolled in a masters/credential program. The faculty consisted of four Latinos, two African Americans, one teacher of Latino and African American descent, and one teacher of Korean descent. In 2007-2008, three new teachers came aboard to replace the others who left for personal reasons or were asked to leave to due poor teaching performance. Five teachers enrolled in a masters/credential program. Of the six Latino teachers, one African American teacher, one of Latino and African American descent, and one Korean, all teachers attained or were in the process of attaining their masters or teaching credential. All of the faculty and staff, with the exception of one teacher, spoke Spanish.

Participants

There is only one seventh- and one eighth-grade classroom in the entire school. The seventh-grade teacher and eighth-grade teacher willingly volunteered to participate in this study on critical literacy practices by having me, the principal, observe their classes and

interview them. I approached them earlier in the year and told them about this study on critical literacy practices for the purpose of my dissertation research. They enthusiastically expressed their intention to be part of the study.

The eighth-grade teacher is of Latino and African American descent. He taught at the school two years prior to my arrival as principal of the school as a fourth-grade teacher. As a young bachelor in his early 30s, his seminary background and world travel allow him to share unique experiences with his classes. He also speaks several languages, including Spanish. He currently teaches as the eighth-grade teacher for the second consecutive year. Based on the school's departmentalized schedule, he teaches the eighth grade students reading and language arts, social studies, and Spanish. He also teaches the seventh- and eighth-grade students social studies and Spanish. He also serves as the Vice-Principal of the school hosting weekly detention, creating yard duty schedules, co-hosting honors masses, and facilitating all administrative duties in my absence. He also coordinates the Black History Assembly, the eighth-grade retreat, and graduation. He holds his bachelor's degree and is entering a master's degree program in teaching.

The seventh-grade teacher was born in Korea, moved to the United States when he was a young child, and recently gained citizenship to the United States. In addition to English, he speaks Korean fluently and is learning to speak Spanish. He came to the school as a first-year teacher last year. For the second year in a row, he teaches seventh-grade students reading and language arts and math. He also teaches sixth- and seventh-grade students math. Additionally, he serves as the school's choir director, Academic Decathlon coach, and soccer coach. In his second year of teaching, he entered a masters/credential program where he lives

with a group of fellow teachers who also work in low-income Catholic schools and attend classes together as a cohort. He is in his mid 20s.

Ten students—five eighth-grade students and five seventh-grade students (ages 12-14)— also participated in the study. I entered the seventh and eighth grade and explained the purpose of my study and their possible involvement in the process. At the end of my brief summary, I distributed consent forms to all students who demonstrated interest in being interviewed in a focus group with their classroom peers. The students had one week to return the forms. Six seventh-grade students returned the forms. I randomly selected five of the six students by drawing their name out of a pool. Only five eighth-grade students returned the form creating a focus group.

All students from seventh and eighth grade are Latino. Two girls and three boys composed the seventh-grade group. All of them spoke English and Spanish. Five girls composed the eighth-grade group. Four of the five girls spoke English and Spanish and one spoke English only yet was familiar with Spanish words.

Consent

Prior to any interviews and observations, I took all necessary steps to ensure the protection of human subjects. The Institutional Review Board approved the methodology. Teachers read and signed a waiver to inform them of their rights and the intent of the study. Students and their parents also read and signed a waiver in English and Spanish. The students themselves speak English, and some speak English and Spanish. Thus, I published the Child Assent Form in English and Spanish. However, the majority of the

parents only speak Spanish. I wrote The Parent Consent Form in English and Spanish. I shared all results with the faculty and community at a final General Parent Meeting.

Methods of Data Collection

Data included observations, interviews, focus groups, and teacher and student artifacts. As principal and researcher at the site, I further served as a participant observer in the study. In addition to formal texts, I wrote notes in a planner of events and dialogues pertinent to the study.

Formally, I conducted six classroom observations, three from the seventh-grade class and three from the eighth-grade class. I recorded field notes by hand to reduce the classroom distraction of typing. I conscientiously inscribed the dialogue between the teacher and student verbatim as opposed to paraphrasing to reduce bias. I also utilized the Critical Literacy Check-List (Shor & Pari, 1999) as a frame of reference for the observations. Later on the same day, I typed the observation and re-read the notes several times before analyzing the data.

I conducted four teacher interviews, two with each teacher. The interviews took place after school in my office at a table, as opposed to a desk, based on the teachers' convenience and request. During the recorded interview, I did not take notes in order to attempt to further create an informal environment. I utilize the Protocol for Teacher Interview form for each interview as a guide for questions. I also asked follow-up questions based on teacher response and classroom observations specific to each teacher. A professional business transcribed the interviews to ensure accuracy. I then listened to the tapes while reading the transcription to ensure accuracy. Later, I submitted the

transcript to each teacher and allowed them to review their own remarks and make any changes or additions.

I also conducted the two student focus groups in my office during the last elective period of the day. The students frequented my office and felt comfortable in the setting. Before conducting the interview, I asked the teacher and students for permission to speak with them during class. I sat with the students around the table in my office and began asking questions from the Protocol for Student Focus Group form, previous observations, teacher interviews, and student work. I again recorded the interview and did not take notes in attempts to create a comfortable environment. Students spoke freely and out of turn during the interview. I asked follow-up questions based on students' responses. At the end of the focus group, I invited students to add any additional comments. Students returned to class before the end of the period. A professional business transcribed the discussion to ensure accuracy. I then listened to the tapes while reading the transcription to ensure accuracy.

To triangulate the data, I collected teacher and student artifacts. I reviewed teacher lesson plans, which I normally collected as the principal on a weekly basis, and their yearly curriculum map. I also collected samples of student work from the teacher such as: writing samples, vocabulary/comprehension tests, portfolios, graphic organizers, and homework. I immediately made copies of student work and returned them to the teacher before they were distributed to the students.

After analyzing the data, I conducted a final focus group with the seventh-grade teacher and eighth-grade teacher. I shared a summary of the findings with the teachers.

We then discussed significant issues to create a plan of action. I took notes during the focus group and published the action plan. We then shared the plan with the other teachers at a faculty meeting. I further shared the results with the community at a monthly General Parent Meeting.

Data Interpretation: Inductive Analysis

Findings were analyzed through inductive analysis. The inductive model allows the researcher to discover meaning from large sets of data that have been gathered with a board focus (Hatch, 2002). The researcher then looks for patterns of meaning by finding connections between specific elements. Hatch (2002) listed nine steps in inductive analysis:

1. Read the data and identify frames of analysis.

2. Create domains based on semantic relationships discovered within frames of analysis.

3. Identify salient domains, assign them a code, and put others aside.

4. Reread data, refining salient domains and keeping a record of where relationships are found in the data.

5. Decide if your domains are supported by the data and search data for examples that do not fit with or run counter to the relationships in your domains.

6. Complete an analysis within domains.

7. Search for themes across domains.

8. Create a master outline expressing relationships within and among domains.

9. Select data excerpts to support the elements of your outline (p. 162).

This process provides a systematic approach that allows the researcher to report findings representative of the setting.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Our faculty is united and works in a collaborative manner. I am an insider because I am a part of the school community as a parishioner. I have also become an insider because I work collaboratively with the faculty and parents to help implement changes they want. However, my positionality as an insider is only partial because I recognize that I brought the idea of critical literacy to the faculty. This study also resided in the category of an insider in collaboration with other insiders because I worked with two other teachers at the same site. By recognizing my position as a researcher, I was able to ensure validity of the study.

I adhered to Herr and Anderson's (2005) five forms of validity. The questions of the study continually change in a spiraling process based on dialogue and evidence to ensure outcome validity. As the principal, I continually reflect on my position, assumptions, and relationships with teachers by triangulating evidence to guarantee process validity. Democratic validity was at the core of this research. I call on teachers, through daily conversations and formal faculty meetings, and students, also through daily conversations and while substitute teaching classes, to determine what they believe is

best for them as an issue of social justice. I monitored teachers' and students' change process and shared this understanding with participants through member checking and conversations to ensure catalytic validity. Lastly, dialogic validity was maintained through dialogue with the teachers, peer review with my cohort, and fellow members of my dissertation committee. These assurances guaranteed the validity of the study while adhering to the goals of action research.

This study met the five goals of action research (Herr & Anderson, 2005). The methodology of the study was sound because it is conformed to quality criteria for action research. This study itself produced results relevant to the setting. The final step of the methodology included the creation of an action plan by both teachers and principal. This step achieved action-oriented outcomes and educated both researcher and participant. Critical literacy practices at an urban-low income Catholic school generated new knowledge for educators aiming to help Latino students.

Positionality, Reflexivity: My Role as Principal

I originally come from a small town in a Western state. The ethnic composition of my town is 50% Latino and 50% Caucasian. Growing up, I attended quality public schools. My parents were both educators. They knew how to lead and guide me to succeed in the education system. I was one of two Latinas who participated in Advanced Placement (AP) classes. I graduated from high school ranked third in my class earning a full scholarship to a private college. The college was 90% Caucasian. It was a big culture shock for me. I participated in all of the minority clubs in efforts to gain a sense of

belonging. I attained my bachelor's degree in biology. My hope was to attend medical school.

Acceptance to medical school was challenging. The acceptance exam was difficult for me. I took a preparation class offered to minority students to improve my tests scores and gain admittance to medical school. It took me one year to gain acceptance.

During this year, I moved back home with my parents and worked at a Boys and Girls Club as their Career Coordinator. I helped tutor low-income, predominantly Latino students with their homework and academic enrichment. I witnessed the injustice of my middle-class education in comparison to schooling received by students living in a poor neighborhood. I always knew that I wanted to work with a low-income, Spanish-speaking population, yet I didn't realize that it would be in the field of education.

I entered medical school the next year. I succeeded in all of my classes. I was still a member of the minority club and recognized the minuscule amount of minority students in the class. Unfortunately, after two years, I decided not to pursue medicine. I did not want to live the unceasing work lifestyle of a doctor. I had met my husband, and I moved to one of the largest cities in the United States.

When I first moved to Los Angeles, I was lost. I felt like I had disappointed my family and community. I was going to be the first doctor in my family. My grandfather had only had a fourth-grade education. My other grandparents barely graduated from high school. I had no idea what I wanted to do. I knew that I wanted to help people, I just didn't know how.

I must give the credit to my husband who suggested that I try teaching. I was extremely reluctant to partake in the profession of my parents. I am sad to admit that I did not feel that teaching was an academically rigorous profession. Little did I know, education would be the most challenging and life-changing profession.

I started by substitute teaching a pre-algebra class in an affluent Catholic school at the end of the school year. Teaching was such a natural fit that the principal hired me as the fifth-grade teacher for the following year. The Vice Principal of Curriculum taught me how to manage a classroom, teach novel studies, and have students work in cooperative groups. Although the principal never observed my classroom, I immediately grasped the concepts of teaching and the ideas just kept coming. It was such a joy to teach. I did not have any discipline problems. All of the parents were involved, and all of the students except one were reading at or above grade level. The school recognized my enthusiasm and placed me in a leadership position.

I served as eighth-grade teacher and Vice Principal of Policy and Procedure in my second year of education. We read novels from Shakespeare, *A Tale of Two Cities* (Dickens, 1868)*,* and *To Kill A Mocking Bird* (1999) found in the "Novel List" (see Appendix A). We were reading to learn, not learning to read. We discussed social issues. Every lesson had a purpose and meaning. I taught literary tools and how to write persuasive articles. I was providing a quality education.

During this year, I completed my master's degree through an on-line program. The school had a new principal who challenged me and afforded me the opportunity to

grow professionally. He encouraged me to pursue an administrative role as a principal in a Catholic school. I embraced his suggestion and began searching for openings.

There were two principal openings in schools close to my home. Both schools were low-income Catholic schools. One was too far away. The other fit my qualifications of distance. I remember driving to the school with my husband for the first time. There was graffiti all along the exit of the highway, homeless people who were clearly inebriated lined the corner, and the public library across was boarded up due to vandalism. We pulled into the parking lot of the school and church. Before me was an orange and brown bi-level building. The need in the area was strong and boldly apparent. I knew that this was not going to be easy. As strong Catholics, my husband and I sat in the parking lot and prayed if this was where God wanted me to be.

At the same time, I was applying to attain my doctorate in education. My peers told me that it would be too difficult to be a new principal and earn a doctorate at the same time. The cohort model gave me strength and kept me focused on my goal of social justice. Every article I read and every paper I wrote led me back to answer the question of why I became a principal. Every time the answer was the same: I was there to help a community help themselves in a society that saw them as less than equal.

I became a principal of the school in my third year of education. The school was definitely a challenge. The student population was 90% Latino, 5% African American, and 5% of other ethnicities. The majority of the parents only spoke Spanish, yet all of the students spoke some level of English. Ninety-two percent of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch according to the government program guidelines. The standard test

scores languished at stanines of 2 and 3, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest. The previous principal mandated teachers not to stray from the textbook. There was a need for change.

Within the first few months of my arrival, I organized parents and community members to paint the school before the school year started. The previous principal was retiring at the age of 72, while I was starting at the age of 27. Her leadership style was dramatically different from mine. I also was the first principal to speak Spanish. Safety, communication, and collaboration were my primary goals. I was strict and had high expectations, but everything was done with a smile. I put in countless hours painting the school, coaching volleyball, holding monthly bilingual parent meetings, writing weekly bilingual newsletters, and running weekend fundraisers. I expected everyone to work hard, and I led by example.

Academically, we needed to change the system if we wanted different results. In the first year, we departmentalized the upper grades. In my second year as principal, we introduced novel studies. Teachers in grades four through eight selected novels to serve as their new reading text books. We had three new teachers on board this year, one in third grade, one in fifth, and one in seventh. I put a strong emphasis on reading, vocabulary, and the writing process. Although the majority of our students learned English as a second language, the teachers were not utilizing strategies to meet their needs. We implemented Thinking Maps, a form of graphic organizers. Teachers selected vocabulary from the novel. Teachers also taught students through themes. Students took weekly vocabulary and comprehension tests to formally assess their progress. Teachers

also began to incorporate cooperative learning. The teachers and students embraced the change.

This is my third year as principal. I am the principal, and I am the researcher. I recognize that I implemented this form of critical literacy at the school. The eighth-grade teacher was originally the fourth-grade teacher during my first year as principal. He previously taught fourth grade two years prior to my arrival. In my second year as principal, he agreed to become the eighth-grade teacher and Vice Principal and teach novel studies and Social Studies. The seventh-grade teacher came to the school in my second year as principal. He entered the school thinking that departmentalization and novel studies were the norm because he was a first-year teacher and had never been exposed to the previous curriculum. Both teachers were excited to take part in this study to improve practices for our students.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Restatement of Purpose of the Study

This action research study explored critical literacy practices that promote student

literacy for low-income Latino middle school students in an inner-city, Catholic

elementary school, where students have been chronically performing at the lowest level

in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. By using critical pedagogy (Darder, 1991; Freire,

1970; Giroux, 1983; Macedo, 1994; McLaren, 1988) as a theoretical framework, this

action research project investigated the effective elements of critical literacy (Cadiero-

Kaplan, 2004; Shor & Pari, 1999) that promote academic learning for Latino middle

school students in a low-income Catholic elementary school.

Introductory Summary of Findings

Teachers employed various critical literacy practices to promote student learning

for Latino middle school students in a low-income, Catholic elementary school.

Previously, the school failed to address students' needs, yet changes in physical and

social structures of the school created a safe environment for teachers and students that

were conducive for learning. The school promoted and attained Catholic identity through

faith-sharing practices and teacher servanthood. Literacy increased because teachers

created classroom environments with high expectations and engaging lessons. Students participated in class because teachers valued students' opinions. Teachers worked to teach the whole child through the use of novel studies where they utilized students' experiences and language to guide instruction in English. Varying forms of assessment allowed students to succeed academically and set goals for their future. Students developed an awareness and conscientization of literacy, education, and learning.

In this chapter, I begin with a brief summary of the previous state of the school prior to the incorporation of critical literacy practices. I then share the critical literacy practices employed by the seventh- and eighth-grade teachers at the school through personal accounts, the seventh- and eighth-grade teachers' perceptions of the practices they used, and the seventh- and eighth-grade students' perceptions of the critical literacy practices they experienced.

Throughout the chapter, I identify four themes that have led to the rebirth of the school: creating conditions for learning, Catholic identity in a Catholic school, critical literacy approaches and perspectives, and conscientization. The school created conditions for learning by altering the atmosphere and holding teachers, students, and parents accountable. Catholic identity resounded throughout the school community as a result of teacher servanthood and faith formation and application. Teachers implemented critical literacy approaches by setting high expectations in an environment that promoted and incorporated student voice to teach the whole child. Teachers included students' language as a foundation to promote direct instruction of the English language, and gauged students' progress through varying forms of assessment. Lastly, students developed

conscientization by setting academic aspirations that countered society's hegemonic forces. The teachers' and students' accounts validated the application and perception of critical literacy practices in this low-income, urban Catholic school for Latino middle school students.

A School in Crisis

The demographics of this school community experienced frequent change. Twenty years prior, the school community was composed of a primarily Caucasian population. As the inner city began to decline economically, an African American community began to dominate the area. As such, the school population reflected those changes. The principal and the teachers reflected the ethnicity of the population served, and the strong African American culture resonated throughout the school. Families hosted fish fries, basketball tournaments, and drill team tournaments. There was a strong sense of community. Yet, the demographics shifted again.

Within five years, the primarily African American school staff now had to meet the needs of a predominantly Latino population. The economy again continued to decline. African Americans moved out of the "Latino" area, and the community grew with immigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and other Central American countries. These families aimed for a better life for their family in a foreign land become familiar.

The area became familiar with local businesses and churches. El Mercado, La Pupuseria, and La Tortuga sold familiar items to Latinos in the area. The parish itself grew to include five masses in Spanish. All three priests spoke Spanish. Parents coming

from Central American countries, who were predominantly Catholic, also sent their children to attend the parish school.

Catholic school is considered a luxury and privilege in Central American countries as it also is in the inner city. Parents wanted the best for their children, and they were going to have it, no matter what the cost. Parents pinched and saved money to provide their children with a safe and good education. The alternative to this sacrifice was a declining public school. Latino parents put their faith in the familiar - a Catholic school. Yet, the parish school failed to become the familiar.

The Dark Ages

The eighth-grade teacher, who taught at the school for six years, reminisced during an interview about his tenure prior to changes in the school. He separated his six years of teaching into three periods. He viewed his first two years of teaching as "the age of exploration" because he was new to the teaching profession. He saw the following two years as "the Dark Ages" because he explained, "There was a lot of decline, morale was low to the point where I almost felt like leaving the school myself." He referred to his last two years as the "Renaissance Period" based on the rebirth of the school.

Teacher isolation. The teachers worked in isolation, as if they existed on individual islands. Teachers only spoke in English in the classroom, although a majority of the students' primary language was Spanish. African American teachers continued to utilize an authoritative pedagogy in the classroom by making students work in silence, and the few Latino teachers were expected to follow their example. Each classroom

existed as an island, and teachers were castaways, having no one to discuss teaching methodologies, lessons, or any classroom practices.

Cultural differences. The aging African American administration worked primarily with Latino students and parents utilizing methodologies that previously fit the needs of students with a different culture and a different language. The African American principal only spoke English to Spanish-speaking parents. Parents were not allowed to help at the school or even enter the office. If parents entered the office to speak with the principal, then the secretary screened the parents at a desk in the front office to determine if the principal desired to speak with them at that time. This atmosphere failed to acknowledge the cultural and linguistic needs of the community.

Teacher apathy and lack of pedagogy. In addition to cultural differences, the students also directly encountered teacher apathy in the classroom and lack of pedagogical practices. The principal mandated teachers to utilize the textbooks only. They presented subject matter in the order it was presented in the book because, according to the principal, professionals wrote the manual, and the publishers knew how to best teach the subject matter. The teachers, in turn, accepted monotonous conformity and followed the mandates. For the teachers who attempted to retain students or provide remediation, the principal instructed the teachers to pass the student to the next grade level. One seventh-grade student spoke about how this pedagogy hindered her academic growth:

> [T]he teachers weren't explaining anything. It was not a bad thing, but I
> think it was their way of teaching. Sometimes when we ask[ed] questions,

they would just tell us to go ask someone else, like another student. [But

because] that student really had a rivalry with you, you didn't want to ask

him, so you [would] flunk.

Students primarily worked in silence in the classrooms, completing worksheets in math,

spelling, and handwriting. Classrooms were devoid of class discussions. In fact, students

rarely spoke during class in English, let alone Spanish. Student voice did not exist.

Bullying. The students felt disrespected. Students, in turn, failed to respect each

other. Students expressed their disrespect for one another through bullying to remedy

their own feelings of inadequacy in order to validate their presence. One seventh grader

recalled a specific example of bullying at the school.

[B]ack then, when we were young, the other students didn't really have

respect for the younger students, and they would just break in[to] the

bathrooms. And even if you were taking a number two, they would just

kick the door [open], and there wouldn't be respect [for] you, or your

privacy.

The students witnessed how the attitude of the principal and teachers towards the students

affected how students felt about themselves and each other. Students, in turn,

disrespected each other through intimidating acts of bullying.

Student resistance. Students resisted the cultural differences and teacher apathy

through actions outside of the classroom such as bullying, and through actions inside the

classroom, such as failing nightly homework assignments and standardized exams.

Students and teachers realized and, for some reason, accepted student failure. I often

98

overheard conversations of teachers discussing "trouble" students and how there was "no hope for them." Teachers further perpetuated failure through monotonous forms of assessment, such as routine worksheets from the textbooks. A seventh-grade student discussed examples of teacher apathy in regards to homework. He explained, "[W]hen we were in first grade, [the teachers] didn't care if you didn't do your homework, they would just bench you. And they didn't care if you didn't do it the rest of the day, they would just give you [a] zero." Students lacked motivation to complete remedial homework assignments because they felt that their teachers accepted student failure as the norm.

Teachers further perpetuated student failure by failing to assign projects or portfolios as another form of authentic assessment to promote student success. According to one teacher, she had never heard of a portfolio and definitely lacked the knowledge to assign this long-term form of assessment. The lack of classroom pedagogy led to a deficit in student motivation and participation. This combination led to student and teacher failure.

Teaching from a script. The previous principal adopted the Reading First curriculum, which is a scripted reading program, for first to third grade because students struggled to meet the curriculum standards. For example, prior to changes in the reading curriculum, many students failed in a variety of subjects due to their inability to comprehend text. The scripted program required teachers to follow specific lessons in detail on a daily basis. Teachers only read stories from the book. The program required formal multiple choice and fluency assessments at the end of each unit, and the teachers utilized the data from those assessments to guide instruction to improve basic reading.

Teachers only prepared students to sound out words, but students were not required to think critically about the material they read. The program, which only focused on the basic skills, also failed to address writing. The eighth-grade teacher experienced the failings of that program first hand when students entered his class with deficits in basic comprehension skills. The program failed to prepare students for higher levels of learning.

The program also failed to incorporate, or even acknowledge, students' prior knowledge and experiences. For instance, students read stories about a family going on a camping trip, when most of them had never been camping. The curriculum taught reading skills with an emphasis on content; the program failed to address students' interest and background knowledge. The goal was to teach a program while disregarding the students entirely.

The Renaissance Period

Teachers and students recalled the former state of the school, yet those who attended the school for several years witnessed the dramatic changes, as if they had entered, what the eighth-grade teacher referred to as the "Renaissance Period." Those who recently arrived at the school witnessed change and growth. These changes offered the support and environment that created an atmosphere conducive for learning. From a classroom environment where students learned about their faith, shared their experiences, and articulated their thoughts and ideas in English in Spanish, to working with teachers who taught as a form of service, the school transformed and created conducive conditions for learning.

Creating Conditions for Learning

Critical literacy approaches began from a school community aspect and permeated the ideology of teachers and students as individuals creating conditions for learning. The process commenced with the "altering atmosphere" of the school aesthetically and through shifts in paradigm of how faculty taught students and viewed themselves as professionals. The new staff viewed teaching as a form of "servanthood," which allowed them to create classroom environments conducive for learning. Their "strict" discipline and high expectations provided a structured and safe environment in a neighborhood of chaos that encouraged teacher and student "humor" leading to joy in learning. Teachers capitalized on "student voice" by promoting class participation and debate. Moreover, teachers remembered their mission of teaching at a Catholic school by developing students' "faith formation."

Because teachers taught to develop all aspects of the students, they reached and recognized the "whole child" by incorporating "their language" in the "direct instruction of the English language" by utilizing novel studies as a vehicle to drive vocabulary and grammar instruction, incorporation of literary tools, and oral and written compositions. Teachers evaluated student learning through "varying forms of assessment" to ensure and promote student success. The combination of these critical literacy practices led students to realize their full potential of "continuing advancement" as they set goals for a future of higher learning.

Altering Atmosphere

Teachers and students recognized changes in their school with the creation of an "altering atmosphere." A newly installed gate addressed issues of safety in the high crime area. Fresh paint and a mural refreshed school aesthetics. Yet, teachers and students still recognized disparities. Despite lack of resources, teachers and students found deeper changes in the school that went beyond physical traits. They recognized a change in the people who made their community.

Aesthetics. Students and teachers mentioned the aesthetic changes of the school with a smile. One seventh-grade student shared her sentiments about the school before and after it was painted saying, "[B]efore you came, the office used to feel all dark and empty. And now, it feels like lighter. And with all the painting and stuff, the school looks better, and with the gate." Even though we were a low-income school, we did not have to look like one. Before the first day of school, parents, community members, and I organized a committee to paint the entire school. We contacted businesses, such as OSH and Home Depot, to solicit donations. Through various contributions, we received enough funding and materials to paint the school without any expense to the school. Some of the parents worked as professional painters, so we utilized their talents, and they helped paint the entire school. Moms, dads, teenager, teachers, and myself, put on old clothes and painted the outside details and the interior of every classroom. It was an amazing day!

Throughout the year, parents found businesses that donated new desks and furniture to the school. I went with a group of parents on the weekend, and we physically

moved in new desks and discarded the old ones. The school purchased fadeless paper for outside bulletin boards to remain looking fresh and new. Parents, teachers, and I also painted the cinderblock walls bordering the school to look like sky and grass with a mural of trees, butterflies, flowers, a swing, and a child reading with a paint donation from OSH and Dunn Edwards. This pride in appearance spread to the students and teachers.

Safety. The most prevalent modification included increased safety and removing signs of violence. The seventh-grade teacher affirmed:

> So many changes… Well starting with I guess just aesthetically, we've worked really hard to make the school have a safe environment for the students by putting up the gate and painting the walls and really working hard to fix everything that needs to be fixed.

Originally, bullet holes penetrated the seventh and eighth grade rear classroom windows leaving a constant reminder of violence. Fortunately, a parent volunteer replaced the windows for the school at a discounted price. Students and teachers noticed the difference in the appearance of the school, and they cherished feeling safe inside and outside of the classroom.

The school, located in a high crime area, previously lacked safety and protection from neighborhood crime and violence. Five year priors, a dead woman was found on the steps of the church on the morning of a school day. One week later, a dead baby was found on the steps of the church. To help take steps to improve safety, the church installed security cameras a year later. However, the cameras were not monitored, they only recorded incidents. In addition, the police often pursued chases through the parking

103

lot adjacent to our open playground. Vagrants encroached on the school grounds and church office in search of food and money. Graffiti often decorated the gray cinderblocks demarking a wall between the parish property and the backside of the local swap meet. The physical environment of the school reflected the cultural and economic marginalization of the community.

Seventh-grade students discussed issues of safety regarding the public library across the street. One seventh grader stated that students from the public middle school often go there to cause trouble. Another seventh-grade student proposed creating a school library so he would not have to go across the street to borrow books. When asked the reason for not wanting to go across the street, another student responded, "Because sometimes across the street there's [sic] a lot of kids over there with bad intentions. Well, I never go across the street, but I hear some things." To ensure the safety of our students, the school prohibited students from going to the public library or any local businesses after school. If a student did enter a neighboring store, then the students earned an automatic detention. Students recognize the proximity of trouble in the area and the rationale behind school safety rules.

If students wanted to walk home, then the school required parents to sign a permission slip to make them aware of our after-school policy. All students remaining 30 minutes after the bell rang entered Homework Club, which is the after-school care program. The school charged parents $5 per day, but parents had the peace of mind that their children were safe and supervised.

The school worked to install a gate between the parish parking lot and the school play ground. Prior to the gate, students' balls often rolled into the parking lot and vagrants entered the premises, including the open classrooms. One eighth grader described an incident about a man who came on campus. Another eighth grader confirmed the incident saying, "He urinated outside by the benches. And then also like just having the other homeless guy that came, and [he] almost like threw stuff at the teacher." The students recognized the need for a gate to ensure their safety.

The pastor and I petitioned for funding from the Archdiocese in order to install a gate to improve safety. It took two years, five letters, and four incidents to receive funding to ensure the safety of our inner-city students. The school installed the gate in July 2007 and hosted a Gate Dedication Ceremony on the first day of school. The Student Body Council led the ceremony in prayer, petitions, and a speech. The pastor blessed the gate and the superintendent participated in the ribbon cutting, and the seventh-grade teacher sang a song. We celebrated our success and safety. Every student wrote thank you letters to the bishop and the Archdiocese, and I sent in photos and a write-up to the Catholic newspaper who published the success of the school. That day, we proved that inner-city Catholic schools are important.

The students also identified the new gate as increasing safety, even though it encroached on their space. One eighth grader shared, "[W]hen we first got the fence, we were all like annoyed with it. But then, we're still kind of [annoyed], but at the same time, we know that it's for safety." She ended the conversation by confirming that the gate has been one of the most significant changes at the school.

Lack of resources. Despite securing a safe environment, teachers and students continued to recognize remaining disparities and lack of resources that the school lacked. The school owned several laptop computers and only one computer projector. The eighth-grade teacher admitted that he would like to incorporate more visual representations into his lessons. Unfortunately, "We only have one projector in our school. Often times, it's like a hotcake, so, I don't get much of a chance to use it so much," he shared.

When asked what he would like to see done in the future, the seventh-grade teacher similarly replied. He aimed to incorporate more technology into the classroom based on methodologies he learned through his master's degree program. He concluded, "[T]here are plenty of ways to do it without that, but I think that it would just open up a lot of new, great possibilities to have internet access or a full computer lab and projectors for the classrooms." The teacher realized technology was not a necessity to teaching; yet, he did recognize the advantage of material resources.

One seventh grader wanted to utilize technology to improve his typing skills. The entire school knew about the Kidtype Grant provided specifically to fourth grade students. The seventh grader also wanted to take advantage of this program. He explained, "I know that I type really, really, really slow. . . I look for a letter, and I can't find it. I take like 20 minutes on some things. And then I need really help." He continued by saying that he appreciated the opportunities the school provided for students to incorporate technology into projects, but the inability to type stifled his creativity due to

time constraints. Students wanted to improve and take advantage of other styles of learning presented through technology.

Teachers and students also yearned for more learning opportunities outside of the classroom. The eighth-grade teacher said, "There's so many things that limit us because of funding or what not." He aimed to raise more funds to take his students on more than one fieldtrip per year. He intended to "get the kids exposed to things beyond the books, beyond the classroom" because he recognized that learning took place beyond the classroom. A seventh grader echoed his comment, saying that he would like to attend field trips to the places they are learning about in class, such as the La Brea Tar Pits. The students yearned to enrich their education with excursions to places that presented examples of book knowledge in action.

Some of the students offered monumental requests that they would like to see in the school. One asked for a gymnasium, and another suggested an outdoor pool. Yet, some presented realistic and rational suggestions. One eighth grader replied that he would like the upper restrooms to be repaired and opened because "the lower restrooms right here are mainly for the little kids, and they're too low. And, there's not an extra door we need." Since his request, the school received funding to remodel the lower restrooms. Unfortunately, the school still lacks funding to repair the upper-level restrooms.

Students also suggested having a library for the school. A seventh grader stated that he would like to have a functional school library. The school possesses a room with a sign that reads "library," however; it only contains a few outdated books. The student suggested that "we should get donated books, or buy some books, and books in the

classroom that way students won't have to go across the street and borrow books." He also suggested adding library cards and chairs to create a fun reading environment. The students realized that the school lacked some common amenities. The amenities provided by the public exposed them to dangerous situations.

Engaging and meaningful relationships. Although teachers and students identified lacking resources, the school made other improvements that were less expensive and more valuable, such as engaging in personal interaction. The changes started with one person in leadership and spread to many. One seventh grader stated that she was afraid of the previous principal, "And, now since she left, everyone started being a little bit not scared to come to the office. And also the teachers teach better now. And they make us do fun assignments." These students acknowledged the concrete changes in leadership, their teachers, and the school as a whole.

Teachers confirmed the students' viewpoint. The eighth-grade teacher previously viewed his teaching experience as an "Age of Exploration" and "The Dark Ages." Within the last two years, his definition of the school changed:

> I see a lot of things spiraling upwards again. I mean morale, motivation is
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> high. And it was funny, I was thinking about the other day, if I had to
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> compare what's going on in school to some historical period in time, I
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> would say it's like a Renaissance. I really would say it's a rebirth of a lot of
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> things that this school has had.

The eighth-grade teacher witnessed the changes in the school and the people. He persevered through challenging times and reaped the benefits of the new model.

The seventh-grade teacher shared similar sentiments about the school. He explained, "The staff is really supportive. The principal, you have been just incredibly supportive in understanding our situation and what we have to go through." The teacher referred to his master's degree program where he takes classes every Monday night at Loyola Marymount University. While completing my doctorate program classes, I often saw three of the teachers during breaks on campus. We all studied, worked, and improved our practices to serve our community.

The community and staff in turn supported teacher efforts. The seventh-grade teacher added, "I guess the strongest things and most beneficial things for me were just the supportive staff and the focus on involvement of the family." Both teachers perceived the school to provide a supportive working and learning environment for both students and teachers.

The teachers further stated the reasoning for such a communal environment was structure and accountability. The eighth-grade teacher explained:

> I think students, teachers and our other team members, the parents, know
> that we hold anyone and everyone accountable for any actions. That is not
> to say any negative things, but that things are led in a fair manner at this
> school. If everybody knows everyone is treated fairly, even teachers,
> parents, students, I think it works out for credibility. So that's very
> important, and it reinforces respect and, again, it just keeps everybody in
> line. We really have to work hard.

This teacher recognized the structure of the school and the work involved in creating such a community. Accountability among parents, teachers, and students created a fair system, which everyone appreciated and respected.

The seventh-grade teacher also recognized the formation of the school and discussed the benefits of its organization. He posited, "I feel that because of the systems that are in place, I've become a much better teacher. . . In my classroom, I can see improvement from me and also from my students because of those changes." The changes allowed both teachers and students to be successful. They felt accepted because the structure and system of the school welcomed their personal attributes and collective culture.

Departmentalization. The departmentalized schedule for the middle school students allowed students to experience the rigors of high school; so when they entered high school, the long periods and changing classes would be the familiar and allow them to learn new material. The sixth-grade teacher taught science, art, and music. The seventh-grade teacher specialized in math and music. The eighth-grade teacher concentrated on social studies and Spanish. Every homeroom teacher taught two hours of language arts as the first subject of the morning. One seventh grader said, "The thing that's helping me learn more is the two hours of language arts now that they have extended it. We learn more from language arts and we have more time to do assignments."

Another seventh grader addressed the departmentalized schedule. He commented, "I think the teachers now are more dedicated to us, and also the switching of the classes,

because we get to go to other classes, and it's really cool." He mentioned that the format of changing classes allowed him to "get the feel of it" before entering high school. The school provided a structure that prepared students mentally for high school and higher education.

Accountability: School Policies

The school provided structure and support for teachers and students by holding everyone accountable for their actions. Clear expectations, communication, and consistent discipline allowed students and teachers to be successful. Teachers implemented policies and procedures that students appreciated because it demonstrated care and concern for them as individuals.

School planners: A tool for success. School policies allowed students and teachers to succeed because of consistency, follow-through, and support with specific use of a planner. Every student and teacher in the school received a planner from the school at the beginning of the year. Teachers maintained a recorded of behavior and possessed a means to communicate with parents on a daily basis. Parents also possessed a means to communicate with the teacher. The seventh-grade teacher specifically valued the structure and discipline of the school enforced through the use of student planners that allowed teachers to "focus on parent involvement." As a first-year teacher last year, the seventh-grade teacher attributed his success to communication with students and parents. Thus, the planner held parents, teachers, and students accountable for each student's education.

The seventh-grade teacher believed that the success of the system to ensure discipline went beyond the classroom, as parents and fellow teachers supported the process. Everyone must be on board in order for the system to work. The seventh-grade teacher explained how his fellow colleagues in neighboring Catholic schools lacked a discipline system similar to ours. As a result, "it's really hard for them (fellow teachers) to maintain discipline and for the students to have clear expectations." Both teachers stated and acted upon clear expectations.

Every day, teachers assigned students a daily conduct grade. A student earned an O for outstanding, G for good, S for satisfactory, or NI for needs improvement. Every night, the school required parents to sign the planner to ensure they were aware of their child's progress. The teachers mentioned that "at first it might seem like it's a lot of work, but actually in the end, it's really beneficial for the students as well." After teachers and students incorporated the planners as part of a daily routine, students completed assignments and behaved appropriately because their parents read about their actions on a daily basis.

Students viewed the conduct grade as an incentive to complete all of their assignments. If a student did not complete a homework assignment, he/she earned an NI (needs improvement) for the day. One seventh grader stated that the NIs gave him "pressure" to do his homework, and he "actually want[ed] to do [his] homework." Another seventh grader admitted that if he failed to complete his homework, then he would "have to receive the consequence fairly." Yet, another seventh-grade student thought this policy helped him "because it has to also do with adults because they don't

get NIs or anything, but they get in trouble." Students recognized how learning the values of completing tasks profited them later on in life.

The students appreciated the structure and discipline of the school and classes because it gave them clear guidelines to follow in order to be successful. One seventh grader responded, "I think the changes that have helped me learn more and helped me learn better is the strictness. . . the principal and the teachers are actually enforcing the rule that if you don't do your homework, and you don't finish it by the next day, you will get an NI," which stands for needs improvement.

Clear expectations and consequences. The school published and enforced clear expectations and consequences for teachers, students, and parents. Weekly detention and a Missing Assignment policy motivated students to complete all of their assignments and demonstrate appropriate conduct. The school further promoted excellence with monthly, quarterly, and end-of-the year Honors Masses for parents, teachers, and students. Through these awards, the school promoted and recognized leadership, service, and academic excellence.

To ensure academic excellence, the school implemented morning detention. Once a student earned three NIs, the student earned a detention. The eighth-grade teacher, who was also the Vice Principal, held detention every Wednesday morning one hour before school to ensure follow through of our discipline system. If a student arrived five minutes late to detention, then he/she completed two additional detentions to make up for the missed one and for arriving late. One seventh-grade student veered away from earning a

detention because he "didn't want to wake up early." If a student missed a detention, he/she attended the next session as well as an additional session for missing the first one.

Because the same teacher hosted detention, he took advantage of the opportunity to address recurring detention student visitors and address their individual needs in order to help them improve. Parents took accountability for their child's actions because they had to bring their child to detention an hour earlier. All parties took responsibility for a student's education. The students knew what was expected of them, and they rose to meet the standard. The students viewed detention as a negative motivational factor, yet they also appreciated the opportunity to succeed.

Yet, the seventh graders all agreed that the policy worked because teachers implemented the policy on a regular basis. A seventh grader smiled saying that she appreciated her teachers' strictness and their consistency in discipline "because they're very strict and if you don't do your homework, you know you're going to get it." The students viewed their teachers' sternness as a form of care. Just as a parent disciplines a child, the teachers took the time to ensure students learned from their mistakes through direct and immediate consequences.

For students who continually failed to complete homework, the school implemented a Missing Assignment Policy. The school dismissed early every Friday at 1:30 p.m. Every Friday, teachers submitted a list of students and their missing assignments to me. At the end of the day, I collected all of the students and escorted them to Homework Club to complete their assignments. The school prohibited students from leaving until their work was complete. In addition, parents paid the standard $5 a day fee

for their child not completing their work. Students who failed to complete long-term projects earned a more serious consequence. The first day, the student earned an NI for a missing project. If the student failed to bring the project the following day, then he/she went home on open-suspension until the project was complete because it was such a large percentage of his/her grade. The school published and distributed the Missing Assignment Policy in English and Spanish to all families.

Students thought that even though there were negative consequences, the school provided them with the opportunity to succeed. One seventh-grade student said that he appreciated the "chance" the school now provided because previously when he was in first grade, he "wouldn't get another chance. [He] would just get benched." With the Missing Assignment policy, students received the opportunity to complete missing assignments earning a lower grade. Students still perceived that "at least [they] got something." The students understood the importance of their assignments.

The students also knew the school and their teachers supported their success. A seventh grader thought that the teachers and I gave him an extra chance to "actually raise up [his] grade." He understood that his grade was "not going to be too high because [he] didn't turn it in at the right time, but it's a good chance." They knew that everyone makes mistakes, but they had the opportunity to make it right.

Students realized that they made mistakes, yet their determination to succeed surpassed extrinsic factors. One seventh-grade student never wanted to feel that she "let [her teacher] down," and she definitely did not "want to bring [her] family down." The

students realized that their teachers and parents expected them to be successful, and students rose to the occasion.

The school provided the means for teachers to recognize students on a monthly, quarterly, and yearly basis for their success through Honors Masses, which further promoted student success through positive motivational factors. Teachers nominated Students of the Month who received a certificate in front of the entire school at the beginning of each month. Teachers also submitted rosters of students for the school to recognize with ribbons for first honors (only A's in major subjects), second honors (A's and B's in major subjects), outstanding conduct, good conduct, improvement, and service at the quarterly honors mass. The school also presented quarterly awards for students who upheld and best demonstrated our School-wide Learning Expectations (SLEs) based on the teachers' recommendations. The SLEs stated that a student be a faithful Christian, academically successful, a responsible member of the community, and a self-motivated individual.

Teachers promoted leadership by recognizing the leadership qualities of the eighth-grade class. At the end of the year during Noche de Las Estrellas, our final awards ceremony, eighth graders led the program with their entrance to Pomp and Circumstance and their class poem. The seventh graders lined the aisles and saluted the eighth graders as they entered. Holding lit candles, the eighth graders said goodbye to the school. The seventh graders then lined up facing the eight graders with unlit candles in their hands. The seventh graders took a pledge to uphold the values of the school and become the future leaders of the school. The eighth graders then passed their light physically and

metaphorically to their protégés. This final ceremony signified the importance of being a leader at the school. The ceremony also recognized community members, parents, teachers, and the entire student body for their success.

<center>Catholic Identity in a Catholic School</center>

Teachers and students maintained and developed their Catholic identity in this low-income, urban Catholic elementary school. Teachers viewed and treated their profession as a vocation, where they worked as a form of "servanthood." They strived to continually improve by furthering their education and collaborating with parents and other teachers to better serve their students.

Teachers further worked to help students develop and foster their own personal faith formation and application. The entire school community celebrated events in the liturgical year, memorized scripture verses, and applied Christian teachings in their daily lives. Teachers utilized the Bible (Hartman & Bourke, 1970) as a supplemental text to deepen students' awareness and provide a foundation with Biblical truths. Students seized the knowledge, applied it in their daily lives, and proceeded to share their faith with others. Students grew spiritually because their teachers nurtured and cherished the opportunity to be Catholic in a Catholic school.

Teacher Servanthood

The teachers treated their position as a form of service, or "servanthood," because they viewed teaching as more than a profession; they saw it as a "vocation." If a student needed anything, the teachers made themselves available. Teachers also took the opportunity to share personal experiences with their students. In return, students

acknowledged and admired their teachers' efforts. Classroom formalities metamorphosed into family unit practices.

Teachers served the students, and teachers served one another by working as a team, utilizing resources from the outside world to enhance and enrich the learning experience. Teachers also supported each other by sharing their knowledge and skills with each other and their students. As a result, teachers aimed to continually grow and improve.

Teachers' availability. Teachers made themselves available to meet with students and the students, in turn, acknowledged their teachers' efforts. Whenever a student raised his or her hand in either the seventh- or eighth-grade classroom, the teacher immediately went to the student and answered the question individually. One seventh grader stated that she was learning because her teacher took the time to speak with them "individually, so they could actually understand during class time." Another seventh grader explained that if she needed help and she didn't understand something, the teacher "will tell [them] what [they] need to understand." By taking the time to speak with students on an individual basis, students thought that teachers addressed their immediate needs in order to help them understand.

If time constraints prohibited individual instruction, the teachers made themselves available after school or at lunch or recess. I witnessed the eighth-grade teacher stating during class that he would give more details at lunch, recess, or after school for students who needed additional help. I also often witnessed teachers meeting with students after school or during recess. The seventh-grade teacher took time to "tutor [students]

individually after school." If a student was absent for a presentation, the eighth-grade teacher allowed the student to present during lunch or after school. He challenged the students to take responsibility for their learning, and in return, made himself available to teach them.

The students felt comfortable asking their teachers for help because the teachers made themselves available. One seventh-grade student also appreciated her teachers' demeanor because she felt that "the teachers really understand [her] better. . . The teachers are willing to take the time, and to tell [her] what each thing means." Students wanted to succeed, and if that meant taking additional time to understand and complete an assignment, they knew their teachers and principal were willing to help them.

Not only did the students feel comfortable asking the teachers for additional help based on the teachers' willingness and openness, the students also felt comfortable asking me for help based on those same reasons. For example, during a lesson I observed, a student approached me during class and asked if he could meet with me at recess for more help. Another student asked to meet with me after school to assist him with an assignment. I accepted both requests, and I met with each of those students individually. One seventh grader specifically appreciated "more communication with the principal." I welcomed students to enter my office and visit me at any time. I also spent time at lunch and recess with them. Students recognized that the principal and teachers worked to develop relationships with the students through well-spent time and energy.

Practice makes improvement. Practice may not make perfection, yet practice leads to improvement, especially in the teaching profession. Teachers aimed to continually

grow and improve to serve their students. The seventh-grade teacher admitted that his first year of teaching was "very much trial by fire." He "experimented" with various lessons to determine what worked best for him and his students. His teaching also improved because of his master's degree program. He learned new ways to "teach comprehension," "tap prior knowledge," and "open up" to the students. He admitted that those "simple concepts really make a difference." He recognized that students, too, possessed knowledge and by addressing their experiences and sharing personal experiences, teachers made an impact on student learning.

The seventh-grade teacher also revealed his reasons for success in his second year of teaching. He taught the same group of students math as sixth graders the previous year. It was "beneficial for [him] because [he] got to know how much they can handle, what their zone is and what works best." He also stated that the students were a "really receptive group," and he attributed success to his students and his awareness of them as individuals and as a class.

The eighth-grade teacher felt similarly. Last year he was a "novice" at teaching eighth graders. However, he felt that his "teaching is far better this year than it was last year," because of familiarity with the curriculum and novel. He also attributed his awareness of various school events allowing him to better "pace" the curriculum to ensure that he covered the standards. The teachers learned from their mistakes and tried to improve every year.

The teachers served their students by continuing to learn new methodologies to reach their students. The teachers spoke with fellow colleagues on an informal level, and

then lent themselves to classroom practices; the conversation cultivated to include experiences outside of the school. Teachers grasped knowledge from their master's degree classes and aimed to apply it to their classroom and students. The eighth-grade teacher took a linguistics class that "really expanded his vision" of student challenges. He aimed to use his newfound knowledge to "refer some of the parents to for some kids who [he] feel[s] may have dyslexia." He aspired "to be of service to everybody here" because he was called to be a "public servant." His students were "first and foremost [his] priority and focus." He intended to help them in any way possible.

Teachers utilized every opportunity to learn more and share this information with others. The seventh-grade teacher discussed how he took advantage of the workshops I sent him through flyers or e-mails that he utilized to "help bring something to the classroom and to other faculty members." He also thought that the Friday faculty meetings allowed the teachers the opportunity to "exchange ideas from workshops or other things." Yet, he realized that working on Friday afternoons took "discipline" on the part of the teachers. Because the staff took advantage of the time with one another, teachers "grow together and help support each other." Every Friday a different faculty member presented a new method to improve instruction in a particular subject. Teachers respected each other and supported each other.

Collaboration. The knowledge and power of the school came from the support of the parents, teachers, and students, who worked in collaboration with one another to ensure student success. The eighth-grade teacher thought that the school succeeded because of the team-oriented environment. He shared:

It's a team effort. So where I say one who would critique or criticize about

anything about the school, they are more than welcome to do so, but

they're also more than welcome to help provide solutions to how we can

do better. . . We can't do it alone so it helps to be a team, be on the same

page and do more action than speaking. That really is what makes a

difference. So whether it is literally rolling up your sleeve and sweeping or

painting an area to helping set something up or prepare for a project or

play, everyone is busy, [and] has something to do. . . And there's no

excuse for anyone to do the wrong thing because everybody has a role to

play and feel very important.

The school welcomed suggestions from students, parents, and teachers.

Conversely, the school expected everyone to contribute to its greatness. To ensure

support, the school implemented Parent Service Hours. Parents donated 20 hours of

service throughout the entire year to the school. Parents helped with monthly yard and

bake sales, school repairs, recess duty, and large school festivities. For parents unable to

donate time, they made copies of the monthly calendar and weekly bi-lingual newsletter

for the school. The school welcomed parents to come and help the school in any way, at

any time, for any service or talent they possessed. Everyone looked at the school as one

body.

Teachers also collaborated and served their colleagues. Teachers utilized each

other to improve and challenge each other and the students academically. The eighth-

grade teacher invited his colleagues to help evaluate his eighth-grade students'

presentations on leadership. He thought that his students "would like to have an audience, and they're welcoming that idea as well." He also aimed "to get some of [his] colleagues involved." Several teachers, including the third- and fourth-grade teachers, skipped their plan periods and recess to help the eighth-grade teacher. I also graded half of the presentations. Teachers moved their personal realm to include students outside of their own classroom to include other grades. Students and teachers witnessed the importance of reciprocal support and service for one another.

Teachers also communally worked to serve the school through extra-curricular, volunteer activities. The seventh-grade teacher spoke of the support and team-oriented environment of the school. He said that he appreciated how every one of the staff members contributed to extra-curricular activities because every teacher at the school led an after-school activity by choice:

I feel that it's stronger with the staff really kind of splitting up duties after school, whether it be coaching sports or this year helping with the academic decathlon and just really working together as a staff, working together as a unit so that every year the students know exactly what we expect. I think that's been a huge change, and I can see it.

By coaching soccer after school, moderating the Academic Decathlon, and leading the choir, the seventh-grade teacher saw various aspects of his students and other teachers. The eighth-grade teacher contributed to the soccer team, all teachers in first through eighth coached a student for the Academic Decathlon, and the second- and third-grade teachers helped with the choir. One teacher led the drill team and led the art fair, one

coached girls basketball and helped with choir, one coached boys basketball and football, one tutored after school and led the yearbook committee, one led the Christmas play and helped with choir, and two hosted student council and any school event.

Every teacher was integral to the school. They all volunteered to participate, and I often witnessed them playing basketball, volleyball, and soccer with the students during lunch and recess after school. One day, the fifth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade teachers organized a soccer game with the seventh- and eighth-grade students after school just for fun. The teachers cared and committed their lives to service.

Teaching as a vocation. Teachers took their profession very seriously, taught with great conviction, and viewed their profession as a vocation. Teachers treated their profession as a year-round engagement by working extra hours after school, on weekends, and even during their summer vacations to go the extra mile to help their students. Teachers further took the time to share personal experiences with their students. They understood the value of their role as teachers, and they took advantage of the opportunity to serve others.

During summer vacation, teachers purposely spent their summers with their students in mind. When asked about how he improved his instruction the following year, the eighth-grade teacher discussed how he brought back a lot of materials and experiences from London that he aimed to share with his students while reading *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* (Lewis, 2000) as listed in the "Novel List" (see Appendix A). He specifically learned "British colloquialisms or customs" and collected postcards and souvenirs to share with his students so they visually saw tangible artifacts

that related to the novel. For example, he displayed a miniature- sized version of Old Ben on his desk. His classroom contained a large lamp post where the characters, Lucy and Mr. Tummis, met in the story. He purposely sought adventures and experiences to share with his students to enhance their understanding of the novel.

Teachers shared personal experiences with their students through classroom lessons while opening their hearts and lives to their students to make a deeper connection with them as individuals. On one specific occasion, the seventh-grade teacher shared his response to a journal topic. When asked about the idea of a perfect day, the teacher said, "[For] my perfect day, I wake up in the morning, birds chirping, music playing (laughter). [There is] little traffic, no red lights."

The students responded, "Oh yeah," in agreement.

The teacher continued saying, "[I'm] greeted by my seventh graders perfectly in line (laughter). After school, [I attend] a nice Dodger game." The students all approved because the teacher included his students as part of his perfect day. He demonstrated through words and actions how important his students were to him. He approached teaching as more than a profession; it was an opportunity to live his dream.

The eighth-grade teacher also shared personal experiences with his students. In reading *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* (Lewis, 2000), I observed him sharing pictures and trinkets from his travel to London because the story is set in England. In discussing a more serious event in the same story, he asked the students if they were ever saved by a family member or friend. He shared a story about how he saved his sister from being stuck in a camper. He ended the story by admitting that he initially put her in the

camper, but then he saved her. The students related to his sibling rivalry and saw a different aspect of their teacher. The teacher shared his childhood mischief, which let students know that he, too, made mistakes and learned from them.

The teachers showed the students that they lived real lives. The teachers enjoyed the same things that the students did; they experienced similar events in their lives. The teachers cared enough to share their lives and took extra time to help students. Teachers taught as a form of service to their students.

Teachers genuinely valued and recognized the significance of teaching. The eighth-grade teacher revealed how his passion and conviction for teaching made a difference in the eyes of his students:

If I believe what I'm teaching, and if I show in an extroverted way, that I believe what I'm teaching, I will influence a lot of these kids in this classroom. Because, these kids are very smart, they'll know if I'm only going through the motions and not putting myself into it. But, they'll also pick up if they know I'm just in love with this material I'm teaching. So, they see that, they pick that up; they're definitely going to be influenced. I feel I'm very influential in the classroom. So, being a person who believes in what he's teaching, what he's preaching, I feel I'm getting my point across.

The teacher knew that students, especially teenaged students, easily and quickly determined if a teacher possessed confidence and respect for their profession. By

demonstrating energy, enthusiasm, and preparation for every lesson, teachers earned students' respect, which directly correlated into the classroom environment.

Faith Formation and Application

In the spirit of promoting Catholic identity, teachers provided opportunities for faith formation and application of student beliefs. People living in inner cities viewed Catholic schools of higher quality compared to public schools. Part of the reason people regarded Catholic schools as being superior included structure and discipline within the school and classroom. The teachers promoted Catholicity through school rituals. Yet, the teachers further aimed to provide students with the knowledge to support their faith. Teachers incorporated their faith into daily lessons, and students in turn also included their beliefs in discussions and assignments. The school strived to teach the Catholic faith to help students formulate their personal beliefs and apply them in real life situations. Students, in turn, applied their beliefs through various classroom practices. Talking about God and faith was part of normal discourse.

Catholic school quality. In the inner city, Catholic schools proved to provide a quality education for students in comparison to their public school counterparts. Teachers and students met the challenges of an academically rigorous program provided at the Catholic school. One seventh grader mentioned that she thought the school was "actually harder" because it was Catholic, and teachers assigned more homework. In addition to academic assignments, teachers also selected material that challenged students spiritually.

The school utilized daily, weekly, and monthly customs to demonstrate and learn the Catholic faith. Students led the class each morning in prayer. The entire school prayed

together at lunch on a daily basis and recited the scripture verse for the month. Every class ended each day in prayer, and the entire school attended mass on a weekly basis. Each class also learned religion as a formal subject in the curriculum with two class periods per week. Teachers also participated in school rituals and implemented school-wide practices into the classroom.

Every month the school celebrated one of the Ten Commandments and memorized a scripture verse selected by the teachers that best reflected the theme. The eighth-grade teacher also took advantage of utilizing the school's scripture verse for the month through practical situations. For example, when students peer edited each others' papers, the teacher walked around answering questions while holding a sign with the scripture verse for the month. It read, "Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:11." He wanted students to use the classroom activity as an opportunity to demonstrate a Christian value while knowing the verse from which it came.

Using the Bible as a text. The eighth-grade teacher utilized the Bible (Hartman & Bourke, 1970) as a supplemental text in his class from the "Novel List" (see Appendix A) in order to provide an academic and theoretical background for students' personal faith. Every student owned a Bible (Hartman & Bourke, 1970) and brought it to class on a daily basis. The students knew the format of the Bible (Hartman & Bourke, 1970) and analyzed it for literal and spiritual meaning. For example, the eighth grade began a lesson by questioning students, "We read Samson yesterday, from where?"

The students all responded, "Judges."

"What testament?" continued the teacher.

"Old," they said in unison.

The class then proceeded to read various passages from the Bible (Hartman & Bourke, 1970). Every student read from their own personal Bible (Hartman & Bourke, 1970) while one student read the passage aloud to the class. They read the story of the Lord's Supper found in Mark 14:22, the Prodigal Son found in Luke 15:1-7, the parable of the Lost Son, and the Lost Sheep (Hartman & Bourke, 1970). They discussed the meaning of words like "Abba" and "transubstantiation."

The teacher aimed for students to relate Biblical allusions to events in their novel, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* (Lewis, 2000). They discussed the theme of celebrity status, foreshadowing, imagery, and formalities. The teacher required students to write the book, chapter, and verses of the story from the Bible (Hartman & Bourke, 1970) in their novels where the allusion applied in preparation for academic discourse. The teacher then asked the class to compare one of the characters in the novel, Aslan, to Samson. The students mentioned that both characters were shaved, they both possessed bravery, and they were both ridiculed.

The eighth-grade teacher incorporated issues of morality into the lesson. When discussing another parable, students discussed "greed, selfishness, forgiveness, and redemption." The teacher highlighted the seven deadly sins. He then discussed how the students utilized themes in our Academic Decathlon. Everything worked together in terms of spiritual lessons, academic lessons, and life lessons.

The eighth-grade teacher discussed the meaning of Christian symbols to bring meaning to otherwise lifeless representations of the Catholic faith. In discussing the mocking of Jesus and how it related to the execution of the character Aslan in the novel, the teacher wrote "INRI" on the board, which is seen on the cross. He asked the students what this means, and all of the students responded, "King of the Jews." As students saw words and figures in mass, the teacher aimed for students to find meaning and understanding about Jesus' life, relate it to their novel, and then relate it to their own personal experiences.

Faith-sharing practices. Teachers took advantage of opportunities to share their faith practices with their students, and students, in turn, formed their Catholic faith by incorporating their beliefs of their own volition. The eighth-grade teacher incorporated various aspects of his own personal journey in the Catholic faith. During class, he often incorporated Latin that he learned when attending mass in Latin. Furthermore, the teacher "never forgot that [he was] in a Catholic school. [He] was born and bred Catholic school." He attended the seminary, and he intended to keep "alive a past or tradition" of the Catholic faith. He incorporated scripture into lessons on a daily basis. His faith determined who he was; it came naturally to him "just like water." He referred to living his faith to "breathing." He integrated his faith through all aspects of his being.

The seventh-grade teacher drew key ideas out of students' response to a journal topic to make use of a teachable moment. When responding to a journal topic about the perfect day, one seventh grader wrote that he woke up in the wrong place, but that he made the best of it and had an amazing day. The teacher replied, "I liked what Louis said.

Some things go wrong, but even if not, you deal with the circumstances, adapt, make the best of what we have."

The students recognized and appreciated the values they learned from their teachers. The eighth-grade teacher commonly related their novel to the Bible (Hartman & Bourke, 1970). One eighth grader realized that because of her teacher, she recognized the underlying Christian themes written in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* (Lewis, 2000) because the author, "C.S. Lewis, wrote the books on his Christian beliefs."

Not only did students learn examples of morality through Biblical stories and their novel, but they also learned how to apply their faith in their own daily lives and they took ownership for their own Catholic journeys. One eighth grader took ownership of her personal Catholic faith by relating it to the novel, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* (Lewis, 2000). She agreed that all of the readings were "a Christian thing, Catholic." She thought that the novel directly related to her. She stated, "Aslan came from the dead. Jesus came back to the dead, so it relates to our faith." She clearly distinguished the parallelism between the novel and her Christian beliefs.

The seventh-grade teacher also positively acknowledged students for incorporating and practicing their faith of their own volition to help them develop their own personal faith journeys. Students, in turn, began to take ownership for their own personal Catholic beliefs by incorporating the sacrament into their setting on their own. When sharing his journal topic about his perfect day, a seventh-grade student said, "I would get a test back with 93 or above, go to church to receive the Eucharist, finish all

131

my homework, talk to friends, [and] watch the Lakers beat the Suns." Students chose to attend mass and receive the sacraments, and even viewed it as a form of perfection.

The seventh-grade teacher highlighted the student's entry who wrote that he received communion on his perfect day when positively commenting on the students' journal entries. The teacher commented, "[That was] nice bringing in the Eucharist. A little Jesus always helps."

Another student interjected, "No, I went to church too."

"Did you?" the teacher asked.

"Yes," he said.

The entire class chimed in, "Yeah, me too."

Students' faith moved beyond ritual and customs. Students took responsibility and ownership for practicing their faith. They cherished the sacraments, and Catholicity consumed the class. Teachers consciously incorporated faith formation into classroom instruction and validated students' faith experiences.

All of the teaching and preaching in the world can go in one ear and out the other. Yet for some students, God became part of their daily lives. When asked about her homework, one seventh-grade student declared that she completed her homework because she did not "want to let [her] parents down and because it affects [her] grades." However, her ultimate reason included God because she knew "that sometimes God is watching us in everything that we do, and we don't want Him mad." She believed that God cared about her as an individual and that He cared about her actions. Another seventh-grade student mentioned God in her plans for the future saying that she will go

"wherever God takes [her]." The students truly believed that God directed their paths and had a plan for their lives.

<center>Critical Literacy Approaches and Perceptions</center>

Teachers and students perceived that the implementation of various critical literacy approaches increased student learning. Teachers created classrooms conducive for learning with high expectations, predictability, creative lessons with humor, and a sense of class camaraderie. Students flourished in this environment because they participated through various modalities, and they possessed the confidence to contribute to the class because they knew that their opinion counted. Teachers also worked to teach the whole child by utilizing novel studies to take learning beyond the text, connect it to students' lives, and validate students' culture. Teachers further incorporated students' language into the class through use of slang and Spanish. The students' took pride in their bilingualism, which served as a platform for the direct instruction of the English language.

Teachers facilitated direct instruction of the English language through multiple strategies. First, teachers held positive views of their students. Because teachers understood students' complex background of economic hardship and dual language experience, teachers scaffolded instruction by implementing various literary strategies and tools. Teachers placed strong emphasis on reading, vocabulary, literary tools, grammar, and writing. In turn, teachers determined student learning through formative and authentic assessments to meet their students' needs. As a result, academic

<center>133</center>

achievement increased because teachers utilized assessments to drive instruction.

Classroom Environment: Clear Expectations

The seventh- and eighth-grade teachers drew from the school climate and created classroom environments conducive for learning through strict discipline, high expectations, and a touch of humor. A morning routine coupled with varying lessons allowed students to express their thoughts and ideas in a safe, non-threatening manner because students predicted the structure and expectations for the day.

Predictability. Teachers promoted, commanded, and reaped the benefits of high expectations because they utilized predictable classroom policies and procedures that promoted student success. All students worked on task and brought the proper materials to class on a daily basis. If they failed to bring their homework, both teachers wrote notes in students' planners. Students recorded their homework on a daily basis, teachers wrote daily conduct grades, and parents signed the planner on a nightly basis. Students stayed organized.

The teachers also gained students' attention in a firm respectful manner. In the seventh grade, if students became too talkative at any inappropriate point in the lesson, the teacher counted backwards from three in a calm, soft voice. At the end, if students continued talking, then he changed their behavior card to a different color denoting student progress, which later he recorded in their planner as a note that went home to their parents. Also, to attain the students' attention, he held up his hand in the sign of a fist. Once students saw his hand, they raised their fists in a similar manner and waited

quietly. The seventh-grade teacher, as well as the eighth-grade teacher, never raised their voices.

The eighth-grade teacher implemented a similar procedure. He also counted backwards from three in a calm, stern voice. If the students worked in groups, then he gained their attention by turning the lights off and on, but he only had to do it once. The class became silent immediately. The eighth-grade teacher commanded attention of all students at all times, just as the seventh-grade teacher did. One morning a student yawned loudly in the eighth grade class, and the teacher responded, "Please don't yawn in class." That was all he had to say, and the student immediately sat up straight.

The seventh- and eighth-grade teachers utilized a morning routine that allowed students to succeed through clear parameters because students predicted the schedule of the morning. When entering the classroom, students knew what to do and what was expected from them. As soon as the bell rang, students lined up outside and followed their teacher into the classroom. Upon entering the classroom, students quietly stood next to their desks and waited to be greeted by their teacher. The teacher greeted them with "Good morning," and the students responded, "Good morning." The morning greeting promoted teacher and student respect. In turn, students learned to greet their teacher and others in a formal manner that prepared them for a future of success.

After the morning greeting, a student, either designated or a volunteer, led prayer before the class. Sometimes the student led the class praying the "Our Father," while other times they said a prayer in their own words. Because the students expected and

even looked forward to the prayer, they anticipated and even prepared in advance for their opportunity to lead prayer with their classmates.

The students then sat down, took out their homework, planner, and journal, and responded to the journal question previously written on the board by the teacher. The students felt and knew that their teachers cared about them because of teacher preparation and anticipation of the day's lesson. Teachers seized every moment of the day to learn, which began when students immediately entered the class. While teachers took attendance and lunch count, students learned time-management skills by observing and participating in multi-tasking, which also prepared them for the future.

The eighth-grade teacher also spoke of utilizing a classroom "routine practice." Every morning students entered to a journal topic on the board "that's already there to incite critical thinking skills." The journal topic is "very subjective." Students answer the topic within the first 10 minutes of class and then the students begin working on their novel. The students take their out their novels and pens "so they can make notes on the book." The teacher then highlights the "literary tool for the day." Sometimes the class uses Bibles (Hartman & Bourke, 1970) as well "to make some comparisons with our novel, *The Chronicles of Narnia*" (Lewis, 2000). The teacher and students knew the morning schedule. The daily practice allowed teachers and students the ability to meet a clear expectation. The structure of the format also permitted students and teachers to start the day in a calm, organized manner.

The eighth-grade teacher attributed his students' success to classroom management. He spoke highly of his students saying that "they're really disciplined."

Because of his "classroom management," the students "are prepared to listen, [and] be attentive." The teacher rarely, if ever, spent time correcting students for poor conduct or behaviors. As a result, he thought that the students "felt great" about their classroom environment because "they know that their teacher is into it. [He] use[s] a little dry humor once in a while, and [he] think that helps out, too, to know that they're awake, they are listening." When I entered the classroom, the students' behavior mirrored the teacher's description. Every student possessed all of his/her homework, they raised their hands to be called upon, and everyone's opinion was respected.

Creative lessons with humor. Although the morning routine rarely varied, the teachers introduced unique lessons and methodologies on a daily basis while incorporating aspects of humor. The objectives ranged from vocabulary instruction, to spelling, to comprehension, which were all accompanied with different activities. Yet every lesson began with a journal topic followed by a list of the day's activities that were written clearly on the board.

Responses to the journal created a fun and creative environment, which allowed the students to feel comfortable expressing their comical ideas and opinions. In response to one seventh grade journal prompt – "when a lion entered a room…" – many students wrote comical entries such as, "I wet my pants when the lion growled, and fell on an old man." The entire class laughed because the students felt comfortable sharing their personalities and sense of humor both orally and in writing.

The students also felt comfortable joking with their teacher. Another student ended his journal response by saying, "It's a true story," which is a saying that his teacher

says all of the time. All students laughed, clapped, and said "Ohhh," as if that student was in trouble. Because the teachers maintained discipline and order in the classroom, students felt comfortable because of the humor their teachers employed in other arenas.

The seventh-grade teacher utilized humor in calling on various students to allow students to feel safe and at ease when speaking in front of the class. He said, "Why don't we have someone share, whose name rhymes with (pause) Rowland?" The students laughed because the seventh-grade teacher was calling on Rowland. He called on another student saying, "One more, I'm just going to give the initial this time, (pause) Louis." Again, the students laughed because the teacher actually said the student's name instead of his proposition of stating only the initials. The teachers called on students in a non-threatening manner that allowed them to feel comfortable sharing their answers. Humor initially drew attention away from the student and kept it on the teacher. As the student slowly began to talk, students focused on the speaker. The transition of attention from teacher to student provided a comforting atmosphere of dialogue.

The seventh-grade teacher also used humor in giving directions to retain students' attention. When asking the students to fold their papers vertically, he said, "I feel like having a hotdog today." When he wanted students to fold their papers horizontally, he said that he felt like having a hamburger. The students laughed and folded their papers as the teacher had modeled. The humor kept students focused and attentively waiting to hear the next form of humor.

The seventh-grade teacher took the opportunity to laugh at himself in front of the students. After students drew pictures of the setting of a story, which involved walking,

the teacher listened to their answers and drew his own example on the overhead projector. He drew an awkward picture of feet, and the students and the teacher laughed together. He erased the drawing and tried yet again. By recognizing his imperfections, students accepted their own imperfections and felt comfortable sharing their ideas and drawings.

The eighth-grade teacher also took the opportunity to use self-deprecating humor. When explaining a project involving a Wheaties box, the students looked at him blankly. He admitted that he might be too old in using a reference from a previous era. The students agreed and laughed. He also said sayings like, "It didn't jive," which kept the students alert and attentive.

Class camaraderie. The eighth-grade teacher also incorporated humor into his lessons to promote camaraderie among the class. He told a fable of a mouse and an elephant in a way that was amusing, which made the students laughed. When he taught his class about properly citing references for their paper, he reminded students that, unfortunately, they could not go to the primary source of historical figures because they were all dead and again, the students laughed. His continual use of humor commanded students' attention, and the students wanted to listen to the teacher's instructions because of that humor. If the teacher said a humorous remark and one of the students failed to hear it while the other students laughed, the students felt left out of the group. As a result, the students listened closely to the teacher to make sure that they heard all of the jokes. Thus, the teacher utilized peer pressure, as well as a teenager's need to belong, to drive instruction.

The seventh-grade teacher implemented additional approaches to promote a unified and disciplined classroom. To build "classroom unity and fellowship," the teacher asked students to "come up with a class motto and a class logo." He gave examples of Nike's motto, "Just Do It," and Gatorade's logo of a lightning symbol, and their motto "Is It In You?" He aimed to create "something that the classroom could own and just give a lot of pride." At the end of every day after the closing prayer, the students said their class motto of "Fly to the Highest Peak." The teacher included the students in the creation of the motto. Because the students contributed to the saying, they recited, practiced, and believed the words they created.

The seventh-grade teacher further incorporated the class motto into novel studies. When reading a quote from *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1995) during class from the "Novel List" (see Appendix A), the teacher reminded the students that it was similar to their class motto. Everyone shouted, "Fly to the highest peak!" The students created their own motto, observed examples of other mottos in their novel, and ultimately believed what they said because the teachers created a classroom environment with structure and discipline while incorporating humor that allowed students to gain confidence.

Clear policies and procedures of the school allowed teachers and students to be successful. Teachers attributed teachable classroom environment to routine, consistency, and unity. Students appreciated the structure and guidelines because it promoted their success.

Student Voice

   Students enthusiastically and confidently voiced their opinions and ideas in class because of teachers' "strict humor" and commitment to "teacher servanthood." Teachers encouraged and even mandated group and class participation, and students felt comfortable participating because teachers respected their opinions, which allowed students to develop the confidence to express their views publicly. From randomly calling on students to writing personal narratives, students dialogued with the class. Teachers heard and encouraged student voice because teachers acknowledged the students' experiences. On occasion, students determined the class activity because the teachers wanted the students to take responsibility and ownership for their own learning. Teachers further taught and prepared students to defend their positions through critical dialogue.

   Student confidence. Students possessed the confidence to stand in front of the class because of the "strict humor," "high expectations," and promotion of "student voice" utilized by the teachers. When describing vocabulary words, one student stated that she preferred to act out the word. She stood in front of the class and began turning around in circles to demonstrate the word 'unceasingly.' She kept turning and said, "It's not going to stop – never ending." She became dizzy and fell to the ground laughing. One student asked if she was alright, and then they all laughed together with the student.

   Both teachers created a classroom environment with a clear structure. Students enjoyed their classes because the teachers expressed wittiness and humor in their lessons.

The students laughed when appropriate because of the discipline and respect maintained in the classroom.

Ensuring participation through various modalities. The teachers encouraged participation, and they aimed to ensure it by employing a variety of teaching methods. The eighth-grade teacher utilized Popsicle sticks with students' numbers written on each stick to ensure that he randomly called on every student. Once he pulled a stick from the cup, the student whose number he selected responded to the question. Even if the student responded incorrectly, the teacher acknowledged the student's effort.

Teachers also implemented pair-sharing to guarantee every student with the opportunity to talk. During a seventh-grade observation, the teacher asked students to pair-share after the morning journal entry. Before students shared their answers with the entire class, students spoke with their neighbor about the topic they wrote. The teacher instructed them to take a few minutes to pair share and then leave a positive comment. The students swapped journals with each other (a pair), whispered (shared), and read silently. The teacher then called on several students to share. Again, the teacher presented students with the opportunity to think and share their answers. By giving direct instructions to encourage one another, students felt comfortable sharing their ideas with their classmates.

Students also voiced their ideas through illustrations. Students improved comprehension by creating illustrations after reading sections of the novel. A student read a paragraph aloud and then the rest of the class drew an individual picture about their understanding of the scene in the story in one minute. Students then took another minute

to share their drawing with a partner. The teacher re-read the paragraph aloud, and the students shared their drawings with the entire class.

The seventh-grade teacher further provided opportunities for students to state their experiences and ideas through autobiographies. Students read the story of a Latino family in *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984) from the "Novel List" (see Appendix A). For the culminating project, students wrote their own chapter book describing their life and neighborhood, just as Sandra Cisneros did in her novel. The teacher encouraged students to record their memoirs and further validated their experiences by demonstrating that their lives were so important that they deserved to be documented.

The seventh-grade students also wrote letters to pen pals at a neighboring Catholic school. They began to share their ideas with the outside world. Their voice was heard in the classroom and now traveled to impact other students and give them the opportunity to share their thoughts, ideas, and opinions.

The teachers also aimed to present lessons that reached and included all students by encouraging and providing the opportunity for students to work in groups. The seventh-grade teacher commented that the key to reaching all students was "working in groups." By working in groups, he was able to help a "range of learners, different learners. The ones that do well can assist the others, and the ones that are not usually so upfront or bold can kind of learn from the others and build more confidence that way." He thought that group work provided an opportunity for students to "encourage" and "motivate" each other. He also recognized that students often learn best by teaching others and placed the power of the teacher in the hands of the students.

The eighth-grade teacher conceded that he also recognized the importance of working in groups. In fact, he aimed to include more group work in his lessons and provide students with the opportunity to "move around." He wanted for students to engage and contribute to their education.

Teachers placed great emphasis on reflection and dialogue which they witnessed through classroom participation. Teachers also recognized that learning also took place outside of the classroom. During daily conversations with each other and other teachers, students learned. The eighth-grade teacher sought out "extroverted forms of learning." He looked for "overall participation." However, the teacher assessed student learning not "just the number of hands that are up . . . but [by] just random, spontaneous occasions when [he] talk[ed] to them at playground, recess, lunch, after school." He took these out-of-class opportunities to ask students "what they remember from their lesson and that always dictated how much they've learned." From their conversation, he concluded what they learned and "to what degree." He also assessed mastery of vocabulary words by the extent to which students used the words "in casual conversation on the way to the classroom or with other teachers."

The eighth-grade teacher demonstrated his philosophy about class participation in his lessons. When asked how he felt about a specific lesson, the eighth-grade teacher stated that the strength of the lesson was "participation." The students engaged in the lesson by writing notes in their book and almost all of them contributed to the class discussion. The teacher "felt great" about the lesson because students learned from each other.

The eighth-grade teacher further explained that "even the most quiet or introverted students have something to say in the classroom." He provided an atmosphere where "it's okay to say any answer without being ridiculed in [his] classroom because of [his] strict discipline. Anybody can answer something, even if it's off-the-wall." He mentioned that sometimes students laughed, but that other students felt comfortable with their response. When students attempted responding, he could "tell by the facial expression that a person answered [a question] wrong, but they knew [the teacher] appreciated any answer rather then a blank answer." The only wrong answer was the answer he didn't hear because he realized that students needed to verbalize their ideas and understanding of concepts to fully master the objectives.

Teachers further promoted student participation by encouraging students to challenge each other on a daily basis by deliberately teaching students to debate in a respectful manner. The teachers also wanted the students to possess the skills to support their ideas and opinions. The eighth-grade teacher majored in philosophy in college. He shared that his academic background taught him the importance of thinking critically and "providing one's argument." He thought that the United States promoted "free speech and formulating your own opinions whether people agree with it or not, but [people] have the liberty to speak [their] mind." In turn, he purposely provided opportunities for students to share their ideas because in his classroom, "everyone's opinions are welcome."

In every class period I observed, the teachers continually asked the question why to teach students to support their ideas with specific examples in order to prove their opinions in the future. For example, the eighth-grade students selected various leaders to

145

research and present to the class as part of a thematic unit on leadership in conjunction

with the novel, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* (Lewis, 2000). When a student

shared information with the class about his selected leader, the eighth-grade teacher

asked, "Last time, King George was a horrible leader, just how horrible is he? What did

he do?"

The student replied, "[He implemented] taxes."

The teacher continued, "That's it?"

"He lost American colonies. He lied to the people," continued the student.

"How?"

"He doesn't care if they can't pay."

"He's concealing the truth. One more, you can make it personal," the teacher

prompted.

The student paused, "He's greedy."

"How?"

"In parliament, they have to pay more and sell cheaper."

"What do we call that? Uneven trade or imports or exports? It was one of our

vocabulary words," the teacher reminded the class.

The student replied, "Mercantilism."

The eighth-grade teacher aimed for students to take their understanding of history

to a higher level using their own words and vocabulary words. He required students to

state examples to support their ideas, and the students welcomed his challenged. One

student raised her hand in excitement and shouted, "Me! Me!" when the teacher asked for

the next student to share their leader. Again, the teacher questioned her ideas, and she proved her point.

The eighth-grade teacher required students to present their leader to the class while taking an affirmative or negative viewpoint of their leader. When students presented their positions on their leader formally, fellow students assumed the teacher's role. The students asked the presenter questions. The presenting student had to know the information and stand facing the difficult and challenging questions of peers.

The eighth-grade students, in turn, took the leadership project very seriously and actually proved the teacher wrong, dispelling issues of hierarchical power. When discussing specific dates or facts of their leaders, the eighth-grade teacher stated, "Princess Di, she died like 96, 97."

The student responded boldly, "97."

"Good, you challenge me. Good, you know your stuff," replied the teacher.

Teachers deliberately and consciously taught students to express their ideas with confidence and conviction. The eighth-grade teacher purposefully chose for students to write persuasive essays, as opposed to autobiographies for their leadership projects:

Debate has no room for autobiographies. Debate has room to prove a point, make an argument, and that's exactly what I want them to learn to do. So if they're going to argue anyway in the school yard, I'd rather it be for something scholastic, not for arguing [with] somebody who stole my milk or for a soccer game at half the time. So you can use those arguing skills for better use.

The teacher also thought that the autobiographical format tended to be "a little bit boring sometimes" for the students. The autobiography merely stated facts about a historical figure; he wanted to "prove a case or prove a point" because he aimed to prepare them for professional careers.

The teacher taught students how to challenge each other in a respectful manner. While preparing for their presentations, the eighth-grade teacher instructed the students to review their partner's paper while specifically looking for the argument and thesis statement. If the student's paper failed to include these aspects, the editing student wrote the missing information. The teacher added, "[Your partner needs] constructive feedback. [Be] honest, positive. If I have chalk on my nose, tell me; be sincere and sensitive." The teacher mandated that the students respect one another. He used himself as an example of how and when to help someone correct their mistakes. Students challenged each other, but they never crossed the line of cruelty or disrespect. The teacher ensured that his classroom was fair and safe.

The students welcomed the opportunity to debate. One eighth grader reminisced about debate topics of gay marriage and immigrant rights. She even presented her stance regarding immigration to me by saying that very few United States citizens are "Native Americans." She welcomed any and all opportunities to share her opinions and ideas.

The seventh-grade teacher also incorporated activities where students challenged each other and supported their ideas. While playing a fishing vocabulary game, students defended their definition of the word to their group members. If the members failed to agree with the definition, the student deposited the fish back into the fishing pool. Again,

148

the teacher ensured fairness and respect. The teacher monitored the groups throughout the game and made himself available to settle any discrepancies. Yet, teachers encouraged conflict and resolution.

Student opinion counts. The students thought their teachers provided an environment that allowed them to contribute to the class where their opinion counted. One eighth-grade student specifically admired her teacher's respect. She commented, "Like that we're all entitled to our own opinion, and if we make a comment, then he doesn't say, 'Oh, you're wrong' or something."

Another eighth-grade student also appreciated the openness to state her opinions freely. She explained that her teacher respects her opinions, even though he may "think another way." The teacher purposely omitted his opinion on various occasions to allow students the opportunity to formulate their own ideas without the bias of the teacher's viewpoint. The students knew that their opinion mattered, even if it was different. Both teachers provided a safe atmosphere for open discussions while maintaining order and respect. Students, in turn, anticipated the opportunity to express their ideas. One eighth grader waited anxiously to hear other students' opinions. She also awaited the opportunity to challenge their point of view through debate.

Teachers also promoted students' vocalization of ideas by allowing students to select the content of projects and activities based on the guidance and direction of the teacher. For an eighth-grade leadership project, the teacher provided a catalog of various leaders composed of a list from a workbook and other historic figures selected by the teacher. The teacher felt "inspired" that he possessed the autonomy to create his own list

for the students. In turn, he preferred the students had "a list that they can pick and choose rather than [the teacher] prescrib[ing] one to them." He aimed for students to be inspired as he was and take ownership for the project. He also wanted students to select leaders "that they are familiar with. [If students] could find something of themselves within that leader, then they'll be certainly inspired or motivated to research that person and give [the teacher] a good product, as opposed to just [assigning] Joseph Stalin and the person has no clue what communism is." The teacher acknowledged the importance of student interest and personal experience.

Students also felt empowered to determine the activities they wanted to do. The seventh-grade teacher thought that his students "really respond well" this year due to his methodology. When the class read the novel, the students became "really upset" when they stopped reading to the point where the students asked the teacher, "Have you ever seen a group of students want to keep reading?" The teacher entertained their enthusiasm and "kept reading more." The seventh-grade teacher took advantage of students' enthusiasm to learn. He understood the urgency of the moment and utilized their energy to determine how to best make use of instructional time.

Socratic Method. In both the seventh and eighth grade, teachers capitalized on students' eagerness to read the novel by promoting classroom dialogue through discussion of the novel by implementing the Socratic Method. On various occasions, at least 10 students raised their hands when the teacher asked a question and the class became an arena of dialogue with darting rejoinders. In a seventh grade discussion of *The*

Outsiders (Hinton, 1995), students answered in rapid response. The teacher said, "It's hard to lose someone you love. What was his state of mind?"

A student answered, "He's dead."

"How does he deal with death?"

Another student responded, "He robbed a store and took out a gun."

"He's not very happy. Add on."

"The only things he loves are dying."

The teacher promoted students' comprehension and interpretation of the text. He aimed for students to see how difficult situations can develop into disastrous events based on people's reactions. Yet, he made his point by allowing students to come to their own realization, as opposed to stating it in a lecture.

The teacher continued to ask questions and the students responded. One student paused before responding. The teacher prompted, "What were the thoughts? No right or wrong answer. I just want to see what you think." The student soon responded and grinned. The teacher took the extra time to allow the student to think. He also put the student at ease by reassuring him that his ideas were valid.

Teaching the Whole Child

Teachers acknowledged and provided lessons that recognized students' experiences and interests in order to teach the whole child. Teachers utilized novel studies as a foundation for literacy development. Students learned new lessons based on their prior experiences that validated students' knowledge and backgrounds while drawing attention to topics affecting students' lives. Teachers also created assignments

and lessons that related to students' interests and further required students to also look past their own struggles. Yet, the focus always returned to the students. Teachers specifically selected novels that shared common elements with students' lives, and the teachers further incorporated students' cultural celebrations into the classroom and simultaneously emphasized respect for all cultures.

Novel studies. As described by the eighth-grade teacher, novel studies is "taking a preferred novel of choice, breaking it into several pieces, analyzing those parts, and then in the end putting it all together." In novel studies, teachers selected three or four novels to read with their entire class throughout the year. Teachers selected novels that inspired them, thus determining the content of instruction. I originally presented teachers with a list of novels according to each grade level. The eighth-grade teacher selected "familiar novels that [he] found to be [his] favorites when growing up." The eighth-grade class read *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* (Lewis, 2000). They then read *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (Frank, 1986) and *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993) from the "Novel List" (see Appendix A).

The seventh grade also read three novels: *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1995), *The House on Mango Street* (1984), and *The Pearl* (Steinbeck, 1994) from the "Novel List" (see Appendix A). This year, the teacher decided to include *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954) also from the "Novel List" (see Appendix A). He selected his novels because he read those books when he attended middle school and "it turned out to be a really good read." The teachers chose novels that interested them. As a result of their interest, their enthusiasm for reading was contagious.

Teachers utilized the novels as the foundation to learn literary tools, reading comprehension strategies, vocabulary, and oral and written compositions. The class read, analyzed, and studied the novel in-depth to address the "roles of characters," "themes in the novels," and "social awareness." The eighth-grade teacher highlighted that because the novels "were not all fairytales," students connected the issues in the novels "to their own lives and the lives of other people such as immigrants, blue or white collared workers, and those who have goals and ambitions."

Teachers further incorporated supplemental readings from newspaper articles in order to "relate the novel to the current world." In the eighth grade, the teacher assigned students to select articles that related to the novel. The seventh-grade teacher explained how on a weekly basis, one seventh-grade student presented a current event based on "the novel or whatever [they] are learning in school."

The seventh-grade teacher enjoyed the "flexibility and consistency" of novel studies. He thought the novels provided consistency because the students focused on one book and overarching theme for an extended period of time. The novels further afforded flexibility because teachers "choose the novel based on the grade level and situation of [the] school." The seventh-grade teacher specifically selected his novel for the age and culture of his students. He explained that "*The Outsiders* and *House on Mango Street* are especially good for middle-school students because it deals with teenage angst and the rebellious nature." He thought that his students related to "*The House on Mango Street* even more so, because it deals with the main character growing up and developing physically [and] emotionally." He specifically selected the novels because he wanted to

validate the journey and hardships encountered by teenaged students and students of the same ethnicity.

The students appreciated the teachers' methodology of relating the information to their lives. One seventh grader attributed his increase in learning to his teacher "because he can relate to you a lot in life." Students felt their teachers' care and support.

Teachers aimed to make classroom lessons a reflective process for students through use of the novel. Teachers wanted students to relate characters and events in the novels to their daily lives. The eighth-grade teacher assigned students to identify the protagonist's flaws in the story because "they're not perfect and reading about the trials and errors and making a connection, is definitely the reward that the kids can identify with the characters." The teacher admitted that by selecting novels that related to students' lives, students proved to "be interested in reading more, and even asking [the teacher] questions after school about an event in the novel." By relating events in a story to students' experiences, teachers increased student curiosity, motivation, and eagerness to learn and read.

Students saw themselves as characters in the book. A seventh-grade student related to a character named Ponyboy in *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1995) because "he is very smart like all of us." The student chose to identify with the good qualities of each character. One seventh grader found *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1995) to be interesting "because it talks about two gangs, and that actually happens in the world today, so it actually relates to the world." Students yearned for novel and issues that related to their lives. An eighth grader also looked forward to reading *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young*

Girl (Frank, 1986). She awaited the opportunity to read about the terror of the Holocaust she experienced on a field trip to the Museum of Tolerance the previous year as a seventh grader.

In determining the content of instruction, teachers possessed the autonomy to select the novels they taught. The seventh-grade teacher identified many positive and only a few negative aspects of doing novel studies. He stated:

> I love it because I have choice of which novels the students can read. And
> instead of just going off like a reading comprehension book or just a
> reading book, I have just the ability to create my own work, and I just like
> it so much more because it really allows the kids an opportunity to
> understand what they're reading.

He mentioned the reading of only one story for an extended period of time as a limitation, but followed with the positive opportunity to create and model his own lessons. He also enjoyed his ability to teach novels "across the curriculum" because it provided "consistency" for additional lessons.

Beyond the text. Teachers utilized the novel to take learning beyond the text. The seventh-grade teacher required students to reflect on events in the novels and apply their ideas to real life situations. When reading *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1995), the class discussed the theme of "dilemma." In the novel, the characters "have to make choices that might affect them, short term and long term. And, they have to deal with the consequences of that." So the teacher assigned students to work in groups and create cards listing specific examples of dilemmas such as "[I]f you saw your friend shoplifting,

what would you do?" As a group, students determined four possible scenarios for each situation. The teacher admitted that the activity "didn't really have to do with the comprehension, per se, but [dealt with] really connecting [the story] to their own life." This teacher realized the various aspects of an education. He taught the students to reflect on a situation, postulate various actions, and incorporate those ideas as a form of praxis if ever faced with a challenging situation.

Students in turn translated their understanding of the novel to relate to their community. One seventh grader related the novel they read in class to her neighborhood. She explained that *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984) related to her family, as they instructed her "not to hang out" with certain people "because they might be dangerous." They also told her not to speak with strangers, just "how it says in the book." The student related her issues of safety to the novel and found comfort in knowing that other teenagers her age experienced similar hazardous environments.

Because teachers acknowledged and respected students' experiences, students incorporated their realities into their assignments. In one creative writing journal topic, one seventh grader paralleled daily school events into her story. She wrote, "There is a real lion, Mr. K. is hiding, during the canned food drive, Mr. K. is scared. Mrs. Grenardo says the lion is safe and is to help us with our homework. It is like our class mascot." The student incorporated our canned food drive and shared her perception of my position as the principal to ensure her safety and complete her homework. The teacher appreciated her experience because it was rooted in her personal encounters.

Connection to students' lives. Both teachers incorporated lessons that connected to students' lives. The eighth-grade teacher integrated "the latest music video, or current events, or what they did on the weekend, and somehow, tie that into the Language Arts studies" because he wanted to "relate the subject material to something that they can relate to," including modern technology. He realized that students learned through visuals means. He thought that students lived "in a fast-food age where everything must be quick, a flash of images." He accommodated this style of learning by "literally and physically changing things in [his] approach in teaching." He recognized the manner in which his students learned based on their age, environment, and culture, and he aimed to meet their needs.

The eighth-grade teacher incorporated modern trends in his lessons to engage his students. For a unit on leadership, students created a Wheaties cereal box about the leader they selected to study to incorporate modern advertising into the project. Students also created collages and utilized Powerpoint presentations to present their leader in front of the class. Students utilized their technology skills to demonstrate their creativity. The teacher provided students with the opportunity to utilize current trends and students' skills to catalyze learning.

The teachers provided lessons appropriate for their teenaged students to spike interest and catalyze learning and participation. The seventh-grade class accomplished this by reading *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1995) as one of their classroom novels. To allow students to experience the era of the book, the teacher hosted a sock hop. The students

worked in groups to create their own hangouts. The activity encouraged students to connect a theme in the book to modern day occasions that they experience.

The seventh grade also read *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984) and participated in activities where students incorporated their outside interests. For one of the lessons, students created skits in groups placing the characters in a modern-day scene. The students incorporated *The Simpsons* (Groening, 1989) and *High School Musical* (Schain & Ortega, 2006). The teacher said the purpose of the activity was "just connecting it to their own lives." He realized that the students need to find meaning in learning by incorporating their own interests.

Teachers provided an avenue for students to share their experiences on a daily basis through journal writing. The students enjoyed the journal topics because it allowed them to write about their ideas and feelings and share them with the class. One seventh grader felt that the journal entry "related to [her] life" because she is able to incorporate "something that's going to happen in the world…that's happening today." Students included "current events" in the world, community, and even our school. By challenging students to glance at the world around them, teachers helped students create a greater world view and the contributions they make to the society in which they live.

As such, the eighth-grade teacher took learning outside of the classroom. While reading *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (Frank, 1986), he took the entire seventh- and eight-grade classes on a field trip to the Museum of Tolerance. He thought that the experience complemented the "chapter on teaching social justice and our role that we need to play in the world, not just on the local scale, but on the global scale, the role

and responsibility we must play." The students not only experienced a field trip that related to their novel, they took their learning to a new level. They discussed their roles and responsibilities as members of society. Learning had a purpose.

The eighth-grade teacher further incorporated students' history to validate their community by encouraging students to analyze their neighborhoods, highlight their heroes, and appreciate the rich history they have experienced. Prior to the presentations on specific leaders, the eighth-grade teacher assigned students to collect newspaper articles of recent heroes. Some students brought in reports about firefighters who rescued people in recent fires that affected the area. Students' experiences moved away from themselves to the periphery of the world around them.

Yet, the teacher refocused the lesson to center back on students' history. In the same unit on leadership, the eighth-grade teacher acknowledged the neighborhood in which many of our students live by asking, "How many of you were saved by a family member or friend? Either from drowning or a drive-by?" The majority of the students nodded their heads in the affirmative. The teacher affirmed that this also happened to him to validate the vulnerability of their surroundings. He further included community events by saying, "Remember in 1995, the riots that took place just right over here? Businesses were burning. Koreans were with shot guns to protect their businesses." He wanted the students to know that their community played an important role in history.

Cultural validation. The teachers made a conscious effort to acknowledge students' cultures and provide experiences that solidified their learning. The seventh-grade teacher specifically selected *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984) for his

students. He chose to study this book because "it's a Latino based book, which is even more helpful to make it relevant to their lives." Because the majority of his students were Latino, he knew students responded to books that included Spanish names and recognizable cultural settings because students were already familiar with the context. He knew that students needed to access the familiar before learning new material.

The teachers further recognized that the students' culture is multi-faceted. The seventh-grade teacher discussed the importance of incorporating soccer into his lessons. He said, "It's such an important game for our students and so every time I can make examples relevant to soccer, with math even, or with goals, or with anything like that, then that helps." Beyond the realm of soccer, teachers recognized the importance of cultural events.

The teachers also included cultural events into the curriculum. The seventh- and eighth-grade teachers incorporated Dia de Los Muertos, a Mexican holiday, with a comprehension activity. Their appreciation of the students' culture and heritage guided their teaching methodologies and novel selection. The eighth-grade teacher stated that he specifically selects his novels with his Latino students in mind. The students appreciated their efforts.

The eighth-grade teacher provided a deeper cultural context for students to access literacy. He explained that the calendar "is embedded with so many politically or cultural events." He rearranged his curriculum to highlight cultural events such as Hispanic Heritage Month in September and Black History Month in February. In celebrating these months, students learned about famous pioneers and their political contributions to the

United States. The teacher further related the themes to the novel. He exposed students to various conflicting events to "see who responds to it." He wanted students to not only celebrate cultural themes, but understand their historical and political significance.

The eighth-grade teacher's awareness of cultural tension allowed him to embrace the predominately Latino community. As a social studies, Spanish, and language arts teacher, he referred to an old cliché that specifically addressed his own personal cultural heritage of "When in Rome." He viewed himself as a "multicultural" due to his African American and Latino ancestry.

> I know I can definitely relate to the African Americans; we have
> something in common. We're dark-skinned; we know we get judged by
> the color of our skin. The Latino students, I have my Hispanic origin, I do
> speak Spanish fluently; read it and write it. And, I feel much at home
> because the majority of students here are Hispanic.

Yet, the teacher admitted that if he lived and worked in a community of a different ethnicity, he would become a "chameleon" and adopt the cultural traits of a new community in order to best serve the students. This teacher acknowledged how his own cultural background played an important role in the students he taught.

The eighth-grade teacher discussed how he dealt with these differences and the challenges he faced in working with a population of various ethnicities:

> I do keep in mind the people who are not Hispanic; they could be White
> Americans, African Americans. I definitely don't want to alienate them
> when I use Spanish words to get a message across to those Latino students

161

who may not be grasping a subject matter. But, when you hear it in
Spanish, and definitely—if they're hearing the way their parents would
talk to them, they'll understand it even more. They might even laugh, say,
"Okay, that's exactly the same way my mom would tell me." So, we have
a connection. But, I do translate and tell the other kids in the classroom
who don't speak Spanish—which, some might be Hispanic and don't
speak Spanish—what they're missing out on. Not what they're missing
out on, but what it is that I'm conveying to the rest of the class and what it
is that they're laughing—and, of course, they laugh with them, too.
They'll go along with it. But, I include everybody as much as I possibly
can. Being at this school, which is predominately Latino, but of course, of
Central American dissent, I feel right at home with them.

This teacher acknowledged the culture and background of the majority of the students, while still welcoming the few students who were from differing backgrounds.

Teachers integrated students' experiences into the classroom. Issues of athletics, technology, and culture determined the manner in which teachers presented lessons. Teachers understood the power of culture and the power of language.

Speaking Their Language

Teachers recognized the power of language, and in turn, communicated with students using their language. They utilized slang to teach concepts, and teachers recognized, encouraged, and spoke students' primary language, Spanish. Language was central to student learning because the majority of the students spoke Spanish as their primary

language. Teachers capitalized on their talent and utilized their knowledge to advance vocabulary instruction. The school also implemented a Spanish class to provide students with the opportunity to formally learn the Spanish language. As a result, students took pride in their ability to speak two languages. In turn, students felt comfortable speaking Spanish and English because of their teachers' validation. This allowed them to transfer their confidence to formal English instruction.

Slang. Teachers utilized slang to reach students and convey the meaning of words. During one lesson, the eighth-grade teacher discussed the meaning of the word "Abba." He explained it by saying, "It is informal like pap, or padre, or madre." A student responded, "It's like pops or daddy." Both teacher and students laughed and agreed. The student created and conveyed his own meaning of the word to demonstrate his understanding of the concept. The teacher incorporated Spanish as an initial frame of reference.

Learning two languages. Many students spoke English and Spanish, which some may view as a hindrance, yet the school and the teachers embraced their skill as an asset. The students mentioned their bilingual backgrounds with pride as a result of the respect, validation, and support of their teachers. One seventh-grade student discussed how she learned to speak both languages by speaking Spanish with her parents and English with her sister. "So it wasn't like 'you're going to learn Spanish today.'" She learned through both languages by speaking both of them simultaneously. Two other students also recalled how they learned to speak English in school and still spoke Spanish at home

Another seventh grader learned to speak English in kindergarten. Prior to kindergarten, he only knew how to speak Spanish and he "would ask [his] teacher things in Spanish, but she wouldn't understand [him]." The public school he attended at the time sent him to special classes every morning where he worked with a teacher who showed him "little pictures" and he "had to say [the words] in Spanish, and then in English. And then, [he] had to say them all in English." The experience of leaving the class made the student feel alienated and different from his peers. The public school failed to promote knowing Spanish as a talent.

Conversely, our school promoted and encouraged English and Spanish development. As such, students spoke of knowing both languages with pride. One eighth grader proudly stated that she learned to speak Spanish with her mom and dad at home. Another seventh grader almost felt disappointed that she did not know Spanish as well as others. She said, "I started off with Spanish, even though it doesn't seem like it. . . So, I remembered some of it, but I don't speak it as good as I used to." The students recognized the importance of knowing two languages.

One seventh-grade student insightfully responded that many people only speak English. He stated that "it would be nice for [people] to learn how to speak Spanish because... the main two languages in the United States are Spanish and English." He saw knowing two languages as being "a gift from God." The students wanted to know both languages.

Spanish in the classroom. Teachers confirmed students' pride in bilingualism by specifically incorporating Spanish into English instruction through specific novels. While

reading *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984), students readily recognized characters that mirrored their culture. One seventh-grade student stated, "*The House on Mango Street* we're reading, you can kind of tell that they're Spanish" because the characters' names are "Esperanza and Maritza." The student added that she knew how to pronounce "Maritza" correctly because her aunt had the same name. Teachers created environments where students succeeded because teachers incorporated students' culture and language.

On various occasions, the teachers incorporated Spanish into their lessons because the majority of their students spoke English and Spanish. During one lesson, the eighth-grade teacher incorporated Spanish to explain a Latin saying to emphasize the moral of a parable as it related to the novel read by the class. A student read the story of the prodigal son from the book of Luke. The teacher stated, "It relates to marines. 'Leave no man behind' Sempre fi – I gave you this last week, simper fidelis. Those who speak Spanish?"

A student clarified, "Like siempre?"

The teacher responded, "Yes siempre fideles – always faithful."

Another student questioned, "Isn't fideles like a cheater or unloyal?"

The teacher explained, "That is unfaithful. El es muy infiel."

The student said, "Oh, I get it," and the class continued to discuss the theme of forgiveness.

The eighth-grade teacher also referred to Joseph Stalin as the original "machismo." All of the students started laughing and immediately understood exactly what that meant. They comprehended the point made by their teacher.

The seventh-grade teacher also encouraged the students to speak Spanish and incorporate it into their writing, as he himself wanted to enhance his own Spanish-speaking skills. One student wrote a journal topic about his favorite day which included eating carne asada and watching Mexico win the World Cup. Other students mentioned eating breakfast, watching sports, winning the lottery, or even going to church. The teacher critiqued the journal entries by saying, "Very nice, [you] included breakfast, a lot of detail, a lot of food, relaxation, and play. Most of you said breakfast. Interesting words, like gabillion, incorporating Spanish, piano – very nice thing." The students smiled at his review and felt content with their ideas in English and Spanish.

Teachers further capitalized upon students' knowledge and understanding of Spanish to support student learning. The eighth-grade teacher mentioned including Spanish into vocabulary instruction. While recognizing the bilingual skills of his students, he explained that the majority of his students are "Spanish-speaking; they're bilingual. So having that Spanish-speaking skill helps them a lot in decoding Latin words." He used the example of the word "agua," which means water in Spanish. If students saw the word "aqua," then they recognized the similarities in spelling and thus in meaning. When witnessing this event, the teacher confessed that the students "surprise themselves and are very proud of themselves when they were [able] to decode a word." By teaching students to decode words utilizing their Spanish language background, students possessed another means to comprehend a word. This teacher recognized students' prior knowledge, saw it as an advantage, and taught the students take control of their talents.

The students approved of this teacher's strategy to welcome all languages and cultures. The teacher spoke Spanish to further clarify the lesson to students. An eighth grader confirmed, "When we don't get words in English, he tells them to us in Spanish. And he's like, 'You get it from this root word.' So he makes it fit with Spanish." Another eighth grader also recognized the importance of incorporating Spanish into the classroom stating, "Because sometimes for people who do speak Spanish, if you don't know, then think of it in Spanish, how you would say it in Spanish, and then you pretty much get the answer." The students and teachers knew the importance of speaking both languages.

The teacher went as far as having students bring in articles written in Spanish to validate and incorporate students' primary language. The teacher assigned students to bring in articles about heroes in our own community. He stated, "We have heroes in our own community from a different country. Not just saving, but protecting. Bring in a newspaper clipping, even if it is in Spanish, from *La Opinion* (a Spanish newspaper), for example, of fire fighter rescuers." The students appreciated the opportunity to utilize whatever resources they had, whether in English or Spanish, to complete an assignment.

In fact, the school added a Spanish class as an elective for middle school students. The eighth-grade teacher taught Spanish to all middle school students. The students appreciated the class and the teaching methodologies. One eighth-grade student explained that some students in the class that "don't get some English words." Other students in the class or the teacher then explains the word in Spanish and "that's when they get it." The student also appreciated the opportunity provided by the Spanish class that allowed students who felt more comfortable speaking Spanish to speak their native language. The

students felt comfortable speaking different languages in the classroom. They recognized the different cultures and languages, and they respected this difference and so did teachers.

The gift of bilingualism. The students acknowledged the challenges for those students who may speak one language better than the other may, yet they all view the skill of bilingualism as a gift and talent. An eighth grader stated, "I like that we have Spanish because for those kids who don't know Spanish, then they will be able to participate in that more, and they'll understand more." Students genuinely cared about each other and coveted opportunities to help each other succeed. Furthermore, the eighth-grade teacher selected Spanish-speaking students to help the student who did not know how to speak Spanish. Everyone had a role, and everyone was important.

The students themselves also viewed their Spanish-speaking skills as a talent. Their bilingual skills gave them economic advantages. One seventh grader declared:

I think it's also good to learn two languages because if you're going for a job interview, when you grow up, and they ask you, 'Do you speak more than one language?' It gives you more of an advantage to get the job. Because they might have, they probably have more offices like around the world, and Spanish is kind of mixed with other cultures too, so it's kind of alike.

The students aimed to work in an international market. Their skills surpassed racism in the United States and took them to a higher level.

Lastly, students recognized their language and culture as a blessing from God. "So, let's say, two languages, it's like a gift from God because he wanted you to learn two languages, so you will have a better reputation," replied a seventh-grade student. Despite all of the poverty, crime, and violence all around them, students possessed an attitude of gratefulness and thanksgiving because they experienced the inequalities and knew the joys of the small blessing they did receive.

Direct Instruction of the English Language

Whether it is in English or Spanish, literacy is key to students' success and requires direct instruction. Teachers defined literacy through various working definitions. Yet, teachers emphasized direct instruction of the English language because they realized that students competed in a society that placed strong emphasis on mastery of the English language. Teachers recognized through their actions that literacy includes more that reading and writing. They deliberately selected novels that taught students themes about how to deal with the outside world. Comprehension began with direct vocabulary instruction. The focus then shifted to identifying literary tools within the novel. Students then employed higher level thinking through the use of imagery, allusions, metaphors, and similes to create their own compositions. After students completed a final project, teachers highlighted and reviewed grammar skills based on student assessment. Students enjoyed the methodology and so did the teachers.

Literacy. The seventh- and eighth-grade teachers both provided succinct definitions of literacy. The seventh-grade teacher stated, "I would define it as the ability to read and understand fluently, effectively; to be able to communicate what you read."

169

The eighth-grade teacher provided a similar meaning: "I would say I define literacy by the ability to communicate through writing, or through verbal skills." Both teachers mentioned reading, writing, and speaking as being essential to literacy. Although their definitions proved to be concise, the ideology behind their reasoning developed as time progressed.

Both teachers completed their first semester of their master's degree program. The seventh-grade teacher drew from a reading from his then-current graduate class. He began to discuss an article by Jim Cummins, who is a proponent of bilingual education. The teacher mentioned that students must "not just read the words, but read the world. In order for them to really succeed—instead of just regurgitating formulated answers, [they must be] able to comprehend, give answers based on their knowledge, and critically think, not just describe." He continued discussing a governmental proposition and the importance of writing. The teacher ended the conversation by addressing the bilingual needs of his students, saying that "it takes about five years or so, to really learn a language fluently. And, for some of these students, they really need the foundation in Spanish, in their home-language, whatever it may be to get a grasp on English." The seventh-grade teacher viewed literacy in terms of his students' needs, both in English and Spanish. The seventh-grade teacher also learned Korean as his primary language. He mastered English and is now learning Spanish. He fully understood the complexity of learning different languages.

Scaffolding. Teachers recognized the realities of students' home life and provided means that allowed them to be successful by scaffolding their learning through in-class

instruction. The seventh-grade teacher elucidated how he met students' needs; he revealed that he preferred to read the novel in class because if students read at home, then he was unable to fully monitor their progress. Previously, when students read at home, "some kids do well and some kids don't" do well on the comprehension test. However, if the class read together, then students performed better on their weekly assessment. Students needed additional support in class to help them succeed.

The eighth-grade teacher also implemented methodologies to help his students. He started a chapter by identifying and discussing key vocabulary words. The class then discussed a few chapters in series. The teacher never "dumped" the book on his students, asking "them to just read this book, here you go, you're on your own, let's talk about it the next day." He scaffolded every lesson with vocabulary instruction, recurring themes, and continual summary and review.

In every lesson, the novel served as a platform for English instruction. Students learned vocabulary words through thematic grouping because all of the words came from the novel. Students incorporated literary tools into their own compositions after recognizing examples of complex writing and themes found in the novel. Teachers taught grammar skills to improve writing. Teachers scaffolded every lesson by providing a foundation with new vocabulary words, analyzing literary tools and themes, incorporating grammar techniques in order for students to communicate clearly their understanding of the novel through written and spoken word. Yet every lesson shared a common context, the novel which provided a solid foundation for students to learn the unfamiliar.

Literacy strategies. Teachers also took advantage of the opportunity and freedom of constructing new literacy strategies to teach that enhanced their creativity. The eighth-grade teacher shared that he aimed to do different activities such as going "outside on a nice, pleasant day, or do[ing] debates or skits or think pair-share, or group activities, or other concepts or drills, or anything just to break the mold." He veered from a lecture format and encouraged students to "learn from each other as well." The seventh-grade teacher stressed the importance of various methodologies. He, too, wanted students to move around and work in groups in order to "engage [student] learning."

Seventh-grade students agreed that their teacher made learning "fun." Because the teacher included various activities, it made "it easy for [students] to learn." The games also helped students "learn faster" and "prepare them for the test."

Students recalled specific lessons that catalyzed their learning. One seventh grader identified an illustrative summary activity where students drew details of a setting after reading a section of the novel aloud in class. He enjoyed the lesson because it was "easier for [him] to understand" and because he had the opportunity to "make it [his] own." This student learned through this approach and took ownership for his own learning.

Conversely, one eighth grader thought that her class rarely provided varying activities. She mentioned reading the novel, discussing themes, and identifying literary tools as common practice in the class. She also referred to frequently doing writing assignments that incorporated literacy. She disliked the formal instruction and wanted to experience different activities in the class.

Another student disagreed with her opinion and firmly stated that she enjoyed the lessons. The student highlighted learning about the life of C.S. Lewis through a film that discussed his childhood. The student recalled other activities that her teacher implemented to supplant their learning.

The eighth-grade teacher also challenged students to develop their own opinions through critical thinking in order to provide a curriculum that was more challenging than the basics. He referred to novel studies as allowing him the flexibility to expand his lessons. He felt that with novel studies he could "take it to a whole new, different level." Studying novels invited more "critical thinking" that allowed students to "develop thought," which students applied to future projects and debates.

Students also enjoyed a curriculum that challenged their thinking. An eighth-grade student added, "I like it more because the novel studies could get more challenging than the basics. The basics, you learn them from fifth, sixth, seventh." Students wanted to be challenged. Through challenges, students felt that teachers respected their ability to learn complex issues and themes. Students also preferred reading novels over textbooks "because they say more, and then they have better assignments for us." Teachers provided more challenging and creative assignments because the novel allowed them to explore underlying issues and topics that interested the students.

Choral reading. Students also liked the format of instruction, which included reading the novel together as a class. An eighth grader appreciated the design of the reading curriculum "because when we learn, we're not all at a different pace. We all learn at the same time. So we're not all confused." Students wanted to be challenged, yet they

also wanted clear directions, explanations, and lessons that provided a means which solidified their success.

The students enjoyed the novel, understood its importance, and appreciated the opportunity to improve by reading aloud. Students read the novel aloud in class, which provided them with the opportunity to "practice their reading." One seventh grader mentioned that one of his classmates read slowly and sometimes "cut out words," but that it was important for that student to read aloud in order to improve.

Students also compared novel studies to other reading curriculums in their previous schools. One student mentioned that her previous school utilized literature circles, in which a small group of students read the same book individually at their own pace. She admitted that the program lacked vocabulary instruction and deeper analysis of the novel. Another eighth grader, who attended a public school, shared that everyone in her class read a different book. Because of the diversity of stories, students received assignments in writing. She complained that the teacher never highlighted examples of other stories or literary tools. The public school also failed to promote persuasive essays, which displeased the student.

Vocabulary. The teachers strongly promoted vocabulary instruction as a tool to scaffold comprehension of the novel. By knowing the meaning of challenging words prior to reading a novel, students placed more emphasis on dissecting underlying themes, as opposed to merely comprehension. The seventh-grade teacher referred to vocabulary instruction as giving students "more tools to use." His students brought application of the new words to the teacher when they read a story or heard it on the television. Vocabulary

instruction was a way of "opening more doors for them and giving them the resources that they need to really comprehend and be literate."

The eighth-grade teacher also selected words from the novel and added words that he thought would boost students' understanding. He selected words prescribed in the *Portals to Literature* (Carratello & Carratello, 1992), a teacher resource guide, and added supplementary words when he thought that students "may not know what the word means either because of the British colloquialism or it's just a word that's a little bit more advanced for their level." He included 20 new words on a weekly basis. Students always studied the words prior to reading the text. The novel enhanced their understanding of the vocabulary words; in turn, students comprehended the text.

The eighth-grade teacher provided reasoning for his emphasis on vocabulary. He explained that in "almost any career, there's going to be a Latin term." By exposing students to Latin and Greek prefixes, the teacher provided them with the skills to be successful in the future.

Both teachers listed vocabulary words on their boards at the front of the room and selected vocabulary words from the novel of the chapters the class read for the week. Teachers assigned students words at the beginning of each week; throughout the week, teachers incorporated various vocabulary activities for students to grasp the meaning and correct usage of the words. At the end of each week, teachers conducted a vocabulary and reading comprehension exam that they created as an authentic form of assessment.

To prepare his students for spelling tests, the seventh-grade teacher proctored spelling pre-tests to familiarize students with the spelling and pronunciation of each

word. During the spelling test, the teacher emphasized the meaning of the word by saying the word in a sentence that related to the novel. For example, one of the vocabulary words from *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1995) was "sophisticated." During the spelling test the teacher said, "Danny was more sophisticated than the Greasers," relating a character to a gang in the novel.

The teachers also included the vocabulary words in their instruction to demonstrate to students how to use the word correctly. When locating Biblical allusions in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* (Lewis, 2000), the eighth-grade teacher assigned the word "transubstantiation" in the vocabulary list. During his lesson, he asked students to state the meaning of the word and then apply it to the novel.

The seventh-grade teacher consciously provided direct vocabulary instruction through various activities. He guided vocabulary instruction by allowing the students to play Super Quiz, where the students worked in groups of four to determine the definition of a vocabulary word by holding up the correct letter to a multiple-choice question. Students also played Pyramid to improve vocabulary. The teacher wrote a list of words on the overhead projector. Then in pairs, one student described the vocabulary word while the other student determined the exact word.

Students often played a vocabulary fishing game. The teacher purchased dowel rods and attached a long string with a magnet at the end. He then wrote all of the vocabulary words on individual pieces of paper cut out like fish with a paper clip on each fish. Students used the magnet to grab the paper from a group of fish on the floor. The students worked in groups and stated the definition written on a paper fish. If the

student's teammates thought that the definition was incorrect, the student placed the fish back on the floor and another student took a turn. Students engaged in the activity and enjoyed learning. For two seventh-grade students, fishing was their favorite activity. From playing Super Quiz, to Pyramid, to Fishing, students learned to describe the meaning of the word without merely repeating a memorized definition.

    Literary tools. Reading and writing went beyond comprehension and regurgitation. Teachers prepared students to dissect literature and incorporate literary tools into their own compositions. Teachers highlighted specific literary tools written by the authors in the novel such as similes, metaphors, Biblical allusions, parodies, alliteration, imagery, personification, and parallelism. The students wrote notes in the margins of their books to spotlight the various literary devices while reading the novel. In fact, one eighth-grade student spoke of literary tools as being part of the daily routine.

    At the beginning of the year, the seventh- and eighth-grade teachers distributed a form listing various literary tools. Students memorized the definition of each tool. Throughout the year, students sought examples of each tool in their novels. Students deciphered literary tools in their novels and later incorporated them into their writings. Teachers encouraged students to incorporate literary devices into their own writings to foster articulation of their ideas in a sophisticated manner. An eighth grader shared that her favorite lesson included learning about literary tools and how to use them in her own writing.

    The students possessed confidence in their knowledge and application of literary tools. A seventh grader decided to provide me with a specific example of a literary tool to

demonstrate his mastery of the concept during a focus group. He said, "The windows were so small, they look like they needed to catch a breath" as an example of personification. Students took pride in their ability to practice and implement their skills.

Grammar. Reading related to writing, writing related to grammar, and grammar skills allowed students to formally express their ideas through written compositions. In addition to vocabulary instruction and comprehension, teachers utilized the novel for grammar instruction. The seventh-grade teacher utilized the novel to teach grammar. While identifying types of sentences, students found "five declarative sentences, five exclamatory sentences, five interrogative sentences from the novel." The teacher also used sentences in the novel as examples to teach students to identify subjects and predicates. Students saw how grammar related to the formation and creation of a story.

The eighth-grade teacher required students to utilize their grammar book as a reference for editing marks when teaching his students to correct their persuasive essays, He discussed the importance of verb tense and homophones while using student examples. He incorporated the grammar lesson as a tool for a greater project, thus allowing the lesson to have direct impact and meaning for his students.

When discussing the importance of grammar and reading, the eighth-grade teacher felt that the two "go hand in hand." He devoted one hour for reading and the other for mechanics, spelling, and grammar because "they both complement each other. Without grammar, they can't recognize a lot of the context within the novel studies. And without reading, they won't develop good grammar skills." Learning all aspects of the English language complemented each other.

Writing with a purpose. The preparation in vocabulary, literary tools, grammar, and spelling allowed students to coherently express their ideas and write with a purpose. The eighth-grade students recalled writing persuasive essays as a skill "that could help both in college and even in high school." For one student, writing was her favorite part of the class because she possessed the vocabulary, grammar skills, and critical thinking ability to articulate her ideas.

Teachers emphasized mastery of the English language to provide students with another avenue to express their ideas. Novels provided a common text from which teachers scaffolded lessons on vocabulary, literary tools, grammar, spelling, and writing. Teachers enjoyed the originality and ingenuity of creating their own lessons. Students reaped the benefits.

Varying Forms of Assessment

Teachers spoke of student growth in a positive manner as a result of utilizing various forms of assessment that allowed teachers to gauge student development. Informal and formal assessments varied to allow teachers to fully determine the progress in students' learning. Varied assessment allowed students to share their talents through different modalities. The teachers gave clear directions and expectations. Teachers rarely, if ever, conducted pop quizzes on erroneous information. Teachers told students the exact material on every test, prepared them to answer the questions correctly, and watched them succeed. Students appreciated the opportunity to learn and grow, so did the teachers. As a result, students felt prepared, and they were ready to conquer the world.

Teacher perception. Teachers perceived students to be literate, which provided teachers with a positive lens through which they viewed and assessed their students. When asked if he felt his students were literate or not, the seventh-grade teacher responded that he definitely found his students literate in terms of reading and writing. He stated that there is "definitely room for improvement as far as comprehension of the material," but students overall knew how to read and write in English fluently.

The eighth-grade teacher shared similar sentiments. He stated that he thought that some of his students were dyslexic due to spelling errors. However, the majority of the students performed well on tests. Despite minor challenges, teachers implemented a rigorous reading program where students learned to think critically.

Meeting their needs. Yet, teachers reached to address the needs of all students. The seventh-grade teacher implemented differentiated learning techniques. After preparing students through various modalities, students generally performed well on tests and "so the results are there in their scores afterwards." The teacher provided various strategies to ensure student learning.

All of the activities and various forms of assessment allowed teachers and students to be successful. The seventh-grade teacher utilized comprehension quizzes and grammar worksheets as a formal form of assessment. Yet, he also incorporated informal evaluations where he "asked the students how they're doing, and you can see it just by the number of hands that go up or their enthusiasm about the reading." In addition to formal assessments, this teacher thought that student enthusiasm also determined progress in learning.

Formative assessments. Teachers utilized weekly exams and rubrics as a form of formative assessment. Teachers created weekly vocabulary, comprehension, and spelling exams. The vocabulary section of the exams included matching, fill in the blank, and student creation of a sentence to demonstrate proper usage of the word. The comprehension aspect included short answers and essays based on the themes and literary tools previously discussed in class. Because the teacher utilized the same format, students focused more on articulating their understanding as opposed to deciphering format.

Teachers used vocabulary words for the spelling tests. Teachers provided clear expectations and qualifying factors for students to promote student success. The seventh-grade teacher proctored weekly spelling pre-tests for students. If a student misspelled a word, the students wrote the word five times to help him/her memorize the spelling of the word in order to prepare for the formal assessment at the end of the week. Students enjoyed knowing pertinent information before formal assessments. One seventh grader commented that he liked the pretests "because it gives [him] a heads up. It's like the same test that they give us on Friday, but they do it a day before so you can actually practice, so that you can actually get a better grade the next day." By knowing the format and content of an exam, students successfully achieved because the teacher set clear expectations for them.

Students learned all aspects of the vocabulary word. The students mentioned how they enjoyed the vocabulary activities. They found that the activities and homework directly corresponded to the test. The seventh-grade teacher similarly perceived that students reached mastery of the words:

I feel that when the students know the material enough to teach others,

then that's at the point where they've reached mastery. Then I can see,

okay, they do know the words, and it definitely makes them accountable

because I let them know before we do an activity like that that they do

have to prepare for it in advance just so that they go into it confident,

aware of what they're doing.

The teacher conducted various vocabulary activities in order to allow students to be successful on the tests. The students, in turn, recognized that increasing their vocabulary provided them with more opportunities in the future.

The eighth-grade teacher utilized rubrics on a regular basis to promote further development of compositions and to provide clear guidelines for his students. He distributed the guidelines and point distribution of the rubric prior to any written or oral assignment. He placed emphasis on content, organization, use of literary tools, and presentation. By only counting presentation as one aspect of an assignment, emphasis veered from grammar, spelling, and punctuation and focused more on thought communication and development.

Authentic assessment. Teachers incorporated authentic assessment to further verify student learning with the use of portfolios and hands-on activities. Teachers further emphasized reflection through long-term projects, such as portfolios. The seventh-grade teacher commonly incorporated the use of portfolios. When reading *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984), students created Thinking Maps, a form of graphic organizers, to describe various aspects of the book as they read chapters in the novel.

Students compiled their work and wrote a culminating summary and personal autobiography to conclude the novel.

Students welcomed the opportunity to demonstrate their growth. One seventh grader thought that portfolios helped him learn better because he is able to "work at [his] own speed and go ahead of the class." Another student felt that with the portfolio, "she has control." Students submitted their work at the end of the week to help them pace their progress. Through this activity, teachers also taught students to manage their time.

To assess student learning through other modalities, teachers incorporated various hands-on activities as a form of assessment. The seventh-grade teacher taught students to create a sunset using pastels to signify the ending of *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1995). Eighth-grade students created cereal boxes, similar to Wheaties boxes, to display their leader. Students further utilized technology to create PowerPoint presentations and posters of their leader. For their final oral presentation, some students even dressed up in costumes like their leaders. These projects allowed students to scaffold their learning and build upon prior knowledge. Assessment of their learning took place on various levels over an extended period of time. Teachers gained a full perspective of student knowledge and progress.

Academic achievement. Teachers utilized formal and informal assessments, as well as formative and authentic assessments, to guide instruction, which resulted in academic achievement. Throughout the week, teachers gauged student learning through classroom dialogues, quizzes, projects, and weekly assessments. Teachers then provided feedback to students through "written notes on their papers, class acknowledgement for

progress, and informal conversations" to recognize students' efforts and help them improve their understanding and communication of their thoughts and ideas. Teachers further modified their lessons to challenge and remediate student learning.

Student achievement improved dramatically over the course of two years. Two years prior, students failed weekly exams and struggled to complete nightly homework assignments. After reviewing seventh- and eighth-grade students' most recent weekly exams and samples of student work, 95% of the students in the eighth-grade class passed every exam, and 100% of the seventh-grade students passed weekly exams, with a few sporadic exceptions. Students also increased the quality of their work by responding to questions in complete sentences and clearly articulating their well-developed thoughts and ideas.

Students' success in authentic assessment transferred to standardized test score results. Standardized test scores increased as a school from stanines of 2 and 3 to 6 and 7 out of 10. Furthermore, the most recent standardized test results indicated that 96% of the seventh graders and 94% of the eighth graders scored average or above average in vocabulary. Seventy-four percent of the seventh graders and 57% of the eighth graders scored average or above average in comprehension. The students also improved in language arts and math.

In terms of quarterly report cards, students extricated themselves from academic probation and earned first and second honors awards. To be placed on cademic probation, students must fail one or more subjects or earn minimally passing grades in two or more core subjects on their quarterly report card. Depending on the student, I

prohibited him/her from participating in extra-curricular activities in order to provide the student with more time to focus on academics. If a student continually resided on academic probation, that student attended mandatory summer school, repeated the grade, and/or I placed the student on contract with goals and consequences created by me, the teacher, the student, and his/her parents. Two years prior, I placed 70% of the students in the school on academic probation. Most recently, I placed less than 10% of the students on academic probation. In addition, two years prior approximately only 10 students received first honors for earning 93% or higher in all major subjects, and 15 students earned second honors for earning 85% or higher in all major subjects. During the most recent awards ceremony, approximately 30 students earned first honors, and 20 earned second honors. Students, teachers, and parents celebrated the success.

The school also proved academic excellence in a learning fair that it competed in against neighboring affluent Catholic schools during the last three years. In the first year in the competition, only one of the students placed, earning third place in the art competition. The following year, the students placed first, second, and/or third in numerous events, including art, debate, prayer, speech, writing, and poetry. The school won second place overall. In the latest competition, the students again earned first, second, and/or third place in several events, such as art, debate, prayer, speech, dramatic monologue, and prayer. The school again won second place overall.

The school also participated and excelled in an academic decathlon where it competed against approximately 200 Catholic schools throughout the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. The first year participating in the event provided the initial learning experience

for the coach, the students, and the parents. In the second year, the school won first place in the deanery, which is composed of 10 neighboring schools. One student also earned seventh place (out of 200 students) in math. The students and teachers brought their trophy (for the school's deanery victory) and medal (for the student placing in math) home to the school with pride and confidence. The students, parents, and teachers possessed the knowledge, credentials, and confidence to demonstrate their academic success in their school and community.

Conscientization

Students demonstrated growth in their awareness and conscientization by seeking academic aspirations and surpassing hegemonic forces. Students understood the importance of homework in preparation for their future. They aimed to counter hegemonic forces through higher education and professional careers. School, education, and learning had a purpose.

Academic Aspirations

Students aspired to succeed because they acquired the skills and confidence to continue to advance academically, socially, and spiritually. The structure and support of the school provided students with skills necessary to enter a competitive high school and then college. Students held aspirations of becoming influential professionals, and their goals directed their paths.

Students gained consciousness and awareness of their future by recognizing the value homework plays in creating a foundation for their future. One seventh grader responded that he completed his homework because his grades helped determine his

future. Another seventh grader concurred, saying that his grades would follow him "for the rest of his life. So, if we go for an interview, like for a job or something, or we want to get into a good college or university, they actually check your grades." He wanted to continue to do his best so he "could even end up here, like being principal of the school."

Students understood the importance a rigorous curriculum played in preparing them for the future. Students looked forward to and planned for the future because they now possessed the skills and cognitive ability to succeed in a competitive society. A seventh grader stated that she like reading novels because "it actually prepares you for high school and college." The students set goals to attain a higher education, and they understood that the process began with their elementary education.

The students talked about their futures with excitement because they aimed to attend prestigious colleges and universities. They aspired to earn high grade point averages and take advantage of local universities, such as the University of Southern California. The student explained,

> If you want to be a lawyer, you're going to have to go to school for that. If
> you want to be a doctor, you have to go to school for that. There's many
> subjects and you need to go to school for and there's very little subjects
> that you don't have to go to school for.

The students recognized education as an integral aspect of their future. They also possessed the confidence and knowledge to aspire to set goals that included higher education.

One eighth grader also realized the importance of a good foundation. She felt that the school prepared her for high school, but she wanted more challenging classes, even though she enjoyed the current curriculum.

Students set goals and aspired to attain a higher education in pursuit of a professional career. The majority of the seventh graders aimed to be lawyers. One seventh grader wanted to be an attorney because "they pay good money." If he did not become a lawyer, he wanted to be a computer technician "because they also pay you good [sic]." He enjoyed dismantling items and putting them back together. If he did not become a computer technicians, he wanted to become a firefighter because "because [he] wanted to save lives." This student knew exactly what he liked and disliked, how economic concerns determined his job selection, and how ultimately he could always make a difference by saving people's lives, regardless of the pay.

The eighth graders also aimed to be lawyers, veterinarians, or enter a health profession. One eighth grader aimed to enter a health care program in high school to help her determine her options. Another student wanted specifically to become a pediatrician. The remaining eighth grader spoke of being a psychologist and wanting to help children with Down's syndrome.

Students realized the preparation that must take place today in order for them to reach their goals of tomorrow. They felt the school prepared them to overcome future challenges in order to pursue their dreams.

Culminating Summary

When I first entered the school, it resided in a state of crisis. Cultural differences, teacher apathy, and lack of pedagogy, all led to teacher isolation, bullying and student resistance. The previous principal mandated teachers to teach from a script as the only form of literacy. The school resided in the Dark Ages.

With the implementation of critical literacy approaches, however, the school bloomed in the Renaissance Period. The school first created conditions for learning by altering the atmosphere with aesthetic changes, increased safety, engaging and meaningful relationships, and a departmentalized schedule. New school policies ensured accountability. For example, the school instituted the use of student planners to ensure that parents, teachers, and students communicated on a daily basis. The school also set forth clear expectations for the parents, teachers, and students, coupled with firm and fair expectations and consistent consequences. Weekly, monthly, and yearly award presentations positively motivated teachers, students, and parents by recognizing them for their contributions, growth, and efforts.

The school also began to thrive spiritually by maintaining Catholic identity in a Catholic school. Teachers worked as a form of servanthood by making themselves available to students and parents, and collaborating with others. Teachers continually aimed to improve their pedagogical practices because they viewed teaching as a vocation. The school celebrated and created weekly rituals to practice the Catholic faith, both inside and outside of the classroom. Students began to take ownership of their faith and incorporated Catholic values in their daily lives.

Teachers implemented critical literacy approaches in the classroom to enhance student learning. First, teachers created classroom environments conducive for learning by setting high expectations that students achieved as a result of predictability. Teachers utilized humor to create class camaraderie and promote student participation. Students, in turn, participated in class because teachers provided students with the opportunity to share their ideas and opinions through various modalities. Students gained confidence because they knew their opinion counted.

Teachers sought to teach the whole child by using novel studies as a consistent foundation to explore lived realities. The novels allowed teachers to teach beyond the text, make connections to students' lives and validate the students' culture. Teachers also incorporated the students' language of slang and Spanish. As a result, students viewed their bilingualism as a talent and gift from God.

Incorporation of student language facilitated direct instruction of the English language. Teachers promoted literacy by utilizing literary strategies and tools to meet their students' needs. Teachers emphasized reading, vocabulary, literary tools, grammar, and writing. In turn, teachers assessed student learning through various methods, including formative and authentic assessments. Teachers utilized these assessments to drive instruction that resulted in an increase in student learning as perceived by teachers and students.

Students gained awareness and conscientization of their counter hegemonic role in society by setting academic aspirations. They started to view homework as a tool to prepare them for a future in higher education and professional careers. Literacy, no

longer a stagnant process of basic skills, emerged as a collective process of student and

teacher learning and awareness.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Purpose of the Study

This action research study explored critical literacy practices that promote student

literacy for low-income Latino middle school students in an inner-city, Catholic

elementary school, where students have been chronically performing at the lowest level

in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. By using critical pedagogy (Darder, 1991; Freire,

1970; Giroux, 1983; Macedo, 1994; McLaren, 1988) as a theoretical framework, this

action research project investigated the effective elements of critical literacy (Cadiero-

Kaplan, 2004; Shor & Pari, 1999) that promote academic learning for Latino middle

school students in a low-income Catholic elementary school.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the critical literacy approaches that middle school teachers perceive

   increase student learning in reading for Latino middle school students in a

   low-income, urban, Catholic elementary school?

2. How do middle school teachers perceive critical literacy practices impacting

   student learning in reading for Latino students in a low-income, urban,

   Catholic elementary school?

3. How do Latino middle school students perceive critical literacy practices

   impacting their learning in reading in a low-income, urban, Catholic

   elementary school?

Discussion of Findings

In this chapter, I analyze and discuss the findings of the study in response to the

three research questions. A brief description of the cycles of this action research study

that I employed validates the findings of this dissertation on critical literacy. The next

three sections specifically address each research question by reporting critical literacy

approaches, teacher perceptions, and student perceptions.

The school incorporated literacy practices, yet failed to practice critical literacy.

Teachers utilized effective literacy practices and incorporated the successful use of novel

studies, while adhering to the mission of promoting the Catholic faith. Although teachers

incorporated students' experiences, background knowledge, and Spanish into instruction,

literacy remained in the classroom and fell short of promoting political and social aspects

of action within the community.

Teachers perceived their literacy approaches as positively impacting student

learning in reading, and they continually aimed to improve instruction to help their

students. Students concurrently perceived their teachers' literacy practices as preparing

them for higher education. Students' ideology shifted from a subordinate stance to one of

confidence and pride in their language and culture. They believed in their promising futures.

I also draw attention to the unresolved questions of whether students understood their responsibility to help the underserved, the marginalized, and the oppressed to create a community that is socially just and whether they understood their role as language minorities in a hierarchically-divided America. I further share the findings of the final focus groups with the teachers and my own personal reflection as a prelude to my recommendations for action and conclusion of the study. Lastly, I affirm the significance of the study and provide recommendations for future research projects on critical literacy practices in low-income schools.

Action Research

This action research dissertation followed Johnson's (2002) nine-step approach to action research. Those nine steps included:

1. Identify the research topic.

2. Provide a theoretical context.

3. Plan data collection.

4. Analyze the data.

5. Allow questions to change.

6. Organize the data.

7. Report the data.

8. Record conclusions.

9. Create a plan of action.

Identifying the Research Topic

My identification of a research topic originally began on a macro-level. I became principal of a school in a state of academic and financial crisis (as detailed in Chapter 4 of this study). I witnessed a myriad of injustices, including crime, poverty and economic hardships, and I set forth to make a difference. I realized that in order for change to occur, others needed to join the journey. I also wanted to employ changes that affected others so that they, too, would learn to read the world and become agents of change.

Politically, socially, and economically, I understood how education serves as a medium of empowerment for students through the foundations of critical pedagogy. After I arrived, the school placed strong emphasis on learning and literacy for teachers and students. Yet, literacy went beyond reading, writing, and speaking. Teachers began to teach with a purpose, and, in turn, students learned as they began to develop their own ideologies resulting in critical literacy.

I encouraged teachers to implement novel studies in opposition to scripted reading programs to connect information to students' lives and meet the needs of their students. My previous affluent Catholic school received a literature-rich and advanced curriculum; our students deserved the same quality education. Teachers and students embraced the new reading curriculum. In order for the change in curriculum to help other low-income schools, I decided to document the literacy approaches, teachers' perceptions, and students' perceptions at this low-income, urban, Catholic elementary school for middle school Latino students.

Providing a Theoretical Context

Critical literacy (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004; Shor & Pari, 1999) and pedagogy (Darder, 1991; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1983; Macedo, 1994; McLaren, 1988) served as the primary theoretical contexts for the study (as set forth in Chapter 2 of this dissertation). Because the transformation took place at a low-income, urban, Catholic elementary school with a predominantly Latino population, I further included literature on Catholic schools (Greeley, 1984), Latino students (Darder, 1991), and effective literacy practices for bilingual students (Au, 1993).

Data Collection

To document literacy approaches, and teacher and student perceptions of those approaches, I collected data from various sources. As principal of the school, I participated in changes in the curriculum from the onset. I documented the result of those changes in the third year of its implementation. I initially interviewed the seventh- and eighth-grade teacher individually based on the "Protocol for Preliminary Teacher Interview Form" (see Appendix A) and their responses. I formally observed their classrooms on several occasions while utilizing the "Critical Literacy Checklist" (see Appendix D), and then I interviewed them again using the "Protocol for Second Teacher Interview Form" (see Appendix B), with questions geared toward their individual literacy practices. I conducted a final formal classroom observation for each teacher where I looked for evidence of the teachers' responses while looking deeper through the lenses of critical literacy, critical pedagogy, Catholic schools, Latino students, and effective

literacy practices. I also spoke with the teachers on a daily basis and kept a journal of those conversations.

To address student perceptions, I held two student focus groups, one for eighth graders and one for seventh graders. I hosted the focus groups prior to the final formal classroom observations. I asked students questions from the "Protocol for Student Focus Group Form" (see Appendix C) and questions based on their responses, classroom experiences, and personal experiences. Although I spoke with and even taught students math on a daily basis, I maintained their privacy and confidentiality in compliance with the Institutional Review Board policies and guidelines. I triangulated the data with teacher lesson plans, student work, standardized test scores, and report cards.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data based on Hatch's (2002) inductive model (as stated in Chapter 3). I read the data and identified frames of analysis based on the "Critical Literacy Checklist." I then created domains based on the semantic relationships I discovered within the frames of analysis. I then identified the salient domains, assigned them a code, and put the others aside utilizing the "Critical Pedagogy Matrix" (see Appendix E). I re-read the data numerous times while keeping a record of relationships I found in the data. I deciphered which data supported the domains to complete the analysis within the domains. I then searched for themes across the domains and created the "Frame of Reference" (see Appendix F). I created a master outline expressing the relationships within and among the domains into which I inserted excerpts from the data to support my findings.

Changing Questions

Throughout the inductive analysis process (Hatch, 2002), I allowed the questions to change. I initially utilized the "Critical Literacy Checklist" to identify specific elements of critical literacy on a micro-level. I next broadened my scope to include the foundations of critical pedagogy on a macro-level. The creation of the "Frames of Reference" allowed me to combine all aspects of the study to create themes that reflected the findings of the study.

As my frame of reference continually shifted, my conversations with the teachers and observations changed as well. With every interview and observation, I probed in more detail for specific aspects of critical literacy, critical pedagogy, Catholic schools, Latino students, and effective literacy practices. I asked follow-up questions and even conducted a second teacher focus group to attain insight to remaining questions that emerged as I began to organize the data.

Organizing Data

I organized and reorganized the data various times to create five distinct themes that addressed literacy approaches, and teacher and student perceptions of those approaches. The five themes included: a school in crisis, creating conditions for learning, Catholic identity in a Catholic school, critical literacy approaches and perceptions, and conscienization.

Reporting the Data

I continually reported the data to the teachers. With each interview, I gave each teacher the transcripts from their own interviews for them to review and reflect on their

answers. I shared my analysis of my initial findings with the teachers to allow them to verify or dispel my conclusions. In the initial teacher focus group, I presented them with an outline of my themes to begin to create the plan of action. After review of their initial responses, I conducted a second focus group to deepen teacher awareness and create a plan of action that reflected the continuing transformation of the school and its incorporation of critical literacy.

Recording Conclusions

I recorded my conclusions at the end of this chapter. The conclusions reflected the reality of critical literacy practices at the school. However, as action research dictates, the cycle of reflection and praxis has already begun with the implementation of the plan of action.

Creating a Plan of Action

The teachers and I worked together to create a plan of action based on my findings. The initial plan failed to address in detail the implementation of critical literacy. I conducted a second focus group with the teachers to expand and challenge our ideologies to further develop a plan of action that sought to incorporate and implement critical literacy practices.

Critical Literacy Approaches

This section addresses the first research question, "What are the critical literacy approaches that middle school teachers perceive increase student learning in reading for Latino middle school students in a low-income, urban, Catholic elementary school?"

The school and the teachers promoted a number of critical literacy practices through effective pedagogical reading curriculum methodologies, including novel studies that incorporated students' language and faith formation. Varying forms of assessment and direct instruction of the English language with an emphasis on vocabulary, grammar, writing, and literary tools promoted student learning and success in reading. Although teacher lessons alluded to issues of social and political significance, action unsuccessfully moved outside of the classroom and, as such, teachers fell short of fully practicing critical literacy.

Students learned because teachers created classroom environments conducive for learning with the support of the school and its administration. The school sought to prepare students to compete within the dominant culture while still validating students' pride in their language, culture, and identity. The school also aimed to shelter students from the chaos of the community, but did not encourage students to be agents of change.

Curriculum

The school followed Archdiocesan guidelines while implementing self-selected literacy practices. The Archdiocese of Los Angeles prescribed curriculum standards that teachers willingly followed because the diocese allowed schools to implement the standards through various methodologies based on the Student Centered Curriculum Model (Student centered curriculum model, 2007). Through this model, teachers continually analyzed "what" students learn, "how" students learn, and how students are "assessed." The teachers followed the standards using teacher selected novels, a grammar text book, and supplemental materials to guide instruction.

As explained below, teachers incorporated various aspects of critical literacy in the classroom based on Shor & Pari's (1999) eight examples of critical literacy practices.

   1. Background knowledge. Teachers began lessons by addressing students' needs, spiking their interest, and accessing their prior knowledge by selecting novels with familiar characters and words, such as those seen in *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984). Teachers also incorporated issues of Catholicity into lessons as demonstrated in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* (Lewis, 2000). Daily journal topics often corresponded with the lesson of the day and provoked students to relate the theme of the day to their own lives.

   2. Student-directed instruction. Teachers involved students in determining the content of the activity, but prohibited students from determining the content of instruction. For example, the seventh-grade teacher allowed students to continue reading, yet students merely followed the pre-assigned activity - they did not determine the content of the activity. Similarly, eighth-grade students self-selected leaders to research, but the teacher provided the list from which to choose and determined the manner of presentation.

   3. Focus on meaning. Both teachers focused on meaning and not mechanics. The seventh- and eighth- grade teachers taught grammar and literary tools within the context of the novel. Moreover, teachers taught these skills with the purpose of providing students with a medium to share their thoughts and ideas through written and oral compositions.

4. Thematic instruction. Teachers centered instruction on themes through the novel. The themes often corresponded with the students' social reality, such as in *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984) and *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1995). Students also related to issues of Christianity in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* (Lewis, 2000) and poverty in *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993). The eighth-grade teacher also highlighted issues of discrimination in *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (Frank, 1986). Although the theme related to students' realities, the theme emerged from the novel and not the students.

5. Dialogue and critical analysis. The teachers strongly encouraged dialogue in the classroom and critical analysis, yet the focus veered away from social realities. Teachers encouraged debate, application of Biblical allusions, and analysis of historical figures. Teachers encouraged, and even mandated, participation from every student to ensure classroom dialogue and discussion. The eighth-grade teacher assigned students to research local heroes; yet classes failed to discuss the creation and ramification of the social realities facing the inner-city community such as crime, violence, and poverty.

6. Participatory tools. Teachers utilized a myriad of participatory tools to explore themes. Students participated by working in groups, pair-sharing ideas, writing personal reflections in their journal, and presenting their ideas formally to the class. Teachers randomly called on students using Popsicle sticks. Every student participated in exploring themes in modalities that catered to each student's needs.

7. Action outside the classroom. Unfortunately, teachers missed a key aspect of
critical literacy by failing to move action outside of the classroom. Students
visited the Museum of Tolerance and wrote letters to pen pals in neighboring
schools; however, students' ideas did not transcend the classroom. Although
students' awareness of political discourse may have been narrow, their wide
scope of poverty moved them to social action as a result of their first-hand
experience. Students raised money for missionaries and collected canned food
and gifts for the poor during Thanksgiving and Christmas at the direction of the
Student Body Council. Ironically, students from the poorest homes often brought
the most to give. Some of them needed the food and gifts more than the families
who received them.

8. Student evaluation. Teachers utilized various forms of evaluation, yet students
did not partake in the process. The teachers created the rubrics and exams.
Students followed the rubrics to successfully meet the high expectations;
however, they did not determine the manner, the content, or the style in which
teachers evaluated them.

Although teachers incorporated some aspects of critical literacy, teachers
prescribed more clearly to progressive literacy, which takes into account students'
experiences but fails to address "questions of culture, power, and politics" (Cadiero-
Kaplan, 2004). Yet, teachers acted politically and socially because they provided this
form of education to all of their students, which included a predominantly low-income
Latino population. Teachers incorporated critical literacy by viewing education as a

process where both students and teachers continually learn. However, teachers failed to address issues of the "quasi-colonial nature" that initially led to the marginalized status of their Latino students within the dominant society (Bartolome, cited in Darder et al., 2002).

The Reading Curriculum: Novel Studies

Teachers selected novels that validated students' experiences and drew upon students' prior knowledge. Each class focused on one novel at a time for several months, which allowed students to immerse themselves in the story and make a strong connection by relating the novels to their daily lives (CREDE, 1999). By selecting novels such as *The Pearl* (Steinbeck, 1994) and *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984), teachers provided students with a familiar context of reading about characters with similar names that proved to be beneficial for second language learners (Peregoy & Boyle, 2000). Teachers counter-acted the "hidden curriculum" by including novels that addressed people of color in *The Pearl* (Steinbeck, 1994) and *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984), the working class in *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1995) and *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993), and women in *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (Frank, 1986) (Arnowitz & Giroux, 1985). Teachers further provided critical instruction by encouraging students to generate themes of morality, life struggles, and peer pressure, and then to relate them to real life experiences (e.g., seventh grade students created dilemma cards for *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1995)) (Shor & Pari, 1999). By teaching students how to handle challenging real-life situations in a manner other than violence,

teachers taught students to "transcend their own environments" in order to compete successfully in the dominant society (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Teaching Practices

Because teachers taught students in a Catholic school, teachers enjoyed the autonomy to teach the curriculum utilizing various methodologies (Buetow, 2002). The incorporation of vocabulary, grammar, spelling, literary tools, and oral and written compositions prepared students to critically analyze themes in the novels through a literature-based approach (Thelen, 1995). Teachers continually utilized effective literacy practices, yet they omitted key aspects of critical literacy such as Freire's (1970) use of "generative themes" and social application of those themes "to bring about justice in a life full of inhumanity" (Shor & Pari, 1999).

Teachers incorporated an abundance of effective literacy practices for students that specifically met the needs of English language learners. Teachers focused on strong vocabulary instruction through various activities such as the fishing game, Super Quiz, and Pyramid to enhance students' understanding of the text (Au, 1993). Teachers further scaffolded instruction by providing "pre-reading" writing prompts in journals; "during-reading" activities, such as pair-share and creating illustrations; and "post-reading" activities, such as the creation of Thinking Maps, written compositions, and class presentations (Hadaway et al., 2002). In every lesson, teachers provided direct instruction for students by modeling, questioning, and providing feedback to students through classroom dialogues.

Students communicated through writing on a regular basis through a morning journal. Teachers assigned daily journal topics that related to the lesson of the day, such as identifying aspects of a good leader for the eighth-grade leadership project, and journal topics that allowed students to include their creativity and add personal meaning, such as describing the perfect day. By encouraging students to write daily about topics with personal meaning and then share their compositions with the class, teachers validated and promoted student writing (Au, 1993). Teachers collected journals every two weeks to give students written feedback on their journals. The students solely received points for content and development of their ideas; teachers ignored grammar, spelling, and mechanics. This form of assessment allowed students to formulate their thoughts and ideas in a manner that focused on meaning and not mechanics.

Students learned to create various types of formal compositions utilizing the writing process that allowed them to structure their ideas. Students wrote informally in daily journals, they wrote formal persuasive essays, and they wrote conversational letters to students in neighboring Catholic schools, all of which enhanced student interest in writing (Hadaway et al., 2002). For formal compositions, teachers provided "pre-writing" activities, such as researching a historical figure prior to writing about his/her significance and creating graphic organizers, that helped students learn more about the subject and organize their ideas prior to communicating their thoughts on paper resulting in a more coherent composition (Hadaway et al., 2002). Furthermore, students created autobiographies similar to Sandra Cisneros' (1984) *The House on Mango Street*, which

enhanced and validated their understanding of themselves and the world around them (Shor & Pari, 1999).

Assessment

Teachers incorporated aspects of critical literacy by utilizing varying forms of assessment to gain a full perspective of students' growth in learning. Assessments, such as portfolios, autobiographies, persuasive essays and presentations, drew attention to students' knowledge, experiences, and thoughts about the content, as opposed to merely regurgitating information through the "banking model" (Freire, 1998). Teachers further incorporated the Socratic Method through classroom dialogues and debate to provide an arena for students to analyze the information while providing real-life solutions.

Teachers further counter-acted hegemonic forces by veering away from "ability testing and tracking as a form of social control and a systematic way of sorting children along ethnic, racial, class, and gender lines" (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004, p. 87). By utilizing portfolios, rubrics, and hands-on activities, teachers allowed students to fully demonstrate their knowledge through multiple modalities, which ensured their academic success. Teachers used informal and formal assessments to guide instruction by providing students with oral and written feedback to help prepare them for the end of the week vocabulary, spelling, and comprehension exams and the end of the novel final exam. Based on student progress, teachers modified their lessons to meet the students' needs.

Validation of Spanish Language and Culture

Teachers incorporated Spanish into English instruction, which enhanced student learning, validated student knowledge, and led to student and teacher success, according

to the perceptions of the teachers and students. Students practiced language acquisition strategies through continual dialogue, oral presentations, vocabulary instruction within the theme of the novel, graphic organizers, and informal and formal writing prompts (Ochoa & Rhodes, 2005). Teachers further integrated Spanish to explain vocabulary terms, and the school even implemented Spanish as an elective to promote and enhance cultural and linguistic diversity (Nieto, 2002). Students no longer resisted education because teachers included their primary language of Spanish while still maintaining and promoting direct instruction of English, thus providing students with the skills to compete within the confines of the dominant society (Darder, 1991).

Teachers also selected novels that related to the students' culture, yet teachers omitted a systematic study of how the cultural material was "produced, distributed, received, and used" (Shor & Pari, 1999, p. 10). The seventh-grade novels highlighted issues in Latino communities, but classroom discussions failed to explore suppressed aspects of history in detail (Shor & Pari, 1999). The eighth-grade class discussed current issues of immigration and gay marriage, and it analyzed the struggles of the Jewish community in *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (Frank, 1986). Moreover, the teachers both incorporated the celebration of Latino holidays, such as Hispanic Heritage Month, Dia de Los Muertos, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Cesar Chavez Day, and Cinco de Mayo, which provided students with self-awareness and pride (Jesse et al., 2004). Unfortunately, this tourist approach to multiculturalism failed to provide insights into forms of oppression. However, this inner-city Catholic school and classroom teachers

catered to bicultural students by incorporating students' language, culture, and faith as a mission of social justice (Greeley, 1984).

Student Participation

Teachers strongly encouraged student participation and taught students to express their ideas and opinions through class discussions, debates, and group activities. Students critiqued and compared themes learned in their novel, which strengthened their ability to compete in the dominant culture (Shor & Pari, 1999). By posing problems, such as taking a stance on a particular historical figure, teachers provided students with the opportunity to partake in academic discourse. Students drew conclusions about their leader based on their prior experiences and knowledge. Students became the experts, which gave learning a purpose through the bidialectal approach (Freire, 1970).

Students successfully participated in controversial discussions because the teachers defined ground rules for communication across differences and in the midst of existing hierarchies of authority (Shor & Pari, 1999). Students challenged each other and their teachers, and the teachers welcomed and appreciated students' responses. By teaching students to question the dominant discourse, students realized their power to challenge hegemonic forces (Darder et al., 1997).

Although students felt empowered, they only skimmed the surface of "emancipatory knowledge" because they fell short of analyzing the underlying social and political structures of society in order to change social forms of oppression (McLaren, 1988). Students questioned knowledge with the goal of proving their position as opposed to challenging inequality (Shor & Pari, 1999). Despite these shortcomings in terms of

209

critical literacy, teachers prepared students with the skills to participate in acts of citizenry in the future.

Teachers encouraged student participation and allowed students to determine activities, yet teachers chose not to include students in determining the content of the curriculum as part of radical reformation of the curriculum (Ruiz, as cited in Darder et al., 1997). Teachers adhered to Freire's ideology of the need to teach with an objective (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Teachers provided students with a clear objective and purpose, as opposed to students determining the content of the curriculum.

Classroom Environment

Teachers created "safe houses," where even introverted students shared their ideas and beliefs because of the structure, clear expectations, and humor in the classroom (Shor & Pari, 1999). Teachers also implemented a systematic morning routine with a greeting, prayer, collection of homework, and planner check that provided consistency and predictability for the students. Teachers and students fostered respect for one another and created a classroom community through the teachers' use of humor while making connections to the real world (Au, 1993). Teachers stepped out of an authoritarian role while maintaining authority by creating a two-way dialogue through class discussions; all constituents shared the power (Freire, 1970, 1993).

Faith Formation

Teachers tirelessly worked for the betterment of the "common good" by promoting the development of the whole person (Maritain, 1943). Teachers reached students' minds academically through novel studies, incorporation of the Bible (Hartman

& Bourke, 1970) as a text, school rituals, and Christian symbolism. Teachers helped

students develop physically by coaching after-school sports and playing unscheduled

soccer games. Lastly, the teachers fulfilled the mission of the Catholic Church by

respecting and promoting students' language and culture to build their self-esteem while

integrating religious values in the curriculum and through their daily lives (Hall & Reck,

1987).

Altering Atmosphere

Previously, the school fell victim to structural discrimination, both economically

and socially (Barrera, as cited in Darder et al., 1997). Poverty, the low quality of the

school, and lack of Latino role-models played a critical role in the future of the

predominantly Latino student population (Perez & Salazar, cited in Darder et al., 1997).

Conversely, affluent schools, less than 30 minutes away, received high quality educations

with the incorporation of novel studies and elective Spanish classes leading to greater

disparities in Los Angeles (Nieto, 2002). Lack of support from the Archdiocese and a

high percentage of lay teachers further contributed to the financial hardships of the school

because the school ran as a tuition-driven school (Hunt, 2005). Parents could not afford to

pay more for tuition, and we barely secured the funds to pay our lay teachers, who earned

a greater monetary compensation than teachers from religious orders.

Yet, the mission of Catholic schools prevailed and proved to help the Latino

student population in inner-city Los Angeles where the public schools failed (Buetow,

2002; Ilg et al., 2004; Neal, 1997). The school ensured student success with high

expectations; interpersonal relationships with students, teachers, and parents; increased

student safety with a new gate; and a curriculum that validated and affirmed student identity, language, and culture (Antrop-Gonzales & De Jesus, 2006). The Catholic school included parents in their child's education to create a sense of community (Innes, 1998). By incorporating Spanish inside and outside of the classroom with students and parents, the school embraced dual-language as an asset and a gift of the students and their parents (Rolon, 2005).

As the principal, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the leadership of the school. My visible presence on the playground, in classrooms, coaching volleyball, and my work with the community in the church and with private foundations, along with my clear vision for the school, led students along a path of academic success because of the unified support of parents and teachers. This action research dissertation afforded me the opportunity to name the injustices and seek truth and equality for the poor and the marginalized by acknowledging their strengths and embracing their talents to truly practice critical literacy.

Teacher Perceptions

This section addresses the second research question, "How do middle school teachers perceive critical literacy practices impacting student learning in reading for Latino students in a low-income, urban, Catholic elementary school?"

Teachers incorporated literacy practices, yet they initially lacked the full understanding of the pedagogy to which they prescribed because of their limited exposure to critical literacy. Nonetheless, because of their progressive view of their Latino students, teachers created classroom environments where they intentionally encouraged

student participation and even gauged their own success as teachers by their students'
interest. Students participated in the classroom because teachers incorporated Spanish
and because teachers purposely included various forms of assessment that allowed
students to be successful. Moreover, teachers treated their profession as a vocation of
servanthood with compassion and conviction.

Literacy

Both teachers viewed mastery of the Standard English language as a major goal
for their students in order to prepare students for the future (Macedo, 1994). The Korean
male immigrant seventh-grade teacher and the male eighth-grade teacher of African
American and Mexican descent both understood the significance and importance of
commanding the dominant language (Freire, 1993). The teachers drew from their
experiences and strived to incorporate strategies to ensure student learning. They believed
in their students' ability to succeed and treated students in a manner that promoted and
commanded their success (Nieto, 2002). As a result, students self-fulfilled their teachers'
prophecy of success and higher expectations (Persell, 1977).

High Expectations

Teachers attributed students' success to the teachers' classroom management
skills and high expectations for their students. Teachers implemented pedagogical
frameworks, they included personal experiences, and they addressed their students'
characteristics in terms of language and culture (Persell, 1977). Although teachers did not
attribute their dry humor as a motivating factor, their personalities promoted student
participation and involvement within the class.

Student Involvement

Teachers involved students in learning. By researching historical figures, analyzing novels, and creating autobiographies, teachers reached beyond functional skills and provided students with the conceptual tools to voice their opinions and debate through academic discourse (Kretovics, 1985). The teachers intentionally taught students to use their voices as a tool to combat and resolve dilemmas on the playground and prepare them for the future. However, teachers neither prescribed to a co-governance model, nor did they incorporate student voice when designing their courses in alignment with critical literacy (Shor & Pari, 1999).

Incorporation of Spanish

Teachers intentionally incorporated Spanish into the curriculum to validate students' language and identity with the ultimate goal of teaching students to master the English language (Freire, 1993). Teachers praised students for speaking Spanish and thus empowered students to use their voices (Darder, 1991). Teachers also taught students to treat others with respect by standing during a greeting and prayer, sitting up straight in class without yawning, and raising their hands as a means to demonstrate and teach social capital to prepare students to compete in the dominant society (Nieto, 2002).

Teacher Servanthood

Teachers perceived their profession and commitment to the school as a vocation of servanthood. They invited and encouraged participation from students in class, from parents by checking their child's planner, and from their fellow teachers in evaluating their students' work to create an enriching Catholic community (Student centered

214

curriculum model, 2007). They attributed "team work" as a key component of the success of the school. By living a message of hope in a high crime and poverty-stricken area, building a sense of community, and teaching their students as a form of service, teachers lived the goals of Catholic education (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1972). Teachers also understood the paramount roles that leadership and the adoption of a progressive methodology played in creating change to better serve Latino students in this low-income, urban Catholic school (Macedo, 1994).

The teachers continually learned to better serve their students. They expected to learn from their master's degree classes, their fellow colleagues, and from their students through classroom dialogue. Learning became a joint process in which everyone grew (Freire, 1970).

The teachers acknowledged how their ethnicity and culture positively impacted their students. The seventh-grade teacher spoke English as a second language himself, and he wanted to learn Spanish in addition to Korean and English. The eighth-grade teacher spoke several languages, including English and Spanish. He further discussed how his multicultural background and linguistic abilities afforded him the opportunity to successfully reach and serve his Latino students. Both teachers recognized their strong impact positively impacting their Latino students as teachers of color (Salinas, 2002).

Student Perceptions

This section addresses the third research question, "How do Latino middle school students perceive critical literacy practices impacting their learning in reading in a low-income, urban, Catholic elementary school?"

Students perceived literacy practices as positively impacting their success in learning. They attributed their success to the modification in the environment of the school (as described at length in Chapter 4) that encouraged their development of the Catholic faith and student voice. Students felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas because their teachers and the administration promoted development of both Spanish and English. As a result of these positive practices, students moved out of the margins, and they developed strength and confidence in themselves that led them to set goals of higher education. However, the question remains if they understood their responsibility to be agents of change or if they will abandon their community and become part of hegemonic forces.

A Changing Environment

Students perceived the change in the school environment as a major factor that allowed them to succeed. They appreciated more communication with the principal and the "strictness" of the school because they felt that their principal and teachers truly cared for them. Use of the planner, "NIs" (i.e., Needs Improvement conduct grade), and detention motivated the students because teachers took the time to acknowledge their progress on a daily basis. Students understood how the power relations of authority promoted student participation and, thus, success (Anderson & Irvine, 1993). As the school also improved aesthetically and increased safety, students began to take pride in themselves and their school because the principal, teachers, and their parents took action to create a pleasing and safe learning environment.

Students also recognized the remaining disparities in the school and community. As they grew to appreciate reading and technology, they realized that the school lacked the resources to accommodate their needs. They saw the attainment of these resources as a possibility because the school granted their previous requests for new paint, a gate, new bathrooms, and a soccer league. Students also took the opportunity to ask for even larger requests, such as a pool and a gymnasium, because they began to develop the skills to create vision and direction for their school.

Catholic Identity

Students believed and practiced the formation of their Catholic faith and created their own Catholic identities. They took ownership and freely practiced inclusion of the sacraments in their writing and weekly practice. Other students congratulated each other for attending mass and, almost as a competition, they wanted their teachers to know that they were "faithful Christians" in conjunction with one of the School-wide Learning Expectations (SLEs). Students freely spoke of God, as if it were a colloquialism, because they truly believed in the divinity of their Lord. Their faith formation may have begun at home, as parents fervently prayed for safety and physical needs such as food and clothing, yet the school continued to foster their faith development through weekly masses, monthly scripture verses, classroom lessons, and the example of servanthood led by their teachers and principal.

Students took pride in their Catholic education. They viewed Catholic education as superior to public schooling (Greeley, 1984; Hofman et al., 2002). Unfortunately, this ideology may lead, and in some cases led, to issues of privilege, where the oppressed

became the oppressor in relation to students in the community who lacked the opportunity to attend a Catholic school. Student pride also led to student confidence, which allowed students to share their voices.

Student Voice

Students awaited and anticipated the opportunity to share their voices. Students anxiously raised their hands in class; they laughed freely with one another; and they shared their thoughts, ideas, and opinions freely because the principal and teachers listened. Student dialogue became emancipatory because students felt empowered to challenge each other, the teachers, and even the principal as long as they spoke in a respectful manner (Darder et al., 2002). Moreover, students felt comfortable speaking in English and in Spanish because the school promoted a dual language community.

Sphere of Biculturalism

Students moved out of their sphere of biculturalism (Darder, 1991) and surpassed its limitations. Students viewed their ability to speak English and Spanish as a "gift." Because the school promoted English and Spanish, students felt free to express their ideas and opinions because "to speak of language is to speak of our 'selves.' Language is at the heart, literally and metaphorically, of who we are, how we present ourselves, and how others see us" (Gonzales, 2001, p. xix). Students no longer viewed their language as separate, dual, alien, or something to be negotiated (Darder, 1991). These students felt comfortable speaking either language at any time.

For example, the school competed in an academic decathlon in an affluent area against students of the dominant class. One seventh-grade student originally incorporated

Spanish into her speech; however, at the competition she omitted the Spanish saying because she "forgot." The following year in the same competition as an eighth grader, she performed a dramatic monologue in front of an even larger audience and sang a song with confidence and pride in Spanish. She no longer felt embarrassed, she no longer negotiated, she was her language (Gonzales, 2001). The school placed in every category both years, and earned second place in the overall competition. Students viewed their language as a platform for social stratification in competing against the dominant class, in addition to distinguishing it as a tool for social and economic advantage (Ruiz in Darder et al., 1997).

Learning English

Because students felt comfortable with their primary language of Spanish, students viewed learning English as a privilege as opposed to a forced regulation. Students learned concepts first through themes in authentic literature, which built a positive emotional, social, and intellectual response to language (Smallwood, 2002). They enjoyed the novels, the activities, and the opportunity to take charge of their learning through portfolios and persuasive essays. Grammar and vocabulary instruction became merely a tool to help students communicate their thoughts and ideas. Because learning had a purpose, students embraced basic skills as a platform, which promulgated them to learn more challenging material, such as literary tools and academic discourse through use of deliberate debate.

Their Future

As a result of the modification in environment, formation of faith, promotion of student voice, incorporation of Spanish, and development of English, students viewed their futures as promising. Students perceived their education as preparing them to attain higher degrees and work as professional doctors, lawyers, and computer analysts. They developed the "conscientization" and deeper awareness, which allowed them to shape, create, and discover their own capacities (Darder et al., 2002).

As students prepared to compete in the dominant society, the question remains if they learned to promote and ensure justice for the oppressed. Their faith taught them to give to the poor; however, did the school promote critical literacy as a social frame of reference? By combating hegemonic forces, students inherently practiced social, political, and economic activism. The question remains if they understood the magnitude of their joint responsibility to ensure social justice.

Reflective Focus Groups

In the first reflective teacher focus group, teachers perceived "the only direction the school [was] heading [was] up." They agreed with the findings and emphasized their role of service, commitment to the school, and the opportunity to teach through novel studies. Teachers believed that their literacy practices and use of novels allowed them to relate content to their students' lives. The novels provided students with the opportunity to "think critically, come up with their own solutions, and apply it to their lives." Furthermore, teachers used the conflicts in the novels to highlight solutions that sometimes are "resolved, and at other times end in tragedy, just like [the students'] lives."

Teachers further incorporated their Catholic faith to create a reading curriculum that "fits like a glove."

When asked about the future direction of the school, teachers provided the following list of realistic goals:

- A kindergarten that will be implemented in the upcoming school year.

- A school board.

- More groups and unions so that "everybody plays as role, all in the common interest, the common good. We care so much for individual, but it's in those individuals that we work collectively to build the school."

- Branch out more in order to "not be a hidden jewel, and mark ourselves in a way that we have people outside of the school also being involved, parishioners that want to lend their time, talent, or money to the school, where everyone knows everybody."

- Participation in wide-scale events, such as academic competitions with other schools (e.g., the academic decathlon) and soccer league.

Teachers aspired to engage in dialogue with various sectors of society because they felt empowered by the academic, social, and linguistic success of their students (Macedo, 1994). Teachers realized the attainment of these goals because of the "support and strong fellowship" of the students, parents, teachers, and staff.

After further analysis and reflection, I conducted a second teacher focus group to discuss the underlying issues of critical pedagogy and critical literacy to supplement the action plan with concrete critical literacy practices. In this final interview, the teachers

disclosed their realization of the importance and power of critical literacy. They shared recent practices and future goals to incorporate critical literacy.

The eighth-grade teacher shared his most recent experience in addressing a social issue with his students. He referred to applying the school's fourth School-wide Learning Expectation (SLE) of being a responsible member in his class' reading of the novel, *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993). He incorporated a reflective journal where the students identified "how the protagonist of that novel would [act] in contemporary times in Los Angeles." He moved away from having students "regurgitating their comprehension of the novel through plays or skits," and allowed students to create open forums where they discussed deeper issues. "Some of these kids are aware of so many kinds of abuses . . . they are aware of violence in the neighborhood." The teacher encouraged the students to apply the lessons they discussed in class to become "responsible members in their community."

The eighth-grade teacher further stated how his students "themselves are each a symbol of change" as they demonstrated with "their inner-self confidence." He stated that the students "want to make a change. They want to see what impact they can make with their opinions and their voices." As a teacher, he stated how he is trying to be "flexible and very open-minded in that [he] acknowledges their concerns and interests." He explained how the students started talking about issues of abortion and domestic violence at the lunch tables "all on their own." The conversation entered the classroom, and the majority of the class chose to discuss abortion. He took a vote based on student interest that resulted in a debate about abortion. The teacher further challenged the

students by randomly selecting them to argue pro and con positions even if it conflicted with their own personal beliefs "so they can be in the shoes of how other people think."

The teacher enhanced their discussion on abortion by having students create billboards on standard-sized pieces of paper to support their stance. The teacher then shrunk their signs, placed them in a diorama as a billboard with a house and a street, and took digital pictures of their work. He displayed the photos in the rooms for students to see how their ideas looked as a real advertised billboard and how they could impact others on a larger level. He also shared the social teachings of the Catholic Church in regards to abortion. The teacher concluded the lesson by saying that he did not "want them to lose interest and shrug it off and say, 'That's on the news, that's not my problem.'" He aimed to seize students' interest in social issues and use it as a spring-board for future lessons.

The seventh-grade teacher similarly shared how he incorporated social awareness through *The Pearl* (Steinbeck, 1994). Students discussed issues of poverty and "how they can interact with families who can not afford health care." The class also discussed issues of technology and addressed the question of whether "technology really enhanced or limited democracy. [The class] explored the themes of how the rich get richer and the poor get poorer." The teacher further encouraged students to explore both sides of the issue by having students role play to understand the position of the rich and the position of the poor.

Similarly, the eighth-grade teacher stated that the school's participation in an academic decathlon, where the students competed against students from affluent homes,

was a political and social action. The eighth-grade teacher intended to expose his students to the dominant class to let his students know that they "can compete. They can't feel like these jobs are only going to be for those who are from affluent families." As an alarm rang loudly from the neighboring swap meet, he continued speaking, "Despite the color of their skin or the language barriers they may have had, or as first generation Americans, they can be competitive." The teacher realized:

> In the future, they won't be competing in a decathlon; they will be competing for jobs they might think were formally reserved for those who have families with all this money. But if they have the education, they have the willingness, the drive, the skills, and I think they have the advantage of being bilingual, they can nail that job. It goes beyond the community.

The teacher began to practice critical literacy, not by changing the school's participation in an academic decathlon, but by shifting his ideology that now recognized the social, political, and economic challenges facing his students.

We further discussed issues of poverty and the Catholic mission to help the poor in relation to critical literacy. We agreed that the social teachings of the Catholic Church coincided with critical literacy, both of which aim to help the poor and oppressed through action. The eighth-grade teacher mentioned how as a school we raise money for missionaries who help the poor. The eighth-grade teacher used that fundraising for the missionaries as a platform to discuss issues of poverty and homelessness in our own community. "When I asked students to draw a picture of homelessness, many of them

drew a man. But I drew attention to the fact that they include all people – children their

own age right there on Skid Row suffer from homelessness as well."

The seventh-grade teacher focused on the theme of contentment and materialism.

He challenged his students to address issues of:

> materialism in our world today and how it drives forces. That's another
>
> reason why there is a big gap between the rich and poor. And
>
> understanding that being content with what we have and really
>
> appreciating the gifts that we do have and working towards helping
>
> everybody else, that's one message that we always try to send in our
>
> school.

Based on our conversation, the teachers set two realistic goals to promote in the

future:

> 1. The eighth-grade teacher aimed to address issues of race in his classroom and
>
>   on a school-wide level. In the celebration for Black History Month, he shared
>
>   with his students how "it's not just about the African American experience, but
>
>   how other people also benefited from the pioneering of the movement by Dr.
>
>   King and other leaders who not only spoke for the African American
>
>   community, but for other people who did not have a voice." He continued to say
>
>   that "it's not just a black or brown thing," but that we all have a responsibility to
>
>   help each other.
>
>   The eighth-grade teacher referred to the school's previous celebration of
>
>   International Day where classes researched foods, customs, and dances of

various countries. This year, he intended for classes to also research the struggles of various peoples and the oppression they endured. "I think we're so used to keeping things positive. Being politically correct, we want to just mention all of the highlights and not the struggles. That is something I would definitely like to highlight." He mentioned his experiences in a museum exhibit, "Little Saigon on Vietnam," where the exhibit depicted Americans as the oppressors.

2. The seventh-grade teacher also sought to address environmental issues. He wanted students to become aware of environmental issues "not just in our community, in our own lives, which is important as well, but also globally." During this conversation, he promoted involvement in global issues "on an environmental level, to be stewards of the earth and to protect it, and to be aware that it is important to leave a world that is at least the same or better than when we came in [to the world], to give our students that mentality, that belief system." He intended to incorporate issues of wealth and power by providing examples of "organic foods and hybrid cars" that are more readily accessible in affluent areas. He also aimed to address "why environmental laws get passed. Maybe it is the government making an effort to go into other countries for more resources. What are the struggles there?" His environmental awareness surpassed the popularity of recycling; he coupled it with the underlying political and economic structures that hinder change. He began to read the world.

Personal Reflection

Throughout this journey, I experienced change myself. Spiritually, I deepened my walk with God by learning to practice my faith and to serve others so that they may help themselves and their community. I embraced my insecurities of speaking Spanish because, as Paulo Freire (1970) taught, I learned with the purpose of communicating with those I intended to serve. Politically, economically, and socially, I learned that if I make people uncomfortable, I am usually doing the right thing. My experiences at this school taught me to see critically and name the injustices in our society. Although I am still learning to read the world fully, I now possess the knowledge to lead, change, and teach others as critical literacy and critical pedagogy have taught me.

I must admit that when I first visited the school and saw the public library across the street boarded up and sprayed with graffiti, I felt hesitant to take on such large societal issues. However, I knew that if God wanted me to become a principal after only two years of teaching, I needed to follow His will. As time progressed, I was no longer here to serve the people – I became the people. It would be naïve of me not to acknowledge that I chose to be a part of the community while at any time I could choose differently, whereas others lacked the same privilege. Yet, I utilized this experience to become an agent of change in the community.

Unfortunately, crime, poverty, and violence filled the community and as time progressed, I quickly grew tired, angry, and frustrated with social injustices in the area. I spoke with one of the priests about an incident of violence, and he encouraged me to

pray. Although I believe in the power of prayer, God does not call us to stand by idly in the face of injustice.

For example, I called the police several times regarding various issues of safety at the school. The first three times, I waited for 10 minutes to speak with an operator, and then it took over 30 minutes for officers to come to our school. Schools in the area received flyers from the police force about a public meeting on school safety. I attended the meeting, took the opportunity to thank the officers publicly for risking their lives on a daily basis. I then shared my less than acceptable experiences in front of the entire forum. Immediately after the meeting, a high-ranking police officer greeted me, gave me his card, and introduced me to the Senior Lead Officer (SLO) for the area. Within the next couple of days, I received a letter from that high-ranking police officer and personal phone calls from members of the police force who wanted to ensure the school's safety. I built a personal relationship with our SLO, and now whenever I need anything, I call him directly and he assists us immediately. This simple act taught me the power of one voice, and although I failed to address the hegemonic forces that cause crime, poverty, and violence, I secured the safety of students and teachers in one school in one area.

I learned to use my voice in English and in Spanish. Growing up, English was my primary language. My grandparents spoke Spanish fluently, but they chose not to teach my parents to speak Spanish because schools reprimanded my grandparents for speaking Spanish. My grandparents wanted to shield my parents from that form of discrimination. Although my parents always promoted pride in our heritage and culture (e.g., they supported my participation as a ballet folklorico Mexican dancer for many years), they

only spoke a few Spanish words at home. I took Spanish classes in middle school and high school because I yearned to speak Spanish, but my insecurities of mispronouncing words and lack of opportunities to practice stifled my progress.

When I began working with a predominantly Spanish-speaking population, I set aside my self-consciousness and worked diligently to improve my Spanish out of the necessity to communicate with my teachers, students, and parents. I was there to serve them, and as such, I needed to learn Spanish. The parents, teachers, and students appreciated my willingness to learn. I published a weekly newsletter in English and Spanish with the assistance of my secretary. The students enjoyed teaching me new words, and the parents commented on my rapid progress. I overcame my lack of confidence to learn a language I can call my own with the help of my community.

I also learned the significance of critical literacy and its power to counter hegemonic forces. The Archdiocese of Los Angeles' efforts to improve literacy through scripted reading programs failed to address the needs of students, specifically bilingual students in low-income urban schools. Scripted reading programs fail to meet the needs of the students because they teach functional literacy, which serves to teach students only basic reading skills (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004). Schools implementing a scripted reading program prepare students to compete for skill-based jobs, which maintain their subordinate role in society. By failing to acknowledge students' experiences and knowledge, scripted reading programs serve as a form of domination that seek to perpetuate hegemonic forces and preserve the status quo.

As a first-year principal, I attended the five-day training for the scripted reading program recommended by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and immediately recognized the myriad problems associated with scripted reading programs. I voiced my concerns, which I supported with literature on critical literacy and critical pedagogy, to several members of the administration of the Archdiocese. Although I received strong opposition to my views, my knowledge and education empowered me to research a literacy practice that served as a platform to teach students literacy beyond phonemic awareness. By teaching students critical literacy, our low-income, bilingual, students of color can move outside of the margins, learn to read the world, and counter hegemonic forces to become agents of change.

Conclusion

Changes in the school and reading curriculum, specifically the implementation of critical literacy approaches that acknowledge bicultural students, increased learning for Latino middle school students as perceived by teachers and students in this low-income, urban Catholic elementary school. Teachers implemented effective elements of critical literacy, including direct vocabulary and grammar instruction, analysis of literary tools, incorporation of Spanish, varying forms of assessment, and inclusion of student voice, through the use of novel studies. The school and classroom environments further promoted academic learning for Latino middle school students with high expectations, humor, and predictability where teachers, who viewed their students with promising futures, taught as a form of service. Although the school and teachers incorporated critical literacy practices, teachers fell short of practicing critical literacy because they

failed to examine the underlying social ramifications of hegemony resulting in political action.

This dissertation met the goals and validity criteria of action research according to Herr and Anderson (2005). Completion of Johnson's (2002) nine-step action research methodology resulted in process validity. The study ensured dialogic and process validity by generating new knowledge of literacy approaches, and teacher and student perceptions of those approaches. The creation of an action plan and recommended plan of action guaranteed outcome validity. The study met the criteria of catalytic validity because the teachers and I both transformed and deepened our awareness of critical literacy. Lastly, the study maintained democratic validity because the results proved relevant to the teachers and middle school Latino students in this low-income, inner-city, Catholic school.

Recommendations for Action

To incorporate critical literacy fully, I provide the following recommendations for action:

- Incorporate students in determining the content of instruction by including them in selection of the novel.
- Discuss the deeper underlying social injustices of themes in the novels and in students' lives.
- Specifically teach students about their responsibility to ensure social justice.
- Provide opportunities for students to be agents of change.

- Acknowledge and address issues of crime, poverty, and racial tension in the community.

- Challenge the Archdiocese's financial leveling to ensure equality for all Catholic schools.

- Promote critical literacy as an alternative to scripted reading programs in other low-income, Catholic elementary schools.

Significance of the Study

Throughout the United States, the majority of inner-city Catholic elementary schools serve low-income, Latino students who are failing academically. This study reveals that Catholic education previously fell short of addressing the academic needs of students of color in impoverished communities. However, with specific and strategic changes in the reading and literacy curriculum, Catholic education can be empowering for Latino students. This study demonstrated that linguistically and culturally-sensitive, critical literacy practices can increase motivation and learning in underperforming Catholic schools composed of students of color.

This action project suggests that Catholic education must create deliberate changes if it wants to fulfill its mission for social justice. This study serves as a platform by documenting critical literacy approaches for Latino students in Catholic schools across the nation. It serves as an alternative to scripted reading programs in inner-city Catholic schools.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study lends itself to several recommendations for future research.

- The study could be conducted at another low-income, urban, Catholic school for Latino middle school students to ensure reproducibility. Although teachers, students, and novels would differ, a researcher could document the impact of critical literacy approaches on student learning in reading.

- I highly recommend a comparative study of critical literacy practices and scripted reading programs for low-income, Latino students in a Catholic elementary school to determine the effectiveness of each program. Results may lead to a revolutionary change within the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and even the public sector.

- A study could be conducted for students of color from different ethnicities in urban, Catholic elementary schools including African American, Asians, Caucasians, and students with the gift of bilingualism.

- The study could also be compared to Catholic schools located in a rural setting to distinguish the impact of inner-city factors.

- Lastly, the study could be conducted in an inner-city public school. This study would help determine the role of faith in student learning. Again, results may lead to the reformation of education for students of color as we know it.

APPENDIX A

Novel List

Cisneros, S. (1984). *The house on mango street*. New York: Vintage Books.

Dickens, C. (1868). *A tale of two cities*. New York: Books.

Golding, W. (1954). *Lord of the flies*. New York: The Berkley Publishing Group.

Frank, A. (1986). *Anne Frank: The diary of a young girl*. New York: Doubleday.

Hartman, L., & Bourke, M. (Eds.).(1970). *The New American Bible, Translated from the Original Languages, with Critical Use of All the Ancient Sources, by Members of the Catholic Biblical Association of America.* Paterson: St. Anthony Guild Press.

Hinton, S.E. (1995). *The outsiders*. New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc.

Lee, H. (1999). *To kill a mockingbird*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

Lewis, C.S. (2000). *The lion, the witch, and the wardrobe*. New York: Harper Trophy.

Steinbeck, J. (1993). *Of mice and men*. New York: Penguin Group.

Steinbeck, J. (1994). *The pearl*. New York: Penguin Group.

APPENDIX B

Protocol for Preliminary Teacher Interview Form

- How did you select the novels you wanted to teach?

- What are you doing to teach novel studies? Describe what you do on a daily basis during reading.

- What evidence would you present to demonstrate your approaches?

- How do you think the students are learning?

- How do the students feel about novel studies?

- What would you do differently?

- What did you change from last year and why?

- How do your literacy practices relate to identity development for our Latino students?

APPENDIX C

Protocol for Second Teacher Interview Form

- How did you feel about the lesson?

- What were the strengths?

- What would you do differently?

- What is your perception of literacy?

- How do you feel about teaching novel studies?

- What are the positive and negative aspects of teaching novel studies?

- How do you think the students feel about learning from novels?

- What can I do as principal to help you and the students?

APPENDIX D

Protocol for Student Focus Group Form

- What do you think of your language arts class?

- What do you like about it and why?

- What do you dislike about it and why?

- Describe what you do on a daily basis during language arts.

- How do you feel you are learning in language arts?

- What are you learning? Can you give me an example?

- How do you feel about novel studies?

- What would you do differently?

- Describe your favorite lesson.

- What do you think of novel studies?

- Do you feel like the teachers relate to you?

- Do you feel like language arts relates to your life? Can you give me an example?

APPENDIX E

Critical Literacy Checklist

Shor, I., & Pari, C. (Eds.). (1999). *Critical Literacy in Action: Writing Words, Changing Worlds/A tribute to the teachings of Paulo Freire.* Portsmouth: Boynton-Cook.

Critical literacy practice	Observed	Description
Start with learners' needs and interest/ background knowledge		
Involve students in determining the content of instruction		
Focus on meaning, not on mechanics		
Contextualize work on form		
Center instruction around themes drawn from learners' social reality		
Encourage dialogue and critical analysis of social realities		
Use a variety of participatory tools to explore themes/ scaffolding		
Move toward action outside the classroom		
Involve students in evaluation		

APPENDIX F

Critical Pedagogy Matrix

Developed from *The critical pedagogy reader.* (2002). Antonia Darder, Marta Baltodano, & Rodolfo D. Torres. New York: Routledge.

Foundation	Definition	Problem	Change	Data
Cultural politics	*Neutral views of education – Legitimize students' experiences*			
Hegemony	*Social control – perpetuate the economic and cultural marginalization of subordinate groups – overcome through resistance, critique and social action*			
Counter-Hegemony and Resistance	*Why students fail – emancipation – student voice*			
Ideology	*Hidden curriculum – interrogated contradictions between main- stream culture and lived experiences*			
Dialogue – Conscientization	*Dialogue and analysis serve as the basis for reflection and action – Students and teachers learn – awareness of social reality*			
Political Economy	*Class reproduction/ racialized inequalities – Acknowledges material conditions*			
Historicity of Knowledge	*Knowledge within social context – transformed by humans, tensions in history, student knowledge is historical*			
Praxis, Reflection, Action	*Self-creating – question posing*			
Dialectical Theory	*Reinforce conformity and control of knowledge and power – Unmask objective knowledge and cultural norms and values- construct new ways*			
Catholicity	*Living the Catholic faith*			

APPENDIX G

Frames of Reference

Critical Literacy
1. Social practice of questioning
2. Power in the larger society
3. Power in the school and classroom
4. Voice and empowerment
5. Identity, culture, language
6. Curriculum on real problems
7. Students' personal experiences
8. Students' previous knowledge
9. Classroom and school environment
10. Social political context brought into the classroom
11. Students as agents of social change

Critical Teaching
1. Teaching encoding and decoding skills
2. Teach comprehension
3. Teach writing
4. Teach standard English, but without dismissing students' identity and language (additive rather than subtractive approach)
5. Integrate in the curriculum subjugated knowledge and histories
6. Use problem posing pedagogy
7. Use dialogue as a vehicle for critical consciousness: students' recognition of their place in society and social injustice
8. Strategies by Shor and Pari (1999)

Effective Literacy Practices for Latino: Second Language Learners
1. Incorporate students' prior knowledge
2. Learn vocabulary in themes
3. Use novel to learn encoding and decoding skills
4. Literature-based units
5. Thematic reading
6. Integrate students' personal experiences
7. Discussion and writing about the content
8. Writing process and writing workshops
9. Writing across the curriculum
10. Community literacy approaches
11. Student doing research
12. Literacy narratives
13. Portfolio assessment

TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Date of Preparation: August 30, 2007

Loyola Marymount University

Social Justice for Latino Middle School Students: Reading the World

1) I hereby authorize Mrs. Jennifer Grenardo, M.A. to include me (my child/ward) in the following research study: Social Justice for Latino Middle School Students: Reading the World; Action Research on critical Literacy Inspired Practices.

2) I have been asked to participate on a research project which is designed to determine effective reading practices for Latino middle school students and which will last for approximately one year.

3) It has been explained to me that the reason for my inclusion in this project is because I am a teacher in the school and my class is being observed.

4)   I understand that if I am a subject I will be interviewed and the investigator will request permission to use a tape recorder. These procedures have been explained to me by   Mrs. Jennifer Grenardo .

5) I understand that I will be audiotaped in the process of these research procedures. It has been explained to me
    that these tapes will be used for teaching and/or research purposes only and that my identity and the identity of the school will not be disclosed. I have been assured that the tapes will be destroyed after their use in this research project is totally completed. I understand that I have the right to review the tapes made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part.

6) I understand that the study described above may involve the following risks and/or discomforts: None that is known to the researcher.

7) I also understand that the possible benefits of the study include improving teaching strategies for middle school students.

8) I understand that Mrs. Jennifer Grenardo, who can be reached at (323) 734-4022 will answer any questions I may have at any time concerning details of the procedures performed as part of this study.

9) If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent reobtained.

10) I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary and I have the right to refuse to participate in, or to withdraw from this research at any time without affecting my evaluation or my employment at the school.

11) I understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate my participation before the completion of the study.

12) I understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent except as specifically required by law.

13) I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question that I may not wish to answer.

14) Some of the information with which I will be provided may be ambiguous, or inaccurate. However, I will be informed of any inaccuracies following my participation in this study.

15) I understand that in the event of research related injury, compensation and medical treatment are not provided by Loyola Marymount University.

16) I understand that if I have any further questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact Birute Anne Vileisis, Ph.D., Interim Chair, Institutional Review Board, 1 LMU Drive, Suite 3000, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles CA 90045-2659 (310) 338-4599, bvileisis@lmu.edu.

17) In signing this consent form, I acknowledge receipt of a copy of this form.

18) Subject's Signature_____ Date _____

Date_____

Witness_____

FORMA DE CONSENTIMIENTO DEL PADRE

Fecha: 26 de septiembre de 2007   pagina 1 of 2

Loyola Marymount University

Justicia Social para Estudiantes de secundaria: Leyendo el Mundo

1) Por la presente autorizo a la Sra. Jennifer Grenardo, M.A.. incluir mi niño/barrio en el siguiente estudio de investigación: <u>Justicia Social para Estudiantes Latinos de Secundaria: Leyendo el Mundo; Investigación de Acción sobre la Capacidad de Leer y Escribir Inspirada in Pedagogia Crítica.</u>

2) Se le ha pedido a mi niño/niña participar en un proyecto de investigación que es diseñado para determinar las prácticas efectivas de la lectura para estudiantes latinos de secundaria y que durará aproximadamente un año.

3) Se me ha explicado que la razón por la que se pide participación de mi niño en este proyecto es porque el/ella es una alumna en la escuela y miembro de la clase que será observada.

4) Entiendo que si mi niño es un participante en el proyecto, el/ella será entrevistado(a) y la Señora Grenardo solicitará permiso para utilizar una grabadora. Estos procedimientos se me han explicados por la Sra. Jennifer Grenardo.

5) Entiendo que mi niño será grabado en el proceso de éstos procedimientos de investigación. Se me ha explicado que estas grabaciones serán utilizadas solo para propósitos de enseñar y/o investigación y que mi identidad y la identidad de la escuela no serán revelados. Se me ha garantizado que las grabaciones serán destruidas después de que su uso en este proyecto de investigación se haya terminado. Entiendo que tengo el derecho de revisar las grabaciones hechas como parte del estudio para determinar si ellas deben ser redactadas o deben ser borradas en el total o en parte.

6) Entiendo que el estudio descrito anteriormente puede implicar ciertos riesgos y/o molestias. De los cuales el investigador no tiene conocimiento.

7) Entiendo también que los beneficios posibles del estudio incluyen mejorar las estrategias de la enseñanza para estudiantes de secundaria.

8) Entiendo que se puede comunicar con la Sra. Jennifer Grenardo al número (323) 734-4022 y responderá cualquiera de sus pregunta respecto a los detalles en los procedimientos realizados como parte del estudio.

9) Si se diera algún cambio en el diseño del estudio, yo seré informado y mi se tendrá que obtener mi consentimiento nuevamente.

10) La participación de mi niño es estrictamente voluntaria y entiendo que el/ella tiene el derecho de negarse a tomar parte en el proyecto o retirarse de esta investigación en el momento que el/ella lo decida sin perjudicar su educación o sus grados escolares.

11) Entiendo que las circunstancias que puedan surgir causen que el investigador termine la participación de mi niño antes de la conclusión del estudio.

12) Entiendo que ninguna información que identifique mi niño será revelada sin mi consentimiento a menos que la ley lo requiera.

13) Entiendo que mi niño tiene el derecho a negarse a contestar cualquier pregunta que el/ella no desea contestar.

14) Parte de la información que mi niño será proporcionado puede ser ambigua o inexacta. Sin embargo, yo seré informado de cualquier inexactitud que impida mi participación en este estudio.

15) Entiendo que en caso de una investigación que incluya daño o prejuicio, la compensación y el tratamiento médico no serán proporcionados por la Universidad de Loyola Marymount.

16) Entiendo que si tengo más preguntas, comentarios, o dudas acerca del estudio o el proceso del consentimiento, yo puedo comunicarme con Birute Anne Vileisis, Ph.D., Interim Chair, Institutional Review Board, 1 LMU Drive, Suite 3000, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles CA 90045-2659 (310) 338-4599, bvileisis@lmu.edu.

17) Al firmar esta forma de consentimiento, yo testifico que he recibido una copia del mismo.

18) El sujeto es un menor (edad_____)

_____
_____.

Firma Madre/Padre/Guardián _____ Fecha _____

PARENT CONSENT FORM

Date of Preparation: September 26, 2007   page 1 of 2

Loyola Marymount University

Social Justice for Latino Middle School Students: Reading the World

1)   I hereby authorize Mrs. Jennifer Grenardo, M.A. to include my child/ward in the following research study: Social Justice for Latino Middle School Students: Reading the World; Action Research on Critical Literacy Inspired Practices.

2)   My child has been asked to participate on a research project which is designed to determine effective reading practices for Latino middle school students and which will last for approximately one year.

3)   It has been explained to me that the reason for my child's inclusion in this project is because he/she is a student in the school and member of the class being observed.

4)   I understand that if my child is a subject he/she will be interviewed and MS.GRENARDO will request permission to use a tape recorder. These procedures have been explained to me by   Mrs. Jennifer Grenardo

5)   I understand that my child will be audio taped in the process of these research procedures. It has been explained to me that these tapes will be used for teaching and/or research purposes only and that my identity and the   identity of the school will not be disclosed. I have been assured that the tapes will be destroyed after their use in this research project is totally completed. I understand that I have the right to review the tapes made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part.

6)   I understand that the study described above may involve the following risks and/or discomforts: None that is known to the researcher.

7)   I also understand that the possible benefits of the study include improving teaching strategies for middle school students.

8)   I understand that Mrs. Jennifer Grenardo, who can be reached at (323) 734-4022 will answer any questions I may have at any time concerning details of the procedures performed as part of this study.

9)   If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent reobtained.

10) I understand that my child's participation in this study is strictly voluntary and that he/she can leave at any time without any reason. I understand that he/she has the right to refuse to participate in, or to withdraw from this research at any time without affecting his/her grades or education.

11) I understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate my child's participation before the completion of the study.

12) I understand that no information that identifies my child will be released without my separate consent except as specifically required by law.

13) I understand that my child has the right to refuse to answer any question that he/she may not wish to answer.

14) Some of the information with which my child will be provided may be ambiguous, or inaccurate. However, I will be informed of any inaccuracies following my participation in this study.

15) I understand that in the event of research related injury, compensation and medical treatment are not provided by Loyola Marymount University.

16) I understand that if I have any further questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact Birute Anne Vileisis, Ph.D., Interim Chair, Institutional Review Board, 1 LMU Drive, Suite 3000, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles CA 90045-2659 (310) 338-4599, bvileisis@lmu.edu.

17) In signing this consent form, I acknowledge receipt of a copy of this form.

18) Subject is a minor (age_____)

_____   _____
Mother/Father/Guardian   Date

APPENDIX K

Forma de Aprobación de los Estudiantes

26 de septiembre de 2007

Loyola Marymount University

Justicia Social para Estudiantes de Secundaria: Leyendo el Mundo

1) La SRA. JENNIFER GRENARDO me ha pedido que tome parte en un estudio de investigación llamado : La Justicia social para Estudiantes latinos de secundaria: Practica literarias criticas.

2) Se me ha pedido que tome parte en el estudio porque soy un estudiante de la escuela, y mis ideas y opiniones son importantes.

3) Voy a participar con la Sra. Grenardo y cuatro otros estudiantes en mi clase para discutir la lectura y escritura.

4) Entiendo que no hay riesgos implicados en esta actividad.

5) Entiendo que los beneficios del estudio incluyen mejorar las estrategias de la enseñanza para estudiantes del colegio.

6) Si Tuviese cualquier pregunta, yo puedo llamar a Sra. Grenardo en (323) 734-4022.

7) Entiendo que tengo el derecho para participar o retirarme del estudio sin ninguna consecuencia negativa para mi educación o mis calificaciones.

8) Entiendo que puedo retener una copia de esta forma.

9) He tomado la decision de participar en este estudio.

_____ _____
Firma de Estudiante   Fecha

_____ _____
Firma de Investigador   Fecha

APPENDIX L

Student Assent Form

September 26, 2007

Loyola Marymount University

Social Justice for Latino Middle School Students: Reading the World

1) I have been asked to participate in a research study with Mrs. Jennifer Grenardo, M.A. entitled: Social Justice for Latino Middle School Students: Reading the World; Action Research on Critical Literacy Inspired Practices.

2) I was asked to participate in the study because I am a student of the school, and my ideas and opinions are important.

3) I will meet with Mrs. Grenardo and four other students in my class to discuss reading and writing.

4) I understand that there are no risks involved in this activity.

5) I understand that the benefits of the study include improving teaching strategies for middle school students.

6) If I have any questions, I can call Mrs. Grenardo at (323) 734-4022.

7) I understand that I have a choice to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences to my education or my grades.

8) I may retain a copy of this form.

9) I choose to participate in the study.

_____ _____
Student Signature   Date

_____ _____
Researcher Signature   Date

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