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Professional Conversations About Race, Culture and Language In Early Childhood Literacy Education: An Administrator's Journey

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PROFESSIONAL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE, CULTURE AND LANGUAGE IN
EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY EDUCATION: AN ADMINISTRATOR'S JOURNEY

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the memory of my parents: Frank A. Mosso, whose life-lessons were the beginning of my journey; and Erika A. Kornprobst, who taught me that education, at any age, was always worth the effort.

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ABSTRACT

Year after year, children of Color, speakers of languages other than English, and children of poverty are served less well in public schools than their White, middle-class peers. The lives of children from White, middle-class homes are regularly normalized as they are described by teachers, administrators, policy makers, and educational programs as those with the most worth and knowledge. In all too many settings, cultures and languages outside this narrowly-defined norm are perceived from deficit perspectives. This hierarchy perpetuates a status quo that privileges and therefore supports the success of some, while devaluing and contributing to the failure of others. Altering these outcomes requires an understanding of issues related to race, culture and language marginalization, and how classroom practices impact children's identities in schools. It is generally acknowledged that administrators are ultimately responsible for creating cultures in their schools that encourage and support teachers' professional growth while deepening their own knowledge. However, there has been little in this work that focuses on the *nature* of the administrator's role particularly in early childhood settings when changes in curricula and impact on student identity are also documented.

In an attempt to fill this gap, utilizing tenets of ethnography, critical ethnography and autoethnography and a pattern analysis for examining data, I sought to understand: What happens when a school administrator and teachers of three- four- and five-year-old children engage in long-term professional study designed to explore issues of culture, race, language? What challenges are met? How are those challenges negotiated? How is

the experience reflected in day-to-day life in the classrooms, particularly as it relates to supporting children's positive literate identities? What is the role of the administrator in this process? Grounded in sociocultural, critical race, linguistic and cultural marginalization, and identity development theories, data analysis led me to findings that shed light on the inherent challenges in this work as well as strategies that worked in overcoming challenges. Fundamentally, however, I found that a range of administratively-facilitated and theoretically connected professional development experiences that are intentionally focused on issues of race, language and culture can be highly supportive of teachers abilities to recognize and challenge deficit, racist views and discriminatory practices and to make changes in classroom practice supportive of students' positive literate identities. Implications are provided to help administrators and other educators seeking to engage in this critical process.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

A few years ago I was preparing the agenda for the first faculty meeting of the school year. I wondered what our Diversity Chairperson had in store for us since she had asked for time to share an activity. Later, when it was her turn to share, she engaged us in a game of 'What is your geometric shape?' Each shape had a personality trait assigned to it and we were asked to join with others who matched our shape. The discussion that ensued had more to do with how fun the activity was than with deeper reflection about self and others. I wondered, 'How does this activity help us understand each other? How does it build the foundation for understanding the rich diversity of our students and families? How does it help the teachers make the curriculum more meaningful?' For the first time, as an administrator, I recognized a specific responsibility to myself, the teachers and the students to deepen our knowledge of issues of diversity and what they might mean for us as a school supporting all children and families.

For the past six years, I have been the administrator of a Child Development Program in a public school system in the southeastern United States. During this study I worked with teachers of three-, four- and five-year-olds, in 13 classrooms throughout the district. My experiences in various cultural settings - as a child growing up in Brooklyn, New York, a Ph.D. student, a teacher, and an administrator - taught me about the importance of valuing difference, but also about how easily educators can give lip service to valuing others without deeply examining what that means in terms of their own biases and day-to-day life in classrooms. I came to understand how school systems that are set up to value one cultural and linguistic model devalue others in ways that are destructive

of: (a) children's identities and opportunities as learners; and (b) the development of a society that genuinely values difference as a resource rather than as a deficit.

In my graduate studies, I was introduced to sociocultural perspectives, culturally relevant teaching, critical race theory, and issues of linguistic and cultural marginalization. I wanted to use these bodies of knowledge to support my growth and the growth of the teachers in the child development classrooms who worked with me. My intentions were to go beyond surface level diversity experiences such as the one described in the opening vignette, to deeply explore issues of education equity, oppression, and discrimination and their impact on our ability to build children's positive identities, in particular, their literate identities.

I did not come to these concerns and goals alone. The need for teachers to explore these issues and studies of teachers engaged in such explorations are widely documented (Allen, 2010; Blackburn, 2011; Boutte, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Delpit, 2006; 2012; Fine & Weis, 2003; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1999; Tatum, 2007; Torres-Guzmán, Mercado, Quintero & Viera, 1994). It is also well documented that most new teachers report feeling unprepared in terms of understanding how to teach children from backgrounds different from their own (Delpit, 2006; 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Long et al., 2006; Nieto, 1999). The literature is clear that this lack of understanding often leads to inequitable, oppressive and discriminatory practices particularly for children of Color, children from low-wealth communities, and speakers of languages other than English (Cammarota & Romero, 2006; Howard, 2010; Macedo, 2006; Saifer, et al., 2011; Steele, 2009; Valdés, 1996) and that professional development that might contradict these

practices requires in-depth study that engages teachers and administrators in understanding self and others in terms of issues of power and privilege regarding culture, race and language - critical components to culturally responsive, equitable teaching (Allen, 2007; 2010; Earick, 2009; Gay, 2000; G. Howard, 2006; Howard, 2010; Saifer, et al., 2011).

From many sources, it is clear that administrators have an essential role to play in this process (Boutte, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Espinosa, 2010; Gay, 2010a; Long, et al., 2006; Meier, 2002a, 2002b; Michie, 2009; Milner, 2010; Nieto, 1999). However, there is little documentation of what the administrator's role might look, sound and feel like, and few descriptions of the process and challenges of the work, particularly for administrators in early childhood settings. For these reasons, my study sought to understand: What happens when a school administrator and teachers of three- four- and five-year-old children engage in long-term professional study designed to explore issues of culture, race, language? What challenges are met? How are those challenges negotiated? How is the experience reflected in day-to-day life in the classrooms, particularly as it relates to supporting children's positive literate identities? What is the role of the administrator in this process?

The Significance of This Study

In the district in which I work, families from over 73 countries and more than 56 languages are currently represented in its schools (Robertson School District (pseudonym) Annual Report, 2010). Fifty-nine percent of the children in the district's schools are African American. However, the curricula most often used in the schools are largely dominated by the values, language, and cultural norms of White, middle-class,

English-speaking homes. The children marginalized in curricula typically represent cultural and linguistic backgrounds different from the backgrounds of their teachers and administrators. These are the same children who have been failed by the system (SEF, 2010). In 2010, 25.9 % of African American children and 31.3 % of Latino children in the district scored *not met* in third grade, on the Language Arts portion of the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS) test in comparison to 8.3% of White students who scored *not met* on the same exam (Robertson School District PASS Data Report, 2010).

This reality is similar to situations across the country (Au, 2009; Cannella, 2002; Delpit, 2012; Gay, 2000; 2010; Heath, 1983; Howard, 2010). Year after year, children of Color and speakers of languages other than English, and children of poverty perform less well in public schools than their White, middle-class peers (Nieto & Bode, 2008; SEF, 2010). Children from White, middle-class homes are regularly described – explicitly and implicitly - by teachers, administrators, policy makers, and educational programs as those with the most worth and knowledge. In all too many settings, cultures and languages outside the narrowly-defined norm are perceived from deficit perspectives (Delpit, 2006; 2012; Gregory, et al., 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994; López-Robertson, Long & Turner-Nash, 2010; Tatum, 2007; Volk & Long, 2005). This hierarchy perpetuates a status quo that privileges and therefore supports the success of some, while devaluing and contributing to the failure of others (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gay, 2010a; Tatum, 1997; 2007). These issues are at the heart of why this study is significant in the field of education: As I designed the study, it was clear that there was much work to be done if we were to understand how professional development and administrative leadership might help teachers better support the learning of all children.

In the following paragraphs, with the overwhelmingly White demographics of the teaching force and the diverse classrooms of children across the country in mind, I articulate the significance of this study by discussing issues considered by many sociocultural and critical scholars as essential to promoting school success for all children. I believe that this study is significant because of: (a) the need for professional and curricular development grounded in sociocultural and critical theories, (b) the pervasiveness of deficit views that obstruct the development of young children's positive literate identities, and (c) the importance of understanding the role of the school leader in professional development surrounding these issues.

Sociocultural and Critical Theories in Professional Development and Curriculum Building

By the time they are four years old, children's understandings about language and literacy are nothing short of genius. This is well documented in studies of young children across the decades (Brown, 1970; Britton, 1973; Donaldson, 1978; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1985; Glover, 2009; Halliday, 1978; Holdaway, 1979; Lindfors, 1991; Nelson, 2002; Ray & Glover, 2008; Smith, 1997; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Another vast body of research describes the rich resources of knowledge, language, and literacies in homes and communities across cultural and linguistic groups (Dantas & Manyak, 2010; de la Luz Reyes, 2011; Delpit, 2006; 2012; Goodman & Martens, 2007; Gonzáles, Moll & Amanti, 2005; Gregory, Long & Volk, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lindfors, 1991; López-Robertson, Long & Turner-Nash, 2010; Nieto, 1999; Rogoff, 1990; Wells, 1986). However, those very sociocultural resources, when different from dominant culture resources which undergird most practices and materials in schools, are systematically

devalued in classrooms (Heath, 1983; hooks, 1994; Santa Ana, 2004; Souto-Manning 2013; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Valdés, 1996, 2001). Thus, while there is an extensive body of research demonstrating not only the brilliance and capabilities of young children but the legitimacy and efficiency of knowledge, language, and literacies used in homes and communities (Compton-Lilly, 2003; Dantas & Manyak, 2010; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Gregory, et al., 2004; Long, Volk, Tisdale & Baines, 2013; Heath, 1983; Martens, 1996; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988), we have only begun to see the impact of that research in schools (Allen, 2007; 2010; Delpit, 2012; Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Gay, 2010a; 2010b; Fassler, 2003; Long, et al, 2013; López-Robertson, 2008; Olmedo, 2004). Not only are multiple ways of being often missing from classroom collections of books, resources, and other materials, they are also missing from curricula, assessment, and classroom interactions. Too often classrooms continue to reflect a narrow view of what counts as language, literacy, and knowledge which, in turn, impacts opportunities for students' success (Dantas & Manyak, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2010; de la Luz Reyes, 2011; Delpit, 2012; Valdés, 2001)

A limited focus on sociocultural and critical perspectives has been particularly true in early childhood education. Traditionally, early childhood education has been defined by its roots in developmental and constructivist perspectives (Lillard, 1972; Montessori, 1965; Piaget, 1969). However, research in the last thirty years demonstrates that what has been assumed by many educators to be developmentally appropriate for all students has in fact, been based on research within only dominant cultural groups (Cannella, 2002; Dyson, 2003; Espinosa, 2010; Gay, 2000; 2010b; Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Rogoff, 2003). This does not mean that

children's development is considered to be better or worse from one cultural context to another, but that there is no one norm for what should be considered appropriate. This view considers variation in language, interactional style, and literacies, parenting strategies, and so on as a resource rather than as a deficiency and recognizes that children learn due to their experiences with others in their worlds (Lindfors, 1999; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 1986). Through these interactions they develop important cultural tools (Bruner, 1996) or funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). However, when different from the dominant cultural norms, these tools and knowledge are frequently dismissed in schools and in society, not recognized and/or not valued in classrooms. This counters extensive research demonstrating that learning occurs when children have opportunities to build on what they know and the strengths they possess (Dantas & Manyak, 2010; Nieto, 1999; Valdés, 1996; 2001).

In contrast to the ideology that dominates classroom practice, in recent years national professional organizations have placed greater emphasis on teachers' understanding of identity and diversity. In 2006, the National Association for the Education of Young Children revised their accreditation criteria for schools, childcare settings, and higher education, to include a greater emphasis in the area of diversity (NAEYC, 2005). The National Council of Teachers of English regularly includes articles about the fallacies of marginalizing languages (Botelho, Turner & Wright, 2006; Souto-Manning, 2007) and the importance of valuing home and community knowledge as resources (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Haight, 2006; Mandrell & Dixon-Mokeba, 2007; Romero-Little, 2006). Educational leadership journals also embrace the notion that much needs to be done in the area of diversity within our schools, challenging the educational

status quo (Cummins, et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008; Kohm & Nance, 2009).

In spite of this emphasis on sociocultural and critical perspectives, the application of these ideologies in professional development, curriculum building, and practice in schools remain, for the most part, lip service (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Earick, 2009; Howard, 2010; King, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Saifer, et al., 2011). Clearly much more needs to be done to promote teachers' and administrators' understanding of the importance of learning about and valuing difference, particularly as those understandings impact the ability to recognize and transform discriminatory practices in classrooms and promote success for all children. This study contributes to filling that gap by describing what happens when professional development and curricular planning focus explicitly on these issues, paying particular attention to the role of the school administrator and the impact of the experience on the development of and support for young children's positive literate identities.

Pervasive Deficit Views and the Development of Positive Literate Identities

Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines' (1988) landmark ethnographic study reveals powerful insights into multiple ways that inner-city families, often viewed through deficit lenses (seen as illiterate), use language and literacy practices proficiently in their homes and communities. A variety of similar studies reveal ways that languages and literacies are used across a range of cultural and linguistic communities (Compton-Lilly, 2003; Dantas & Manyak, 2010; Duranti, Ochs & Ta'ase, 2004; Heath, 1983; Olmedo, 2004; Romero, 2004; Volk & de Acosta, 2004) as children recite long passages from religious texts, communicate in two or more languages, identify public transportation routes, and/or

follow recipes for cooking or baking. Compton-Lilly (2003) describes these literacies as “alternate discourses that children bring to school [that] reflect useful, powerful, and productive ways of being and making sense of the world” (p. 28).

In spite of this large body of literature, however, deficit views persist as children of Color, children who speak languages other than English, and children from low-wealth communities are repeatedly seen as lacking in literate abilities. Negative identities – “Nobody reads in that home;” “There is no language in that home” - are imposed on many children and their families, identities that are then internalized by the children themselves (de la Luz Reyes, 2011; Delpit, 2006; 2012; Santa Ana, 2004). These deficit views and negative literacy identities are further perpetuated when students’ home languages, literacies, cultures, and families are not represented in the curricula, books, or other materials in the classroom (Boutte, 1999; Gay, 2010b; Long, et al., 2013; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Saifer, et al., 2011). This work goes hand-in-hand with the work of critical race theorists who argue that issues of bias in education, particularly in relation to issues of race, privilege, oppression, and voice, must be at the forefront in teacher education and professional development (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Rousseau, 2006; Taylor, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Scholars propose that when educators recognize the existence and the perpetuation of discriminatory practices and do something about it, for example, by valuing and building on students’ in- and out-of-school literacies, students are more likely to succeed (Dyson, 2003; Fassler, 2003; Goodman & Martens, 2007; Long, Bell & Brown, 2004; López-Robertson, 2008). This work suggests that when children are encouraged to use all that they bring to the classroom, they “develop/maintain/expand

upon personal images of themselves as literate learners” (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988, p. 208). The research is undeniably powerful and has (as described in more detail in the review of literature) positive implications for teaching practices in support of children’s positive literate identities (Allen, 2007; 2010; González, et al., 2005; Gregory, et al., 2004).

Once again, large bodies of research are all but ignored: In spite of the vast bodies of work documenting the importance of positive literate identities, the validity of home and community literacies, and related issues of bias and discrimination, power and privilege, this ideology is rarely foundational to teachers’ inservice professional development. As a result, deficit views persist. Because there are limited opportunities for teachers to gain this kind of knowledge and to then use it to contradict deficit views and support students’ positive literate identities, it follows that there is also limited research that examines how teachers might be supported in this endeavor. My hope is for this study to contribute to filling that gap by documenting the process of professional development experiences designed to build knowledge about issues of culture, race, and language while focusing on implications for building children’s literate identities in the classroom.

The Role of the School Leader and Promoting Change

It is generally acknowledged that administrators are ultimately responsible for creating cultures in their schools that encourage and support teachers’ professional growth while deepening their own knowledge (Fullan, 2005; Jacobs & Rotholz, 2005; Schmoker, 2006; 2011). However, there has been little in this work that focuses on the *nature* of the administrator’s role, particularly in early childhood settings, where

educators are studying issues of race, language and culture and where changes in curricula and impact on student identity are also documented. Existing studies of educational administrators have typically focused on the characteristics of good leaders (Evans, 1996; Fullan, 2001, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Reeves, 2009; Robb, 2000) and, although some studies focus on the importance of the administrator's role in addressing diversity issues (Jacobs & Rotholz, 2005; Kohm & Nance, 2009; Meier, 2000a; Michie, 2009; Schmoker, 2006; 2011; Wortman, 1995), few of them describe the process of teachers and administrators learning together and the impact on curricular planning, teaching and learning. Additionally, while many school leadership models attempt to promote teachers' growth and development, few have focused on diversity issues and some actually perpetuated deficit perspectives. For example, in *Redefining Staff Development: A Collaborative Model for Teachers and Administrators*, Robb (2000) discusses a professional development program she developed with one school principal to "create a climate for change" (p. 36). Using deficit language, she described how she and the administrator "proposed a program for these literacy-deprived children" (p. 36) to ensure reading success. The pervasive use of deficit language such as *literacy-deprived* necessitates the need for research that looks at how administrators not only guide teachers in exploring issues of race, culture and language, but address their own learning in the process. This study did just that, as one administrator and teachers worked together to understand those issues, reflected on their own learning, and created new possibilities for early childhood classrooms.

Definition of Terms

This section highlights and provides explanations for some of the terms used throughout this study.

Assimilation: I use the term assimilation to mean losing one's culture and language to adopt the dominant culture and language (Nieto, 2010; Tatum, 1987).

Bias: In this study I use the term *bias* to refer to "any attitude, belief, or feeling that results in, and helps to justify, unfair treatment of an individual because of his or her identity" (Derman-Sparks, 1983, p. 3).

Children of Color: I use the term *children of Color* to refer to children who are non-White including but not exclusive to African American, Native American, Asian, or Latino/a children.

Critical: The term *critical* (as in, *critical friends*, *critical literacy* or *critical pedagogy*) is used in this study to refer to a stance that requires questioning, exploring, examining power structures with a focus on discrimination, silencing, marginalization, privileging, or oppression and conversely, cultural relevance and or cultural significance.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: In this study, the term *culturally relevant pedagogy* or *culturally responsive* teaching refers to ways in which classroom instruction centers on multicultural or "multiethnic frames of reference" (Gay, 2000, p. xix) as a tool for teaching to support learning and student outcomes (see Review of Literature for more extensive definition).

Deficit view: The term *deficit view* is used throughout this study to describe negative talk and/or descriptions of students, parents and families that focus on

what they do not know or what they cannot do rather than coming from a strengths-based perspective (Boutte, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Long, et al., 2006; Nieto, 2010).

Discrimination: I use the term *discrimination* throughout this study to describe the ways in which equal access or rights are denied to people based on biases or stereotypes - rooted in the history of inequality in the United States and particularly in schools (Nieto, 2010).

Equity Pedagogy: I refer to *equity pedagogy* as teaching in ways that challenge the dominant discourse in schools by “questioning assumptions, paradigms and hegemonic characteristics [in an attempt to help] students become reflective and active citizens of a democratic society” (Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 152). I see equity pedagogies as those that make it possible for all students to reach the highest levels of success.

Essentializing: In my study, *essentializing* refers to the generalization, or application of characteristics of one person as indicative of characteristics of all people in a particular culture (Landsman, 2009; Nieto, 2010).

Funds of Knowledge: The term, *funds of knowledge*, (Moll, 2005) in this study refers to the cultural/community knowledge children possess including the vast amount of understanding about the world, how it works, and how to function within it.

Hegemony: I use the term *hegemony* or hegemonic practices to mean dominant practices or views.

Identity: I use the term *identity* to describe the felt, earned, and imposed definitions of self and others in terms of how we see ourselves and others, and how others see us (Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001; Tatum, 2007).

Literate identity: The term *literate identity* refers to the ways in which one is viewed and views others/how we define ourselves and define others with a particular focus on literate acts (speaking, reading, writing, etc.) – the ways we express meaning and knowledge (Bartlett, 2005; Rowe, 2003).

Marginalization: I use the term *marginalization* to refer to the relegating of human beings to the margins of what is considered (by dominant cultural groups), to be normal - usually occurring when human beings from other than dominant cultural and linguistic groups are not valued for their ways of being (Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001; Nieto, 2010).

Romanticizing: The term *romanticizing* in this study refers to the ways in which we assign positive attributes to actions about which our limited backgrounds do not provide sufficient insights to allow us to interpret with confidence.

Stereotypes: In this study *stereotypes* is used as a belief that all people of a particular culture or group behave, act in a particular way (Ramsey, 2004).

Theoretical Stance

Sociocultural theory is at the foundation of my theoretical frame and helps to explain my beliefs about how children come to know, communicate, and make sense of the world and includes an understanding of cultural and linguistic marginalization. My theoretical stance is further informed by work in the areas of critical race theory which foregrounds issues of race and power as foundational to equitable practices in education

and identity theory and the development of literate identities. I see these theories as lenses that are foundational to my study (Figure 1.1). I designed and implemented the study and analyzed data with attitudes and beliefs grounded in sociocultural knowledge, issues of cultural and linguistic marginalization, critical race theory, identity development theories, and thinking in the fields of culturally relevant practice and professional development. These bodies of work are reviewed in detail in Chapter Two, but the beliefs that guided this study as seen through these theoretical lenses are described in the following sections.



Figure 1.1. Bodies of theory that undergird my theoretical frame and that are the lenses through which the beliefs guiding this study were formed.

Children Learn Legitimate, Rule-Governed Languages and Literacies from the Time They are Born

I have come to believe that children learn much about language and literacy practices from the time they are born through their purposeful interactions with significant others (Lindfors, 1991; Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 1986). They continually become more literate (Rowe, 1999) as they engage with other language and

literacy users in their home and communities in various contexts and in meaningful ways (Allen, 2007; González, et al., 2005; Gregory, et al., 2004; Long, et al., 2007). The cornerstone of this belief is the understanding that, across cultural and linguistic communities, there are important differences in languages and literacies and the ways in which they are taught and learned, however, these differences do not constitute deficit. In other words, one way is not better or worse than another. Hence, foundational to this study is the notion that children learn languages and literacies that are legitimate, rule-governed, and represent efficient ways of communication depending on the context in which they are required and they learn those languages and literacies both at home and at school.

Devaluing Multiple Ways of Being Can Have Detrimental Effects on Teachers'

Abilities to Teach and Children's Opportunities to Learn

Through studies in cultural and linguistic marginalization (Boutte, 1999; de la Luz Reyes, 2011; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; López-Robertson, 2008; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Santa Ana, 2004; Valdés, 1996; 2001) I have come to believe that when teachers do not value multiple ways of being, it can have a serious detrimental impact on teachers' abilities to teach all children. It is widely documented that, while many White, middle-class children succeed in schools, there are more children of Color and speakers of languages other than English who are not successful in schools (de la Luz Reyes, 2011; Delpit, 2012; Nieto, 2010). The framework guiding this study draws from the belief that it is not the children who are failing, but that schools are failing children, and that a reason for this failure is a pervasive deficit attitude about children and families from non-dominant cultural and linguistic communities that keeps teachers from seeing potential in

children as learners. This deficit attitude perpetuates a view that there is one right way of being which is typically defined by White, middle-class, Christian, heterosexual norms (Sleeter, 2009). Through my study and my experience, I have come to understand that too often, those outside this dominant norm are devalued, whether intentionally or unintentionally, in ways that strip human beings of their identity and that this has direct implications for teaching and learning (Blackburn, 2011; Boulware, Carrier & Baker, 1991; Purcell-Gates, 2002; Suina, 2009; Toepke & Serrano, 1998).

Racism Exists and Teachers Have a Responsibility to Interrupt Discriminatory Practices

Further reading in areas of identity development (Delpit, 2006, 2012; Tatum, 2003, 2007) and critical race theory help to build my understanding that racism continues to exist in overt and covert ways (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Taylor, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2009) and that teachers have a moral and ethical obligation to interrupt oppressive and discriminatory language, ideas, and structures which continue to privilege only some (Howard, 2010; King, 2005; Kozol, 1991). I believe that, in order for teachers to support students of Color and students from cultural and marginalized groups - particularly in nurturing and developing positive literate identities - they need to be able to look inward to uncover and explore their own attitudes, beliefs, bias and stereotypes (Earick, 2009; Howard, 2006; Howard 2010; Nieto, 1999). I believe that it is only through such examinations that teachers can begin to understand why some practices discriminate and others do not and the effect that such practices have on children's opportunities for success. One way I believe teachers can work to disrupt discriminatory practices in classrooms and increase student learning

outcomes is through the implementation of culturally relevant practices (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gay, 2000; 2010b; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Saifer, et al., 2011).

Educational Leaders are Responsible to Support Teachers in Addressing Injustices in Children's Education

Undergirding this theoretical frame is the conviction that, as the educational leader, I am responsible for creating professional development opportunities for teachers that support learning for all students and that this can best be accomplished by addressing the issues described above (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Fine & Weis, 2003; Irvine, 2003; Meier, 2000a; 2000b; Schmoker, 2011). This requires administrators to engage in school-wide reform *with* teachers to: develop shared understanding of the need for this work, identify effective and ineffective practices, develop or uncover necessary resources, and make school improvement continuous (Hawley, 2008; Schmoker, 2006). I have come to believe that administrators have a huge role to play in these efforts that they can serve to increase teachers' capacity to engage in equitable teaching practices or they can serve to impede their ability to do so (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Long, et al., 2006). Based in these beliefs, my theoretical framework (Figure 1.1) shapes and informs my role as the researcher in the study. These beliefs form the lenses through which I engaged in the research process and analyzed my data, as well as the overall methodological design.

Conclusion

Jonathan Sacks (2002) wrote that, "difference does not diminish; it enlarges the sphere of human possibilities" (p. 209). Inspired by thinkers such as Sacks, this study

contributes to the field of education through its examination of the process of an administrator and a group of early childhood educators engaged in long-term professional study for the purpose of recognizing and countering deficit-based dispositions, curricula, and classroom practices while generating practices that promote positive literate identities in young children. More than 20 years ago, Johnathon Kozol (1991) wrote that pedagogical texts written for teachers were designed to share strategies for success in the classroom, but that they did not address essential issues of injustice or inequality. Today, the field continues to call for professional development that supports careful examination of race, culture, and language as they relate to classroom practice and to students' positive identities as learners (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gay, 2010b; Gregory, et al., 2004; Howard, 2010).

As a White, Christian, middle-class, heterosexual, English-speaking woman, I recognize that I have limited knowledge of what it means to be *not like me* in this world. Because the teaching force across the United States is largely populated by White, middle-class, English-only, Christian, heterosexual teachers, it is likely that my experiences mirror those of many educators (Earick, 2009; Howard, 2006; Howard, 2010; Irvine, 2003; Nieto & Bode, 2008). With diverse classrooms of students across the country, it is also likely that many teachers fail to see the knowledge children possess, the rich resources that they bring with them to school, and the various ways they understand all that they do. This limits teachers' abilities to support children in building and sustaining positive learning identities, which in turn, limits the probability that schools will provide equitable opportunities for all children to succeed.

To challenge this status quo, administrators have a significant role to play. They are charged with creating professional development experiences that fuel teachers' understanding of how to value and utilize the knowledge children bring with them. However, we know little from the administrator's perspective about the process of developing, implementing, and learning from such experiences as they learn alongside teachers. Through this study I hope to contribute to the research in this area through my examination of what happened when a school administrator and a group of teachers of three- four- and five-year-old children engaged in long-term professional study designed to explore issues of culture, race and language for the purpose of generating school practices that nurture student's positive literate identities.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

As described in Chapter One, several bodies of literature inform the belief system that guides this work. Those bodies of work also constitute the research in which this study is situated. Thus, to detail the work that undergirds my theoretical stance, and situate this study within existing literature, reviews of the following bodies of work are provided in this chapter: (a) sociocultural theory, (b) cultural and linguistic marginalization, (c) critical race theory, (d) identity development, (d) professional development and issues of diversity, and (e) culturally relevant pedagogy.

Sociocultural Theory

Socio refers to the social interactions in one's worlds. The word *culture* describes the many ways that one comes to understand the micro worlds in which each of us exist and function each and every day. Geertz, (1973) believed that culture is essentially a pattern of meanings embedded in symbols, which allow people to communicate and share information about how to live. Likewise, Goodenough (1981) described culture as a way to exist within a socially acceptable manner according to the members of the group. In broader terms, culture encompasses the ways of knowing, believing, interacting, and surviving in the world constructed and valued by groups of people (Gay, 2000; 2010b; Nieto, 1999). Sociocultural theory brings together understandings about culture as socially constructed and has evolved from the fields of anthropology and psychology.

Work drawing on sociocultural foundations examines culture and social interactions as the heart of understanding its link with cognition (Gregory, et al., 2004; McIntyre, Roseberry & González, 2001). Sociocultural theory provides a perspective on how human beings come to know (Bruner, 1996; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 1986) with an emphasis on the people and cultural contexts that create and perpetuate this knowledge (González, Moll & Amanti, 2004; Heath, 1983; McIntyre, Hulan & Layne, 2011). Sociocultural theory is often used to shape the understanding of how educators can deepen their knowledge of self and others. Several concepts, described below, are crucial to my understanding of sociocultural theory as foundational to the stance I take with me into this study.

The Sociocultural Nature of Learning

The sociocultural nature of learning is a way of understanding the link between culture and cognition through interaction primarily through engagement with other human beings. From a sociocultural perspective, humans come to learn all that they do, think or say through these interactions (Gregory, et al., 2004; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 1986). Many theorists suggest that, from the time children are born they are natural problem solvers attempting to make sense of their world (Britton, 1973; Bruner, 1973; Donaldson, 1979; Lindfors, 1991). Sociocultural theory helps to illuminate how children come to understand the world through relationships with people in their lives. Rogoff (1990) describes this as an apprenticeship – learning through guided participation with others. Vygotsky (1978) established the notion that this occurs within ever-changing zones that he called zones of proximal development.

The zone of proximal development. Lev Vygotsky (1978) coined the term, *zone of proximal development* (ZPD), to describe the distance between what children can do alone (their actual development level) and their potential development through guidance or collaboration with an adult or more capable peer. According to Vygotsky, this assumes that if a child is capable of solving a problem then the accompanying functions for that ability have matured in him. The zone of proximal development is the theoretical space created when two or more learners interact (Lindfors, 1991). Within this space, functions that are in the embryonic state, mature. Adults or more capable peers *scaffold* children as they create this space when working to complete a task or solve a complex problem (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). They do so by demonstrating, offering ideas, or making suggestions to make it possible for learners to go beyond what they can do alone. Other researchers (Rogoff, 1990; Wells, 1999) have extended Vygotsky's notion of ZPD and suggest that this interaction is not merely one-way, but that as two or more people interact they go in and out of the roles of expert and novice teaching and learning from each other. As such, there is reciprocity that occurs within the ZPD and there is no designated teacher. Wells (1999) wrote:

Participants adjust their manner of participation to take account of each other's current levels of knowledge and skill in carrying out the activity and, on the other, the transformation that takes place, in the process, is their individual potential for participation. (p. 322)

A critical point to make is that the ZPD is not static or measurable and changes as the learners interact with others (Wells, 1999). Lindfors (1999) writes about the zone of proximal development as the place where inquiry lives, meaning that as students interact with each other, they learn in ways that extend their knowledge of the world. They begin to question and wonder, as they seek to understand each other.

Social referencing, intersubjectivity, and guided participation. In addition to the zone of proximal development, Rogoff (1990) discusses social referencing as a strategy used by children as they use aspects of their existing schema to comprehend new situations. Social referencing is anchored in intersubjectivity, which is the mutual understanding between two people. Bruner (1996) writes that intersubjectivity emerges as a pleasurable eye-to-eye encounter between a newborn infant and her mother and steadily moves toward joint attention to objects and ultimately to exchanges of words, that continues and is never finished. Social referencing and intersubjectivity among older children and among adults occur when there is shared understanding of a situation which is at the heart of communication (Rogoff, 1990).

Guided participation among learners and teachers (which can be adults and/or children) provides learners with the guidance and support to “stretch [their] understanding” (Rogoff, 1990, p. 18) as they work toward achieving goals or solving problems. This guided practice occurs as learners are apprenticed to more experienced partners and engage in activities meaningful to both learner and teacher (apprentice and expert). For example, children learn to eat with a fork and knife, brush their teeth, potty, wipe, etc., as they are guided through their participation in ways that increase in complexity as children’s skills develop. Along with social referencing, guided participation helps children become enculturated to/learn ways of being within and beyond their cultural worlds – how to learn, teach, use language, and behave – within cultural contexts that are important to them.

Syncretism. Gregory, et al. (2004) further this discussion by using the term *syncretism* as “the creative transformation of culture” (Kulick, 1992, as cited in Gregory,

et al., 2004, p.3) and using the notion of syncretic literacies – or new literacies developed as children appropriate knowledge from multiple worlds to create new spaces for learning and teaching. The term syncretism has its roots in anthropological studies and is described as the “process in which people reinvent culture as they draw on diverse resources, both familiar and new” (Gregory, et al., 2004, p.4). Syncretism refers to the activity of transformation and its resulting new outcome. For children, the process of syncretism is most evident in play as they explore each other’s worlds and perspectives and construct new ones. Understanding children’s ability in drawing on their own knowledge to create new spaces for learning, teaching, and sharing (Long, Volk, & Gregory, 2007; Long, et al., 2013) implies an understanding of children as competent and intentional in the ways that they bring resources from all aspects of their lives to their interactions (González, et al., 2005; Long, et al., 2013; Pahl & Rowsell, 2010). It follows then that, if the zone of proximal development is the place where inquiry lives (Lindfors, 1999), then it may also be said that the ZPD is the place where syncretism lives as children engage with peers, siblings, family and community members representing richly diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Funds of knowledge. To further understand learning and teaching, it is critical to recognize children’s “funds of knowledge” (González, et al., 2005, p. ix). The term was coined by educational researcher, Luis Moll, who engaged groups of teachers in spending time in the homes of students to learn more from families, asking questions with the intent of learning more about community-based knowledge (González, et al., 2005). As Moll writes, it was important for “teachers in these home-based contexts of learning [to] know the child as a whole person, not merely as a student, taking into account or having

knowledge about the multiple spheres of activity within which the child is enmeshed” (p. 74). The concept of funds of knowledge suggests that children are competent and that they come to school with vast amounts of understanding about the world, how it works, and how to function within it.

Moll and his team of researchers also looked at the teachers to learn more about their pedagogy and its connection to families and communities. The teachers in this work, and work that followed it, recognized the need to build relationships with families based on *confianza* or mutual trust and reciprocity and the need to see families and communities as richest sources of information and insight (Allen, 2007; Dantas & Manyak, 2010; Meier, 2002a; Rogoff, 2003). These insights were then used to inform classroom instruction. In Moll’s study, for example, Cathy Amanti wrote about her role as both teacher and researcher and how going into the homes of her students served to help her not only understand her students’ culture but also inform her instruction:

Actually I never totally disengaged from my role as a teacher, and when such things as cross-border trade came up, I thought this would be a great topic to use in my classroom and I tried to figure out how I could capture this resource for teaching. (González, et al., 2005, p. 79)

The work of Moll and others, (Gregory, et al., 2004; Dantas & Manyak, 2010; Yosso, 2006 to name a few) show the vast amount of knowledge children bring to school with them as well as *how* they have come to learn that knowledge. Such studies demonstrate how young children learn with siblings, grandparents, peers and communities: the “cultural wealth” (Yosso, 2006, p. 176) that students bring with them to schools; and how that knowledge needs to be utilized to counter pervasive deficit narratives that describe many children and families from marginalized communities.

The concepts explored here as foundational to sociocultural theory – the social nature of learning, zone of proximal development, special referencing, intersubjectivity, guided participation, syncretism, and funds of knowledge: (a) highlight the human resources, the key people or mediators of learning in children’s lives; and (b) recognize the potential for how these resources might inform teachers in transforming practice in schools. These ideas further reveal culture’s inextricable link to cognition and learning (Bruner, 1996; Donaldson, 1978; Lindfors, 1991; Rogoff, 1990). Sociocultural perspectives have been used to support an educational stance that embraces children’s cultural identities and employs practices that draw from their experiences as teaching and learning resources.

Cultural and Linguistic Marginalization

Language is often regarded as a descriptor of who we are. With it comes historical, cultural, and social experiences and particular ways of understanding the world (Bruner, 1996; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). When language is devalued, humans’ very core is devalued and opportunities to build new knowledge by drawing on what Moll (2005) calls, *funds of knowledge*, are sharply diminished. Researchers such as Halliday (2002), Purcell-Gates (1995) and Valdés (2001) among many, remind us that language is learned as it is used meaningfully rather than in isolation from its function. When learning a new language, multiple studies show that learners are supported when they are allowed to use the meaningful context of their home language as a bridge to learning new languages and to support their learning of content (de la Luz Reyes, 2011; Fassler, 2003; Hollie, 2001; Long, 1998; López-Robertson, 2008; Nieto, 1999; Perry & Delpit, 1998; Valdés, 2001; Whitney, 2005). Many scholars describe ways in which

students grow in knowledge of both their home language and the new language, and content knowledge when they are encouraged to use both languages to communicate (Fu, 2009; López-Robertson, 2008; Valdés, 2001). Therefore, marginalizing or eradicating children's home languages impact opportunities to learn in profound ways (de la Luz Reyes, 2011; Delpit, 2006; Gregory, et al., 2004; Nieto, 1999; Souto-Manning, 2007; Valdés, 2001) and are discussed below.

Assimilation: Stripping Away Culture

In the early part of the twentieth century it was thought that assimilation into the existing, mainstream culture meant a better chance of getting along in society, fitting in and succeeding in achieving the so-called American-Dream (Santa Ana, 2004; Valdés, 2001). This assimilation process also meant giving up one's home language. Today, however, sociocultural scholars suggest that assimilation actually holds back potential for success and also limits possibilities for all human beings to broaden their world views. Although many people of Color, and speakers of languages other than English, achieve success despite the marginalization of their language (Dowdy, 2002), for many, this has not been the case (Nieto, 1999). Multiple scholars write that this assimilationist view does more than a disservice to children, it can negatively impact their identity and thereby their opportunities for achievement (de la Luz Reyes, 2011; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Hilliard, 2002; López-Robertson, 2008; Santa Ana, 2004; Zentella, 2005). Ways in which language or culture have been stripped away and further serve to marginalize individuals are through: (a) changing or altering names; (b) not seeing the cultural significance in language or songs; and an (c) *English only* mentality.

Changing or altering names. The research is filled with information regarding how children of Color or speakers of other languages are asked to surrender their names for more homogenized, American ones (Delpit, 2012; Martínez, 1993; Nathenson-Mejia & Escamilla 2003; Souto-Manning, 2007). Altering children's names is akin to marginalizing language. Names are rooted in language as a part of culture, family, and identity. In the children's book, *My Name is Maria Isabel*, Alma Flor Ada (1995) wrote of the historical familial connection her character, Maria Isabel Salazar Lopez's name held as it was derived from both her grandmothers, a grandfather and her father. However, when Maria Isabel entered school, her teacher assigned her the name of Mary Lopez. Flor Ada wrote about how Maria Isabel had great difficulty connecting to her *assigned name* because her family history was deeply connected to her actual name. Similarly, educational researcher, Mariana Souto-Manning (2007) wrote about adult peers calling her Mary Ann instead of pronouncing the name, Mariana as it was given to her in her heritage language of Portuguese. She warned that when teachers take away, alter or mispronounce children's names, it sends a message that their culture is less desirable or lacking in some way and is another form of language marginalization and disconnects children from their culture. She argued:

By not allowing these students to bring their home identities to the classroom, we attempt to assimilate them instead of embracing opportunities to enrich the school community. Consequently, everyone loses. (p. 2)

In other words, assimilation not only limits the opportunity for learning for people of Color or speakers of languages other than English, it limits opportunities for White and/or English only speaking students to learn about other cultures and languages. It hurts us all.

Songs and language hold cultural significance. In much the same way names carry cultural meaning, songs also hold cultural and historical significance but can be easily dismissed or marginalized. In the film, *The Language You Cry in: A Mende Song* (Toepke & Serrano, 1998) a familiar song in an American Gullah family's life was traced back to the song and language of a village in West Africa. The song preserved cultural and historical meaning for both the Gullah community and the people of Sierra Leone. Sadly, the Gullah community in the United States was systematically stripped of its identity when the Gullah of the song and their ancestors was viewed as exhibiting bad English. At the same time, the Mende song and language were key to an important cultural past. In the film, the comment is made that "to master a people, strip him of his identity, his land, and the memory of his ancestors." This quote perfectly sums up the destructive nature of marginalization in the lives of children and their families. Because language and culture are inextricably connected, the effects on children's identities can have detrimental affects on children's opportunities as learners.

bell hooks (1994) wrote of her awareness of how the English language used in schools and society served to marginalize and oppress. Describing this link she wrote:

Words impose themselves, take root in our memory against our will...standard English is not the speech of exile, it is the language of conquest and domination; in the United States, it is the mask which hides the loss of so many tongues, all those sounds of diverse, native communities we will never hear, the speech of the Gullah, Yiddish, and so many other unremembered tongues. (p. 167,168)

hooks (1994) asserted that it is not the English language itself, but how it is used as a weapon by oppressors who use it to humiliate and shame those with various dialects and languages, such as rejecting someone as ignorant who talks with a dialect or speaks a language other than English.

English only mentality. For far too long, American society has held an *English only* mentality that maintains the notion that people from other cultures must learn and use only English language in schools. Despite significant evidence that documents the success students have in both learning English and in supporting academic achievement when afforded the opportunity to use their home languages, many schools forbid speakers of languages other than English from using their home language in schools and force them to learn in an English only environment (de la Luz Reyes, 2011; Salas, 2009; Suina, 2009; Valdés, 2001).

Suina (2009) described in detail how as a young child in the 1950's growing up in a loving, supportive Pueblo community provided him with confidence and a sense of pride in his Cochiti village and people. However, the confidence he felt was threatened as his Pueblo culture and language were taken from him when he entered school for the first time. Suina describes the attitude of the teachers at the time, when they instructed him to, “‘Leave your Indian at home!’” (p. 159) and further describes the confusion of that experience:

This reprimand was for speaking the language of my grandmother, and I spoke so well. With it, I sang beautiful songs and prayed from the heart. At that young and tender age, it was most difficult for me to comprehend why I had to part with my language. (p. 159).

Suina wrote that the new English language that was often depicted in the Dick and Jane reading series and the new values of how people should live, act and pray were artificial, unnatural and painful experiences for him. This new English language and new ways of being taught him that everything “[he] had, and was a part of, was not nearly as good as the white man’s” (p. 159). Before long, school managed to tear away the confidence and pride he once had in his culture and language as he began feeling ashamed of who he

was. He ultimately became more and more detached from his Cochiti community and recognized he had to give up part of his life to “compete with the whiteman” (p. 161).

Over a half-century later, this whitewashing and stripping of cultures and languages continues to exist in schools. Researchers such as de la Luz Reyes, 2011, Krashen, (2009), Salas (2009) and Valdés (2001), to name a few, continue to shed light on this issue. They particularly discuss the negative effects English only environments have on students who are not only learning a new language but are often expected to learn content knowledge in English only classes as well. Santa Ana (2004) points out that the number of children who are speakers of languages other than English or non-standard English constitute over 40% of our public school children, yet the nation’s policies regarding English only classrooms are still the norm in most schools. He also believes that teachers often unintentionally contribute to this through unexamined, “unquestioned acceptance of the monolingual ideology” (p. 3).

Implications of Marginalization on Student Motivation and Performance

Educational researchers point out the disastrous implications of marginalization on students’ motivation, performance, and opportunity (Delpit, 1995; 2012; Hilliard, 2002; Howard, 2010) and recognize the need to work toward generating practices that value and support multiple languages in our schools and classrooms. The Southern Education Foundation (SEF) (2010) report, *A New Diverse Majority*, points out that the South is one of the most diverse areas in the country with one of the fastest growing African American and Latino populations. From 2000-2008 the number of African Americans in the south grew 13% compared to 7% in the rest of the nation; and for Latinos, the growth was 41% compared to 27% in the rest of the nation. The report

further suggests that this diversity will continue to grow. The report illuminates the fact that children of Color and speakers of languages other than English have continued to perform less well in schools than their White peers. This gap in achievement suggests that traditional ways of thinking, teaching and learning are not working for a vast majority of students of Color and speakers of languages other than English. The report calls for transformational thinking in educational policies and practices.

Assimilation and its effect on children's cultural and linguistic identities and the implications of cultural and linguistic marginalization on students' learning are crucial concepts to consider. These concepts, presented here, greatly determine: (a) children's attitudes towards schools as they enter their doors for the first time; and (b) the detrimental effect limiting the ability to draw from one's culture and language has on future learning – both for learning standard English and learning content areas.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

While the language and culture of many groups are marginalized in schools, race remains the element of discrimination described by critical race scholars as the most oppressive (Hilliard, 2002; Taylor, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2009). Hilliard cautions researchers and educators about the failure to “deal with the existence of oppression and its impact” (p. 91) regarding race. Elements of critical race theory are instrumental in shedding light on issues of race, racism and power in education. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) define critical race theorists as “a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (p. 2).

CRT grew out of the mid 1970's when not much was being done to ensure the expediency of promised outcomes of the civil rights movement and when other, covert

forms of racism continued to occur (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). During the 1990's critical race theory took a turn from its roots in legal studies to include educational issues (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Taylor, Gillborn & Billings, 2009). According to Dixson and Rousseau (2006), critical race theory strives to accomplish six elements to give voice to the oppressed and move toward more transformative action in education:

1. Recognize that racism is a pervasive and permanent part of American society;
2. Challenge dominant claims of objectivity, neutrality, colorblindness, and merit;
3. Challenge ahistoricism and insist on a contextual/historical analysis of the law;
4. Insist on the experiential knowledge of people of color in analyzing law and society;
5. Interdisciplinary in nature; and
6. Works toward eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression. (p. 4)

Transforming teachers' notions about racism must be at the heart of the work in schools. Tatum (2007) wrote that educators cannot simply sweep the past under the rug and hope that race relations will naturally get better. She and others (Boutte, 1999; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Fine & Weis, 2003; Irvine, 2003; King, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; McIntyre, 1997; 2008; Pollock, 2008) urge educators to engage in open an honest dialogue, and have the tough conversations regarding race. Scholars write that, while this is clearly not an easy task to accomplish, it is critical that we move beyond perpetuating a status quo in which racism continues to exist. To do so, educators

must recognize that hegemonic policies and attitudes have dominated our instructional institutions and recognize that these messages are deep rooted in overt as well as covert ways.

Power, Privilege, Oppression and Hegemony

Critical race theorists argue that conversations about race are inherently about power, privilege, oppression, and hegemony (Bell, 1992; Freire, 2003; Gillborn, 2009; Jeffries, 2003; Leonardo, 2009; McIntosh, 1995; Vaught, 2011) suggesting that the dominant White culture has typically held the most power and that giving equal rights to People of Color, would mean giving up some of that power (Howard, 2006; Vaught, 2011). They also suggest that power and hegemony are embedded in the institutional policies, such as those in schools, that are largely written by White policy makers who often leave children of Color and speakers of languages other than English as “characters written into a subplot by the dominant authors, who can rewrite their intentions at will” (Vaught, 2011, p. 64). Therefore, critical race theorists (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Earick, 2009; King, 2005; Taylor Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2009) suggest that examining and overthrowing oppression and racism means looking closely and examining the many ways that oppression is manifested not only in policies but in our every day lives.

Delpit (1995) wrote that “it is those with the most power, those in the majority, who must take the greater responsibility for initiating the process” (p. 46). Freire (2003) warned however, that this must not be in the form of “false generosity” (p. 45), “that authority must be on the side of freedom” (p. 80). In other words, those in power must fight to destroy the causes of oppression in all its insidious forms, recognizing the

institutional policies as well as their own participatory role in perpetuating oppression and relinquishing some of the power they wield. They point out that it is the lack of examination of self and practice that is often at the root of prejudices underlying discriminatory practices that result in inequitable educational opportunities. For educators – particularly White educators - this means: (a) recognizing White privilege; (b) avoiding notions of *colorblindness*; and (c) developing increased awareness and understanding of the detrimental effects discriminatory practice has on learning.

Recognition of White privilege. Several researchers (Earick, 2009; Howard, 2010; Leonardo, 1999; McIntosh, 1995; Vaught, 2011) have shed light on the issue of White privilege, power, and entitlement. McIntosh (1995) proposed, “White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks” (p. 71). McIntosh (1995) wrote that White people, and teachers in particular, must recognize that just by the nature of being White, have privileges that are afforded to them such as being able to avoid feeling uncomfortable in a crowd, always knowing that our voices would be heard, not having to have conversations about being White, to name a few (McIntosh, 1995).

Howard (2006) suggests that it is the unexamined nature of White dominance that remains a fundamental problem and further warns that a superficial attempt at self-examination will translate into superficial attempts at change. He described stages in the process of self examination to include, first feelings of shame and guilt then moving towards a desire to separate from Whiteness followed by a move beyond this disequilibrium to find a place to be both White and anti-racist. It is during this time when

Whites actively seek insight from other cultures and groups to engage in authentic dialogue towards change (Howard, 2006). Vivian Paley (2000) in one of the few published examples of teachers coming to this important conclusion, described how she began to reflect on her attitudes and expectations for her students and saw that her expectations for White students were clearly higher than for Black students.

Howard (2006) advised that “it is important to remember that the enemies in our multicultural healing work are dominance, ignorance, and racism [as well as all the other ‘isms’], not White people” (p. 114). As suggested earlier, the field of critical race theory concludes that an essential step in moving towards more culturally relevant teaching and resisting the manifestation of oppression is the recognition of racism in education in overt and covert forms (Howard, 2006; Tatum, 2003). Paley (2000) and Jane Elliot’s (Peters, 1971) honest dialogue must be at the heart of improvement in this area and a concerted effort at looking hard at our individual prejudices and talking openly and honestly about them is warranted (McIntyre, 1997; 2008; Meier, 2002a; Tatum, 2007). Researchers such as Earick (2009), Howard (2006) and McIntyre (2008) found that when White teachers, as well as teachers of Color, take critical steps towards self-reflection then there is the likelihood that conversations dealing with issues of race can take place.

Avoid notions of colorblindness. Researchers such as Delpit (2006), Ladson-Billings, (1994), Milner, (2010) and Tatum (2007), among others, discuss the importance of seeing color and bringing conversations about race to the forefront in educational settings. They argue that one’s color is part of one’s culture and to not recognize it denies children of that culture. Many teachers are guilty of statements such as, “I don’t see color; or I treat all my students the same.” Researchers warn that this sends a

homogenized message that all students will be treated as White. Scholars write that many teachers are not often conscious of the effect that their use of language - verbal and non-verbal – such as the term *colorblind* can have in perpetuating hegemonic views (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Milner, 2010; Tatum, 2007). Many suggest that, for White educators, the first step in truly being able to understand the continued existence of racism is to consider Whiteness as race and to acknowledge the unearned privileges enjoyed by Whites simply because of the color of their skin (Earick, 2009; Milner, 2010; Vaught, 2011).

Develop an understanding of discrimination. Peters (1987) account of Jane Elliott’s well known blue-eyes/brown-eyes experiment provides one of many examples of the way in which racism demoralizes human beings and reinforces negative identities and, consequently, lower achievement in learners. Third grade teacher, Jane Elliott, sought to teach the students in her elementary school classroom about discrimination and discriminatory practices. She divided her class of White students into two groups, a blue-eyed group and a brown-eyed group, identifiable with blue and brown collars. On alternate days one group would be placed in the role of the superior group, having all rights and privileges, and regularly celebrated for their knowledge and good judgment. The other group was labeled as the unprivileged group, with few privileges, sent last to lunch, not allowed to drink from the water fountain, and ridiculed by the teacher. The children lived up to their labels. Within minutes of starting the experiment, children in the “non superior” group became nervous, depressed, and resentful. Treated as less intelligent, they began to doubt themselves and, in fact, performed at a lower level on tests on which they had previously performed well. They were afraid to take chances and

to risk responses. Jane Elliott said of the experience, “What they remembered, what they talked about, and what they applied to other situations, was not how good they had felt when they were treated as superior but the misery of being treated as inferior”(Peters, 1971, p. 45). This experiment begins to help us understand the impact of discriminatory actions on children’s identities and the impact of identity on learning, particularly for children of historically marginalized groups. It makes clear the role played by educators in affirming positive identities or negating and destroying them. The findings of Elliott’s work are not isolated. Researchers have repeatedly demonstrated how discrimination affects student achievement (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ferguson, 2008; King, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Yosso, 2006), noting, for example, the disproportionate number of students of Color who are suspended, expelled and drop-out from school (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006).

Media Plays a Significant Role

In subtle and not so subtle ways, newspapers, television and other media play a significant role in developing and perpetuating racial stereotypes (Holtzman, 2000). Because media representations of people’s languages and cultures are often the only exposure to other cultures that some students experience (Tatum, 2007) this is something that Delpit (1995) reminded us must be changed. Studies reveal the overt and covert ways that messages are sent every day as the way we use language and actions in ways that perpetuate the status quo. For example, words and phrases so ubiquitous to our existing language are still uttered in all sorts of media and everyday talk with little or no thought that these words are laden with oppressive overtones. Words such as blackmail, blackball, black sheep, all have negative connotations and add to oppression at the

unconscious level (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Earick, 2009). Additionally, language used in the media to describe individuals and/or events serve to contribute to racist notions. Earick (2009) illuminates this fact with two pictures in the newspaper taken during Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Louisiana. The first picture, with two White people wading in water with bags of food over their shoulder, read, “Two residents wade through chest-deep water after *finding* [emphasis added] bread and soda from a local grocery store” (p.21). The second photo of a young African American man, also wading in the water with a bag of food over his shoulder, read, “A young man walks through chest-deep flood water after *looting* [emphasis added] a grocery store in New Orleans” (p. 22). This example, further illustrates the racist language and thought that seeps into every day lives that serves to perpetuate racist practices that demoralize human beings (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Pollock, 2008). Understanding the use of such language and images as discriminatory only tips the iceberg in terms of the problems that exist, but is significant in that children and teachers come to school steeped in these bombarded messages. These messages serve to reinforce notions of power, privilege and hegemony (Miller, 2012) and further marginalize and demoralize students of Color or speakers of languages other than English.

Critical race theory and concepts such as White privilege, colorblindness and discriminatory practices help us understand the ways in which: (a) power, privilege and hegemonic practices are the fundamental causes of oppression; (b) discriminatory practices limit students’ achievement; and (c) challenging the status quo requires sincere self-reflection and critical examination of educational policies and practices.

Identity Development

Tatum (2007) wrote, “identities are the stories we tell ourselves and the world about who we are, and our attempt to act in accordance with these stories” (p. 24). Identity is also shaped by what we hear told about ourselves by our parents, our families and others including teachers and media as we go through our lives. Identity impacts our lives as learners (Bruner, 1996; Chasnoff & Cohen 1996; Chen, 2009; Lightfoot, 2008; Tatum, 2007). According to Bruner (1996) each child possesses a “cultural tool kit” (p.19) that helps him or her understand the world and his or her place or identity within it. Within that tool kit come key people in children’s worlds who help them come to know all that they do (Gregory, et al., 2004). When children are not afforded the opportunity to draw from their knowledge and experiences, then learning is greatly hindered. For example, in the documentary, *It’s elementary: Talking about gay issues in schools* (Chasnoff & Cohen 1996) several students and teachers speak out about the challenges of being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender in schools, and a comment is made by a physical education teacher who suggests that “being gay in school is like playing soccer with one foot tied behind your back.” This metaphor vividly demonstrates how some students are not granted full access to education when they are deprived of bringing their identity to the forefront.

Cambourne (1984) reminded us that we learn more when we feel valued for who we are and what we know. Therefore, children’s identities – including their literate identities - can be destroyed or supported in classrooms. When students feel valued they are more confident and free to enter school without having to leave their race, ways of being, knowing, using language, and so on, at the door. However, this has not been the

case in the majority of schools in the United States (Boutte, 1999; de la Luz Reyes, 2011; Nieto, 1999; Tatum, 2007; Valdés, 2001). Described in the following sections are discussions of ways in which educators can: (a) tear away identities, or (b) build positive identities.

Tearing Away Identities

The attitudes and beliefs of White (European), middle-class, Christian, heterosexuals have been, and continue to be, the norm in most schools. Classroom materials, deficit or racist language, and language and literacy practices that do not honor students' culture or language can have negative effects on students' identities, and are discussed in more detail below.

Culture is not represented in the curriculum. Many students outside of the norm in most schools do not see themselves in classroom materials such as textbooks, and if they do, often their culture is not reflected in a positive light or worse, grossly misrepresented (Banks, 2006; Delpit, 2006; 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1994; 2009). James Banks (2006) wrote that he wondered as a young child in the 1940's, why he seldom saw African Americans in textbooks other than smiling slaves happily serving their masters. He relates that this directly contradicted his understanding based on what had been shared with him from his family, friends and community. Banks further pointed out that the question from his youth - "Why were the slaves represented as happy?" - still remains the subject of deep reflection in the twenty-first century.

Deficit language/perspective. Another issue facing children of Color and speakers of languages other than English, that serves to further tear away at children's identities is the "deficit perspective" (Foster, Lewis & Onafowora, 2003; Nieto, 2008;

Volk & Long, 2005). Children who come to school with language or knowledge that has traditionally not been valued have been seen as less competent (de la Reyes, 2011; Delpit, 2012; Heath, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Attitudes and phrases such as seeing children *at-risk*, *literacy deprived*, or *illiterate* serve to tear away children's identities, particularly their literate identities. Heath's (1983) groundbreaking research shed important light on this issue. Her study of three communities revealed that *school language* (language compatible with that used in classrooms) was the dominant language of the townspeople, whose ways of being mirrored that of mainstream, middle-class, White America. The children from that community were more successful in school than those in the other two communities. However, Heath's work does not conclude that there were deficits in the children from the other two communities. On the contrary, it points out that the schools were deficient in their recognition of the efficient language systems in all communities and in their failure to acknowledge differences in interactional style rather than deficit. So while Heath's study highlighted powerful literate behaviors in all communities (such as storytelling and different ways of responding to questions), only the children of townspeople fared well in school because theirs was the language valued at school.

Michaels and Cazden (1986) study found that children's dialect and discourse was closely connected to their identity. Both White and Black teachers were asked to listen to Black children's narratives. Overall, the White teachers responded negatively, explaining that the stories lacked substance and did not remain on topic. When asked about the children's literacy potential, the White teachers predicted that the children had reading problems and did not do well in school. Conversely, Black teachers who listened to the same narratives reported that the stories were full of details and descriptions, and were

easy to follow and understand. When asked the same question regarding literacy potential, the Black teachers predicted that the children were bright and did exceptionally well in school.

These examples serve to illustrate how easily negative messages can be sent to children from teachers whose cultures and languages are different from their own. This research suggests that when children's culture, language, and ways of knowing are not visible in the classroom materials, viewed from a deficit perspective, or not seen in language and literacy practices in the classroom we tear away their identities and thereby limit learning potential.

Building Positive Identities

Research suggests that building students' positive identities, particularly literate identities, involves knowing children well (Nieto & Bode, 2008), which necessitates the need for an understanding of home and community knowledge, and using that knowledge to provide counternarratives supportive of student's racial, cultural and linguistic identities.

Home and community knowledge. Cathy Amanti's (2005) research in homes and communities demonstrates how she supported children's identities by bringing the discussion of border control to her classroom after visiting her students' homes and learning about their funds of knowledge. Allen's (2007) and (2010) research reveals that teachers' understanding of supporting students' cultures is grounded in these opportunities for home and community involvement. Allen, in addition to others (Dantas & Manyak, 2010; Gregory, et al., 2004; Shockley, Michalove & Allen, 1995), suggest that the information gleaned from home and communities provide schools opportunities

to gain deeper insights into students' identities as learners - particularly in language and literacy - and serves to build on what children know and works towards building and nurturing positive identities.

Provide counternarratives. Tatum (2007) described another way that teachers might contribute to students' positive identities. Information regarding home and community knowledge and practices serve to challenge misrepresentation in curriculum or textbooks. She advises that when teachers openly invite discussion regarding the accuracy and authenticity of curriculum and textbook accounts of events, people, and places, then there is a real possibility that a broader range of identities can be valued and nurtured in the classroom. In addition, providing counternarratives offers varying and alternative perspectives which allow for critical conversation and discussion.

Dowdy (2002) further reminded us of the importance of valuing all languages and literacies and recognizing that as important as building positive identity is for the individual, making that information visible and sharing it with others is crucial. She wrote, "the war will be won when she who is the marginalized comes to speak more in her own language, and people accept her communication as valid and representative" (p. 13). This is important for broadening the world view of others while simultaneously bettering the education for the individual, helping to build what they know and seeing it as important and vital part of the classroom community.

Professional Development and Issues of Diversity

By definition, professional development is designed to educate administrators and teachers as they continue to grow in their ability to create teaching and learning environments where all students learn (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Evans, 1996;

Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Schmoker 2006; 2011). Typically, educational administrators (principals, district administrators, curriculum coordinators) are given the task of establishing professional development opportunities for teachers that are designed to meet the needs of students (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Professional development in diversity does not stem from questions centered around *what* issues, but rather about ensuring transformative thinking within the educational organization. Irvine (2003) along with others (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Hawley, 2008; Hollins, et al., 1994; hooks, 1994; Howard, 2010) suggest that it is the culture and climate that provide the groundwork in going beyond and seeking genuine solutions for implementing any kind of professional development in understanding of diversity. Inclusive of these professional development opportunities are: (a) the need for administrators to create professional learning communities that encourage conversations about race, culture and language; (b) the role of teachers; and (c) culturally relevant teaching.

The Administrator's Role in Creating Professional Learning Communities

Freire (1993) suggested that the challenge for administrators is to create opportunities for professional discourse among teachers. This challenge continues as administrators work to create professional learning communities in their schools. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) pointed out that “professional learning communities aren’t merely convivial and congenial; they are demandingly collegial in the levels of commitment and critical debate they require in order to address compelling problems of student learning” (p. 128). When specifically addressing issues of race, culture and language, Irvine (2003) adds that it is important to “create a climate of commitment and direction based on a set of clearly articulated values and beliefs about the parameters of

common cultural discussions” (p. 19). This helps to set the tone for the administrator and the teachers in educational settings to know what is expected and for how to begin the professional conversations. It also allows teachers to see administrators as a learner along side them with the same fears and anxieties, which is particularly important to make visible to new teachers (Long, et al., 2006). Researchers suggest that the opportunities for this discourse to happen must be created and nurtured and administrators have to provide space and time for that to happen (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Long, et al. 2006; Meier, 2002a, 2002b).

Linda Darling-Hammond (2010) spoke passionately regarding the importance of teachers having an in depth knowledge of the interactions among development, knowledge, and learning, as something that administrators need to make sure to provide to their teachers. She suggested that administrators provide professional development opportunities that highlight the importance of understanding that learning is embedded in cultural contexts and suggests that administrators work with teachers beyond book studies and programs to become more immersed in experiences with children and their families. This allows administrator’s and teachers to develop cross-cultural competence (Irvine, 2003; Lucas, Henze & Donato, 2004) an essential component in meeting children’s needs and helping them make connections from their home to their school learning (Delpit, 2012; Gay, 2010b; González, et al., 2005; Mcntyre, Rosebery & González, 2001) by ensuring meaningful classroom practice and moves away from “dilettantes” (Irvine, 2003, pg. 16), which is a superficial interest in other cultures.

Research recommends that administrators think in terms of broadening the understanding of all by including these multiple points of view in professional

development opportunities (book studies, inservices, home visits, and presenters) as well as classroom discussions and positive talk (Long, et al., 2006; Vasquez, Tate & Harste, 2013). They suggest that this extends the schools walls to make home and community a vital part of professional development engagements. The more diverse the faculty is, the more these points of view are often visible (Meier, 2002a). However, when the faculty is homogeneous, then the need for intentionally and specifically bringing to the surface many points of view becomes even more critical, particularly in the light of the increasingly diverse student population and homogeneous teaching staff.

The Teachers' Role

The teachers' role in professional development opportunities in diversity ideally begins with an awareness of one's own ethnocentricities such as, who we are, what we value, and what we believe, as well as being open and honest about our assumptions of different cultures (Boutte, 1999). Boutte offered some ideas regarding questions that can guide teachers' understanding of who they are and what they have come to know about others, such as: How do I participate in stereotypes? What are my current assumptions about cultures other than my own? Where have I come to learn these things? As multiple scholars suggest, knowing one's self is vital before we can truly understand others (Earick, 2009; Howard, 2006; Quintero, 2009). Tatum (2007) suggests that this is particularly true for teachers in their ability to support positive identities for students.

Professional development that encourages and supports teachers beyond the schools walls and into homes and communities of the students they teach, is vital in understanding diversity – particularly issues of race, culture and language. Furthermore, when this knowledge is brought back into the classroom, this information can be used to

create meaningful learning activities that help to illuminate new ways of learning that support student voices that have been traditionally unheard, marginalized or underrepresented (Long, et al., 2013; Saifer et al., 2011). This helps to make students feel valued and important contributors in their own learning. It also has significant impact on students' learning by reforming classroom practices that have historically privileged a select few and bring new practices to the classroom that increases the learning of all students.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2009), culturally relevant teaching, or culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000; 2010b) refers to teaching in ways that take into consideration children's cultural tool kits and their multiple ways of knowing, which includes their race, culture and language (Compton-Lilly, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2010; Ramsey, 2004). Teaching in culturally relevant ways serves to "transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, pg. 19). This means that teachers work to preserve students' cultures by having curriculum and content representative of many cultures. It also means recognizing that children come to school with various ways of coming to that knowledge given the sociocultural ways in which children learn. This way of teaching utilizes and draws from students' knowledge, sees it as a strength and resource from which to build new knowledge. Gay (2010b) wrote:

In other words, culturally responsive pedagogy lifts the veil of presumed absolute authority from conceptions of scholarly truth typically taught in schools. It helps students realize that no single version of "truth" is total and permanent. Nor should it be allowed to exist uncontested. Students are taught how to apply new knowledge generated by various ethnic scholars to their analyses of social histories, issues, problems and experiences. These learning engagements

encourage and enable students to find their own voices, to contextualize issues in multiple cultural perspectives, to engage in more ways of knowing and thinking and to become more active participants in shaping their own learning. (p. 38).

Core tenets of culturally responsive or culturally relevant pedagogy require: (a) teachers to be both competent *and* caring with high expectations for student success; and (b) grounding curriculum in the cultural experiences of children as opposed to using culture as an add-on to existing practices that do not alter practices in any way. These are discussed below.

Competent and Caring Teachers: High Expectations for Student Success

Research clearly illuminates the need for teachers to be both competent and caring. Culturally responsive teachers are those who care about students enough to make the necessary changes in their practices to ensure successful student outcomes. It is not merely enough to sympathize or empathize with students if there are no actions taken to support them. Gay (2010) writes:

Feelings are important, but culturally responsive caring as an essential part of the educational process is much more. It focuses on caring *for* instead of *about* the personal well-being and academic success of ethnically diverse students, with a clear understanding that the two are interrelated. While *caring about* conveys feelings of concern for one's state of being, *caring for* is active engagement in doing something to positively affect it. Thus, it encompasses a combination of concern, compassion, commitment, responsibility, and action. (p. 48)

Ladson-Billings (2009) suggests that while some children come to school from homes that are more like school in attitudes and practices, those students coming from more diverse experiences and backgrounds are dependent on schools to teach them in ways that ensure their success. For this reason, researchers such as Delpit (2012), Long (2011) and Perry, Steele and Hilliard (2003), among many others, write about the importance of teachers in the lives of children in their responsibility to hold students to high standards.

Delpit described these teachers as “warm demanders” (p. 77) who not only care but also expect students to succeed and convince them of their own brilliance and capabilities.

Students’ Cultures are Grounded in the Curriculum Not Considered an Add-On

Teaching in culturally relevant or responsive ways requires teachers to become students of their students (Ayers, 2010) to learn about them, their culture, and their ways of knowing. Equally important however, is how this knowledge translates to teaching practices. It requires teachers to learn from students and their families to *engage* in practices that ground curriculum from that knowledge of students to make learning meaningful and engaging. Teachers need to know how to embed the knowledge in classroom practices that ensure positive and successful learning outcomes for all children (Howard, 2010). Additionally, it is important to note that these practices are foundational to teaching across *all* subject areas (McIntyre, Hulan & Layne, 2011; McIntyre, Rosebery & González, 2001) not as mere add-ons to some existing curriculum. This is of critical importance because all too often teachers see a new way of teaching as yet another thing to do as opposed to practicing in a better way (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Culturally relevant teaching requires a paradigm shift in the way teachers have traditionally taught that works to ensure all students are successful.

Conclusion to Review of Literature

The research and theories explored in this review of literature shed critical light on our responsibility as educators – administrators and teachers alike – to create learning spaces respectful of children’s cultures, languages and ways of knowing that broaden visions of what counts as the norm and lead to achievement for all students. This work helps us recognize and acknowledge the effects and prevalence of racism, linguisticism, and

other forms of discrimination in our everyday life, in classrooms, in policies and in practices and offers ideas to use in interrupting, fighting and warding against discriminatory practices, attitudes and behaviors that impede success for *all* students. These theories and the research that undergirds them are at the foundation of my study and hence, my methodological stance which opens Chapter Three and prefaces the explanation of my methodological design.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

This study examined the process experienced when I engaged a group of teachers with me in a five-month professional study exploring issues of culture, race, and language. Located within a Child Development program for children from three-to-five years of age encompassing 13 schools in a large suburban school district in the southeastern United States, the questions guiding the research were:

- What happens when a school administrator and teachers of three- four- and five-year-old children engage in long-term professional study designed to explore issues of culture, race, and language?
- What is the role of the administrator in this process?
- What challenges are met?
- How are those challenges negotiated?
- How is the experience reflected in day-to-day life in the classrooms, particularly as it relates to supporting children's positive literate identities?

The study utilized tenets of ethnography as well as some aspects of critical ethnography and autoethnography as foundational to the research design. Data were collected from June through December 2010 in a range of contexts related to a 13-classroom, nine-site public school child development program. Those contexts were: two whole faculty *Inservice* meetings (attended by 13 teachers, one from each of the child

development classrooms and me, the program administrator), *monthly Diversity Group meetings* (attended by three teachers who were the study's focal participants, as well as three other teachers and me), *monthly Focal Group meetings* (attended by the three focal participant teachers and me), approximately once a month *One-to-One meetings* (often spontaneous and informal meetings between me and each focal participant), my monthly visits and observations in the classrooms of the focal participants, and visits in the home and community settings of some of the center's students by me and the focal participants. Video and audiotape, still photographs, observational/field notes, and written reflections were used to collect data. Formal and informal interviews were conducted with teachers, children, and family members. Data were analyzed using a pattern analysis process. Details of this methodology are described in the sections below prefaced by a section describing basic tenets of qualitative and ethnographic work and why those methodologies supported this research.

Why Qualitative Research?

Depending on the era of study, qualitative research has been described in various ways. Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) generic description offers a helpful definition as I conducted research in naturalistic settings. Denzin and Lincoln offer that:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

Guided by this interpretive stance, qualitative methodologies allowed me to better understand what happens when a school administrator engages teachers in long-term professional study for several reasons. Foundationally, qualitative methods allowed me “to investigate the processes of interactions, to understand how they occurred, and to analyze how individuals’ own cultures and dispositions play a role in shaping those processes” (Rex, Stedman & Graciano, 2006, p. 744). These were all essential elements in my research that sought to understand a professional development experience grounded in issues of culture, race, and language. I used the work of Hatch (2002) to outline further characteristics of my study that were qualitative in nature. Hatch wrote that qualitative studies take place in natural settings, foreground participant perspectives, view the researcher as the data gathering instrument, involve extended firsthand engagement, are grounded in centrality of meaning, are inclusive; complex and critical, establish rapport and subjectivity, are responsive to emergent design, and are reflexive in nature. These characteristics as they relate to this research are described below.

Natural Settings

When studying participants in their *natural setting* the researcher commits to looking at people in the real world and how things naturally occur as they go about living day-to-day (Denzin, 1997; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hatch, 2002) as well as understanding how people make sense of that world (Hatch, 2002). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) advocate that “a good physical setting to study is one that the same people use in a recurring way” (p. 63). This study took place in settings connected to the Child Development Center that I administered, including inter-related communities within and beyond it - classrooms, professional development areas, and families’ homes and

communities. Representative of a large part of my day-to-day life as well as the day-to-day lives of teachers, families, and children who were involved in the study, the Center provided a natural setting for this research.

Participant Perspectives

Drawing from the advice of qualitative methodologists, this study sought participants' perspectives as its foundation by asking questions such as: "What is happening here?" "What [does this] mean to the participants? (Hatch, 2002, p. 7) "What are the major events in this social situation?" and "Which participants or actors participate in which events?" (Spradley, 1980, p. 81). In this way, the use of qualitative methods required that the voices of my participants were to be heard throughout the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hatch, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). What matters to the actors or participants in this study also is of primary interest to the researcher (Hatch 2002). In this study, participant perspectives were critical as they made it possible for me to understand what was happening as we explored issues of language, culture, and race together and as we constructed our understanding of how to support students' positive literate identities.

Researcher as Data Gathering Instrument

Unlike quantitative data that are drawn from testing or other measuring devices, qualitative researchers rely mostly on themselves to obtain data and interpret it. Qualitative researchers record field notes or use audio or videotape to capture phenomena which are later transcribed and analyzed, embracing a humanistic approach that suggests that people have the ability to make sense of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hatch, 2002; Spradley, 1980). As Spradley (1980) writes, "all human beings use their perceptual

skills to gather information about social situations” (p.56). Goodwin and Goodwin (1996) further remind us that, due to the fact that the researcher is constantly making decisions about what information to collect, as well as how data are analyzed, he/she is the instrument and the role is “pervasive, continuing, and expansive” (p. 111). In this study, the role of the researcher was critical to every aspect of the work: The researcher was a primary participant in the study and analyzed data and interpreted findings through a theoretically – and personally – driven lens. Because of this, my role and my biases as researcher are described in detail later in this chapter.

Extended Firsthand Engagement

Hatch (2002) along with others (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996; Wolcott, 1992) believe that to truly capture the ideas and beliefs of participants or to gain insights in answer to the question that guides a study, the researcher must spend an extended amount of time in the natural setting. In fact, Hatch (2000) proposed that “extended engagement continues to be one of the hallmarks of high-quality qualitative work” (p. 8). Dyson and Genishi (2005) expanded this notion by suggesting that researchers engage in observations “intentionally and closely over time” (p. 42). While Dyson and Genishi (2005) admitted that the exact length of time it takes to get to know something well is arbitrary, Hatch (2002) suggested that many qualitative studies usually encompass a year or longer. This study spanned the first five months of the school year and followed a two-year informal pilot study. Thus, the extended period and daily firsthand engagement were characteristics that made qualitative methodology appropriate for this research because I was involved in the research site on a daily basis functioning as both participant and researcher.

Centrality of Meaning

Dyson and Genishi (2005) suggested that meaning making is central to qualitative studies because researchers seek to understand how participants make sense or meaning through interactions in their everyday life. Centrality of meaning then is grounded in the notion that meaning is socially constructed. This concept was critical to my study as I sought to understand how administrators and teachers constructed understandings about issues of culture, race, and language and utilized related insights that generated classroom practices that supported the growth of students' literate identities.

Inclusive, Complex, and Critical

Qualitative studies are inclusive, complex, and critical in that they strive to include voices that have been otherwise silenced or may have been overlooked. Qualitative methodologies are charged to take into consideration multiple points of view and capture detailed descriptions that will help to understand lived experience. Qualitative studies are not reduced to the sum of parts but are rather studied as they are positioned in the larger picture. Each setting studied is unique based on the people and interactions that comprise it (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Eisner & Peshkin, 1990; Hatch, 2000). My study was inclusive, complex and critical because it considered multiple perspectives and did not only focus on professional development or solely on classroom practices, but it served to follow teachers full circle from professional development to classroom practice. In addition, the study created spaces to invite the voices of teachers, students and families.

Emergent Design

Although many qualitative studies begin with a set of questions and an idea of how to begin the study, the research is open to the possibility of emergent design. As the data are collected and analyzed, questions may change and/or new ones emerge. Methods too may change as the study unfolds to include other ways of data collection or design (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Hatch, 2000). Although my study began with a set of research questions and methods, and a solid plan and timeline, I remained open to how the data shaped the work. I did this by studying and reflecting on data each week and determined whether or not new questions needed to be asked (of participants and myself) or if new kinds of data needed to be considered to deepen and clarify my understanding of “what was happening” in this professional development experience.

Reflexive in Nature

Hand-in-hand with the need for an emergent design is the need for regular reflections on the part of the researcher and the participants. Goodall (2000) suggests that reflexivity is “the process of personally and academically reflecting on lived experiences in ways that reveal deep connections between the writer and his or her subject” (p. 137). Hatch (2000) offers the idea that reflexivity is what separates some quantitative from qualitative researchers and what constitutes quality qualitative studies. In qualitative work, researchers are required to acknowledge their emotions and biases as part of the lens through which they develop the study, collect and analyze data (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Doucet & Mauthner (2002) believe that reflexivity is significant “to issues of honesty, transparency and overall accountability in research” (p. 125). The position I held as administrator and researcher necessitated the need for me to be consistently reflexive.

It was critical that I considered my own biases and was cognizant of the effect my position had on the teachers, students and families and their participation in the study.

Ethnographic Elements of This Work

For the reasons described in the previous section, this study was qualitative in its methodology. As a qualitative researcher, I drew from basic tenets of two forms of qualitative work: (a) critical ethnography and (b) autoethnography.

Ethnography and critical ethnography. While my study was not a true ethnography in the anthropological sense (it was not long-term immersion in a particular cultural setting), it was in many ways *ethnography-like* in that I studied a range of cultural settings in which I was deeply involved and learned about, with, and from, the participants in these settings (Spradley, 1980). Wolcott (2008) has long described the field of educational ethnography as including cultural settings close to researcher's personal and professional worlds. In that sense, while this was not a long-term study in which the researcher is immersed in a particular community's culture for many years, it was a study of the culture of professional development as experienced by teachers and an administrator over a five month period of time in settings very much a part of my personal and professional worlds.

Dyson and Genishi (2005) provide a framework that I used to conceptualize the ethnographic elements of this study. Their ethnographic approach to research suggests that it is important to "get to know one thing well" (p. 42). Drawing from this tenet, in this study, I focused on the experiences of teachers and one administrator as we worked together to explore issues of race, culture, and language and considered teaching implications. In ethnographic fashion, I focused on as many aspects of our experience as

possible: Our work with each other and in our One-to One meetings, Focal Group meetings, Diversity Meetings and whole faculty Professional Development /Inservice meetings, our work with children, and our associations with families and community members.

Dyson and Genishi (2005) point out another characteristic of ethnographies that was also characteristic of this study: While it is important to develop research questions to guide the design of the study, they should not restrict nor constrain it. During the course of this study, it was vital that the research remained open to the patterns and themes that emerged; and therefore was open to the need to revise questions, aspects of questions, methods or settings for data collection.

Critical ethnography is a form of ethnographic study that gives particular attention to missing voices and recognizes issues of power, hegemony, and social inequities, but ultimately “begins with the critical consciousness of the researcher” (Willis, et al., 2008, p. 50). This was particularly vital to my study as I engaged with teachers in professional conversations regarding culture, race and language and how we served to perpetuate or interrupt the existing notion of what is *right* and *normal*. The use of critical ethnography supported the critical lens I used throughout this study.

Autoethnography. If, as the research suggests, we must self-reflect to further our understanding of others (Howard, 2006; Nieto & Bode, 2008), my understanding of autoethnography prompted me to draw from it as essential to this study. Autoethnography provides a way of recording both the process of self-reflection while simultaneously studying the culture within which we administer and teach (Chang, 2008), both important elements of my research.

Like ethnography, autoethnography comes from anthropology studies but it differs from traditional ethnography in several ways. In ethnographic studies, the researcher positions herself as part of the culture she is studying, but often does not include herself in the study (Ellis, 2004). Autoethnography focuses explicitly on the researcher's role and its influence in the actual study. As Ellis (2004) explained, "in autoethnography, we're usually writing about epiphanies in our lives and in doing so, we open ourselves up for criticism about how we've lived. You become your stories to your readers, and to yourself" (p.33).

Just as there are some differences between traditional ethnography and autoethnography, it is also important to delineate differences between autoethnography and autobiography. Some researchers use autobiography as part of their autoethnographic studies (Pennington, 2007), but it differs in that, in autoethnographies, personal histories are not only recorded but analyzed (Ellis, 2004) and considered just as important to findings as other data. Ellis (2004) wrote:

Essentially, reflexive/narrative ethnographies focus on a culture or subculture and authors use their life story in that culture to look more deeply at self-other interactions. This approach offers insight into how the researcher changed as a result of observing others. The researcher's personal experience is also important for how it illuminates the culture under study. (p. 46)

According to Chang (2008) the benefits to autoethnography are three fold:

1. It offers a research method friendly to researchers and readers;
2. It enhances cultural understanding of self and others; and
3. It has potential to transform self and others to motivate them to work toward cross-cultural coalition building (p. 52).

These benefits were important to me as a researcher who documented the process of how an administrator and teachers journeyed together through professional development experience and how that understanding informed classroom practices supportive of students' positive literate identities.

I came to autoethnography with experiences from a mini-study that I conducted in a course on sociocultural theory. During this experience, I brought forward all my assumptions and preconceived notions regarding the setting for my study – the cultural home and community in which I was to immerse myself (in this case an Asian Indian family). As I sought to understand this particular family and their culture I simultaneously explored my own bias, cultural self, and insecurities. As I analyzed the data, I included an analysis of my reflections and their connection analytically to the other data. As I wrote, each informed the other. This micro-study was as much or more about discovering who I was and recording my transformations than it was about learning more about another culture, albeit a mere glimpse of that culture.

Research Design

In the summer of 2008, two years prior to the initiation of this study, as the administrator of the Saddle Creek Region Child Development program (pseudonym) in a public school district, I initiated a series of professional development sessions with the thirteen teachers in that program. Together, we began to study issues of identity development, and linguistic and cultural marginalization. We started with a focus on language development and learning about home and school literacies to foster our understanding of language and literacy acquisition (Appendix A). We continued the study into the school year using the district's five inservice days. Because schools in our district

are site-based, I had the autonomy to decide how those days would be used. Seeking to learn more in the area of diversity, five teachers and I created a small diversity group and tied it into our goals-based plan for the next five years.

In our district, Goals Based Evaluations (GBE's) are part of the evaluation process (Appendix B) for teachers who are expected to develop professionally in ways that meet their individual and school needs. Teachers create their own professional goals that span a minimum of one year and the maximum of five years. As a result of our inservice experiences studying issues of diversity, six teachers in the program and I decided that our professional goals would include continued learning in that area. So we created a diversity group and tied it into our goals-based plan for the next five years. We began calling our monthly meetings our *Diversity Group meetings*. We committed to meeting once a month to listen to speakers, watch and discuss videos; and read and discuss professional literature (see Appendix C for list of speakers, videos, and readings for 2008- 2009). This small group was particularly important to me because of my interest in learning with colleagues as opposed to being merely the administrator who directed the professional development. I wanted the faculty to see me as a learner alongside them – as someone who did not have all the answers, but who also struggled to find the right words, or was insecure and vulnerable. Another important aspect of this small group experience was that we began to step outside our cultural comfort zones to spend time in student's homes and communities. Teachers reported that while the experience was initially intimidating, it was well worth the effort because of the insight it provided them as teachers.

In 2009 we continued into the second year of our diversity group meetings. Four additional teachers joined the group and one dropped out due to scheduling conflicts. The eight of us continued to explore issues of cultural and linguistic marginalization, identity development, language and literacy development, and began including discussion of issues regarding race. I also scheduled four whole faculty professional development sessions that also explored issues of race, culture and language (see Appendix D for topics, presenters and reading in the 2009-2010 academic year).

The research that is the foundation of this dissertation began in our third year meeting as a group. With the initiation of this study, I wanted to know what might happen when our work focused specifically on issues of culture, race and language as they impact classroom practices and children's literate identities. Data were collected from all 13 teachers as they participated in various forms of professional development, but this study focused primarily on me and three of the six teachers in the diversity group: Tammy, Lyndsay and Kim. The four of us formed the *Focal Group*.

Research Site

Physical site. The research site for this study was a subset of the Saddle Creek Region Child Development (SCRCD) program – Saddle Creek Region Montessori - located in a suburban area situated in Robertson School District located in a suburban area in the southeastern part of the United States. Saddle Creek Region Montessori was tuition-based and was designed to serve children from three- to five-years of age. Since education for three- and four- year-olds was not mandated in our state, the school district provided this as a service to the community and it was housed in the district public schools. Funding for the program came from several sources. The district paid for the

cost of the building, utilities and the lead teacher's salary but all other costs came from parent tuition, the ABC vouchers program, and grants. The program demographics were approximately 48% African American, 44% White, 4% Asian, 3% Latino, and 3% Biracial. Approximately 5% of students were identified as special needs (which includes those identified as speech only), approximately 55% were males and 45% were females.

Curriculum. The first year in its new location the five classrooms program's curriculum utilized what we termed, "best practices" in early childhood education. This meant that we drew directly from the National Association for the Education for Young Children's (NAEYC) criteria as well as the children's interests to determine the curriculum. However, in 2008-2009 the program began offering a Montessori magnet option, which meant that these five classrooms would operate under the Montessori Curriculum (Montessori, 1965) and began to also enroll kindergarteners as part of the multi-age classrooms (ages 3-5) embraced by this model. Described below, the district superintendent at that time gave me, as the program's administrator/ lead teacher, the intellectual freedom to adapt Montessori Curriculum as I felt it best enhanced the beliefs and practices that were already foundational to our program, particularly in the area of language and literacy. The classrooms at the other sites remained curricularly eclectic, but drew largely from a program used widely in early childhood classrooms that focused on an array of creative centers for students to explore and investigate, the Creative Curriculum (Dodge, 2008).

The Montessori curriculum at SCRC. The Montessori curriculum was created by Maria Montessori (1965) in the early 1920's and was grounded in her philosophy that children's learning should be child-centered, using self-correcting or didactic materials

designed specifically to teach the child order and organization. She believed that the child's need to explore and follow his/her interests was at the heart of educating the child. She also believed that children needed to learn a respect for the environment and needed to be taught with actual items as opposed to toys. For example, it was Montessori's philosophy that initiated the use of child-sized objects in preschool programs. She also believed the child should have real world experiences as opposed to make-believe - for that reason most Montessori classrooms do not have sociodramatic play areas.

Although I believed there were many wonderful aspects of the Montessori curriculum such as the focus on the development of mathematical concepts through the manipulation of concrete materials, science concepts that encourage the exploration of nature and life-cycles, and inclusion of geography awareness that begins at age three, there were some aspects of it that concerned me. For example, my view of literacy learning was more holistic than the strictly phonetic approach that was basic to Montessori curriculum. I believed that literacy learning must fill the classroom and bathe children in a sea of meaningful language and literacy experiences.

I was also concerned that the Montessori philosophy focused little on social interaction between and among students and teachers. My educational beliefs drew from a sociocultural approach grounded in the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978) which demonstrated that children learned more when they are provided opportunities to interact with adults and children. The Montessori program is sometimes criticized because of its one-size-fits-all philosophy in terms of materials and procedures, ignoring diverse interactional styles and ways of learning and teaching.

When the district made the decision to offer the Montessori curriculum as a basis for one of the options within the SCRC D program, I met with the district superintendent and shared my concerns. I explained my view that rigidly embracing the Montessori Curriculum would undo many of the excellent practices the program was already implementing, such as the rich language and literacy practices that focused on a holistic approach to language and literacy, as well as our program's sociocultural philosophy which encouraged student-student and student-teacher interactions. The superintendent expressed his confidence in my leadership abilities as well as his desire for me to implement the Montessori curriculum in ways that best suited the students and their needs. On March 12, 2010, the superintendent wrote, "Sabina, Thank you for your excellent work in R2. I am especially appreciative of your leadership in creating SCRC D and the Montessori ("Mosso-sori") Magnet at PES [Prospect Elementary School (pseudonym)]." This reference to "Mosso-sori" is reference to my last name – Mosso – and an indication of his confidence in my ability to utilize the best of multiple classroom approaches.

With license to proceed, the teachers and I created a program that utilized the Montessori curriculum in ways that supported sociocultural understandings about how children learn including such non-Montessori literacy practices as, morning message, interactive writing, shared reading and written conversations. Also, unlike traditional Montessori classrooms, talk is valued and our classrooms hum with the voices of children interacting with each other and with adults in the classroom throughout the day.

As we ventured into the 2010-2011 school year, one year into having established the Montessori curriculum, we did so with a new superintendent. I feared that the

autonomy I held with the former superintendent could be threatened. However, my fears were soon put to rest as I learned that our new superintendent was driven and passionate about meaningful and engaging work for all students in our district. I was enamored with her determination to charge all schools in our district with the responsibility to create meaningful learning for ALL our students. Her desire to transform the district into a true learning organization meant that she trusted administrators, teachers and staff alike as professionals. She believed that we would design meaningful work for students. This allowed the teachers and me to enter this research supported in our quest. While I recognize that some administrators in the district seemed to interpret less autonomy or at least to claim less autonomy, I felt that the new superintendent had the best interest of students at heart and trusted administrators to engage faculty and staff in ways that would create learning environments where all students were successful. This difference among administrators will become important in the discussion of Implications at the end of this dissertation.

Primary (Focal) Participants

The primary participants in this study were three of the thirteen teachers working at the Saddle Creek Region Child Development Center (SCRCDC) and me. Secondary participants in this study (described later in this document) included the three primary teachers' assistants, the children in their classrooms, the families of some of those children, and the other ten teachers working at SCRCDC. The primary participants' last names are pseudonyms.

Mrs. Kim Miles. Kim Miles, was a 37-year-old, White, Jewish, English-speaking, female teacher with fourteen years experience working in early childhood

education. In 1995, Kim and I were hired as teachers together. She was hired as a regular education teacher and I was hired as the special education teacher. She left the program after she married in 1998 to travel with her husband to Germany. She worked in early childhood classrooms in American schools while in Germany, and in particular in a Montessori classroom. Although Kim was thousands of miles away, she and I stayed connected through periodic phone calls and cards. She returned to the U.S. in 2007 and was rehired as a teacher in our child development program where I was serving as the lead teacher/administrator. Kim offered a great deal to our faculty and program both educationally and personally because of her experiences inside and outside of the United States.

Due to our long relationship, I felt that I could count on Kim to be honest with me. It seemed to me that she was not uncomfortable challenging me on issues or asking questions. Data later confirmed my feeling about her comfort with me. While she did not take advantage of my position as her supervisor, it did not appear that I intimidated her.

Kim held a Bachelor's degree in early childhood education with some graduate hours towards a Master's degree in counseling. Additionally, she was working to obtain Montessori certification through the Institute of Montessori (pseudonym) in a neighboring town in our state.

Kim had been married for twelve years and had two sons, ages nine and four at the time of this study. Her youngest son was enrolled in our program during this study and was a student in Mrs. Carter' class. I invited Kim to participate in this study due to her involvement with the diversity group, and her classroom's proximity to my office.

Ms. Lyndsay Carter. Lyndsay Carter, a 24-year-old, White, Christian, English-speaking female was in her second year of teaching. She held a Bachelor's degree in early childhood education and had a particular interest and knowledge in the area of language and literacy. She came to our child development program with fresh ideas from her experiences at the University, which included her student teaching in our program in 2005. This experience helped to familiarize her with the culture and philosophy of our program long before she was hired in 2008. Lyndsay was passionate about early childhood education and came to us with an intellectual spirit that pushed her constantly to ask questions and work to learn more. Lyndsay was also perusing her Montessori certification, along with Kim, at the Institute for Montessori.

My relationship with Lyndsay was both that of a supervisor and a previous classroom parent. My six-year-old son was a student in her classroom a year before this study took place. I invited Lyndsay to participate in this study due to her involvement with the diversity group, and her classroom's proximity to my office.

Mrs. Tammy Greenway. Tammy Greenway, was a 38-year-old, African American, Christian, English-speaking female. She had been teaching for 14 years in early childhood education and had taught in various parts of our state. She came to our child development program 11 years ago. Tammy and I taught together for four years prior to my position change to curriculum specialist and then lead teacher. As the only teacher of Color, Tammy helped our faculty, and me particularly, grow in our understanding of issues of race and cultural diversity while also helping us recognize that she would not or could not represent the life, beliefs, and cultural worlds of every African American female. She and I have collaborated on projects together that highlighted the

ways in which she embraced diversity in her classroom. We have shared many private conversations that made me appreciate her as a valued and critical member of our faculty as she was able to offer perspectives as a person of Color.

Tammy received her Bachelor's degree in early childhood education from a neighboring university and has earned a Master's degree in education from Cambridge College. Along with Kim and Lyndsay, Tammy was perusing her Montessori certification, at the Institute for Montessori.

Tammy had been married to her husband for six years. She has two children ages four and one respectively at the time of this study. I invited Tammy to participate in this study because she was member of the diversity group and her classroom's close proximity to my office.

Researcher/school administrator. In addition to being the researcher who conducted this study, I was also a primary participant as the administrator of the child development program and a participant in the Focal Group. At the time of this study, I had been employed with the district and the program since arriving in South Carolina in 1995 with seven years prior experience in early childhood special education. I began my career in South Carolina as a preschool special education teacher moving in 1999 to the position as regular education preschool teacher, then in 2004 to the position as curriculum effectiveness specialist, arriving at my current position as the program lead teacher/administrator in 2007. These 15 years of experience with the program gave me the advantage of having a deep knowledge of the culture of the program and its history. It also afforded me the opportunity to build relationships with many families because I had taught many of our current student's older siblings. My 22 years of experience in the field

of early childhood education, in addition to my graduate studies at the University of South Carolina, provided me with specific beliefs and perspectives regarding the importance of the early years in education and the significance of addressing issues of culture, race, and language. My passion for wanting to learn, empowering teachers, and creating respectful, meaningful learning environments for children and families, led me to conduct this research. Details about my role as researcher/participant including beliefs and biases are examined later in this chapter.

Secondary Participants

Teaching assistants. Each child development classroom has a full-time teaching assistant who works alongside the teacher to ensure our teacher/student ratio. Each classroom also has a part-time teaching assistant who works the early and late shifts of the 11-hour classroom day. All assistants' names are pseudonyms.

Ms. Angela Kern. Angela Kern was Mrs. Kim Miles' full-time teaching assistant. She was an African American, Christian, English speaking woman. Ms. Kern had been with the program for 14 years and during that time had worked with many teachers, including her work as my teaching assistant from 2000-2004. She was extremely knowledgeable, competent and dedicated to the Child Development program. Ms. Kern had one daughter who was in the fourth grade.

Ms. Halle Cedric. Halle Cedric was Ms. Lyndsay Carter' teaching assistant. She was an African American, Christian, English speaking woman who had been with the program for 21 years. Ms. Cedric was currently in a regular education classroom, but had begun her career working as a special education assistant. As a special education

assistant, she worked with many teachers, including her work as my teaching assistant from 1995-1999. Ms. Cedric had two adult children and two grandchildren.

Mrs. Robin Matherson. Robin Matherson was Mrs. Tammy Greenway's teaching assistant. She was an African American, Christian, English speaking woman who had been with the program for 32 years. Mrs. Matherson had taught with many teachers and had taught some of the parents of our students. She was married to a retired and beloved math teacher in our district.

Señora Maria Hermas. Señora Hermas was a full-time assistant, working as our Spanish teacher. She was Latina, Christian, bilingual Spanish and English speaking woman. Señora Hermas also worked in Tammy's classroom from 7:00-9:00 a.m., at which time Mrs. Matherson arrived and Señora Hermas left to teach the Spanish classes. This was Señora Hermas' first year with our program. She taught Spanish in each classroom for 30 minutes, once a week. She taught an extra one-hour session of Spanish to the Kindergarten students on Friday afternoons. Señora Hermas was married and had one son who was a second grader at a local elementary school.

Teachers other than the three primary participants. There were thirteen teachers in the SCRCD program. Twelve of the thirteen teachers were White, eleven female, one male. One teacher was an African American female. Twelve of the teachers identified as Christian, one as Jewish. All teachers were monolingual English speakers, were of middle-class status and self-identified as heterosexual. Two teachers were new to the faculty during the data collection period, but this did not affect the demographics of the teaching staff. All but two teachers had three or more years of teaching experience. All teachers were participants in some form as members of the Diversity Group and the

whole-faculty Inservice sessions. Data were collected from these faculty members using videotape during our monthly Diversity Meetings and one Inservice meeting. Faculty members' permission was obtained to videotape. Pseudonyms were used for all teachers.

The students. Since this study was designed to follow teachers into the classrooms, it was critical to observe teacher/student and student/student interaction. During the period of data collection, there were approximately 20 students – three-, four-, and five-year-old students - in each of the three teacher/primary participants' classrooms; 10 boys and 10 girls. The program did not control for ethnicity or socio-economic status. As described earlier, students ranged from those paying full tuition (typically 57 % of our students), those on ABC vouchers (typically 10%), or those for whom tuition was not required (Kindergarteners who were served free of charge by the district, 33%). According to the Montessori approach, students remained with their classroom teachers for three years if they entered as three-year olds. They were selected to participate in the program by lottery. The lottery opened at the beginning of January and closed the end of January. Students were randomly assigned a computer-generated number. Student selection was then based on the number of slots in the program available. Once the program was filled, students remained on the waiting list. Should a child move or drop from the program for any reason the next child on the list was selected. Final lottery selection for the 2010-2011 school year was made in mid-May after which our classroom assignments were made.

Because my research involved very young children, it was important to describe the sensitivity necessary with regard to their position as students (Corsaro, 1981; Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Hatch (2002) cautions researchers to remember that “students are

especially vulnerable due to exploitation because of their youth and their positioning as a kind of captive audience in the school” (p. 67). Since my study included recording interactions in the early childhood classroom setting, I attempted to be responsive to their individual and collective needs during the entire duration of the study by asking permission to ask questions, engage with them or use their work. Every parent received full explanation of the study and was asked to sign informed consent forms to give permission for their children’s participation in the study. At any time a parent said they did not want their child to participate or when any child expressed concern about participation or about the use of their work used as data, they were not required to do so. I understood that there were issues of power and control, given that I was the school administrator and knowing that children often want to please adults, particularly in an educational setting. I attempted, to the best of my ability, to be sensitive to those issues throughout the course of this study. I provide an overview of the 2010-2011 enrollment of each class included in the study in the following paragraphs. Pseudonyms were used for all children with the exception of Pedro, per parent permission. An informed consent (see Appendix F) was sent home with each student at the beginning of the year.

Kim Miles’ class. Kim’s class consisted of 20 students, seven kindergartners, seven four-year olds and six three-year olds. One kindergartener was retained to accommodate parent’s request. The ethnic make up of the class consisted of eight African Americans, nine Whites and three Asians. Two children were Jewish, two were Hindu and 16 other children identified as Christians. Three students received speech services, one student was identified as having Autism.

Lyndsay Carter's class. Lyndsay's class consisted of 20 students. Seven students were kindergartners, seven were four-year olds, and six were three-year olds. The ethnic make up of the class consisted of five African Americans, one African American/White, 13 Whites (including one Middle Eastern) and one Asian. Eighteen children identified as Christian, one Jewish, and one Muslim. Two children received speech services and one received ESOL services.

Tammy Greenway's class. Tammy's class consisted of 20 students, seven were kindergartners, seven were four-year olds, six were three-year-olds. One kindergartener was retained by parent's request. The ethnic make-up of the class consisted of eight African Americans, eight Whites, three Latinos, one Black/Latino. Eighteen students identified as Christians, one Jewish, and one Hindu. Two children received speech services.

The families. Families selected for teachers to visit, to interview, or for member checking came from the three primary teachers' classrooms in the study. Families were also selected based on teachers' reference to them in meetings. I met with families, emailed or called them in cases related to member checking or as part of my role as program administrator. Families were also visited by the focal group teachers and were selected as families to visit based on their race, culture and/or language as different from the classroom teacher. For example, Tammy chose to visit Thom's family, which was Jewish, and Lyndsay chose to visit Taj a Muslim-American, at the Mosque, Kim visited Sarah an African American, Christian student. As the administrator, I also visited students' and staff's homes and communities representative of cultures, race, or languages outside of my own. I visited Taj with Lyndsay at the Mosque and the home of

Mrs. Chakraborty one of our part-time teaching assistants from India. Pseudonyms were used for all families' names.

Thom's family. Thom's family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Tyler and his older brother, Will. Thom's family was White and Mr. and Mrs. Tyler were Jewish. Mrs. Tyler only recently converted to Judaism. Mrs. Tyler often participated as a volunteer in Tammy's classroom.

Sarah's family. Sarah's family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Miller and one older brother. They were African American and Christian. Mrs. Miller often came to read in Kim's classroom.

Taj's family. Taj's family consisted of his mom, Dr. Baghdadi his dad, Dr. Darzada, and his older sister. They were Pakistani and Muslim. Dr. Baghdadi often participated as a volunteer in Lyndsay's classroom.

Contexts for Data Collection

Data were collected in the following contexts: (a) monthly Diversity Group meetings; (b) two whole faculty Inservice sessions, (c) monthly Focal Group meetings; (d) One-to-One meetings with primary participants; and (d) classroom observations and interactions. These settings are described below.

Diversity group meetings. The primary setting for this study was the monthly Diversity Group with the primary participants in this study – Kim, Lyndsay, and Tammy and me. Three other faculty members were also involved in the diversity group. While they continued to be members of the study group throughout the study, I did not focus data collection on their experiences. However, I did include some examples of conversations with them when their comments were a part of our conversations. I served

in multiple roles with this group: participant, facilitator/planner, program administrator, and during the period of data collection, researcher.

The Diversity Group began meeting in fall, 2008. We met to discuss specific topics such as: Home and Community Visits; Self Awareness; Language Marginalization; Celebration of Families- Family Heritage Night; Latino issues; Gay, Lesbian and Transgender issues (see Appendix C for 2008-2009 topics, presenters and readings). The meetings were very informal and began as simple conversations. We met for an hour each month and decided together during the meeting, on an assignment that we would each complete and share the following month. Each month we also planned the topic for the following month's meeting.

In fall, 2009 we continued our Diversity Group meetings and explored topics such as: language and literacy development; home and community visits; and cultural and linguistic marginalization. During that year, we also began to discuss issues regarding race. Our conversations probed deeper, exploring stereotypes, biases, and the use of deficit language. Our discussions were further fueled by our experiences in four whole faculty professional development days that year (described in more detail in the following section) in which speakers addressed issues of race, oppression, and cultural and linguistic marginalization. During the 2009-2010 school year, we began to engage in home and community visits and discussions about them in our group sessions. During the 2010-2011 year, we increased home and community visits to include at least three.

Our work in 2010-2011 (this dissertation study) built from the prior two year's of work. Realizing that we needed a more specific focus, trajectory and direction to our study, and clearly defined topics, I created a plan for 2010-2011 (see Appendix E). The

plan served as a guide and allowed for flexibility in our work so that we could be responsive to each other's ideas, questions and concerns.

As in the past, the 2010-2011 meetings were held once a month on Thursdays, after school for one-hour. The sessions were more informal than the whole faculty Inservice days. They followed a format that was developed by the teachers and me that included:

- Focus on a particular issue/s
- Discussion of reading (book chapter or articles) related to that issue
- Assignment related to the issue
- Home and community focus

Each of these meetings were videotaped to capture the dialogue and interactions among participants of the group and to gain additional information such as facial expressions or body language that cannot be captured in audio taped sessions. After transcription of the videotapes, I provided copies to the group for member checking and triangulation of data. No data was used without their approval.

Whole faculty inservice sessions. Whole faculty inservice sessions occurred during five inservice days throughout the year. These days were designed to provide teachers with knowledge and strategies that strengthened teaching practices that supported the learning of students in their classrooms. All thirteen teachers in the SCRC program participated in these sessions. Two of these days occurred during the period of data collection. The first, in August 2010, focused on plans for the school year and topics of diversity discussion. The second, held on October 22, 2010, focused on issues related to critical literacy and supporting children's literate identities. To prepare for the sessions,

all teachers read the book, *Literacy in the Welcoming Classroom* (Allen, 2010) and excerpts of *Negotiating Critical Literacies* (Vasquez, 2004). This session was videotaped, transcribed, and interpretations were returned to participants for member checking and triangulation.

Monthly focal group meetings. Each month I scheduled meetings with the three primary participants – Kim, Lyndsay, and Tammy – and I met for 30 minutes to one hour to review data (field notes, transcripts, and student work). These meetings provided regular opportunities for member checking as we discussed that month’s data and my interpretations of those data. I used insights from these meetings to determine any necessary changes to the course of the study. The meetings were also recorded and analyzed and used as further data in the study. This also provided me the opportunity to ask questions to clarify the teachers’ thinking about issues of culture, race, and language particularly as they affected their work in supporting children’s literate identities. For example, when classroom observations showed teachers supporting literate identities of children in a particular way, I asked, “what prompted you to bring a particular idea or strategy or use of language into the lesson?” I asked specifically about a book choice or other resource teachers used to understand their thinking behind their decision. And, after spending time in homes and communities, data often lead to further questions or the need to clarify interpretations.

One-to-one meetings with primary participants. I met one-to-one with Tammy, Kim and Lyndsay approximately once a month to review transcripts of my videotaped classroom sessions and/or observation notes. I also used this opportunity to meet with them one-to-one as a way to check-in to see how things were going in their classrooms,

to hear about their home and community visits, or to ask how I could be of any assistance. Meetings typically lasted between 20 minutes to one hour.

Classroom observations. As the administrator and lead teacher, I interacted with teachers, students and families on a daily basis. I typically went into each classroom on a regular basis to talk with teachers or children, demonstrate lessons or strategies or to provide tours for future families interested in our program. I met with families as warranted or greeted them each day. I was also responsible for teacher evaluation via walk through observations and Summative ADEPT Formal Evaluation of Teachers (SAFE-T) for new teachers.

During the period of data collection I set up video cameras in the classrooms of the three teachers' who were the primary participants and videotaped *morning group time* on a monthly basis. Morning group time was important to this study because I wanted to capture the dialogue between the teachers and the students during a time of day when teachers focused most on literacy. I was interested in seeing if, and in what ways, the teachers used their understanding of information gleaned during our diversity sessions to support students' literate identities. During group time, also known as *line time* in the Montessori curriculum, the children come together on the carpet for a large group session – usually no longer than 20 to 30 minutes. During line time, several activities typically took place in these classrooms: introduction of a lesson for the day based on the unit of study, writing a morning message, reviewed the calendar, reading a book related to the unit of study, discussion of a classroom issue that involved all students, or engagement of all students in an activity to build classroom community. There were no specific rules as

to what happened during the morning group time; it was important because this was one of the few times the children sat together as a class.

Data Collection Techniques

The techniques I used to collect data in the settings described above included: videotaping of Focal Group meetings, Diversity Group meetings, classrooms, and whole group Inservice meetings; teacher reflections/journals; researcher journal/field notes/extended notes; student interviews/reflections; and student work samples. I analyzed data gathered using these techniques to understand (a) what happens when an administrator and teachers are involved in a study of culture, race, and language, (b) the process of my own experience as an administrator/participant, and (c) if and how our growing insights lead to the development of new classroom practices that nurture students' literate identities.

Videotaping. To better understand how teachers support student positive literate identities I videotaped once a month in Kim, Lyndsay, and Tammy's classrooms for the duration of the data collection period for a total of five times each. The duration of each tape was approximately 30 minutes. During the course of the study, I also videotaped the monthly Diversity Group meetings and the one whole group Inservice session that occurred on October 22, 2010. The use of video allowed me to capture detailed descriptions of classroom engagements and teachers' interactions adding elements not easily documented in observational field notes. Videotapes revealed body language, made it easier to identify students or faculty who are speaking and helped to reveal more intricate behavior not captured by audiotape (Hatch, 2002). With permission of the participants, it is possible that the clips from video data may be used later in conference

presentations, education courses, or professional development and training sessions (Patton, 2002). The use of videotapes also helped, when we used them in our Focal Group sessions, to enhance awareness of teacher-child interactions. Videotapes were transcribed and analyzed. Transcriptions were further reviewed by the teachers, Kim, Lyndsay, and Tammy for accuracy.

Audiotaping. I audiotaped the monthly Focal Group meetings with the primary participants as well as the One-to-One meetings I had with Kim, Lyndsay and Tammy. I used audiotaping as backup to videotaping. Audiotaping also allowed me to capture the One-to-One meetings that the teachers and I had because it required little set up and was portable.

Teacher journals. Each focal teacher kept a journal of their thoughts and reflections. Although I provided a composition notebook for each teacher, they chose to use various forms of recording their thoughts and reflections. Lyndsay wrote in her composition notebook whereas Kim used loose notebook paper in a folder. Tammy kept her journal in an electronic format and typed hers in an ongoing document. Although I had initially intended for teachers to keep separate journals, teachers felt it was easier to use one journal to document the various experiences and reflections. Teachers documented experiences and reflections from Diversity Group, home visits and classroom observations or questions in one teacher journal.

Diversity group and home visit journals. During our monthly Diversity Group meetings, teachers were asked to reflect in their journals after our discussions. Examples of questions that guided our discussions and their reflections were:

- Has today's discussion helped in your understanding of how to support students' literate identities? If so, in what ways? Do you feel it is important to do so? Why?
- What do you feel good about in terms of your own classroom practices and building children's literate identities? Why? How do those practices connect to what we discussed today?
- What do you question about your own classroom practices as a result of today's discussion? Why? What might you do differently?
- How can I help you as an administrator?

As we became involved in home and community experiences, related questions were a part of this group time and included questions such as:

- How does learning from families and communities help you to further understand issues of race, culture and language and other issues surrounding how to best support students' literate identities in the classroom?
- What language and literacy practices did you observe in the child's worlds (home and community)? Be sure to think beyond traditional literacies like books, magazines and newspapers. How does this help to define the child's identity as a literate person?

Classroom journals/field notes. The teachers who were primary participants reflected in their journals and recorded their insights, problems, ideas, questions or thoughts as well as interactions among or between students or between students and themselves. For example, Lyndsay wrote about how she helped a child during a written conversation by building on something she gleaned from her family visit. I asked

teachers to reflect on their daily activities in the classroom as they related to supporting students' literate identities and to discuss their struggles and successes with creating environments, both physical and emotional. Questions that guided their reflections included:

- How did you support your bilingual or multilingual children today?
- What did you do to increase other legitimate language and literacy practices that demonstrate to your students that there are many ways to be speakers, readers and writers?
- Did you interrupt a previous misconception a student may have had about another child's legitimate use of language or literacy? If so, how? Describe what you did.
- In what ways did you support students' language and literacy attempts that were of culturally and linguistically different from their own? What helped you to value the need to do so?

It was also important for the three primary participants to document their feelings as they worked with students and their families, articulating their fears, questions or revelations regarding how, or if, they used the information gained through whole group Inservice meetings, Focal Group meetings, Diversity Group meetings, One-to-One meetings or through home and community visits, to support student's literate identities. These entries were shared during meetings with the teachers. Teachers had the right not to disclose their thoughts.

Researcher/administrator's journal. As the researcher and the administrator in this study it was important that I also recorded my journey. It was particularly important

in this study to record my thinking, questions and feelings given that I wanted to reflect on my own practice as well as the teacher's practice. My journal entries from the various settings I observed provided me an opportunity to do so.

Diversity group and home visit entries. Spradley (1980) wrote that the researcher's journal is a place for the researcher to record daily thoughts, ideas, questions, wonderings and insights. This was critical as I contemplated how I engaged teachers in conversations that caused them to feel uncomfortable, challenged or supported. It was also important that I record my personal feelings, as I too was challenged, as the administrator involved in this process. Doing so helped me to understand my role in this process of creating professional development opportunities that assisted teachers in building their skills at creating supportive literate environments for all students. These notes helped as I attempted to create meaningful professional development engagements, but also served to document my growth over the course of this study. I also documented my experiences from my home and community visits. It was important for me to journal my feelings since I wanted to learn from families in ways that helped me to understand how to create professional development opportunities that ultimately nurtured children's positive literate identities in our classrooms.

Field notes/extended notes. Each time I entered the classrooms, Diversity Group meetings or whole group Inservice meetings, homes, or communities as the researcher, I took field notes using thick description of my surroundings and interactions (Spradley, 1980).

In classrooms, I was particularly interested in how teachers utilized the discussion topics from our Diversity Group meetings to support students' literate identities in the

classrooms. I looked at teacher practices, the types of materials they selected for instruction, the language and terminology they used with students. I also looked at student's interactions with each other and how what students believed about language and literacy differences was supported, challenged or interrupted. My classroom observation questions included:

- Are teachers using the information they glean from professional development opportunities and from families to support literate identities in the classroom?
If so, how?
- Where do I see instances of children's literate identities furthered/supported or interrupted/negated?
- Are teachers' valuing the out-of-school literacies and making them visible to students?
- Does this help to nurture children's literate identities? How? What evidence demonstrates this?
- In what other ways are teachers nurturing literate identities? What language or terminology are they using to support or not support literate identities?
- How do the students interact with each other? Do they nurture each other's language and literacy attempts? How?

During whole faculty Inservice, Diversity Group and Focal Group meetings, I recorded the interactions between and among the participants. I looked for how, as the administrator, I supported the process of professional development that cultivated practices, which nurtured student's positive literate identities. I recorded my interactions

during the Diversity Group meetings as a participant. Questions that guided my field notes and reflections included:

- In what ways do I support the process of professional development?
- What are the resources provided? Time and planning involved?
- What are the challenges? How are they negotiated?
- In what ways do I encourage and support teachers' discussions?
- In what ways do I suppress or discourage their attempts during discussions?
- Where are the times when I am the administrator during the meetings?
- When am I a learner?
- How is the role of administrator/learner challenged?

During or after home and community visits, I described the settings and created maps. I also asked questions that helped me understand families' home uses of language and literacy. Questions that guided my field notes and reflections included:

- What are the out-of-school literacies in children and families worlds?
- What do the families consider to be literate behaviors that are important to getting along in their worlds?
- How does this knowledge of home literacies and literate behaviors help to define the child's literate identity?
- How do children see themselves at home compared to school?
- How do families support student's literate identities at home?
- Who are the people at home and in the community who teach the child what he or she knows as a speaker, reader, and writer.

- What do they do to support the child's literate behaviors? How are they nurtured?

Students' reflections. Students were asked from time to time to express verbally about how they feel about themselves as speakers, readers, and/or writers; or what was important to them in terms of what they choose to read, write and/or speak about. The teachers or I asked them to orally describe, draw, or write a story about themselves at school, home or in the community. Anecdotal records by the teacher and my field notes captured dialogue not captured during videotaped sessions. Some of the things I wanted to know were how students defined themselves as speakers, readers, and writers in the classroom and at home. In other words, did they identify as literate and if so, how? What kinds of engagements did they see as valid language and literacy practices?

Student interviews. I conducted student interviews beginning in September in all three classrooms at least once. Spradley (1980) reminds us that we need to know what questions to ask but caution that they should not be scripted, but rather open to the students. Through these interviews with children, I wanted to understand more about how children's literate identities are supported in their classrooms. These questions allowed me to see if teachers' classroom practices nurture student's positive literate identities. These questions revealed children's beliefs and attitudes regarding legitimate language and literacy practices. I entered the classroom with an idea of some sample questions that guided the interviews such as:

- What kinds of things can we read?
- Who is a good reader in your class? Why?
- Describe a girl or boy who speaks really well?

- Who is a great writer in your class?
- When do we learn to read or write?
- What kinds of things do we read?
- What can your teacher do to learn more about you?

Graue and Walsh (1995) found that grouping children together helps them to feel more relaxed during the process and when children are interviewed in small groups their answers typically do not influence one another but rather provide children a comfortable situation with which to speak. They also note that “group interviews capitalize on social interaction” (p. 147) which supported the theoretical framework of this study. With this in mind I interviewed the students in groups of three or four, but I also conducted informal interviews as I played with children in centers or read to them individually or in pairs or small groups.

Student work samples. Student work samples such as drawings, sculptures, and children’s writing such as written conversations were collected to see how or if they communicated ideas that provided insights into their literate identities. Student work samples were helpful in addition to their interviews due to the fact that children expressed themselves in a variety of ways. For example, one child verbally described an experience while another drew or created something that revealed what they were feeling. Alternatively, student work samples also were used to check for negative cases. For example, children said one thing to appease an adult or teacher, but revealed another in their drawing or writing. When applicable, copies of the student work were made so that the child did not have to part with any item. When items, such as a sculpture or structure for example, were created, pictures were used to capture students’ work.

Member Checking and Triangulation

Member checking. Since it was important to capture the participants' perspectives it was vital to solicit their continued input as I analyzed the data as well as during the writing process. I met with the three teachers in the study once a month to review data and check for mutual understanding throughout the study. I also went back and forth presenting the data analysis to teachers, teaching assistants, and family members to further check the data patterns and codes for shared meaning making (Long, et al., 2006; Merriam, 2009). Member checking and triangulation of the data helped to ensure trustworthiness of the study. As I wrote about my findings I provided drafts of the interpretations section of the dissertation to the three primary participant teachers to check again for accuracy of interpretation. Finally, as I was writing the dissertation, I found it necessary to go back to participants – teachers, teaching assistants, and family members - to gain clarity and further perspectives. I found that this was essential to my understanding and allowed me to reflect more on my thinking and practice in the process.

Triangulation. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) identify “data triangulation: the use of a variety of data sources in a study” and “methodological triangulation: the use of multiple methods to study a single problem” (p. 46). According to Wolcott (2008), *triangulation* is a term used “to remind of the need to corroborate findings” (p. 216). Triangulation was accomplished in this study through multiple methods and sources of data, including: teachers, children, families, as well as video tape and field notes in professional development, homes and communities, diversity group sessions, monthly meetings with teachers, classrooms, interviews and reflective journals.

Record Keeping and Organization

I kept all data organized in notebooks separated by tabs indicating classrooms. Within the classroom tabs were tabs identifying the types of data taken. For example, each classroom had a class binder identifying the teacher, video taped transcripts, student interviews, etc. All transcriptions were backed up by a disk, hard drive, and hard copy. All data was stored in the binders in a locked file cabinet, in a locked room in the child development program's administrative office as well as a copy in possession of the researcher. Signed informed consent forms and district approval documentation were kept on-site at all times separate from the data. Videotaped recordings were stored on a laptop computer and thumb drive that were in the possession of the researcher at all times.

Informed Consent

The informed consent forms (Appendix F: student and Appendix G: teacher) described the study and its intended purpose. They also described the benefits, risks, confidentiality, and provided the researcher's contact information should participants have questions about the study at any time. Prior to conducting my study, I secured written permission from all teachers and their students' families. Signed informed consent forms were kept in the SCRCDD administrative office, locked in a secure location, and separate from the data. Teachers and students' families had the right to cease participation in the study at any time without consequence.

Data Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) propose that qualitative researchers are creating a picture with the data as opposed to going in to the study with the picture already formulated. Dyson and Genishi (2005) wrote that:

The analysis of qualitative data is inductive, grounded in particular pieces of data that are sorted and interrelated in order to understand the dimensions and dynamics of some phenomenon as it is enacted by intentional social actors in some time and place. (p. 82)

This suggests that data analysis in qualitative research tends to move from the specifics to generalizations (Hatch, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009) which are constructed as patterns or themes which are then further grouped into possible categories.

The analysis process used in my study involved looking for patterns and/or themes in the data to describe what is going on (Gibbs, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Spradley, 1980) within and across our meetings, journals, classroom setting, student artifacts and home and community visits. When analyzing data I made detailed notes to identify any relevant pieces of data (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995) and I constructed patterns by using domain and cultural analysis and using creative codes to name them (Spradley, 1980). Domain analysis involves creating individual categories to describe patterns discerned from review of the data. Cultural domains include smaller categories determined by having meaningful relationships within the categories. For example, in this study I looked at how teachers supported positive literate identities and worked to identify the ways in which that happened in classrooms. Together we created cultural domains of supporting children's positive literacies which included getting to know children, bringing families, etc., all of which were directly related to supporting children's positive literate identities. Creating domains helped to

make sense of the data (Hatch, 2002; Spradley, 1980). Dyson and Genishi (2005) reminded us that we are not on the search for a “singular truth... but rather thematic trends, meaningful events and dynamic processes” (p. 111). This helped to understand what was going on in the setting and helped to further refine questions as the study unfolded. This tenet also aligned with the sociocultural framework of this study.

The data were analyzed according to three phases. I began by analyzing observational notes, journals, transcriptions of videotape of Focal Group, Diversity Group and whole group Inservice meetings, and classroom observations. I coded these data considering potential insights about my role as administrator in the process of providing professional development for teachers that helped teachers support their understanding of supporting students’ literate identities. In particular, I analyzed to understand challenges that are met and how those challenges were negotiated. Second, I looked at the data set and constructed patterns or themes that helped me understand if and how the professional development experience (including home and community visits) impacted teachers’ support of the development of children’s positive literate identities in the classroom. In the third phase, I analyzed data from families and children seeking further insights about the support for the development of children’s literate identities in the classroom.

Throughout the analysis process, I conducted a negative case analyses, looking for discrepancies and anomalies as well as supporting evidence in determining how administrators create professional development opportunities that support teachers’ ability to sustain and nurture students’ positive literate identities in classrooms.

I was cognizant of the point that Smagorinsky (2008) makes, that “coding establishes the researcher’s subjectivity in relation to the data and the framework through which data are interpreted” (p 399). In other words, I understood that another researcher looking at the same data set might view the data differently. My analysis reflected my theoretical framework as well as the input of teachers who provided feedback as the coding and themes were developed.

Analyzing video and audiotapes. Videotapes were transcribed monthly using Rowe’s (1994) transcription conventions (Appendix H). These conventions were used because they most closely addressed conversation with young children but could be used with adults as well. Additional conventions were added when needed. It was important to transcribe and analyze data as the study unfolded to identify specific questions that helped guide future tapings. Dyson and Genishi (2005) created a “kind of global brainstorming” (p. 92) around the initial coding of audiotapes. They asked, “How can we describe what we think is going on here?” (p. 92). During the analysis process I looked for information to help me describe what was going on in our professional development meetings and began name it. In the classrooms, I looked for classroom practices that supported students’ positive literate identities.

Analyzing interviews. All interviews were analyzed and patterns were constructed that supported (as well as those that were anomalies) domains found through analysis of field notes as well as videotapes. New domains or categories were created given that perspectives from parents or other family members sometimes differed from teachers and students. Dyson and Genishi (2005) advised to “keep a running list of all descriptors” (p. 85) so as to further develop more in-depth category system. I kept a

running list of descriptors as I wrote in the margins of my transcribed data. For example, some of the descriptors I initially used to code family responses regarding classroom practices were: supported language, cozy environment, built self-esteem, value family and parent involvement. I constructed patterns that identified families' concerns, their sense of being supported or not being supported by teachers/administrators/schools, and/or the kinds of practices that they considered literate at home and at school.

Timeline

I began collecting data for this study in June, 2010. The last day of formal data collection was on December 20, 2010 (Figure 3.1). The specific details of the research timeline can be found in Appendix I. Figure 3.1 provides an abbreviated chart of my research timeline.

Research Timeline	
August 2008- June 2010	Pilot Study
June 2010 – August 2010	Research study began Collected data: Researcher/administrator journal
August 2010 – December 2010	Data collection began in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • three classrooms; • teacher/administrator meetings; • home and community visits Transcribe data Preliminary data analysis In-process member checking
December 2010 – June 2011	Transcribe data Primary data analysis Retrospective member checking
July 2011 – September 2011	Development of findings Further data analysis Further member checking Writing and revising dissertation
September 2011 – March 2013	Ongoing data analysis Final member checking Writing and revising dissertation

Figure 3.1. An abbreviated chart of research timeline.

Issues of Consideration

Issues of consideration critical to this study included: rapport with participants and the role of the researcher. These issues are described in detail below.

Rapport with Participants: Issues of Power and Position

Glesne (1999) suggests that “in qualitative inquiry, the nature of relationships depends on at least two factors: the quality of your interactions to support your research-or rapport-and the quality of your self-awareness of the potential effects of self on your research-or subjectivity” (p. 95). Gaining rapport meant that I had to secure trust with the participants. I recognized that my position as administrator did not necessarily guarantee rapport with the teachers, students and families but I have worked over the past 15 years to establish a culture of care and understanding in our program. Teachers’ evaluations of me as an administrator in the past revealed that they felt comfortable coming to me with questions, ideas or comments and they felt that they were contributory members of our program’s thought collective. At the same time, I understood that a power structure existed and that there was no denying that I am the person who evaluated their work. In conjunction with deeply ingrained expectations for how schools and education have typically functioned and the varied attitudes and experiences toward administration that teachers bring with them, the power differential certainly played a role in our relationship and it was therefore likely that I may have never accurately understood how they felt about my role in their professional lives.

Families who have been with our program for several years may have felt more comfortable with me than parents entering the program. Anonymous annual National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) surveys of parents and

family members who children attended our program revealed that over 90% of those responding sensed that there is reciprocity in the relationships in our program. For example, results of prior annual surveys, suggested that parents felt that they have a say into the development of the overall program goals and objectives (NAEYC parent survey results, 2009). Despite our Child Development Program's long history of having worked with families and my efforts at maintaining a sense of community for families, and children, I was cognizant of the fact that some parents may have responded positively on surveys in fear of repercussions (despite their anonymous format) from the teachers or the school. I was also aware that family members may have had prior negative experiences with teachers, administration and school practices in other programs and institutions and that I may have never fully understood or captured their true feelings.

I attempted to be extremely cognizant of these things and worked to give families and teachers a voice during the research process. I did this by inviting families and teachers to review data and provide ideas and comments during the analysis process. I conducted extensive member checks during both the analysis and writing processes. This may have helped to gain trust and reduce the power I hold as researcher and administrator. I was hopeful that both teachers and parents felt they were active contributors to this research study. The informed consent forms (Appendix F and G) explicitly explained the research study and specifically stated that there were no consequences for not participating in the program and that participation in the study would not have a negative affect on children.

Role of the Researcher/Researcher Subjectivity and Bias

I designed this study as the researcher, but also as a primary participant. I wanted to understand not only what happens when teachers engage in the examination of culture, race, and language, but also the process of my own learning. Thus, I was a researcher/participant, a role that is somewhat different from that of being merely a participant observer. Spradley writes that “the participant observer comes to the situation with two purposes: (a) to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and (b) to observe the activities, people and physical aspects of the situation” (p. 54). As an administrator who was very familiar with my school setting, students and families, I came to this research as an insider with questions unique to our setting, but also as a participant who was engaged as a learner along with the other primary participants. Due to the nature of my role as lead teacher/administrator of the program, I saw my role as moving back and forth from “passive participation” to “complete participation” (Spradley, 1980, p. 59-61). For example, I was more of a passive participant as I observed a conversation between a teacher and a student, an active participant as I engaged students in their classroom, and a complete participant when the teachers and I interacted together in our Diversity Group and whole group Inservice sessions.

As Spradley (1980) suggested, I recognized that there are aspects of my position as administrator that must be acknowledged. For example, regardless of how comfortable I thought that the other participants (teachers, students, and family members) might have felt with me, the power structure existed because of my role as administrator.

In qualitative research, the researcher understands that objectivity is impossible to maintain, that biases will affect the study, and hence subjectivity is a part of the data

analysis process (Rex, et al., 2006). Therefore, the researcher must continually make visible his/her biases so as to not jeopardize the integrity of this study. Reflecting on my own biases as they could have impacted this study, I perceived them to include my experiences as a White, middle-class, English speaking heterosexual, Christian women as well as the intimate position I held as an administrator within the program. I brought my strong views about the importance of understanding issues of marginalization and discrimination as basic to learning to teach. I brought my biases about literacy practices, believing in holistic, meaning-making processes as critical to children's learning. I brought convictions that all children bring rich resources to the classroom and that teachers must learn to value and utilize these resources as foundational and critical to children's learning and success in school.

Conclusion and Organization of Findings

This study was designed to understand what happens when a school administrator and teachers of three- four- and five-year-old children engage in long-term professional study designed to explore issues of race, culture and language for the purpose of generating classroom practices for the purpose of nurturing student's positive literate identities. It further sought to understand the administrator's role in this process and the challenges met as well as how they were negotiated. Grounded in a sociocultural belief that learning happens when we interact with others and that all students bring with them an identity steeped in rich cultural knowledge, expertise, and experience, I entered this study with the belief that upon students' entrance into school, teachers are responsible for creating learning environments that support their growth and build on existing knowledge, particularly in the area of language and literacy. I also held the conviction

that these environments can unwittingly perpetuate discriminatory practices that destroy children's positive literate identities when teachers have few opportunities to explore issues of culture, race, and language and, in particular, to examine biases that may be unrecognized but that impact teaching. I felt strongly that administrators are responsible for creating professional development opportunities that help teachers support student learning; recognizing that such experiences rarely get at the core issues such as race, identity, cultural and linguistic marginalization. Through my review of the literature and my own professional experience, I knew that, just as rarely are administrators involved in the process as learners themselves.

Although research in the area of diversity is vast, work that examines intersection of issues of diversity and professional development - particularly settings in which administrators and teachers learn together - and the impact on classroom practices that nurture the literate identities of very young children is rare. The methodology for this study was designed so that I could document and describe such a process as teachers and I traveled this journey together to build on and contribute to the research in the field of early childhood education.

I present my findings in the following three chapters to coincide with my research questions. Chapter Four addresses challenges we encountered and ways that we attempted to negotiate those challenges; Chapter Five examines classroom practices with regard to how teachers used their learning through our professional development experiences to enhance former practices or create new ones in support of students' positive literate identities; and Chapter Six discusses my role – the administrator's role - in creating and facilitating the professional development experiences. The dissertation

closes with Chapter Seven which is a discussion of implications from this study for educators wishing to engage in critical study of issues related to race, culture and language. Implications are provided for professional development, for administrators, and for teachers as well as for future research.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHALLENGES AND NEGOTIATING CHALLENGES

It was a beautiful August morning and the sun was bright as children and their families arrived on our school campus. The five classroom portables, each adorned with flags reading, “Welcome Everyone,” were ready to welcome new and returning students. Children were dressed in pressed pants and shirts, dresses, bows and new book bags. Some appeared hesitant, clinging to their parents’ hands, and others were carried, their arms wrapped around parents’ necks. Other children, those who were with us last year, ran ahead of their parents or caregivers to greet their teachers for another school year. Teachers too experienced the range of emotions, excitement for the new school year and returning students and their families, but also some trepidation regarding the few very young children, who had never been away from home or family. The first day of school that year also marked the continuation of the professional journey begun two years prior; this year we would focus our ongoing explorations of diversity specifically on issues of race, culture and language marginalization through a variety of professional development experiences in the hopes of cultivating practices supportive of students’ positive literate identities.

At the end of the first week of school, I gathered three teachers, Kim, Lyndsay and Tammy, for what was hopefully the beginning of a deeper focus on equity issues following whole faculty Inservice sessions and smaller group Diversity meetings the year

before. The four of us planned to meet weekly as a *Focal Group* in addition to monthly Diversity Group meetings and whole faculty Inservice days in which we would participate with other faculty members. Due to the hectic nature of school life - mine as well as theirs – the weekly Focal Group sessions we hoped for were ultimately limited to monthly meetings.

Although these teachers and I had worked together for the previous two years studying issues of equity and diversity with other faculty members, this August marked the beginning of more focused work and the research through which I studied the process of our experiences. I sought to understand: What happens when a school administrator and teachers explore issues of culture, race, and language for the purpose of generating teaching practices that support and nurture students' positive literate identities? In particular, I wanted to know:

- What challenges are met? How are those challenges negotiated?
- How is the experience reflected in day-to-day life in the classrooms, particularly as it relates to supporting children's positive literate identities?
- What is the role of the administrator in this process?

Audio, video, and artifactual data were collected during sessions with varying groups of faculty (Table 4.1) over the course of this study: (a) *monthly* sessions with Focal Group (three primary participants -Tammy, Lyndsay, Kim, and me), (b) *monthly* Diversity Group meetings (a group of seven teachers – on whom secondary data were collected - which included Tammy, Lyndsay, Kim and me), (c) *two* Inservice Sessions (all faculty members - 13 teachers - from across nine sites within the child development program), and (d) *approximately once a month* One-to-One meetings with primary

participants. See Chapter Three for detailed descriptions of each faculty group. Data were also collected (audio, video, field notes, and artifactual data) during regular observations in the classrooms of the three Focal Participants; during home visits and other community experiences in which we engaged; and from interviews with students, teachers and family members.

Table 4.1. Groupings of faculty members in this study highlighting the four primary participants in each group; pseudonyms are used for all secondary participants.

Focal Group (Primary participants; meeting monthly as a group and approximately once a month one-to-one with me)	Diversity Group (Primary and secondary participants; voluntary group consisting of teachers working on their district- required Goals Based Evaluations (GBE); meeting monthly as a group)	Inservice Session (Primary and secondary participants; mandatory meetings for the entire faculty; meeting twice during the study)
Kim Lyndsay Tammy Sabina	Kim Lyndsay Tammy Sabina Shirley Sally James	Kim Lyndsay Tammy Sabina Shirley Sally James Lynn Samantha Diane Andrea Thomas Ashlee Eve

I planned curriculum for the monthly Diversity Group sessions, which formed the nucleus of this study (see details in syllabus in Appendix E). From August 2010 to December 2010 those plans involved Tammy, Kim, Lyndsay and me (as primary participants) along with three other teachers in equity and cultural conversations that

consisted of the following topics: (a) looking at our cultural selves – based on the belief that before we can truly understand others, we must first understand ourselves; (b) identity development – recognizing that children come to us with an identity steeped in cultural and linguistic knowledge that should be valued and utilized in classrooms; (c) cultural and linguistic marginalization – working to recognize and challenge marginalization and understand how it affects students’ performance in schools; (d) issues of race - in particular, how race and racism are manifested in classrooms and schools and tied to learning opportunities; and (e) language and literacy development – how children develop as literate beings. The exploration of these topics was supported by readings (see list of readings in Appendix E), guiding questions, home and community visits and debriefings and book studies, which provided us with direction, focus and a foundation for discourse.

Findings resulting from a pattern analysis of all data are organized in this chapter according to two overarching themes which align with the study’s first two research questions. Those themes are: (a) challenges (that we encountered through the process of our study) and (b) beginning to negotiate challenges (ways in which we attempted to address our challenges, learn from them, and alter attitudes or practice as a result). Discussions of those themes are prefaced by further introductions to each of the major players in this study: brief descriptions of our backgrounds as revealed during our Diversity Group, Focal Group and One-to-One meetings. The introduction of major players does not, however, merely serve to provide descriptions of participants as in Chapter Three but it constitutes findings about each participant based on analysis of data and the understanding that our stories matter (Boutte, 1998; Hamel, 2006; Nieto, 2009;

Milner, 2010) in the process of professional development that seeks to deepen educators' understandings of self and others. Thus, to understand the challenges we met and how we tried to negotiate them, it is important to learn a little more about each of us.

Understanding Others Meant First Understanding Ourselves

Riessman (2003) wrote: "The meanings of life events are not fixed or constant; rather they evolve, influenced by subsequent life events. The stories we tell to ourselves, to each other, to researchers, offer a unique window into these formations and reformations" (p. 331). In other words, our personal lives and experiences provide a glimpse of the people we are and the people we are growing to be through our experiences in life and with each other. Also, it is important to note that our stories are partial and incomplete, given that we each chose to reveal specific experiences and not others and that these narratives are continually evolving as they are shaped by present and future events (Riessman, 2003).

This study set out to examine the process of professional development designed to support educators' deepened understanding of others. As found by other researchers, we learned that this required first understanding ourselves recognizing we cannot begin to value others if we are not aware of our own biases, cultures and beliefs (Ayers, 1993; Boutte, 1998; Earick, 2009; Howard, 1999; Milner, 2010). Bringing personal stories and experiences into our conversations was one way to begin to examine self while learning more about each other. Our conversations, grounded in the specific readings and engagements outlined in Appendix E, revealed some of the ways in which we came to our beliefs about race, culture and language. This knowledge about our pasts allowed us to begin negotiating the challenges we faced regarding our biases or stereotypes of others

by making us more aware of our ideas and attitudes and to consider how and where they had been developed; these conversations helped us define ourselves as we worked to better support students' positive literate identities.

Although some of us shared more than others, we all engaged in personal storytelling at some point. Our discussions often centered on experiences with other people and travel (which helped us understand the importance of valuing other ways of knowing), interactions with our families (which provided insight into each other's values and beliefs), and experiences outside the classroom (which influenced our work and interactions with students, families and each other). Teacher experiences and stories presented here are not presented to be profiles or comprehensive in any way but merely a glimpse into each participant's background as a backdrop for understanding further findings.

Kim

Kim spoke often of her sons, who were eight and six years old, and of her husband. She shared that one of her biggest reasons for placing her two sons in public schools was to be with a diverse group of people. This was important to Kim because she witnessed, through her husband's business, what happens when people have limited experiences with culture, language and beliefs and have no awareness of worlds beyond their own, insinuating that this was necessary to be able to succeed in one's work. She remarked:

When there is one dominant group and they [her children] miss out on these learning experiences and you get to adulthood and these are the people, I mean [my husband] sees it all the time, big corporation guys or big state agency people leading the group who are so ignorant [about] others. (One-to-One Meeting, October 21, 2010)

Kim brought in many other stories of her own children and the importance of their experience with other cultures. Another example was when she told of an incident involving her younger son's Korean classmate, Joshua. Kim explained that her son's kindergarten teacher sent home a flyer about a Korean festival in town and that he asked her, "Mom can we go? Because it's Joshua's." Kim spoke about how she would have never randomly taken her son to the Korean festival had Joshua not been a good friend of his. She felt that it was very important to her son to go to the festival to support Joshua and his family and to "foster a relationship with them." Kim's story spurred a conversation regarding the importance of "putting a name to culture and language." It was not just the Korean festival; it was Joshua's festival. I added that, "children can identify with a friend or someone who means something to them. It just makes more sense to them that way" (Diversity Group meeting, October 21, 2010).

Tammy

In many of our meetings Tammy talked about her two young children, ages five and two, as well as her husband. During a One-to-One meeting Tammy shared how she worked at home with her son, teaching him about respecting others. In particular, she stressed her need for him to respect his teacher regardless of the cultural differences that might exist between them. She offered, "Respect is not just for when it's comfortable. Respect is him making the earnest decision to respect what [his teacher] says the first time." Tammy explained that she wanted her own children to understand that for someone else to respect them, they had to respect others. She continued, "I want my child to respect the person he's with, not because it fits him but that he learns to respect people,

whether they look like me [his mom] or not” (October 5, 2010). Tammy explained that having children helped her realize the importance of valuing differences.

Tammy also shared some of her experiences growing up often as the only Black student in all White schools. These stories often included her mother who was a major influence in her life. Tammy told us that her mother intentionally placed her in schools where she would be with White students so she “could assimilate into the White schools.” Always aware of her “Blackness,” Tammy explained differences in her interactions across racial groups, “While I always got along well with my White friends, the kinds of conversations I had with my White friends were very different than the conversations I had with my Black friends” (One-to-One meeting, December, 2010). I asked Tammy if it was a kind of “code switching” between the different groups of friends but Tammy believed that she really did not do much code switching in terms of the way she used language, but that it was “more about what we talked about that make the conversations different.”

She talked about how, as one of the only Black students in her school she would often be looked at as having “all knowledge about all things Black.” She relayed her frustration with being called on to be the Black expert when she told the group, “I’m just Black like me. I don’t do any other Black but this Black, you know? It’s just so much pressure” (September 16, 2010).

Lyndsay

Lyndsay was a second year teacher and came to our school right after graduation. Thus, of all the teachers Lyndsay had the most current theoretical understanding of issues related to race, culture and language due to the specific classes she took at the university

that addressed issues of equity in education. She spoke of her experiences growing up in the south as a Christian, with her parents, two younger sisters, and even younger brother, who was five-years-old. She spoke of her recent engagement to her fiancée, and upcoming nuptials. Lyndsay spoke of how she grew up but how she envisioned life differently for her own future children. Her comments reveal how her attitudes towards accepting others have changed due to her experiences with university classes, with travel and learning about others in the world, and acknowledged biases she held prior to those experiences:

I would never say that I was brought up bad, but I do want to introduce my own children to other languages, cultures and religions. I think the first time I went out of the country really opened my eyes to the world and that everything in my life isn't all there is; there is so much more. I think there are so many judgments that I have made in my life because I thought the only way to live was the way I was living, and I want to make sure that my children appreciate all the differences around them, but find similarities and accept who a person is. (One-to-One meeting, December, 2010)

As a young, single, second year teacher, the experiences Lyndsay shared also centered on her university classes and her learning about culture at school. On many occasions she discussed that “her eyes were opened up” in terms of issues of race, culture and language marginalization through her interactions with professors, classmates, readings and assignments given during that time. In particular, she spoke about her realization of the privileges she was afforded, “being White” and coming from what she felt to be “a middle-class family.” The classes she took along with her experiences were important in our understanding of Lyndsay but also provided us with jumping off points for discussion that helped us learn to rethink the idea of one right way of existing. For example, in a Focal Group meeting, early on in the study, we discussed how important continued intentional study was to our understanding of the students in our program and

their families. Lyndsay's talked about how her university classes, "made me want to learn more and to be open to more cultural issues . . . and more accepting of others"

(September 16, 2010).

Sabina

As the administrator and facilitator of many of our discussions, I shared my experiences as I hoped they would provide insight to me as a person and as an administrator. I also hoped that my experiences and stories would provide a platform to share how my coming to understand issues related to race, culture and language was helping me to move forward in more just ways in the educational setting and in life. On many occasions I relayed stories from my youth or provided examples of my learning trajectory. I felt that it was important that I placed myself in a vulnerable position so that teachers knew it was okay to take risks. I used stories of my childhood, my children and husband and discussed the shifts in my thinking as I took classes, read books and stepped outside my cultural comfort zone. So much of what I requested of my teachers were opportunities and strategies that helped me reach beyond my once held beliefs.

I shared my experiences from the classroom as a special education teacher and early childhood teacher. I also spoke of my two boys, ages 19 and six, and my husband, who was born and raised in the South. I shared my personal experience growing up with a father with a disability and my disequilibrium in moving from Brooklyn, New York, to Manchester, Tennessee, when I was a junior in high school. I relayed my personal history of how I grew up in a diverse area in Brooklyn, New York, and how I thought I "knew about diversity because I lived in a diverse neighborhood and had friends of Color and of diverse religions" but how, looking back, this could not have been further from the truth.

It was true that I had diverse experiences and many friends of Color, but I was completely oblivious to the racism, oppression and language marginalization that existed.

Patterns and Anomalies Across Our Background Stories

Key insights from our stories revealed that we were all middle-class and each of us grew up Christian although from differing Christian belief systems (Baptist, Methodist and Catholic), with the exception of Kim who converted to Judaism as an adult. We each experienced race, culture and language in our own unique way: Tammy as one of the only Black students in her school; my experience living in a diverse community in New York; Kim's travels around the world; and Lyndsay's learning about diversity at the university. The stories we chose to share are those that we felt immediately connected to our professional development conversations. However, with exception to Tammy's experience our pasts do not reveal that we ever reflected on our identity in any of our lived experiences. Kim, Lyndsay and I, as White middle-class women, had never seriously explored our understanding or notions of what it meant to be "not like me" prior to our explorations in this study or, in my case, prior to my graduate course work.

It is important to keep these stories in mind when reading further as they matter in the process of the participants' learning. For example, when Kim stated on several occasions that, "I just don't get it. I want to, but I just don't understand how our students are really all that different from one another." This reflects her lack of prior examination of how race, racism and marginalization have and continue to privilege some and marginalize others. Tammy reminded her of this when she responded to her by saying, "You wouldn't feel it because you've never had to think that way. You know you just 'ain't Black, boo" (Diversity Group meeting, November 4, 2010). Understanding that

Kim had minimal, if any, experiences, prior to our study, in which she was asked to critically examine her White privilege helps us understand how this affected our learning.

Quintero (2009) reminded us that, “People’s own histories are the context for developing identity, learning cultural information, and learning all new information. Reviewing the past enables one to view the present in a critical way and to effect changes in the future” (p. 7). As Quintero, I realized through this study how much our stories and experiences matter in professional development because they helped to shed light on our previous held beliefs that may have been at the source of many of the challenges we faced, particularly in terms of what we thought to be, “typical,” “normal,” or “right.” But also our experiences and stories provided an opportunity to learn and move beyond previous held beliefs in an attempt to negotiate those challenges.

Challenges

The experiences and stories of primary participants shared in the previous paragraphs provide a backdrop against which I was able to understand more about the challenges that we encountered throughout the process of exploring diversity issues. While I do not want to communicate that these challenges were in any way linear or disconnected from each other, they are presented separately for clarity as they centered around: (a) exposing our own biases and stereotypes; (b) confronting families’ biases; (c) failing to respond to students and families in culturally sensitive ways; and (d) getting lost in the process (Table 4.2). Although the challenges highlighted here are few in number, they are significant in that we revisited them over and over throughout the study and across all data sources.

Table 4.2. Challenges encountered in the process of examining issues of race, culture, and language.

Exposing Our Own Biases and Stereotypes	Confronting Families' Biases and Stereotypes	Failing to Respond in Culturally Sensitive Ways	Lost in the Process
<p>Naming biases</p> <p><i>Viewing America as the "right way"</i></p> <p><i>Wanting to "fix" kids: Deficit views</i></p> <p>Challenges that came to light as we named our biases</p> <p><i>Our own nervousness: Fear with difference</i></p> <p><i>Struggling to know when our judgments about children were biased or when we used deflection tactics to avoid confronting biases.</i></p> <p><i>Romanticizing</i></p> <p><i>Essentializing</i></p>	<p>Holidays & celebrations</p> <p>Black Stereotypes</p> <p><i>Black people buy liquor</i></p> <p><i>Going to a "good school"</i></p> <p>Struggling to know how to interrupt biased talk</p>	<p>Aware of cultural ineptness</p> <p><i>Aware of potentially biased responses: Outing our biases</i></p> <p><i>Aware of limited linguistic or cultural knowledge</i></p> <p>Unaware of biased responses that perpetuate deficit views</p>	<p>Bird-walking to find safer ground</p> <p>Being unprepared</p> <p>Lost because of unclear definitions: What are we looking for?</p> <p>Getting lost sometimes led to new understandings</p>

Exposing Our Own Biases and Stereotypes

Recognizing and confronting our own biases and stereotypes were important aspects of our learning because this allowed us to begin examining reasons behind our dispositions and discuss ways that our views had direct impact on our teaching. At the same time, coming to recognize our own biases posed challenges that were not always easy to overcome. Before discussing those challenges, I name biases that were recurrent

themes in the data as well as those that were only found once or twice but significant in the impact they had on the thinking of the group or a group member. Then I examine issues/challenges we encountered in the process of recognizing and discussing those biases.

Naming biases. Naming/exposing our biases was evident throughout our professional development conversations. Sometimes these biases were revealed in the words of only one member of the group and sometimes there were multiple examples. Since any self-reflection about bias was at the heart of this study and each time we put our own biases forward it generated important conversations within the group, it was therefore important to discuss even isolated examples here.

Viewing America as the “right way”. During our Diversity Group meetings, the teachers and I often spoke of our past experiences as well as current ones which brought up challenges as we began recognizing biases we did not realize we had or biases that we felt we had overcome. Kim shared one such bias on several occasions as she described how, prior to her travel outside the U.S., and her two years living in Germany with her family, that she had always perceived America as “the best.” She explained that she thought America did everything better but that when she traveled overseas she realized that “we’re just a little dot in all of this.” She shared that the act of reflecting on this bias helped her better understand the perspectives we were exploring in our group: the notion that there is no “one right way,” but that there are many ways to perceive, behave and use language, parent, and teach that are “right” and “acceptable” depending on the cultural context.

As discussed earlier, prior to Lyndsay's opportunity to travel out of the country she believed that the only way to live was the way she was living. She shared those biases:

I think the first time I went out of the country really opened my eyes to the world and that everything in my life isn't all there is; there is so much more. I think there are so many judgments that I have made in my life because I thought the only way to live was the way I was living, and I want to make sure that my children appreciate all the differences around them, but find similarities and accept who a person is. (One-to-One meeting, December, 2010)

Wanting to “fix” kids: Deficit views. In a subsequent Diversity Group meeting, I shared my experience as a young teacher, 23 years ago, teaching in an early childhood special education program. I described that I wanted to bring children home with me as an attempt to “fix them.” I reluctantly admitted my bias regarding some of the students' parents – that I then believed that they did not care as much as I cared about their children. I explained my prior belief that, if parents did care, their children would be clean, or read to, or some other aspect of education and upbringing. This prompted other teachers in the Diversity Group to share how in the past, they held deficit views or were biased about children from backgrounds different from their own. For example, Sally shared a story about how she judged her students' families when they did not participate in school-related functions and activities. Explaining that, in a past teaching situation, only about 10% of her students' families showed up for school functions. She recalled:

I would make assumptions that parents didn't care. I didn't always investigate and take the time [to understand families]. And at that point I didn't really know to look further to see that a lot of times that those parents may have been working two jobs and that they were doing all they could just to put food on the table. (November 4, 2010)

Confronting our own past and present biases was particularly important as we discussed issues each of us faced in our own classrooms. As will be described in Chapter

Five, this ultimately allowed us to work toward recognizing and eliminating our deficit views of children and their families and thinking about what that meant in terms of practice. For example, bringing biases into our conversations helped us understand deficit language often associated with children from low-wealth communities. We spoke about children in our classrooms from such communities as commonly being labeled “at risk” for school failure. Tammy pointed out that the assumption that “my intellect is directly related to my mom and [how much] she makes” was unfair. I commented that, “children in free child development programs or those receiving vouchers were often viewed from these deficit perspectives.” Mimicking commonly-used deficit language, Sally added, “well you’re ‘AT RISK’.” I used an excerpt from one of the books we were reading for diversity book study - *Telling a Different Story: Teaching and Literacy in an Urban Preschool* (Wilson, 1999) - to address this deficit view of children. In her book, Wilson shares how teachers in an urban preschool setting sought to celebrate the knowledge children brought with them and how they created spaces for children to celebrate their identities:

Head Start teachers and families envisioned these early childhood classroom experiences not as interventions to compensate for perceived lack of intellectual stimulation or reading arrangements in the home but as affirmations of cultural identities and sites for reconfiguring the social, political and economic conditions in which their children would live. (p. 70)

Tammy agreed and further added that she witnessed a director of a free preschool program in her area (where she lived) demonstrate this negativity when she said that, “they didn’t want all the dumb kids.” Tammy commented, “All I could think of was, what can you give to these students if your mind says, ‘hmmm, [this child] is not good enough?’” We discussed how our expectations for students greatly impacted student

learning and that our notions of what counted as knowledge was important to examine as well. I added:

The expectations for children need to be ‘you will succeed’ and not that our expectations are lower. I’m guilty of it, myself. I [haven’t] always seen the strengths that children bring with them. It’s [important to] empower kids, to say that you’re powerful, you’re wonderful, you’re knowledgeable.

Tammy added, “all children *are* ‘at risk’ when we don’t see them as having something valuable, [but] not because they come from low-income homes” (November 4, 2010).

Challenges that came to light as we named our biases. Although naming our biases was a step forward in exploring issues of race, culture and language marginalization, those conversations were not without challenges. This section describes challenges that came to light in the process: (a) our nervousness/fear with difference, (b) struggling to know when our judgments about children were biased, (c) romanticizing, and (d) essentializing.

Our own nervousness/fear with difference. Although we each professed an appreciation for cultural, racial, and linguistic differences in our classrooms and in society, when it got right down to it, our discussions sometimes exposed the fact that we had some nervousness about or fear when considering worlds outside our own. One such issue arose when Lyndsay and I were discussing and sharing, with the Diversity Group, our visit to a local mosque. At the time of our visit, there was much anti-Muslim sentiment in the U.S. surrounding the building of mosques, including national controversy surrounding construction of a mosque near the site of the World Trade

Center¹ in New York City. We found that, although we expressed beliefs contrary to the negative publicity surrounding the World Trade Center issue and other similar issues regarding anti-Muslim prejudice, there remained an undeniable uneasiness when we set out to visit a local mosque. We explained our discomfort to the group:

Lyndsay: I was scared. I didn't know what to expect.

Sabina: I was nervous too.

Lyndsay: And when we pulled up and walked in I was like, oh my, they don't want us here.

(Diversity Group meeting, September 18, 2010)

In a One-to-One meeting with Tammy, she also described a time when she was fearful of someone who appeared different. We talked about religious difference and specifically the different things people wore because of their religion. Tammy discussed how in the past she had perceived particular clothing as negative. Tammy made the comment that, "It's the image of seeing somebody that looks like somebody you associate with something negative and before you even know if they're Islamic or Pakistani, you just assume that they're not good" (October 5, 2010). Tammy was describing a negative visceral reaction to seeing someone in clothing such as a burqa (a garment typically worn by Muslim women) or a turban (worn by Muslim or Hindu men).

Struggling to know when our judgments about children were biased or when we used deflection tactics to avoid confronting biases. Although the teachers, staff and I felt that we worked diligently to welcome all families, there were times when it was difficult to discern if we were biased in our decisions as well as our thinking. Many examples of

¹ The World Trade Center, consisting of twin towers (north and south), was destroyed on September 11, 2001 by two hijacked airplanes that were flown into the buildings. The number of deaths totaled 2,749 people from 83 different countries.

this happened early in the school year as we worked to help three-year-old students feel at home and at ease in our multi-aged classrooms, many of them for the first time. One incident in particular helps to illustrate this challenge. Two children whose parents were from India were in Kim's class: three-year-old Hemanshu and Hema were boy and girl twins. I initially placed the twins in two different classrooms. However, the parents asked if we could keep them together, which I was able to accommodate and moved both students to Kim's classroom. The first day of school was challenging as it is with many of the three-year-olds entering our program for the first time, but for Hemanshu (or Heman as he was called by his parents) it appeared to be most difficult. He screamed the entire first day, ran out of the classroom, threw toys and was virtually inconsolable. Each day during the first week of school we worked to support Heman by providing one-to-one assistance, providing him time and space to roam around the classroom and asking Heman's mother to stay with him to ease the morning transition from home to school. As the days went by, Heman appeared calmer for short periods of time, but he continued to scream and cry for a major portion of the day. We tried further strategies in an attempt to work successfully with Heman: his mother stayed with him in the classroom for longer times for a few days, I shifted assistants between two classrooms to place someone who spoke Telugu (Heman's home language) with Heman, and we brought into the classroom a picture of Krishna, Heman's God, thinking that would help to provide a more comfortable environment for him (a suggestion made by the teaching assistant who not only spoke his home language but was also a personal friend to Heman's family).

I met with Heman's parents who felt that we needed to be more patient and give him time - that he just needed loving. Mrs. Mishra, Heman's mother said to Kim, "We

love them first, then teach them” (Kim’s Journal, August, 2010). I met with Heman’s father on several occasions to learn how best to support Heman. At one point he explained, “You need to be patient with him” (Personal Communication, August 25, 2010). One challenge appeared to be related to how Kim and I interpreted “being patient” and “loving them first.” As I was analyzing data, I realized that we never really learned or tried to understand what Heman’s parents meant by, “love them first then teach them.” Kim assumed that Mrs. Mishra meant that loving and teaching were separate actions and that one must occur prior to the other while Kim believed that, “loving and teaching needed to be done simultaneously.” Kim drew this conclusion without asking for clarification from Heman’s mother interpreting Mrs. Mishra’s words through her own cultural lens. Looking back, I wonder why we did not question Kim’s reaction as a group; why would loving first and teaching next not be something we would embrace as teachers? Or, perhaps Mrs. Mishra actually had the same interpretation as Kim – that both loving and teaching must happen simultaneously, one could not happen without the other. Could it be that subconsciously (or consciously), Kim was looking for a reason to disagree with Mrs. Mishra’s comment because of her discomfort with Heman’s situation and, for the same reason, I was not facilitating clarification in terms of our interpretations of Mrs. Mishra’s words?

After several weeks, Heman was still having difficulty in the classroom. A significant issue we faced in addition to the crying and screaming was that we could not physically keep him in the classroom; he would leave the room and run into the parking lot, which created a safety issue. During our One-to-One meeting, Kim and I talked about our concerns that we might have to dismiss Heman from the program, per program policy

which states that, “Continuous non-compliant behavior (biting, kicking, throwing, screaming, spitting, cursing, running off from the group) may result in dismissal from the program.” Thus, due to his difficulty in adjusting to the classroom environment, policy required that we recommend that he be moved to a setting more conducive to his needs. Again, I wonder now, were we using policy as a shield, as a convenient excuse for not seeking deeper understandings – hiding behind program policy - because of a problem I did not know how to solve? Or was this a legitimate rationale? As the administrator, I felt pulled in several directions: I worried that our program was not the right placement for Heman but also worried that his behavior was in some way tied to a cultural disconnect between Heman and us that we were not recognizing or acknowledging. The following dialogue excerpt illustrates our struggle with the decision to dismiss Heman from the program including an indication of yet, possibly, another deflection strategy as Kim reminded me that the decision was mine to make:

- Sabina: We have some challenges, and well, I have to swallow my pride too because I was saying just yesterday, if anyone really wants to try it's me, but I wasn't really sure if we are trying.
- Kim: Well, you've got to think; you have a whole classroom [of children].
- Sabina: That's the hardest thing for me.
- Kim: And the parents.
- Sabina: I'm struggling to know when to draw that line.
- Kim: It's your decision ultimately.
- Sabina: And I'm not sure it's the right thing.

(Focal Group meeting, August, 2010)

Much of our talk was filled with deflection strategies. It seemed easier to say, “You’ve got to think about the whole classroom”, “It’s your decision ultimately” and “loving and teaching need to be done simultaneously” than to continue working to get to the bottom of a situation. In my researcher’s journal I wrote about the contradictions I felt:

Things are not going well for Heman and I am getting frustrated and concerned. I find myself in an awkward place right now. The parents are begging me to keep him but I have serious concerns that this is an inappropriate placement for him. We do not have the resources to provide him with the amount of attention he needs. (September, 2010)

Reflecting now on my own words, I see how my use of “we do not have the resources to provide him with the attention he needs” was another possible deflection strategy on my part; I am not sure we even worked long enough with him or really listened carefully enough to his parents. After several weeks of working unsuccessfully to help Heman transition into our program we made the decision to, as the program policy termed it, “dismiss” him, language that in and of itself reeked of a deficit orientation insinuating that there was something wrong with the child. I explained to his parents that we would be glad to try again when he was a little bit older and Heman left to begin his new experience in a home-care setting with someone the family knew and who spoke Telegru.

The decision to *dismiss* Heman left us wondering if we could have done more to support him. It was difficult to know if we were being biased by expecting Heman to act in a certain way or by not figuring out why he wanted to leave or was so unhappy. Examination of the language Kim and I used when describing the situation with Heman - “his difficulty” or “his inability to adjust” - suggests that we may have unintentionally

expected Heman to assume the responsibility for transitioning to the classroom environment rather than take responsibility ourselves for understanding the situation. Had we been unwilling to accept that responsibility? Did my desire to support Kim as a teacher take precedence over the parents' request to keep Heman in the program?

In this example, we struggled to know if our decisions were grounded in unexamined biases. While this is one of the most intense examples we faced during this study, these kinds of questions came up during our diversity discussions but also in my researcher's journal as I constantly questioned my own judgment against biases I struggled to recognize in myself.

In the Fall of 2011, after a year in in-home care, Heman returned to the child development program, as we hoped. He had many successes as he transitioned from in-home care to the child development classroom. By the end of the 2011-2012 school year, Heman made significant progress as evidenced in his end-of-the-year narrative. Heman's teacher reported that:

Heman continues to grow in every way! He is participating in calendar and weather by raising his hand to answer questions, interacting with the SMART board and leading the class in songs. He enjoys running, jumping and hopping outside with his friends. He can now count and recognize numbers past 100! He is a great classroom helper and knows the rules of the class. He loves to play with David in the Block Center. (March 23, 2012)

Regardless of whether or not we made the right decision initially, Heman returned to the child development program, where he ultimately experienced success in the classroom. However, the reflections that resulted from this experience helped me better understand the depth with which I must examine issues and draw on multiple sources for feedback if I am to ensure that I am at least working toward decisions that do not buy into

institutional policies or my own and others' assumptions that too easily deflect what could be racist or discriminatory reactions.

Romanticizing: Making non-critical cultural generalizations. Confronting our own biases also meant sometimes considering whether or not we were making cultural generalizations and, in particular, romanticizing (assigning positive attributes to actions about which our limited backgrounds did not provide sufficient insights to allow us to interpret with confidence) about a particular action or comment. For example, during a Focal Group meeting in August, we were talking about several Indian families and a family from Pakistan. Lyndsay described her observation of the Pakistani father slapping his child, Taj, to get his attention. She explained that, in her view, the slap did not appear to be painful to the child, feeling that it reflected a cultural, interactional style specific to if not Pakistanis in general, to Taj's family traditions. Was she romanticizing about this action? It was difficult for us to know without more evidence and experience with Taj and his family and other families from Pakistan.

While we did not know the answer to that question, this is an important example of how easy it might be to romanticize the actions of students and families from backgrounds different from our own when we are working to avoid deficit views. How do we know when our attempts to look at incidents from a non-deficit perspective might lead to overly positive views that keep us from recognizing that other issues are at play? The bottom line in this situation seemed to be that Lyndsay made assumptions based on limited information: She assumed but did not actually know whether or not the child felt pain, a distressing assumption aside from cultural considerations; she assumed that the father's slap reflected Pakistani practices of discipline or family discipline practices.

Trying not to look at the situation through a deficit lens, she overcompensated and romanticized the situation. In the midst of this romanticization, Lyndsay prevented herself from gaining all of the information necessary to have confidence in stating her own enculturated views which may have contradicted the appropriateness of the slap.

In instances such as this, particularly when we were first learning about other interactional styles, it was often difficult to separate the desire to validate other cultural styles from something that crossed the line in terms of abusive behavior. We did not know where to locate that line. This tendency to romanticize was yet another challenge and indicative of our need to learn more, get to know cultural insiders in ways that we could not by keeping our relationships within the classroom walls. Without deeper relationships with those from backgrounds different from our own, we could not truly know if we were “right” or tending to romanticize.

Essentializing: Operating from our own cultural lens. There were also times when, rather than romanticize a parental behavior (as in the example above), we generalized or essentialized across cultural groups. An example of this comes from an instance when Lyndsay described Taj’s mother’s interactional style with her son as very different from the style of Taj’s father. Not only was she generalizing about Taj’s parents based on limited observations of their interactions with their son, but she (and the rest of us through the conversation) were essentializing gendered parental behaviors across all Indian families as well as defining *appropriate* child rearing only through our own cultural lens. The following conversation illustrates how easily we were willing to make generalizations and participate in this potentially biased view. This exchange follows our discussion of Taj’s father’s slap:

Lyndsay: [Taj's] mom is not like that at all; she makes him wear a bib and brings him a sippy cup.

Kim: When you said that about mom and the sippy cup, I'm starting to think that [there are no boundaries]. Because my little fella [Heman], [Heman's mom] said, "Oh we spoiled him" and then also with Riza. I know they're probably from different areas [in India] but the boundaries don't seem to be set.

Lyndsay: Well Sasha is that way

Kim: They want to love them first, then teach them. You need to do that simultaneously. Well you can set boundaries and love a child at the same time. So they're thinking, 'Just don't set boundaries is loving them.

Tammy: Aadi, he's never had to do anything. He said, "Oh I think I feel sick." I said, "pick that paper up please" and he said, "Oh no it's too heavy." I said, "Are you sick, or feeling sick because whether you're sick or not, you need to pick the paper up." He said, "Oh okay, Mrs. Greenway, I'll pick it up."

Kim: Well that's what I'm saying.

(Focal Group meeting, August 27, 2010)

The sheer number of generalizations and assumptions made in this exchange is startling as I look back at these data, generalizations that we did not recognize at the time and that were grounded in cultural perspectives regarding how children should be raised and treated: the use of the word "they" directed towards all Indian and Pakistani families; stating that "boundaries don't seem to be set" – describing what Kim, Lyndsay and Tammy considered to be *unacceptable* behavior for preschool children; saying, "Sasha is that way" implying negativity about a behavior; and probably the greatest assumption made about what the families were thinking – "They're thinking, 'Don't set boundaries is loving them.'" With very little evidence and no conversations with the families to explore

and better understand these notions, we were making wide-sweeping generalizations based on only one cultural view.

This is a particularly surprising finding given that the purpose of our diversity discussions was to contradict and eradicate just this sort of talk although it is less surprising when we consider the years of indoctrination that each of us has as we are socialized to believe in certain “right ways” of parenting, behaving, reacting, etc. Each of us had also been indoctrinated to believe in the universality of a mono-cultural view of *appropriateness* through our program’s study of developmentally appropriate practice. Historically, the Child Development program has largely depended on the guidelines of National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) to outline, define and provide guidance for the ways in which teachers teach and interact with children, parents and families. Guidance from NAEYC focuses on developmentally appropriate ideologies (NAEYC, 2005) and, while NAEYC has made some effort toward bringing culturally relevant understandings into their documents and publications (Espinosa, 2010; NAEYC, 2005) and their new criteria request that teachers include parent perspectives on issues related to child rearing, curriculum, and assessment, notions and ideas of developmentally appropriate practice continue to be largely determined by White, middle-class values and expectations.

Considering issues that came to light, the opportunity to foreground biases and discuss them through our faculty conversations laid the groundwork exploring our biases and stereotypes but we did not have a mechanism in place to support us in holding each other accountable for talk that essentialized and romanticized – talk that assumed without sufficient evidence and without interchanges with the very people about whom the

assumptions were made. At the same time, our conversations were important starting points because, through an analysis of them, our biases not only about how young children should be taught, but our assumptions and cultural generalizations about behaviors we assigned to them and their families have the potential to be interrogated. Discussed as an implication in Chapter Seven, this would have been an important next step in our work; for us, as a group to consider how we might have jumped to the conclusions that all Indian and Pakistani families, particularly mothers, did not set boundaries for their children; that they've "never had to do anything;" that they believe "you love them first then teach them;" they are "like this;" "they think that," professing to know what they are thinking; "they" are wrong; and here's what "you" need to do.

Confronting Bias Expressed by Parents and Families

A challenge illuminated in the data, specifically in our teacher and researcher journals, revealed that at times we were in positions where we felt the need to confront parents and families regarding what we saw as their biases and stereotypes. These instances typically occurred during one-to-one conversations between a teacher and a parent or other family member when parents and families came to visit their children's classrooms or during our home/community visits. Patterns in the kinds of bias that we felt were expressed by parents and families are described in the following sections, concluding with a look at the challenges faced when we considered how we might interrupt those biases.

Holidays and celebrations. Holidays and other celebrations sometimes seemed to trigger displays of bias in some parents' comments and actions. For example, Tammy wrote in her journal about a conversation with one of her students' parents. The parent

was upset because, during the time of the Thanksgiving holiday, Tammy did not “talk about Indians and make tepees.” The parent wanted her to add this topic to her November unit. Tammy shared how she addressed the parent’s concern:

I told her I did not want to do some thrown together study about some stereotypical group of Native Americans and miseducate my students about any group of people. I would not want anybody to throw together a study about African Americans without doing research. Why would I do that to another group of people? (November, 2010)

Another incident, also with a parent in Tammy’s classroom, occurred during the month of December when the class was celebrating holidays around the world. A parent came into the classroom to share, along with her son, their family’s celebration of Hanukkah. The mother and child (Thom) shared games and information with the class and provided a dreidel and printed information about Hanukkah for each child to take home. When another child’s father, Mr. Gupta, a practicing Hindu, came to pick up his son, Jai, he told Tammy that his son did not need the information about Hanukkah; nor did he need the dreidel. Because Tammy had carefully developed a close relationship with the families of her students, she responded in a manner that was respectful of the father, yet did not allow the biased comments to go unaddressed:

I reminded [Jai’s father] that if he wanted the students to listen to him and respect him when he comes to the class to talk about being Hindu he had to give respect to our Jewish friends in their religious practice. He agreed and asked [his son] about the [dreidel] game Thom taught him and took the information home with him. (Tammy’s Journal, December 2010)

Black stereotypes. At times parents and families expressed biases and stereotypes directly related to Black people or culture. This was revealed in statements such as: “Black people buy liquor”, and “going to ‘good’ schools and are explained below.

“Black people buy liquor”. There were times when we encountered parents and families outside of the school day and school walls and felt the need to confront biases and stereotypes. An example of this occurred during an interaction I had with the parent of a child in Tammy’s classroom. Mr. Gupta owned a liquor store in the downtown area of our city. One weekend while downtown I visited Mr. Gupta in his store. As my husband and I entered his establishment, he recognized me and shouted from the back of the store, “What are you doing here? White people don’t buy liquor, Black people buy liquor.” I found his comments to be offensive and I was embarrassed because there were several African American people in the store for whom Mr. Gupta seemed to have little or no regard. I immediately responded, “Well that’s not true Mr. Gupta, we’re here and I know plenty of White people who buy liquor. Maybe they’re just not coming to your store.” He laughed and we purchased our goods and left the store. This data example is used as a way to express the need we felt to interrupt biased talk in families and others as members of a community in which our students and families live.

Going to a “good school”. During the course of this study I visited the homes and communities of some of the students in our program as well as the homes of some of our program’s Teaching Assistants (who were African American, Indian, and Iranian) in an effort to learn from the lives and experiences of people outside of my own cultural comfort zone. One of the visits was in the home of one of the teaching assistants, Mrs. Chakraborty, who was from India and spoke Telugu. She graciously invited my son and me to her home to meet her husband, daughter and father (who was visiting from India). I enjoyed a wonderful home cooked meal, Indian movies, a dance video of their daughter during an India Day celebration, and conversation. After dinner our conversation turned

to a discussion of schools in our district. Wanting to understand their experience, I asked about how they felt about our schools. Mrs. Chakraborty and her husband appeared hesitant and did not answer but her father did. He remarked, “We don’t want her [his granddaughter] to go to Eastway Elementary (pseudonym) [her zoned school]. We want her to go to a good school.” Taken aback by his comment, I asked what he considered to be a good school to which he responded, “The test scores were low because there are so many Blacks there.” I attempted to explain that Eastway Elementary was a great school and that test scores were not always a good parameter to use in determining whether or not schools were good. I spoke of the disparity in test scores between children of Color and White children and how schools in the United States have not traditionally supported students of Color, and therefore Black students may not perform as well as White students, but that this did not mean that a school was bad. I sensed that one conversation was not going to convince him that Eastway Elementary would be an adequate school for his granddaughter, but I felt that I had to attempt to interrupt his thinking. I worried, too, about Mrs. Chakraborty, his daughter and a teaching assistant in our program, being influenced by her father’s notions. I wondered if she held similar beliefs and whether or not those beliefs would be felt through her interactions with Black students and families in our schools.

This data example is used to demonstrate one of the ways that we found and attempted to address bias as expressed by families. This challenge made us aware of how imperative it is to work not only with teachers, staff and students but with parents and families to help them understand ways that racism has labeled schools unfairly among other discriminatory practices. In this case, I felt that it was important to address and

interrupt biased comments in a way that did not alienate the grandfather but that might be instructive or food for thought for him and others participating in the conversation.

However, as described in the following section, we were not always successful or did not always know how to interrupt racist, biased talk.

Struggling to know how to interrupt biased talk. While there were times when we were able to confront parents and families regarding biases and stereotypes, there were also times when we struggled to know how to interrupt biased talk. For example, an incident recorded in Tammy's journal involved Jai's father, Mr. Gupta, and occurred when he spoke with Tammy about his profession. Mr. Gupta was the focus of the data excerpt described earlier as I shared my visit to his liquor store. He told Tammy, "If you want to make money in the liquor business, open you a store in a Black neighborhood. You know how I know? My money tells me so" (September, 2010). Tammy recalls in her journal that the comment did not make her angry because she felt it was merely based in his life experiences and perceptions so she did not respond to correct him or try to alter his viewpoint. During a member checking meeting with Tammy, I asked for clarification about why she did not interrupt Mr. Gupta's comments. Tammy replied that as an African American woman, "I did not take his comments personally. I felt that Mr. Gupta respected me as a teacher. His comments were based on his experience specific to his business." Tammy also stated that she "valued his honesty" and felt that they had "developed a good relationship" (Member Checking meeting, October 9, 2012). Despite Tammy's belief that she and Mr. Gupta had a good relationship and despite her ability to interrupt other biased remarks made by Mr. Gupta and by other parents, she did not interrupt this biased talk because, "at the time, I did not feel as if [Mr. Gupta's

comments] had any bearing on me, my students, or my classroom as the other instances did” (Member Checking meeting, November 5, 2012).

As I look back at that discussion, I think about the balancing act that some African Americans feel (Tatum, 2007; Milner, 2010) as they stand up for racial discrimination and yet do not want that to be the daily focus of their existence. I also wondered if Tammy was learning, too. Tatum writes, “We cannot assume that teachers of color are confident in their abilities to talk about these issues as well. None of us can teach what we haven’t learned ourselves” (2007, p.38). Did Tammy fully grasp the ramifications of Mr. Gupta’s comments? Or, was this a choice that Tammy made, figuring that she had to choose her battles wisely? Was she weary of the constant battle faced daily? Was she judging her response according to the relationship she was trying to build with a parent?

As I was writing this dissertation, I went back to Tammy to review this data excerpt once more to ask her these questions. Tammy’s response led me to understand her response to Mr. Gupta in a whole new way. She explained that she did not interrupt Mr. Gupta’s statement because she “believed [his statement] to be true.” She said, “I can’t fault him for being right.” She shared that she sees liquor stores as part of the problem in Black communities adding, “the way you interrupt this kind of racism is to boycott the stores and sign petitions to keep them from coming to Black communities.” Tammy brought to light a much larger issue facing African American communities I was not fully aware of. She said that she felt that all too often “these liquor stores intentionally set up shop in Black communities because they can make money there.” However, she felt too, that Mr. Gupta, “held me to a higher standard because I was his

son's teacher. I wasn't going to change his mind about what he said, his experience told him otherwise." Tammy admitted, "sometimes it is better not to say anything . . . in some ways I pick my battles" (Member Checking meeting, March 6, 2013). She also shared that before our professional development sessions she kept a lot more in but she has become more willing to share her thoughts and opinions due to the increased opportunities to engage in our professional development conversations. The whole experience is indicative of the fact that constantly questioning to seek clarity and deeper understanding is critical for administrators and other facilitators of anti-bias work.

Failing to Respond to Students and Families in Culturally Sensitive Ways

Analysis of data revealed that, at times, we failed to respond to students and families in culturally sensitive ways. We appeared to fall into one of two categories in this area: those of us who seemed (a) aware of our cultural ineptness and how that affected students and families; and (b) those who were unaware of how our responses affected students and families.

Aware of cultural ineptness. At times our failure to respond to students and families was grounded in biased responses and other times it was due to our lack of linguistic and cultural knowledge. Each of those kinds of responses is described below.

Aware of potentially biased responses: Outing our biases. While there were some incidents and issues of bias that I only recognized through the analysis of these data, there were times when teachers and I identified our own bias during the study, particularly when we felt unsuccessful in responding to students' families in culturally sensitive and relevant ways. The existence of our study groups provided space and purpose for such identifications to occur and we recognized and articulated these as

issues that needed to be addressed. Often this occurred as we reflected on an event that occurred in a classroom or interaction with families and children. In this way, we were *outing each other and ourselves* and providing a way to deepen our conversations by drawing attention to interactions that we felt were biased. We acknowledged that our behaviors may have been culturally insensitive to the students and families and were able to reflect on that behavior. One particularly salient example occurred during a September Diversity Group meeting when Kim shared how she felt that an interaction with a student's father constituted the first major interaction in which, in her view, culture came into play that school year. Wanting to make the point that culture comes into play from the first day of school, I suggested that she might be talking about the first time that she recognized a cultural conflict. To understand our eventual response as reflecting our awareness of bias, it is important to read the transcript from the conversation that prompted our response:

Kim: I guess the situation with one of my students this year was my first major, I don't know the right word.

Sabina: Conflict?

Kim: No, not conflict. But I felt that culture came into play. That our two different cultures coming together came into play, where I'd never had that before.

Sabina: How do you think culture played into it?

Kim: I felt we had a bad situation and we had to release the student from the program but we kept one of the siblings and so we were in contact with the parent and I felt a little bit like me being female that I was degraded, that I was looked down upon.

Sabina: What made you think that?

Kim: Well I think it started off with the way they treated the children differently, one was male and one was female. Right there I think a

flag went up that there was a difference between gender and about how gender was treated and even a little bit about the interaction between mom and dad. And that might not have anything to do with gender but I just felt a little bit disrespected by the dad.

Sabina: Can you talk about the specific behaviors that made you feel that way?

Kim: He just attacked me a few times like he said, “fix this!” instead of saying, I feel this is the issue can you please look into it. It was like, more of a demand, that’s how I took it... He doesn’t make eye contact with me and I felt a bit disrespected. I thought that maybe it may be cultural not looking me in the eye, but the mother did so that’s why I felt it might have been a gender thing.

(Diversity Group meeting, September 16, 2010)

Kim’s interaction with the student’s father revealed her culturally-learned perspective that people should “look you in the eye” when they speak with you and her assumption that his interaction constituted an attack. She thought that the lack of eye contact was due to disrespect. As the teachers and I talked through this interaction, we offered some possible reasons for why the father did not look her in the eye. Speaking from her own cultural background, Tammy offered the perspective that if the father was angry with Kim perhaps he could not look at her in the eye. We discussed that the interaction could have also been due to etiquette in cultural male/female interactions, which Kim identified as a possibility. Kim resolved that it could have been a misunderstanding; and we all discussed that it was a challenge to understand his actual intent given that we all reflected on the interaction from our own cultural perspectives. We acknowledge that none of us actually knew the father’s perspective. While we had been successful in building relationships with other families, so we could seek their input and perspectives, our interactions with Heman’s family were so brief that we did not develop that relationship with them. Although we were not any more aware of why the

child's father did not look Kim in the eye, Kim was able to recognize that at least one source of the tension she felt between them could be the result of cultural dissonance that was not fully understood on her part. I noted in my researcher's journal that "I was proud of Kim and her ability to discuss this encounter. It was evident that she struggled to find the words to describe her feelings, but she attempted to do so [and she was also brave to allow others to offer contradictory explanations for why he might have acted as he did]."

Aware of limited linguistic or cultural knowledge. In addition to outing our biases, at times we were also aware of how our limited linguistic and cultural knowledge impeded our interactions with students and families. An example of this occurred as Tammy reflected frustration *with her own* inability to connect with the family of one of her students in culturally responsive or sensitive ways, particularly with regard to language. Tammy's journal entry reveals her feelings about not being able to speak Spanish, the family's home language:

I hate not being able to communicate with José or his family. It makes me feel very nervous. I pride myself on developing an open relationship with my parents and communication is the foundation. Having José's mother constantly look for Señora Hermas [Tammy's assistant] to talk to makes me feel very bad. (Tammy's Journal, September, 2010)

Tammy articulated the understanding that her lack of ability to speak Spanish interfered with building a relationship with José's mother and therefore limited her ability to be culturally responsive. In this instance, rather than insist that the family learn English or degrade them because they did not speak English, she took responsibility for the lack of communication and, in the process revealed frustration at her limited cultural and linguistic knowledge.

Another incident occurred during a Focal Group discussion and was related to my visit to an area mosque with Lyndsay. Recounting our experience at the mosque, Lyndsay and I expressed our concern that the clothing we wore for attendance at the Mosque may have been viewed as offensive or disrespectful to Taj's family or the Muslim community. We shared our thoughts:

Lyndsay: Sabina said, "Did you bring a shawl?" And I was like, oh no!

Sabina: Well I didn't know and I didn't want to be disrespectful.

Lyndsay: No, me neither and I didn't even think [to ask] about that. I didn't want to do anything wrong. I didn't want to offend anybody.

(Focal Group meeting, September 16, 2010)

In this example, Lyndsay and I both recognized our lack of cultural knowledge regarding appropriate dress for our visit to the mosque. I assumed that women were to be expected to be covered up and Lyndsay admitted that she "did not think about it" at all. Neither Lyndsay nor I ever actually asked Taj's mother specifically about what would be appropriate to wear which would have provided us with the cultural knowledge we needed.

Unaware of biased responses that perpetuate deficit views. Whereas Kim, Lyndsay, Tammy and I (primary participants) tended to look critically at our own actions and verbalizations and we sometimes recognized when we were biased or lacked cultural knowledge in our responses to children and families, some other teachers in the Diversity Group did not always seem to recognize (or at least verbalize that they recognized) a lack of cultural responsiveness. Their contributions in our discussions sometimes reflected bias without recognition of it. An example of this occurred at the beginning of our September Diversity Group meeting. I opened the meeting by discussing our experiences

with the home and community visits we each conducted. I asked the group, “So what are some of the things you learned [from your home visits] that you could bring back to your classrooms that could help you?” There was a brief pause and then Shirley explained that in the homes she visited, “a couple of students were very defiant.” She went on to use that generalization to draw implications for her teaching, “So I knew I was going to have to be really firm and that I was going to have to follow through [in the classroom]. So that helped me a lot.” Shirley continued to share that, “Some of the students [also] had speech problems.” Shirley, whose students were predominately African American, did not appear to recognize this as bias in the form of a deficit view based on a snap judgment during her home visits, nor the ways that such responses were culturally insensitive and uninformed. Reflecting on Shirley’s words, I attempted to clarify the intent of the home visits offering, “It’s not about finding out what’s wrong with children, it’s about finding out the nuggets of brilliance that each [child] possesses. You know? Find that and bring that back into your classrooms” (September 16, 2010).

Addressing the same question another teacher, James, submitted that his students’ families ranged in linguistic diversity to include Vietnamese, Telegru, and Hindi languages. However, he then revealed a lack of attention to cultural responsiveness as he described a situation regarding the *Parent Program Handbook* that is given to families. Each year, the teachers are asked to share the handbook with the parents and ask them to sign the last page (on a line indicated for name, date, and signature) as proof that they have read and agree to abide by the child development program’s policies and procedures. The directions to do so are written at the beginning of the handbook: “Please sign the *last page* of this handbook and return to your child’s teacher.” However, the last

page in the handbook is actually blank; the page prior to it has a place for parent signatures. Commenting on some parents' literal interpretation of the instructions, James remarked:

They [Asian families] take things literally. You [Mrs. Mosso-Taylor] asked them to sign the last page of the [parent] handbook and bring it in. Well the very last page in the handbook is actually blank. So they said, "where do you want me to sign on this page?"

Although James further commented that "[he] made copies of the page for the families to sign," he did not offer any regret that he did not straighten this out for the families but rather made a generalization concerning the Asian families providing a deficit view of them and their ability to negotiate an unfamiliar text and system.

It seems clear from instances such as these that there was a clear difference between the sensitivity ultimately demonstrated by the Focal Group teachers and those who only participated in the Diversity Group and whole faculty Inservice sessions. As will be discussed later, the finding seemed very clear that it was the opportunity to engage regularly and across different contexts but also as a small group in which we could focus on hard questions in trusting contexts that teachers and I were most able to recognize and confront our own moments of insensitivity.

Getting Lost in the Process: Deflections

Meeting with the teachers during our monthly Diversity Group meetings and in the regular Focal Group sessions meant having the opportunity to purposefully engage in conversations regarding race, culture and language. It provided opportunities to discuss books and articles we read and discuss issues facing the teachers and their students. However, this was also often a reason for getting lost in the process. By getting lost, I mean that our intended diversity topics and conversations would occasionally become

derailed by other things teachers wanted to discuss and there was also an unclear understanding of the actual intent of our focus on issues of culture, race and language marginalization. In the literature, this is sometimes referred to as deflection (Watt, 2007) – deflecting from the more difficult issues for a variety of reasons. In terms of supporting students’ positive literate identities, we got lost in or deflected from the process by (a) bird-walking; (b) coming to meetings unprepared; and (c) having unclear definitions of positive literate identities.

Bird-walking to find safer ground. Although each Diversity Group and Professional Development session had a planned agenda, we would inevitably *bird-walk* by getting off the planned topic shifting to something that was happening in the teacher’s specific classrooms such as a field trip, classroom activity or personal story about a student. Due to our limited time together, we all wanted to share events from our home life as well. Teachers wanted to talk about their children or grandchildren and things they were planning to do and other activities in and outside of school. This was all very important in understanding ourselves as human beings and getting to know and gain trust with each other as a critical part of the process of understanding each other. However, this also meant that keeping our focus on the topic at hand was a constant challenge. Bird-walking was more likely to happen with the larger whole faculty Inservice meetings and the Diversity Group, finding the most examples of bird-walking in the Diversity Group. This may indicate that there were some possible deflection/diversion tactics that we consciously and unconsciously used to avoid discussing sensitive and personal issues related to race, culture and language marginalization. It could also indicate the need for administrators or group leaders to learn strategies for allowing some element of bird-

walking as teachers bring up related topics while directing the discussion back to the focus.

An example of this occurred at the beginning of the September Diversity Group meeting. I asked the teachers, “What have you learned about yourselves over the past years as you’ve been trying to delve into your families’ [lives] and bringing that [knowledge] into your classrooms?” Tammy was the first to respond. However, she did not respond to the question but instead talked about a parent who called her “fat” to which everyone laughed. Tammy went on to explain that the child’s father said to her that he wanted his son to “get big like you.” This conversation led to another discussion about this particular child’s family, however it was not until the very end of the meeting that we made our way back to the original question regarding what our home visits taught us about ourselves.

Another example occurred when we were choosing books to read for a subsequent Diversity Group meeting. Providing a brief synopsis of each book so that the teachers could choose a title that was of interest to them, I talked about *Other People’s Words* (Purcell-Gates, 1997). Before I could share the next book, Shirley volunteered a story about her mother-in-law who was a nurse in Appalachia:

That reminds me of my mother-in-law who was a traveling nurse in Appalachia. She walked along swinging bridges to deliver babies all over the place. She had one father come out with a shotgun and said, ‘It better be a boy’ and it was a boy. (September 16, 2010)

Stories such as Shirley’s were important for us to learn more about each other, but they were very often a cause for getting off track and lost in the process. Retrospectively, and through further analysis of the data, however, I wondered if I had not fully appreciated the relevance of Shirley’s comments during this conversation as she attempted to make a

personal connection to the reading. How stories such as these are essential in exploring the negative stereotypes and the deeper issues associated with them. Learning to build from connections that teachers made back to the focus of the discussion is an important consideration (and will be discussed as an implication in Chapter Seven).

Bird-walking did not always happen *during* the meetings. Occasionally it was just difficult to pull the teachers together to begin the meeting. For example, at the beginning of our October Diversity Group meeting it took us almost 15 minutes to get started. Shirley wanted to share cereal box picture frames that her students made. She scattered the picture frames, which were very lovely, out on the table and teachers explored and admired them. Shirley shared how the students made them. She explained, “These are recycled cereal boxes my students made. I have a mom who helped us make them . . . they are cut into strips to make frames.” Other teachers asked Shirley questions about the picture frames and we spent several minutes talking about them. After sharing the pictures frames, Shirley then talked about her overnight camping trip with her students and their families. Shirley added, “All the things we’ve done this year, even our camping trips, I went and spent my [school classroom materials] allowance. One parent couldn’t handle the hard surface. Five people left about 9:00pm.” While Shirley shared her camping story, Tammy left the meeting to get her keys. I also got up to lock the door as to not to be disturbed.

I struggled with the feeling that these incidents were interruptions to the focus and plan I had developed as they contributed to delays in getting started with meetings. I felt this challenge throughout the study. At the same time, bird-walking sometimes led to (or had the potential to lead to) important and very relevant conversations but I did not

always notice those moments as they arose and therefore sometimes failed to capitalize on opportunities to explore issues that could have led to deeper meaning.

Coming to meetings unprepared. In an attempt to make our Diversity Group meetings productive, I would sometimes provide tasks or assignments to help us think about a particular issue or provide questions to guide our thinking (provided in detail in Chapter Three) prior to a particular session. However, the participants did not always come prepared with completed assignments. I felt that this also caused us to become lost in the process. While this may have been deflection from the topics of discussion on the part of participants or may have simply been a ramification of teacher exhaustion, I needed to be careful not to deflect myself by excusing lack of preparation on the busy life of teachers and I realized that I might need to provide alternatives other than requiring the reading of book chapters and articles at home if I truly wanted teachers to be prepared for meetings in that way.

One example occurred during our October Diversity Group meeting when we were to bring back our book-study books and information based on interviews the teachers were supposed to have done with families using guiding questions I emailed to them. As our session began, I asked, “Alright, so did you all bring your books back? I emailed everyone [questions for the home visit].” After the teachers revealed that they had visited families but had not used my questions to support interviews in the homes, I spent another few minutes reminding them about that expectation. James said, “You emailed everybody?” “Yes, I emailed you the questions to ask your families [for home and community visits], remember?” I replied. The teachers’ responses indicated that none of them remembered my email. With humor in her voice Kim said, “Of course we

remember,” and others added: “What kind of questions?” (Sally), “I remember the questions” (Tammy), “Can you rejuggle our memory . . . can you resend them?” (Shirley). I was disappointed. Although we continued to discuss their home visits, we were not able to reflect on questions I felt were important such as: What does the family want us to know about their child? What are the child’s strengths and fears? Who taught them what they know and how did they teach them? What kinds of things does the family like to do together? While the conversations about the home and community visits were still important and valuable, I felt that the questions would have provided us with a focus for our discussions because they would have provided parent and family perspective, which we did not have without them and was a reason for getting lost in the process.

Again in our November Diversity Group meeting, when we were to have completed our individual book studies and talk about the books we read with the group, not all the teachers had completed their reading. Kim stated, “Well we’re in the process of reading. Sally and I are reading, *Reading Families: The Literate Lives of Urban Children* (Compton-Lilly, 2003).” I then asked Tammy if she would like to share her book, to which Tammy replied, “I got to be honest Sabina, I’m still working on it . . . I didn’t get all the way to the end.” Kim then announced that she felt that she received the “wrong book.” “I don’t think I picked that book out,” she added. I offered her the opportunity to view the transcripts of our previous meetings to make sure that the book was what she chose. Again, because the teachers were not fully prepared, we got lost in the process as we did not have a foundation (shared experience with the text) to ground our discussions that day.

Lost because of unclear definitions: What were we looking for? We often found that we were lost in the process of learning more about culture, race and language, and how this supported children's positive literate identities because we were unclear about what a positive literate identity was. During a Focal Group meeting in September, this was first revealed in a conversation about the kinds of engagements the children were working on in the classroom. I asked specific questions regarding children's positive literate behaviors such as: What are some of the ways your students use language in your classroom? What are some of the things they like to do with language and literacy? How do they communicate best? We also discussed the importance of identifying the literate behaviors in children whenever we see them to validate and support the students in the classrooms. However, when I asked the teachers to discuss what they saw as literate behaviors in their classrooms, their responses demonstrated that they really did not have a solid idea of what I meant when I used the term, *positive literate identities*, and consequently, they struggled to understand the focus of our study. When Kim asked, "What are you looking for in this?" I realized that, already a month into the study and I had not done a good job in defining positive literate identities. In the following excerpt from that Focal Group meeting, recognizing that the group did not have a clear view of what I meant by literate identities, I tried to provide a clearer explanation:

Sabina: I was thinking that maybe I needed to define literate identities.

Kim: Yeah.

Sabina: Children might not be read to every night but they might be doing all these other literate things that are so important, whatever it is, and that just supports children's literate identities so that they are very much literate in so many ways. Children read the world. Taj at the mosque, he knows the symbols, he knows the signs, and he's more literate there than we are.

Lyndsay: Yeah.

Kim: Yeah, I guess I was thinking more diversity versus literacy.

Sabina: Well it's both. I want to know how we're using that knowledge of kids and their diverse settings. Who they are and how they've come to know the knowledge they have. How then are we turning that information in the classroom to support them so those [diversity] conversations are still important. So we're not saying, "oh they don't read to their kids every day" so we're not getting into that deficit perspective. We're looking at what they ARE doing every day because they . . . can recite bible stories or follow Lego directions, and to see that and value that as a literate behavior is critical for them and for everybody else in the classroom. You know there are a lot of ways of doing it, to be a reader and a writer, and what does that look like in our classrooms? Does that make more sense?

Kim: Uh, huh, uh huh.

Sabina: So it's about supporting [the students], their literate identities. But you can't support a literate identity without knowing their identity- who they are as people, culturally, so that's a part of supporting them.

(September 16, 2010)

Data analysis reveals that despite my attempts in trying to make what we were doing together clearer and although (as in the excerpt above) I tried to define what might constitute literate identities beyond those involving academic literacies, classroom implications were still limited. A month after the interchange described above (two months into the study), there were still doubts about what positive literate identities were supposed to look and sound like in the classroom. For Tammy this confusion was also connected to her feeling that, in terms of understanding diversity issues or how to better value knowledge from homes and communities, she was already supporting students' identities across cultural and linguistic groups (described in more detail in a later

finding). She expressed this in one of her journal entries writing that she was lost in the process because she wasn't sure she understood the purpose of our work. She wrote:

I feel kinda lost in this process. I respect all my students and I try to really listen to each of them. I think that's what makes them feel a bond with me. I feel like when I listen, I mean really listen to them they begin to trust me. I hear them talking and we talk freely. I just don't hear enough to write about. Maybe I don't know what I am listening for. (October, 2010)

Getting lost sometimes led to new understandings. Getting lost in the process presented a continual challenge for me as we worked to gain a collective understanding of positive literate identities. However, this was also a positive element in our work. It was actually through many of the conversations that emerged when we went off the track from my planned direction or when we lacked clarity in our focus, that the discussions led us to understand more about the importance of understanding students' identities as cultural human beings. Lack of clarity and some bird-walking played roles in leading to that learning as small moments contributed to the larger understandings. For example, during our November Diversity Group meeting, the conversation began as described earlier with everyone not as fully prepared for our meeting as I would have hoped (although the teachers had read some of the book they selected and were able to share some aspect from them). As we discussed our individual book studies, Tammy shared her thoughts regarding information she gleaned from her book, *Telling a Different Story: Teaching and Literacy in an Urban Preschool* (Wilson, 1999) that helped her understand, and others through the conversation that followed, about the value of supporting students' literate identities and the impact it had on their learning:

Tammy: So if [children] feel as if their own homes or lives are inappropriate, or not good enough, they don't feel the need to express themselves and they may shut down.

- Sabina: uh huh, exactly.
- Tammy: It's like if I'm not like you then my experiences are less than yours.
- Sabina: Right. And that's what [the teachers in the book] are doing here. They are seeing the strengths and all the knowledge . . . the cultural richness that the children bring. And they are directly addressing that and moving kids forward [using that knowledge].
- Sally: My book [Reading Families (2003)] is actually saying that the home is a literate environment and that the families cared and demonstrated their desire for their children to be readers in ways that are not in the traditional ways . . . and that teachers might not look for [in classrooms].
- Sabina: And those children coming from alternate discourses have traditionally not been seen as literate. This is what Shirley Brice-Heath talks about. Compton-Lilly points out that [children] come [to school] with lots of strengths but teachers [typically] do not build upon those strengths. That's why supporting children's literate identities is critical to their learning.
- Sally: Uh huh.
- Tammy: Right, it's a different structure in every home. We need to build on that.

Despite the bird-walking and deflection strategies, when it came right down to it, teachers were beginning to formulate a better understanding of what positive literate identities were and the implications for not supporting them in the classrooms.

Beginning to Negotiate Challenges: Toward Deeper Understandings

This section highlights some of the ways that the teachers and I began to move forward in light of the challenges described above. It is important to note that negotiating our challenges was a collaborative and ever-evolving process during and beyond this study and in no way suggests that we ever fully arrived at our understanding of supporting children's positive literate identities. However, we did make some progress

and specific elements of our experience seemed to affect that progress more than others. An analysis of data seems to show that, through the interfacing of many experiences in our school and personal lives, we were supported in beginning to negotiate challenges through the following elements of our experience (Table 4.3): (a) positioning self as learner; (b) accessing professional development; (c) reflecting on classroom data; (d) valuing multilingual teaching assistants; (e) and the interfacing of a-d. In this section, I discuss how these events helped us confront challenges. The changes in classroom practices that resulted from our reflections are described in Chapter Five.

Table 4.3. Elements of our experience that helped us begin to negotiate challenges

Position Self as Learner	Accessing Further Professional Development Experiences	Reflected on Classroom Data	Value Multilingual Teaching Assistants	Interfacing of experiences: One workshop is not enough
Examining Self Learning about essentialization Learning from homes and communities <i>Inside the classroom</i> <i>Outside the classroom</i>	Talking and asking questions: Defining positive literate identities Using children's literature	-	Mrs. Chakraborty Señora Hermas Mrs. Mohammadi	-

Positioning Self as Learner

An overarching finding was that an important part of learning how to negotiate our challenges was the ability to position ourselves as learners *in* and *outside* of our

classrooms and to learn as much as possible about ourselves as well as the children and families we served. This became an essential lens through which we sought to understand families' expertise, wisdom, and knowledge without romanticizing or essentializing. Positioning ourselves as learners was also critical to developing sociocultural knowledge about students and families and bringing that knowledge into the classroom. As we learned more about ourselves as well as students' multiple ways of knowing, we were more apt to make learning meaningful for students in ways that validated and supported their identities and potentially increased the learning sphere for all students in their classrooms. For our group, positioning self as learner involved us primarily in: (a) examining self; (b) learning about essentialization; (c) learning through home and community visits.

Learning about self. In the majority of our activities and discussions, we ended up learning as much about ourselves as we learned about others and this helped as we began to negotiate some of the challenges mentioned earlier in this chapter. This focus on self was intentional on my part, feeling that it would help us begin to recognize biases and in turn allow us to see how those biases affect our ability to teach in culturally relevant ways. In many of our meetings we spent time talking about the cultural lens that we brought with us to the classroom. We learned that we could not change what we did not acknowledge and we were supported in ultimately acknowledging biases by building awareness. An awareness of our own growth was important because without this awareness we could not fully understand others, which was essential in our ability to learn how to negotiate challenges. It was important for us to acknowledge where our thinking began and how it was evolving as we worked towards understanding others. In

one of our Focal Group meetings, for example, I shared my awareness about how I came to understand more about myself:

It wasn't until I started looking at things from multiple perspectives [drawing on sociocultural and critical race theory] that I started seeing more injustices. Being a White, middle-class person allowed me to go through the world like everything was rosy. I was getting to know people [culturally] but I never really subjected myself to situations where I wasn't in control or in a place of power. So putting myself in a place of more vulnerability has made me understand the need to do more of it. (Focal Group meeting, September 16, 2010)

I also spoke about how, when I first began to explore issues of race, culture and language marginalization, I believed, "I already knew everything" by virtue of the fact that I had lived in a diverse city like Brooklyn, New York. I told the story that illustrated this narrow-minded thinking during our November Diversity Group meeting. I talked about how embarrassed I was when I retrieved an article about White Privilege and Male Privilege (McIntosh, 1995) that I read for the first time 10 years ago. I had intended to share it with a friend, but after reading my comments written in the margins of the article 10 years ago (Figure 4.1), I decided against sharing the article out of embarrassment. I was shocked at my previous thinking. Some of the comments I wrote were: "I disagree. I don't think White privilege is taught." And, in response to McIntosh's comments that Whites have unearned assets, I wrote, "Unearned assets, is that fair?"

I shared this instance not only to out myself to the group, but to emphasize the importance of examining self by continuing to read, listen, and learn - not going through the world with blinders on just because I was privileged to do so as a White woman. I explained that this lesson helped me realize that our thinking continually evolves and that we must continually examine ourselves for biases so that we can do our best to avoid

hegemonic practices that privilege some and marginalize others particularly in classrooms.

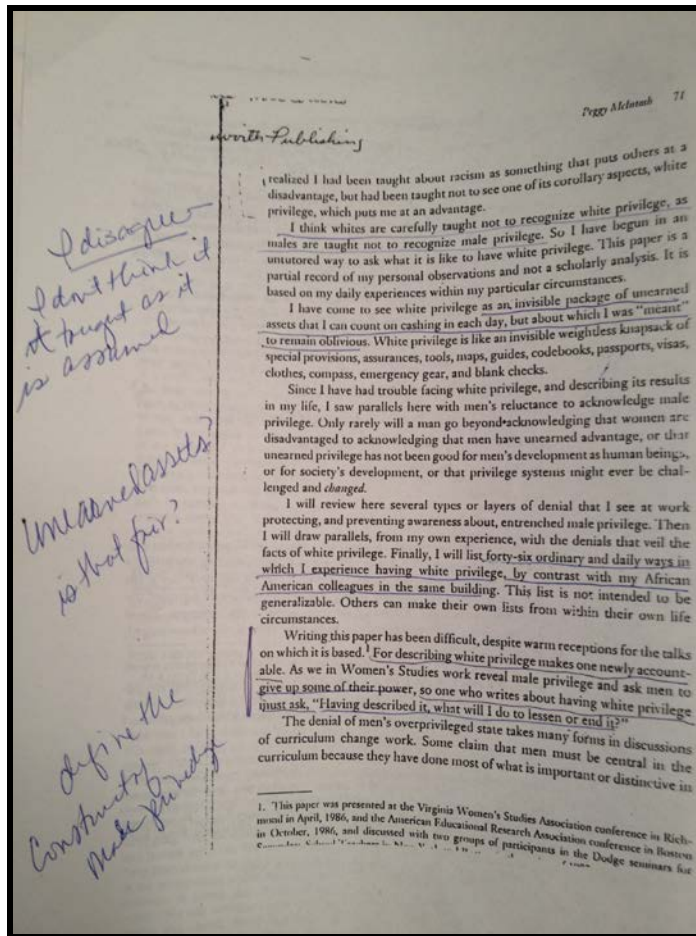


Figure 4.1. Excerpt from White Privilege and Male Privilege article (McIntosh, 1995) with my notes in the margins written 10 years prior to this study.

In a One-to-One meeting with Lyndsay, she and I talked about how these discussions of self-examination about personal bias caused us to consider what we know and believe about students and families in new ways. We discussed how, once we began exploring our own issues of bias, it was easier to identify instances of bias in our teaching lives:

Lyndsay: Like you said, it's just once you hear it, it's just a part of you.

Sabina: It's like you can't ignore it anymore.

Lyndsay: Yeah, it's like- I wasn't already doing that? I can't believe I wasn't thinking about that. I'm thinking that I'm such an awful person.

Sabina: Yeah, I know, but you're not.

Lyndsay: It's just one of those things you get!

Sabina: And you get better and better by having those engagements, because unless it's meaningful [students] really don't get the full benefit from that learning experience, so the more knowledge you have about your students the more able you are to make their learning real.

(October 4, 2010)

Tammy also shared thoughts during our November Diversity Group meeting regarding her own growth and the idea that we start with assumptions but must move beyond them and that this is important to the interpretations we make as we “get into the business” of children and families. She commented:

You know, that's what it is, ... gettin' into the business of what makes [children] click. How do ya'll do things? So you don't just get it by assumptions, but you may start out that way. Eventually [you say] tell me this, or [the child] tells me this. (November 4, 2010)

Learning about essentialization. At the beginning of this chapter, I wrote about a story Tammy shared regarding her experience growing up, often “as the only Black student in her class.” Tammy's story was important for the Diversity Group members to hear because it helped to enlighten us as to one of our challenges - the problem of essentializing or expecting our students or families to be representative of their entire culture. Tammy's comment that she was expected to have “all knowledge about all things Black” and the comment that followed, “I'm just Black like me. I don't do any other Black but this Black, you know? It's just so much pressure,” illustrates what happens when we begin to assume that because we may know an African American person, we

therefore know *all* African Americans. This conversation allowed us to begin building our capacity to avoid essentialization as one way to be more culturally responsive to students and their families. For example, one of the teachers, Shirley, commented on Tammy's remarks saying, "Just listening to you all today was just so enlightening to hear how you feel. I always love listening to Tammy because Tammy is so frank and I think we probably all need to be more frank." Commenting on Tammy's statement I contributed, "Yeah, right! That's essentializing. You can't say all Blacks do this, all Indians do this, [or] talk about *they* do this or *they* do that" (September 16, 2010). Tammy and Shirley's comments and mine that followed highlighted the importance of not essentializing.

Kim mentioned on a number of occasions how she loved learning about the families of her students and when they came to share in the classroom; she was able to see how important students' cultural backgrounds were to them commenting, for example, that having Kat and Sol's father share about their Jewish culture "makes it so personal to them." Kim provided an important example of how this kind of personalized learning reminded her not to essentialize across cultural groups recognizing that, although she was also Jewish, the opportunity to learn directly from the children's father meant that she "learn[ed] more about them as a family" recognizing that Sol and Kat's experiences were unique to their family and of particular importance to them.

Learning from homes and communities. Whether parents and families came into the classrooms or we ventured outside the classroom into students' homes and communities, we gained valuable information from families in terms of supporting children's literate identities. This helped us negotiate challenges because we were able to

see children and families from a strength-based perspective as we came to recognize the literate identities children possessed at home and at school.

Inside the classroom. One way we learned from homes and communities was by inviting parents to spend time in classrooms. One of the strategies we used to make this possible was to send home surveys at the beginning of the year asking parents and families what they felt most comfortable sharing with the class (Appendix J). Also, during the program's Open House each year, I extended an invitation to all families, immediate and extended, to share with us some aspect of their language, culture, religion, or anything that was of importance to them and their children. Throughout the year, teachers also verbally invited, emailed, or surveyed family members to extend an open offer to visit the classroom, teach their home language, or share a talent with the students (Figure 4.2). For example, parents who spoke Spanish, Hebrew and Urdu came into the classrooms to teach some words and phrases in their home languages to the children and teachers.

Bringing families into the classrooms contributed to our learning as we understood at a deeper level the importance of and strategies for validating students' home languages. This helped us negotiate and learn beyond our Amero-centric views as we encouraged the use of languages in addition to English in the classroom. For example, Taj's mother came into Lyndsay's classroom to teach the children some words in Urdu. In Tammy's classroom, Pedro's mother volunteered once a week to teach the children Spanish and, in Kim's class, Sol and Kat's father shared Hebrew language with the children. This enriched the learning environment in each classroom as well as the teachers' knowledge and insight as evidenced by teacher comments such as, "My Spanish

is getting so much better having both Señora Hermas and Dr. López-Robertson in my classroom” (Tammy) and “It was so wonderful to see how excited Taj was to see his mom in the classroom...and I learned so much, too” (Lyndsay).

PARENTS AND FAMILIES - YOU'RE INVITED!!

Dear parents and families,

In our effort to learn more about you and your child, as well as to become more aware of the ways in which families live, speak and learn, we invite you to come share your culture, language, traditions, celebration and/or your talents with us. Please indicate below what you would be willing to share with us. If it is not listed please feel free to add to this list. We appreciate your willingness to share your knowledge and expertise!

I/we would like to share/teach our home language(s), which is/are:

I/we would like to share/teach about our culture(s) and/or religion, which is/are:

I/we would like to share the way our family celebrates holidays or traditions which is/are: _____

I/we would like to share our occupation(s) which is/are: _____

Other ways in which I/we would like to share in the classroom are: _____

Thank you!

Figure 4.2. Sample letter/survey sent home to parents inviting them to share their culture, language or talents

In another example, Kim involved families by having them come to the classroom and sharing their talents. She reflected on her growing understanding of self and others as influenced by this kind of involvement of families in the curriculum. She wrote, “Not only am I learning that I learn more about my families [when they participate in the classroom] but the children learn from this experience. They are so close to their families and need to share that connection” (Kim’s Journal, December, 2010). In a follow-up interview, after the study, Kim further described challenges to her own prior views

experienced when she involved family members in the classroom: “I learn[ed] that people were different than you thought they were. You learn that every situation is not always what it seems.” She elaborated on this comment:

One person that comes to mind is Asia’s [pseudonym] dad. He came in [the classroom] and basically said, “Good morning and good-bye.” He seemed so serious and a no nonsense kind of guy. He seemed so serious and a bit intimidating, too. I assumed he was not personable. However, I made the point to invite him to spend time in the classroom as often as he could. I asked him to come in for a parent workshop and I made the comment [to all the parents] that Mr. Green does magic tricks (Asia told me that he did), and he said, “Yes, do you want me to show you some?” After that, he came in the classroom; he came in and did magic tricks and made the kids laugh. More importantly, we learned [from him coming into the classroom] that there were four generations of military families in their family and how much the men and women in his family did in service of this country. I would have never known this had I not opened up the classroom and invited him to come in. I wanted [Mr. Green] to feel comfortable to come into the classroom. The first six months of school was just hello and goodbye. But I invited him in and I learned more about the family and that he was not at all what I had initially thought. (Member Checking meeting, November 9, 2012)

Kim also spoke about how knowledge gained when family members spent time in her classroom helped her negotiate the challenges she faced in learning to move beyond her biases into new understandings of others. She felt that having families involved in the classroom moved her one step forward towards building relationships and trust with families, which helped her get closer to understanding about her students. She commented, “Inviting parents in to the classroom moves one step further in building a relationship, which makes you closer to the child. Which makes that learning and teaching process better” (August 2, 2012). One of the member checking conversations with Kim expanded on this statement by providing Kim’s specific learning about a particular child and how she used that learning to impact practice:

Kim: I knew that [Charlie] was autistic but having conversations with his mom and building that relationship helped me understand his life

from his birth. I saw him in a different light. Hearing her perspective, I saw her pain and her struggle with learning to deal with a child with disability.

Sabina: How did that make your experience with him in the classroom change?

Kim: It made me want to learn more from mom regarding how I can make him more successful in the classroom. She told me what worked and what didn't work [at home] and it made it where we were on the same page. Like [she suggested] creating a visual schedule and giving him five minutes before transitioning from one activity to another.

(Member Checking meeting, November 9, 2012)

Outside the classroom. Although learning from families' interactions in the classroom was certainly important, I felt that it was important for us to learn beyond the walls of the school because: (a) many families were not able to spend time in schools; and (b) there was so much more that could be learned on families' own turf. As a result, I asked the teachers to spend time as learners in home and community settings of at least a few of their students. Through these experiences, not only did teachers learn more about students and families but they also confronted their own biases or inaccurate assumptions about them. The information and insights gained through those experiences helped us challenge our notions about "one right way" because it helped us recognize and give legitimacy to the many ways children and families interact, learn, and support each other. As described in this section, these experiences helped us address bias that might have kept us from supporting every student's literate identity and to work towards more culturally relevant practices as we gained new information and insights.

At our first Diversity Group meeting of the school year, I asked the teachers to visit the home and community of at least one student from their classroom. I specifically

asked that they choose a student outside their own cultural worlds so they could expand their worlds by recognizing, firsthand, the validity of other ways of being. I also wanted them to learn from students and families about the things that were important to them, and to think about how that information could be used to make classroom learning more meaningful for the student as well as to broaden world views for the entire class.

The notion of going beyond the school walls to learn about students was something with which the faculty was unfamiliar prior to our attention to diversity issues. Some faculty members understood home visits as conducted for the purpose of teaching parents and families how to work with their children: teacher as expert. Conversations in Diversity Group meetings following their home and community visits revealed shifts in teachers' understanding not only about issues facing many children of Color and speakers of languages other than English, but also about the knowledge and wisdom contained in each home and family as well as reasons teachers should spend time in homes and communities in the first place. For example, Sally revealed her changed notions in the following conversation:

Sally: I think back to my early days when I taught and came in as a young White teacher in an almost all minority school...I would make assumptions that parents don't care. I didn't always investigate and take the time to see that they were working two jobs and doing all they can to put food on the table.

Sabina: What was your intent for going in the home?

Sally: We took activities for parents and children to do together but it was a get to know you. You know, do things that would help us get to know the child and the family. Those visits are not the same that I do now. I mean I've grown in my sensitivity to wanting to know more about the family. I think when I do them [home/community visits] now I do a lot less talking and a lot more asking.

- Sabina: So what's happened in the last couple of years in your understanding of the need to talk less and ask more?
- Sally: A lot of what we've learned here.
- Sabina: For example?
- Sally: Just realizing that the child brings so much into the classroom and that we need to find out what those funds of knowledge are and that the more that we can embrace the families and make the families feel a part of our school family it's not so much about telling families how to work with their child, they already know that. It's more about finding out about how they are doing that and what their children know.

(Diversity Group meeting, November 4, 2010)

Tammy shared important insights gained about herself as a learner and about her own misconceptions as a result of one of her home and community visits to five-year-old Thom's and his family's friend's home during the family's celebration of the Jewish holiday, Rosh Hashanah. Thom's family members were recent converts to Judaism and, at this gathering, their friends shared what it was like for them growing up Jewish in the South. Tammy wrote in her journal about how the conversation that evening led her to reflect on her own knowledge and experience:

Tonight I had an opportunity to celebrate the Jewish New Year with Thom, his brother Will and their mother Dana at Kim's house. [T]here was a very interesting conversation about the challenges of being Jewish in the south during the civil rights movement in the fifties and sixties. It was different to hear the difficulties of another group of people and their struggle for equality. (September, 2010)

Tammy continued, "It was odd because it was like a different discrimination conversation that didn't have nothin' to do with me." Tammy was also shocked to learn about specific forms of discrimination experienced by Jews in the South as explained by these family friends, for example, being moved to the back of the classroom for no other reason than because they were Jewish. The visit led to a new realization for Tammy - that

others (in addition to African Americans) experience (and had experienced)

discrimination in the South:

I don't think about it in the realm of other than my people [Black] being discriminated against. Hearing it from the voice of a Jewish person made it more real. It was a conversation about discrimination that had nothing to do with Black people. We weren't the only ones. (One-to-One meeting, October 5, 2010)

This interaction appeared to mean a lot to Tammy and came about as a result of having the opportunity to visit Thom's family and friends. Coming to an awareness of how marginalization affected Thom's family and their friends, Tammy was able to recognize and consider discrimination as something not unique to the African American experience.

Through this experience, not only was Tammy able to learn more about Thom and his family and friends than she had learned in the classroom, she was also able to form a deeper connection with the family based on her understanding that, although they were from different cultural backgrounds, they had each experienced some form of civil rights struggles living in the South. Thom's mother, Dana, also felt a deepened sense of connection because of Tammy's home visit, less "disjointed" from the classroom. In a member checking conversation with Dana, I asked her how she felt about Tammy's participation in their Rosh Hashanah celebration. She commented:

You can't know the child without knowing the family. As a new convert to Judaism the conversation that night enlightened me to the trials and tribulations of the Jewish struggle during the civil rights era. I felt that Tammy's participation was very important because now she knows why my child is talking about the holidays. It shows that she's interested in my child . . . she knows Thom, not just his interests, she knows his humor, his quirkiness . . . this is all very important to me. (August 16, 2012)

I further asked how she would feel if Tammy had not visited Thom in his home and community, to which Dana added, “I would feel isolated [from the classroom] as a family. I wouldn’t feel that I was part of a community . . . disjointed.”

Lyndsay shared that coming to know Taj and his family and, through them, learning more about Muslim culture enriched her understanding of bringing children’s culture and language into the classroom. Lyndsay remarked, “I had no idea of what Taj’s family did or how they grew up, their backgrounds or their beliefs or language, so when we went to the mosque, I don’t know, it just opened my eyes to their [Taj’s] community (Diversity Group meeting, September 16, 2010). Lyndsay also spoke of her excitement of learning Urdu from Taj, which she connected immediately to her teaching. She wrote about this experience and how she made her learning explicit to her students. In her journal she wrote, “I told [the students] how important it is to learn from others and how I learn everyday just like you do. And you teach me things! They liked that I still learn too” (Lyndsay’s Journal, November 1, 2010). She talked about learning some words in Urdu from Taj’s mother, “such as Salaam, which means hello”, during her visit to the class. Lyndsay also wrote in her journal about using her newly learned words in her morning greeting with the class and is shared in more detail in Chapter Five: Classroom Practices.

Accessing Further Professional Development Experiences

Accessing professional development experiences beyond our faculty groups provided another kind of support as we attempted to negotiate challenges. Those kinds of opportunities included: university courses, a lecture series at the local university, and invited speakers to our school. Each of these opportunities focused on topics such as race,

critical literacy and language marginalization. Specifically, in addition to our two whole faculty Inservice days and the Diversity Group meetings, the teachers and I attended a lecture by Dr. Dianne Johnson about African American children's literature, and invited university professors, Dr. Julia López-Robertson, Dr. Gloria Boutte, and Dr. Susi Long, to speak to us regarding equity issues in early childhood education. Some teachers took graduate level classes that focused on diversity issues.

Building on knowledge gained through these professional development experiences beyond our faculty groups, meant that we could use that knowledge to try to create classroom environments that did not see America or English or Whiteness or middle-classness as the only "right way" but as one of the many ways of learning, teaching, using language and literacies, and expressing knowledge in the world and in our country. This also influenced our ability to teach in culturally responsive ways (see Chapter Five for specific ways that we brought out expanded/deepened knowledge to our teaching). The professional development experiences accessed by participants beyond our faculty groups contributed to our knowledge and deepened our group discussions in the following ways: (a) provided opportunities for talking and asking questions which helped us better define *literate identities*, and (b) supported our learning about using multicultural and multilingual children's literature.

Talking and asking questions: Defining positive literate identities. Talking and asking questions through professional development experiences beyond our group work helped us think more about our current beliefs and understandings which, in turn helped us address the challenge of defining positive literate identities. Lyndsay, for example, spoke of learning about culturally relevant teaching in her university classes

and professional development opportunities at school. She discussed how “it just opened my eyes to paying attention to those differences, rather than it just being about me. So talking about it and being asked questions about it made me think and be open to more cultural issues” (Focal Group meeting, September 16, 2010). In a member checking meeting, I asked Lyndsay to explain what she meant by the differences that opportunities to talk and ask questions helped her to understand. She elaborated:

Differences meaning anything that wasn’t in “my everyday world”, from lifestyles to ethnicity, clothes to food, the experiences of others or the way others look at situations or things that I am blind to, etc. For example, things that some people have happen because of the color of their skin. (October 22, 2012)

An opportunity to hear Dr. Long speak about the value of home and community visits allowed us to understand the importance of going into homes and communities as learners. During our September Focal Group meeting, Lyndsay and I drew from this professional development experience. We discussed our visit with Taj and his family to the mosque during Eid, a Muslim holiday, and we talked about receiving henna tattoos as part of that celebration (it is common for children and women to have traditional henna tattoos applied during the Eid celebrations). Lyndsay recounted an event that occurred in her classroom the day after the Eid celebration. She told the group that the morning after the Eid celebration Taj appeared reticent about showing his henna markings until she showed the class her Henna tattoo received at the mosque. Through her recounting of these events Lyndsay revealed that her community visit with Taj’s family allowed her to understand the cultural significance of the tattoos and the need to celebrate children’s knowledge and positive literate identities in the classroom. She remarked, “I don’t think [Taj] was embarrassed about it, but I don’t really think he thought to share it. So we talked about why [Muslims] do it as part of their celebration and he shared his henna

tattoo [with the class]” (September, 16, 2010). I contributed to this conversation by adding other information we gleaned from both Dr. Long and Dr. Boutte - that we should honor children’s cultures and connect it to their learning. I also shared a conversation I had with Mrs. Muller, a parent in Kim’s class, who wrote about how happy she was that her children’s teacher was Jewish. We discussed how important it was for children to see themselves reflected in the classroom/curriculum and how that was critical in supporting their literate identities. I remarked:

We’re bringing [cultural] knowledge into the classroom . . . and I think we can’t do that enough, you know like what [Lyndsay is] talking about as part of [her] curriculum that extends beyond the holidays. Kat’s mom [from Kim’s classroom] emailed me and said that . . . she was so excited because her teacher was Jewish and because she’s somebody like her and that’s important. (September 16, 2010)

We continued to build our understanding of positive literate identities, from what we initially learned in our outside professional development regarding supporting children’s cultural and linguistic identities with Dra. López-Robertson. I thought that we might be able to better understand what positive support might look like by thinking about what the consequences would be if we did not support students’ literate identities. I asked the question: “What happens when children are *not* supported culturally in schools? And what are the implications for student learning? What follows are bits of the conversation teachers offered about what happens when students’ full identities are not embraced in the classroom. We discussed what happens when children’s home languages are omitted from the classroom and curriculum. James commented that not supporting students’ literate identities would occur when teachers limit children’s learning by “not encouraging them to speak their own language, making English the only type of language that is accepted.” We discussed how children need to see themselves reflected in the

curriculum, the books we read and the languages we use in our classroom. Lyndsay added that “if [children] don’t see themselves in the classroom then [they think] something is wrong with them.” Building on Lyndsay’s comments Kim talked about how this lack of support could lead to students’ feeling that they have to assimilate and lose their home beliefs and practices in order to succeed in school. She said, “They may feel like that they want to lose their identity and attach themselves to someone else’s [and one way that we cause that to happen is by] celebrating holidays that are . . . only Christian holidays.” I added that not only was it important to validate and support other ways of speaking, believing or knowing but “it is critical that we make this visible so that all children understand that there is not only one way of speaking, believing or knowing.” Sally addressed the importance of faculty diversity and curriculum support saying, “I think when all the teachers look different [from the students] and they are not represented in the literature [or curriculum] then if we don’t somehow bring it in we are not supporting their identities.” These small moments when we were able to build on our outside professional development engagements, when we talked about them and asked questions all contributed to our collective and growing understanding of the definition of positive literate identities.

Conversations such as this led to discussions about the importance of understanding and interrupting biases and challenging assumptions in our classrooms in order to further support students’ positive literate identities. For example, after that particular conversation, I questioned, “How about not standing up when a stereotype is mentioned and not challenging those kinds of assumptions and statements. What happens if they go unchallenged?” James’ answer to that question reminded us how important it

was to be ever mindful of the importance of speaking out in our work with our students when he said, “sometimes if you don’t say anything at all you are making a loud statement. If you’re not challenging [biases or stereotypes] then it must be okay” (October 21, 2010).

Using children’s literature. Opportunities to use children’s literature during professional development opportunities brought another dimension of clarity to our work allowing us to reflect on our teaching practices (thus negotiating challenges) in specific ways. For example, on October 22, 2010, all 13 members of the faculty participated in a professional development opportunity that I conducted to involve them in discussing issues related to critical literacy and social studies. We spent time looking critically at children’s books for stereotypes, bias, misrepresentation and/or underrepresentation of cultures and languages. I also read excerpts from the children’s book, *My Name is Maria Isabel* (Flor Ada, 1995), to spark discussion regarding the importance of children’s names. Anonymous surveys given to the teachers at the end of the day revealed that many of them came away with important information from this session using children’s literature titled, *Looking at Early Childhood Social Studies Through a Critical Lens*. When asked, “What information stood out to you as important to know?” Survey results suggest that accessing professional development experiences, in which the focus is on using children’s literature to address issues of diversity, impact teachers’ understandings of the need for improved teaching practices in support of our students’ learning. Teachers’ responses included several elements of the session that helped gain new perspectives about honoring diversity in their classrooms. They wrote that they learned:

Teacher #1: To respect each child’s given name and not shorten or change it for my own personal convenience.

- Teacher #2: It is important to pay attention to details. Some books that we have been reading for years and years can be stereotypical.
- Teacher #3: Keep your radar open to what is going on in our world and class community.
- Teacher #4: [I]t is important for us to encourage each child to embrace and share their culture with us. Also, I was reminded how important each child's name is to them, and how we have a responsibility to honor that.
- Teacher #5 [I]t is always important to look at what we are teaching or using as literature for our classroom and ask, 'why?'

(Anonymous teacher surveys, November 8, 2010)

Reflecting on Classroom Data

The process of reflecting individually and in our various group conversations on classroom data was another important element in helping us move toward negotiating challenges. Opportunities and guidance for reflection on classroom data afforded us opportunities to discuss practices that supported or did not support children's positive literate identities across cultural and linguistic groups. Teachers often reported that the opportunity to reflect on their practice using classroom data was one of the best tools to help them *see* what they were doing in the classroom related to what we were learning together through our professional development experiences.

Periodically, I observed in the focus teachers' classrooms. I took field notes and videotaped lessons at group time during whole and small group sessions. At times, I interviewed individual students asking them questions such as: What kinds of things can we read? Who is a good reader in your class? Why? Describe a girl or boy who speaks really well. Who is a great writer in your class? When do we learn to read or write? What kinds of things do we read? What can your teacher do to learn more about you? I

transcribed all video data and interviews and then met individually with the teachers using transcripts, field notes, and video excerpts from my observations as the basis for our conversations. Kim, Lyndsay and Tammy reported that this was one of the strategies that helped them the most in understanding their teaching practices in support of children's positive literate identities. Kim commented how much she valued my classroom observations shared in this way because otherwise she missed so much of what went on with the other students when she worked with one or two students in guided reading activities. She lamented about all the "stuff" she was missing as the other 18 students were engaged in independent activities:

That's the stuff I would love [to see]. I feel like when I'm doing a lesson and I look up I don't get to see the fine details. You know, like you did. You just got to sit there [take notes and videotape]. You were able to focus on a conversation or a particular activity. (One-to-One meeting, October 21, 2010)

Kim explained that reflecting with me while watching the videotapes or reading my field notes and transcripts was a "powerful opportunity to learn about [her] students and [her] teaching." Lyndsay also commented on the opportunity to reflect on the transcripts of my observation in her classroom echoing Kim's sentiments, "Yeah, this is really neat because you miss so much [of what happens in the classroom]." In a member checking meeting with Lyndsay I asked her to explain what she meant by "really neat." Lyndsay explained:

Neat meaning such a great experience because so much of what is being said by each individual student is missed. When children are having conversations or working through their work it is nice to have another pair of ears to recognize what is being said or happening that one set of ears can miss. (October 22, 2012)

Opportunities to reflect on classroom data provided teachers time to reflect "through new eyes" on the kinds of things they said or did as well as the things the children said and did, and how teachers questioned or redirected the students in support

of their positive literate identities. Tammy also wrote about the opportunity to use classroom data and how she valued our discussions of classroom transcriptions and interactions observed. She wrote:

I really enjoy the feedback from you after your classroom observations. Sometimes other people see things you do and say with your students that you may be unaware of that may or may not be good practices, so it is good to take a look at yourself through new eyes and that is what the feedback does. (Tammy's Journal, December, 2010)

Valuing Multilingual Teaching Assistants

We were fortunate to enjoy the expertise of several multilingual teaching assistants in our school: Mrs. Chakraborty who spoke Telegru; Señora Hermas who spoke Spanish and English; and Mrs. Mohammadi who spoke Farsi. Their support was critical to our ability to begin negotiating challenges, particularly as we taught and responded to students across cultural and linguistic backgrounds. When possible and as needed, I shifted assistants from one classroom to another in order to place someone who spoke a particular child's language in the appropriate classroom. This was done only after consulting with the classroom teachers and both assistants involved in the exchange. For example, Heman's and Hema's parents initially wanted their children to be with Mrs. Chakraborty but we did not have availability in her classroom. To accommodate the parents' request and after consulting with the teachers and assistants we decided to move Mrs. Chakraborty to Kim's classroom because she spoke Telegru, Heman's and Hema's primary language.

Señora Hermas. Tammy negotiated the challenge of responding in culturally responsive ways, in particular by learning to speak Spanish through her interactions with Señora Hermas. Tammy often discussed the relationship between herself and Señora

Hermas, her part-time teaching assistant who is bilingual speaker of Spanish and English. They worked well together in the classroom and there was evidence of reciprocity in their learning. Señora Hermas helped Tammy learn Spanish and Tammy helped Señora Hermas learn some nuances of English. Tammy explained, “She’s good for me and I’m good for her. I explain to her and I say, ‘I’m going to say something and I’ll explain it to you when I’m finished.’ So now she understands certain words that she didn’t understand before...and I’m learning more Spanish” (Diversity Group meeting, September 16, 2010). Señora Hermas felt the same way about their relationship. In a member checking meeting I asked how she felt about learning language and working with Tammy. She replied:

Since Tammy was not very proficient in Spanish, it made me realize that I too was allowed to make mistakes in English. This gave me the confidence to speak English without worrying about making mistakes. Tammy made me feel comfortable when I had questions about translating certain words into the English language. (October 23, 2012)

This reciprocity helped Señora Hermas and Tammy gain linguistic and cultural knowledge about each other and used that in their teaching. Examples of this teaching will be shared in Chapter Five: Classroom Practices.

Tammy often spoke of her attempts to learn Spanish from Señora Hermas along with her students. She shared how she and her students would try to learn new phrases in Spanish to “surprise” José’s mother, Señora Lupe, and Señora Hermas with their Spanish language ability. Tammy proclaimed:

They [the students] even talked to José’s mom today. I told them [the students] I need to talk with Señora Hermas just to surprise her some morning by speaking to her and asking how her day is and having a whole script. (One-to-One meeting, October 5, 2010)

Tammy believed that the students were doing better than she was in learning how to speak Spanish and stated that, “right now when [Señora Lupe] comes in [the classroom the children] automatically know that she doesn’t speak English, so they speak Spanish to her and I try too.” I shared with Tammy how important it was for students to see her learning alongside them. I added that “[the students] see us trying the language and how it’s always important for us to attempt because they see us in a learning role- we’re learning as they’re learning” (October 5, 2010). In particular, it was important that we moved away from expecting parents to speak English when their primary language was Spanish. As teachers made the effort to learn Spanish, with the help of Señora Hermas, they celebrated the times when they “surprised” parents visiting the classroom by speaking to families in their home language.

In a member checking meeting with Sra. Hermas, now a teacher in another child development program within our district, she told me how much it meant to her to have the opportunity to speak and teach Spanish in Tammy’s classroom and in the child development program. She also praised Tammy for her willingness to try to speak Spanish and valued that she encouraged her to take the lead in their classroom:

Tammy always helped me when I was in her classroom. She let me take the lead and teach the children and Tammy tried hard to learn Spanish, too. The children [saw] her trying to speak to me, [to the children] and to José’s mom and that made them want to learn more. Tammy and Mrs. Matherson treated me like a teacher not an assistant. I loved being in that classroom. I miss it very much. (January 29, 2013)

Mrs. Mohammadi. Mrs. Mohammadi, a part-time assistant in Lyndsay’s classroom was from Iran and spoke Farsi. Lyndsay spoke often about how Mrs. Mohammadi provided additional language experiences for the students including classroom materials such as children’s books and stories and songs on tapes in Farsi.

Lyndsay also spoke about how Mrs. Mohammadi taught the children Farsi and they added the newly learned words to their morning message and morning meetings. In one of her journal entries Lyndsay wrote, “The children ask [her] how to say bear, cat, witch, can, man, kangaroo [in Farsi] and Mrs. Mohammadi would tell us” (November 11, 2010). In my researcher’s notes I also recorded Mrs. Mohammadi role in bringing Farsi children’s literature to the classroom:

Mrs. Mohammadi brought in two children’s books written in Farsi today. She said they were her children’s. I have never seen books written in Farsi so I was thrilled that she was willing to share them. I am so happy we have such wonderful assistants that provide such important cultural and linguistic resources for our staff, students and their families. (December 3, 2010)

Successes Came Through the Interfacing of Experiences: One Workshop is Not Enough

Each professional development opportunity within and beyond our group work gave us new insights but data seem clear that it was the combination of experiences and opportunities to explore issues of identity, equity, and cultural relevance over time that led to the deepest learning. We all felt that one workshop or any one professional development opportunity was just not enough to help us build knowledge that would influence classroom changes. For example, Lyndsay explained that, while a workshop with a visiting professor caused her to be open to bringing students’ home languages to the classroom, she ultimately began embracing more than one language (Spanish) in the classroom when that initial learning was interfaced with access to insights from a cultural insider positioned in the school, our Spanish teacher, Señora Hermas. This was evidenced when I asked Lyndsay why she decided to incorporate both Spanish and English into her morning message. She responded:

It was Susi Long who came in to talk to us about how to incorporate different languages and books and morning messages and everything. I began by just saying, ‘Hola’ in the morning message and that was about it. But Señora Hermas [our Spanish teacher and Tammy’s part-time assistant] has been printing off a lot of phrases for us to use and children just love Spanish so sometimes I’ll take it and write it in English and say, ‘What could we take out and say in Spanish’ or sometimes I will write in Spanish and have them translate it to English. They just really love it and it’s really meaningful. (One-to-One meeting, October 4, 2010)

Another professional opportunity involved a presentation by Dr. Gloria Boutte, an early childhood professor from a neighboring university. She shared issues with our faculty related to race and culture and African American language. This initial professional development served to support further conversations and reflections as Tammy shared an experience in her classroom. She spoke about how hearing Dr. Boutte speak enhanced her already sensitivity to, “students’ notions of beauty” of many of the Black female children in her class, particularly when she began hearing the girls in her classroom discuss who could or could not be a princess. Tammy built upon this experience with Dr. Boutte and developed a study of princesses around the world grounded in children’s interests and questions. In a member checking meeting with Tammy, she conveyed Dr. Boutte’s influence on her practice:

Hearing Dr. Boutte speak helped to confirm how I felt as an African American teacher hearing students talk about their ideas of what beauty was. Her presentation fueled me to interrupt that kind of thinking in my students. I did my own [internet] search for princesses around the world and showed the students what ‘real princesses’ looked like. (December 8, 2012)

Tammy added that she built upon her initial knowledge, hearing Dr. Boutte speak, and believed that her continuous conversations in our Diversity Group and One-to-One meetings helped her, “to think more [critically] about the materials she used and the lessons she taught in her classroom.” In both situations, teachers used prior knowledge

from previous professional development experiences to enhance their students' classroom experience.

A critical overarching finding in our quest to negotiate (or attempt to negotiate) the challenges in our exploration of diversity and children's literate identities was the importance of the interaction of a variety of mechanisms accessed in support of such explorations. *In other words, it seems clear that any solutions or successes came, not from one experience, one speaker, one reading, but from the interfacing of the range of planned and unplanned opportunities in which Tammy, Kim, Lyndsay and I participated in and out of school.* These opportunities included Focal Group, Diversity Group, whole faculty Inservice Days, One-to-One meetings; conversations between me and teachers, home visits and conversations with parents, families and staff; and other professional development opportunities such as courses, conferences, and workshops; in conjunction with our diverse life experiences in our own homes and communities. As described in Chapter Six, this was supported by the autonomy I provided for the teachers as they planned and taught in classrooms. Thus moments when we were able to articulate coming to know others and ourselves and recognize and attempt to negotiate challenges we encountered in the process, emerged out of our collaboration with each other, students, families and the professional resources that were a part of our collective intentionally planned and theoretically consistent experiences.

Conclusion to Chapter Four

I entered this study believing that our ability to support students' positive literate identities was largely determined by the type and quality of professional development we received. I believed that effective professional development must focus on helping us

recognize and reflect on biases that may keep us from seeing children and families for the many dimensions that define them. I worried that most professional development in the area of diversity was merely a set of “fun” activities that left participants with nothing valuable to use in the classroom. In this study, while I found that our professional development sessions were important to our understanding of how to support and nurture students’ positive literate identities, there was not one particular interaction that proved to be more important than another, but rather the collective interactions of professional development, Diversity Group meetings, Focal Group meetings, one-to-one conversations, and home and community experiences with students and families.

In terms of the impact across faculty groupings, I found that those of us who participated in all three contexts (Focal Group, Diversity Group, Inservice Meetings) versus the faculty who participated in only one or two of the groups were provided more opportunities for conversation in the area of equitable practices. The ability of the primary participants to identify and reflect on instances when we were not culturally responsive or about our limited linguistic and cultural knowledge illuminates the importance of administrators and teachers carving out time to discuss issues of race, culture and language marginalization systematically, regularly, and over time.

Through the process of exploring our understanding of race, culture and language marginalization, we recognized that family and community knowledge is essential for all of us, teachers, staff and students alike. However, we also recognized that we could not begin to understand or value others until we first understood ourselves; hence the importance of our conversations and exploration about our learning and beliefs. The process presented us with many challenges, but it was due to these challenges that we

were able to reflect on the ways in which we expressed biases or stereotypes, to understand instances when we essentialized, romanticized, and failed to respond to students and families in culturally relevant ways. This further reveals that, despite our long-term study in this area, we were only at the beginning stages of our understanding and that transformation in our thinking would take our continuous commitment to explore these issues. We never truly tackled or unpacked some important issues that undergirded discriminatory practices in schools that marginalize some students and privilege others such as racism, oppression or marginalization. I do not believe our lack of exploring issues at a deeper level had as much to do with our ability to discuss these issues as it did with my role in facilitating the conversations necessary for such exploration and I explore this concern in more detail in Chapter Six: The Administrator's Role.

We also found that to interrupt the biases and stereotypes, it was not enough to merely talk among ourselves as faculty. Parents and other family members should have been included in these critical conversations for two reasons: (a) they could provide cultural insight that might interrupt our biases, stereotypes, essentializing or romanticizing; and (b) we (and they) could become more informed as to the ways in which biases and stereotypes interfere with learning and supporting students' literate identities.

Through this experience we began to negotiate some of the challenges we faced as we talked and asked questions and began to build on our understanding of positive literate identities. Chapter Five focuses on how we attempted to use the knowledge gained from those experiences to support students' positive literate identities. Drawing from professional development opportunities; interactions with faculty, staff, students

and their families; and opportunities to engage with families beyond the classroom walls, we simultaneously brought enhanced ways of thinking into the classroom as we worked to engage students in culturally relevant practices.

CHAPTER FIVE

CLASSROOM PRACTICES: USING INITIAL AWARENESSES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS' POSITIVE LITERATE IDENTITIES

Chapter Four addressed many of the challenges met as I sought to create space and support for teachers to discuss issues of race, culture and language, particularly as those issues related to supporting students' positive literate identities. The chapter also addressed the ways that we attempted to negotiate those challenges and how we sometimes failed or were not successful in those negotiations. Although challenges continued throughout this study, we were not without successes as the teachers and I used our learning to recreate learning environments. In this chapter, I specifically focus on the three teachers' classroom implementations and discuss some of the ways in which Kim, Tammy, and Lyndsay worked to support children's positive literate identities in new ways or by enhancing or altering existing practices as a result of our professional development experiences. As noted in Chapter Four, data analysis makes it clear that it was not any one experience that led to new thinking or changes in teaching, but the interplay of multiple professional development opportunities over time.

The Problem

In Chapter Two, I discussed how sociocultural theory helps us understand how children come to know what they do through engagements in their sociocultural worlds. Through their sociocultural worlds, children develop literate identities. Sometimes those identities are positive – “I am literate; the ways I use literacy are valued and significant”

– and sometimes those identities are negative – “The literacies I know are not valued; I am not literate.” These identities in turn, reflect the many ways in which children reveal or suppress their cultural knowledge, identify themselves culturally and linguistically, and use their cultural and linguistic knowledge as a resource in the meaning-making process. Therefore, it is foundational to how they communicate (Nieto, 1999). Research tells us that children: come to school with a vast amount of knowledge about the world and how to interact across multiple cultural and linguistic worlds (Gregory, Long & Volk, 2004; López-Robertson, 2008); already possess identities steeped in their home culture and language (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005; Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001; Tatum, 2003); and are continually developing as language and literacy users (Rowe, 1994). This helps us understand why it is so important to support children’s home literacies and languages as a part of the meaning-making and communication processes at school. If teachers are not aware of how children come to learn what they do, if they are not aware of the resources children bring to the classroom, they may misjudge students’ existing knowledge and potential, and not know how to build on the strengths that children possess. In fact, all too often children who come from homes where the literacies do not match the literacies at school are seen as deficient. At the same time, children from dominant cultural and linguistic groups too often are seen as and come to see themselves and the literacies and literacy practices in their lives as superior (Gregory et al, 2004).

The literature points out that, historically, students with literate identities that match traditional school literacies are seen as having the most knowledge in classrooms (Heath, 1983) but those students whose literate identities differ from school literacies are often seen from a deficit perspective (Delpit 2006; 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto,

1999; Tatum, 2007). This deficit perspective has negative impact on students' achievement due to teachers' lack of understanding of students' existing cultural/linguistic knowledge, which often leads to low student expectations and/or inappropriate and/or unsuccessful curricular engagements (Delpit, 2006, 2012; Milner, 2010; Tatum, 2007). This helps to explain why many students of Color, speakers of languages other than English, and children from low-wealth communities are so often served less well in schools than their White, middle-class peers and speaks to the need to support all children's cultural knowledge and positive literate identities (SEF, 2010).

New or Enhanced Practices

The issues described above were those that this study hoped to address. Through the professional development experiences I designed, I hoped that, as we explored our understandings about issues of race, culture, and language marginalization, we would gain new insights about why and how we might better support positive literate identities in our diverse classrooms of students. Our growing understandings helped us recognize the importance of knowing students and the cultural resources that they brought to school, building relationships with families and seeking their input (classrooms becoming shared spaces for teachers, students and families), bringing students' home and heritage languages into the classroom and making those languages visible, and stepping outside of the school walls into homes and communities of our students' and families.

Coming to these realizations, it was then important that we figure out ways to create or revise classroom practices supportive of students' positive literate identities by drawing on our new insights. Although I was often a part of these discussions and work in classrooms, this chapter specifically highlights the ways Kim, Lyndsay and Tammy

attempted to support children's positive literate identities in their classrooms by drawing on their learning through our professional development experiences. At times, the teachers' strategies and practices differed from classroom to classroom, but the intent of their teaching was generally the same. Thus, the content of this chapter reflects new practices implemented in more than one classroom that are a direct result of professional development conversations (N); practices that were in place prior to the study but that were enhanced through our continued growth (EE); and practices that were new but unique to an individual teacher or classroom (NS).

With that foundation in mind, this chapter is organized according to ways that Tammy, Kim and/or Lyndsay used their knowledge and new insights to build new practice and/or enhance existing practice by: (a) getting to know the children by bringing family and home culture into the classroom; (b) helping the children see power in multicultural knowledge: modeling respect for culture and language; (c) visibly valuing non-traditional literacies; and (d) supporting traditional literacies in culturally responsive ways. The classroom practices included in these insights are reflected in Table 5.1.

It is also important to note that much of the data presented in this chapter were collected during the study but further insights were collected through extensive member checking. As I analyzed data, I realized that there was much I still did not know about how our professional development experiences specifically influenced classroom changes. As a result, member checking at the point of writing this dissertation provided insights that give more specificity to these findings.

Table 5.1. Classroom practices: Using initial awareness to support students’ positive literate identities (EE- existing enhanced practice; N- new practice; NS- new practice-specific to a particular teacher)

Getting to know children: Bringing families in	Helping children seeing power in multi-cultural knowledge: Modeling respect for language, knowledge and culture	Valuing non-traditional or deprived literacies	Supporting traditional literacies in culturally sensitive ways
Family pictures (EE) Me Boxes (EE) Family recipes (EE) Celebration of Life (N) Self-portraits (EE) Book of Sunbeams (NS) “I Can” chart (NS) Face-to-face communication (EE) Building relationships with families outside the school walls (N)	Trying on language (N) Making children’s language visible (EE) Encouraging parents and families to share culture and language (EE) Interrupting children’s misconceptions (N)	During outdoor playtime (N) Children represent their knowledge “how they wanted” (EE) Reading maps (EE) Practicing literate behaviors through block play (N)	Defending beliefs and convictions (N) Multiple daily read alouds drawing on funds of knowledge (EE) Using multicultural children’s literature: Seeing themselves in books (EE) Morning message (EE) Written conversations (EE)

Getting to Know Children: Bringing Family and Home Cultures into the Classroom

Through our professional development experiences, we deepened and expanded our existing belief that getting to know children was paramount in understanding how to teach them (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) and positively supporting their literate identities (Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001). We learned that first and foremost family and home culture played an important role in that process. Lyndsay articulated this as of particular importance. During one of our Focal Group meetings she said, “I think that part

of [teaching] is getting to know your children and asking questions . . . [otherwise] you have no idea of what they know or how they grew up, their backgrounds or their beliefs” (September 16, 2010). We recognized that the physical presence of family members in the classroom helped us get to know students better. As demonstrated in the following sections, bringing families into the classroom allowed teachers to learn more about the students, provided the students with knowledge about their classmates, and supported children whose families became classroom participants. In her journal, Kim expressed her belief that students learn from their families due to the connection they have with them. She commented, “The children learn from this experience. They are so close to their families and need to share that connection” (Kim’s Journal, December 13, 2010).

With this insight in mind, the teachers intentionally employed many strategies specifically designed to get to know students, particularly when they were new to the school and/or the classroom, but also throughout the time they were in our program. Those strategies – twists on existing practices and experimentation with new ideas - included the use of: (a) family pictures, (b) me boxes, (c) family recipes, (d) celebration of life, (e) creating self-portraits, (f) book of sunbeams, (g) “I Can” Chart, (h) through their writing, (i) time for face-to-face conversations, and (j) building relationships by stepping outside the school walls. All of these strategies are further discussed below.

Family pictures. For many years, teachers typically requested family photos at the beginning of the school year as part of the student’s classroom supply list. Most families participated and most all children were represented. This often served as a way for us to learn more about children’s lives and beliefs as illustrated by one of many instances in Lyndsay’s class. When one Muslim family did not have a picture displayed, I asked the

child's mother, Dr. Baghdadi, about it and she told me that it is "not allowed in our religion," that they did not believe that pictures should be displayed because the "angels won't come." When I asked to learn more about this belief, she answered, "Not all Muslims do this but I won't take any pictures of myself. I will take pictures of my children." As I researched this belief system, I learned that while some Muslims are stricter than others regarding this practice, she was likely referring to the Islamic belief that photos are often not taken because the Prophet Muhammad teaches that no living images should be displayed because they can become *haram* (forbidden) if they become revered as idols. In some Muslim homes, pictures are not visible because it is believed that angels will not enter the home where images are displayed (Al-Qaradawi, 1980). Dr. Baghdadi also felt that despite her religious belief, "it [did] matter [that the family photos] were in the classroom" and it was important for the teachers to ask for them. In Kim and Tammy's classrooms, photos were also displayed and used to know children and families better. Figure 5.1 illustrates some of the family pictures displayed in Tammy's classroom.



Figure 5.1. Family pictures displayed in Tammy's classroom

The use of family pictures was not a new strategy. Teachers long used family portraits as a means of bringing aspects of children's individual and community identities into the classroom. However, in the past, family pictures were used for display only. Since our professional development focused on the importance of family and culture as they impact student learning, Kim, Lyndsay and Tammy attempted to support students' positive literate identities by not only displaying family pictures, but using them to discuss the different kinds of family structures and types of families. For example, in August, during a transition from indoor work to outdoor playtime, students in Tammy's class were asked to line up by different family groupings. She reminded the children that they could refer to their family pictures if they needed. She proceeded to call students by asking, "If you have two people in your family, line up. If you have four people, line up" (August 26, 2010).

Again in September, I observed Tammy using children's family photos to discuss the Spanish words for various family members. Tammy asked the children to gather their pictures and place them in front of them on the carpet. She proceeded to talk with the students about their families. Señora Hermas helped and provided the necessary assistance in Spanish. In the following example, family pictures become an entree to teaching in culturally relevant ways and supporting students' positive identities by building on what they knew – their families. Tammy also shares that Thom's picture is missing and that it was important to get it back. In doing so, she relays the importance of the family pictures as essential to the classroom and his learning:

Tammy: What have we been talking about?

Children: Our families

Tammy: Did everyone share their picture?

Children: Yes!

Tammy: And we talked about . . . what was the name for brother in Spanish?

McKenzie: Hermano

Tammy: Hermano

Señora Hermas: Si, Hermano

Tammy: And sister, would be what?

Children: Hermana

Tammy: And you told Señora Hermas if you had a hermano or a hermana and everyone showed their beautiful family pictures. Some of you had brothers; some of you had sisters. Some had neither. Some people had brothers and sisters. Some people had big brothers; some had little brothers. Some had big sisters or little sisters, but everyone shared their family photo. BUT we have a problem. We lost one photo! I'm not sure where it went. Thom did we give you your picture last year when you went home?

Thom: I think so.

Tammy: Well I need it back! We have to have a picture of your family, Okay? Let's find out! Does Thom have a hermana or hermano?

Thom: Hermano

Child: Cool!

Tammy: Is he grande [big] or pequeño [little]?

Thom: Well, kind of in the middle, he's nine.

Tammy: He's nine? What's in the middle (to Senora Hermas)?

Señora Hermas: Mediano

Tammy: Mediano

(Classroom Observation, September 14, 2010)

During a member checking meeting with Tammy, I asked her about her use of family pictures during transition time and the use of the family pictures as a source of Spanish language opportunity for the students. She explained how her practice of using family pictures changed due to her involvement with our professional development:

I began [in years past] using family pictures as a way to make the classroom a more cozy place. But after our conversations [in professional development engagements] and listening to everyone and how they did them, now I use them to graph, or for art - they use them for self-portraits, talk about different kinds of families; because some children are raised by grandparents or one parent. I want them to know that all families matter and are special. I learned and understand how important it is to expose children to other languages so I have added learning words about family in Spanish. Instead of a worksheet of random people, I use their family pictures. It just makes the learning important to them. (December 7, 2012)

Family pictures were displayed in all areas of their classrooms for the entire school year and served to support their message that families were important and were foundational to students' lives and hence their identities. Family pictures helped teachers get to know who the important people were in children's lives as well. They were also important in sending the message that the classroom was a place that included not only students and teachers, but families too. When I asked parents what it meant to them to have their family pictures displayed in the classroom they relayed that it helped develop a sense of belonging in the classroom not only for the students but for the families as well. I asked about this through the member checking process. Dra. López-Robertson, a parent in Tammy's classroom, offered her view of family pictures as part of the classroom environment:

I think it is important to have family pictures displayed in the classroom; it gave us a sense of belonging and it was great to see that a 'family' has many different ways to look. I found myself checking out all the other pictures to see what the

other families looked like. It also helped create a connectedness, a warm feeling that ‘hey, not only is my child welcomed here but so is our family.’ (J. López-Robertson, Personal Communication, January 16, 2013)

Another parent, also from Tammy’s classroom, Mrs. Holt, shared how she felt the use of family pictures in the classroom supported her daughter’s sense of belonging as well as a place in the classroom community:

I think the family pictures are great because it’s like a family atmosphere- It makes my child feel a sense of belonging; that [Mrs. Greenway] cares about my child and us as a family. And it makes [Nicole] feel like she’s a part of a larger family [classroom community] as well. (J. Holt, Personal Communication, January 13, 2013)

Some parents saw the family pictures as a source of comfort and support for their children. For example, Mrs. McNulty, a parent in Lyndsay’s classroom, commented on the opportunity to provide a picture to display:

I appreciated very much the opportunity to share pictures of our family. I felt it made the classroom more “homey” and it gave the children a place to go when they were missing mommy and daddy. (D. McNulty, Personal Communication, January 5, 2013)

Additionally, Mrs. Warren, a parent in Kim’s class offered, “I’m glad Dillon has a picture of our family in the classroom. I think it gives him comfort and makes him feel like he belongs there and has our support” (A. Warren, Personal Communication, January 14, 2013)

Me boxes. *Me Boxes* were children’s collections of artifacts that held significance to them, their interests, or their lives. They were treasure troves of possibilities for the teachers because they had the potential to reveal the vast funds of knowledge that children and their families possessed and to provide insights into the kinds of things valued by the children and their families. Children used boxes, bags, or any type of container to hold their items (typically limited to about five items). Children gathered

these items at home, often with the help of their families, and brought them to school to share with their classmates, the teacher and assistants. All three focal teachers invited families to share items of importance to their child. Figure 5.2 is a letter Lyndsay sent to parents about the Me Box and ideas about items to include.

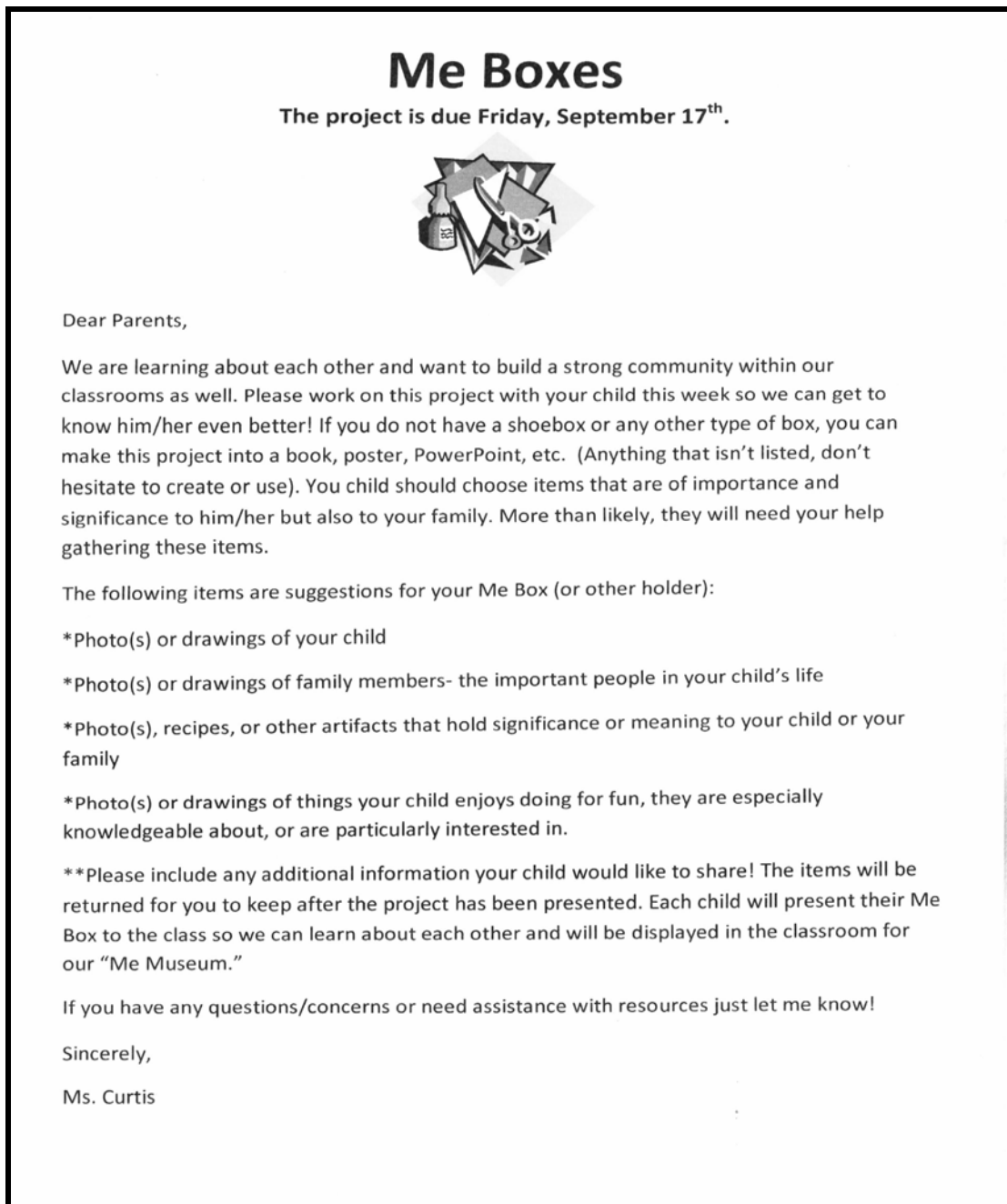


Figure 5.2. Lyndsay's letter to parents requesting items for children's Me Box

This practice existed prior to our professional development but because of specific guest speakers at our professional development sessions and subsequent faculty conversations, teachers developed a deeper understanding of ways they might use Me Boxes to support students' literate identities. During a member checking meeting with Kim she revealed how her use of the Me Box changed because we explored issues of race, culture and language:

Sabina: Was the Me Box something you have always done in your class?

Kim: Initially it was something that I just did. Through our discussions and workshops and learning from other teachers, I learned more about what to do with them. We started learning to do more and go further than a Me Box.

Sabina: Can you say what you specifically learned?

Kim: I learned to use the information all year as opposed to one lesson; for example, the literature about African American hair, from Gloria [Boutte], the book about Maria Isabel [presented during inservice] that I never thought about. It made me aware of what to do with the information and why it was important to do so.

Sabina: Why was it important?

Kim: I felt that it was important to know that who [the children] are mattered. The professional development helped me think further, culturally.

(January 11, 2013)

An example of how children used Me Boxes to highlight their existing knowledge occurred during an observation in Lyndsay's classroom. I observed during a large group share time where children were taking turns talking about their Me Boxes. Students shared with their peers as they sat in a semi-circle in front of them. Gale shared his knowledge of dinosaurs, Taj shared books written in his language - Urdu, Harry shared his knowledge of sports and Kat shared her love of dolls (Classroom Observation, August, 2010).

Informing curricular planning. The use of Me Boxes further supported teachers' abilities to promote positive student identities throughout the year when teachers used the information gleaned to make the curriculum meaningful and build on children's cultural knowledge. Students shared pictures, toys or items of importance to them. They also shared their favorite food or family trip taken and shared stories associated with each of their items providing further insights for teachers into the students' identities which, in turn, allowed teachers to create meaningful classroom experiences based on that information. During one of our member checking meetings, Lyndsay commented on how she used that learning to celebrate children's language and their individual strengths and interests:

[Taj's] language was the main focus of his [me] box and you could tell how proud he was to share it, especially when he saw his friends excited. I also found out he enjoys working and teaching others...especially teaching me. He thought that was funny, but I told him that I am always learning just like him. Leigh brought dolls, and doll books and anything pink or purple. Hilton brought a football and other sports items. [This information] helped me have a connection with the children and I was able to use the information when I did plans. It also helped me bring in items that would make lessons more fun and meaningful...like giving Gale a dinosaur project that he had to present to the class. He was so excited about sharing! Or giving Harry pictures of sports items that he had to sort. (November 10, 2012)

Through the use of Me Boxes in Kim's class, the class learned that Sol and Kat were Jewish. Knowing this, Kim invited Sol and Kat's father into the classroom during the month of September to teach the children about their family's celebration of Rosh Hashanah. Sol's father brought in the Shofar, an instrument made from a ram's horn, and demonstrated how it was used during the celebration at the Jewish Temple. The children participated in tasting apples dipped in honey, another tradition during the Rosh Hashanah celebration. Later, in December, when the class unit of study was *Winter*

Celebrations Around the World, Sol and Kat's mother came in to talk about how their family celebrated Hanukkah (Figure 5.3). Knowing that Sol and Kat were Jewish allowed Kim to provide meaningful curricular engagements for them while making it possible for the other children to learn from further dimensions of Sol and Kat's identities. Mrs. Muller described how positive and expanded understandings of Kat and Sol's identities were supported through this opportunity:

I like coming into the classroom because I feel like it is something I can share with the class and Kat and Sol can help me explain the holidays. It helps them feel special and it takes the mystery out of the holiday for the class. The teachers have always made Kat and Sol feel special for their religious differences and each loves to share their experiences. I feel that it supports their identity by reinforcing the common ideas that the holidays represent with the classmates while making [Kat and Sol] feel special. It also helps us bond as a family to share the experience together. (H. Muller, Personal Communication, January 17, 2013)

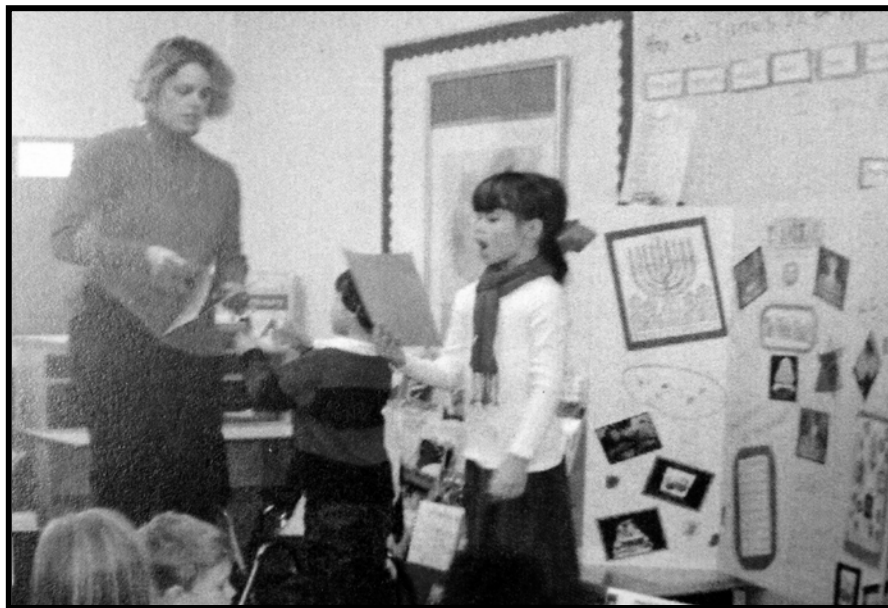


Figure 5.3. Sol, Kat and Mrs. Muller teach the class about Hanukkah

Enjoyment/excitement. Students appeared to enjoy sharing the stories associated with their artifacts based on their willingness to share and excitement for sharing with the class. For example, during a classroom observation in Lyndsay's classroom Shaun raised

his hand vigorously and asked, “Is it my turn next? Can I share next, please Ms. Carter?” (September, 2010). Shaun shared his Me Box with the class and showed them his collection of artifacts that included action hero figures, figures of wrestlers and pictures of his family.

A way to introduce themselves and build confidence. Lyndsay suggested that the Me Boxes were “a really good way for the children to introduce themselves.” She added:

If I were to just ask them to tell me about themselves it may be hard, but if you tell them to go home and fill a box with their favorite things then that makes stories pop-up and then parents get involved and they say ‘ooh remember about this picture when you did this, or when you were two, or when we went here?’ And they come back . . . and they’re excited and their friends are excited . . . and that’s been really meaningful. (Focal Group Meeting, October 4, 2010)

Another parent from Lyndsay’s classroom spoke about the confidence and pride she feels that the Me Box activity provided for her child:

When Dillon was asked to bring a Me Box, he really enjoyed sharing *his* things with his friends. He did like seeing his friends Me Boxes, but I think the biggest gain (in confidence and pride) is for the child doing the sharing. (A. Warren, January 14, 2013)

An opening for parent-child discussions. I asked several parents about their view of the Me Box. Mrs. McNulty, a parent in Lyndsay’s classroom mentioned how important it was for her child, Shin Shin to bring in a Me Box. Shin Shin was adopted from China and the act of finding artifacts for the Me Box gave Mrs. McNulty an opportunity to have a discussion with her daughter about the items she chose:

My daughter and I took the time to look through pictures and add items of important to her Me Box. She enjoyed the process and it made for great discussion – why she liked certain things, memories from pictures, etc. (D. McNulty, Personal Communication, January 5, 2013)

Appreciating differences. Along with sharing similarities, another outcome of having children share something about themselves through their Me Boxes was the

ability to appreciate each other's differences. For example, in a member checking interview with Sarah's mother, Mrs. Miller, she shared how Sarah learned to appreciate the religious diversity of her classmates:

Mrs. Miller: Sarah brings that home to me and shares that information. I remember one point as it relates to another culture, when Sarah shared with us about Kat and Sol's religion and learning about their holiday, Hanukkah. We were able to see the impact and end result [of that knowledge] and the effect on Sarah, and I'm certain the other children. She was bringing [home] various information about various cultures and was excited to share that information with us.

Sabina: What impact did it have on her?

Mrs. Miller: She was excited to learn that other classmates had different religions than her.

Sabina: Is that important to you?

Mrs. Miller: Oh absolutely! It's important that she learns and appreciates differences in her classmates.

(S. Miller, Personal Communication, January 16, 2013)

Sharing similarities. One outcome of requiring the Me Boxes was that they helped to highlight some of the similarities that students shared. Sharing similarities, even something as simple as a favorite food, served to support teachers in honoring individual and collective students' identities. This was also important in building classroom community. For example, when observing in Lyndsay's room early in the year, as children shared their Me Boxes with the class, Taj (Pakistani-American, Muslim) and Gale (White, Christian) were both excited to learn that they each loved macaroni and cheese (Classroom Observation, August, 2010), so while Me Boxes helped the students come to value differences, in this case, Gale and Taj also found a similarity in their self-proclaimed love for macaroni and cheese.

Family recipes: Learning about family and heritage stories. Asking children to bring in favorite family recipes was another way that teachers and classmates got to know students and their families. This was a new practice, directly related to a specific professional development experience prior to this study but teachers continued to use and build upon this as a strategy to learn more about our students during this study. I asked Kim how our professional development prompted her to build upon this strategy. She explained:

Although I have asked for recipes from children before, it's changed through this professional development in culturally relevant practices [such as] our faculty inservices, Susi's [Long] visit, and many conversations. The direction [of the use of recipes] has changed. We want to use it as another means of opening the door to learn more about children and their culture. That before I can support their identity you need to know about them and what makes them tick. And those opportunities to open doors may be different for different kids and families. It's not the same for every child. So we do Me Boxes, recipes, family pictures and other things as a way to find that opening now, instead of just doing them to be doing them. (January 11, 2013)

Kim used this strategy in her classroom in an attempt to support children's positive identities by not only celebrating the recipes but the stories, memories, or important people often connected to them. Since we learned through our professional development engagements that family recipes often reveal cultural roots and resources, Kim asked families to send recipes of their children's favorite food or a traditional family favorite and to share something about why the recipe was special to them. The recipes were collected and a book was made and shared with the entire class so that all classmates could enjoy the recipes and the stories that supported the children's identities. Mrs. Miller, a parent in Kim's classroom, shared her thoughts on the book of recipes that was sent home and how it helped her learn a little more about the lives of Sarah's classmates:

Providing a story with the recipe made it fun and more interactive with my child, to be able to put a story behind the recipe, because generally there's always one. It was very interesting and Sarah loved it and was excited about it. And after the fact, the follow-up piece of it was sitting down [with Sarah] and looking at that end product and reading about her fellow classmates and their different stories behind the recipes. Although [Sarah and I] share stories all the time, it gave us an opportunity to share a story with the class and learn more about her classmates. (S. Miller, Personal Communication, January 16, 2013)

To ensure that all families who wanted to participate were included, Kim often emailed families, particularly those who lived far away. As she explained, "Evan's father, lived in Massachusetts . . . [so], with Evan's mothers' permission, I emailed Evan's father and grandmother to include them in the classroom collection of recipes" (Kim's Journal, November 2010). Through these emails, Kim learned that Evan's paternal grandmother was Italian and that one of his favorite meals was "Mimi's soup." Evan's grandmother, emailed Kim a family recipe, along with a message that read, "Evan named the recipe 'Mimi's soup,' his favorite, otherwise known as pasta fagioli . . . Buon appetito!" (J. Harder, Personal Communication, November 14, 2010).

Family recipes were also shared in classrooms during parents' visits to the classroom. For example, Pedro's mother, Dra. López-Robertson taught Spanish to the students in Tammy's classroom once a week. During one of her visits, Dra. López-Robertson also taught the students about a hot chocolate recipe, special to her family along with a song to go along with the recipe. They sang the song over and over again as each child took turns mixing the chocolate in the pitcher. In a member checking survey, I asked Dra. López-Robertson what it meant to her to have this opportunity to share a part of her family's culture with the children in her son's classroom. Her comments reveal how strategies such as using recipes helped to support students' pride in their culture and

identity. Dra. López-Robertson described her experience working with the students as well as the pride she saw in her son:

[E]ach of the children took turns mixing the chocolate in the Colombian pitcher with the hand-carved mixing spoon while we sang the song over and over. The looks on [the students] faces were unforgettable and for my own child the glow and pride that he showed that day are the best gift he's ever given me! (J. López-Robertson, Personal Communication, January 16, 2013)

Celebration of Life. An activity unique to the Montessori classroom is called the *Celebration of Life* (Meyer, Seldin & Meyer, 1988). Used in Kim, Tammy and Lyndsay's classrooms, the *Celebration of Life* was an activity designed to celebrate children's birthdays. Although this is a relatively new practice, Kim, Tammy and Lyndsay drew from their professional development knowledge to alter the practice from the traditional Montessori structure. The original Montessori practice suggests that the children sit in a circle on the carpet - representative of the sun. The teacher pronounces the child's birth then proceeds to have the birthday child walk around the sun (children sitting on the carpet) one time. She then lights a candle and says, "Now you are one" and shows a picture of the child at one-year-of-age. The child continues to slowly walk around the children-simulated-sun with the teacher lighting a candle until the current age of the child is reached, each time showing another picture of the child at that age.

The original practice is intended to teach the child about his or her place in the world, the concept of a year, and about the concept of change. However, using the knowledge Kim, Tammy and Lyndsay gleaned from our professional development experiences, they enhanced this practice by adding what they were learning about supporting children's funds of knowledge and identity development. They did this by asking children's families to participate in the event to share stories or letters, celebrating

children's knowledge and learning. Tammy commented on how this knowledge enhanced her practice:

When we went through the Montessori training we learned about the Celebration of Life and how the teacher lights the candle and the child walks around the circle. But I think we've made it better by having families tell stories about their children. You know, we've talked [during diversity meetings] about how important it was to celebrate what kids know, what they do good. This way it really makes them feel special and important and they're still learning about the concepts of a year and their place in the world. It's just that everyone's place in the world is different and we want to make each special. (Member Checking meeting, December 7, 2012)

Parents or family members were asked to write a letter or to create a display of their child's life from birth to present, which was then presented to the child's classmates as a means to honor the birthday child. Often family members were present for the celebration honoring the birthday child. This particular event supported children's positive identities by celebrating the child: what made them special, what they wanted for their future, and the memories from birth to present. It supported literate identities as many parents wrote letters with accompanying pictures, others produced Microsoft PowerPoint presentations, i-movies or displays, but all were designed to celebrate the child's life and further served the teachers and students by providing more information about each student and his or her family and traditions. An excerpt of one parent's letter for the celebration of life illustrated the love of Riza's parents (in Kim's classroom) coupled with information that provided deeper knowledge for the teacher about the child:

Dear Riza, Happy 5th Birthday Cookie! Mommy and Daddy love you so much and we want you to have a wonderful birthday celebration with your classmates today. You love Superman and Star Wars and want to fly on a rocket to space when you are grown up like Daddy. You even love the Science Channel, which we are proud to see! But most important, when you were 4 ½ you became a big brother you your baby sister Aiasha! We love you so much! (Parent Letter, August 19, 2010)

A parent, from Lyndsay's classroom, felt that the Celebration of Life "helps each [child] reminisce about their younger years and understand how they've grown and changed" (A. Warren, Personal Communication, January 14, 2012). Parents from Tammy's classroom also reflected on this strategy as a way to get to know students. Nadia's mother offered that:

The Celebration of Life, is another opportunity to get to know [each other]. We were able to share our daughter's pictures right from when she was born to her latest birthday. My daughter felt very proud to have celebrated her birthday with her friends. (S. Fergus, Personal Communication, January 15, 2013)

Mrs. Dean, Jayden and Scott's mother, added, "I LOVED the Celebration of Life! I used [the boys] pictures to make an imovie. My children were both so proud to show [their imovie] to the class" (J. Dean, Personal Communication, January 17, 2013).

Creating self-portraits. Through our conversations and professional readings, we learned that providing children with opportunities to share how they viewed themselves and their individual identities could empower them to "self-identify, rather than being labeled with socially constructed racial identities that are embedded in notions of White privilege" (Earick, 2009, p. 120). The use of self-portraits (Figure 5.4) provided children this opportunity. In addition, it was a way to enhance their sense of belonging in the classroom community and generate discussions. Kim shared in a One-to-One meeting that her students' self-portraits helped to display the rich diversity in her classroom and to communicate "that each [child] was unique in their own way" (October, 4, 2010). I asked Kim to elaborate on the use of self-portraits in her classroom and her growing understanding of their importance. She discussed how her use of self-portraits with students evolved overtime as she came to understand how self-portraits were reflective of the students' view of themselves and the importance of conversations about race:

When I started teaching, I never talked about skin color, it was that uncomfortable for me to do that. In time I grew to come safer with my African American assistant and she helped me to understand that race was important, but having our faculty conversations about race helped me to feel safer to have those conversations with my students. (Member Checking meeting, January 11, 2013)



Figure 5.4. Self-portraits displayed in Kim's classroom

Tammy shared similar growth in her use of self-portraits with the students in her classroom. She pointed out that while she was aware of Black/White issues her use of self-portraits has changed:

Before our professional development [discussing issues of race, culture and language] the way I used self-portraits was just generic. I didn't take the time to celebrate the different shades of people, draw on their color, the power and uniqueness [of each one]. [Professional development] made me value [student] differences. I was aware of Black/White issues of course, but having a diverse group of students was important to me to appreciate their uniqueness. (Member Checking meeting, January 16, 2013)

In all three classrooms, teachers asked children to create self-portraits. When designing their portraits, children were encouraged to use multicolor paints that they felt best matched their skin color. As mentioned earlier, Tammy asked children to use their

family pictures to create their self-portraits. Kim on the other hand asked children to bring a mirror in to look at themselves. She commented that she “wanted [the students] making their own realizations regarding their features.” In this way she felt, “it was good to see children come to that revelation without any involvement of teachers” (January 11, 2013). In a member checking meeting, I asked Kim what the realizations or revelations were she referred to. She explained that:

I wanted the children to see if they recognized ways that they were alike or different. The conversations generated by the children led to more fruitful discussions of skin color, eyes, etc. I also liked seeing how they were able to point out the ways they were alike as well as different. It was like an inquiry about themselves and each other. (March 6, 2013)

Children shared their self-portraits with each other and were celebrated by their teachers. In Tammy’s class, students were asked to share what they noticed about each other’s portraits and that generated conversation about skin color, race and beauty.

Tammy recalled the students’ conversation around the creation of their self-portraits and in particular, their hair:

Children made positive comments about their hair. We compared my hair [African American] to Nicole’s hair [Biracial Black/White] and Nadia’s hair [Asian - Indian] and compared it to the environment. Like one student said, ‘Nicole’s hair looks like spiral pasta.’ Mrs. Matherson helped us think about some things in the environment that matched our hair, like some of those flowers like calla lilies. And we talked about how all hair was beautiful. [The students] said they liked my hair because it looked like pom poms. (Member Checking meeting, January 17, 2013)

Tammy also shared an incident regarding one of her students, Nadia, and her quest to “to find the right color paint to use for her self-portrait.” Tammy conveyed that Nadia was adamant about being brown and she was very specific about what color she used. Tammy said that Thom, a White classmate, had commented on how beautiful Nadia’s skin color

was and knew how important it was to her to find the right color paint. She said that Thom worked with Nadia to find the “just-right brown” color to match her skin.

Our Book of Sunbeams. A new practice exclusive to Lyndsay’s classroom was a collection of brag notes written by parents about their children. *Our Book of Sunbeams* was the title of the book Lyndsay gave to her classroom’s collection of the daily family brag notes. I asked Lyndsay about her thoughts behind naming the book, *Our Book of Sunbeams*. Lyndsay explained that, “children always beam when their parents share moments about them that they are proud of; so I thought it made sense to call it *Our Book of Sunbeams*” (One-to-One meeting, December, 2010). Each morning as parents or family members dropped their children off in their classroom they had the opportunity to share a brag note or *sunbeam* about their child. The book was placed at the sign-in table where parents could jot down a note in the book, while their child signed-in in their journal. These sunbeams were typically about things the children did at home, how they helped around the house, or about an event that the child participated in. The notes were read to the students each day during classroom morning meeting to reveal and celebrate children’s positive identities. Some example notes from the *Sunbeams* book were:

Ashley did very well reading her chapter book yesterday. She was also well behaved at church and followed instruction. That’s my Ash, have a great day babe! Love, Mom. (October 20, 2010)

Jack went on a nature walk and climbed a giant wood chip and gravel pile. (December 6, 2010)

Dillon helped his dad lay down tarp in the plant bed and steered the lawn mower. (December 6, 2010)

The notes reveal how Ashley is well behaved at church; Jack goes on nature walks with his parents; Dillon is seen as a helper at home - all positive identities that may or may not be seen in school.

Lyndsay shared with me that she came to understand the importance of obtaining this information initially in her university classes on diversity. She also cited her involvement with our professional development conversations about race, culture and language, specifically that:

I learned through our conversations about supporting students' identities that it was important to step outside of school to know children at home. I can't always visit each child's home but I can have parents share what they are doing at home that shows who they are outside of school, in-school. Each parent or family member can write a brag note about their child in the notebook. During our morning circle I read the notes to the class. The children learn to value and respect what the children do at home as well as school and I learn to see my students from their parents' perspective. (Personal Communication, January 16, 2013)

“I Can” Chart. Another new strategy used to support students' positive literate identities –to make children's expertise visible - was a classroom “I Can” chart that Lyndsay and her students constructed (Figure 5.5). The “I Can” chart was created by asking the students, “What is something that you do really well?” Lyndsay recorded the students' responses and the chart was displayed in the classroom. Lyndsay reminded the children after the activity, “there are a lot of experts in swimming, playing and running. If anyone needs to know anything about swimming you will know to ask, Keller, Morgan or Leigh.” Lyndsay went through the chart to highlight knowledge the other children shared as well. Lyndsay later discussed her thinking behind providing this opportunity for her students during a One-to-One meeting. She explained, “I think that a part of getting to know your children is asking questions. A lot of them [students] were saying, ‘I can't, I can't’, so I told them that they had to spit the word ‘can't’ out and say ‘I can.’” Lyndsay

further shared that she felt it was necessary to “have [the students] be seen as experts” (October, 4, 2010).

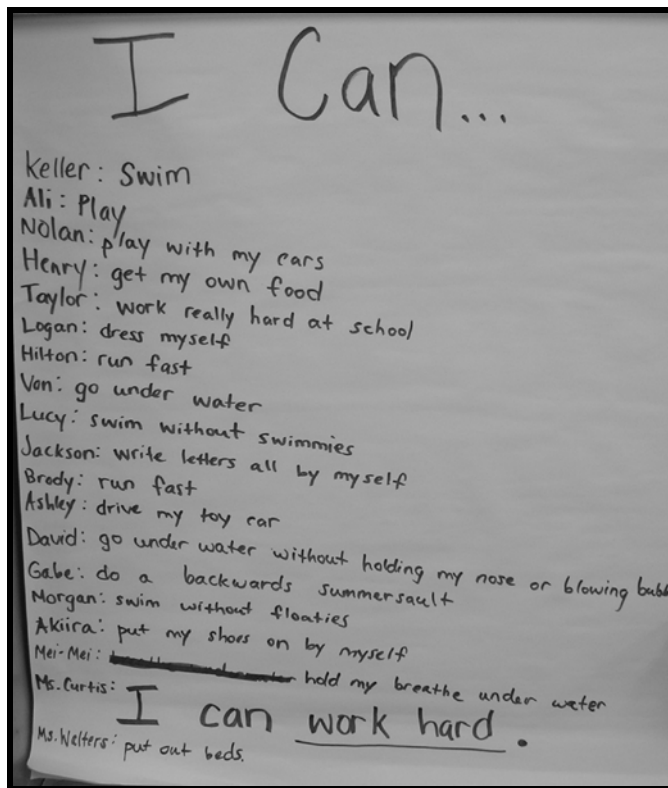


Figure 5.5. Lyndsay’s “I Can” chart

Children’s writing. Another way of getting to know students and support their positive literate identities was through their writing. While writing was an existing practice in every classroom, the ways in which teachers engaged young children through their writing, specifically the topics they wrote about, changed through our discussions in professional development. We discussed this often in our Diversity Group and Focal Group meetings, particularly how critical it was that we engaged children in literacy practices that were culturally relevant. For example, during our September Diversity Group I reminded the teachers that, “We can’t support students’ literate identities without knowing their identity—who they are as people culturally. We need to use this knowledge

and embed it in the things they read and write and in all subject areas” (Diversity Group meeting, September 16, 2010).

Writing supported children’s meaning making and their literate identities because teachers valued the many forms of writing such as scribbles, drawing, letter approximations and invented spelling (Lutz, 1995). More important, they learned that the kind of writing was essential to culturally relevant teaching. Thus, they engaged children in writing about things that were significant to them as opposed to prompts or superficial questions such as, “Is it hot or cold outside today?” Or random, superficial fill-in-the-blank formats of writing such as worksheets. Students were typically encouraged to write about the things, people and events that meant something to them. Students wrote independently, together with the teacher or other students as in written conversations (Short, Harste & Burke, 1996) – conversations written on paper or on dry erase boards. Children revealed themselves through their writing and the information was important to providing a supportive positive environment for students’ literate identities. This strategy was a powerful way for teachers to scaffold children as writers and literate beings, while getting to know more about them as individuals. Thus, two of the ways we enhanced our ability (through our professional development) to learn more about children while supporting them as writers occurred as we engaged students in: (a) written conversations, and (b) journal writing.

Written conversations. Typically, a *written conversation* is a conversation on paper. Used with older children, the engagement is usually silent as the conversation solely occurs on paper. However, using this strategy with very young children requires the conversation be both oral and written so that the child can observe the word being

written as it is spoken. The teachers often encouraged the children to write and draw about their lives using the written conversation strategy. As a result, they often wrote about experiences at Church, Synagogue/Temple, Mosque and Hindu Temple and wrote often about their holidays. In an example representative of ways that teachers did this, Figure 5.6 provides a written conversation between Kim and five-year-old Kat regarding one of the Jewish holidays, Rosh Hashanah. Kim and Kat were both Jewish, and this was a way for them to share a commonality and to learn more about each other. In the process, Kim supported Kat's positive literate identity by moving Kat forward as a writer. This written conversation is particularly important with regard to the focus of this study: It is not superficial and does not contain random prompts or insignificant questions. It is specific to Kat's life and her family holiday; it contains vocabulary that Kat knows well such as temple, Rosh Hashanah and matzo ball soup.

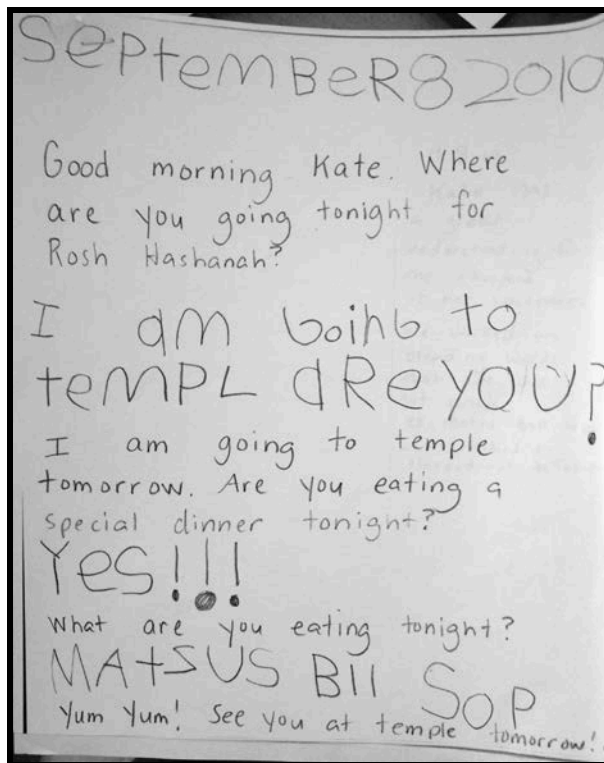


Figure 5.6. Written conversation between Kim (teacher) and Kat (student).

The following dialogue accompanied the written conversation revealing the richness of the interchange as Kim and Kat learned more about each other:

Kim: Good morning Kat. Where are you going tonight for Rosh Hashanah?

Kat: I am going to templ[e] are you?

Kim: I am going to Temple tomorrow. Are you eating a special dinner tonight?

Kat: Yes!!!

Kim: What are you eating tonight?

Kat: Matsus bll sop [Matzo ball soup]

Kim: Yum Yum! See you at temple tomorrow.

(Written Conversation, September 10, 2010)

Journal writing. It was important in supporting children's literate identities to pay attention to how the children described or saw themselves. Writing/drawing in students' journals provided openings for these kinds of descriptions. Given opportunities and support, children often wrote about things they loved, for example, their ability to dance and their love of music. Through their journal writing, Kim learned that one of her students, Gabbi, was talented as a dancer and another student, Akira, was talented as a musician. In their student journals, Gabbi wrote, "I am amazin[g] because I can dance" and Akira declared her affection of music in her drawing and caption, "I am a redr [reader] I like muiscik [music] book[s]" (November 5, 2010). Kim celebrated Gabbi's ability to dance and Akira's love of music as literate behaviors and recognized them as part of their literate identities and knowledge that she could build upon in her classroom and in particular their writing using what they know and love as an entry point to writing.

Time for face-to-face conversation between parents and teachers. The opportunities for parents and teachers to talk together about moments from the classroom day through face-to-face conversation were possible since parents had to drop-off and pick-up children from our school each day. This was an existing practice that was enhanced through our professional development conversations as we deepened our understanding of the importance of seeking parent input and expertise in support of student learning. As a result of such opportunities and our learning, teachers began asking parents more questions regarding how they could better support the development and maintenance of children's positive identities. In the following example, Tammy reveals how face-to-face conversations help her gain a parent's perspective and insight but also how conversation provided information for the parent about children's thinking and sharing at school. Tammy wrote an interaction with Nicole's mother:

Today I told Nicole, a three-year-old biracial White and Black student, she looked like her mother. [S]he told me 'I don't look like my mother; I look like my Daddy. I'm Black and she's White, so how could I look like her?' I told her she had the same eyes, nose and mouth as her mother. She looked at me like I was crazy. When her mother came to pick her up I told her what [Nicole] said. [H]er mother told me Nicole was told that before and she told the person that the only thing that looked like her mother was the bottom of her feet because they were white. (Tammy's journal, October 2010)

In a One-to-One meeting with Tammy, she shared that Nicole's parents wanted to support Nicole's biracial identity. Tammy and I talked about using children's literature in the classroom to support her, books such as: *Black White, Just Right* (Davol, 1993) and *Black is Brown is Tan* (Adoff & McCully, 2004) and we talked about inviting Nicole's parents to come into the classroom in any capacity that they felt comfortable, to positively support Nicole's comfort with and pride about her biracial identity. Speaking with Nicole's mother about Tammy's conversation with Nicole, revealed that, as a White

mother, Mrs. Holt was comfortable with Nicole identifying as Black because “that is the way society sees her.” She also revealed her appreciation of the relationship she had with Tammy when she said, “It really helps to know what Nicole is thinking and sharing [her culture] at school. It makes me feel good that she’s supported and valued at school as well” (Personal Communication, August 17, 2012). At the same time, in a follow up conversation with Nicole’s mother (perhaps reflecting a growing feeling of trust in having discussions about race with me), Mrs. Holt shared that while at times it “doesn’t faze her” when Nicole identifies only as Black, that there were other times when she “does think about it.” She talked about her feelings:

Sometimes [society seeing Nicole as Black] doesn’t faze me- sometimes I do think about that I would like for my children to look like me. Sometimes I see parents with their children and they look like them and I wish my children looked more like me. But it really doesn’t matter that they don’t. When I go to pick them up at dance their friends will say, “That’s not your mom, are you adopted?” I know they know I’m their mommy but I really haven’t talked to them much about it.

Mrs. Holt’s comments above, and those that follow, shed light on the importance of multiple face-to-face, trust-building conversations with parents as a means to support students’ positive identities; not only for the implications at school but for home as well. Mrs. Holt pointed out that our conversation helped make her think about this issue and that she could have more conversations with Nicole about her feelings realizing that she needed to share them with her at home:

You know, you got me thinking. Talking with you has helped me think that I need to talk to them more. I think I need to talk more with my girls about race- because they don’t think about me as looking like them. Maybe when we’re alone I can ask them some specific questions like, what do you think you get from me? From daddy? etc. I have thought about it, but I never want to do anything that will make them feel uncomfortable. Now I am really thinking about it. (Personal Communication, January 13, 2013)

Building relationships with families outside the school walls. Whether teachers were working to build relationships with families to better communicate with them or to learn more about them, we found that these relationships were foundational in supporting students' positive literate identities because there was reciprocity in the interactions. Through discussions in our Diversity Group Meetings where we shared our studies of professional literature (books) such as *Growing Up Literate* (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1998) and *Reading Families* (Compton-Lilly, 2003) and through our home visits, we learned about the out-of-school literacies/knowledge that children possess and the importance of building family relationships. This also appeared to be important to families as well. For example, Mrs. Miller, Sarah's mother, spoke about how important it was that Kim made an attempt to learn more about them by spending time with them beyond the school walls:

[Mrs. Miles] visit[ed] with us and that gave us an opportunity to get to know each other even more because she came to Sarah's dance classes and watched her lessons, we went out to dinner and at the end of the day we came to the realization that we had so much in common there really weren't that many differences about us. But through our conversations and interactions it opened her eyes and gave her confirmation that we really weren't that different from her.

When I asked Mrs. Miller what it meant to her when Kim, her daughter's teacher, spent time with them outside of school, she was quick to answer:

It meant a lot! And gosh if it didn't mean a lot to Sarah, ohh. The impact on this [teacher visiting outside of school] is huge and for a parent that type of interaction is very much appreciated. And to see the benefits and reaction from your child - that is huge. (S. Miller, Personal Communication, January 16, 2013)

All four families visited by me and by the teachers in the Focal Group relayed positive experiences throughout this study in our attempts to build relationships with

them. While I do not show anomalies to this experience, I recognize that these experiences may not reflect the attitude or experiences of other families in our program.

Helping the Children Seeing Power in Multicultural Knowledge: Modeling Respect for Culture and Language

One of the desired outcomes of supporting children's positive literate identities was the students' ability to recognize the power of multicultural knowledge, such as having the ability to speak two languages, and seeing this as an asset in themselves and others. In all classrooms, teachers felt that they attempted to model respect for culture and language. However, while the teachers felt they had demonstrated respect for students and families in the past by treating them kindly, our professional development experiences helped us all deepen our ability to learn about and draw from students and families' funds of knowledge and to see families as an asset in the classroom. At the beginning of this study, the notion of drawing from the resources of homes and communities was relatively new to all of the participants.

Modeling respect for culture and language was important not only between teachers and students but also between the teachers and parents, and between faculty and staff. This was central to some of our professional conversations as we talked about how our behaviors in and around the school demonstrated to students that there were many ways to speak or to do things and that we were committed to demonstrating respect for others who had different belief systems, skin color, languages, and cultural traditions. For example, in a One-to-One meeting with Tammy we discussed the importance of respecting cultures and languages and how critical it was for children to see us using languages other than English in the classrooms:

Tammy: If Señora Hermas is in there teaching Spanish and I'm there and I'm participating [because] it's like respect. When I'm interested in it and when she's teaching the children it's valuable [knowledge].

Sabina: I thought of how they see us *trying the language* and how it's important for us to always attempt because they see us in a learning role and we're learning as they are learning too.

(October 5, 2010)

This is but one example of the many ways we tried to model these dispositions for students. Looking across data, it is clear that we worked to live our commitment to valuing difference and learning from it by: (a) trying on new languages; (b) making children's language visible; (c) encouraging parents and families to share their culture and language; and (d) interrupting children's misconceptions.

Trying on new languages: A Spanish lesson once a week is not enough. Often the teachers and I struggled as we attempted to *try on language* meaning when we attempted to use languages in addition to English to demonstrate to students that it was exciting and informative to learn new languages, that it took time and was difficult but that the only way to learn was to just get out there and try. We learned through professional development that we had to make the challenges we felt explicit if our students were to understand the importance of trying and to have the confidence to try. We also learned that it took more than a one-time Spanish lesson each week to send a message to students that other languages were important. If we did not try using languages ourselves throughout the week, the likelihood of the students trying or even valuing a language other than their own would be slim-to-none.

Trying on language also provided us with a deeper understanding of how frustrating it could be to try to communicate in meaningful ways when we knew what we

wanted to say but struggled to say it in another language. This gave us further insights into how families and children must feel entering our school and our classrooms. During one of our Diversity Group meetings, Tammy and Kim shared one of these moments as they discussed Tammy's attempt at speaking Spanish to Señora Lupe, José's mother:

Tammy: Kim and I shared today. We were trying to figure out [how] to talk with José's mom.

Sabina: And then what?

Kim: Tammy did a fantastic job speaking Spanish.

Sabina: Oh she's doing awesome!

Kim: She's making a great effort to speak with the family. Although I laughed at her after they left, but she was doing a good job!

Tammy: I called Kim to ask her how to say, 'good day' and Kim so lovely said, 'Tienes?' (Demonstrates in a low, soft questionable voice) So I said [to the parents], "Tienes" and they laughed at us.

Sabina: They, the kids?

Tammy: The parents [Kim and Tammy laughs]

Sabina: The parents? Oh! But it's good to be on the other side.

(Diversity Group meeting, September 16, 2010)

While I noted in my research journal that, during the meeting Tammy "appeared to be slightly embarrassed" that José's parents laughed at her attempt at speaking Spanish, I felt that it was critical for the students and the parents to see us trying and struggling sometimes, as Tammy did. It was also important for Tammy to experience what it might feel like to attempt to speak another language and to experience and make assumptions about others' responses. I remarked, "It was good to be on the other side" of that experience, meaning that all too often there is an assumption that speakers of other

languages, who are learning English, are less intelligent or are mocked for the inability to say exactly what it is they mean to say in English and it helps to be put in the position of feeling the same stereotype. Also, being on the “other side” means that we must feel the struggle and the frustration to articulate our thoughts and thereby develop greater admiration for others struggling to communicate with us in our home language. Although Tammy perceived the laughing as negative commentary, I wanted us to discuss that there could be many reasons why laughter was a response, one being that it could have been a friendly appreciation of her attempt and an attempt to make the situation less tense.

Conversations such as these were an important aspect to our professional development. They provided opportunities for us to talk about the kinds of things that were happening day-to-day in the classrooms as we attempted to work through them. They provided us opportunities to reflect on our practices in terms of what we were learning as we moved towards deeper understandings of these issues.

Making children’s languages visible and important. In all, three primary participants, and some of the secondary participants, attempted to make children’s home and heritage languages visible in their classrooms. This was important because, through our professional development, we learned that cultural and linguistic marginalization serves to impede students’ learning and performance in schools. Therefore, teachers attempted to demonstrate the value of cultural and linguistic knowledge with students in a variety of ways. While this was an existing practice, we increasingly enhanced it as we learned more about the importance to do so.

Sally, one of the Diversity Group members, discussed how she helped her students see the power of multicultural knowledge. This occurred during a class

discussion that was not at all focused on building multicultural knowledge. Sally, gaining sensitivity to the importance of honoring children's home resources, was able to weave new multicultural understandings meaningfully into a conversation designed to address a behavior issue. During her class' calendar time, as the students worked on number sentences, one child, Steven, consistently answered before the others could attempt to respond. Sally took Steven to the side and asked him, "Would you be my expert and let the others have a chance to answer? I want everybody to try to figure it out." Steven questioned, "Because I'm the smartest?" Sally responded:

You really [are] a smart fella and you know a lot of things, but Yashi [a classmate] knows how to speak Telegru and I don't even know how to do that. So we all know different things [and] we can help each other to learn. (Diversity Group meeting, October 21, 2010)

After hearing Sally's solution, Tammy asked if that solved the problem. Sally responded, "I got plenty of answers once he held back and didn't jump in. [The other students] began to figure it out. I didn't want to validate that idea [that Steven] was the smartest." She and Steven worked out a signal where she would wink at him and then say, "Steven, what do you think?" at which time he would tell them the answer. This interaction between Sally and her student was important because it demonstrated to Steven that he was indeed smart but that it was one kind of smart. The fact that Yashi spoke two languages was to be equally valued.

In another example, as an attempt to value Spanish as well as English in her classroom, Señora Hermas (a Spanish-speaking teaching assistant) made Spanish visible for Tammy and her students. After several observations in Tammy's classroom, I noted that Señora Hermas appeared to go in and out of speaking Spanish when working with José and Pedro who were bilingual Spanish/English speaking students, and the other

children who were monolingual English speakers. I also noted that Tammy and Señora Hermas appeared to comfortably go back and forth between each other in Spanish and English. During one of our One-to-One meetings, I asked Tammy why she felt it was important to support the classroom with Spanish. Tammy communicated:

The children really benefit from her [Señora Hermas] . . . and Spanish families and the class. [I]t just seems natural . . . and it does help my children who do speak Spanish to feel more valued, that it is an equal language and not a secondary language. (October 5, 2010)

In a member checking conversation, I asked Tammy to expand on what she meant about Spanish not being regarded as a “secondary language.” In the conversation that follows, she demonstrated that she was utilizing the information learned from our professional development opportunities. She explained that she did not want the students to see Spanish as a language that is less important or as a hidden language only used at home. She wanted her students to value the Spanish language as a language that is equal to, and not less than, English:

I think sometimes . . . our primary language [English] it’s not a better language or more educated language, it’s just another language. If the children hear Spanish spoken they take more pride in themselves. It’s not a hidden language that they speak at home but nobody else speaks it [at school] so it must not be important. ‘[C]ause I think that could happen [if] you’re a child you might think Spanish is not as important so maybe I don’t need to speak it because it’s not the dominant language [at school]. (December, 2010)

Tammy further stated that both José and Pedro had begun to speak more Spanish at school since Señora Hermas made a point of speaking to the students in Spanish.

Lyndsay also shared how she attempted to make language visible in her classroom. Although there were no students in Lyndsay’s classroom who spoke Farsi, it was the home language of Lyndsay’s teaching assistant, Mrs. Mohammadi. One student, Taj, spoke Urdu which, as his mother explained, had some words similar to Farsi (for

example, “Salaam” or “Salam” which mean, “Hello” is pronounced the same in both languages). Mrs. Mohammadi agreed with Taj’s mother explaining that many of the words in Urdu and Farsi were similar. Lyndsay talked about how she wanted Mrs.

Mohammadi to share some of the Farsi language with Taj and the class:

Lyndsay: I talked to her [Mrs. Mohammadi about using it [Farsi] in the classroom a lot and speaking Farsi in the class.

Sabina: That’s awesome!

Lyndsay: ‘Cause the kids love it. They love to hear it [different languages].

Sabina: Well they NEED it. You know they need that exposure [to languages].

Lyndsay: I need it!

(November 4, 2010)

Lyndsay also shared how Mrs. Mohammadi pointed out to the students that Taj knew how to say, “hello” in Farsi and Urdu to which the children said, “Taj, teach us!” Taj shook his head no and Lyndsay asked, “Would you like if your mom came in and taught us more Farsi and Urdu and you could help?” Taj answered, “Yes.” In her journal, Lyndsay wrote about the children’s comments: “The children said, ‘we will know a lot of languages and we can teach people and go different places because we will know how to talk!’ I told them how important it is to learn [languages]” (November 1, 2010). Later the same month Lyndsay discussed how she wanted the students in her classroom to value multiple languages and made a point to use Farsi and Urdu in her classroom. She wrote:

Mrs. Mohammadi is speaking to the children in other words [in Farsi] and I am using what I know [about Urdu] to demonstrate that I want to learn with them! I told Mrs. Mohammadi that I want [the] students to welcome all languages, cultures with an open heart. She told me how great it is to feel that connection with someone when they speak your language and that was so powerful to me!

Taj hears us using a language that is used in his home and it is bringing a strong connection into the classroom! (Lyndsay's Journal, November 11, 2010)

Lyndsay wrote about other students as well. She shared that, Ashtyn, brought to school a book with Chinese words, *Ni Hoa Kai-lan's Book of Words*, by Ellie Seiss (2010) in her *Me Box*. She wrote, "Ashtyn presented her *Me Box*. We made connections to other friends *Me Boxes* and discussed her Kai-lahn book and the Chinese language" (Lyndsay's journal, September 7, 2010). In the following excerpt from her journal, Lyndsay describes a class language experience in the outdoor learning garden where the children, excited to see butterflies, initiated speaking in Spanish:

The garden outside was swarming with butterflies today! The kids ran over and said, 'Mariposas!! [Butterflies]' We went on a walk [talking] in Spanish to look for mariposas and that experience was what gave the children the connection at this point. They were using Spanish and counting the mariposas in Spanish. Their faces were lit up! (Lyndsay's Journal, October 1, 2010)

In all examples, Lyndsay made languages other than English an important part of the classroom-learning environment and made them visible to her students.

Kim also made an effort to make other languages visible in her classroom. She did so by including Spanish in her classroom morning routines. During calendar time, she used sentence strips with, "Hoy es," which means, "Today is," and the children had to finish the sentence with the appropriate day of the week and date (Figure 5.7). I asked Kim why she felt it was important to incorporate Spanish into her morning time routine to which she replied, "I don't have any students who speak Spanish, but Señora Hermas is working with them [teaching Spanish] each week and I want to support her. It's also José and Pedro's language and [the students] want to learn it" (September 8, 2010).

Tammy, Lyndsay and Kim's comments shed light on the importance of making children's language visible in the classroom not only to support individual students'

positive literate identities but to increase the respect of and knowledge about languages for all students in the classroom.

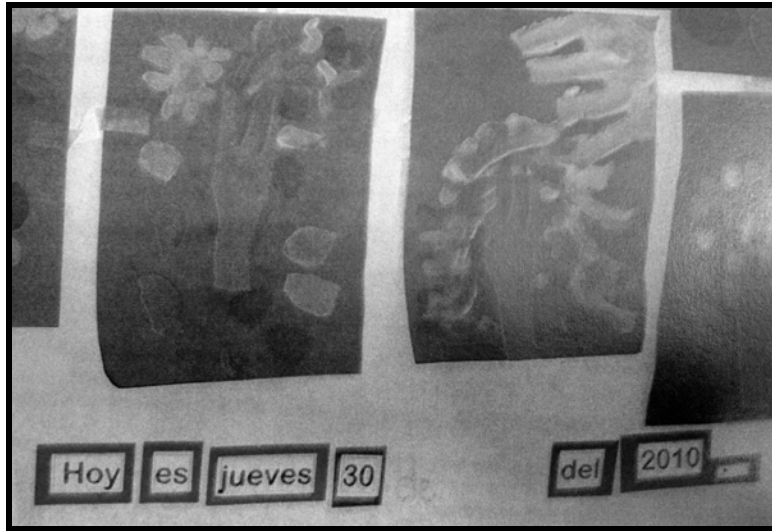


Figure 5.7. Kim's use of Spanish during her calendar time

Parents and families share culture and language. Parents and families were an integral part of supporting and respecting cultures and languages in the classrooms by sharing and teaching about their cultures and languages. In previous years, parents came to classrooms to teach Portuguese, Russian and Tamil. During the course of this study, parents and family members came into the classrooms to teach Spanish, Urdu, and Hebrew. While this was an existing practice prior to data collection (it originally emerged from our studies beginning in 2008 when the Diversity Group started) because of our deepened and continuing study about supporting students' positive literate identities, I began to see this happen with greater regularity.

An example of this occurred in Tammy's class. Pedro, one of Tammy's bilingual students, did not appear comfortable sharing his home language with the class when he first came to school despite Sra. Hermas's attempt at speaking Spanish with him. Tammy

invited Pedro's mother, Dra. López-Robertson, to spend time the classroom and she graciously accepted. As a result, Dra. López-Robertson came to Tammy's classroom once a week to share children's literature and engage the children in various activities related to her Latina/o culture and language. She introduced Tammy and her class to Señor Calavera, "the trickster," in Yuyi Morales' books and engaged the children in singing and dancing to songs in Spanish (Figure 5.8). Through the many engagements such as making Colombian hot cocoa, reading books and singing songs each week, she taught the students about some aspects of Latino culture from her own experiences growing up with Cuban-Colombian heritage and as a teacher in Tucson public schools where she worked with many Mexican-American children and families. Her teaching of the Spanish language, in particular, in authentic and meaningful ways helped Tammy avoid the *tourist view* of culture and language (Nieto, 1999) in her classroom.



Figure 5.8. Doctora López-Robertson singing in Spanish and dancing with the children

Later, Dra. López-Robertson, reflected on the opportunity to be invited to the classroom to share her culture and her language with the class. While we (and she) felt

that she made a difference for all of the children, in this excerpt she emphasized the difference her presence made for her son, Pedro:

When [Pedro] entered school, he wasn't too sure about this whole 'Spanish' thing and it wasn't until I was invited by his teacher that he saw the value in being bilingual. Once he saw that his teacher valued bilingualism and that she participated in the lessons and treated him as an 'expert' he blossomed and became the confident bilingual he is today. (J. López-Robertson, Personal Communication, January 16, 2013)

Dra. López-Robertson was not only a parent, but a professional resource for our professional development. Through conversations with her, coupled with our continued reading, such as in *Tongue-Tied: The Lives of Multilingual Children in Public Education* (Santa Ana, 2004), we began understanding the importance of bilingual education and the need for teachers to make languages visible in our classrooms, which also contributed to building relationships with families. We learned that children should not be seen as the sole translators for their families, that while it can be sometimes beneficial, teachers should make a concerted effort at learning students' languages as much as possible. This knowledge helped us learn the need to do more in our classrooms as well as with our families. Through teachers' efforts to forge deeper relationships, parents learned that we cared to learn their language and culture and we learned some of the things that were important to them as families.

Another example of an authentic experience with language occurred in Lyndsay's classroom. Taj's mother, Dr. Baghdadi, taught the students some words in Urdu and talked with them about their family's culture. Taj's family was from Pakistan and practiced Islam. Dr. Baghdadi taught the children songs, common greetings and words. The class wrote down several of the words that Dr. Baghdadi taught them which were displayed in the classroom (Figure 5. 9) for the children to use as a resource and were

recorded in Lyndsay's journal, "Hello – Salaam; Goodbye – Allah Hafiz; red – Laal; Please – Lotfan; and Thank you – Merci."



Figure 5.9. List of words Dr. Baghdadi wrote for the class

After Dr. Baghdadi taught her lesson and left the classroom, Lyndsay approached Taj who was working by himself in one of the centers in the classroom. She asked, "Did you like your mom coming to teach us about your language?" He smiled and said, "Yes" (Lyndsay's Journal, September, 2010).

Having parents and family members share their culture and language with the students in these ways supported their own children's positive literate identities because it validated and made visible their home language and culture for them and for the other children. Thus, it helped to position children in their own eyes and in the eyes of others as experts, as having language and culture of value, as coming from a family of great worth and with much to offer everyone else in the classroom. Dr. Baghdadi talked about how

coming into the classroom to talk about Ramadan and Eid “helped Taj to feel comfortable to talk about our culture in public” (S. Baghdadi, Personal Communication, January 11, 2013). It also provided information to the other children that helped to foster a deeper understanding and respect for each other. After Dr. Baghdadi’s lesson in September, children continued to use some of the words they learned in their daily classroom routines. In November, Lyndsay wrote about how her students continued to use Farsi and Urdu in their large group meeting:

We [did] our group meeting by greeting each other in Farsi/Urdu by saying, ‘Salum/ Salaam’, as well as, ‘good morning’ and ‘hello’, etc. We talked about the many different ways we can greet each other. Almost everyone said, ‘Salum/ Salaam’ and they were using [the language]. It was very cool to see the excitement in their faces. (Lyndsay’s Journal, November 9, 2010)

Interrupting children’s misconceptions. In addition to implementing new practices and enhancing existing ones, teachers used their professional development insights to recognize the importance of interrupting children’s misconceptions about each other, their teachers or other people in order to establish a classroom climate supportive of students’ positive literate identities. For example, Tammy shared with the Diversity Group that, at the beginning of the school year one of her students, Jai, called her “colored.” Jai was from India and his father owned a liquor store, as shared in Chapter Four. She explained that Jai was looking for her one day and asked, Mrs. Matherson (Tammy’s full-time assistant, also African American), “Where is the other colored lady?” Mrs. Matherson said, “What did you say?” Jai repeated, “The colored lady.” Upon hearing this from Mrs. Matherson, and taken aback by the student’s comment, Tammy attempted to explain to Jai that it would be more appropriate to call each other by their names. She wrote in her journal that she attempted to interrupt his thinking by saying:

You have to call me by my name because I could say, ‘where’s the little tanned dude with the lunch box?’ I said, ‘that’s not all that you are’ and he said, ‘No’ so I said, ‘So who am I, what’s my name?’ and he said, ‘Mrs. Greenway.’ I told him ‘You know what, you call me Mrs. Greenway and I’ll call you Jai.’ (September, 2010)

In the process of describing this experience, Tammy explained that she felt that, Jai’s own ethnic background and the fact that he was an English language learner positioned him to use words such as “colored” without knowing the implications of it. She did not replace his word with a more appropriate word such as African American or Black. She felt that at that time she just wanted him to refer to her as Mrs. Greenway. Our professional development session provided a space for Tammy and me to discuss this incident and the importance of interrupting children’s misconceptions so that children learn that what they say and the words they use matter:

Sabina: So did you interrupt that thinking?

Tammy: No, I called him afterward and said, ‘Jai what did you call me?’

Sabina: But then you did interrupt it?

Tammy: Well, I explained who I was and what my name was. I understood that he’s just learned English and he learned that from home.

Sabina: You interrupted that thinking, but maybe you need to give acceptable vocabulary, like Black or African American in addition to [telling him] your name. It is important that they know the words they use matter. Don’t you think?

Tammy: Yes

(Diversity Group meeting, September 16, 2010)

Tammy also shared that, while some other students in the class (from India) were darker skinned than she was, when Tammy asked Jai if the darker skinned students from India were colored, he perceived them to be white. Jai apparently had learned to call

African Americans “colored” with at least one exception - dark skinned people from India. I felt that it was extremely important that we teach Jai that “colored” was not an appropriate word to use. We would not tolerate him using derogatory or stereotypical language in the classroom. I felt that it was incumbent upon Tammy to interrupt this talk and provide appropriate words in their place in addition to her name. Kim also suggested that Tammy “should have said something to Jai” regarding his inappropriate comments. I added that:

I think it is our responsibility with young children to make sure that we are interrupting thinking so that we do not perpetuate stereotypes and bias that we give [student] a positive view of all people and to teach the basis of social justice. (Diversity Group meeting, September 16, 2010)

In another example of interrupting students’ misconceptions was brought out during one of our Diversity Meetings when Tammy talked about an incident that occurred in her classroom as she and Señora Hermas prepared a Costa Rican recipe (rice and beans) for the children to taste. Tammy recalled that when Aadi, one of the students in her classroom, saw the food, he looked at it and said, “Ehhhh, yuck, I don’t like Mexicans.” Tammy talked about how she used this opportunity to discuss the inappropriateness of his statement. She recognized that he may have meant *Mexican food* but she wanted him to understand how his words could hurt someone:

I told him that it was okay to say that he did not like Mexican food but that he should not say that he did not like Mexicans because Mexicans meant people and we should never say we don’t like a whole group of people - that words like that hurt. (November 4, 2010)

Tammy focused on the implication of the child’s words as commentary on a group of people but also used this opportunity to teach Aadi that there are many countries where people eat food like rice and beans – Mexico, Spain, Africa, and the United States, South

Carolina in particular – and that Señora Hermas was actually from Costa Rica, not Mexico. Tammy explained that, just because someone speaks Spanish and/or eats rice and beans does not mean that they are from Mexico. I responded that “Now they know that they can speak Spanish and eat rice and beans in Mexico, Costa Rica and Cuba and a whole host of other places” (September 16, 2010). The opportunity to have this conversation in our Diversity Group Meeting provided a place to share these issues and thereby move us to a deeper understanding about what to say in future situations.

Valuing Non-Traditional or Deprived Literacies

We discussed celebrating non-traditional or deprived literacies in many of our professional development engagements. We defined non-traditional literacies as the ways in which the children communicated their ideas and knowledge other than those typically regarded as academic literacies (reading books, writing narratives). Examples of what we called non-traditional literacies were sculptures, music, building structures, drawings, movement, signs, cereal boxes, oral storytelling, reciting bible verses, and sign language. (Allen, 2007; 2010; Gregory, Long & Volk, 2004; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Wohlwend, 2008). We learned that valuing non-traditional literacies helped us see children as knowledgeable, literate beings because it allowed us to value literacies beyond books. This supported a strength-based perspective that suggests that children make sense of their world and communicate in many different ways and that we can build on those strengths to develop positive literate identities in classrooms (Delpit 2002; 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Tatum, 2007; Valdez, 2001; Zentella, 2005). Many classroom activities in Kim, Lyndsay and Tammy’s classrooms demonstrated that they valued non-

traditional literacies. Lyndsay communicated this understanding in her journal. She wrote:

I have a child that loves to cook and she writes in steps. I asked her about this and she said, 'you know you have to first cook, then mix, and like that.' She wrote a story about coming to school in the morning. She was able to make a connection between cooking (something that impacted her) and writing at school. Another girl, Taylor, was impacted by Mrs. Mohammadi and her books from Iran. They read from right to left so when she wrote her book she said, 'you read it backwards.' We talk about all kinds of books, authors, illustrators, genres, etc. in the classroom and ways we read when we aren't [conventionally] reading books. (Lyndsay's Journal, December 10, 2010)

In our professional development work together, we also learned how some children – those with traditional literacy knowledge – are often privileged in schools and others – those from homes with non-traditional literacy knowledge - are often marginalized. This is largely due to a narrow view of the curriculum and a deficit approach to knowledge and literacy (Gregory, Long & Volk, 2004; Heath, 1983). Through our professional development experiences, including guest speakers, reading, and conversations, we deepened the understanding that to support positive literate identities across cultural and linguistic contexts, we had to make children's non-traditional literacies visible and valued in the classroom. The examples in the paragraphs that follow represent that awareness and deepening knowledge and are reflective of new practices within our classrooms. Teachers began to give credibility to a range of literacies as they observed children throughout the day: (a) during outdoor playtime, (b) when children had freedom to represent knowledge "how they wanted to," (c) when reading maps, and (d) through block play.

During outdoor playtime. Children often revealed their non-traditional, literate selves during outdoor playtime and, because of our professional development

experiences, teachers were more attuned to it. An experience that occurred on the playground in September involved two of Lyndsay's students who were engaged in the same outdoor activity but demonstrated very different personal literate experiences with the activity. Both Ashley and Taj were using the fresh fallen pine needles to weave in and out of the perforated metal picnic table on the playground. Lyndsay wrote in her journal that she validated both children's experiences as literacy events as "children described their actions and made their personal connections." Lyndsay asked Ashley, "What are you making?" To which Ashley announced, "I'm making a quilt like my grandmother!" Lyndsay started talking with Ashley about the quilt and Ashley followed with, "My grandmother loves to do this and every time I go to visit I use the quilt." When Lyndsay asked Taj the same question, he described his woven pine needles remarking, "this is an airplane going up and down" (Lyndsay's Journal, September 14, 2010). Lyndsay recognized that both children were creating meaning from this literate activity. Lyndsay also remarked about how much this event helped her learn about her students' important cultural connections, such as Ashley's connection to her grandmother's quilt.

Doing it "however they want to". Sometimes teachers asked children to represent their ideas telling them that they could do so "however you want to" as a means of supporting children's positive identities. Allowing this freedom afforded children the opportunity to express themselves in ways that were meaningful to them and that often gave teachers further insights into literacies in their worlds beyond books. For example, during a unit study in which Kim's class was creating a school map, the children were provided the freedom to experiment with how to represent their ideas through whatever means they felt comfortable doing so. Kim described how her class walked around the

school recording observations of where things were located in preparation for the map. Some children took notes and some drew pictures. Describing students' willingness to take on this work, Kim extolled, "I love watching the work that comes out of no boundaries." While children were *taking notes* they were able to draw, scribble or represent their thinking in ways that made sense to them. Talking further about the importance of providing students freedom to represent their work, she added, "they feel like valued members of our [school] community" (Kim's Journal, October, 2010). Asked later why she believed the students felt more valued when allowed to represent their ideas as they wanted to, Kim said, "sometimes if you ask children to write they think they can't, but if you tell them to do it *however they want to* [emphasis added], the work is more meaningful and becomes theirs" (One-to-One meeting, December, 2010).

Reading maps. Lyndsay also hoped to teach children about the non-traditional literacies around us and to value them as literate behaviors by using maps. While reading maps was something Lyndsay practiced with her students prior to our study, understanding how it supported non-traditional literacies was something that she was beginning to learn and put into practice. She wrote in her journal about the experience:

Today we talked about maps. We taped lines on the carpet and placed pictures of each child's street sign on a line [which represented a road]. We talked about how to *read* [emphasis added] this type of map by saying, 'Keller turn left on Harry's street and right on Von's street. They had so much fun and loved seeing pictures of their street signs! (September 23, 2010)

The notion that she asked them to "read" the street signs highlighted the ways in which children were given opportunities to not only "read the word [but] the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, pg. 8). Lyndsay talked about the importance of providing children with explicit demonstrations through their map study that highlighted the ways in which "we

read when we don't even realize we are reading.” During a One-to-One meeting with Lyndsay, I commented on the importance of “making these things visible in our classrooms so that all children become more knowledgeable regarding the rich literate events that take place in our lives” (October 4, 2010).

Practicing literate behaviors through block play. Due to our many professional development conversations, teachers were beginning to recognize more and more non-traditional literacies in their classrooms. Literate meaning-making through block play was another example. For example, one day, Gale and Harry, students in Lyndsay's classroom, were working together building with the Montessori red rods and pink tower (two of the block-like materials popular in the Montessori curriculum). They created a structure on the floor of the classroom (Figure 5.10) and when asked what they were doing Gale announced, “We are making science.” Lyndsay took a picture of their work and Gale turned non-traditional literacy into traditional literacy (Figure 5.11) as he wrote about it: “The scei [science] by Gale and Harry I yudds [used] the red odss [rods] and the pec tarr [pink tower]” (Classroom Observation, October 21, 2010).

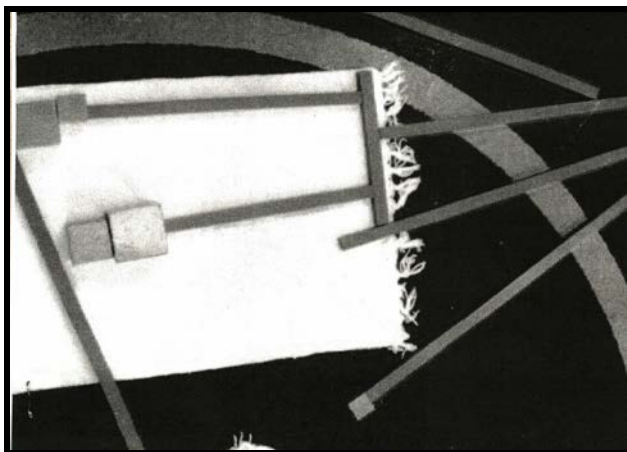


Figure 5.10. Example of non-traditional literacy: Gale and Harry's science structure

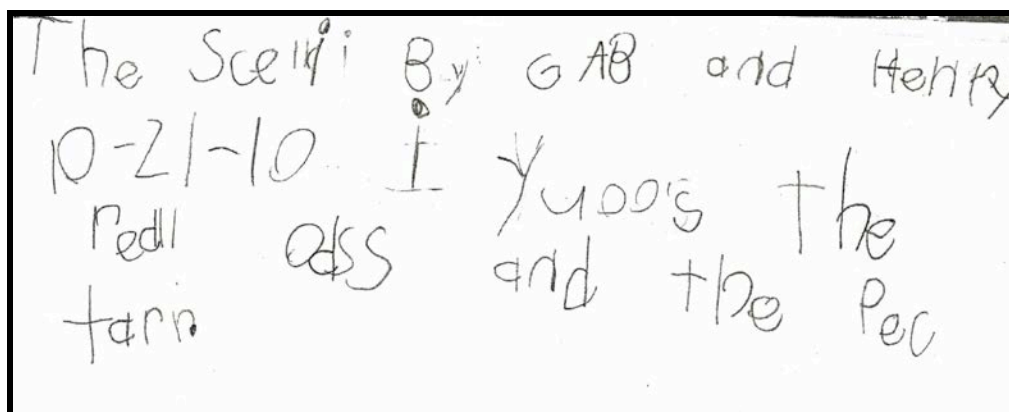


Figure 5.11. Example of non-traditional literacy prompting traditionally literate expressions.

Lyndsay wrote about children using other types of blocks as a foundation for using non-traditional literacies to practice traditional literacies: “During work time, Ashtyn was using pattern blocks. After she made a pattern she said, ‘Look Ms. Carter, a ‘Y’!’ She had made the letter ‘Y’ and she continued to make a world, and a calendar” (Lyndsay’s Journal, September 22, 2010). These examples valued children’s non-traditional literacies and helped to support children’s meaning making and their positive literate identities through their opportunities to chose how to represent their ideas and understandings.

Supporting Traditional Literacies in Culturally Sensitive Ways

Our professional development work helped us recognize the importance of valuing non-traditional literacies, however, as demonstrated in some of the examples in the previous section, it also supported our thinking about how to provide students with the necessary skills and strategies that would allow them to succeed in reading and writing in conventional or traditional ways. It was important to all of us that children developed reading and writing strategies by using what they already knew to develop as

strong readers and writers in conventional ways. Our professional development experiences helped us experiment with ways to do that while remaining culturally sensitive and aware. Some of the strategies that the teachers used to support traditional literacy practices in culturally relevant ways included (but were not limited to) new choices they made with regard to: (a) defending culturally relevant practices, (b) multiple daily read alouds and funds of knowledge, (c) using multicultural literature: seeing themselves in books, (d) morning message and (e) written conversations.

Defending culturally relevant practices. The practices and strategies we employed in our school to teach students in ways that supported students' positive literate identities were at times at odds with typical Montessori traditional literacy practices or with ideas parents had for our teaching. In these instances we found that, to be able to continue teaching traditional literacies using culturally responsive practices, we had to defend our beliefs and convictions. We found that our professional development experiences before and during this study contributed to our ability to articulate why our teaching practices were so important.

For example, during the course of this study, the three teachers in the Focal Group participated in Montessori training and were periodically visited by Montessori assessors who observed and assessed in the classrooms. After one of their observational visits, Lyndsay shared how she had to defend her use of the large A-Z letters on the wall with children's pictures and names displayed below the letters corresponding with their first names. She explained to the assessor that this was a practice used to help children make connections between their names, their friends' names and letter sounds and it supported students' positive literate identities by drawing on something students knew - their

names. She further explained that the large letters/photos were used as a resource for the students as they wrote or used literacy throughout the day to help them become more independent. This clashed with the Montessori curriculum that encouraged a limited number of items on the wall. When the assessor asked Lyndsay to move the letters because “they cluttered the room,” Lyndsay announced, “I’m not moving them” and then proceeded to justify her statement with the explanation cited above. Lyndsay said that it was important to articulate her convictions to the Montessori assessor, explaining that this practice was a critical part of her classroom environment in support of students’ positive literate identities. Lyndsay felt that our professional development experiences gave her not only the language but the knowledge to respond with confidence.

The use of large letters (A – Z) with children’s pictures was an existing practice prior to our switch to Montessori curriculum. However, through our professional development conversations and multiple experiences with knowledgeable professionals in the field of early childhood, language and literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy, the teachers learned the value of such practices and, as a result, found the courage to defend their use. Lyndsay explained:

I learned that I cannot support children in their language and literacy development if I don’t help them make connections to what they know. What they know more than anything else is their name. Their pictures with names under the letters are important in my classroom because it helps make children independent readers and writers. (Member Checking meeting, February 6, 2013)

Multiple daily read alouds drawing on funds of knowledge. Daily read alouds were foundational to our child development practice and existed for many years prior to this study. However, since we began studying diversity issues, the teachers engaged with children’s literature using a more critical lens – meaning that they learned to examine

children's books for bias and/or stereotypes. Both Dr. Susi Long and Dr. Gloria Boutte helped us understand how we should be critical in our selection of books for children. We learned to seek parent input regarding book selection for cultures outside our own as well as holding each other accountable for book selections. We continued to have professional development which enhanced our understanding of how multiple read alouds could support the development of children's positive literate identities and the importance of critically selecting books. For example, one of our whole faculty Inservice meeting days specifically addressed the importance of choosing children's books by using a critical lens which meant paying attention to the ways in which cultures were represented or missing from texts. It meant looking closely and asking questions about what was portrayed as *right*, or *good* or *beautiful*. It also meant thinking about how we could use texts to draw from students' funds of knowledge to bring meaning to the texts.

A longstanding practice in our center was that teachers read *at least* three books a day, and often many more than three. In the example that follows, Tammy draws from this professional development experience to teach traditional literacies in culturally relevant and critical ways. In Tammy's classroom, children regularly brought in books that were important or held meaning to them. Many of the books were in the vein of *Dora the Explora* (©Nickelodeon), or commercially driven children's books, especially those that were also Disney movies such as, *Cars* (2006) and a host of princess and ballerina books to name a few. Tammy suggested that the books children brought in were important because they revealed students' interests, talents and strengths. Tammy also managed to tie in acknowledgment of children's home and community funds of knowledge with many of the children's books brought in and read to the class. This gave

them a sense of expertise which further supported the development of their positive literate identities. I observed an example of this during one of my class visits. Nicole brought in a Dora Explora (Inches & Alkins, 2006) book and asked Tammy to read to it the class. Benny the Bull was a character in the Dora Explora (©Nickelodeon), stories who wore a bell around his neck. During the read aloud one of the children asked, “Why do cows wear bells around their necks?” Knowing that Sam’s grandparents owned a dairy farm, Tammy responded by saying, “I don’t know, let’s ask Sam. Sam, why do cows wear bells around their necks?” Sam shared that bells are used so that they always know where the cows are.

Later, in our September Diversity Group meeting when I asked Tammy to share this interaction with the other teachers, she revealed that not only did Sam share with the class about cows and bells, Sam’s father offered to bring in different kinds of bells and come in to talk about the reasons bells were used. Through our professional development engagements, Tammy and the other teachers learned that it was important to draw from students’ funds of knowledge, such as Sam’s about cows, and make visible this knowledge in the classroom in support of students’ positive identities. This supported students’ traditional literacies because it bathed them in language and literacy experiences in which the teacher demonstrated specific reading strategies. It was further enhanced by professional development conversations which helped Tammy go beyond traditional literacy demonstrations by focusing also on students’ funds of knowledge (Cowhey, 2006; González, Moll & Amanti, 2005). This was another way that a traditional literacy engagement was made more culturally relevant.

Using multicultural children's literature: Seeing themselves in books.

Through our study of culturally relevant practices, we deepened our learning about the importance of using multicultural children's literature classrooms as was discussed in Chapter Four. Although using books in general was seen as traditional literacy, we learned that the use of multicultural children's literature was critical in supporting students' positive literate identities in that it offered students opportunities to see themselves in the literature. Using multicultural literature was an existing practice but teachers were learning to appreciate how identity was critical to learning and that children needed to see themselves reflected in the literature as often as possible. Teachers attempted to fill their classrooms with many books that depicted people with varying abilities, sexual orientations, races, ethnicities, and cultures, as well as books written in many different languages. Some of the ways teachers supported students' identities reflected in children's literature was through: (a) creating class-made books, (b) sharing teacher's culture through books, and (c) engaging in an exploration about princesses.

Class-made books. Teachers also engaged children in writing classroom books based on trade books they read together. Making class books was an existing practice and a way to include all children in the classroom in the texts they used for read alouds, independent reading and texts they took home to share with their families. Through our professional development experiences and opportunities however, we learned that these class-made books could also serve to highlight specific children and their backgrounds, families, knowledge and languages, making the learning specific to them. For example, in Lyndsay's class the children read *The Color of Us* (Katz, 2007) and *We Are Alike We are Different*, (Cheltenham Elementary School Kindergarteners, 1991). Both books helped to

spearhead conversations with the students about similarities and difference among them and the importance of valuing everyone's voices and then prompted the creation of a class-made book. Lyndsay wrote about this experience in her journal:

[Today] we had a discussion about how we are alike and different and Gale said, 'Everyone speaks a different language, but everyone has a voice.' I was so excited and we discussed how this is true. We took a picture of all of our hands after reading *The Color of Us*. (Lyndsay's Journal, October 15, 2010)

Students in Lyndsay's class then created a book in which they each wrote a page about how they were alike and how they were different from each other and they used the pictures of their hands to create the front cover of the book (Figure 5.12)

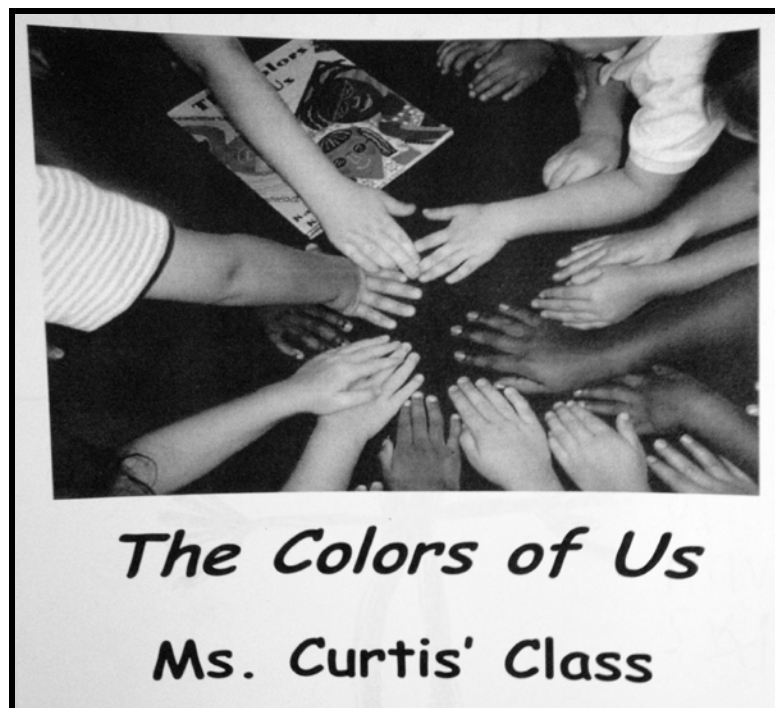


Figure 5.12. Cover of Lyndsay's class-made book, *The Color of Us*

Sharing teacher's culture. Because Kim wanted to share her Jewish heritage with her students, she used multicultural literature such as the books, *The Colors of the Jewish New Year* (Goldvukson & Wilker, 1998) and *The Jewish Child's First Book of Why*

(Kolatch & Araten, 1992), to name a few. Again, although these books constituted a traditional form of literacy and supported children's knowledge of traditional literacies, they were used in culturally relevant ways – to share an aspect of Kim's life with the students, to create opportunities for Kat and Sol who were Jewish students to share their experiences, and to broaden the knowledge of the non-Jewish students. Parents of non-Jewish students reported that their children came home interested in Hanukkah: Joel and Billy's father commented that "The boys came home and said they wanted to celebrate Hanukkah" (Personal Communication, Mr. Swann, December 2010) and Katherine's mother commented that she was glad that her daughter was learning about various cultural holidays such as Hanukkah and said, "Katrina said when she grew up she wanted to [do] Hanukkah" (Personal Communication, Mrs. Roland, December 2010).

An exploration in princesses. A classroom experience a few months prior to this study influenced Tammy's existing use of traditional literacy, in this case multicultural literature, in new ways. Tammy talked about this experience during our Inservice meeting:

A few of the African-American girls in my class were bringing in Disney princess books depicting White princesses such as *Cinderella* and *Little Mermaid*. I read the books to the students because I valued the books that the children bring to school. I was disheartened by the way the students answered the question, 'How many princesses do we have in our class?' Only a few female students raised their hand and one African-American female student pointed to a White female student and said, 'Only she can be a princess because she is White and has long blonde hair.' I had to make sure I made it clear to my students that no one can define who they are. It made me realize the importance of bringing in many books so children can see themselves [reflected in them]. I googled all the different princesses around the world and made a power point out of it. I also took pictures of all the girls in my class, imposed tiaras on each of them and wrote how beautiful each one was both inside and out. They asked me to read it to them again and again. (October 22, 2010)

Exploring this experience through our professional development led Tammy to further uses of multicultural literature (traditional literacies) in culturally relevant ways as she sought to provide counter narratives regarding *princesses*. Tammy's experience helped us think about the message that books and literature send to children. In a professional development session, I commented, "If you are not sure [what message children receive] you need to ask. Ask, like Tammy did. Ask the students, the parents, even the community because you won't know unless you do" (October 22, 2010).

In a member checking meeting with Tammy, I inquired about this practice as a means of supporting the young female students of Color in her class. Tammy relayed that hearing Dr. Boutte speak during one of our professional development sessions helped her become more aware of the need to draw attention to notions of beauty. Tammy shared that, "It helped me think about the different notions of beauty and how I had a responsibility to show that in my classroom" (December 7, 2012)

Morning message. The morning message is typically a message written by the teacher to the students, often on a large white board or on large chart paper, and then read with the children as a whole group at the start of the day. It can be used as a way to describe the plan for the day, or a reminder of a particular event or to tell the story of something that occurred in the teacher or someone else's life. It is also a way of demonstrating the conventions of writing. It is used as one meaningful way for children to engage with print as well as a reference that children can use as when children read or write independently.

As with read alouds and multicultural literature, the use of morning message was not new to our program. However, through our study of issues of race, culture and

language marginalization, we learned to use the morning message as a means to support literate identities in new ways. For example, we learned to use the morning message as a place to value, introduce and support multiple languages, to celebrate children's events in their lives and to support children in their language and literacy development (Figure 5.13).

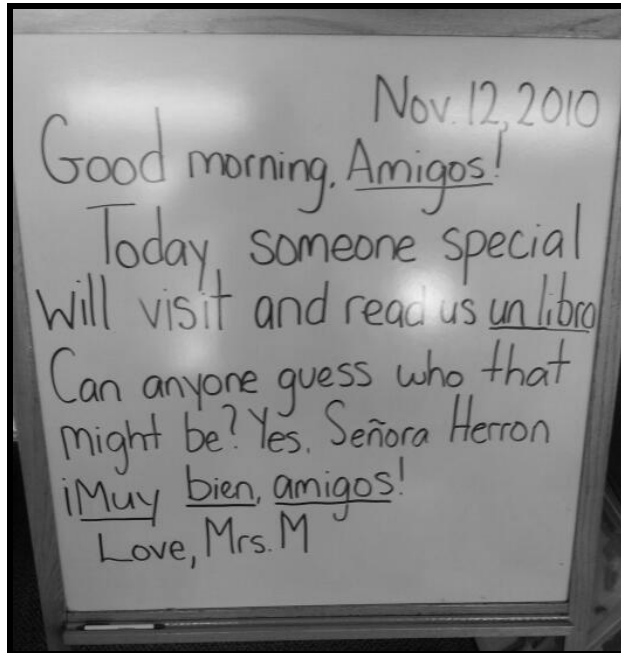


Figure 5.13. Using the morning message to support traditional literacy as well as multiple languages

In fact, all three teachers used the morning message as a means to expose the children to new languages or to support home languages while learning the conventions of traditional literacies. Lyndsay began using Spanish in her morning message when she first learned about doing so from a professional development opportunity conducted by Dr. Susi Long; she further developed this practice with the help of Señora Hermas, our Spanish teacher. She also asked her assistant Mrs. Mohammadi to write some words in Farsi and used student's home languages such as Urdu in her message. In her journal,

Lyndsay wrote about her use of languages in her morning message sharing one student's reaction. She wrote: "Taj hears us using a language that is used in his home and it is bringing a strong connection into the classroom" (November 11, 2010). Dr. Baghdadi, Taj's mother, also commented on how exposing Taj, as well as the class, to his home language makes him, "proud to talk about his culture and language in public." Taj's mother further described what she felt it meant for the others to know or be exposed to her language. She said, "I like the diversity to which kids are exposed, that will help them be more aware and appreciate and acknowledge others" (S. Baghdadi, Personal Communication, January 11, 2013).

In these ways, the morning message served to support traditional literacies by demonstrating the conventions of writing such as the way letters are formed, letter-sound correspondences, putting spaces between words, and punctuation but was also culturally relevant as it both supported and demonstrated a valuing of students' home languages while exposing all children to the fact that languages other than English exist and are used by people around them.

Kim also used the morning message in her class to demonstrate reading and writing in conventional ways in addition to teaching about events or celebrations in support of students across religious and cultural groups. For example, she made a point to use the Morning Message to introduce Rosh Hashanah and Hanukkah (both the words and the meanings) to her class to support both Kat and Sol, who were Jewish as well as to introduce their beliefs to the rest of the class. She taught conventional literacy skills in culturally relevant ways by introducing vocabulary and terms that were explored later through books, parent presentations and lessons. In a member checking meeting, Kim

discussed how the traditional use of the morning message in her class has evolved with her knowledge of culturally relevant practices:

[In a professional development session] Dr. Susi Long shared the ways in which she incorporated different languages in the morning message to make it more culturally relevant. That triggered thoughts and awareness of how I could do other things too. Through our other [professional development] meetings and conversations I left with new ideas to continue thinking about building in culture and languages. (February 15, 2013)

Other teachers used morning messages to help students examine punctuation, high frequency words, and conventions of print such as when to use upper and lower case letters, spacing, etc. Occasionally teachers asked children to write the morning message as a means to build their independence as writers. For example, during one of my observations in Lyndsay's classroom I observed two children, Keller and Harry writing the morning message. After the observation, I asked Lyndsay how she supported children in this process. Lyndsay elaborated on this strategy:

We are always talking about how to be an independent writer, but we need strategies to help us do this. So, we ask a friend or sound out or look around the room. When we did this at the beginning of the year the *morning message writer* always asked for help. Today Keller wanted to do it by herself and Harry was able to get a little advice. We also discussed editing our work and getting help from each other. (One-to-One meeting, November 9, 2010)

All three teachers engaged in the use of the morning message as a means to build on student strengths and support their literate identities as readers and writers while writing in culturally sensitive and celebratory ways.

Written conversations. The use of written conversations (Short, Harste & Burke, 1996) was another existing strategy teachers used to engage students in reading and writing engagements that were supportive of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds while also attempting to nudge them forward as conventional writers. Although the use of

written conversations was introduced earlier in this chapter, I return to them here to provide further evidence of ways that they were used to support traditional literacies in culturally relevant ways.

I introduced the faculty to written conversations after my exposure to language and literacy courses I had taken with Dr. Susi Long at the university several years prior to this study. Since then, Dr. Long presented to our faculty about the use of written conversations with children as means of supporting their language and literacy development, as well as a way to value children's home and community knowledge. Therefore, the ways in which we used written conversations developed over time, as we explored issues of race, culture and language learning to use this writing opportunity as a means of supporting children's knowledge, skills and interests as opposed to using mere random questions and responses as we had in the past.

Kim, Lyndsay and Tammy all used written conversations in their classrooms with students regularly. They sat one-to-one with a child and talked aloud taking turns writing their conversation on paper. Discussed below are the ways in which professional development helped teachers began to use written conversations in more culturally sensitive ways as they promoted traditional literacies and came to better understand children's reading and writing development.

Understanding children's reading/writing development. Through written conversations, teachers were able to work one-to-one with students to assess and gain information regarding their reading and/or writing development while gaining cultural and linguistic knowledge about the child. For example, Figure 5.14 illustrates a written conversation between Kim and one of her students, Ella. Kim noted that during this

written conversation, Ella spelled many words conventionally, while also using invented spelling (children's attempts at using their existing knowledge about sounds and letters to write words); that she used appropriate spacing between words and at times used punctuation; and that when Ella used inventive spelling she was hearing virtually all the constants in the words, such as, "BrB" for Barbie, "hr" for her and "SPrCLSin" for sparkles. Using this as an assessment tool for informing instruction, Kim was then able to discuss her plans for future lessons to support Ella: "I will continue to work with Ella on her use of punctuation. I will also encourage her use of invented spelling while drawing her attention to vowel sounds in words she writes" (Kim's Journal, December 22, 2010). In this example, Kim saw Ella's use of invented spelling as an emerging understanding of conventional writing and scaffolds her in traditional ways but she also supports Ella in culturally relevant ways by commenting on her celebration of Christmas and Santa.

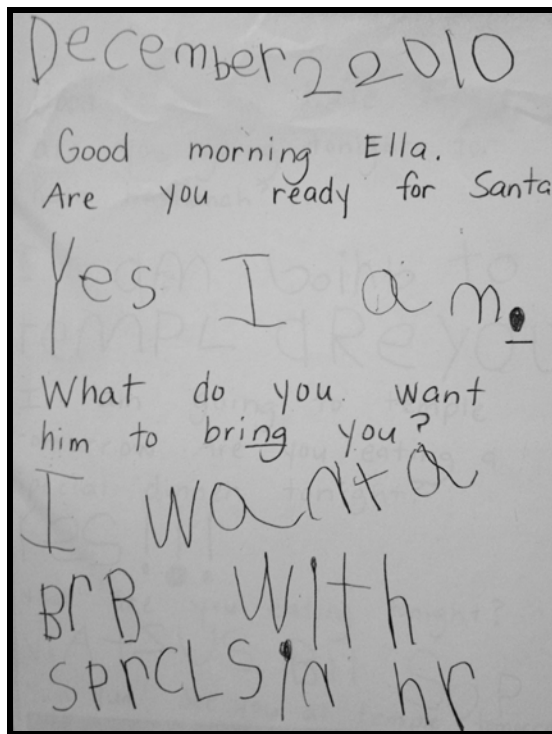


Figure 5.14. Written conversation between Kim and Ella, age 5

In a member checking meeting with Kim, I asked her how our professional development conversations helped to enhance her existing use of written conversations. She was quick to credit her professional development experiences as “essential” in this process. Reflective of the views of the other focal teachers, she described how in particular, she learned how the use of written conversations was not only to support children’s reading and writing strategies but their cultural selves as well:

Our [professional development] conversations were essential in my use of written conversations to support children’s writing strategies, culture and language. When we shared in our diversity meetings, I learned from the other teachers . . . especially the one-to-one times when you [Sabina] came into my classroom to model the use of written conversations for both [traditional and cultural ways] and gave me opportunities to talk with you about how [written conversations] can be used to support reading and writing *and* students culture, language and beliefs. So while I used written conversations to help children become better readers and writers I knew that I needed to make the conversations specific to each one of [the students]. (February 15, 2013)

Conclusion to Chapter Five

Through professional development opportunities and through the many engagements with faculty, staff, students and families, teachers in this study worked to gain knowledge about supporting students’ literate identities by validating them and making them visible in their classrooms. An important first step in our practice was to get to know the students and their funds of knowledge - including their language, their strengths and interests. In the process, we came to understand literate behaviors that might not have been otherwise visible to us. Findings reveal that to acquire this knowledge we employed strategies such as using family pictures, Me Boxes, self-portraits, family recipes, and Celebration of Life. Because of our professional development experiences, we brought new twists to these existing practices as we used

them to learn more about our students and families and used the information in more specific ways that supported students' culture and language in the classroom. We recognized that face-to-face time with parents and building relationships with families was foundational to our practice.

Data also highlight the ways in which our professional development engagements helped teachers to see children as knowledgeable/experts and built on that knowledge by positioning themselves as learners, and the children and families as teachers. We learned that families were an important component of classroom practices supportive of students' positive literate identities. Teachers further learned to utilize families' cultural and linguistic knowledge as often as possible. Our professional development studies gave us courage and conviction to interrupt children's misconceptions about race, culture and language as we worked to model respect as well as directly interrupt instances of disrespect for differences. We also found that, in the process of modeling respect for culture and language, it was important to "try language on" – to use it regularly in the classroom - so that the children and their families saw that we learned from them and from the families of their classmates.

Findings also suggest that, as a result of our professional development, teachers valued and made visible the non-traditional literacies – making meaning with blocks, reading maps and other environmental signs, and engaging in literacy events on the playground, often using these literacies to help students make connections to conventional literacy skills. We learned that we had to support non-traditional literacies and use that knowledge to scaffold to new and conventional literacy events.

We found that our professional development engagements gave us the knowledge to defend our beliefs and convictions of teaching traditional literacies in culturally relevant ways by being able to justify our teaching practices to outside people who questioned and challenged them. The use of read alouds, multicultural literature, morning messages and written conversations were common daily practices that existed prior to this study. However, through involvement in professional development we learned to do a better job of implementing these practices in culturally relevant ways by: using a critical lens in the selection of children's books; using multicultural literature reflective of our students lives, languages and cultures; employing multiple languages in the morning message; and using written conversations in ways that scaffold conventional writing and positive attitude as writers while supporting students' cultures and identities. We essentially learned that non-traditional and traditional literacy events were not mutually exclusive. They co-existed - one was often used as a springboard for the other - and both were nurtured in all three classrooms.

While we generated many several successful strategies that supported students' positive literate identities, it is critically important to note that the specifics of what that looked like in the classrooms varied depending on the teachers, children, and families involved and the literate identities and the cultural resources that teachers were able to discern and utilize. There was no cookie cutter answer to how to use our knowledge about language, race, and culture to inform classroom practice. Practice was grounded in knowledge and appreciation of children and families.

In spite of these successes, it is important to note that the strategies and practices used in the classrooms were not as significant as the ideas that supported them. Guiding

any changes in practice was our recognition that: children come to school possessing cultural and linguistic knowledge; valuing students' culture and language is essential in supporting their continued learning and the learning of their peers; and when valued in schools, home, and community, knowledge and literacies can support children's expertise with conventional literacies buoyed by the development of their positive literate identities.

The practices discussed here have and will continue to be scrutinized by us as we engage in ongoing professional development opportunities. We recognize that we cannot be alone in this venture. We must include the students and families as we learn from and with them to ensure our classrooms are supportive of all children's positive literate identities.

CHAPTER SIX

MY ROLE AS ADMINISTRATOR

As the administrator of the Saddle Creek Region Child Development Center, I was primary participant, organizer, facilitator, and researcher in this journey as the teachers and I explored issues of culture, race and language marginalization. Because of my conviction that the role of administrator is critical to this process and because of limited research documenting the administrator's role in such endeavors, it was essential that I study my learning as well as theirs. In this chapter, I highlight several themes that I constructed across data sources that illuminate my role in this process. Because the role of the administrator has been shown to be vital to the success of any professional development endeavors (Hawley, 2008), it is important that it is included in this study. This study affirmed my belief that administrators must understand the critical nature of their role in supporting equitable practices in schools. Perhaps this is the most important finding because, without administrative support, teachers may or may not have opportunities to learn about and feel empowered to practice in culturally responsive, equitable ways (Jacobson, 2003; Long, et. al. 2006). It is also important to address the administrator's role because of the difficulty and the seriousness of the work involved. Administrators need to know that they are not alone in their quest to provide spaces for conversation nor in the challenges and frustrations they may meet along the way. I offer this analysis of my experiences to provide insights for other administrators as they learn

how to create and sustain effective spaces for exploring equity issues and effective practice in their schools.

My philosophy, and the philosophy that guides my work as an administrator, is that children learn by engaging within and beyond their sociocultural worlds and that, in the process, they construct understandings of how to act, think, and speak. Recently, I added a critical lens to this perspective which requires me to view issues of power, privilege, and oppression in conjunction with an appreciation of the knowledge that children and families bring to classrooms. This stance also requires that I understand that teachers also bring experiences to the classroom, experiences that guide their notions of racism, oppression, marginalization and other social/political issues. Finally, my administrative work is guided by a commitment to identifying and challenging power structures that contribute to racism, oppression and marginalization particularly in institutions of education as those structures perpetuate educational inequities (Compton-Lilly, 2004; Earick, 2009; King, 1994; Macedo, 2006; Perry & Delpit, 1998; Zamudio, Russell, Rios & Bridgeman, 2011). These beliefs undergird my desire to work with teachers to better understand how race, culture and language are inextricably tied to children and families. I believe that it is of the utmost importance that administrators take responsibility for providing extended, ongoing, research-based opportunities to deepen their own and teachers' knowledge of these issues in order to make classrooms more supportive, inclusive environments for all students, particularly as related to students' positive literate identities.

Organization of This Chapter

Findings about my role are varied and sometimes conflicting but clear. For example, while opportunities arose when decisions and moves that I made clearly helped to extend my own and other participants' understandings of particular issues, at other times I was guilty of perpetuating stereotypes. There were also times when I felt completely isolated or inept in my quest, particularly at the beginning of the journey: losing friends, not always finding the right words to say, or getting frustrated with the teachers or with myself. However, there were also times when I felt much-needed support from other professionals in my life. My analysis of data also revealed my commitment to the work as well as my naïveté and inadequacies in terms of challenging teachers' thinking, and the expectations I had for the process and outcomes of the experiences.

Perhaps the most important finding about my role is something I did not realize until far into the data analysis process: I had a vision for what I wanted to happen that did not always match what I said or did. At times, that vision caused me to be judgmental of the teachers' responses rather than learning from or through them. Thus, while I feel confident that this was an important beginning, I believe that there was much more I could have done. As I consider my role in the process of efforts to engage faculty in honest discussion about issues of race, culture and language marginalization, the following themes (Table 6.1) seem most salient and are discussed in this chapter: (a) how I saw my role, (b) faltering courage and (c) perseverance: finding support and courage.

Table 6.1. Themes related to my role as administrator

How I Saw My Role	Faltering Courage	Perseverance: Finding Support and Courage
<p>Administrator as learner</p> <p><i>Learning not to assume</i></p> <p><i>Learning to listen: Allowing myself to be accountable</i></p> <p><i>Learning to ask for clarification</i></p> <p><i>Learning in homes and communities</i></p> <p>Administrator as teacher/leader</p> <p><i>Setting an example for educator as reader</i></p> <p><i>Highlighting critical sound bites</i></p> <p><i>Providing opportunities to learn from others</i></p> <p><i>Being responsive while not losing diversity focus</i></p> <p><i>Pairing professional development with autonomy</i></p> <p><i>Taking responsibility to extend understanding</i></p> <p><i>Supporting and valuing teachers' opinions</i></p>	<p>Frustrations</p> <p><i>Losing White friends, letting go</i></p> <p><i>Challenging teachers' views of already "having a grasp on diversity": Remembering your own journey</i></p> <p><i>"You cannot teach me, it's who I am": Kim's feeling she was already there because she cared about kids</i></p> <p><i>Difficulty in interrupting biased thinking within cultural groups</i></p> <p><i>Insecurities and uncertainties</i></p> <p>Exhaustion</p>	<p>Seeking professional others</p> <p><i>Professors and doctoral peers</i></p> <p><i>Conferences and other presentations</i></p> <p>Working through stereotypes and biases</p> <p>Addressing issues directly</p>

How I Saw My Role

As an administrator, my role is to provide professional development for the faculty and staff. I am responsible for working with and for faculty and staff to create a vision, goals and priorities and I am ultimately responsible for supporting curriculum and instruction, particularly as it relates to our program's philosophy which is grounded in constructivism and culturally relevant pedagogy. Having worked for the past few years as a doctoral student studying and learning about issues of culture, race and language marginalization, these were topics I was passionate in pursuing, not only for myself but for the teachers in the interest of better education for children. Given this knowledge, I felt compelled to make a concerted and systematic effort towards providing a learning environment supportive of ALL children. In attempting to reach those goals, during the course of our study, depending on the topic of conversation or situation, I saw my role both as: (a) a learner, and as (b) a teacher leader.

Administrator as Learner

My analysis of data shows that one of the foundations of my role as an administrator was that I viewed myself as a learner as well as a leader. During this study, I learned alongside the teachers in many ways but particularly as we ventured into homes and communities of children in our program. I wanted them to know that I too felt the importance of continuing to venture outside my comfort zone to learn about others as well as myself. I often attempted to make my learning visible by using myself as an example. Some of the most important learning for me during this study included: (a) learning not to assume; (b) learning to listen; (c) learning to ask for clarification; and (d) learning in homes and communities.

Learning not to assume. In my own study of equity issues and sociocultural and critical theories, I became more cognizant of the ways in which we are quick to assume. I often pointed out to the teachers my own struggle with learning this in my daily encounters. For example, during one of our Diversity Group meetings I shared with the group one of my learnings:

One of the things we need to be really careful about which is hard to do, is to *assume*, particularly when we talk about *they* do this or *they* do that because that's easy to do. I'm learning that [about myself]. (Diversity Group meeting, September 19, 2010)

However, despite my revelation about the ways in which we are quick to “assume” and my attempts at avoiding doing so, I made an assumption about one of our teaching assistants, Mrs. Mohammadi and her relationship with Taj, a student in Lyndsay's classroom. Because both were Muslim, I assumed that they must both attend the same local mosque and would, therefore, know each other. But in fact, Mrs. Mohammadi although Muslim, attended a different mosque than Taj's family. I later learned Mrs. Mohammadi was from Iran and Taj's family was from Pakistan. They knew each other as acquaintances from another school setting but not from the mosque. I wrote in my researcher's notes, “I made an assumption today that just because Mrs. Mohammadi was Muslim that she knew Taj from the mosque. [This] shows some of my need to move beyond making assumptions” (Researcher's Journal, October 21, 2010).

Another example of assumptions that I made, involved my thoughts about Tammy's attitudes towards our study. Early in our study Tammy made comments that I assumed suggested a belief that teaching in kind, inclusive, and responsive ways was part and parcel of her work as a teacher and a human being. I thought she did not feel it was something one could learn through a course or professional development experience. She

described it as “organic” and “so much of who I am.” Tammy felt that, for her, the desire to teach in culturally relevant ways could not be motivated from some outside influence nor professional development sessions such as ours. She declared, “You can not teach me how to do this; it has to be something I want to do.” I wondered if she was confusing her disposition with knowledge. In a member checking meeting with Tammy she clarified her intent explaining that she definitely saw herself as a learner and that when describing her teaching as “organic” and “just who I am” she meant that it is the *learning* not the *having arrived* that is who she is. She explained, “you can’t teach in meaningful ways if you do not learn how to make what children know a part of the classroom and to do that you need to study and learn” (Member Checking meeting, June 2, 2012). This taught me to not assume and to probe to better understand the meaning behind teachers’ words before making judgments about their intent. Clearly it is important for administrators to work towards not making assumptions and it is equally important to be upfront about our own tendencies to assume, providing a model for teachers that this is an ongoing, learning process for all of us.

Learning to listen: Allowing myself to be held accountable. There were often times when teachers held me accountable and questioned or interrupted something I said demonstrating their growth as well as my learning. This helped in my learning because it caused me to listen more to the teachers and reflect on my own words and practices. For example, during a Diversity Group meeting (prior to the official period of data collection for this study, but an important piece to share given that it demonstrated how teachers held me accountable), I talked with the teachers about the use of the term “persons of Color” as opposed to the term “minorities.” Kim commented that she felt the term

“persons of Color” was not appropriate and she would be inclined to take offense to the term were she a person of Color, because she believed it was akin to the term “colored person.” I attempted to explain the political implications of the word, *minorities*, verses the power of the term “persons of Color.” Kim pressed me on this issue and asked me to explain how it was a better term to use. At the time I struggled with trying to explain to satisfy her understanding and felt that we were going around and around with little success. I then just tried to end the conversation by shaking my head and saying, “Never mind!” Kim responded in an elevated tone and said, “Oh no, you don’t get to say, ‘never mind’ when the conversation gets difficult for you. This is what you’ve asked us to do and you need to do it too.” This was important in my learning because Kim caused me to truly think about what it was I was trying to say, caused me to reflect on my own practices and understanding, and allowed me to be as accountable for persevering with challenging conversations as I expected for everyone else.

In another instance, during our October whole faculty, Inservice day as we discussed children’s literature, I talked about Mem Fox’s (1995) book titled, *Guess What?*. The teachers had not heard of the book before so I provided them with a synopsis, not having the book with me. During my description of the book, Sally, one of the teachers and Diversity Group member, helped to hold me accountable regarding my choice of words:

Sabina: I think one of the purposes of [the book] is to say, just because someone is *ugly* they are not mean.

Sally: You mean they don’t look as you think they should look.

Sabina: Yes. Thanks Sally! See, that was a great thing to happen. That happens all the time, it happens to me all the time. You have to stop yourself and rewind. That wasn’t quite what I meant to say.

That is what living a critical life is all about! So anyway, that was a good thing to happen.

(October 22, 2010)

It was good to have one of the teachers recognize and make visible my inappropriate choice of words. It was something that helped me to move forward as well to let teachers know that they *could* hold me accountable. The important implication is that not only did Sally hold me accountable but I listened to what she said and reflected on my words. It is also important to note that in both instances, the teachers seem to have felt a certain level of trust with me to feel free enough to hold me accountable. In a member checking meeting with Tammy when we talked about the level of trust she felt throughout this study she expressed that sense of trust:

You opened the door for us to have these conversations and you made it okay to step outside of our comfort zones to say what we were thinking. You thanked us if we said anything and you didn't judge us for not agreeing with you. You made us talk, you asked us questions, and *you* did the things we were doing, too. You made it okay for us to challenge you too. You had me talking and I don't even like to talk. (March 6, 2013)

These kinds of incidents also sent a message that we were moving toward more critical understanding of the implications of our words. Teachers were listening and the words I used mattered in terms of how it supported students and a strength-based perspective.

Learning to ask for clarification. Another way that I fulfilled my role as learner was through conversations about teachers' classroom practice. I often met with teachers to review transcripts of my classroom observations. I used this, not punitively, but as a way of gaining clarity to help my understanding of their particular practices. As much as I desired to extend teacher understanding, I also needed the teachers to extend my understanding of the kinds of engagements they were providing for students. Some of the

instances that provided clarity for me (learning) were when I asked about specific practices in which the teachers were engaged, or asked what prompted them to know to incorporate languages other than English in their routines and activities. I also learned/gained clarity by asking teachers to elaborate on their experiences in homes and communities. For example, after observing Lyndsay's classroom, I wanted to know how her home and community visits supported her practices. An excerpt from our conversation follows:

Sabina: How does, or does it at all, that information that you're getting from [home and community] experiences, how does that support you in your classroom? When you are creating lessons, when you're trying to figure out how to engage kids in different activities, how does that help you? Or does that help you?

Lyndsay: It helped a lot because you want to make lessons that are meaningful to a child and they can make a connection with. I think that a child just being able to see some of their home in the classroom . . . it just makes a huge difference.

(One-to-One meeting, October 4, 2010)

I did not want to assume that home and community visits were instrumental in teachers' development of plans and practices, I needed to gain clarity by asking about what they found valuable from these visits.

Learning in homes and communities. During this study, I spent time in home and communities of students and staff - particularly those outside my own realm of cultural and linguistic knowledge and experience - as often as I could. I felt that, as an administrator, it was important that I engaged with families in homes and communities as I was asking of the teachers. Also, as a result, I could use what I learned from families in my work with teachers. During this study, I focused my time particularly in the community of Taj, a Pakistani-American whose family was Muslim. I knew nothing at all

about Pakistani culture, language, or Muslim religion and I was eager to learn as much as I could – understanding that it would be merely a glimpse into Taj’s life and not representative of his whole self or of all Muslims or all Pakistani-Americans. With Lyndsay, I visited Taj and his family with Lyndsay at the mosque during Eid services. We spent two hours sitting and listening to the women talk and pray. During Eid it is customary for women and children to have henna painted on their hands. Lyndsay and I participated in this event and learned about the art that is handed down from generation to generation. I struggled not knowing where to go or what to do but I looked to Taj, his sister and Dr. Baghdadi for guidance. I wrote in my researcher’s journal about my experience with Taj and his family at the mosque they attended:

I gained so much from being with Taj and his family tonight. I didn’t know what to expect so I was initially anxious about going but all my fears were put to rest once I was greeted at the door by the Imam of the mosque, or masjid as Taj’s mom referred to it. I have never heard the word masjid before – that was new to me. I learned that Masjid is the Arabic word for mosque. It was good to see Taj in his environment and see how comfortable he is in it. It makes me want him to feel this way at school, too. (September 7, 2010)

My visit in Taj’s community also reinforced my theoretical understanding regarding students’ funds of knowledge and multiple literacies. I learned through a firsthand example how one child learned within his sociocultural communities. For example, through my visit with Taj and his family at the mosque, I learned that, in that setting, Taj was more literate than either Lyndsay or me. Lyndsay and I did not know what to do, say, or how to behave and we looked to Taj and his family for cues.

During the mosque visit, it was clear how very much it meant to Taj to have his teacher and school administrator visit a place so special to him and his family. It also gave him courage to be more of himself in the classroom. For example, Lyndsay wrote in

her journal how reticent Taj was to show his henna tattoo to his classmates after the Ramadan services at the mosque we attended with Taj's family. Lyndsay described Taj as "walking around with this hand tightly shut, [as if he might have been embarrassed] to show [his henna tattoo]" (September 9, 2010). Lyndsay asked Taj to share his tattoo with the class and Taj shook his head no. Then Lyndsay called me to come to the classroom and she and I talked to the children about our visit to the mosque and showed Taj and his classmates our henna tattoos. After our conversation with the students, Taj was observed walking around with his hand open showing his classmates his henna tattoo. The development of Taj's positive identity was supported as Lyndsay and I celebrated and validated the tradition of the henna tattoos. We were able to do so because we had pushed ourselves out of our comfort zones to learn something new. In doing so, we provided an opportunity for Taj, and his classmates, to see Taj's culture and traditions honored and valued in the classroom.

This experience helped me learn that we must create learning environments at school where we draw from our students' funds of knowledge and their literacies and make that visible to all children in our classrooms. This allows the entire child to be present in the classroom: they do not have to leave their cultures at home when they come to school. Children are embraced and celebrated for what they know, supported, and provided opportunities to build from that knowledge to new learning. It also gave courage to the teachers when they saw me spending time outside my own worlds because they saw it as something that I found important enough to do myself and that I was learning alongside them.

Administrator as Teacher/Leader

Data analysis led me to believe that in addition to seeing myself as a learner, I also saw myself as a teacher/leader particularly in the area of professional development as I designed many of the opportunities that we engaged in as a faculty. I define teacher/leader as someone who provides learning opportunities (for herself and the school's faculty) with the potential to extend ideas about educational theory and practice in the interest of better educating all children. In this case, those theory/practice ideas were related specifically to issues of equity in early childhood education. I also see a teacher/leader as someone who challenges teachers but leads by example. As a teacher/leader, I attempted to support teachers in a variety of ways; I: (a) set an example as a reader; (b) I highlighted critical sound bites; (c) provided opportunities for us to learn from others; (d) responded to teachers without losing diversity focus; (e) provided autonomy; (f) took responsibility for extending understandings; and (g) supported and valued teachers' opinions. Each of these elements of my role as teacher/leader is described in detail below.

Setting an example for educator as reader. I was intentional in my attempt to set an example as educator as reader. For example, I frequently brought in professional books and articles to demonstrate and remind the faculty of the importance of taking the initiative as professionals to continue to read and grow. I also wanted them to know that it was not just me who believed that critical pedagogy was important to children's learning, that there were many researchers and practitioners in the field who suggested that it was essential to do so. The books I brought to school to share with the faculty came from my continued reading in the field of critical race theory and culturally relevant

pedagogy (see Table 7.1 in Chapter Seven). I often brought three or four books at a time to discuss and from which I drew key quotes and/or passages. I also selected several books for the teachers to choose from for individual book studies. I tried to communicate my stand that professional reading was part and parcel of our jobs explaining at one Diversity Group meeting:

The only way we are going to stay abreast of issues related to race, culture and language is to read as much as we can. I didn't know much about critical race theory until recently so that made me want to know more. I read one book and that makes me interested in learning more about others. One researcher will quote someone and I'm off trying to locate that book. (Diversity Group meeting, September 16, 2010)

Kim then asked, "When do you have time to read?" I shared with the group that I read all the time, whenever I could. I felt that, in this way, I could set an example for living a critical life, which involved reading and staying abreast of topics and research that supported our work in equity education. I wanted the teachers to recognize that we have to stay abreast of the research if we were going to make a difference for the students and families in our program and that continuing to read was very important in our work, and that teaching was "intellectual work" (Nieto, 2003, p. 76). Therefore, bringing in books was a way I could communicate my conviction and set an example for them of educator as reader while using the texts as jumping off places for our conversations.

Highlighting critical sound bites. Another way I attempted to serve as a teacher/leader was through the use of *critical sound bites*. A university colleague, Dr. Erin Miller, shared this idea with me. Erin developed the idea of critical sound bites through her work with preservice teachers. She explained that these sound bites are bits of audio, video or print media that reveal stereotypes, underlying issues of racism, cultural and linguistic marginalization, misrepresentations or omission of marginalized

people. Critical sound bites were virtually everywhere. I often paid close attention to these sound bites anytime I heard or saw them and brought them to our Diversity Group meetings for discussion. One such incident occurred during one of our Diversity Group meetings. I read aloud from a book I found on our school bookshelf, a pamphlet-styled book that had been there before I began as administrator: *Essential Spanish for Teachers and Other School Personnel* (Alcorta, 2001). I explained that when I first found the book, upon reading the title, I was excited to have a pocket pamphlet to carry with me for easy access to Spanish phrases. However, under closer inspection, I noticed a picture of the author, Dr. Alcorta, wearing a sombrero on the front cover of the book and was immediately concerned about stereotype. I asked the teachers what they thought of the picture. James laughed, “It’s Juan Valdez” referring to a character portrayed in the *100% Colombian Coffee* commercials (©NFCGC, 1985). Tammy followed with, “It looks like the Tequila man.” I remarked, that I thought he looked “like he was a Mariachi musician” (Diversity Group meeting, October 21, 2010). I told them that, when I found the book, I immediately thought the picture was very stereotypical but nonetheless, I was intrigued and began to read. I relayed that, after reading only a few lines, my jaw fell open and my eyes widened. The majority of the English/Spanish translations offered were phrases that were deficit in nature and quite disturbing to me. I then read some of the phrases aloud (which were listed in English and Spanish) to the teachers, to get their responses. The title of that section of the book was *Parent, Principal Conference*. The phrases included:

- 1) Mr. Garcia can you come to school for a parent conference?
- 2) Why do you want to see me?
- 3) We need to talk about some things.
- 4) Your son/daughter has not had a good day.
- 5) Your son/daughter is misbehaving in class.
- 6) Your son/daughter does not respect the teacher.

- 7) Your son/daughter does not want to work in class.
 - 8) Your son/daughter has not attended class.
 - 9) Your son/daughter has used profanity in school.
 - 10) We have to punish or discipline your son/daughter.
 - 11) May I have permission to spank your son/daughter?
 - 12) Your son/daughter will be suspended/put in isolation for three days.
 - 13) Your son/daughter has lice and/or nits and according to the state law he/she cannot be in class until he/she is clean.
 - 14) My son/daughter says his/her teacher does not like him/her.
 - 15) That is not true, Mrs. Castellio cares about all her students.
- (Alcorta, 2001, pp. 31-33)

When I finished reading the list Kim asked, “Who wrote it?” Shirley added, “What is the copyright?” Lyndsay agreed, “That’s the first thing I said.” I followed Kim and Shirley’s questions and told them that it was written by a professor of Spanish from Abilene, Texas and that the copyright date was 2001. Shirley gasped, “No! Gosh, come on! I could cry.” James remarked, “It’s kind of crass isn’t it?” Kim added, “Well that’s assuming that the only kind of interaction between a principal and parent would be negative and bad things.” Tammy’s statement echoed the majority of our sentiments when she advised, “Sabina, you need to throw that book in the trash can!” I added, “This is the reason we need to pay attention to what is going on around us and live critical lives. We need to constantly keep our radar on and try to increase its range over time.”

This is one example of how the introduction of critical sound bites through my role as teacher/leader led to important conversations about the continued existence of discriminatory practices. This particular critical sound bite allowed us to think together about the importance of observing and paying attention to the deficit language around us. I shared with the group that once they started paying attention to things that they see and hear, as they continue to read and learn, they would realize how important our intentional study in the area of race, culture and language marginalization was.

Another example of using critical sound bites occurred during our September diversity meeting when we discussed two photos cited in Earick (2009) as a way to discuss racist language in media (Figure 6.1). The photos depict people walking through chest-deep waters after Hurricane Katrina came through New Orleans, Louisiana on August 29, 2005. “The first photo read, ‘Two residents wade through chest-deep water after *finding* [emphasis added] bread and soda from a local grocery store after Hurricane Katrina came through the area in New Orleans, Louisiana.’ The second photo read, ‘A young man walks through chest-deep flood waters after *looting* [emphasis added] a grocery store in New Orleans’”(Earick, 2009, p. 21-22).

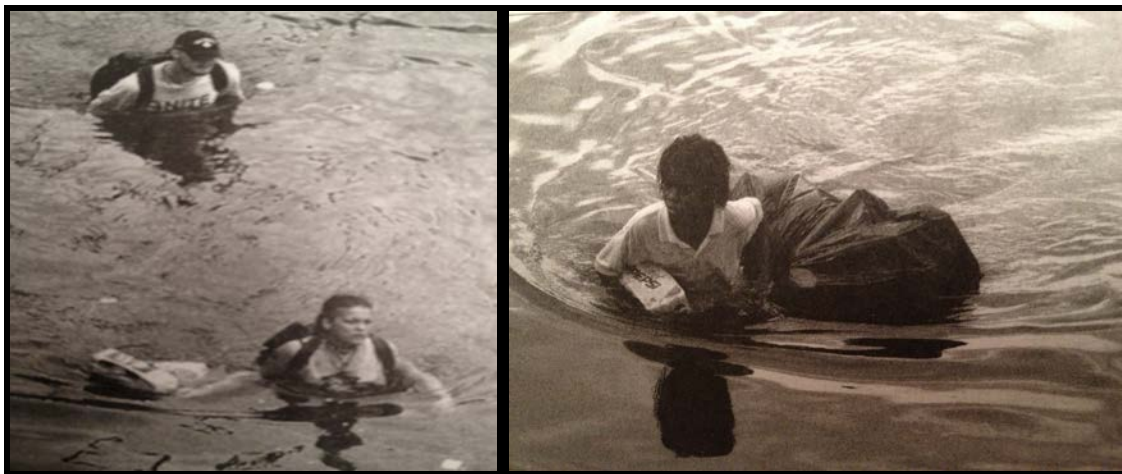


Figure 6.1. Critical sound bite of racist language used in the media

I used this critical sound bite with the faculty as a way to make visible the ways in which racism sneaks into our lives. I discussed how these critical sound bites reflect the ways in which oppression keeps people down. I shared that the more I see, the more it incenses me. I said, “we must make these things visible and call them as racist when we see them.” I continued to speak but began to get choked up. Shirley broke the silence by adding, “You have a cause, Sabina, and we all appreciate that fact. We teach and we need

to get the very best of each child.” I managed to get myself together and ended our meeting by saying:

I think we can all contribute to making things better or we can all contribute to perpetuating the status quo. I want us to think about these things. So we’ll leave it here for today. I didn’t mean to break down. I feel that with you guys, I can grow, and I can share . . . and have a place to fall too. (September 16, 2010)

Together, it led us to discuss how deficit and oppressive comments and ideas are common place in the media and our everyday lives but we have been so accustomed to hearing them they often go unnoticed until we begin paying attention to the ways in which these messages serve to perpetuate an unjust status quo, as well as how we need to further work to name them as racist and then interrupt them.

Providing opportunities to learn from others. I envisioned that my role as teacher/leader would include providing opportunities for teachers to grow through my facilitation of our discussions, but I also came to realize the importance of providing opportunities for teachers to learn from others. I often saw the need for this when some teachers made comments such as “You can’t tell me to do this, it has to be something I want to do,” “we have this diversity thing down,” or “we want to study other subjects instead of diversity.” This led me to the realization that I needed to bring in other people that could assist me in illuminating the importance of teaching in culturally relevant ways. It was important that I brought in others or provided opportunities away from school for all of us to hear presenters speak to the essential nature of our work. These opportunities helped us understand that it was only through intentional study in race, culture and language that we could begin to know how to create such practices for our students. Equally important was that these experiences also validated the convictions and commitments that I was espousing; giving credence to the work I wanted to accomplish.

Some of the professionals who were a part of this validation and furthering of our learning were scholars brought to the university as speakers in the 2009-2010 College of Education of African American Students Symposium: Joyce King (2005), Evelyn Bethune (2008), Valerie Kinloch (2010) and Dianne Johnson (Johnson-Feelings, 1990; Johnson & Johnson, 2007), (all speaking at the university in the months just prior to this study) as well as Theresa Perry (Perry & Delpit, 1998; Perry, Steele & Hilliard, 2003), and Ana Celia Zentella (2008) (during this study). On many occasions I invited the teachers to attend these seminars with me and was successful in taking the teachers to several events.

Dr. Dianne Johnson's presentation particularly resonated with the teachers. Some of the teachers talked about the presentation and how it supported their emerging understanding of culturally relevant practices. Shirley commented, "It was good to learn how important it is to have children's literature reflect the children in your classroom." Lyndsay added:

[Dr. Johnson] made me think about the importance of books in children's lives. She helped me [to] think about how books can support or not support children [in classrooms]. I feel a responsibility to make sure I choose the best books for my students. (August, 2010)

Being responsive while not losing the diversity focus. As mentioned in Chapter Four, bird-walking was challenging for me. This occurred usually at the beginning of our meetings or during meetings when teachers wanted to talk about other things. My dilemma was in knowing when what I perceived to be bird-walking was actually an important diversion related to our work that would deepen our knowledge and/or create space for the voices of particular participants. For this reason, a part of my role as teacher/leader was to recognize when I should abandon my prepared plans and follow the

direction of the teachers and when it was important to halt a bird-walk and refocus the discussion. To do this, I had to learn how discern when moving outside of prepared plans might actually take us into important and related territory as we continued to address issues of diversity and equity. I learned to recognize that purposeful deviations from my plans were when participants described something that happened in a classroom or a particular news event related to equity issues. I relayed this in my journal:

I guess just like the students in our classrooms, we have to know when to abandon our plans and shift to what they (students or teachers) want to discuss as long as it is around issues of diversity and how we can make it better for the students in our classrooms, I am more than willing to digress from the agenda. I'll pull it back on course eventually. (September 20, 2010)

Another example of abandoning plans but maintaining focus happened during our September Diversity Meeting. My plans were to talk about issues of identity by discussing some of our book studies. However, given the controversy in the news at that time regarding the building of a mosque at the site of the World Trade Center in New York City (New York Times, September 12, 2001), our conversation shifted to discussion of the racism that Muslims were facing in the United States. While I had not planned this discussion, the topic still allowed us to discuss issues of identity. I shared my observations of my visit to New York City in June. I talked about observing Muslim vendors near the site of the World Trade Center (WTC) as well as a mosque about four blocks from the World Trade Center location. I explained that I didn't understand the controversy regarding building of a new mosque/community center two blocks away from the World Trade Center, which opened up opportunities for further dialogue:

Sabina: I lived there and I just got back in June. I found it interesting, and this was just an observation, and I know there has been controversy about building the mosque there which is about two blocks from the WTC which we walked by you know, but two more blocks

away is another mosque and on the whole street that lines the WTC are vendors who are Muslim who sell food and they are store owners. So my question is why is it okay to make a living but not to worship there? You know in the WTC there were Muslims who perished.

Kim: You are saying it's okay to trade there but not worship there in that area?

Sabina: Right. Literally on the block of the WTC there are vendors who are Muslim. So I just wondered why it is not okay to have a place to worship. And I have recently learned that there was a mosque on the 17th floor of the WTC as well.

Lyndsay: I didn't know that. I mean, I don't think people know that. I'm sure there's a lot of things people don't know. Looking at the whole picture from the news and everything, that's all you know.

Sabina: And we make those judgments about things, about what's right and wrong without looking at the whole thing and taking multiple perspectives. How do you think our Muslim families feel when they see the controversy and all the stuff delegitimizing and demonizing [Muslim] culture?

Lyndsay: I'm sure they feel a lot of different things. I am sure they feel angry or they could feel hurt or they could feel like they don't want to be judged that way. Like in our case, just all I really know is just from one family, but I don't think they would ever mention anything. I would have only talked with [Taj's mother] about school, never about their feelings about this.

Sabina: We need to realize that children's identities are shaped by their social cultural words but how the political climate affects them, too. I think about little kids and young adults who listen to that and go out into the world. What do you think that does to your identity, your person, how you present yourself in the world?

Shirley: My oldest son said one time and he had been in a lot of trouble, he said, "people tag me as bad."

Sabina: I can't imagine living like that.

(September 16, 2010)

While the topic was not one that was planned, the conversation was still fruitful in that we were able to discuss issues of identity and social injustice. Unfortunately, in hindsight I did not always use the opportunities that arose to its fullest extent. While our conversations were fruitful they never delved as deeply as they might have into issues of racism, oppression or marginalization, a frustration that is discussed later in this chapter.

Pairing professional development with autonomy. Analysis of the data demonstrates that an important element of my role as teacher/leader was to provide autonomy for teachers to practice in ways that were meaningful and appropriate to the students in their classroom. Teachers needed the opportunity to explore and experiment with their new ideas in their classrooms in their own way. Therefore, our professional development did little good without pairing the learning with the ability to be autonomous. Teachers were unique in their own ways, with their individual cultures, interests, talents and strengths. All the teachers were early childhood certified, some with advanced degrees. Our teaching assistants were experienced and knowledgeable as well, some had been with us for over 25 years. I felt confident that, given our collective willingness to continue to grow and learn through intentional study, teachers should be treated as professionals and allowed to be autonomous in their teaching practices.

As the administrator of 13 teachers and approximately 37 staff members, I felt that providing an environment where teachers could work with autonomy would benefit the students and families because they knew their students and families best. Based on my knowledge of the teachers and their experience and obvious commitment to children, I had to trust that they would employ practices that met each of their children's needs. However, as I often shared with the teachers, and as the literature describes (Long, et. al.,

2006), with this power also came high expectations and great responsibility. I had high expectations for teachers regarding practicing in ways that supported students' cultural and linguistic knowledge. They also knew that there were philosophical tenets that were foundational to our program that I expected to be visible in our program. These tenets were outlined in our program handbook and we shared with teachers, parents and community members by distributing hard copies and providing links to our program's website (Appendix K).

Many of the teachers in this study shared their feelings regarding their license to be autonomous in the classroom. Tammy said, "I really feel like if I didn't want to do something that you wanted me to, I could say, 'no' and as long as I could validate why I felt that way, and it was in alignment with our core philosophy that I could do so." Lyndsay, too, commented: "[Autonomy] shows how much trust you have in your faculty." I did trust the teachers and the assistants to provide quality care and education because I knew they were people who, while all different from each other in culture, religion, age, experience and background, they had similar philosophical beliefs and were willing to continue to grow and learn with and from each other and the students and families we served. Knowledge of these characteristics of the teachers allowed me to comfortably and without hesitation provide autonomy to them.

Taking responsibility to extend understanding. Analysis of data also led me to believe that a large part of my role as teacher/leader in our discussion of race, culture and language marginalization was to facilitate the extension of teachers' understandings. There were several strategies I used in my attempts to do so and they are described below.

Building on teachers' input to make explicit points. Often during our One-to-One, Focal Group and Diversity Group meetings I attempted to extend our understandings by using what teachers said to help extend their understanding by making an explicit point. For example, during a Focal Group meeting with Kim and Lyndsay, we discussed our involvement with bringing in culture and families into the classrooms. Lyndsay mentioned that she felt that these attempts at bringing family and community knowledge, cultural custom, language, and expertise into the classroom demonstrated to parents “that we cared.” I attempted to extend this by adding that it was that we cared and much more. I wanted them to know that seeking to learn about and bringing elements of children and families’ cultures and languages into the classroom and involving parents in and out of the classroom allowed us to build on students’ strengths, to foster positive identities, and to help all of our students to realize that there are many ways of believing, acting and speaking in our world. So, building on Lyndsay’s comment, I offered:

Exactly! And you do care and we extend that [knowledge] and we bring it into our classrooms. Like what you [Kim] did for Kat and Sol who celebrate Rosh Hashanah, who may not have it celebrated in [another] school at that level because you participated with them. Looking at their faces [during my classroom observation] while you were talking about [Rosh Hashanah] seemed so important to them, and their dad coming in to do the Shofar [a horn made from a Ram’s horn]. I mean those are important [strategies]. As I was sharing with Taj’s mom, it’s not just about us [only] learning about the children, it’s about [us] sharing that knowledge that we learn with all the kids in the class so everyone understands a more global position. (Focal Group meeting, September 16, 2010)

During another One-to-One meeting, Tammy and I were discussing topics related to religion. I shared my experience watching a program on the National Geographic channel about Islam. Tammy announced, “I am so ignorant in all of that and . . . I never thought about learning about Islam.” I responded, “Yeah, I didn’t either until this year [having Taj in our program].” Tammy expressed an interest in being educated “in case

any of the children asked me any questions.” Elaborating on Tammy’s thoughts, I attempted to extend thinking by commenting that we had to make a concerted effort to learn about our students – stepping out of our comfort zones. I made the explicit points that, before this study, we had students who were Muslim or Hindu but we did not think about learning more about those cultures. I explained my view that having students and families from different cultures in our program provided us with the need to learn more as we attempted to support their positive literate identities:

Right. I think that’s when we make a concerted effort to dig [information] out and learn [what we do not know] because I don’t know that I would have ever sought to find out [about] the Hindu faith or the Islamic faith. Had I not started thinking more deeply . . . you know I was very content going through life . . . just being who I was. (October 5, 2010)

In this way, I attempted to build on Tammy’s recognition of the fact that we could go about our way and never intentionally try to learn about anyone else’s culture and language or, as in this case, religion. I tried to extend that realization by explaining the importance of intentionality as teachers devoted to learning about those beyond our own worlds.

Asking questions. Other ways in which I worked to facilitate and lead discussions and to extend understandings was by asking questions. In order to keep our attention and focus on our critical conversations I often interjected questions to help guide the course of the conversation in ways that would extend our thinking. Sometimes the questions I asked helped me better understand how to best support the teachers through this process. For example, in an attempt to illuminate the intentional ways we work to know students and their families, I asked the teachers to think about their home and community visits:

If we weren’t working in this Diversity Group and we weren’t making a concerted effort at going into the homes and communities of [our students] . . . would you

do that? If we weren't saying as a faculty, 'Let's do this'. Would it be something that you would have done anyway [from the perspective of learning from students and families]? (Focal Group meeting, December 16, 2010)

These questions provided Kim, Lyndsay and Tammy an opportunity to think about what they were learning and understanding and how that information was continuing to inform their understanding of race, culture and language marginalization. Tammy answered my questions explaining that she would want to get to know the students and families but she “would not have thought about going into the homes and communities . . . I gained so much information about my students outside of school” (Focal Group meeting, December 16, 2010).

At times I turned the questions toward our own practice and environment. During one of our whole faculty Inservice days, I talked to the teachers about living a critical life and looking at things through a critical lens. I indicated the sign (Figure 6.2) posted in the front of our school depicting children from around the world each dressed in stereotypical clothing with generic faces and slightly different shading representing skin color. I asked the teachers to think about the message the sign sent to our families: “Are we perpetuating a stereotype of each of these cultures begin represented in [such] a stereotypical way?” The teachers and I went to look at the sign during our break. Although the conversation did not go as far as I hoped, their comments revealed that my question caused them to begin to reflect together. Kim suggested, “I think that even though every child doesn't wear that particular clothing that it still is an important part of the culture and you'd want to keep it.” Sally offered, “They should all be wearing blue jeans.” The point I tried to make through my questioning was that we needed to be mindful of stereotypical representations within our own program and classrooms.

Whether they were in the books we read or the graphics in our own child development signs, I wanted us to ensure congruency between our words and our practices and that, without this critical lens, we could not support children's literate identities. This example also demonstrates how, my own reflection on conversations prompted by my questioning led me to recognize when we needed to go more deeply into an idea or topic even when I was not quite sure how I might accomplish that.

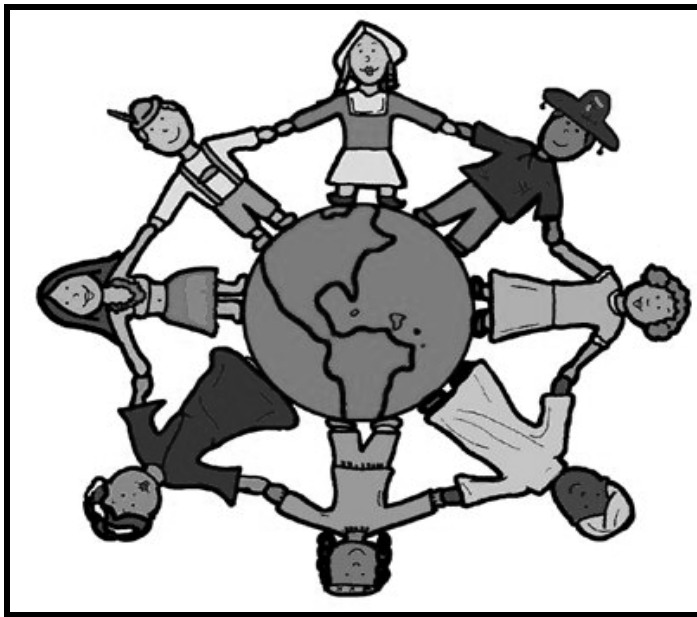


Figure 6.2. Picture of our school sign depicting children around the world

Supporting and valuing teachers' opinions. My analysis of data showed that my role as a teacher/leader working to further teachers' understanding regarding diversity issues required the ability to support them and show that I valued their opinions. Going into the study, I knew it was important to attempt to create an environment where teachers felt comfortable discussing and sharing. I recognized that I was in a position of power. That power might make it difficult not only for teachers to make themselves vulnerable enough to enter into discussions with honesty, but to ascertain whether or not

they felt supported or valued for their opinions. The only way I was able to come close to a sense of how they felt was through anonymous teacher feedback. Random responses from anonymous surveys taken after our October Inservice day seemed to suggest that, at least at that point, teachers felt affirmed and safe:

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Teacher #1: | Mrs. Mosso-Taylor was very receptive to an open dialogue and listened as well as facilitated the discussions with the group. |
| Teacher #2 | She was open and responsive. She challenged people to talk about why they felt the way they do. |
| Teacher #3 | She was very open to our thoughts and learning from us. |
| Teacher #4 | Mrs. Mosso-Taylor encourages discussion and is open and responsive to other people's thoughts, even though she may not be in agreement. |

(Anonymous teacher surveys, November, 2010)

Member checking meetings also provided an opportunity for teachers to share some of their thoughts regarding my support of them during the study. For example, at the time of our member checking meeting, Kim was no longer employed as one of the child development teachers and therefore I was no longer in a direct position of power in her professional life. We met to review some of the data excerpts as a way to gain more insight into her thinking at the time. During our conversation, Kim relayed her thoughts regarding our interaction a month prior to this study, when she disagreed with me on the term *person of Color*. In doing so, Kim revealed the importance of administrators' supporting and valuing teachers' opinions, particularly with regard to feeling comfortable discussing potentially uncomfortable topics. Kim reflected on our interaction:

The time I confronted you about using the term *people of Color* – when I disagreed with you - that I didn't like [the term] and you said that it was more appropriate to use; I felt that as an administrator, I felt that I was disrespecting

you in front of a group. For me to tell you, ‘no’ regarding things that made me feel uncomfortable during our talks in our diversity class, and you being okay with that, opened the door to make me feel safe and comfortable to discuss topics that were not normally comfortable for me. (January 11, 2013)

Kim’s comments helped me to see how very important it is for administrators to allow their actions and words to be interrogated, but more important that professional development experiences must take place within safe places for teachers to share their thoughts and feelings, free from consequences. One element in developing that safe space was for the teachers to see that I valued what they were saying and that I too was willing to put myself in a place of discomfort in order to move towards more equitable practices.

Faltering Courage

Analysis of my data illuminated that in my quest to persevere throughout our professional development experiences together, there were moments when my courage wavered. This seemed to occur when I was: (a) frustrated, or just (b) exhausted. Both of these feelings contributed to my faltering courage as I worked with teachers during our professional development time together and are discussed below.

Frustrations

During the course of our time together throughout the study, as well as during the two years prior to the study, I struggled and often felt frustrated as I doubted my own ability to move teachers forward and to provide them with adequate information and direction as we moved toward the goals I felt were important towards understanding race, culture and language marginalization. My courage faltered as I faced the frustration that I did not have all the answers; I was learning too. I often questioned my ability to provide quality professional development experiences for the teachers and at times felt tremendous sadness and loneliness as I ventured in to our continued work. I represent my

frustrations in the discussions below in the following ways: (a) losing White friends; (b) challenging teachers' views that they already "have a grasp on diversity"; (c) teachers' views about their own knowledge; (d) difficulty in discerning when thinking was biased; and (e) insecurities and uncertainties about my own abilities.

Losing White friends, letting go. When I began making a full-on attempt at ensuring that our professional development experiences centered on making critical conversations a way of life in our program, it initially appeared that all the teachers were *on board* with our new focus and direction. However, as we moved forward and had deeper critical conversations, I felt as if I was losing friends, White friends. For example, a few of the White teachers in our program had been my friends and confidants for many years having taught together prior to my role as curriculum specialist and then administrator. However, I slowly watched some of those friendships disintegrate upon the new direction of our conversations. My White, middle-class teacher friends in whom I used to confide, laugh with, and go out with after school for drinks, now appeared to avoid me and often met together without me. I tried not to let it show, but in truth it hurt. I wrote about my sadness during this time:

I can't seem to shake the somewhat sadness I feel. Teachers who previously invited me out for drinks or to their home now avoid me. Those that were the closest to me now seem most distant and reported their dissatisfaction with my direction. Part of me says, 'Fine, let them go.' But honestly there's a part of me that is depressed because I feel I am losing my friends and I feel alone.
(Researcher's Journal, July 10, 2010)

During our Diversity Group meetings, in which the same teacher friends initially participated, these teachers seemed defensive with my questions or initiation of conversations regarding White privilege and other issues of racism, culture and language marginalization. One of the teachers ultimately left our program (prior to my study) and

the other teacher asked to leave the Diversity Group during the study. Losing White friends was a frustration that I continued to wrestle with throughout the study but was somewhat better able to accept over time through my focus on the importance of the work – ensuring equitable practices for the students and families we served.

While I reflect on this, I realize now that the literature is full of these kinds of instances – White people losing friends as a result of this kind of work (McIntyre, 1997). I recognize this as a real turning point in the process. I had to recognize when it was time to *let go* of people that felt differently about the importance of this work and I sought the support of those who encouraged, supported and sustained me - my allies. I believe that letting go and seeking the support of those allies bolstered my convictions of how very important this work was to me (discussed later in this chapter). This leads me to believe that, for administrators who desire to engage in this work there must be realizations that: (a) there is discomfort in the work – administrators need to find ways to get comfortable with the discomfort; (b) seeking the support of allies and like-minded individuals is essential in supporting your convictions and building stamina to sustain this work; and (c) not everyone will join you on this journey – make peace with that; recognize when it is time to let them go and move on. All of which are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven.

Challenging teachers’ views that they already “have a grasp on diversity”; remembering your own journey. This study began with my frustration that some teachers seemed to believe they “had a grasp on diversity” when through observing and talking with teachers in my school, I felt that there was much more we could explore and learn together. I also realized that the literature is full of examples of educators who feel

that they are dealing with diversity issues but really have never scratched the surface of the individual and institutional biases that are perpetuated daily (Abt-Perkins & Gomez, 1998; Hamel, 2006; Nieto, 1999; Tatum, 2007). So, as we ventured into this work, I found myself frustrated as I challenged teachers' beliefs that they were already at some illusive "there" or place of understanding. I was frustrated because I wanted the teachers to *get it* – to understand why we had to learn more about issues of race, culture and language, that it was not something that just happened overnight or by changing out a few books in the classroom nor was it a place at which we would we ever arrive; it would be lifelong work.

During the summer before I began this study, I mulled over the end-of-the year anonymous teacher surveys from the previous year's professional development experiences. I asked teachers to respond to a survey each year in order to know how to improve our professional development for the next school year. That summer, I was extremely frustrated with their responses which, by and large, suggested that we needed to focus differently because: "I have a good grasp on diversity" and "I want to do something else besides diversity." One teacher even suggested a "personality profile" as a "fun" sort of activity for the faculty. The frustration I felt was evidenced in my researcher's journal:

The response that set me on fire was the one person who suggested that we use the 'personality profile' as a 'fun way to begin [the year].' That is the EXACT reason I began this quest towards more equitable and critical conversations to get away from the Diversity Group meetings where we played games and [were] left with nothing to support our students and families! (June 4, 2010)

I recognized that I was at a cusp: I could either forge ahead full-steam or acquiesce and go back to the way things had always been done before in professional

development sessions – playing games, introducing teaching activities, etc. While I chose the former, my courage was challenged as it was frustrating to confront teachers' notion of already "having a grasp on diversity." I hoped that the teachers would come to the realization that these conversations were essential to their knowledge much sooner in the process. Retrospectively, I believe that the true frustration was with my own abilities and forgetting that this is widely cited as a common reaction among people at the beginning stages of these conversations (Abt-Perkins & Gomez, 1998; Earick, 2009; Irvine, 2003; Tatum, 2007). I had also forgotten to think back to my own initiation into the study of issues of discrimination, privilege and oppression and how this was also reminiscent of my own journey as someone who thought they knew about diversity just because I spent much of my life living in a diverse place such as New York.

"You cannot teach me; it's who I am": Kim's feeling she was already there because she cared about kids. Perhaps one of the frustrating challenges for me was one that emerged time and time again and across the data: it was reflected in Kim's view about her own knowledge and caring dispositions. She said, "You cannot teach me; it's just who I am" meaning that, as a caring teacher, she would, of course, recognize and be sensitive to oppressive and discriminatory practices. Perhaps it was due to my personal experience and similar thoughts years ago when I began learning about systematic racism in schools and White privilege that I was frustrated by these kinds of comments: "I care, therefore I am knowledgeable about equity issues." When I was first faced with articles and books on such topics, I also felt that I was not prejudiced. I thought that, because I grew up in a diverse neighborhood, I respected all people; I did not see Whites as being in a better position than any one else.

Similarly, Kim believed that her ability to teach in responsive ways was “just who we are” and a reflection of her life, meaning that she did not think that professional development activities necessarily altered their views but that the ability and desire to embrace multiple ways of being in the world and to teach equitably was inherent in her personality and caring behaviors. While Kim actively participated in all professional development engagements, and at times acknowledged that she gained valuable information from those meetings, she seemed to feel that, while interesting and important, our experiences had not significantly changed practices that she felt were already there.

This was frustrating to me because I believe, and it is supported in the literature (Gay 2010; Irvine, 2003), that teachers cannot act in culturally responsive ways by simply wanting to do so or by being “good people.” I believe that teachers need to recognize that, unless we are intentional in our quest to understand other ways of knowing and being in the world, it will be virtually impossible to create culturally responsive, equitable classrooms. I also believe that we have to see issues of low achievement for students of Color and students who are adding English as a new language (Perry, Steele & Hilliard, 2003; SEF, 2010; Zentella, 2005) as tied to much more than simply the need for good or kind or loving teachers. There are issues of both individual and institutional oppression and privileging that perpetuate systems of inequity and I wanted us to understand those together. It means going far beyond having kind and all-embracing dispositions toward our students.

However, feelings that she had innate sensitivities toward all students seemed pervasive. Kim said that she could not imagine teaching in any other way. In one of our

first Focal Group meetings Kim explained, “For me, it’s just a given that you would want to learn about your children, period.” In other Focal Group and Diversity Group meetings Kim said, that she “would ask questions and want to get to know people even if she worked at Walmart” and oftentimes mentioned, “I don’t get it. I want to get it, but I don’t understand how teachers cannot teach in this way. I just feel like, that’s who we are.” And yet, as described earlier in Chapter Four, Kim also essentialized about the ways in which Indian and Pakistani families, particularly mothers raised their children and revealed several biases and possible cultural disconnects with students and families. So clearly, as in my own learning journey, we could all gain further insights.

As I reflected on the member checking interviews with Kim, I became more aware of one of my many challenges as an administrator. The frustrations I felt led me to recognize the need for me to learn how to ask the right questions to have teachers reflect on their own learning and knowledge, and ask teachers to think with me more critically about their own dispositions and how they develop.

Difficulty in interrupting biased thinking within cultural groups. As challenging as it was to know when we were being biased about others based on our personal cultural understandings (described in Chapter Four), in some instances it was difficult for me to interrupt biased thinking that I observed within cultural groups. For example, stereotypical or biased thinking was illustrated in our attempts to understand more fully one of the Latino families in our school. José, a four-year-old boy from Mexico, was new to our program; his parents were involved with José’s classroom. Señora Lupe, José’s mother, spoke Spanish and was learning English. She often came into the classroom to observe the class during a lesson or to speak with the teachers and

assistants. One of the full-time assistant's in José's classroom, Señora Hermas from Costa Rica, also spoke fluent Spanish and was able to translate for Señora Lupe when she wanted to communicate with Tammy and/or the students. Señora Hermas worked closely with José in the classroom to support both his Spanish and English. This close relationship prompted José to confide in Señora Hermas regarding his home situation. One day José said to her, "Papa hits mama." Tammy discussed this in one of our Focal Group meetings explaining that Señora Hermas reported this exchange to her and suggested that men from Mexico tended to be more aggressive than men from other countries. Although I attempted to interrupt this line of thinking, my views appeared to carry less importance than Señora Hermas's perspective, implying that since Señora Hermas was Latina, she "knows the culture." The conversation continued:

Tammy: He confided in her and she knows the culture.

Sabina: Right.

Tammy: And she states that Mexican men tend to be a little more aggressive.

Sabina: That's just a stereotype.

Tammy: Like Maybe I could say something about Black men.

Sabina: Yeah?

Tammy: So she said that they [Mexican men] tend to be a little more macho.

(Focal Group Meeting, August, 2010)

Member checking with Señora Hermas revealed that she did, in fact, feel this way and held a stereotype about Mexican men:

Yes, Mexican men are what we call 'macho,' they are more aggressive. They are physically aggressive with their woman. I've seen this myself. Their wives are

afraid of them and feel that they have to ask to do anything. They are the head of the house. (August 21, 2012).

Retrospectively, I recognized that Sra. Hermas's statement may have stemmed from a bias felt against Mexicans also expressed by other Latina/o cultures (Torres & Ngin, 1995) which is actually something she revealed in a later conversation (see the example described in the following paragraph). Regardless, it reflected an unsubstantiated bias and stereotype that I did not know how to interrupt at that point.

This struggle to interrupt bias happened again during another Diversity Group meeting when Tammy shared that she was trying to work with José, helping him with both English and Spanish. Tammy told the group that Señora Hermas explained to her that some Spanish speaking countries had different dialects referring to the way José spoke compared to Pedro (a Latino classmate of Cuban and Colombian heritage) and Señora Hermas. Tammy shared that Señora Hermas sometimes appeared not to understand José when he spoke. Tammy asked Señora Hermas if she understood him and told us that Señora Hermas answered, "no I don't. They [José's family] speak a broken Spanish.'" After Tammy shared this with our group, I attempted to respond by interrupting the biased thinking, particularly the use of deficit language:

Sabina: I wonder what she meant by 'broken Spanish?' Because that's another [example] of deficit language.

Kim: It was probably a derogatory comment though [the use of the word, 'broken'].

Tammy: Well you know, I'm not Spanish, so I can't say what's derogatory or not. I don't know but there is a hierarchy among Spanish speaking people you know.

Sabina: Well [deficit language and marginalization are] not exclusive to one group of people. I think we can all learn from having these

kind of conversations. Because just the term, ‘broken’ anything is deficit in nature.

(Diversity Group meeting, October 21, 2010)

Since Señora Hermas was not at the Diversity Group meeting that day, I met with her later to get her thoughts on this. She said that she did not intentionally mean anything derogatory by saying that José’s language was “broken.” When we talked about what the word “broken” invokes, I explained that it often referred to something that was not complete, was less than, or not *right*. She was quick to respond, “I was meaning that he was talking both English and Spanish. His vocabulary was not good in either English or Spanish. His Spanish was not good.” I also asked for her views about the existence of a hierarchy among Spanish people. Señora Hermas explained, “Yes, there is. Although, this is horrible to say, but [Costa Ricans] do think we speak better than Mexicans. When we hear Mexicans speak at home, we laugh and say, ‘they’re from Mexico.’” When I mentioned the possibility of seeing differences in languages as varied ways of speaking and communicating rather than seeing one language as better than the other, she agreed, “Yes, I see . . . I would like to read more about that.” I suggested she might like to read books by Ana Celia Zentella (2005; 2010), Otto Santa Ana (2004), and Guadalupe Valdés (1996; 2001) and offered her my copies explaining that, “all these books shed critical light on the strength of home languages and the importance of understanding its affect on learning.”

This made me aware of how important it was to have critical conversations with the teaching assistants as well as teachers and to probe beyond surface assumptions that might generalize insider knowledge. This would have allowed me to question the earlier bias about Mexican men more knowledgeably as well as to interrupt bias toward Spanish

spoken in Mexico. In this example, Tammy looked to Señora Hermas as the knowledgeable person, accepting that one Latina could speak for all other Latinas, but Tammy also realized that there were a range of views and a hierarching within cultural and linguistic groups. Involving Señora Hermas in critical conversations about what constitutes deficit language helped to halt the perpetuation of notions that one language - or in this case, way of speaking - is better than another.

Insecurities and uncertainties. Finally, one of the most intense frustrations that led to faltering courage in my role as administrator were the many times when I felt insecure and uncertain in my own knowledge and abilities. It was important that I, in some way, paved the way for our professional development journey but I was a learner alongside the teachers. I wanted the teachers to realize I made mistakes and needed to reflect critically on my actions just as I hoped for them. However, too often, I fell into the insecure place of feeling that I needed to have *the* answers when often I struggled to address particular issues or felt inadequate to provide experiences that would move us all forward. Despite my earlier convictions that I was “feeling more comfortable and self-assured” (August 17, 2010), I felt insecure and uncertain of my ability. I articulated this frustration as we neared the end of the study:

We are a week or so away from the end of my data collection period and I look back on the past months and worry that I may not have provided adequate opportunities for the teachers. Half the time I wasn't sure if I was saying the right thing or not. I feel so uncertain and insecure at this moment wondering about these things. (Researcher's Journal, December 9, 2010)

It was frustrating to see how I went from confident and self-assured at the beginning of the study to feeling uncertain and insecure by the end of the first part of the school year. I wanted the teachers to be afforded the best possible opportunities for rich

and meaningful discussions that fostered their understanding of race, culture and language marginalization and I was just not sure that I provided those opportunities. I wonder if the reason I did not always question or challenge comments was because of this lack of confidence that was making itself known more and more as the study continued.

Exhaustion

Irvine (2003) writes, “Educating educators is a daunting, persistent challenge” (p. 40). I could not agree more. Searching and analyzing the data and thinking about reasons why I may have sometimes lost courage revealed that, in addition to the frustrations described above, I was often simply exhausted. Trying to provide high quality professional opportunities took much time, effort and energy to facilitate and sustain. While I was committed to having continued conversations, the truth was it was exhausting work. The day-to-day interactions with teachers, staff, students and families made every decision an important one as they were all grounded in these issues of race, culture and language, particularly in our support of students’ positive literate identities. These were not decisions and issues that could be left at the schoolhouse door; they stayed with me, kept me up at night and were a cause of constant reflection. My journal entries throughout the study reveal the energy that it took to sustain this work. For example, in August when we were working with Heman and his family (discussed in Chapter Four) I wrote, “I find myself up at night worried about the decisions that I’m making. I am deeply troubled worrying about making the right decisions.” In October, I wrote about how frustrated and exhausted I was at trying to constantly challenge teachers’ thinking, that:

I get frustrated because there is so much that I don't know and there are just so many hours in a day to read, reflect, discuss and learn. When I lie in bed at night or take a shower all the great things that I should have said or questions I should have asked come to mind. Why don't I seem to have the right things to say at the right time? It seems that I am always drained and it's in these quiet moments that I am most able to think and reflect. The problem is, they are far and few between. (October 9, 2010)

Additionally, the amount of reading and reflecting it took to increase my understanding and knowledge was ongoing and was largely done on my own time. The decisions I made regarding what we would read as a group and the salient points to discuss were always at the forefront of my attempts towards designing experiences that would impact teacher learning and growth. It took time and energy as well, to model strategies, and to observe in classrooms, even when I was working with teachers who welcomed me into their classrooms and saw this as important work. But it took even more energy working with teachers who were not as accepting of this work. I believe that exhaustion often led to my lack of courage as well to many of the insecurities and uncertainties mentioned previously. My final journal entry revealed my feelings of exhaustion:

Today marks the last day of my study and I am so exhausted. It has been a great few months but I realize how much energy, effort, time and commitment it takes to sustain such important work in this area. (Researcher's Journal, December 17, 2010)

Perseverance: Finding Support and Courage

In spite of many moments in which my courage wavered, there were also many instances when I was able to work through my faltering courage. I found that key to being able to persevere was being able to: (a) seek the support of professional others, (b) debunk stereotypes and biases, and (c) address issues directly.

Seeking Professional Others

Seeking outside support of other knowledgeable professionals was critical to supporting my own, as well as the teachers' understandings of culture, race and language marginalization and how that knowledge translated into classroom practices. In the following paragraphs I discuss how I was supported by professors and doctoral peers as well as by my selective attendance at conferences and presentations.

Professors and doctoral peers. Support I sought and received from other educators, particularly professors and doctoral peers who work with teachers and/or university students in this area was critical to my empowerment to continue the work. For example, after spending the summer reflecting on the year and conferring with one of my former university professors about my uncertainty about what I was doing, she helped me to think through the way I should present the issues of race, culture and language marginalization that honored my teachers' need for learning other topics while standing by my convictions. I documented my feelings and thoughts in my journal:

I called to meet with Susi to share my concerns. It was even hard to share with her without crying. I am realizing that it bothered me more than I thought it did. Susi's advice was spot on (as usual) as she asked me to consider their request but to keep true to my convictions and that there was no reason the two (their needs and my needs) were mutually exclusive. So I will do my best to incorporate other areas in our professional development. It helped me so much to have someone to talk with about this because I often feel so alone as the sole administrator of the program. (July 10, 2010)

Being able to talk with someone who had been through this struggle, who had the knowledge and expertise and could understand the internal struggle I was experiencing was essential in the development of my personal conviction and learning.

Dr. Julia López-Robertson was another professor who supported and understood the challenges associated with my work with teachers. Dr. López-Robertson was a

university professor, but as mentioned in this study, she was also a parent at our school and she taught a university course onsite at the school. During the course of my study, I often consulted with Dr. López-Robertson. She provided me with some knowledge of Latino/a culture and second language acquisition not only as a professor but also from a parental perspective. The opportunity to consult often with Dr. López-Robertson gave me courage and stamina to continue my conversations with teachers because she helped me to recognize how very personal it was to her - as a parent who was raising a bilingual child attending our school. One of my journal entries highlights how appreciative I was to have Dr. López-Robertson's support and the courage it gave me: On September 28, 2010, I wrote:

I can't imagine what I would do without Julia [López-Robertson]. It seems like every time I see her I stop her for advice or ask her questions related to something the teachers have asked me or something I'm thinking or wondering about. She is always supportive and really encourages me to stay with it. And it helps that she's also a parent raising a bilingual child because it's something that is personal to her which makes [learning to value and support that bilingualism] even more important to me.

As with Drs. Susi Long and Julia López-Robertson, conversations with doctoral peers, now professors, Drs. Cindy Morton-Rose, Erin Miller and Kindel Nash, supported me throughout the course of the study and beyond. They supported me as friends but also as researchers and White women who used critical race perspectives in their work. They knew the inherent challenges that existed when issues and conversations about race were brought up, particularly with people who may have never had to face issues of race, marginalization and/or oppression. They each experienced those challenges within their own studies as White, middle-class females - Erin with her research on how children learn Whiteness (Miller, 2012), Kindel's research foregrounding race in a preservice

early childhood language and literacy course (Nash, 2012) and Cindy's research on how literacy policy is appropriated in schools.

I met with Cindy and Kindel from time-to-time after school for drinks and professional conversation and likewise met with Erin one-to-one both at my school and in the community. Each time I met with them I felt a renewed sense of conviction and courage that allowed me to persevere. One of my early journal entries indicated that those opportunities to meet and talk also provided me with an opportunity to “let go of some steam, that I could not have done with the teachers” (August, 2010). I often talked about my frustrations or how alone I felt during the process of engaging teachers at school in conversations about race, culture and language. They each recalled similar feelings and validated the importance of pushing through, because as Kindel said, “the students matter and they deserve the very best. This work is too important not to require them to have these conversations.” Erin was often quick to remind me that, “you are doing good work, Sabina, know that.” Surrounding myself with like-minded professionals was of the utmost importance to me as an administrator and as a person. These moments were relaxing and encouraging and they provided me with confidence and courage to pursue my work with teachers.

Conferences and other presentations. Other outside support also came from attending conferences and making a point of attending sessions with presenters who work in the area of equity education and who insist that this kind of work is essential in schools. Conferences and other presentations often helped fuel my commitment and courage and helped me to persevere. They provided opportunities for me to surround myself with other like-minded educators who were committed to equity in education. I

was strengthened in my beliefs and they provided me with research-based examples to use when I worked with the teachers in my school.

Strength-based approach. One presentation that played a particularly strong role in fostering my understanding and courage for this work occurred during a doctoral roundtable session with Theresa Perry (October 8, 2010) when she visited our university. Dr. Perry spoke about maintaining high expectations for all students, particularly for students of Color, to have positive views of the strength and knowledge that they bring to school and the strength-based attitude teachers needed in the classroom. Upon returning home from the session with Dr. Perry, I wrote about my experience:

I found Dr. Perry's session to be one that truly helps to fuel my work and my desire to continue to bring awareness of issues of inequality, racism and oppression to the teachers. I realize that my continued growth as a learner, seeking out these opportunities to hear great speakers are at the heart of what allows me to facilitate the discussions within my school community. We must maintain high expectations for all students. (Researcher's Journal, October 8, 2010)

Dr. Perry's words echoed in my head regarding setting high expectations for all students and the importance of operating from a strength-based perspective. I often used and referred to Dr. Perry's books, *The Ebonics Debate* (Perry & Delpit, 1998) and *Young, Gifted and Black* (Perry, Steele & Hilliard, 2003) as resources throughout my work with the teachers.

Bilingual education. Another university presentation I was fortunate to attend was that of Ana Celia Zentella, on bilingual education, "TWB, Talking While Bilingual" (September 30, 2010). I brought back what I learned from Dr. Zentella's presentation regarding one of her topics of discussion, the term *Spanglish*. She shared how *Spanglish* is both a creative and rule governed way of speaking bilingually and that is reflective of

living in two cultures. This knowledge helped me support Tammy as she worked to value bilingual students in her classroom. I shared this with Tammy during our Focal Group meeting particularly since this is what José had been doing in Tammy's classroom. The conversation follows our discussion of José's use of both English and Spanish in the classroom.

Sabina: I know Ladson-Billings and others talk about code-switching and being able to go from one situation to another . . . one way at home and another way at school.

Tammy: Yeah

Sabina: In José's case it's like what Dr. Zentella talked about during her presentation, living in two worlds and the use of Spanglish – both English and Spanish. We want to recognize that as something important for him to do living in both cultures.

Tammy: He calls me Greenway, he doesn't call me Señora. He knows and made the connection that I do not speak Spanish . . .when he speaks to Señora Hermas he speaks in his home language.

Sabina: But is he speaking to her in Spanish now? Because I know at first he wasn't. And sometimes he may use both [languages] in one sentence – that's okay!

Tammy: Right. He can speak both well if he's allowed to.

(Focal Group meeting, October 5, 2010)

I also used this information during the member checking conversation I had with Señora Hermas (discussed earlier) regarding her concern that a student in her class, José, was using "broken" English. The discussion of Dr. Zentella's presentation helped provide theoretical knowledge that undergirded classroom practices that supported children such as José and Pedro, students in Tammy's classroom, with opportunities to speak as they felt comfortable, using both languages. The ability to draw from my increasing

knowledge in issues of race, culture and language provided me with courage to support others and to use that knowledge as a means to challenge our thinking.

Working Through Stereotypes and Biases

Times when I was able to successfully work through and thereby debunk our group's stereotypes and biases also provided me with the self-confidence, courage and conviction to continue our conversations in race, culture and language. When I felt successful in challenging biased notions, I was encouraged to go on because I recognized how important it was to do so *and* that success was possible. I felt this particularly in terms of recognizing our own biases as we worked to impact student learning. For example, during a One-to-One meeting with Tammy, she made a statement about negative associations regarding religion. She said, "It's the image of seeing someone that looks like somebody that you associate with something negative, that before you even know if they're Islamic, Pakistani, or whatever, you just assume that they're not good" (October 5, 2010). I felt that this was a good explanation of how stereotypes are developed and perpetuated. Tammy's comment reminded me of the study Dr. Zentella shared during a presentation I attended at the university. I shared a little bit about the study with Tammy, describing how researchers used a recording of *one* generic voice paired with two different computer generated faces, one White and one Asian. When participants in the study were asked to listen to the White face and then the Asian face speaking, the study participants reported that the White person was easier to understand than the Asian person. This was despite the fact that both voices paired with the faces were identical. This was exactly what Tammy was referring to, in regard to preconceived

notions, and in her case clothing and perception of people “who were not like [her].” Our conversation ensued:

Tammy: That’s the thing, religion is so secondary. Like when you go in a store and you see someone visually looks Black and they’re wrapped in face covered [clothing] and are all covered and they might be not Black. I don’t think about Islam and I don’t think about that but the same person may be a little lighter then you think they really are Muslim.

Sabina: Hmm, so a Black person who was wrapped in the same clothes and who might be Muslim you wouldn’t think anything of it?

Tammy: I really don’t give it much thought.

Tammy and I continued our conversation regarding these negative associations. We talked about how such biases can impact our relationships especially those with families and children:

Tammy: I am so ignorant in all of that and I never thought about learning about Islam.

Sabina: Yeah, I didn’t either until this year.

Tammy: I want to be educated if some of my children ask me. What does it mean? What do they do that is different from us? I would like to point out like being Jewish and Christians, what are the small differences?

Sabina: Right, but I think that’s when we make a concerted effort to dig that out and learn and thinking more deeply about these things. You know I was very content going through my life just being who I was.

Tammy: When you have accountability of [students] I want to be sincere. I want my children see me researching. Because I think once you can explain something about another culture and still have faith in your own then that’s when you really have faith in what you believe in.

Sabina: Right! That’s just what I said the other day! That is one of the most important things we can give our students is the ability to be open to difference and whatever different ways, that being open to it

doesn't mean giving up who you are – it puts us on equal footing and says these are equal and very valid ways of being in the world.

Addressing Issues Directly

Learning to address issues directly also gave me courage to persevere. For example, my convictions about the work were relatively easy to put forward because I felt them so strongly. I wanted the teachers to understand that we were in this for the long haul and that I was not going to be deterred from the focus. During our first whole faculty Inservice session in August, I shared with the faculty that I had reflected on their surveys from the previous year and had, as a result, considered their expressed needs but felt that:

My conviction about supporting student's positive literate identities [was] too important to not consider addressing issues of race, culture and language marginalization in our professional development. Therefore, we can look across all areas, whether it is math, science or social studies, as long as we're still talking about race, culture and language marginalization and dealing with issues of diversity then at least we're meeting your needs and my needs too.
(Professional/Development Inservice meeting, August 2010)

However, sustaining this stance was not always as easy as merely making direct statements of conviction. I had to sustain courage as the days and weeks followed. Later in a Focus Group meeting with Kim, Lyndsay (Tammy was absent), I asked how they perceived my direct approach with the faculty. Lyndsay suggested that she thought it went well: "I thought it was good. People wanted other subjects and books about math and different things. The math books that you gave us were great and that is what everybody asked for." Kim added, "[Diversity] is something we want to do as teachers, but I think if you don't want to do that or if you're close minded or you wouldn't even think about it. I don't know, but maybe diversity [conversations] really does open their minds up" (September 16, 2010). While Lyndsay acknowledged that I was attempting to provide the teachers with some of the other things that they needed and requested in

addition to the focus on equity issues (the study of social studies, math and science for example), Kim appeared to think that I would still have to work to “open their minds up.” Upon leaving that first August whole faculty Inservice session, I felt strong in my directness and, as a result, a renewed conviction for the work.

During our September’s Diversity Meeting we discussed some of our home and community visits and how what we learned about our students outside of school was critical to our understanding of who students were and the knowledge they possessed. I wanted to make sure I addressed this issue directly so the teachers were clear in my expectations and convictions regarding this practice. Courage came as I was direct in sharing those views with the faculty:

[Children] are all individual and they’re all unique and come to know what they know because of their family and their language [and culture]. We, as their teachers, have a responsibility to support that knowledge in the classroom. That’s our agenda . . . that we need to embrace in our classrooms – that there are multiple ways of doing things. And we learn this by stepping outside the school into homes and communities [of our students]. (September 16, 2010)

Similarly, my courage and conviction were buoyed through my directness during another Diversity Meeting. I addressed the issue of assimilationist views that some families have and bring with them to school. I spoke about how some families in our program did not feel comfortable sharing their language and culture at school and how we needed to work hard to ensure that they did. I felt that it was important that they recognized that we valued their culture and language and saw it as a strength. I shared this sentiment with the faculty:

We have families in our program who don’t want their children to speak their home language. They’ve already come to us with an assimilationist view that somehow, somewhere they feel like . . . they have to assimilate to ‘American ways of being’ or speaking [English] and that bothers me. I want them to know that [our school] is a place where your culture [and language] is valued and that

we are going to do both [support your home language/culture and English]. It's not like one at the expense of the other but we're going to use that strength of one to [support] you [in] the other. That's the kind of message I want to send to families. It's who I'm evolving to be. (November 4, 2010)

In spite of the fact that my own moments of directness grew out of but also contributed to my courage and sense of conviction, it is important to point out that merely being direct was not enough. Looking across findings, it is clear to me that directness must be paired with an administrator's understanding of issues of race, culture and language, as well as the willingness to change course when needed by listening and being responsive to teachers. Balancing those pieces, however, is at the heart of the challenge for administrators.

Conclusion to Chapter Six

Through this study, I found that, in my role as administrator, it was essential to create and facilitate many opportunities for the teachers and me to think about, discuss and question issues surrounding race, culture and language marginalization, and privilege and oppression and to help us make explicit connections to how we could use that learning to better support children's positive literate identities. My role as administrator seemed to fall into two distinctive categories: that of a learner and of a teacher-leader.

As a learner, I worked alongside the teachers and engaged in critical conversations that often caused me to reflect on my own words and decisions. I learned from teachers as they held me accountable for my words and actions and more importantly I learned to listen. I learned from families as I engaged in home and community visits which caused me to reflect on practice and spurred many of our professional development discussions regarding how we can do more to support students' identities. My role as a teacher-leader meant that I worked to provide professional

development opportunities, extend our understanding and provide clarity where and when I could. It involved living life as a reader and using myself as an example of someone continually seeking to understand more. It included the need to provide examples that would make visible the racism and deficit views that exist everywhere and to facilitate conversations regarding the educational damage that such views cause. My role was grounded in the belief that teachers needed autonomy to generate new practices and experience with those practices in their classrooms. I needed to be open to teachers' views and supportive of their need to question and understand without fear of retaliation or consequence.

As the administrator, I experienced many frustrations which contributed to moments of faltering courage. I was sometimes frustrated that teachers felt that "they [had] this diversity thing down" and that I needed to recognize that this was a common reaction well documented in the literature (Howard, 2010; Irvine, 2003; Nieto, 1999). Some frustrations were due to the loss of White friends because of my focus on White privilege and domination as a problem in our schools. I had to adjust to that and be able to let go of some past friendships if I was going to continue the work wholeheartedly. Another frustration was with my own insecurities as I worried about whether or not I had the knowledge and expertise to facilitate critical discussions. And I had to acknowledge that sometimes the exhaustion that comes with this work can become overwhelming and can sap one's courage making it all the more important to draw on sources of energy and support from professors and doctoral colleagues, conferences and presentations by key people in the field, and by reflecting on moments in which biases *were* interrupted and issues bravely and directly addressed.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that, while I learned much during the professional development experiences with teachers, the bulk of my learning occurred through data analysis. It was through the scrutiny of data that I was often able to see the disconnects between what I wished to occur and what actually occurred. In retrospect, I was never really able to delve deeply into many of the issues that I had hoped to. I wish that we had explored White privilege and hegemonic practices at deeper levels. I wish that we had explored racism more and learned to identify and name racist practices more readily. I wish we had done more explorations of historical and institutional privileging that led to and perpetuate students' marginalization today. I think we accomplished a lot, but I also think that we skirted on the fringe of understanding the teacher's role in identifying individual and institutional discrimination as connected to students' limited opportunities in schools.

The process of transforming educational practice to become more equitable was infinitely more complex and multidimensional than I could have imagined. The bottom line, however, is that I committed to trying to figure out how a group of early childhood educators might learn more about issues of race, language marginalization, oppression and privilege and use new understandings to better support the positive literate identities of young children. It is the need to constantly work to live that conviction that I see as one of the most important findings from this study and that, without conviction, commitment, and support at the administrative level, teachers must find the time and the resources as well as the motivation on their own. Given the prescriptive, fearful cultures in many schools where administrators feel the pressure of district and state mandates, I believe that this work is only likely to happen if administrators stand up and together to

build their own knowledge and use that knowledge to create the time and space in schools to truly make a difference.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IMPLICATIONS

This study was designed to explore what happens when an administrator/researcher engages teachers of three, four, and five-year olds in long-term professional development opportunities that focus explicitly on issues of race, culture and language. The study was also designed to follow three of those teachers into their classrooms to see how, or if, the professional development experiences enhanced or changed classroom practices supportive of students' positive literate identities. The work was grounded in sociocultural theory and supported by critical race perspectives that emphasize ways that, all too often, schools are places where some children and families are privileged and others, particularly students of Color and speakers of languages other than English, have been marginalized and oppressed. The study was further grounded in the knowledge that conversations about race, culture and language are not typically commonplace in professional development for educators in early childhood education, particularly as an administrative agenda and that we know little about these kinds of explorations as initiated by administrators. Data were collected from a range of professional development engagements, interviews, home visits and classroom observations. Audio and video transcripts, field notes, and journals were analyzed to determine findings. These findings offer insights that inform the implications outlined in this chapter.

Implications of this study focus primarily on the key findings that: (a) the combination of intentionally connected professional development experiences were critical to deepen understandings of self and others with regard to issues of race, culture, and language; (b) as the administrator, my role was significant in the development and sustainability of the teachers' continued explorations and classroom changes; and (c) through the process of engaging in critical conversations, teachers were better able to enhance or create new strategies for supporting students' positive literate identities. Thus, this chapter focuses on implications for: (a) professional development, (b) the administrator's role, (c) teachers and classroom practice, and (d) future research in this area. These implications are directly connected to the research questions which sought to understand: What happens when a school administrator and teachers of three- four- and five-year-old children engage in long-term professional study designed to explore issues of culture, race, language? What challenges are met? How are those challenges negotiated? How is the experience reflected in day-to-day life in the classrooms, particularly as it relates to supporting children's positive literate identities? What is the role of the administrator in this process?

Implications for Professional Development

My findings support that of others (Earick, 2009; Irvine, 2003; Nieto, 2010; Tatum, 2007) who suggest that educators must engage in critical conversations about race, culture and language marginalization if they are to create meaningful learning environments supportive of all children. As the teachers and I engaged in professional development that was intentionally designed to explore those issues, we came to better understand how our practices and interactions might or might not support students in our

child development program. In the paragraphs that follow, I offer implications gleaned from the study of those professional development experiences.

One Workshop is Not Enough: Plan for the Interfacing of Multiple Intentionally-Planned, Connected Experiences

My findings make it clear that any solutions or successes came, not from one experience, one speaker, or one reading, but from the interfacing of a range of planned opportunities in which teachers and I participated in and out of school. Teachers who attended all three professional development opportunities that I facilitated (Inservice Meetings, Diversity Group Meetings, and the Focal Group Meetings), in addition to One-to-One conversations, attending lectures and conferences, and participating in home and community visits, were more reflective of their practices and their interactions with families than the teachers who attended only the Inservice Meetings or those who attended just the Inservice and the Diversity Group meetings. For example, both Shirley and James, who attended the Diversity Group and whole faculty Inservice sessions but not the Focal Group and One-to-One meetings, were less likely to pick up on the deficit nature of their talk about families whereas Kim and Tammy who participated in all of the professional development opportunities, were better able to recognize their own cultural insensitivity (for example, when Heman's father did not look Kim in the eyes, and she reacted negatively, but was later able to reflect on her reaction and reconsider her views; similarly, Tammy took responsibility for difficulties in communicating with José's mother, during our discussions, rather than blaming Señora Lupe, Tammy looked to her limited ability to speak Spanish).

The interfacing of multiple professional experiences was also essential in learning how to support students in classrooms. For example, Lyndsay's ability to give Taj comfort in sharing his henna tattoo was due to the opportunity to engage in readings and discussions about identity development in Diversity Group meetings in conjunction with One-to-One conversations about the importance of bringing in Taj's religion into the classroom, and insights gained by attending services at the mosque with Taj and his family. These multiple opportunities to gain information and insight from a variety of contexts, provided Lyndsay with the understanding of how she might better support Taj's identity as a Muslim child in her classroom.

Throughout the study, Kim, Lyndsay and Tammy made references to learning from other faculty members during the larger group discussions (whole faculty Inservice meetings). Of all of the professional development configurations, the Inservice meetings provided the greatest opportunities for teachers to hear and learn from each other with my guidance. However, the smaller Diversity Group allowed for more specific conversation that connected readings and experiences (home visits and personal experiences) to implications for classroom practice. And the One-to-One conversations I had with teachers, however brief they may have been, created opportunities for me to further support each teacher's thinking while relating the discussion specifically to their own classrooms. For example, my conversations with Kim about Heman who spoke Telegru helped me think about shifting assistants so that Mrs. Chakraborty could be in his classroom and provide language support. Similarly, my conversations with Lyndsay about Taj, provided opportunities to discuss how to support religious beliefs in the

classroom; and my conversations with Tammy about Jai provided opportunities to discuss the importance of interrupting children's misconceptions about people of Color.

The spaces provided by the various professional development groups focusing explicitly on issues of race, culture and language also helped to take away the taboo of talking about those issues. The personal connections and one-to-one conversations between teacher and administrator were foundational to gaining comfort with each other so we could talk about and examine discriminatory practices, which then made it possible to address classroom practice and consider ways to better support students' literate identities. Without these one-to-one conversations and connections, I would not have known the individual concerns of teachers and it is likely that there are many misperceptions that I would not have picked up on; thus, my ability to support them in nurturing children's positive literate identities would have been diminished.

There were times when topics initiated in the Inservice meetings spilled over into the Diversity Group meetings and were then picked up in the One-to-One meetings. Conversely, topics beginning in One-to-One meetings carried into the Diversity Group and Inservice meetings. The point is that these professional development opportunities were not disjointed. There were common threads that traversed from group to group. And they were all necessary. This suggests an important implication from this study: *Multiple intentionally-planned, theoretically and philosophically and pedagogically congruent engagements, in a variety of settings across time, can be critical to ensuring the greatest amount of opportunities to hear, make sense of, and utilize in practice varied perspectives about race, culture and language.* The interrelated nature of all professional development opportunities was essential in addressing and helping us understand how

deficit language, assumptions, stereotypes, biases and racism contributed to discriminatory practices that impede opportunities for student success in classrooms.

Suggestions for providing opportunities for teachers and administrators to engage in multiple experiences are provided below. However, it is important to note that it is *essential* that these multiple professional development experiences are *consistent in terms of focus and purpose*, that they build on and support each other explicitly. With that in mind, I suggest that professional development planning include:

- Large group experiences
- Small focused group experiences
- One-to-one discussions between administrator and teachers
- Outside-of-school experiences such as home and community visits, professional conferences and/or lectures on topics of race, culture and language
- Focused professional reading (Table 7.1, p. 339) and opportunities to discuss those readings in terms of what they mean for classrooms

Provide Opportunities for Teachers to Share Their Own Stories as a Basis to Reassessing Beliefs

My findings support research (Howard, 2006; Howard, 2010; McIntyre, 2008; Nieto, 2010; Quintero, 2009) that suggests that conversations about race, culture and language must begin with reflection of one's self, culture, identities and beliefs; that to better know others, we must first know ourselves, but that these stories are partial and incomplete in that we are constantly adding to them. In this study, sharing our stories helped us learn more about our beliefs and their origins. It allowed us to recognize that

we continue to grow and learn through our experiences and challenges. As our personal stories developed, they were influenced by the experiences in and out of school and were often shared in our Diversity Group meetings. In the process of building upon our individual stories, it was important to have experiences that helped us consider counternarratives that challenged assumptions, bias and stereotypes when they surfaced. For example, throughout Chapter Four, Five and Six, I shared how Lyndsay and I learned from Taj and his family who were Muslim and about our experiences at the mosque. The positive experiences that Lyndsay and I then shared with the teachers in our Focal Group and further discussed in our Diversity Group meetings provided counternarratives to the messages often portrayed regarding Muslims and the Islamic religion in the media. Not only were Lyndsay and I able to provide counternarratives that challenged *our* uncertainties, Tammy too, was able to build from our stories to reflect on her own learning. During a One-to-One meeting with Tammy she shared how she would have never thought to learn more about Islam, but through our conversations she became more aware of the need to explore these issues. Her comments, discussed in Chapter Six, demonstrate the importance of continued self-reflection and continued learning:

I'm so ignorant in all of that, I never thought about learning about Islam. I want to be educated if my some of my children ask me, 'what does it mean?' When you have accountability of [students] I want to be sincere. I want my children see me researching. Because I think once you can explain something about another culture and still have faith in your own then that's when you really have faith in what you believe in.

Build Trust So That You Can Hold Each Other Accountable

Throughout our explorations of race, culture and language we recognized that it was sometimes easier to see discriminatory views and biased practices in others than in ourselves. For example, Kim pointed out that Señora Hermas' use of the term "broken

Spanish” was derogatory in nature, yet she was not aware of the ways in which she essentialized about Pakistani and Indian mothers and their children. Although we did not always do so, we found that it was important to hold each other accountable in each of our sessions. It was important to establish a climate of trust for this to occur. The ability to build trust emerged from the ongoing nature of the professional development experiences across various settings and constant communication and opportunities for formal and informal conversations as I also made visible my own uncertainties, biases, and tendencies to stereotype. In a member checking meeting, Tammy reflected on this issue. She said, “We knew these conversations were going to happen and you had us talk and talk and talk, so eventually we were all talking because it felt comfortable to do so.”

While our professional development conversations about issues related to race, culture and language began in 2008 they were not as in-depth in the first years. We only briefly discussed them in Diversity Group meetings and did not specifically engage in intentional One-to-One meetings or other forms of professional development at that time. However, as we continued our professional development journey and engaged in smaller and one-to-one opportunities for conversations, talk about race, language and culture became *a way of being* in our school. A climate of trust was established over time and provided us many opportunities to demonstrate that holding each other accountable was important. For example, Kim held me accountable for defining the term, *people of Color* and Sally held me accountable for the using the word, *ugly* (see Chapter Four). Kim’s member checking statement in Chapter Six reflects that, although she felt as if she was disrespecting me when she held me accountable, the fact that I allowed her to do so, helped to create a climate of trust in our discussions. Likewise, when I held teachers

accountable for their comments, they understood that it was in an attempt to support students, not to personally attack or judge them. It was vital to the success of these experiences that we recognized that we were all learning, we all held unexamined biases and stereotypes, and we could not change without holding each other accountable. Some ideas to help teachers and administrators challenge assumptions, biases and stereotypes and hold each other accountable are to:

- Ensure that there is a safe environment for professional development conversations about race, culture and language to occur. Establishing trust is essential in the ability to hold each other accountable. The administrator can lead by demonstrating through his/her own examination of self that it is important to make assumptions visible and allow them to be examined. If participants understand that it is not about judging, but increasing understanding, trust is more likely to be established.
- Encourage participants to keep a journal of assumptions about race, culture and language. Because teachers and administrators are more apt to capture in-the-moment kinds of thoughts when they write them down as they occur, it is important to create structures for them to do so.
- Require participants to revisit assumptions regularly allowing them to think about and question their views and their views about others.
- Make time in professional development sessions for participants to discuss how they are challenged, changed or altered. This may be best shared in one-to-one meetings but, as trust builds, it can be shared within larger group settings.

Include the Requirement to Engage with Families and Communities Outside of School

In this study, it was essential that we stepped outside of our cultural comfort zones into homes and communities to learn more about others through our students and their families. It was important for us to learn about the people, places, belief systems, and ways of interacting that were important in our students' lives and to then reflect on that learning as it might impact classroom practice. For example, Tammy, who is African American and Christian, visited Thom and his family, who are White and Jewish. Lyndsay and I, both White and Christian, visited Taj and his family who are Pakistani and Muslim; and Kim who is White and Jewish, visited Sarah and her family who are African American and Christian. Although we recognized that each of our experiences only provided a glimpse into other cultures or experiences, it was so important to do so. Each of us learned something from these experiences: Tammy learned that the family she visited experienced discrimination as Jewish people living in the south; Kim learned that Sarah's family's experiences were more alike than different from her personal experiences; Lyndsay and I both learned that, although we had some initial trepidation regarding our visit to the mosque - "[they] may not want us there" – we were welcomed and appreciated for visiting. As Chapter Four describes, these insights were invaluable as the teachers and I considered how we might better support the positive literate identities of our students. To make such out-of-school experiences possible, I suggest the following strategies as educators plan for professional development:

- As a foundational aspect of the professional development experience, require teachers and administrators to step outside of their cultural comfort zones to

spend time in the worlds of families from cultures, religions, languages and/or ethnicities different from their own.

- Establish a new lens for spending time in homes and communities, one that seeks not to evaluate but to recognize the importance of learning from families, to understand the variety of ways families' live and learn.
- Work with administrators to help them envision ways to create time for teachers to visit families by:
 - Administrators teaching classes for two hours once a week so that one teacher each week can spend time in homes and communities OR bank the time and use it on the weekend or evening to visit students in their homes and communities,
 - Devoting half-days from professional development days to time for home/community visits.
- Create structures in professional development sessions for discussing these experiences in terms of challenging prior assumptions, dominant biases, and implications for classroom practice.
- Work with administrators to access monetary support for teachers to order books and materials (reflecting multiple languages, races, faiths, etc.) to use when generating and implementing classroom practices informed by home and community visits.

Include Opportunities to Learn from Professionals Others

For similar reasons, I brought in professional others or encouraged teachers to attend conferences and symposia where they would hear speakers who could help us

challenge our current held beliefs and assumptions. These professional others provided us with varying perspectives on the issues of race, culture and language and they provided validation and corroboration for the work I was trying to do. It is critical that these professional others are philosophically aligned with each other and with the focus of the professional development, thereby contributing to teachers' overall understanding about how to use learning to impact practice. For example, I invited Dra. Julia López-Robertson to speak to our Diversity Group. She was a university professor and Latina raising two bilingual children and offered professional and personal insights into the discrimination English language learners and Latinos often experience in schools. She made connections to our readings in books such as Santa Ana's (2004), *Tongue Tied*, and added her personal experiences as a young child growing up Latina, teaching first grade in Arizona public schools, and as a mother of bilingual sons in public schools. Narratives from speakers like Dra. Julia López-Robertson provided us with greater understanding and information that helped challenge notions of what it meant to be *not like me* in the world. Consequently, they supported teachers' understandings about what was missing in their support of every child and their ability to enhance or create classroom practices in support of students' positive literate identities. Some specific ideas for making it possible for teachers to experience the work of professional others are to:

- Invite professional others to speak at professional development sessions and/or spend time in classrooms to offer insights. Seek speakers who offer a variety of perspectives regarding race, culture and language and yet who are aligned with the focus of your work, and who can draw from the literature but

also provide personal accounts that will provide opportunities to hear first-hand accounts of these issues.

- Seek opportunities for participants to hear speakers from local area colleges and/or universities. Many colleges and universities offer opportunities to hear presenters or conferences at minimal cost.
- Include in professional development experiences, vehicles for connecting to local, state, and national organizations that offer workshops, online resources, and/or conferences that support work in equity pedagogies. National organizations such as the *National Council of Teachers of English* (NCTE); *National Association for Multicultural Education* (NAME); and *Association for Childhood Education International* (ACEI) offer yearly conferences and online access to the most current theory and research in the field. *Rethinkingschools.org* and *TeachingforTolerance.org* are other important resources.

Define Key Terms

Another implication of this study is the importance of clarifying key terms, terms that are foundational to the work at hand. In our case, the definition of the term, *literate identity* was critical to the success of our professional conversations. Early in the study, I assumed that the teachers and I shared a common definition of *literate identity* and soon recognized that we did not. This leads me to suggest that it would be beneficial to co-construct definitions pertinent to any professional development endeavor as those terms are introduced and then to enhance or add to those definitions as the group learns and grows. Throughout this study I struggled to provide clear examples of the term, *positive*

literate identities. My lack of clarity ultimately impeded teacher understanding. When I realized this, we were able to step back and build an understanding of the term together.

I also realized that to understand a term like *positive literate identities*, teachers first needed to broaden their views of what constitutes *literacy*. This led to discussions about traditional versus non-traditional literacies. Definitions of these terms early in the study may have enriched and expedited the process of our work together. For example, as Lyndsay and I discussed one of her journal entries (described in detail in Chapter Five) about Taj and Ashley weaving pine needles on the playground, she eventually recognized these playful engagements as literacy events. This allowed us to use that expanded view of what counts as literacy to construct an understanding of what a positive literate identity might mean for each student in our classrooms. We began to recognize that these literate identities differed from student to student and from experience to experience. The benefit of developing a common definition to ground the conversation provided clarity and collective understanding. Suggestions for defining and clarifying terms include:

- As the facilitator, be clear in your definition of the terms used as you introduce any professional development experience.
- Ask teachers to share their initial definitions of the term(s) at the beginning of professional development experience and use those definitions to assess their understanding and then to plan experiences to clarify, expand, or build on that understanding.
- Periodically revisit the definition(s) and add to it (them) collectively as you learn and grow together.

- Keep the definition(s) posted in a visible place where everyone can be reminded and the definition can be referred to and revised regularly.
- Encourage teachers to journal their thoughts, emerging ideas and supporting examples of definitions to share and discuss with the group.

Specifically in terms of defining *positive literate identities*, educators who are planning for and facilitating professional development might:

- Point toward definitions as found in the following professional texts:
 - *Literacy in the Welcoming Classroom: Creating Family-School Partnerships that Support Student Learning* (Allen, 2010)
 - *Many Pathways to Literacy: Young Children Learning With Siblings, Grandparents, Peers and Communities* (Gregory, Long & Volk, 2004)
 - *Critical Literacy Critical Teaching: Tools For Preparing Responsive Teachers* (Dozier, Johnston & Rogers, 2006)
 - *Critical Literacy in Early Childhood Education: Artful Story & The Integrated Curriculum* (Quintero, 2009)
 - *Negotiating Critical Literacies With Teachers: Theoretical Foundations and Pedagogical Resources for Pre-Service and Inservice Contexts* (Vasquez, Tate & Harste, 2013)
- Involve teachers in bringing (to professional development sessions) samples of student work or examples from classroom observations that they believe supports students' positive literate identities. Ask questions such as:

- In your example, what are the literate identities you see exhibited by the child?
- How do you know? What did the child say or do to reveal this literate identity?
- What information, if any, did you ascertain from home/community visits or conversations that helped you see this as a literate identity? What other literate identities did you notice in the home and community setting?
- What are some ways that you support/not support positive literate identities in your classroom?
- What could you do to support/further support positive literate identities in your classroom?

Find a Balance Between Top-Down and Collaborative Professional Development:

Know When to Hold Your Ground

While I did not recognize this at the time, I now recognize the top-down nature of professional development that I often described as collaborative. However, the reality is that I planned the sessions and I usually guided the direction they would take. While I hoped that we were collaborative in our learning, the focus of our work was not collaborative. I was clear that our focus was to engage in conversations about race, culture and language. I firmly believed (and continue to believe) that without that conviction these conversations were likely never to happen.

However, because our meetings were primarily designed by me with some input from the teachers, I also believe that teachers may have been even more focused if they

had felt greater investment in the process and design of the study as well as the professional development experiences. Thus, findings of this study suggest that it may be helpful to:

- Provide teachers with more choices of literature and topics. Bring in a variety of selected texts (Table 7.1) that fall within the topic of study; allow teachers to browse and select those that are most interesting to them, or that serve to support their particular questions (i.e., about identity development, language marginalization, issues of race, etc.).
- Provide teachers with opportunities to choose and check out movies on DVD's (Table 7.1) on their own time to learn more about race, culture and language. Particularly important are movies to help understand the historical antecedents and current realities of racism such as *Up From Slavery* (Hersberger, 2011); *A Class Divided* (Peters, Beutel & Elliott, 1970); *Precious Knowledge* (Palos, et al., 2011); *Slavery by Another Name* (Pollard, et al., 2012).
- Gain teacher input in the design of the engagements. Ask how they would like to structure their time together. Do they prefer to read first then discuss? Would they like time to collaborate and share before reading?
- Survey teachers about their interests or best times to meet. Do mornings work best? Then maybe 30 minutes of coffee and conversation before school will work for some teachers. Find times that work best for them.
- Be flexible with smaller and one-to-one meetings – go to their classrooms and engage in conversations.

- Generate discussion questions used for professional development together as a group.

Recognize When to Follow Teachers' Leads or Refocus Discussions

In Chapter Four, I used the term, *bird-walking* to describe moments when our discussions were diverted from my intended focus. This was a constant struggle for me throughout our professional development conversations. Sometimes bird-walking occurred when teachers were unprepared and tired and they would give excuses for not having read their books; sometimes it occurred at the beginning of meetings when teachers wanted to share events from their lives outside of school; and sometimes they would interject stories during our meetings. While I believe that, to conduct work that examines issues of race, language, and culture, a leader/facilitator *must* maintain that focus so that the work is not diverted from it, I also look back and recognize that sometimes moments that I dismissed as bird-walking were actually missed opportunities when teachers' comments and stories could have led to fruitful and relevant discussions. Implications for professional development that recognizes bird-walking that is non-productive but also understands the need to follow teachers' leads and develop a more collaborative approach are discussed below.

Accommodate the lives of busy, tired teachers. In this study the reality of teacher's work schedules and their lives in and outside of school meant that they often came to meetings unprepared (they had not read the professional literature required for that session) because they were just down right busy and tired. This sometimes led to bird-walking because it either slowed us down or changed the course of the planned discussion. This leads to the suggestion that those who facilitate professional

development sessions need to recognize that when professional development comes at the end teachers' long days, and in the midst of many other obligations, the sensitivity of the facilitator is key. Thus findings suggest that it is beneficial to engage teachers in ways that are respectful of their busy lives:

- Plan for 10 minutes of informal talk time at the beginning of each session, time for teachers to debrief from their days; but be sure to end that time after ten minutes (a timer or other technique will be helpful).
- Build in the time to read professionally as part of teachers' annual district evaluations, which makes the work count towards other district requirements.
- Provide short articles rather than longer pieces to read between sessions; excellent resources for short professional pieces that focus on issues of race, culture, and language and that provide teachers with research-based information in small sound bytes that allow them to think, talk and reflect include:
 - Chapters in *Rethinking Multicultural Education* (Au, 2009) and other articles from www.rethinkingschools.org provide insights about a wide range of discrimination issues.
 - Chapters from *Tongue Tied* (Santa Ana, 2004) and *Home-School Connections in a Multicultural Society* (Dantas & Manyak, 2010) provide insight into experiences in and out of school.
- Provide time to read during the school day or at the beginning of meetings. For example, build reading time into the faculty meeting agendas and

professional development sessions so that the first 20-25 minutes are spent on reading each week.

- Ask invited presenters to send articles or recommended reading to teachers prior to their visits/presentations.
- Provide time prior to invited presentations to allow teachers to read and think about the particular issue/s that are to be explored and discussed during the presentation.
- Increase teacher focus and preparedness by:
 - Opening each meeting with a 15-minute writing reflection based on teachers' thoughts, wonderings, and reflections from assigned or independently driven readings.
 - Opening each meeting with a 30 minute quiet reading time when teachers can enjoy the benefit of a quiet time to read assigned texts without being required to read between sessions; an advantage is also that teachers will have read the material immediately prior to discussing it.
 - Providing guiding questions during meetings to trigger conversations. This allows teachers to be prepared to participate in conversations and not feel pressured to do so on their own time.

Some questions to guide thinking from the texts are:

- What key ideas do you glean from this reading?
- What connections can you make to your own experiences?

- How does this knowledge enhance or challenge your current understanding?

Recognize that what might seem like bird-walking is not always off-topic.

What I saw as bird-walking was sometimes actually on-topic discussion and because I did not recognize or capitalize on those moments, those were actually missed opportunities to explore issues at a more personal level with teachers based on the connections they brought to the discussion. An example of missed opportunity, described in Chapter Four, occurred during our Diversity Group meeting when Shirley talked about her mother-in-law who was a nurse in the Appalachia area. I dismissed Shirley's comments as bird-walking because I was focused on the agenda for that day: presenting our book studies. As a result, I missed an opportunity to delve deeper into the deficit perspective that is often used when describing people from Appalachia; for example, I could have used Shirley's story as the impetus for drawing from Purcell-Gates (1997) book, *Other People's Words*, a book about how negative cultural and linguistic stereotypes affect people of that region. Therefore, it is important to recognize when teachers' stories are actually bird-walking (off topic) and when it may be important to follow the direction the walk takes you. Some suggestions to support this implication include:

- Be open to teachers' personal experiences and stories. Before assuming that their comments and stories are bird-walking, listen to what they say. Listen for potential connections to topics or issues being discussed. Use what they say as an example and then build from there.

- Help participants begin to recognize bird-walking practices for themselves so they can stop them. This could be set up at the beginning of the meetings and become a part of the rules for conversations. Some of indicators of bird-walking include:
 - Changing the subject or veering from the conversation without making specific connections in ways that supports the conversation or questions being discussed.
 - Making a joke that leads to other jokes and stories and takes the discussion off track.
 - Asking another question without answering the initial question.
 - Needing to leave the group to go to the rest room, make a phone call, lock the door, get a snack, etc.

Strategies for helping teachers recognize and then limit these bird-walking tactics include:

- Share the preceding list with teachers regarding some common bird-walking signals. Make sure participants are aware of what these bird-walking strategies might look like.
- Ask teachers to begin to identify bird-walking moments for themselves.
- Administrators or facilitators of the professional development experience can assist in drawing bird-walkers back in to the conversation with comments such as:
 - Okay, everyone, let's come back together.

- That is an interesting thought, question, comment, etc. How does that help us to understand _____?
- Before you left for the restroom, got a snack, or located your keys we were talking about _____ can you offer some thoughts on that?

Recognize Deflection Strategies and Interrupt Them

Sometimes, we found that it was easier to make excuses or use policies to justify our belief and actions rather than to challenge our assumptions and seek deeper understandings that would allow us to tackle difficult issues. In these instances, we deflected from the harder work of learning to recognize and admit bias, seek the views of families and community members, and figure out difficult issues. This was particularly visible in the instance when we were working with Heman and his family and we said things like, “You’ve got to think about the other students;” “We don’t have the resources to support him;” or “Our policy states that we can dismiss him.” After we used existing policy to dismiss a child, we wondered if we had positioned the child in a way that would allow us to invoke policy to dismiss him: The child was disruptive; policy states that you cannot keep disruptive children; the child must be dismissed. If we had positioned him differently, other results may have occurred.

Another instance of deflecting the focus regarding difficult issues included my own deflection from answering Kim’s question regarding the term, *person of Color*. I advised Kim that the term *person of Color* was a better term to use than *minorities*. Kim pressed me to define the term in a way that helped her understand, however I deflected by saying, “never mind” as to not have to answer her question.

These findings lead me to suggest that professional development experiences must ensure a focus on helping participants learn excuses that deflect from seeking deeper understandings of issues. Some suggestions for professional development that roots out and challenges deflection strategies include:

- Seek deeper meaning of the problems. For example, when students are not successful in the classroom, before deflecting the issue to blame parents or expect the child to be responsible for the issues, involve parents to gain their input. Ask positive questions: What would you like for me to know about your child? What do you think is happening? What strategies might I try? What might I be misunderstanding? Is this what you mean?
- Examine current school and district policies and practices that may use deficit terms that perpetuate a deficit-based status quo. Recognize that it can be very easy to deflect and use policies that support the status quo without questioning them. For example, our policy states, “students who are non-compliant may be dismissed from the program.” However, issues with non-compliance may have more to do with cultural differences in expectations for behavior, adult/child interactions, communication, etc. than with actual non-compliance. Also, behaviors that may be mistakenly interpreted as non-compliance may, in fact, reflect something else. Examination of such terms used in policies may cause teachers and administrators to reassess the ways in which policies are used as deflection in support of some children and families while marginalizing others.
- Develop strategies for holding each other accountable such as:

- Agree to deal with issues by taking responsibility. Establish rules such as: When you hear someone begin to make comments such as, “*He’s* not adjusting,” or “You have to think of the other children,” or “They don’t set boundaries for their children,” stop and refocus on perspective. Examine all possibilities. Consider: home language and communication, interactional style, cultural norms, home practices, stimulus (too much noise, people, etc.). And most important, *ask* those involved for their perspectives (see next bullet).
- Actively seek the views of parents and families to ensure multiple perspectives with regard to any situation that you might question. When assumptions made about families and children, be sure to *go to the families* for their views and do so until you feel that you understand their perspective. Be aware that your interpretation of family members’ words and actions come from your culturally-created assumptions. Ask families what they mean by their explanations and actions rather than making assumptions about the words they offer. Explain your interpretation of words and events and ask them if you have captured their perspectives accurately.

Recognize and Eliminate Tokenism

Another implication that findings suggest as important in professional development is to recognize and eliminate tokenism. This study made perfectly visible the importance of not tokenizing anyone in professional development sessions. Given that the majority of the teachers in this study were White, and only one of the primary participants was a person of Color, we learned that it was important to be careful not to

make her an example for any one way of being. Tammy's statement, "I don't do any other Black but this Black" solidifies this point. Tammy meant that she only represents herself. She does not speak for all African Americans. Implications are that multiple perspectives need to be provided as much as possible both within and beyond racial and cultural groups. Other examples include when we assumed all Pakistani and Indian mothers treated their children in a particular way and when Sra. Hermas said all Mexican men were "Macho." Some suggestions to increase understanding within and across cultural groups so that professional development experiences do not rely on one experience or one perspective are:

- Seek parent input about *their* family's perspectives. Do not assume that students and families from the same or similar cultures have the same practices, values, or ideas. Think about your own cultural identity/group and how you differ from others within your own culture.
- Understand that experiences with one or two people from various cultural groups outside your own are not inclusive of all people in that culture. Likewise, identifying with a particular culture does not make you an expert on everyone in your culture. For example, being Black does not mean that you know how all Black people feel. It does however position you to be more knowledgeable than cultural outsiders, but it is important to recognize that stereotypes occur within cultural groups as well.

Interrupt Biases and Stereotypes: Take a Critical Stance

Findings suggest that the ability to interrupt bias and stereotypes during professional development conversations was essential in moving towards more equitable

understanding and practices. In other words, a critical stance was essential to our work. Such a stance is one that poses questions such as: What is happening here? How do we know? Whose voices are represented or missing? How are we working to support children and families? How is what we are doing supportive of individual ways of knowing? Are we using deficit talk? For example, Shirley who did not seem to recognize the deficit language she used when describing students she met during her home visits as “not disciplined,” or the many instances when we placed the blame on families stating that, “they do this,” “they do that,” each demonstrated opportunities for us to interrupt our biases and stereotypes. The more opportunities we had to engage in critical conversations, the more opportunities there were for us to recognize when our own biases and stereotypes surfaced and the more knowledge teachers and administrators have about students, parents and families the more apt they may be to interrupt biases and stereotypes when they surface. Some strategies that might be used in professional development settings to interrupt biases and stereotypes are to:

- Support each other (teachers and administrators) in taking responsibility for *individual* lack of knowledge when incidents occur with students rather than immediately putting the blame on the child or their family. Ask: How do you know? Did you seek the parents’ advice? What are some of the things you tried in your classroom to be successful? It is important that we turn these questions to ourselves so that they become an internal dialogue that we ask ourselves as we consider how to support student learning.
- Invite parents or families who would be willing to speak to teachers during professional development sessions about their families’ experiences at home

and with schools. Invite them to talk about some of the ways that schools can better support them, their home language, religion, culture, etc. and to provide deeper understanding of issues related to their particular culture, race and/or language.

- Work with teachers to generate questions specific to race, culture and/or language; these questions could be sent to families with an invitation to join teachers professional study together. Families could choose to speak as part of a forum, send in written responses to teachers' questions, or join professional conversations around the table. Providing opportunities for several families to participate might make the experience more informal and comfortable for both families and teachers. In this way, no one family would be put on the spot in terms of being the responsible for responding to the teachers.
- Send an interest survey to parents or family members who might be interested in learning more about race, culture and language and entering a study group with teachers. Develop a teacher/parent group that is interested in learning more about these issues to bring in multiple perspectives (both in and out of school experiences of students). Ideas for parent/teacher group engagements could come from texts such as *Creating Welcoming Schools: A Practical Guide to Home-School Partnerships with Diverse Families* (Allen, 2007); discussions could also be grounded in children's literacy work both at home and at school settings to gain better understanding of how to support students' identities.

Utilize Professional Development Resources and Plan Specific Engagements

Throughout this study I used a variety of professional resources which introduced theory and ideas that undergirded our discussions and conversations (Table 7.1). Findings suggest that resources which illuminate issues of race, culture and language were essential in supporting virtually all professional development conversations because they provided the underlying theories and research that helped us understand the importance and relevance of this work.

However, while we spent time exploring some of the inequities children of Color and speakers of languages other than English face, we did not explore in-depth the historical antecedents that created the inequitable structures in schools to begin with. These are important next steps in our journey that would have benefited teachers at the onset of our work together. Some strategies for exploring these issues include:

- Read and discuss texts such as: *Racism Without Racists: Colorblind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequity* (Bonilla-Silva, 2009), *A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present* (Zinn, 2005), *Racism: A Short History* (Fredrickson, 2003); also texts in Table 7.1.
- Access websites regularly that deal with historical and institutional issues: zinnedproject.org; teachingfortolerance.org; rethinkingschools.org.
- Engage teachers in discussions about how this history and institutions affect policies, curriculum and expectations in school and in classrooms. Explore ideas about how to interrupt the perpetuation of racism in your school and /or classroom.

Table 7.1. Suggested texts, journals, videos and websites for use in professional development engagements designed to address issues of race, culture and language.

Texts
<i>A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present</i> (Zinn, 2005)
<i>Artifactual Literacies: Every Object Tells a Story</i> (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010)
<i>Black Ants and Buddhists</i> (Cowhey, 2006)
<i>Can We Talk About Race?</i> (Tatum, 2007)
<i>Classroom Diversity: Connecting Curriculum to Student's Lives</i> (McIntyre, Rosebery & González, 2001)
<i>Confronting racism, poverty, and power: Classroom strategies to change the world</i> (Compton-Lilly, 2004)
<i>Critical Issues in Early Literacy</i> (Goodman & Martens, 2007)
<i>Growing Up Literate: Learning From Inner-City Families</i> (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988)
<i>Home-School Connections in a Multicultural Society</i> (Dantas & Manyak, 2010)
<i>Learning and Not Learning English: Latino Students in American Schools</i> (Valdes, 2001)
<i>Multicultural Teaching in the Early Childhood Classrooms: Approaches, Strategies and Tools Preschool-2nd Grade</i> (Souto-Manning, 2013)
<i>Negotiating Critical Literacies With Young Children</i> , (Vasquez, 2004)
<i>Other People's Words: The Cycle of Low Literacy</i> (Purcell-Gates, 1997)
<i>Racism: A Short History</i> (Fredrickson, 2003)
<i>Racially Equitable Teaching: Beyond the Whiteness of Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators</i> (Earick, 2009)
<i>Racism Without Racists: Colorblind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequity</i> (Bonilla-Silva, 2009)
<i>Reading Families: The Literate Lives of Urban Families</i> (Compton-Lilly, 2003)
<i>Rethinking Early Childhood Education</i> (Pelo, 2008)
<i>Rethinking Elementary Education</i> (Christensen, et al., 2012)
<i>Rethinking Multicultural Education: Teaching for Racial and Cultural Justice</i> (Au, 2009)
<i>Room for Talk: Teaching and Learning in a Multilingual Kindergarten</i> (Fassler, 2003)
<i>Telling a Different Story Teaching and Literacy in an Urban Preschool</i> (Wilson, 2000)
<i>Tensions & Triumphs in The Early Years of Teaching: Real World Findings And Advice For Supporting New Teachers</i> (Long, et al., 2006)
<i>The Real Ebonics Debate: Power, Language, and the Education of African-American Children</i> (Perry & Delpit, 1998)
<i>Tongue Tied: The Lives of Multilingual Children in Public Education</i> (Santa Ana, 2004)

<i>We Can't Teach What We Don't Know</i> (Howard, 2006)
Journals
<i>Language Arts</i> (NCTE)
<i>Multicultural Perspectives</i> (NAME)
<i>National Journal of Urban Education</i>
<i>School Talk</i> (NCTE)
<i>Urban Education</i>
<i>Young Children</i> (NAEYC)
Videos
The Language You Cry In (Toepke & Serrano, 1998)
Family Across the Sea (Boulware, Carrier & Baker, 1991)
It's Elementary: Talking about Gay Issues in Schools (Chasnoff, et al., 1996)
The Eye of the Storm (Peters, 1970)
Precious Knowledge: Arizona's Battle Over Ethnic Studies (Palos, et al., 2011)
Websites
Rethinking Schools- www.rethinkingschools.org
Teaching Tolerance- www.teachingtolerance.org
Wow Stories: Connections From the Classroom - http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/stories/storiesiii1/9/
Zinn Educational Project: Teaching a People's History - http://zinnedproject.org

It is important to keep the preceding ideas and implications in mind when setting out to design multiple professional development engagements within an early childhood educational setting. They are offered here as suggestions, in that it would be most helpful to gain teacher, teaching assistant, and family perspectives on designs conducive to specific school or program's features.

Recognize That it is a Journey: You Never Arrive

Exploring issues of culture, race and language marginalization must be an ongoing evolving process, which involves constant self-reflection, because shifts or changes in ideas, beliefs and attitudes develop over time and are never ending. Although

our diversity conversations began in 2008, and only more intensely since this study in 2010, we recognized that the more we learned the more we realized there was to learn. As discussed often throughout this chapter, we only scratched the surface of what we needed to explore to truly understand issues of discrimination and racism. For this reason, our learning is an ongoing one – a continuous journey where no one ever *arrives*.

Implications for Administrators

Readers will find some overlap between implications in this section and implications for professional development. This is done intentionally to emphasize the importance of these implications not only for professional development in general but for school leaders who make the decision to commit to planning, organizing, and facilitating work with teachers that examines issues of race, culture, and language.

Findings from this study suggest that the role of the administrator is critical to initiating and sustaining focused long-term professional development about issues of race, culture, and language. This is substantiated by the literature: Tamar Jacobson's (2003) work - among other sources (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Earick, 2009) - argues that administrators are an essential part of this process. However, Jacobson also suggests that administrators should not be a part of groups in which they emotionally engage with teachers in discussing issues related to biases but that counselors should play that role. I disagree. In my study, it was clear that my active involvement in the emotional, critical, political discussions that occurred in the process of this work were essential to the trust and knowledge built by each of us individually and as a group. To provide this emotional support, it was critical that I created a climate of trust with the teachers. Allowing myself to be vulnerable emotionally was an important part of that trust-building process. While I

found outside persons to be valuable sources of information and, in many cases, support or springboards for important conversations, I felt that my support and active involvement as an administrator was essential to the process of our joint learning. Thus, this section provides implications from this study for the administrator's role as essential to a faculty's commitment to the study of issues of race, culture, and language. These implications are written in the form of advice for administrators as they consider this kind of work.

Recognize Challenges but Maintain Courage and Stamina

As outlined in Chapter Six, the experience of engaging in this professional development work led to challenges for me as an administrator. Reflection of those challenges leads me to suggest that administrators who desire to engage in this work must realize that: (a) there is discomfort in the work so find ways to get comfortable with the discomfort; (b) you must take care of yourself, (c) it is essential to seek support of allies if you are to sustain and reinforce your convictions and build stamina to sustain the work; (c) not everyone will join you on this journey, make peace with that; recognize when it is time to let them go and move on; (d) you must understand your purpose and have strong convictions about it; exploring race, language, and culture to develop more equitable practices has to matter to you – a lot - if you are going to support teachers in exploring the same issues; and (e) it is critical that you continue your own professional development. In the following sections, I provide suggestions for administrators to address these challenges.

Get comfortable with the discomfort. Understand that challenges are inevitable; embrace them as lessons learned and opportunities to learn more. The many challenges

we faced were often due to our lack of recognition of our own cultural biases and stereotypes. It was difficult at times to see when we viewed students and their families through our own cultural lens. It is important then, to get comfortable with that kind of discomfort. For example, I struggled in helping Kim to see how some teachers have not supported all children in classrooms – particularly children of Color and speakers of language other than English. It was difficult for her to understand how teachers could not just “do what’s best for their students”; I felt that she never fully grasped the power she held as a White teacher. I was uncomfortable because I wanted teachers to come to this realization early in this process, forgetting at times that my own journey took time as well. It was important for me to get comfortable with the recognition that teachers enter these discussions at different places of understanding and bring to those conversations a myriad of experiences. It was vital for me to remember my own journey toward critical understandings. Remember that this is a process and be patient. Discomfort in this respect is part of the process.

Take care of yourself. One element I did not include in this experience was to stay physically active. During this study I neglected myself: I did not take the time to go for a walk or go to the gym as often as I should have; I did not get adequate sleep. I believe that so much of my frustration and exhaustion was related to my own personal well being in addition to all that I was trying to accomplish. If this is to be a life-long process then it has to become doable and sustainable. This implies that administrators must make time for themselves away from school to decompress, vent, relax, exercise, and rejuvenate in order to refresh and ignite their passion and commitment to sustain this work.

Seek the support of allies. Throughout this study I found constant support in other like-minded professionals, who understood the value and critical need for educators to engage in these conversations. For me, this was one of the most important components in this work. These like-minded professionals were friends, university professors, and doctoral peers (now professors) each of whom provided me with much needed respites from the daily challenges of this work, as well as support for continuing the work, because of their similar convictions. Their words of comfort, encouragement and professional knowledge were vital to my confidence. Urging me to persevere because they saw value in the work was essential to the stamina necessary to continue the process. Away-from-school gatherings and conversations afforded me the opportunity to vent frustrations, let my hair down, have a drink, clear my thoughts, and ask for advice or suggestions. Meeting outside of school with friends, colleagues or other like-minded people provided support and stimulated me intellectually.

Recognize when it is time to let go: Focus on those who will become allies. There were times when I had to come to the realization that I had to let go of those who chose not to join me on this journey. I believe that the ability to *let go* reflected and demonstrated my growth and commitment to this work. Early in this process, I spent too much time worrying about teachers who had little or no interest in this work. For example, when one teacher asked to leave the diversity group as we entered this study, I truly lamented her leaving and felt that I was losing a friend. However, I had to direct my energy towards the teachers who were willing to participate. I came to believe that the energy spent on those not interested in the work was better spent on those who were interested, recognizing that teachers willing to engage in the work served to inspire others

through their commitment, dedication and through their success with students. So, in actuality, I was not giving up on the other teachers, but focusing where I felt the most impact would be felt so that I could nurture further allies. Furthermore, I learned that, because of a strong commitment from me as the school administrator, naysayers either: (a) eventually came to see how vital the conversations were to classroom practices; or (b) left to work with someone else. There really is little or no middle ground.

Understand your purpose: Articulate its importance. Administrators need to be mindful of and embrace the challenges that will be met when addressing issues of race, culture and language as they are part and parcel of the process of moving forward. My commitment as an administrator was that our professional development *would* address issues of race, culture and language. I was strong in my purpose and the rationale for the work recognizing that, for far too long the same children have been successful in schools while others have been marginalized and poorly served. I was bolstered in my purpose because I was well aware of statistics showing continued vast disparities in student achievement between White students and students of Color and/or speakers of languages other than English (SEF, 2010). Thus, it is important that administrators know what their purpose is and develop the ability to articulate that purpose clearly and profoundly. Success can only be accomplished if we remain determined, committed, and focused on the bottom line - EQUITY in education and for ALL children.

Continue your own professional development in earnest. My ability to confront challenges and maintain courage was also fueled by my own continued professional development and desire to learn. I found support when I attended conferences and seminars, consulted university professors, continued to read and reflect

on my practices, and stay abreast of current research and theory using such resources as those listed in Table 7.1. Additionally, the process of conducting and writing this study also served as a profound learning opportunity. For example, it was only through constant dialogue with my doctoral advisor, probing me to explain and expand my thinking, that I was able to recognize some of the reasons we only scratched the surface of what was possible in our professional development sessions. This helped me to think about how I can move forward after this study and how I can better support teachers as we engage in this work together in the future.

Invite Professional Others

So much of the work I did with teachers as we engaged in professional development experiences discussing issues of race, culture and language was aided and enhanced by the support of professional others who knew the inherent challenges of this work. While this was touched on in the Implications for Professional Development, it is important to include here to emphasize that the school administrator must play a key role in the process of engaging professional others.

Throughout this study, teachers reported learning valuable information from speakers I brought to our school and those they heard at conferences and other workshops and symposia. Kim, Lyndsay and Tammy all spoke about learning from professors from a nearby university who contributed to our understanding of culturally relevant practices. Administrators should not be solely responsible for the teaching or leading. Opportunities to hear other professionals serve to affirm or reaffirm the work by providing additional research and credence with regard to their efforts. Implications for administrators interested in securing outside professionals include the following:

- Use inservice days as opportunities to bring in professional others who can support your work.
- Check with local universities regarding available speakers (i.e., professors, doctoral students, etc.) to discuss issues of equity in education or provide research that they may be engaged in that looks at how teachers are supporting students through culturally relevant pedagogy.
- Consider collaborating with a local university to conduct graduate level courses onsite in your school; seek funding by writing grants; this could provide teachers with opportunities to work towards advanced degrees while learning how to better support their students.
- Encourage faculty and staff to attend conferences and seminars in your area that help to build understanding of culturally relevant practices; provide release time during professional development and inservice days or by taking teachers' classes yourself. Utilize district professional development funds.
- Encourage faculty and staff to access online seminars and workshops; some are available at <http://www.ncte.org> and <http://www.readwritethink.org>. There are also a wide array of TED talks online or YouTube lectures and classroom demonstrations that can be accessed.
- Seek other like-minded administrators who are interested in this work and collaborate with them to bring knowledgeable educators to speak to joint school events. This would not be as cost prohibitive as securing a speaker for only one school.

Get Involved with National Professional Organizations

Get involved with professional organizations that consider race, culture and language critical to classroom practices. A few excellent organizations to consider membership in are: *The National Council for Teachers of English* (NCTE) - their attention to issues of race, culture and language in language and literacy practices (from early childhood to high school) provide theoretical and practical knowledge and support for educators and administrators; *National Association for Multicultural Education* (NAME); *Association for Childhood Education International* (ACEI); *National Black Child Development Institute* (NBCDI), and the *National Association of Black School Educators* (NABSE) all work to advocate for education that promotes social justice and equity for all children. Additionally, the *American Education Research Association* (AERA) has Special Interest Groups (SIG) specifically devoted to issues such as critical race theory, critical perspectives on early childhood education, bilingual research, leadership for social justice, and multicultural/multiethnic theory to name a few.

Involve Parents, Families, and Teaching Assistants in Professional Development Conversations

We constructed our understanding of supporting positive literate identities *through* the process of reading professional literature, talking with families and students in schools, reflecting together in our professional development settings, but one of the most important elements of our experience was getting beyond the school walls. Issues of race, culture and language were better understood once we stepped outside our cultural comfort zones. It was only through intentionally seeking the views of families and communities that we were able to begin to understand the literacies and languages valued

in homes and communities and how we might use that knowledge to support children's literate identities in schools. And when we were guilty of making assumptions about families and cultures, our experiences with families allowed us to better reflect on those moments.

However, other than Pedro's mother, who was also a professor at a local university, we did not invite parents or families to speak with us *during* our professional development discussions. I believe that many of the challenges we faced early in the study could have been negotiated by bringing some of our questions to parents who may have been willing to join us during our diversity group meetings. This would have provided the missing voices that may have helped us challenge our biases and stereotypes. This supports Miller's (2012) findings and implications for working with teachers who are trying to work toward an understanding of race and racism and the important role of people of Color play in part of that journey. The implication for administrators then is to seek parent and family perspectives by actively inviting parents of Color, parents of diverse religions, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or speakers of languages other than English to join teachers as collaborators – not token contributors - in the study of race, culture and language.

In this study, we were also missing the voices of teaching assistants during our professional development sessions. Through my many member checking conversations with teaching assistants, I realized that they too, needed to be involved in our conversations. Many of the challenges that were presented early in our professional development were due to assumptions on our part that could have been minimized had we invited them to share insights as a part of our discussions.

Suggestions to include families' and teaching assistants' voices in professional development conversations are to:

- Create or encourage small group diversity groups comprised of faculty, staff and/or families who are interested in exploring issues of race culture and language. Books such as *Literacy in the Welcoming Classroom* (Allen, 2010) and *Home-School Connections in a Multicultural Society* (Dantas & Manyak, 2010) are wonderful resources to help to bring in family voices.
- Include opportunities for assistants to meet with teachers or in small groups; provide short book chapters such as those found in *Rethinking Early Childhood Education* (Tenorio, 2008) or *Rethinking Elementary Education* (Christensen, et al., 2012).
- Make discussions of issues of race, culture and language a routine part of the teacher assistant meetings.
- Provide opportunities for teachers and teaching assistants to meet with administrators to discuss issues specific to their classroom. Administrators could meet with teachers and assistants in individual classrooms and draw examples to spearhead discussions in larger groups.

Trust Teachers as They Build Knowledge: Provide Autonomy

Jacobson (2003) writes that “teachers need people to believe in them and trust their ability and potential” (p. 83). My findings supported this statement and suggest that teachers valued the ability to be autonomous and needed it to engage in practices that were supportive of the children in their classrooms. Opportunities for teachers to employ practices supportive of their students' positive literate identities, which were different

from those implemented in the classroom next door meant that they could use their learning to learn about and address every child's strengths and needs. Lyndsay's comment that, "it shows how much you trust us" validates that view that teachers appreciate being trusted as professionals. However, with autonomy comes a higher level of expectation, what other researchers have referred to as *responsible autonomy* (Long, et. al., 2006). In this study, teachers were given autonomy but they were expected to use that freedom in professional and culturally responsive ways. This implies that to truly use knowledge gained from professional study, teachers must be provided with autonomy but also given support through tools, resources, and professional conversations to ensure that their practices are grounded in carefully explored theory and practice.

Put Yourself Out There

When administrators put themselves out there in terms of fessing up to their own learning inadequacies or shortcomings, it creates a safer place for others to recognize and discuss their own biases. For example, when I shared my responses to the *White Privilege* Article (McIntosh, 1995), describing my earlier assumptions sent a message that I was willing to put myself in a place of vulnerability and provided the teachers with the knowledge that this is, a constant journey. Kim confirmed, in a member checking session, that this meant a great deal to her. I learned that the times I invited teacher interrogation of my statements or made visible my shortcomings and learning process helped to foster a safe and trusting climate. Administrators need to be willing to set the example and *put yourself out there* to foster the climate of trust essential in this work.

Question More, Judge Less

In this study, as I recorded and analyzed teachers' statements and comments, I initially perceived that Tammy, for example, believed that she was "already there" in terms of understanding issues of diversity. It was not until the member checking phase that I began asking questions to probe beneath my assumptions and discovered that she did not mean that at all; she saw herself as someone who wanted to continue to grow and learn, someone with the disposition to move beyond her current understanding of students and their families. For this reason, member checking was perhaps the most important part of my analysis process and critical to this study. Member checking means asking questions knowing that the answers may challenge our initial assumptions, a strategy that I believe to be as important for administrators guiding professional development as for researchers conducting studies.

Administrators, it is important that you probe beyond teachers' surface comments; do not make assumptions based on the words teachers say but keep probing for clarification. It is important to tell teachers what you think you hear and ask if your interpretations are aligned with their intentions. Access the knowledge and power you have to go beyond your assumptions about what others say, whether it is teachers, staff, parents, or families. Do not assume – ask! Question more and judge less.

Spend Time in Classrooms

Findings suggest that classroom observations were pivotal in supporting our discussions about race, culture and language marginalization. Transcripts of videos or researcher notes from classroom observations provided a way to use observations with teachers to discuss and reflect on how their attempts to support children's literate

identities. Our reflections about transcripts typically took place in One-to-One meetings which allowed teachers to clarify what I was seeing and I was able to discuss the research which supported their practice. Findings suggest that teachers believed that this was one of the most valuable parts of the study; and where they felt most supported by me as an administrator. Thus, an implication for administrators is to make time to observe, take notes and/or videotape classroom practices and to use those notes, videos or transcripts as a means of teacher reflection. Some suggestions to guide those conversations might be:

- This is what I observed. Tell me your thinking regarding what is happening here.
- Where do you see yourself supporting students' positive literate identities in this transcript, video, observational notes, etc.? Where, if anywhere, are you not supporting them?
- What could you do to enhance, change or create engagements that do support students?
- How can I (as the administrator) support you to further your understanding?
- What are your thoughts, wonderings or questions?
- Is there a specific classroom interaction or engagement that you have particular questions about that you would like me to observe?

Ask Teachers What They Would Like You to Observe in Their Classrooms

I believe that one thing I could have done differently as the administrator is to ask teachers what language or literacy engagement, classroom strategy or interaction they would have liked me to observe related to our study of race, language, and culture. These foci could then have been used as the basis for discussion during professional

development sessions. Having conducted this study, I am able to see how beneficial it would have been to gain teacher input about where they would like me to pay attention as I took notes or videotaped. The questions in the previous section could support discussions that would follow such observations.

Recognize That You Have More Power Than You Realize

As detailed in Chapter Three, I am fortunate to work in a district that I perceive as providing autonomy for administrators to plan for professional development that meets the needs of the teachers in our educational setting. However, I want to be very clear that not all administrators in the district interpret district policy as providing autonomy. This is one of the most critical implications I want to provide for administrators: It is essential that administrators, rather than make assumptions about edicts from the district based on hearsay and individual interpretations, find out exactly what kind of administrative autonomy is provided. I believe strongly that administrators have more power and autonomy than they realize regardless of where they work or who they work for.

Administrators who are truly invested in this work and who can articulate why professional development about race, culture and language is important to student outcomes can make these opportunities foundational to any professional development experiences even within restricted mandates. Some strategies that school administrators might use to identify the existence of autonomy in their jobs and to ensure further autonomy are:

- Engage in conversations with the district superintendent. By the time messages trickle down to administrators, the superintendent's message can get blurred. Talk *with him/her* about his/her overall vision for the school district.

Ask what he/she believes about providing administrators autonomy. Share your work, your purpose, the rationale for the work, and the plan for accomplishing the work.

- Establish and build relationships with the district superintendent and other academic personal. They need to know your commitment to students and families; they need to be able to trust that you are knowledgeable in your area (early childhood, in my case) and your work with issues related to race, culture and language.
- Provide data about the success of your efforts as well as research that documents successful efforts in other settings.
- Offer to conduct workshops with other district personal to provide opportunities for district level and school level educators to learn more about the purpose, need and improved student outcomes of this work whenever possible.

Seek Collaboration With Other Innovative Administrators

As mentioned earlier, it is important that administrators surround themselves with people who support their work such as university colleagues, researchers, authors of professional literature, and conference presenters, but it is also important to seek other school administrators interested in joining you in this quest. Collaborative colleagues can serve as critical friends who understand your local challenges and while systematically helping to work toward changing an unjust status quo. While I did not seek support from other administrators during this study, my findings lead me to believe that it could be

very helpful in being able to sustain this work. Some ways I hope to seek and sustain collaboration with other administrators in the future are:

- Engage in one-to-one conversations with other administrators during elementary principals' meetings to ascertain who may be interested in discussing and exploring issues of race, culture and language.
- Invite fellow administrators expressing interest to one of our Diversity Group meetings or whole faculty Inservice meetings to experience firsthand some of the conversations that take place.
- Invite a colleague to develop a similar professional development experience at his/her school. Arrange to document the process and meet regularly to share data and ideas. Use data to jointly present at national, state and district conferences for administrators and principals. One such conference at the national level is the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).
- Start an administrators' study group in which we explore issues of race, culture, and language together.

Implications for Teachers and Classroom Practice

As much as this study offers implications for professional development and administrators, it also demonstrates how teachers were able to enhance existing practices or generate new practices supportive of students' positive literate identities. These implications are discussed in the following sections.

Recognize that Positive Dispositions Toward Children are Not Enough

During this study, while we felt caring and loving toward children and families, there were multiple instances in which we demonstrated biases and stereotypes that contradicted our claims. And, during our professional development conversations, we revealed that, although we thought we understood how to support children's identities prior to these discussions, we really did not. However, as a result of our study, we were able to intentionally and explicitly generate practices that created an environment in which we: thought about and explored our notions of race, culture and language, became reflective of our practices and held each other accountable; and stepped outside our comfort zones and into homes and communities. Furthermore, teachers used this new knowledge in the classrooms as they employed strategies and enhanced new and existing practices that were inclusive and supportive of students' positive literate identities.

Suggestions for teachers and administrators are to:

- Recognize that loving children does not necessarily translate into cultural sensitivity or the ability to develop culturally relevant practices to support students' positive literate identities. Teacher recognition of ways that school/societal structures and attitudes perpetuate inequitable practices are essential to understanding, recognizing, and changing those practices.
- Explore and discuss the historical antecedents of racism and marginalization of children of Color and speakers of other languages, this provides teachers with a basis for the problem in schools, as well as how it affects each of us, students, families and teachers alike.

Recognize When You Are Romanticizing or Essentializing

In Chapter Four, I described how Lyndsay romanticized Taj's culture when she excused his father's slap as cultural. I also described the generalizations we made about Indian and Pakistani mothers. Through this and other experiences, we recognized the importance of learning, talking, and asking questions to keep us from romanticizing or essentializing about any family, culture, race, or language. This implies that it is probably wise to put a structure in place to help teachers and administrators "police" each other as they talk about families. Some strategies for guarding against essentialization and romanticizing might be:

- Discuss and identify ways that we each operate from our own cultural lens and perspective. Recognize that, there is no way that we can know what other parents or family members think about particular situations or issues without first asking them.
- When one person begins a sentence with "they," stop and ask, "who?" Similar to implications offered for professional development, it is important to hold each other accountable for not proceeding further without making sure that what is being said will not romanticize or essentialize. Ask questions such as:
 - Who did you ask about this for clarification?
 - What do the parents/family say about it?
 - What are you basing your comments on?

Learn How to Recognize and Respond to Biased Statements From Students and Families

In Chapter Five, an example was shared in which Tammy challenged Mr. Gupta's biases when he initially refused the dreidel and Hanukkah information offered by Thom's mother and later changed his view because Tammy said to him, "If you want others to appreciate your Hindu religion, you will have to appreciate Thom's religion." It appeared that Mr. Gupta really had not thought about his actions prior to Tammy's interruption of his thinking. Tammy believed that she was able to offer her comment because her relationship with Mr. Gupta as well as her deeper convictions about interrupting bias as a result of our professional development.

There were many other times when Tammy was able to interrupt biases such as when a parent requested that she teach about American Indians, or when Mr. Gupta and his son, Jai, referred to her as "colored." The only time Tammy did not interrupt a biased statement was when Mr. Gupta, suggested that "only Black people buy liquor." This interaction caused me to wonder how we could better work not only with teachers, staff and students but with parents and families to help them: (a) recognize when their words and actions reflect bias, (b) understand ways that such discrimination affects learning as well as how racism has labeled schools unfairly; and (c) develop a repertoire of strategies for interrupting biases and stereotypes. Some of the implications for teachers and administrators who want to interrupt biases such as these are to:

- Trust is key. Build relationships with students, parents and families by getting to know them so that you can ask about misconceptions others have about them and what they want you to know about their child. With close

relationships, it will be easier to interrupt a bias or stereotype when you hear it. This demonstrates that you genuinely want to create classroom environments where biases and stereotypes are not perpetuated but extinguished.

- Share your own learning about biases and stereotypes with students, parents, and families, so they may be more likely think about their own biases and stereotypes.
- During parent workshops and events, make it a point to share the ways in which you are working with the students on issues of equity, have the children report through presentation, music and songs, etc., about what they learned about, and from, each other. Offer parents who attend these events opportunities to add to the conversation after the presentation, performance or workshop.

Use Knowledge From Professional Development Opportunities to Support The Development of Positive Literate Identities in Classrooms

Throughout this study, part of my research question sought to understand how teachers used knowledge gained from our professional development experiences to support students' positive literate identities in their classrooms. Findings demonstrate how new classroom practices were generated and former classroom practices were enhanced. Some of those practices, implications for using knowledge of race, culture, and language to support children's positive literate identities, include:

- Lyndsay's classroom use of brag notes in her *Book of Sunbeams* to bring in information from home regarding the children's behavior, interests, and interactions with family and community members.
- Stepping outside of our cultural comfort zones and into homes and communities of our students and families to learn more about them, what they valued, and what they wanted us, as educators, to know about them as a family.
- Sharing family photos and using them in a new way: Prior to our learning about race, culture and language, Tammy merely displayed the students' family pictures; through her new understandings, she began incorporating them as part of her lessons and transitions throughout the day.
- Talking about race during students' construction of self portraits: Kim's comfort in talking about race when comparing and describing students' self portraits came about through removing the taboo of talking about race in our many professional development experiences.
- Incorporating multiple languages in the morning message: All three teachers began using multiple languages in their morning messages more often within the message as well as regularly throughout the school year.
- Enhancing written conversations by supporting students' culture, language and/or religion through the writing.
- Creating children's books based on the knowledge, cultures and languages of the students in the class.

- Utilizing children’s multicultural literature to support students’ identities and funds of knowledge.

Member checking and other data made it clear that these new and enhanced practices were a direct result of the interplay of a variety of intentionally-focused and theoretically consistent professional development experiences in which the teachers and I engaged over time. Suggestions for teachers seeking to impact classroom practices in similar ways are:

- Learn more about the nature of children’s learning and knowledge and the importance of drawing from their cultural and linguistic resources in their academic success. Books such as *Black Ants and Buddhists: Thinking Critically and Teaching Differently in the Primary Grades* (Cowhey, 2006) and articles such as “*We’ve Been Doing it Your Way Long Enough*”: *Syncretism as a Critical Process* (Long, et al., 2013) and *First Steps in Conducting Counter Narratives of Young Children and Their Families* (López-Robertson, Long & Turner-Nash, 2010) are excellent examples of resources to learn from other successful teachers working to support students in culturally responsive and equitable ways. See Table 7.1 for more suggestions.
- Continuously reflect on classroom practices and ask how they can be enhanced to make them more culturally relevant to your students. Think about the vast amount of parent and family resources that could be used and included in your classroom. Think about the communities in which your

students live, play and worship and how information can be utilized in terms of resources or knowledge.

What If All The Students Are White or Only Speak English?

In this study, we were fortunate to have a diverse student population including socioeconomic, religious, cultural, racial, and linguistic diversity. Teachers were able to utilize resources both in and outside of school to illuminate the legitimacy of languages other than English and the richness of cultural and religious diversity. This supported individual students while teaching others about the other ways of being, knowing, thinking and speaking. However, in the event that classrooms consist of all White, middle-class students, the question then becomes: How do we embrace cultures and languages in our classrooms while also expanding beyond them?

Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2006) suggest that while it is important to support the identity of White middle-class students through the strategies similar to those expressed throughout this chapter, to broaden the world views of the White students, we have a responsibility to work to take extra steps to invite people of Color and speakers of languages other than English in classrooms to demonstrate, make visible, and explicitly express the importance of diversity. We have a responsibility to engage classes of all White middle-class students in racial, cultural, and language settings and events beyond their own worlds and then to use those experiences to build appreciations of the contributions of a range of groups to the world in which we live. An extra effort needs to be made by teachers to step outside of their cultural comfort zones to learn and gather as many resources as possible to make that visible as often as possible in classrooms each day.

Implications for Future Research

As I engaged in this study, at each step of the process I found myself thinking of the ways that this research could have been conducted differently or might have been enhanced as well as new gaps created by the work. First, in terms of the methodological design, other possibilities to lend further insights about how professional development might support teachers in supporting students' positive literate identities might be to:

- *Focus on one child and family per teacher and follow the teachers into their classrooms in support of that one child and their family.* While my study included classroom practices and included families, I did not focus on any one family or child in the classroom. I believe this would have allowed classroom observations and home and community visits to be more focused. Therefore research that involves case studies of one student and family in each classroom may offer further insight into how to best support students' positive literate identities.
- *Increase length of time of the study.* This study was conducted during the first part of the school year (August –December), while the length of time provided significant data that helped understand the implications of professional development on classroom practices, the study would have benefited from data collected for an entire school year and possibly longer. Longitudinal studies in this area may provide clearer pictures and deeper insight of teacher growth and understanding as well as student impact and overall achievement.
- *Include parents and other family members as participants in the professional development experiences and study that process.* As stated throughout this

chapter, one limitation of this study was that parents and other family members were not a part of our professional development conversations. I believe it would greatly enhance understandings, reduce instances of bias, and strengthen teachers' abilities to interrupt bias if parents and families were engaged in this way. There is limited research that looks at that involvement of family members in professional development conversations. Although there are some researchers who do discuss the importance of this work (Allen , 2007; 2010; Gregory, Long and Volk, 2004), more research is warranted, particularly as it is initiated from within schools.

- *Involve Teaching Assistants in professional development experiences and study that process.* Despite the many references in this study to the importance of teaching assistants in sustaining supportive learning environments for students (particularly as it related to supporting students who spoke languages other than English), I did not include them in our professional development experiences. However, teaching assistants work as much with students as teachers, are often directly involved in the children's communities, and are also responsible for student learning outcomes, research is warranted that documents their involvement in professional development conversations as well.
- *Include a focus on historical antecedents and structural/institutional aspects of discrimination.* In this study we only scratched the surface of the implications of racism on student learning. We did not explore historical antecedents or institutional issues so necessary for teachers to understand the

insidious and embedded nature of discrimination. I believe that not spending time exploring racism in this way at the beginning of our study made it more difficult for the teachers to see it as foundational to our work.

As I continue to read, learn, and understand, I recognize that much more needs to be done in educational settings to address issues of race, culture, and language with students, teachers, assistants, parents and families. Specifically, seeking to understand how these conversations are initiated and sustained asking: What are the challenges unique to these conversations and how are they negotiated? How does that knowledge translate into better classroom practices supportive of students' identities?

Conclusion to the Study

As I reflect on my journey with teachers in our exploration of issues of race, culture and language in the interest of supporting students' positive literate identities, I am reminded of the hefty responsibility we accept to ensure that classrooms are spaces where equitable learning opportunities exist for all children. The ability to create such learning places requires much more on our part as educators than just kind and caring intentions. It requires administrative vision and support for intentional study, deliberate actions, and an underlying understanding as to why this work is so important.

Additionally, it requires educators to have unwavering convictions about uncovering racism, bias and discrimination and meeting them head on in the quest to generate new possibilities for classroom practice that contradict those messages.

I entered this study because I was frustrated with ways in which we, as a faculty, typically engaged in existing discussions of diversity and I was concerned about the children regularly underserved in schools throughout our state and our nation. I felt that

too many discussions of discrimination were treated as add-ons to other topics. Prior to this study, I never once left any professional development sessions (that claimed to explore diversity issues) any more knowledgeable about how to better serve our students and/or their families. They were fun, we laughed and enjoyed each other's company, but they never helped us to think critically or explore the ways in which we served to perpetuate a racist, Euro-centric status quo or how we might interrupt it in the interest of serving every child well. It was important for me as an administrator charged with the responsibility for 13 teachers, 29 assistants and 260 students to provide the best possible teaching and learning environment that I possibly could. To do this required a change in the way we engaged in professional development.

As the administrator and facilitator of our professional development experiences, I did not always feel confident or successful in my attempts but I had to dig my heels in, stay focused and committed to this work. Due to this dogmatic stance, some teachers continued the journey with me, others did not. The teachers who followed me, in particular Kim, Lyndsay and Tammy, spent many hours in professional development conversations courageously discussing difficult issues. We faced many challenges along the way and learned how best to negotiate them given our knowledge and understanding. However, in no way did we ever arrive. In fact, we merely scratched the surface of what I hope will become a life-long process of exploration.

At the same time, due to the consistency, commitment, and focus of many professional development engagements and conversations about race, culture and language, the teachers and I gained more knowledge about how to support students' positive literate identities. Teachers' classroom practices were enhanced and new

practices emerged. Although parents and families participated in classroom activities in the past, teachers grew to understand how very important parents and families were in support of children's learning in and out of school.

Home and community visits were important in this process because we were able to tap into students' funds of knowledge and gain cultural insights outside of school. Teachers saw me engage in these activities with them; they knew it was something I believed in strongly. As a result, the home and community visits positioned us to see the students and their families in a new light; as literate outside of school: Taj at the mosque; Thom during Jewish holiday services; and Sarah at dance class, to name a few. Parents and families added important perspectives to our classrooms as they immersed the teachers and students in their languages and cultures through music, movement, stories and activities. Dra. López-Robertson, Dr. Baghdadadi and Mr. and Mrs. Muller, among many, supported their children's positive literate identities each time they came into their classrooms and expanded the understandings of all children by exposing them to authentic experiences regarding their cultures, languages and experiences.

As the administrator and researcher in this study I learned about myself, perhaps more than anything else. I learned that I was a bit naïve in my initial attempts to facilitate professional development conversations. It was only through constant dialogue with my doctoral advisor, probing me to explain and expand my thinking, that I was able to recognize some of the reasons why we only scratched the surface of what was possible. Thus, this study has helped me to reflect more profoundly than I ever have on my own attitudes and actions.

To administrators, teachers and educational professionals wishing to engage in this work, while there will be a plethora of challenges along the way, it is however important to recognize that, in the end it comes down to doing what is right for the students and families we are charged to serve each day. Despite continued efforts toward closing the achievement gap, there continues to be great disparities among educational opportunities for White students and students of Color. This tells us that what we are doing in schools is not working. For early childhood educators, this means we have to start early – in preschool and kindergarten - to understand what constitutes teaching that often leaves out a vast majority of our students. We need to operate from a strengths-based perspective and not from a deficit stance. Conversations about race, culture and language allow us to see the brilliance in students.

As a result of this study, I believe even more firmly that administrators have the greatest responsibility and power to create professional development opportunities that help teachers to support students in ways that can have direct impact on their learning outcomes specifically in terms of their positive literate identities. We know what to do and how to do it; but more importantly we know *why* we have to do it - our students deserve nothing less.

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APPENDIX A

Current Understandings about Language and Literacy Learning

Name Lyndsay

Date 6/17/08

Children learn to read by: environmental print, read-alouds, meaningful print, pictures. From read-alouds children learn that the pictures correspond with the words, and when asked questions about comprehension the child will draw in focus about the whole language. (whole-part-whole)

As a teacher, I believe that it will be my responsibility to do the following things to help children learn to read and write: Display print and environmental print in my classroom, Morning message, Read-alouds, and bring in literacy from the children's homes + experiences

When I think about children from low socioeconomic homes...

I worry that: Parents will not be able to meet physical needs and may not be able to spend as much time w/ their child b/c of work. (not just b/c of socioeconomic status)

I wonder about: Their views on education

I think that language and literacy in their homes is: there, but they may not know how to use it, just like many parents/families

I think that their parents... love and care for their children but don't have enough time to be fully involved in everyday life.

I think that people often have stereotypes about them like: not caring for their children b/c they work all the time. Don't have good hygiene b/c parents don't care.

APPENDIX B

Research and Development Goals-Based Evaluation

Teacher's name Tammy Grade(s)/subject(s) PreK /Kindergarten
 District RSD2 School SCRCD
 Dates of GBE cycle from 9/2008 to 9/2013

♦ **Goal:** To develop a deeper understanding of diversity and cultures outside our own to enhance teaching and learning in our classrooms.
 (This goal is number 1 of 1 goals for the educator's five-year GBE cycle.)

♦ **Duration of goal:**

Anticipated beginning date (*school year*): 9/18/2008 Anticipated completion date (*school year*): 2013

♦ **Types of evidence** required to verify annual progress/overall goal accomplishment:

- meet monthly as a diversity group
- go in to homes of families outside our own to increase knowledge and awareness of different cultures.
- to attend local community events such as the Greek Festival, India Day, etc.
- journal our journey over time looking at changes in thinking
- invite parents and community people to speak with our faculty about diversity issues
- write a grant to provide money and opportunities for professional development in the area of diversity
- attend events that support diversity issues
- Conduct and participate in book studies that foster greater awareness of diversity.
- Conduct a Family Heritage Night each year
- incorporate our new understandings into the classroom and our lessons

♦ **Level of performance** required to determine satisfactory progress/goal accomplishment:

Satisfactory performance is required. This is measured by:

- Attendance at monthly diversity meetings-sign in sheets serve as documentation
- Participation in group discussions-journals serve as documentation as well as video or audio tape
- Attendance at conferences, workshops or presentations- documentation is needed
- Participation in book studies- reflection of book study used as documentation
- Participation in off campus activities with students and families- interviews, pictures or journals serve as documentation.

♦ **Certificate renewal:**

Activities related to this goal

- ☒ may apply toward this educator's certificate renewal *if* approved by the district.
☐ may not apply toward this educator's certificate renewal.

The above plan was jointly prepared and agreed upon by the following individuals: [*please sign*]

Educator: _____ Date: _____

Supervisor: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C

2008-2009 Goals-Based Diversity Group Meetings

Thursday Afternoons

3:30-4:30pm

Date: September 2008

Topic: Discussion of Home and Community visits

Place: Spears Creek Road Child Development

Assignment: Go into the home of one student outside your culture

Date: October, 2008

Topic: Learn more about ourselves: Paint Me Like I Am-Nicki Grimes Poems

Assignment: Create a poem in the style of Grimes Poems

Place: SCRCD

Date: November, 2008

Topic: Latino Issues

Presenter: Dr. Julia López-Robertson

Place: SCRCD

Date: January 2009

Topic: Family Heritage Night

Presenters: Families shared displays of their family heritage, culture, traditions

Place: SCRCD

Assignment: Write a reflection of your experience

Date: February 2009

Topic: Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Issues

Film: It's Elementary

Place: SCRCD

Assignment: Write a response to the film

Date: March, 2009

Topic: Stereotypes- Misunderstandings of Ethnic Groups

Assignment: Watch the Movie *Crash*

Place: SCRCD

APPENDIX D

2009-2010 Goals-Based Diversity Group Meeting

Thursday Afternoons

3:30-4:30pm

Date: September 17, 2009

Topic: Discussion of Home and Community visits

Assignment: Go into the home of one student outside your culture

Place: SCRCD

Date: October 15, 2009

Topic: Politically Correct Terminology and Deficit Language

Assignment: Read: Rethinking Early Childhood Education

Place: SCRCD

Date: November, 2009

Topic: Language Marginalization

Film: The Language You Cry In

Assignment: Write a response to the film

Place: SCRCD

Date: January 21, 2010

Topic: Family Heritage Night

Presenters: Families shared displays of their family heritage, culture, traditions

Assignment: Write a reflection of your experience

Place: SCRCD

Date: March 18, 2010

Topic: Who are you?: Exploring our Beliefs

Assignment: Write Five question poem from Dr. Boutte's presentation

Place: SCRCD

Date: April 15, 2010

Topic: African American Children's Literature

Presenter: Dr. Dianne Johnson

Assignment: Attend presentation by Dr. Johnson

Place: University of South Carolina

Date: May 20, 2010

Topic: Home and Community Literacies: Discuss Dr. Long's Presentation
Assignment: Begin planning for home and community visits for next school year
Place: SCRCD

APPENDIX E

2010-2011 Goals-Based Diversity Group Meetings August –December 2010

August 2010

Title: Confronting Our Cultural Selves in Support of Students' Positive Literate Identities

Rationale: An understanding of others requires first an understanding of ourselves. Creating positive learning environments for students means learning to confront our beliefs and understanding of other ways of knowing.

Objectives:

- To understand that we are continually evolving as teachers.
- To understand that what we believe shapes the way we teach and engage with students.
- To understand our role as educators and that in order for all our students to succeed, we must look at how we can change our practice ensure an equitable education for all

Reading:

Chapters from: Rethinking Multicultural Education (2009)
Introduction

Topics for conversation:

What have we learned about ourselves from the past two years?

If we think of change in terms of bettering our teaching practices, what may that include in terms of what we need to explore as a faculty in terms of understanding race, identity development, and cultural and linguistic marginalization?

Introduce and discuss diversity group plan and focus for the year.

Reflection:

Write in your journals to be turned in.

September 2010

Title: Identity Development

Rationale: An understanding of identity development serves to assist in supporting students' learning by creating learning environments respectful of all ways of knowing.

Objectives:

- To understand that children come to school with an identity steeped in cultural and linguistic knowledge that represents valid, efficient, and meaningful ways to communicate and get along in the world
- To discuss how students' literate identities are destroyed or supported in schools
- To understand the importance of avoiding deficit language and attitudes and the impact it has on learning outcomes for students

Readings:

Book Study: Teachers will choose books to read to share with the group. Options include:
Growing Up Literate, Denny Taylor and Catherine Dorsey-Gaines
Reading Families, Catherine Compton-Lilly
Telling a Different Story, Catherine Wilson
Other People's Words, Victoria Purcell-Gates
Articles from: *Language Arts*, (López-Robertson, Long & Turner-Nash, 2010)

Topics for conversation:

What were the strengths of the people in the book that you read?
What were the language and literacy practices that they used in their daily lives? Were they valued in school? How did the school portray the children's literate identities?
What can we learn from these studies?
Share key lines from the book that you felt were important to know and to share with the group.

Reflection:

Write in your journals to be turned in.

Guiding questions for your home visit:

What you would like me to know about your child? Your family?
What do you like to do as a family?
What are your child strength's? fears?
How did he/she come to know that? Who are the people in his/her life that taught them?
Where do you feel most valued? Who are the people that make you feel that way?

What has been your experience with school? How would you like for schools-teachers and administration to support you and your child in their learning? If possible, what would you like to see changed?

October 2010

Title: Cultural and Linguistic Marginalization

Rationale: Cultural and linguistic marginalization occurs in many schools all across the United States. Educators' understanding of how culture and language can be used to bridge learning between home and school is critical in supporting students' literate identities.

Objectives:

- To understand that culture is embedded in language and literacy
- To understand that cultural and linguistic marginalization serves to impede students' learning and performance in schools
- To understand that home and community knowledge and variety of literacy practices continue to develop throughout children's lives in meaningful ways

Readings:

My Name is Maria Isabel, Alma Flor Ada (1995)

Articles from: Education Rethinking Early Childhood (2008)

Unwrapping the Holidays

Rethinking Multicultural Education (2009)

And Then I Went to School

Ebonics and Culturally Responsive Instruction

Taking a Chance with Words

Tongue-Tied, Santa Ana, O. (2004)

Suite for Ebony and Phonics: Reflections on African American English

Topics for conversation:

What were some of the ways that children's culture and language were marginalized in these readings?

What do you think happens to students' learning when their culture and language are marginalized?

What are the ways we, as educators, could work to value home and community language and literacies at school? What might that look like in your classrooms?

Reflections:

Write in journals to be turned in.

Guiding questions for your home visit:

What is the origin of your child's/family's name?

Who are the easiest people in your life with whom you communicate? Who are the people who understand you the most?
What are some of the favorite expressions of your family? When do you use them and why?
At school, when is it the easiest to communicate with the administrators, the teachers? When do you find it most difficult?
What are some of the favorite expressions of your family? When do you use them and why?
At school, when is it the easiest to communicate with the administrators, the teachers? When do you find it most difficult?
Where do you think people value your culture, language, traditions the most? The least? Where are the places in your world where it's easiest to communicate? What makes it easier?
Where is it difficult to communicate? What makes it difficult?

Reflection:

Write in your journals to be turned in.

November 2010

Title: Issues of Race:

Rationale: The ideology of 'race' drives much of what happens in the world and in education. We must tie together the issues of race, identity, hegemony, and education (Hillard, 2009).

Objectives:

- To understand how race is tied to learning
- To understand issues of race and the acknowledgement of unearned privilege and unequal power
- To understand the implications for supporting students' language and literacy development.

Readings:

Articles from: Rethinking Multicultural Education (2009)

Once Upon a Genocide: Columbus in children's literature

Race and the Achievement Gap

What Do We Need To Know Now?

Book study: Racially Equitable Teaching, Earick, M (2009)

Other readings: We Can't Teach What We Don't Know, Howard, G. (2006)

Can Talk About Race? Tatum, B. (2007)

Topics for conversation:

Discuss the differences among individual racism, cultural racism, and institutional racism that Earick writes about. How do we as a school contribute to these? What can we do to avoid them?

How does racism hinder students' learning? Who suffers? Why?

What are the goals of RET? How can we align them with the goals for our program?

How does the understanding of race, power, and hegemony help in supporting students' positive literate identities?

Reflection:

Write in your journals to be turned in to Sabina

Guiding questions for your home visit:

Where have you been when you have felt you were discriminated against because of your Color, culture, or language?

Do you mind sharing some of those experiences with me? How did they make you feel?

What do you think schools should do differently? The administration? The Teachers?

Reflection:

Write in your journals to be turned in

December 2010

Title: Language and Literacy Development

Rationale: Children are continually becoming more literate as they engage in daily interactions with other language and literacy users; and that the ways children see themselves as literate learners depends largely on the home and cultural experiences they bring with them to school. Teachers need to be versed in the ways to continually meet the need of students' language and literacy development while keeping the issues of race, identity and cultural and linguistic marginalization ever at the forefront of their understanding as they work towards nudging children further in their development.

Objectives:

- To understand that language and literacy is a continual process
- To understand that we can not separate conversations regarding race, identity and cultural and linguistic marginalization from our discussions of language and literacy development

Readings:

Articles from: *Language Arts*; and

Critical Issues in Early Literacy, Goodman & Martens, Eds. (2007)

Effective Young Beginning Readers
Invisible Mediators of Literacy: Learning in Multicultural
Communities

Book study: Black Ants and Buddhists, Cowhey, M. (2006)
Racism, Poverty, and Power, Compton-Lilly, C. (2004)

Topics for conversation:

In what ways are you supporting your students' positive literate identities?
What have you learned that has helped you support your students' literate identities?
Specifically in what ways has that information helped you?

Reflection:

Write in your journals to be turned in.

Guiding questions for your home visit:

What are some of the ways your child uses language at home?
What are some of the things he/she likes to do with language and literacy?
How does he/she communicate best?
Go on a literacy dig with your student in his/her home. What did you learn about your student in terms of their literate identity? How does the child's family see the child in terms of their literate identity?
In what ways is your child different at home then he/she is at school? Why do you think that is so?

APPENDIX F

Informed Consent Form – Students/Families

Dear Families,

It is without a doubt a privilege to work with you and your children. In addition to my role as Lead Teacher of the SCR CD Program, I am also a Doctoral Candidate in Early Childhood Education, University of South Carolina, under the direction of Dr. Susi Long, Department of Language and Literacy. While working with children and their teachers, I have become increasingly interested in how, as an administrator, I can support teachers as we learn to better support our students' positive literate identities in our early childhood setting. This dissertation research could positively impact the future of early childhood education, and in particular practices that support teachers' awareness of race, culture and language, which further may support language and literacy practices in the classroom. All information obtained will remain confidential in all written manuscripts that result from this study by use of pseudonyms. I am happy to answer any questions in person, by phone (803) 865-5355 or by email smosso@richland2.org. Thank you very much, and as always, I am looking forward to working closely with you, your child and their teacher this year.

Sincerely,

Sabina Mosso-Taylor
Lead Teacher/Researcher

This form regards permission for my child to participate in the dissertation research carried out in collaboration with the teacher, _____, and the lead teacher/researcher, Sabina Mosso-Taylor, to better understand how teachers support students' positive literate identities. The study will be conducted from August through December 2010. I understand that:

- This research captures what naturally occurs in the classroom and does not interfere with typical daily activities.
- Classroom activities will be video taped and some class work will be photocopied.
- Children will be interviewed by Mrs. Mosso-Taylor regarding their perceptions of themselves as language and literacy users.
- All data will be kept in a locked and secure facility, and I am welcome to request to review copies of data at any time.
- All student identity will be kept confidential and the use of pseudonyms will be used.
- I can at any time request that my child's participation in the research study be discontinued with no penalty.

Please check appropriate line:

☐ I give permission for my child to participate in the dissertation research.

___I **do not** give permission for my child to participate in the dissertation research.

Parent's signature

Date

Child's name

APPENDIX G

Informed Consent Form – Teachers

Background Information and Purpose

In addition to being the Lead Teacher of the SCR CD Program, Sabina Mosso-Taylor is a doctoral candidate in Early Childhood Education, University of South Carolina, under the direction of Dr. Susi Long, Department of Language and Literacy. Her dissertation research seeks to understand how the use of professional development grounded in conversations about race, cultural, and linguistic marginalization support teachers' practices which may in turn support students' positive literate identities in early childhood settings.

Benefits

While you may not directly benefit from this study, you will have helped in bringing awareness to how best to support young children's positive literate identities in early childhood settings.

Risks

There are no known risks, physical, emotional, legal, financial, or social, involved with participation in this study.

Confidentiality

All information collected, as part of this study will be kept strictly confidential. To ensure confidentiality, videotapes will be kept separate from transcripts and informed consent forms. The materials will be kept in a secure location. Identifying information will be removed from the transcripts and no identifying information will appear in the dissertation.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision, whether or not to participate, will not affect your relationship with SCR Child Development nor the University of South Carolina. No deception will be involved in this study and you are free to end the study at anytime without penalty. Your input into the study is appreciated and valued and you may ask questions at any time.

Questions about the Study

If you have any questions about the research study you may contact Sabina Mosso-Taylor at (803) 513-9339 or email smosso@richland2.org

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

Participant Statement:

This study described above has been explained to me. I understand that I am consenting to participate in classroom observations, one-to-one, focus group and/or monthly

diversity meetings and professional development meetings, which will be audio or videotaped. If I have any questions I know I can contact the person listed above.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX H

Transcription Conventions

Rowe, D. (1994) Preschoolers as authors (p.223)

Direct transcription: when speech is transcribed verbatim from videotape (VT) or audiotape (AT) or field notes, it is enclosed in quotation marks (e.g., “It’s a dot rainbow”).

Emphasis: where a word or syllable is spoken with extra emphasis, it is underlined (e.g., “Staple regrabber!”).

Simultaneous speech: where two people speak at once, the overlapping portion of their utterances are enclosed with slash marks (e.g., /”Right!”/ says Jared. “/Right/” agrees Tokkumma.).

Incompleteness: where an utterance is interrupted or otherwise left incomplete, this is indicated by “-” (e.g., “It’s- That’s musical notes.”).

Pausing: when there are noticeable pauses either within or between utterances, this is indicated by a series of dots (e.g.,...).

Inaudible speech: where words or phrases are completely inaudible, this is indicated by a series asterisks enclosed in parentheses (e.g., (***)). The number of asterisks is an estimate of the number of words which were spoken.

Tentative transcription: when the exact transcription of speech is difficult, this is indicated by enclosing a probable transcription in parentheses (e.g., “We make a somebody (doubledoo).”).

Omitted conversation: when transcripts have been shortened, this is indicated by a series of carets (e.g., ^^).

Explanatory comments: when explanatory comments are added to direct transcription, they are enclosed in brackets, (e.g., Look it’s long [the tail], or marked by use of narrative conventions (e.g., “Oh, you want to draw a monkey?” I guess.)” (p. 223).

APPENDIX I

Research Timeline

Month 2010/11	Administrator/Researcher	Teachers	Students	Families
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defend dissertation proposal Obtain IRB approval Obtain direct approval 			
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare for professional development for 2010-2011 school year Submit professional development request to district 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet with Tammy, Kim, and Lyndsay to review dissertation proposal 		
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summer Meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet with Tammy, Kim, and Lyndsay to discuss procedures of data collection and obtain informed consent 		
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct program open house Obtain informed consent from parents Begin collecting data Inservice Meeting Begin Diversity Group meetings once a month 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend program open house Submit informed consent 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend program open house Submit informed consent
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begin videotaping in all three classrooms once a month Begin going into homes and communities Conduct monthly Fous Group meetings with Tammy, Kim, and Lyndsay Participant observation approximately 1-2 times per month per classroom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begin going into students' homes and communities Diversity Group meeting (3rd Thursday) Record notes in teacher journal: classroom, home and community visits, and Diversity Group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begin collecting student work samples/pictures Videotape each classroom one time each month Student interviews Take researcher field notes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family/ community visits

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take field notes • Transcribe and member check 	<p>meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-to-One meetings with researcher, approximately once a month to review data 		
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Videotape in all three classrooms once a month • Go into homes and communities • Diversity meeting once a month • Conduct monthly meetings with Tammy, Kim, and Lyndsay to review data • Participant observation 1-2 times a week per classroom • Inservice meeting • Take field notes • Transcribe and member check 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go into students' homes and communities • Record notes in teacher journal: classroom, home and community visits, and goals-based diversity meetings • Diversity Group meeting (3rd Thursday) • One-to-One meetings with researcher, approximately once a month to review data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect student interviews/work samples/pictures • Videotape each classroom one time each month • Student interviews • Take researcher field notes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family/ community visits
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Videotape in all three classrooms once a month • Go into homes and communities • Conduct Focus Group and One-to-One meetings with Tammy, Kim, and Lyndsay to review data once a month collectively • Participant observation 1-2 times a week per classroom • Take field notes • Transcribe and member check 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go into students' homes and communities • Record notes in teacher journal: classroom, home and community visits, and goals-based diversity meetings • Diversity Group meeting (3rd Thursday) • One-to-One meetings with researcher, once a month, to review data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect student interviews/work samples/pictures • Videotape each classroom one time each month • Student interviews • Take researcher field notes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family/ community visits
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Videotape in all three classrooms once a month • Go into homes and communities • Conduct Focus Group and One-to-One 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go into students' homes and communities • Record notes in teacher journal: classroom, home and community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect student interviews/work samples/pictures • Videotape each classroom one time each month 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family/ community visits

	meetings with Tammy, Kim, and Lyndsay to review data once a month collectively <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant observation 1-2 times a week per classroom • Take field notes • Transcribe and member check 	visits, and goals-based diversity meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity Group meeting (3rd Thursday) • One-to- One meetings with researcher, once a month, to review data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student interviews • Take researcher field notes 	
Jan.- May, 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze data • Transcribe • Member check 			

APPENDIX J

All About My Culture

Parent/Families, please tell us about your family's culture. Completion of this survey aids in our ability to provide us with knowledge that can support classroom curriculum, strategies and activities reflective of the children in our program.

My name is:_____

My family is from:_____

That makes me:_____

The language/s my family speaks/spoke are:

Some games from my culture include:_____

Some recipes or food from my culture are:_____

and my favorite is_____

Some music from my culture includes:_____

Some of my family traditions are:_____

I would like to share information about our culture/language or family traditions with the class. Please list times you are available:

APPENDIX K

PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

(NAYEC 2.A.01)

The staff and faculty of the SCRC D recognize and affirm the concept that the early formative years of childhood are crucial to optimum development. Further, we believe that every child, regardless of cultural, physical, or intellectual differences should be afforded the kinds of experiences that will ultimately enable him/her to become a self-fulfilled, contributing member of society.

We respect each and every child as a unique and dynamic being; therefore, to best meet the needs of our children, variety, quality, and relevance are the cornerstones of our program. Cognizant that all aspects of development are interwoven, the learning environment is designed to foster and sustain intellectual, social, personal, emotional, physical and creative growth simultaneously. To promote such growth, we strive to maintain a program that is child-centered and experienced-based. We believe that teachers should serve as guides and facilitators of learning and should provide essential sensory, perceptual motor experiences for each individual child.

We strive to ensure a high quality program for all children. High quality encompassing, but not limiting to, the following:

- For students to be taught in a safe, secure physical and emotional environment;
- For all students in child development to be nurtured, supported and empowered to be seekers of knowledge and life-long learners;
- For students to understand that learning is not just what happens within the four walls of the classroom but EVERYWHERE;
- For students to understand that their role in society is important at any age and that their contributions have a great deal of impact in their community;
- For students to develop an appreciation for all people and living things through their interactions and experiences with one another and their environment.
- To value input from families and seek to learn from and with them.

Thus, it is our conviction that a comprehensive, sound early childhood curriculum should enable each child to:

1. Continue to foster a positive identity.
2. Grow in his/her ability to relate, to interact, and to communicate effectively with peers and adults.
3. Acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary for critical thinking, creative expression, and productivity in an ever-changing world.

We respect the role and the rights of parents and families and seek a cooperative home-school relationship. We will endeavor to create and sustain an atmosphere of welcome to encourage families to contribute to and to benefit from our program.