Learning To Become Culturally Responsive Critical Inquirers: A Never Ending Journey

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by

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Dedication

To Tania, whose energy and thrive for living inspire me to be the best I can and to Alfredo, for his patience and support throughout this process.
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To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating. (Barad, 2007, p. ix)

As Karen Barad (2007) skillfully explains it, we tie our existence to those around us in multiple ways. It is through those entanglements that we become who we are and emerge as unique human beings. Our experiences are alive in the present—in what we do, think, and believe—and our present survives as a silent witness to this past. To those who supported me and helped me reach this very important and personal goal, I thank you.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the nuances of becoming a culturally responsive critical inquirer. A postcritical ethnographic case study offered the frame to describe my attempts to produce and implement culturally responsive curriculum with two teachers in a bilingual second grade classroom. Data included participant observations over a six–month period, field notes from classroom observations, interviews to different stakeholders, and documents and artifacts analysis. I used narrative to provide an ethnographic description of the site, and to describe the research participants and our interactions. I did so in order to describe the ways in which personal histories, school, and district structures, combined with social conditions, circumscribed teachers’ responses to my invitation to work together to incorporate a culturally responsive stance into classroom practices. I relied on the dialogues and expressions that I audio recorded during my time with the teachers and subsequently transcribed and used these to present a multivoiced narrative that positions the participants as collaborators in this study.
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Chapter 1: Introduction and Theoretical Framework

All societies produce strangers; but each kind of society produces its own kind of stranger, and produces them in its own inimitable way. If the strangers are the people who do not fit the cognitive, moral, or aesthetic map of the world... if they, therefore, by their sheer presence, make obscure what ought to be transparent, confuse what ought to be a straightforward recipe for action, and/or prevent the satisfaction from being fully satisfying; if they pollute the joy with anxiety while making the forbidden fruit alluring; if they befog and eclipse the boundary lines which ought to be clearly seen; if, having done all this, they gestate uncertainty, which in its turn breeds the discomfort of feeling lost—then each society produces such strangers. (Bauman, 1997, p. 17)

My interest in culturally responsive teaching is rooted in my experiences with children who bring discomfort to their teachers, children—who disrupt the notion of the expected in mainstream classrooms. Generally, those children are from minoritized groups because of their language patterns, emergent knowledge of English, or behaviors they exhibit that contravene the culture of silence that prevails in today’s classrooms (Wolk, 2008). I believe that teachers who are culturally responsive (Gay, 2010) adapt their learning engagements to serve the needs of all the students in their educational communities. In this study, the term culturally responsive teaching means the ability educators can develop to recognize and value every child’s cultural heritage. Such knowledge gives teachers the opportunity to connect the curriculum with the cultural backgrounds of students in their classrooms and make their learning experiences positive and meaningful.
**Rationale**

There is considerable agreement about the need for teachers to become culturally responsive, in order to turn their classrooms into equitable places for all children (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010; Ladson–Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2010). Scholars and researchers are deeply concerned with improving teachers’ practices in ways that include the cultural heritages of their students. However, despite the amount of attention culturally responsive pedagogies receive in teaching and educational research circles, the number of studies that provide specific insights into the construction and implementation of culturally responsive curriculum remains scarce. As Boutte, Kelly–Jackson, and Johnson (2010) pointed out, “there is much theoretical talk about culturally relevant pedagogy, but few explicit classroom examples that help teachers envision possibilities and gain insights on ways to deepen their understanding of the complexities involved in the process [of becoming culturally responsive]” (p. 2). In fact, I found only three studies that specifically explored the use of culturally responsive teaching in classroom contexts. The first one, Esposito and Swain (2009), examined the ways in which seven African American urban teachers implemented what the authors named culturally relevant pedagogies in their classrooms. The second study (Milner, 2011), analyzed how a European American science teacher built his cultural competence in a highly diverse urban school. The third study (Wyatt, 2014) analyzed how seven teachers serving culturally and linguistically diverse students in Hawai’i, combined a scripted program with culturally responsive pedagogies. None of these studies involved working with teachers (which would have allowed them to be part of a collaborative effort to produce culturally responsive curriculum). Nor did they analyze what collaboration entailed.
I conducted my study to fill this gap in the literature. I wanted to explore different ways to become culturally responsive in a collaborative environment that included teachers, students, and a researcher, and to use such knowledge to enrich the curriculum and sustain culturally responsive practices across time. To guide my inquiry, I asked the following questions: (1) What characterizes the co-construction of a culturally responsive curriculum? (2) What characterizes the co-implementation of a culturally responsive curriculum? (3) What is the impact of a culturally responsive curriculum on teachers, students, and researcher?

My Beliefs: The Guiding Principles of My Work

“Knowledge depends on the capacity of the knower; for what is known is in the knower according to the measure of his capacity” (Saint Thomas Aquinas, 1a.14.1).

My knowledge about cultural responsive teaching is grounded in semiotics, linguistic anthropology, and sociocultural theories of learning, philosophy, and postcritical studies. These fields help illuminate the situated and personal nature of learning, culture, and language and offer me theoretical constructs I can use to understand processes of socialization, teaching, and learning. Additionally, they provide a framework through which I am able to look at the experiences of children from minoritized groups and recognize the ways that systems of power perpetuate views that keep teachers from educating them well. It also makes evident my responsibility to take action.

My theoretical framework rests on a series of beliefs that function as guiding principles for my research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). There are five main elements: (1) knowledge is constructed through transactional processes we constantly engage in with
the world around us; (2) culture is a personal, fluid process, a product of a transaction between our selves and the world; (3) learning is the result of a construction with others; (4) language plays a crucial role in the construction and enactment of our cultural ideologies; and (5) there is a close relationship between power and the kind of knowledge we can access.

**Knowledge is constructed through transactional processes.** My belief that knowledge is a construction originates in Peircian semiotics. Charles S. Peirce (1955), a scholar of philosophy and the father of pragmatism (the idea that thought is an instrument for action and problem solving), developed a constructive, interpretative, and transactional theory that functions as a logical epistemological base to understand the way we make meaning and, therefore, produce knowledge. His theory is constructive because it holds that learning is not transferred from one person to another (as from teacher to student); rather, Peirce’s theory posits that knowledge is something built by learners through a process of inquiry. The theory is interpretative because it requires someone to make meaning of signs—such as things, thoughts, gestures, and situations from which we can construct meaning—and thus, positions the meaning maker as an active interpretant of the world. Finally, the theory is transactional because people make meaning of signs through a three-part, semiotic process.

Peirce (1995) explained meaning as a triadic relation that is understood only in the relationship between firsts and seconds (p. 91). He grounded his triadic model of meaning–making (or knowledge construction) in the idea that every phenomenon has three characteristics: firstness, secondness, and thirdness. Firstness suggests possibility, feeling, quality, and chance. A first is something that exists by itself outside our
awareness. Secondness refers to the entities or signs that bring attention to the existence of firsts and exist only in relation to firsts. Thirdness refers to ideas that mediate between firsts and seconds. Together, they represent the future, the thought, and the way we allot meaning to things.

Peirce’s triadic relation is one of his greatest contributions to the understanding of knowledge construction. For Peirce, meaning does not reside in an object but in the transaction between the object and the knower. This also implies there is not a univocal correspondence between a sign and an object but that the meaning we make is the result of an intersubjective transaction (Kockelman, 2005). Peirce’s model of meaning–making shows that learning and understanding occur in relation to something else; therefore, we cannot understand or get to know things that do not hold a relation. Take a flag for example; a flag constitutes a symbol of a country only if we know that countries use flags as symbols of their sovereignty. If we do not possess that knowledge, a flag is simply a piece of cloth; we do not have any other understandings in relation to it.

Another important component of Peirce’s theory of knowledge construction is abduction. Peirce believed that it is through abduction that we generate new ideas that help us resolve our doubts (Peirce, 1955). Peirce (1955) defined abduction as the inferential step between, “the first starting of a hypothesis and the entertaining of it, whether as a simple interrogation or with any degree of confidence” (p. 151). Since, according to Peirce “all our knowledge may be said to rest upon observed facts” (p. 150), abductive reasoning involves analyzing the facts at hand and then developing a theory to explain them. It is from those facts that we create hypotheses to make them applicable to other circumstances different from the ones we observed in the first place. In this
process, metaphors play a key role since “metaphorical expressions are not in language, but in thought: They are general mappings across conceptual domains” (Lakoff, 1992, p. 203). Metaphors help us put the old ideas and the new ones together. They involve reasoning from what we know to what we do not know, “by way of metaphoric leap or projection . . . the first and most important stage in inquiry” (Prawat, 1999, p. 62). They are a set of signs that help us use concrete fields to describe abstract domains of experience (Kockelman, 2005).

Metaphors also help us consider a problem or resolve a doubt by using comparisons and from there generating a new idea. For instance, a teacher might use the metaphor of a food factory to explain the concept of photosynthesis to her students. This metaphor puts together the image of a series of self-contained units with the specific job to produce certain “essential” products (Prawat, 1999). Like factories, plants also use specific parts to transform light energy from the sun into the chemical energy they use in their activities while they consume and release oxygen as a waste product. Using this metaphor could help students understand the role each part of the plant plays in the photosynthesis process (Prawat, 1999).

Two other modes of reasoning are induction and deduction. Peirce (1955) defined induction as “the operation of testing a hypothesis by experiment” (p.152); it is operative in nature. Deduction, on the other hand, is explicative; it is an analytic inference. Deduction implies a new statement that collects the regularities that appear on explicative facts (Peirce, 1995, pp. 180–81). It is through these interdependent modes that reasoning takes place. However, neither induction nor deduction can generate new ideas, neither can resolve doubt (abductive reasoning can).
Culture is a personal, fluid process, a product of a transaction between our selves and the world. The array of experiences and socialization processes we go through in our lives defines our culture. Our conceptions and cultural practices, therefore, vary within and across communities. Poststructural ideas about culture refuse to consider it as a fixed static concept. They see culture not as an immutable collection of practices, but a concept that incorporates a series of practices through semiotic encounters (Agha, 2007). It is precisely through these encounters that we construct the consciousness of who we are and establish, dispute, or keep building common understandings as we transact with those around us. Culture, understood as a system of participation, acknowledges the fact that our actions carry a social, collective, and participatory dimension (Duranti, 2013); thus, it requires semiotic competence from its participants (Agha, 2007). Understanding the multiple signs that intervene in our semiotic encounters demonstrates our cultural competence, which gives us a sense of belonging to the community where those semiotic encounters take place. The idea of culture as a system of participation implies that it is neither external nor internal to the individual, but a fluid process that exists through the physical participation of social actors in different life experiences. Our cultural practices sustain the structures in place, while at the same time these structures sustain our practices; we keep them alive in the doing (Gee, 2011). Social life is “mediated by discursive interaction” (Agha, 2007, p. 229), by linguistic processes that give agency to social actors who participate in the co-construction, and maintenance of the social spaces they occupy.

A fluid conception of culture opens the door to an understanding of the multiple and varied ways in which we construct ourselves; some authors refer to this as multiple
identities (Caraballo, 2014; Josselson & Harway, 2012). It helps us realize how “no two individuals occupy the same social space” (Hill Collins, 1990, p. 225). Therefore, to recognize and understand what constitutes my inner self—my identities and my culture—I must deconstruct the false “we” that is attributed to “our” cultures, as if all members of a given system are the same and share the same immutable views and perspectives (Hartsock, 1990). The way people interpret signs and signals are the result of an intersubjective transaction (Kockelman, 2005). Thus, we could assume that our cultural ways of being are the outcome of the socialization processes in our cultural systems of participation, and mark us as competent members of our society (Schieffelin, 1990), although the process itself will be unique for each of us. As Duranti (2013) stated:

What characterizes people who share the same culture is not uniformity, but “their capacity for mutual prediction” (Wallace, 1961, p. 28) . . . We know that communities are successful . . . with a manageable degree of internal conflict, not when everyone thinks the same (something that seems impossible), but when different points of view and representations can co-exist. (pp. 32–33)

Cultural systems of participation have their own particular ways to interpret signs, which respond to the intersubjective transaction among members of that specific cultural system. Interpretations may be different from the interpreter’s expectations, while being completely appropriate for its members. For example, in certain cultures, it is a sign of respect to avoid eye contact when an elder talks to you; in others, it is a sign of disrespect. Both cultures value demonstrating respect to elders, yet they express it in different ways.
When we demonstrate open mindedness and flexibility, encounters with diverse systems of participation have the potential to alter our own conceptions. If, instead of judging certain cultural practices as inappropriate, we analyze them to understand their core values, we will be better equipped to develop a culturally responsive stance. In the context of a classroom, if we make an effort to understand the diverse cultural heritages of our students, we will facilitate the possibility of finding commonalities from which to build understanding and respect.

**Learning is the result of a construction with others.** Lev S. Vygostky, (1978), a foundational figure in sociocultural, constructive theories of learning, argued that learning takes place at two levels, in the interpsychological plane, between the learner and other people; and in the intrapsychological plane, when the individual incorporates the learning into her mental structures (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, learning is generated through our interactions with those around us and is the product of the learner’s agentive stance. Learners “do not simply internalize and appropriate the consequences of activities on the social plane, [they] actively restructure their knowledge both with each other and within themselves” (John–Steiner & Meehan, 2000, p. 35). Teachers support learning by creating what Vygotsky (1978) called a zone of proximal development (ZPD), in which students can move from their current level of understanding, where they can perform a task by themselves, to a new one, where they will be able to perform a task with the guidance of an adult or in collaboration with a more capable peer, until that knowledge is incorporated into the students’ mental structures. Teachers become participants with learners in a process of shared cognition, as they assist them in constructing meaning in a particular situation. Meaningful teaching implies generating
situations where the learner can develop thinking strategies that are appropriate for problem solving. Vygostky’s ZPD brings attention to the social dimension of learning which, in educational contexts, shifts the role of teachers into mentors who come to understand that in each interaction with learners a shared knowledge, useful to both, is produced (John–Steiner & Meehan, 2000). Therefore, learning is not passive. It requires an active participation of an autonomous learner who decides to get engaged in a cognitive process. It involves selecting relevant information and interpreting it through one’s existing knowledge. Cognition cannot be separated from our actions. It actually emerges from them, which is why “the appropriate unit of analysis for cognition is not the individual mind, separated from and encoding representations of the world, but instead processes that connect people to aspects of the world through practical activities” (Wortham, 2006, p. 96). Consequently, learning is not only a process of internalization of knowledge; it is the ongoing outcome of our participation in “communities of practice that concern the whole person acting in the world” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.49).

Language plays a crucial role in the construction and enactment of our cultural ideologies. Language is much more than a tool to express our thoughts: It gives an account of our views of the world and provides us with a useful link between inner thought and public behavior. Duranti (2013) stated that,

When we articulate our thoughts in our own mind, we are only partly doing something private. We are also relying on a set of cultural resources (including categorizations, theories, and problem-solving strategies) that belong not only to us but also to a community . . . . [In short,] language as a set of practices emphasizes the need to see linguistic communication as only a part of a complex
network of semiotic resources that carry us throughout life and link us to particular social histories and their supporting institutions. (p. 49)

Because the language we use relies on our cultural resources, it positions us as a member of a certain group. Differences in language use or register become another way to mark differences. As Agha (2007) explained, speakers of a language do not always have access to all registers used in a particular society. Social boundaries within societies determine the existence of different registers. They define who has access to them. Even more, “asymmetries of power, privilege and rank [define which individuals have access] to [what] registers and practices” (p. 157). The ways in which the social image of someone is associated to a certain register is illustrative of the social discourses that circulate and reveal, “that each social group ideologically formulates a self-positioning modeled on perceptions of the other” (p. 175).

The context of a classroom, which is immersed in a school and societal environment, is similar to what happens in society. Accordingly, we must be cognizant of the ways in which we position our students as users of different registers. For example, accents are not only markers of sound patterns, they are “linked to a framework of social identities” (Agha, 2007, p. 191). Thus, part of our job in a classroom is to deconstruct the idea that there is a “correct” way to speak. By exposing our students to different registers and pronunciations, we are familiarizing them with the array of language users they might encounter in their lives. We are also acknowledging the fact that difference in language use is the norm not the exception (Duranti, 2013).

There is a close relationship between power and the kind of knowledge we can access. Knowledge and power hold a relationship that affects minoritized groups.
Power relations are socially and historically created (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994), making it important to look at the “historical conditions that motivate our conceptualizations [adding] a historical awareness [to] our present circumstances” (Foucault, 1982, p. 778). Groups in power define what counts as knowledge, who and in what circumstances has access to it. In such a scenario, schools are not “exceptional institutions promoting quality of opportunity; instead they reinforce the inequalities of social structure and cultural order” (Collins, 2009, p. 34).

Theories that explain this reproduction phenomenon consider an economic (Althusser, 1971; Anyon, 1980; Bowles & Gintis, 2002), cultural (Bettie, 2003; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990a; Foley 1990; Heller, 1994; Pahl, 2012; Sarroub, 2005; Street, 2012), or linguistic perspective (Bernstein, 1964; Cazden, John–Steiner, & Hymes, 1972; Cazden, 2001; Perry & Delpit, 1998; Gee, 2011; Heath, 1983; Zentella, 2005). However, early studies of economic, cultural and linguistic reproduction did not adequately address all the particularities of the phenomenon they wished to understand, which is why few continued with this line of inquiry. According to Collins (2011), economic reproduction models failed to recognize the role of race, gender, and the agency of social actors. Linguists, on the other hand, set aside their focus on social reproduction in classrooms and schools as their interests shifted into the exploration of agency and identity. Subsequent models that advocated for the consideration of more encompassing accounts of these same issues and their relationship to schooling (Bettie, 2003; Foley, 1990) proved to be informative but limited in their accomplishments (Collins, 2009). They explored different trends of the phenomenon but lacked a more holistic reading of it. An important issue largely unexplored was the analysis of language
and social constructions such as class as interconnected practices (Collins, 2011). This is mainly due to conceptions of language that isolated it from communicative practices and looked at it as a separate object of study. These models failed to recognize that in such practices “an array of signs is being performed and construed by interactants, of which language is but a fragment of a multi-channel sign configuration, whose performance and construal, enactment and response, constitutes the minimal, elementary social fact” (Agha, 2007, p. 6). Thus, in order to understand “class and language as historical recreations, as ‘constructions’ in current terminology, then we must strive to understand their mutual co-creation in communicative practices that occur in diverse, interconnected settings, sites, domains and conflicts” (Collins, 2011, p. 614).

Current studies have focused their analysis on the role of schooling in social reproduction, attending to the dynamics of global processes in social polarization, such as migration (Collins, 2012; García–Sánchez, 2013) or to the performative dimensions of language use while challenging large scale structures and the ways in which they maintain linguistic inequalities (Minks, 2010; Reynolds & Orellana, 2014). These studies contributed to the analysis of social and cultural reproduction by using diverse approaches and conceptual tools, such as indexical analysis (Silverstein, 1976). They also focused on scale, which Collins (2012) defined as a concept to understand “the world as composed of stratified, layered units of differing size” (p. 197) and varilingualism, expressed by Minks (2010) as the text of various competencies and patterns of mixing linguistic systems that may be interrelated. By looking at the different layers that compose social inequality, these types of studies reveal the “profound social, cultural, and economic changes associated with globalization” (Collins, 2012, p. 192) and
present a more effective way to expose inequality. Consequently, any analysis of cultural
responsiveness in an elementary classroom, such as the one I pursued, must pay attention
to the social, cultural, and linguistic dimensions of social reproduction. I considered all
of these, as I attempted to design culturally responsive curricula that would celebrate
students for who they were and the way they spoke—and not label (or silence) them.

Conclusion

My beliefs give account of the complex interrelation between knowledge, culture,
learning, power, and language. They help me understand that in order to recognize the
internal complexities of classrooms and educational systems it becomes important to
adopt a posture that acknowledges the unpredictability of human behavior and
knowledge, culture, and learning as very personal processes. Such processes allow us to
transact with the world in multiple and varied ways. At the same time, my beliefs are
foundational to my understanding of knowledge as power (Foucault, 1982) and push me
to find ways to open spaces for teachers and children so they can find their own ways to
agency (Gunzenhauser, 2004).

Becoming culturally competent is a never-ending process. It entails “troubling
and being troubled” (McCoy, 2012, p. 763) as part of an open system with a multiplicity
of actors. It is troubling because we might make evident systems of oppression that
remain hidden and affect minoritized groups. It also troubles us because it is possible
that we will find ourselves contributing with those systems we think we are resisting. A
constant “being on the lookout” (Deleuze & Pranet, 1996) becomes necessary as it helps
us to question our actions and the ways in which we interrupt or perpetuate systems of
domination since what appears “natural” might in fact be a “cultural” interpretation
(Duranti, 2013). My beliefs help me understand that an analysis of the ways in which our “semiotic encounters” (Agha, 2007, p. 10) affect our perception of diverse cultures or cultural ways of being cannot be fractured (looking at culture, language, and learning in isolation), but must encompass the totality of the human experience. We must recognize our cultural practices are not “a static property of things or people but a precipitate of sociohistorically locatable practices, including discursive practices, which imbue cultural forms with recognizable indexical sign values and bring these values into circulation along identifiable trajectories in social space” (Agha, 2007, p. 190).

An all-encompassing posture towards knowledge, culture, language, and learning contributes to the expansion of our understanding of the world and of our own selves in a holistic, although unfixed, way. It is an ever evolving notion that acknowledges the fact that we are always in a process of becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Teachers must learn to recognize, honor, and incorporate the personal abilities of students into their teaching strategies. If this is done, then school achievement will improve . . . [we will be emphasizing] the talent potential of underachieving students of color, and placing them at promise, instead of at risk . . . . [That is] culturally responsive teaching. (Gay, 2010, p.1)

While searching for articles related to my topic, I found 54 that offered information regarding cultural responsiveness. Most studies were conducted with preservice teachers in college classroom or during field experiences. Nine studies analyzed preservice teachers’ cultural responsiveness through surveys or cultural inventories (Brown, 2004; De Juanas et al., 2009; Koyama, Plash, & Davis, 2012; Milner, et al., 2003; Reiter & Davis, 2011; Russell & Russell, 2014; Thomas & Kearney, 2008; Yang & Montgomery, 2001; Yeung, 2006). These studies looked at cultural responsiveness from a quantitative perspective outside of the context of a classroom. Thirteen articles offered theoretical bases to define cultural competence (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Byram, 2012; Cochran-Smith, 2003; Dobinson, 2012; Juodaityte & Siauciuliene, 2012; Martins–Shannon & White, 2012; Mitchell, 2009; Nelson & Guerra, 2012; Sanchez, 2008; Sato & Lensmire, 2009; Ruiz, 2013; Scott & Mumford, 2007; Trumull & Rothstein–Fish, 2008). Four analyzed the cultural experiences of college professors and high school students’ trajectories of social identification (Chen, Wang, & Zang, 2013; Duff, 2002; Florio–Ruane & Williams, 2008; Wortham, 2005).
Three studies closely related to my topic looked at the ways in which teachers used culturally responsive teaching practices in classroom contexts. Esposito and Swain (2009) studied seven African American urban teachers in a southeastern U.S. city. Milner (2011), focused on science classes at a middle school, and, the last one, Wyatt (2014), explored ways to integrate a prescriptive program with tenets of culturally responsive teaching during a graduate-level course with practicing teachers. The remaining twenty-five studies helped me reflect on the role of language in the development of cultural responsive teaching and gave me ideas about different ways to increase my cultural knowledge and that of teachers. I divided them into studies that: (1) explored the language of teachers in elementary classrooms; (2) reported on assignments designed to increase preservice teachers’ cultural responsiveness; (3) used children’s literature to explore cultural concepts; and (4) described field experiences that influenced the cultural responsiveness of preservice and in-service teachers.

**Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices in the Classroom**

Advocates of culturally responsive pedagogies have explored the experiences of successful educators as a means to understand the ways in which those experiences can shed light into the core tenets of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Ladson–Billings, 2009). The tradition keeps informing the field. For instance, Esposito and Swan (2009) examined the ways in which seven African American urban teachers used what the authors termed culturally relevant pedagogy as a means for teaching for social justice. Using in-depth interviews and a focus group, the authors explored teachers’ beliefs regarding culturally relevant pedagogy and prescriptive school reform models. They interviewed each teacher twice from one to three hours. Teachers also participated
in a two–hour focus group. Esposito and Swain audio recorded and then transcribed all interviews and the focus groups. The authors concluded that school reform brought a series of constraints to teachers that perpetuated social reproduction. The scripted curriculum that came with school reform provided little room for critical thinking activities, which at the same time left students ill prepared for the future. They noted that teachers who advocated for social justice put themselves in risk of being reprimanded or fired for challenging their present circumstances. Esposito and Swain noted that even though the risks were high, the teachers they studied who maintained a social justice agenda were willing to confront the struggles.

Milner (2011) used culturally relevant pedagogy as a conceptual framework to analyze the tensions, opportunities, and successes of Mr. Hall, a European American science teacher in a diverse urban school. The author focused his analysis on Mr. Hall’s development of cultural knowledge and competence to teach diverse students. Throughout the study, Milner attended and observed Mr. Hall’s classes, school-related events and activities, and visited the library and the cafeteria. He spent half a day in Mr. Hall’s class, once a week, during the 19 months of the study. Milner also conducted semistructured interviews with Mr. Hall, which he tape recorded and transcribed. He kept detailed field notes from a number of informal interviews. Milner concluded from his analysis that Mr. Hall was able to use culturally relevant pedagogy in his science class because he built cultural competence. According to Milner, four main issues helped Mr. Hall in this endeavor: (1) his ability to sustain meaningful and authentic relationships with students; (2) his capacity to recognize the multiple layers of identity among his students; (3) his courage to confront matters of race with them; and, (4) his conception of
teaching as a communal affair with colleagues and students. Milner asserted that his observations and interviews led him to conclude that cultural and racial convergence are necessary for academic success. He believed that Mr. Hall was able to develop congruence with his students because of his cultural competence, which at the same time deepened his knowledge of himself.

Wyatt (2014) conducted a study with kindergarten to 5th-grade teachers, who enrolled in a year-long professional development that included six credits of graduate-level course work at a local University in Hawai’i, where teachers use the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE) model. Teachers in the study served high levels of culturally and linguistically diverse students and were required by the district to implement the scripted program. Wyatt sought to understand how teachers could implement both the required program and the CREDE model. The CREDE model considered a series of standards teachers had to use in the construction and enactment of their lessons, in order to respond to the specific contexts where they taught. The author examined lesson plans, teaching reflections, reflections on videotaped lessons, and coaches’ observational notes during a four-year period that included different cohorts. Teachers enrolled in the class also participated in four workshops on the CREDE model and coaching sessions. According to the author, many teachers felt that the two models were similar in terms of the opening procedures, so did not modify them. They did, however, reduce the time America’s Choice required for opening instructions. Teachers also transformed the America’s Choice curriculum from a sequence of activities to multiple, simultaneous activities, in which students rotated every 15 to 20 minutes. Additionally, during stations time, teachers worked intensely with one
group of students, while the others participated in collaborative activities. To add elements of the CREDE model to their teaching, educators encouraged students to make connections with their home lives. Some of the teachers also offered students the option of making decisions about their learning. Wyatt concluded that when teachers had the opportunity to make adjustments to commercially developed programs, they could work in ways that supported the diversity of their students. She noted that teachers where able to shift the how, they taught while maintaining the fidelity of the scripted program. Thus, she believed it was possible to combine scripted programs and culturally relevant teaching so that the scripted program was meaningful for culturally and linguistically diverse students.

**The Language of Teachers**

Words do more than express thoughts; they can be seen as a “mode of action” (Duranti, 2013, p. 215). They play an active role in human cultural productions; they are tied to the social contexts in which they occur (Hanks, 1996). Consequently, examining the use of language in a speech community, such as a classroom, is a relevant task if one wishes to understand how teachers mark differences through their language. Collins (2012) embarked in such analysis. Through an ethnographic study of Latino migrant children in upstate New York, he explored the ways in which community-wide, institutional treatments and social discourses of migrants and their home languages affected the decisions teachers made regarding their teaching strategies with immigrant children. Collins’ multilayered analysis drew from concepts such as indexicality, the study of “how language provides cues about relevant context, and how, conversely, readings of context inform the meanings we attribute to utterances” (p. 196); interaction,
the idea that “communicative contexts and social activities are layered with participants capable of multiple, shifting alignments to differing ongoing activities, each with different constraints and [emphasis in the original] creative potentials” (p. 197); and scale, a concept that considers social events and processes as constantly moving and developing on a continuum of layered scales that range from the local to the global with an array of intermediate ones. Collins’ year-long ethnographic study included a wide focus survey of cities and suburbs in the New York area to get a sense of where Latinos lived and what organizations and schools they attended. He also relied on interviews with community leaders, trade unionists, members and leaders of religious organizations, and educators. Collins and his assistant, Ana Lourdes, attended different public and private events where they learned about the ways in which people challenged the “English only” discourse kept in public spaces and official activities. They found Latinos were a “‘hidden minority’ in a region of presumptive English monolingualism” (p. 200). Collins’ primary sociolinguistic data came from observations of two immigrant girls, from a Trique-speaking family, in their respective third- and fourth-grade classrooms. Based on his analysis of the interactions between teachers, tutors, and students, Collins concluded that the language ideologies of teachers fueled by national educational policies, social discourses, and personal beliefs affected the ways in which teachers perceived multilingual children and their multilingualism as an asset or a problem. These perceptions also framed the learning engagements teachers chose and the freedom or the constraints they imposed on the use of languages other than English in the classroom. Collins argued that in our globalized era, conflicts of belonging and economic conditions appear in new, polarized ways. He asserted it is imperative that “we connect such
polarization and its effects to our understanding of sociolinguistic scale as a feature of
globalized linguistic and cultural diversity and as a tool for investigating the changing
dynamics of social reproduction” (p. 208).

García–Sánchez (2013) conducted a two–year linguistic anthropological study in
a 4th-grade classroom with the purpose of investigating the socio-cultural ecology of the
lives of Moroccan immigrant children in a small town in South-Central Western Spain.
Her analysis focused specifically on teacher–student interactions and discussions during
social studies and language arts classes. In her analysis, the author drew from an
ethnomethodologically-informed analysis of the interactions she explored as well as
linguistic anthropology and classroom discourse analysis methods.

The class García–Sanchez observed had 24 students between the ages of 8 and 11. Seven of them were Moroccan and two of Roma descents. She followed closely a small
group of six students, three boys and three girls. García–Sanchez observed the class
weekly in regular classroom activities as well as in activities outside of the classroom
such as recess, school field trips, and extracurricular programs. She also observed the six
students in activities outside of school such as after school Qu’ranic classes, local health
center (where children usually translated for their parents), their homes, and playing
places such as the street near their houses, the park, and vacant lots.

García–Sanchez (2013) concluded that teachers inadvertently took part in
excluding immigrant children from belonging to the national collectivity, even when they
thought they were doing the contrary. Practices of distinction, authentication, and
authorization took place on a regular basis through every day linguistic and interactional
practices, such as deixis (words or phrases that hold meaning only when related to
contextual information), appellation (direct labeling), and forms of class participation. Children were constantly used as tokens of “their culture” or assigned membership by ethnoprototype, which demonstrated the constant marking of Moroccan immigrant children as “Other” while perpetuating ideals of a homogeneous national community. At the same time, García–Sanchez noted that the Moroccan children had a sense of agency. During their interactions with teachers, they constantly co-constructed the field of the classroom and their own identities. Children drew from their multiple linguistic and national collectivities to claim alternative forms of cultural identity and challenged assumptions made about their communities. The study expanded the notion of cultural citizenship by highlighting additional aspects of the relationship between legal and socio-cultural formulations of it. García–Sanchez also brought attention to the taken-for-granted nature of ideologies of homogeneism or the normative believes that a homogeneous society is the unmarked, and diversity is both suspect and problematic” (p. 492).

Hollingworth (2008) described the teaching practices of an elementary teacher who used multicultural children’s books during language arts and social studies classes. The research was part of a larger study conducted during the 2003–2004 and 2004–2005 school years. This case study took place on a fourth and fifth grade class in a small city in the midwestern United States. It included 49 students, ages 9 to 11. In the school, 45% of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. Eighty-seven percent of the students were European American, 8% African American, 3% Latino American, and 2% Asian American. The teacher, Patrice, was a European American woman who grew up in the Midwest. She had been teaching for five years. The author negotiated her entrance to
the classroom by promising the teacher that she would not interfere with regular classroom activities and was going to protect the anonymity of all participants.

Hollingworth observed, recorded, and coded 30 class and 45 small group discussions. She used critical discourse analysis in her exploration of the interactions between teacher and students. She examined each transcript to systematically study the relationship between discourses and contexts, and to understand the beliefs behind what participants said and did in the classroom. Hollingworth paid particular attention to the portions of the transcripts that revealed attitudes about race, especially the normalization of Whiteness. From her analysis, Hollingworth concluded that the teacher’s ideologies about race influenced her discourse regarding race, racism, tolerance, and stereotypes. She argued that conversations around multicultural children’s books tended to normalize Whiteness and did not offer students the opportunity to deeply reflect and challenge stereotypes and assumptions about race. She also pointed out in her discussion that students were not passive recipients of the literature. They were open to discuss and ask questions about race although those questions were not always answered. Hollingworth suggested her study could offer valuable information for teacher training programs as well as future educational research.

**Assignments to Increase Preservice Teachers’ Cultural Awareness**

Exposing preservice teachers to diverse activities in order to increase their cultural responsiveness is a continuous effort among college professors. These activities aim to prepare young professionals to address the needs of a constantly changing landscape in American classrooms. Several authors reported their use of cultural autobiographies and videos to increase the cultural consciousness of their students.
Other professors explored creative practices with the same purpose. For instance, Friedman and Herrmann (2014) explored the effects of telementoring or virtual mentoring in the development of cultural competence and cultural identity. Participants in this study were 36 English teacher candidates from a private university in Massachusetts and a group of 9th grade students in a language arts class. Mentors included 14 undergraduate and 22 graduate students: 1 European American male, 1 African American female, 26 European American females, and 9 European American males. Each mentee worked with two mentors. Mentors received preparation in urban teaching, culturally relevant pedagogy, adolescent development, writing workshops, and protocols for providing feedback prior and during the telementoring process.

Friedman and Herrmann argued that mentor–mentee exchanges gave both groups the opportunity to learn. On the one hand, mentees used writing, in the form of an autobiography, to develop their cultural identity. On the other hand, mentors developed their cultural competence through cultural explorations. The authors analyzed excerpts from the exchanges. They asserted mentees shifted from silence to spoken anger, which helped them to develop a healthier cultural identity. Conversely, mentors gained ideological clarity by challenging their personal assumptions. They were able to exhibit cultural empathy as they strengthened the ties with their mentees. The authors argued that using cultural competence and culturally relevant pedagogy principles to inform the study proved useful to mobilize preservice teachers’ beliefs regarding culture. Nevertheless, they also recognized the limitations of their approach and wanted to search for ways to develop “cultural competence as a habit of mind” (p. 205).
Labbo (2007) documented a semester in which she tried to raise the cultural awareness of 24 undergraduates in an elementary literacy methods class she taught. Through a series of three assignments, she created specific conditions in an effort to inspire preservice teachers to develop complex views of culture and explore their notions of prejudice and empathy. Her first assignment included a quick 10-minute free write exercise to help students reflect on their culture. This led to a more complex autobiography where students had the opportunity to explore their cultural identity. Students had the choice to use a photo essay, Power Point, scrapbook, or a narrative cultural memoir to comply with the requirements of the assignment. Her second assignment was tied to the field experience of students. They had to write a Student Biography on an elementary student of diversity. Students could choose from carrying out observations, conducting interviews, or sending home a disposable camera for the elementary student to create her own photo essay. Her third and final assignment asked for connections between the students’ autobiographies, elementary students’ biographies, and discussions of children’s literature. Labbo reported that students came to realize they each had unique cultural experiences. This awareness helped them to recognize prejudiced thinking and interrogate it in order to gain new perspectives.

Thompson (2009) reported her findings from a pen pal cultural exchange project between 40 mostly European American female, preservice teachers in an elementary reading methods course, and 26 fourth graders in an urban elementary school. The fourth graders who participated in the study attended an elementary school in an impoverished neighborhood of a Midwestern U.S. city, where 92% of the student population received free or reduced lunch. The purpose of the project was to give participants the opportunity
to exchange information about their cultures. Preservice teachers had to reflect on their own cultural experiences, the experiences of their pen pal, and the differences among them. They also participated in class discussions about related issues and in a final event where preservice teachers had the opportunity to spend a day with fourth graders at the University campus.

Thompson asserted the project had a transformative effect on preservice teachers. She believed they moved from being disgruntled preservice teachers who could not see the connections between literacy teaching and learning and culture to more concerned educators who believe they could make a difference in the life of their pen pal. Shared past experiences as well as the opportunity to participate in the current lives of their pen pal positively affected the perceptions this group of preservice teachers had about children from minoritized groups. The author argued that teacher participation in community-related activities would help prepare teachers to teach children from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Turner (2007) conducted a practitioner–researcher study while serving as the instructor for a literacy methods course—the 3rd in a 4-course sequence required for initial elementary teaching certification. Students were 14 females, 6 males, 14 European American, 1 African American, 2 Afro-Caribbean, 2 Latin American, and 1 multiracial. The author experimented with a pedagogical activity called visioning in an effort to help prospective teachers construct and articulate their visions of what ideal classroom practices would look like. Turner developed her course around three main objectives: (1) introduce evidence-based instructional skills and pedagogical strategies for teaching reading in elementary school settings; (2) support reflective and effective classroom
practice; and (3) address issues of cultural diversity. Her data came from 20 prospective
teachers’ vision statements produced during her semester-long course. She also used
observations of five class sessions, research notes, and analytic memos for triangulation.

After examining and coding students’ vision statements, Turner (2007) concluded
they all held complex understandings of what culturally responsive literacy instruction
was. Her students believed that: (1) elementary classrooms must become literacy
communities; (2) literacy teachers are responsible for the well-functioning of these
communities; (3) students must actively participate in their communities; (4) a learner-
centered curriculum is the key to literacy development; and, (5) in order to properly serve
students from diverse cultural backgrounds, students should develop ownership towards
literacy. The author recognized two blind spots in students’ vision statements: Classroom
management and parental involvement. Even though the teachers envisioned themselves
as culturally responsive teachers, 40% of them held a color-blind view of classroom
management. They did not discuss how cultural background could affect teachers’ and
students’ expectations of classroom behavior. They did not discuss how culture might
play into classroom management policies. Sixty percent thought that a culturally
responsive approach was all they needed to prevent classroom management issues. In
terms of parental involvement: 85% of the responses from prospective teachers described
homeschool relationships as “challenging” because they believed parents from cultures
different than theirs would not be supportive of their children’s education or would lack
strong educational values. The preservice teachers envisioned a number of barriers to
their relationship with parents such as language differences, work schedules and limited
time. They also identified some possible strategies to cope with these problems; for
instance, meeting at places other than school, creating flexible opportunities for parent participation, and working with interpreters to translate important school documents and be present at parent–teacher conferences.

**Using Children’s Literature to Explore Cultural Concepts**

Researchers have explored how the use of children’s literature in college classrooms can increase cultural awareness and challenge preconceived notions of people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Deprez, 2010; Stewig, 1992; Wilkinson & Kido, 1997; Wilkinson, 1995). Studies conducted with preservice teachers give account of such gains. For instance, Hadjioannou and Hutchinson (2014) explored the potential of transmediation, “the process of translating meanings from one sign system (such as language) into another (such as pictorial representation)” (p. 3) as a tool for fostering critical engagement with multicultural literature. The context of the study was a literacy methods course for preservice teachers in which students learned about transmediation by engaging in transmediative activities with multicultural children’s books. Participants in the study were 21 preservice teachers (16 female and 5 male). The authors collected data through observations, transmediative artifacts (posters, collages, poems, photographs, and video clips), postactivity reflection papers, and transmedia projects. They asserted this methodology had a positive effect in preservice teachers’ instructional planning and practice. Students were able to comprehend texts more deeply, increase their level of empathy to diverse characters, and value the intellectual challenge of mediating semiotic systems. Hadjioannou and Hutchinson suggested teacher-educators should “address transmediation methodically and comprehensively, make a clear distinction between trivial and substantive transmediations, and provide teachers with sustained support and
adequate opportunities to experience, plan and implement transmediative activities” (p. 17).

Hammet and Bainbridge (2009) reported a cross-Canada research project in which researchers at six different higher education institutions used picture books to help their students understand multiculturalism and diversity. The part of the study reported in the article I reviewed took place in Newfoundland and Labrador with 66 students. All of the preservice teachers participated in focus groups during the first year of the research and 10 of them were interviewed post-practicum.

The study explored how preservice teachers interrogated their own personal, professional and national identities through reading and responding to Canadian multicultural picture books. In two workshops, Hammet and Bainbridge introduced preservice teachers to a selection of 70 Canadian picture books that considered multiculturalism and diversity issues. Preservice teachers discussed the books and created unit plans as text sets. They also developed criteria for text selection and pedagogical strategies for teaching diverse school populations. The authors analyzed data from open ended questionnaires that requested demographic information and basic understandings, focus groups where students discussed their sense of what implies to be a Canadian and understandings of diversity and multiculturalism, unit plans that incorporated selected picture books in preparation for a semester long school practicum, and, either pre or post-practicum interviews.

According to the authors, the study revealed discourses of racism and Whiteness commonly discussed in the literature. They asserted preservice teachers demonstrated blindness and ignorance in their assertions of the invisibility of diversity through their
comments. They also demonstrated different levels of tolerance, acceptance, and pride in acknowledging Canada as a multicultural country. Students did not seem to acknowledge Canada as a nation of immigrants, settlers, and indigenous peoples. In fact, they reported few or no comments on First Nations, Innu, or Metis. Students often considered diversity themes and multicultural material as controversial in teaching practices and schools. There was an evident fear of community opinions, especially before securing a tenured teaching position. The authors argued preservice teachers and some practicing teachers as well are not always prepared to accommodate heterogeneity in their classrooms.

Iwai (2013) conducted a study with nineteen preservice teachers enrolled in a literacy class to look at their perceptions of multicultural and diversity issues through multicultural children’s literature. Students explored multicultural children’s literature, participated in group and class discussions and developed a project over a semester. The author collected data from a pre- and post-Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI), open-ended response questionnaires, quick writings, projects and class interactions. Iwai argued that students exhibited a positive attitude towards this type of literature. They came to appreciate the possibilities it offered to foster children’s awareness of diversity, respect, and tolerance towards differences. Through students’ responses to the instruments she used for her analysis, Iwai concluded that students planned to utilize multicultural literature in their future classrooms and this demonstrated the positive effect this type of literature had on students.

Morton, Siera, Grant, and Giese (2008) conducted a qualitative study using multicultural children’s literature to explore its potential to serve as a catalyst for increasing preservice teachers’ understanding of diversity. Participants in the study
included preservice teachers from two Teacher Education Programs: A state university in the Southwest and a small liberal arts, Catholic University in the Northeast. They were all elementary majors enrolled in a required Children’s Literature class. Students at the regional university were mostly female, 20% of them were either Native American or African American. Students at the Catholic university were mostly European American, with a small percentage of African American and other minorities. The authors replicated the study over four semesters with different groups of students each time. Class size ranged from 12 to 35 students. They used 10 different chapter books to expose preservice teachers to several aspects of diversity. Students read selected pieces of children’s literature, discussed the books in small and whole groups, recorded their reflections about readings in a personal journal, and wrote a final structured reflection. Each student was expected to read three books from the list provided and held small group discussions with those who read the same book. The instructors provided the following prompts for group discussions: (1) What issues are discussed/raised in your book? (2) What connections did you make to yourself, to others, to the world you live in? (3) What are the challenges in dealing with these issues? (4) How might this book influence your teaching? (5) Did you gain any new insights about diversity?

The authors read all written responses from group discussions, journals and final reflections. They coded them for themes. Three major themes emerged: plans for future classroom use, heightened awareness, and confronting a paradigm. They concluded the reading influenced students’ thinking in terms of: how to use literature in their future classrooms, articulate feelings they did not consider before, which gave them the possibility of looking diversity from a different perspective, and confronting their own
and their classmates’ beliefs about diversity. Morton, Sierra, Grant, and Giese (2008) also asserted that deep reflection is not spontaneous and that students need guidance, which can be provided with children’s literature.

**Field Experiences to Impact the Cultural Awareness of Preservice Teachers**

Professors in college classrooms make efforts to provide well-designed courses that address cultural knowledge concepts and to offer enriching cultural experiences (Linn, 2010; Mbugua, 2010). However, the ability to prepare teachers to become culturally competent practitioners is still a challenge for them. Four studies with preservice teachers during local and international field experiences showed the efforts of teacher educators to engage their students in first hand experiences with the potential to enhance their cultural awareness (Dantas, 2007; Malewski, Sharma, & Phillion, 2012; Nieto, 2006; Sahin, 2008). They believed these types of experiences better prepared their students to respond to the needs of the diverse students they will encounter in their classrooms.

Dantas (2007) led a joint project developed by two universities: one in Southern California and the other one in Brazil. The author reported the experiences of six American teacher education students in a graduate program in literacy education. The purpose of the study, described by the author as a situated learning experience, was to give students the opportunity to make visible assumptions about culture as well as about learning and literacy. Students were all female: five European Americans and one Mexican American. They came from middle to upper middle class backgrounds, which the author believed mirrored the demographics of California’s public school teachers. The course was implemented in the U.S. and Brazil. It involved four class sessions in the
U.S. prior to the international experience, 8 days in Brazil and one follow-up session back in the U.S. Dantas collected data in two phases: during and after the course. The first phase of data sources included field notes, videotapes of course activities in Brazil, all written course assignments, including journal entries and emails from participants, course materials, and documents. For the second phase, Dantas analyzed the data from written questionnaires, follow-up interviews, and papers and materials collected for students’ portfolio projects.

Dantas asserted this learning experience was particularly significant because it gave students the opportunity to use what they learned about sociocultural theories in an international context. In the article, the author described: (1) the clashes and disruptions to the students’ lives and how students turned them into rich points; and, (2) the ways students built and transformed their understandings of culture, cultural identities, and diversity and their relationship with literacy practices. She believed the six teacher education students experienced the process of learning to “read the word” (Freire & Macedo, 1987), the situated practices of a particular state located in Brazil’s Northeast region, and to read the word within the social and cultural contexts in which they were immersed as well as alternative forms of literacy. Uncovering students’ assumptions of culture increased their ability to negotiate disruptions of the ordinary throughout the trip, exposed them to other ways of being, and allowed them to develop a new repertoire of actions.

Malewski, Sharma, and Phillion (2012) examined the outcomes of a short-term study abroad program in Honduras with 49 preservice teachers from a Midwestern university over a six–year period. Forty–seven of the students were European American,
one was biracial European/European American and one was Latin American. Their ages ranged from 18 to 21. Five were fluent in Spanish, six had a working knowledge of it, and the remainder had no knowledge of the language. This qualitative collective case study included the experiences of students during their 3-week field placement in two schools in Honduras: Esperanza Elementary School in Zamorano and Gloria Secondary School in Tegucigalpa. Data collection occurred from 2003 to 2008. The authors used qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, and formal and informal discussions. They also analyzed teachers’ course assignments, reflective journals, observations and field notes. Every set of data included four phases: (1) a 1-hour guided interview; (2) an unstructured interview conducted onsite; (3) a 1-hour focus group; and, (4) a 1-hour, unstructured interview post-trip. The researchers analyzed the interviews in order to understand preservice teachers’ experiential learning, changes in their cultural awareness, and levels of engagement with cultural knowledge. Additionally, they observed each preservice teacher twice during field placements back in the United States. The focus of the observations was the preservice teachers’ understanding of the relationship between classroom knowledge and students’ cultural knowledge in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. Malewski, Sharma, and Phillion (2012) conducted member–check with 17 of the preservice teachers, which gave them the opportunity to verify interpretations and obtain additional details.

Malewski, Sharma, and Phillion (2012) identified six common themes across their data that had implications for teacher education: (1) language and culture; (2) cross-cultural communication; (3) privilege and deprivation; (4) cultural knowledge; (5) study abroad; and, (6) self-reflection. They concluded that international settings are ideal for
developing cross-cultural awareness; they allow preservice teachers the opportunity to question conventional teaching practices and cultural norms; they promote a deeper understanding of themselves, and give them tools to teach culturally diverse students.

Lastly, the authors stated that international field experiences are valuable to properly prepare preservice teachers as a whole. Based on their experiences, they offered the following suggestions: (1) prepare a well-organized curriculum for study abroad programs; (2) include opportunities for engagement with content, cross-cultural and experiential knowledge; (3) design classroom engagements that integrate theoretical and practical dimensions of experiential learning connected to real world contexts; and (4) consider study abroad experiences as an effective way to successfully prepare preservice teachers to work with diverse students.

Nieto (2006) reported on a cultural immersion activity called a cultural plunge, which he regularly used in his classroom. He described the activity as “individual exposure to personas and groups markedly different in culture (ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and/or physical exceptionality) from that of the ‘plunger’” (p. 77). Plunges last around an hour. The main objectives of the plunges are: (1) get in direct contact with people who are culturally different; (2) learn about the characteristics of the community where the activity takes place; (3) experience how it feels to be different from the rest of the people in the community; and (4) learn about one’s own values, biases, and affective responses. After each plunge, students had to write a three-page reaction paper where they listed 10 popular stereotypes of the community they visited, their emotional responses to the experience, and their reflections.
regarding how the plunge either reinforced or challenged the popular stereotypes they described.

Nieto (2006) asserted the cultural plunges gave students a learning experience that standard teaching methods could not offer. Although reactions from his students varied, he reported an overwhelming majority expressed a positive reaction towards the activity. He suggested that cultural plunges “represent a significant means towards students’ greater understanding and acceptance of others, as well as of enhancing self-awareness” (p. 83). Nieto recognized in the activity a great potential to sensitize preservice teachers to social and cultural realities, explore their own preconceptions, and prepare them to teach in culturally diverse classrooms.

Sahin (2008) studied the effects of international student teaching experiences on the professional and personal development of 26 preservice teachers in a graduate educational program in a private university in Turkey. As part of their program internship requirement, eight female and three male students from a midwestern U.S. state worked with thirteen mentors, in four different subject groups (English, History, Biology, and Turkish Language and Literature), for two months. Students started their contact with their mentors before their arrival in the U.S. Once in the country they were placed in their mentor’s classroom and expected to observe and teach with their mentor’s support. Sahin (2008) asserted that this unique opportunity for Turkish students gave them the opportunity to learn and expand their teaching strategies and increase their level of self-development, cross-cultural effectiveness, and global perspectives. The experience also prepared them to offer alternatives to improve their own educational
systems. The author suggested overseas teaching experiences have the potential to increase cultural awareness and self-efficacy as well as participants’ global-mindedness.

**Conclusion**

The need to raise the cultural responsiveness of both preservice and in-service teachers is today more necessary than ever due to the constantly changing landscape of American classrooms (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010; Nieto, 2010). Increasing the cultural knowledge of preservice and in-service teachers is crucial if we wish to properly educate children from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, in order to attain such goal, it is essential to consider the complexity of the teaching process and acknowledge the ways in which quotidian uses of linguistic and interactional practices affect it and depict larger societal exclusionary discourses. Efforts such as the ones explored above could be used with in-service teachers to raise their level of cultural responsiveness and/or to adjust their classroom practices to include the cultural heritages of their students. Professional development that includes an exploration of the belief system of teachers paired with contrasting experiences could be beneficial to increase their cultural responsiveness. Teachers require tools to address the needs of their students as well as experiences that can help them inform and challenge their classroom practices. A postcritical ethnographic case study committed to the use of a collaborative approach in the exploration of the different factors at multiple scales that impact teaching and learning processes holds a lot of potential. It is in the consideration of multiple perspectives over sustained periods of time that cultural ideologies emerge and structural inequalities become visible.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Ethnographers not only “invent” their scholarly texts, but the cultures they study as well. The researcher strives to render his or her experiences understandable, in a familiar way, and invents them as “Culture.” (Murillo, 2004, p. 158)

My theoretical framework as well as the insights I gained from the review of pertinent literature guided my decision to choose a postcritical ethnographic case study as the methodology to conduct my work (Madison, 2012; Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004). This choice gives account of my beliefs regarding knowledge, how it is produced, and who is entitled to produce it. It also gives me the foundation to understand there are not definitive answers to our questions, but that we construct them together within the systems of participation we act upon. The theoretical constructs that sustain my beliefs help me recognize learning and research are very personal processes. They also led to me to understand we do not teach anyone anything; we can just actively enrich the soil, in as many ways as possible, and hope it will give fruits that will continue building the new social order we all wish to see (Johnston, 2004).

I chose a qualitative approach to my type of research because it is a form of social inquiry driven by the desire to understand human phenomena (Carspecken, 1996). As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) explained:

Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. 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. Qualitative research...
involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional and visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. (p. 2)

Within the realm of possibilities qualitative research offers, I selected a postcritical ethnographic case study to understand how the co-construction and the co-implementation of a culturally responsive curriculum could affect the learning of children, teachers, and researcher in an elementary classroom. In order to understand the complexities of local realities in such setting, it was crucial to attend to the different scales: Micro–macro, local–global and in between, that affected them (Collins, 2012). A postcritical ethnographic case study gave me the opportunity of looking into the routines of everyday life, in this case, at the intersection of students, teachers, and curriculum as well as at the inherent relationship between the classroom and the broader social and cultural contexts in which it was immersed (Bloome, 2012). The analysis of everyday routines through a postcritical lens was an appropriate means to understand the ways in which relations of domination took place and inequality was forged because the “critical” in postcritical studies refers to the histories of critical theory that address the deployment of power and inequities (Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004). Additionally, a postcritical ethnographic case study gave me the opportunity to problematize the experiences I encountered (Lu & Horner, 1998), making visible their complexities and allowing multiple interpretations and not only mine. As Noblit et al., (2004) described it, postcritical ethnographic work:
is not one single thing, rather it is many. It is less about unity and more about difference. The emphasis on critique remains and is in fact expanded as it addresses objectification (McCadden, Dempsey, & Adkins, 1999), representation (Givens, 1999), and positionality (Murillo, 1999) (Noblit et al., 2004, p. 2)

Originally, I imagined that this study would be a response to the call for action that critical researchers argue is still lacking in some critical work (Johnston, 2004; Gerstl–Pepin, 2004) and that all stakeholders need to be involved in “deep and abiding dialogue” (Madison, 2012, p. 10). At the study’s conclusion, I feel ready to acknowledge the complexity of such an enterprise, but at the same time confident that even though our collaboration did not materialize the way I ambitioned it, our lived experiences had a positive and even transformative effect on two of us. In addition, my postcritical ethnographic case study allowed me to analyze local processes and practices that either fostered or hindered the emergence of the expected outcomes (Erickson, 1992): Teachers’ and researcher’s cultural competence enacted through the co-implementation of culturally responsive curriculum planned collaboratively to better serve the children in the classroom. I present in Chapters 4 and 5 how the study unfolded in practice.

Because ethnographic case studies require engagement within a community of practice over a sustained period of time (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and postcritical orientations promote collaboration whenever possible, the purpose of my study was to generate, through collaboration, rich data that represented the voices of teachers, children, and myself as we co-constructed meaning of our experiences. This kind of work was an effort to theorize collaboratively “into the contested, constructed, and negotiated nature of knowledge production” (Noblit et al., 2004). Using a postcritical
ethnographic case study also implied considering issues of dissemination of knowledge and accessibility (Gerstl–Pepin, 2004). It demanded using different means to make its findings accessible to the common public in an effort to both acknowledge those behind its production and democratize knowledge. Moreover, I assumed it was my ethical responsibility to embed my ethnographic case study within a critical perspective (Madison, 2012). This was my way to address social inequalities and direct my work towards positive social transformation (Carspecken, 1996) as I made efforts to value the cultural heritage children from minoritized groups brought with them to the classroom. 

In addition, an important issue embedded in the use of this methodology was the need to reflect on the possible challenges and opportunities it entailed.

Specifically, I worked with two second-grade teachers (one taught in English the other one in Spanish) and 39 children, all of whom were in one large elementary school classroom. My intention was to collaboratively develop, implement, revise, and learn from curriculum that incorporated the array of cultural backgrounds present in the classroom. Collaboration, however (as I will explain in Chapters 4 and 5), proved to be hard to achieve and did not occur at the level I expected.

Although my study did not start but until January 2015, when I got district approval, I had the principal’s approval to attend the school in Fall 2014, as a helper. While getting to know the teachers I planned to collaborate with, they and I established contact with a second-grade class in a bilingual elementary school in South America. The purpose of our communication was to provide teachers and students with the opportunity to contrast their way of being with others. The community in South Carolina focused on English-speaking students in a Spanish immersion program. The community
in South America focused on Spanish-speaking students in an English immersion program. The purpose of our communication was to put children in South Carolina in contact with children in South America, via email and Skype sessions, to learn from each other and to expand their understanding of what communities in other places look like. Teachers at Liceo la Alborada (the school in South America) shared their units with us and together we discussed ideas that could allow us to put children in contact. We maintained constant communication among teachers via email and Skype. On average, we talked every other week from mid-November to early February, except during winter break and, whenever possible, planned common activities to implement at both sites. Starting in mid-February, due to changes in the relationship of teachers that I will explain in detail in Chapters 4 and 5, only Ms. Bravo and I communicated with teachers in Mexico. Despite this situation, I believe that the teachers and students from both countries and I were able to learn about and learn from the commonalities and differences within and across communities. This experience gave us the opportunity to consider multiple perspectives about how to create and sustain culturally-responsive practices. To guide my inquiry in my study, I posed the questions: What characterizes the co-construction of a culturally responsive curriculum? What characterizes the co-implementation of a culturally responsive curriculum? What is the impact of a culturally responsive curriculum on teachers, students, and researcher?

To explore these questions, I focused my attention on patterns of interaction and language use between teachers and students, researcher and teachers, and researcher and students. My objective was to document the interplay of school and societal discourses
that affected our cultural conceptions and to shed light into the beliefs that sustained our practices and the structures that affected them.

**The Ethnographic Lens**

Ellis (2003) described ethnography as the writing or describing of people or culture, a type of description that uses firsthand observations while participating in a setting. These types of observations are what traditionally constitute ethnographic work, “the interest in self, others and the world” (Clair, 2003, p. 4). However, such interest has not always been unselfish. In fact, ethnography, historically the main enterprise of anthropologists, received sharp criticism as it was associated with colonialist and imperialist agendas (Kabbani, 1986). This criticism was of such magnitude that it almost disqualified ethnography as a reliable source of knowledge (Brown & Dobrin, 2004). Perhaps one of the most harming features of classic ethnography was its egocentric perspective under the label of objectivity, a claim postcritical orientations eschew (Noblit et al., 2004). As Madison (2012) pointed out, “many early researchers, particularly during the colonial and modern period, did not recognize that their stalwart ‘objectivity’ was already subjective in the value–laden classification, meanings, and world views they employed” (p. 8).

Nevertheless, ethnography proved itself resilient and capable of moving from “expressing a one-sided view of the Other to expressing its own possibilities as a language of resistance and emancipation” (Clair, 2003, p. 19). This gradual shift, influenced by critical theory and the related interest in challenging inequitable social conditions, gave birth in the late 1960s to what several authors call critical ethnography (Anderson, 1989; Jordan, 2003; Jordan & Yeomans, 1995).
Critical ethnography is a way to reflect on culture, knowledge, and action while establishing a dialogic relationship with members of the research project. It acknowledges the presence of the researched in the study and avoids static, unchanging representations (Madison, 2012). Critical ethnography situates the researched as a co-investigator. It includes the researched and the ethnographer in the analysis of the issues under scrutiny in order to establish a plan of action to find suitable alternatives (Brown & Dobrin, 2004). Nevertheless, in order to engage in such relationship “critical ethnographers must explicitly consider how their own acts of studying and representing people and situations [were] acts of domination even as critical ethnographers reveal[ed] the same in what they study” (Noblit et al., 2004, p. 5). Critical ethnography requires that researchers constantly reflect on and be reflexive of their actions. In fact, it was this need to create spaces for people to represent themselves as a means to challenge systems of inequality that kept pushing critical ethnography to the limits of its scope and critical researchers to examine the success of their work.

The result was bittersweet. Although critical ethnography achieved its goal of exposing systems of inequality, it fell short in bringing concrete improvement to the social conditions of oppressed people (Hytten, 2004; Johnston, 2004). Postmodernism, particularly in terms of a reconceptualization of culture, added a much-needed perspective. It conceptualized culture “not [as] an object to be described, neither… a unified corpus of symbols and meanings that can be definitely interpreted … [but, as] contested, temporal, and emergent” (Clifford, 1986, p. 19). Postmodernists advocated for more than one truth, which implies there is no such thing as being objective. Research depends on the perspective we bring with us. Postmodernism, although with its own
limitations and flaws, such as advocating for more than one truth but ignoring the contributions of critical scholars and feminists (Clair, 2003), was a positive step forward. Postmodern orientations moved the discussion in such a way that they shifted “the critical gaze of ethnography away from science toward politics, away from interests of ethnographic Self and toward a concern for altering the material conditions that determine the lived reality of the Other” (Brown & Dobrin, 2004, p. 3).

Postmodernism also paved the road for the emergence of what Noblit et al. (2004) called postcritical ethnography; an approach that aims to “reinscribe critique in ethnography” (p. 4) by engaging researcher and researched in a dialectical, collaborative process to shape, produce, and disseminate knowledge (Freire, 2000). Postcritical ethnography urges us to pay close attention to issues of self-reflexivity, nonexploitation, and dissemination of knowledge (Gunzenhauser, 2004), giving a broader dimension to the critical work. New experiments with ethnography such as “alternative positionalities, representations, theoretical locations, and practicalities” (Noblit et al., 2004, p. viii), give account of the efforts of postcritical ethnographers to not only explore and expose the experiences of disenfranchised groups, but also to open spaces so that such groups can find their own ways to agency. This implies an understanding that “freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift” (Freire, 2000, p.47). New ways of doing ethnography blur the lines between theory and method (Conquergood, 2002) and arise from researchers’ awareness of the blind spots in their critical work when the research is only about the researcher’s agenda. Postcritical ethnography, thus, pushes us to envision ways to describe realities and to discover ways to transform them (Gerstl–Pepin, 2004). Our critical work will be incomplete if it does not include ways to make the knowledge
gained accessible to those who participate in the research as well as those who could
benefit from it and engages in the search for meaningful action.

Consequently, a postcritical ethnographic case study gave me the opportunity to
narrate the ways in which macro and intermediate structures affected the world of the
classroom I worked with and its microstructures. It helped me recognize that different
forces seemed to determine the ways in which teachers collaborated with me or not. It
also helped me reflect on the complexities inherent in becoming culturally responsive.
The postcritical component of my study required that such narration be anchored in a
dialectical, collaborative exercise that recognized the role of all actors, including me, in
an effort to make spaces for teachers and children to develop their own ways to agency.
Adopting this methodology implied accepting the pedagogical nature of it;
understanding, as Freire (2000) suggested, that in doing research I am educating and
being educated at the same time. A postcritical ethnographic lens informed my work as I
collected data, making sure I obtained thick descriptions (Geertz, 2006) of the knowledge
that was being constructed by students, teachers, and me as the researcher. An
ethnographic case study was a way to depict the intersection of theory and practice within
the particular context where action took place acknowledging the social structures at
different levels that affected the lives of those who were part of this community of
practice.

The Case Study Lens

Several authors have described a case study as detailed examinations of an
individual matter, event, or setting of a single or several participants (multi-case studies)
with the purpose of identifying structures and forms of interaction; assessing the
performance or progress or several of the above issues at once (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1989). Case studies, as Dyson and Genishi (2005) asserted, “are constructed, not found, as researchers make decisions about how to angle their vision on places overflowing with potential stories of human experience” (p. 2). Thus, since one of the goals of this study was to understand the role of co-constructed and co-implemented culturally responsive curriculum in the learning of children within this particular community of practice, a case study became the appropriate means to establish boundaries that helped me collect specific information. By establishing such boundaries, I learned to tune eyes, ears, and mind to the everyday rhythms of the classroom (Dyson & Genishi, 2005) as I reflected on my lived experiences.

In that sense, my case study was an observational one as described by Bogdan and Biklen (1998). These authors assert an observational case study based on its data collection, mainly on participant observations as well as interviews and review of documents. My unit of analysis was an elementary school classroom. Because I wished to understand what the co-construction and co-implementation of a culturally responsive curriculum involved, as well as its impact on students’ learning and teachers’ and researchers’ beliefs, my viewpoint needed to include the children, the teachers, and myself. At times, I narrowed my attention to focus on individual students. At others, I focused on the teacher’s interactions between themselves, and between them and their students, to better understand their stance toward culturally responsive practices.

Within this frame, my interests in reading and writing processes led me to pay attention to the ways in which generative theories of reading and writing emerged or not over time (Stephens, 2012). Because they became evident through a variety of
performance tasks and reflections of learning, it was necessary to collect enough details of the performance of students over a sustained period in order to notice such emergence. While focusing on all students at the same time seemed an impossible task, I decided to focus my attention on five students suggested by the teachers. However, the organization of the classroom made the task harder than expected. Children worked in different groups at different stations most of the day. In order to follow each one of them, I had to constantly change groups, which did not allow me the consistency I had planned. I decided then to establish regular periods to work with each of the five students individually, usually 20 minutes, during the days I was in the classroom. This arrangement gave me more consistency, but it was hard to maintain due to the constant changes in the routines of the classroom or because children had to attend special classes such as ESL and math. I ended up working in a more consistent fashion with three students: Aurora, Carl, and Norton (pseudonyms).

Advantages and Challenges of this Methodology

A postcritical ethnographic case study offers the possibility of exploring the different factors at multiple scales that affect teaching and learning processes. On the one hand, a postcritical lens urges the consideration of multiple perspectives. On the other hand, a case study centers our attention on local processes, organizes data, and helps researchers “identify and gain analytic insight into the dimensions and dynamics of the phenomenon being studied” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 81). This methodology opened spaces to comprehend the implications inherent in the co-construction and co-implementation of a curriculum that I hoped would respond to the needs of all the children in the classroom.
A challenge in using postcritical ethnography to inform my methodology was my commitment to collaboration with the teachers. As Kemmis (2008) asserted, collaboration entails a process of critical reflection that guarantees praxis, reflection in action (Freire, 2000), informed by “intersubjectively-shared understandings” (p. 135). Collaboration involved embracing the different voices and the silences that implicitly unfolded in our construction of meaning. It implied understanding that although co-researchers might “hold a common vision on some level, otherwise collaboration breaks down… differing visions, agendas, and interpretations [are the ones] that complicate and accordingly enrich the dynamics of collaboration” (Lassiter, 2005, p. 137). I believe it was our combined lack of “intersubjectively-shared understanding” of what collaboration entails that did not allow Ms. Bravo, Ms. Franklin, and I to accomplish the level of collaboration I envisioned for this study. I tried to adopt a flexible posture and a commitment to reciprocity with teachers in order to facilitate collaboration. Nevertheless, it proved not to be enough. Our different views of teaching and learning and our stance toward culturally responsive practices affected our possibilities to collaborate. In the end, collaboration was only possible to achieve with Ms. Bravo. This severely limited the impact of our work.

**Reflecting on My Positionality**

Any qualitative research study requires an investment of the self (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998); a personal engagement with the project. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that whenever we analyze any educational system or practice we bring with us who we are, our culture, and set of beliefs. These beliefs define our positionality in terms of a range of identity factors (including race, ethnicity, class, and gender) to which
we have become socialized and that greatly impact the lens through which we design and
carry out our work (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Gregory, Long, & Volk, 2004). My reasons
for choosing a postcritical ethnographic case study were rooted in the gamut of identity
factors that define who I am. Those identity factors were the ones that originated the
political and moral dimensions of myself, which defined my positionality and the impact
it had in my work. With this acknowledgement, I began to explore my positionality in
this study, bearing in mind that my subjectivities were always present, as we signify our
experiences according to the repertoires transmitted by our cultures (Dyson & Genishi,
2005). In fact, consciousness of who we are is a key component in qualitative research
(Milner, 2007; Peshkin, 1988) that requires being both reflective and reflexive. As
Chiseri–Strater (1996) explained, the distinction between these two terms is that “to be
reflective does not demand an ‘other,’ while to be reflexive demands both an ‘other’ and
some self-conscious awareness of the process of self-scrutiny” (p. 130). I engaged in
constant reflection of my actions, decisions, and choices while I scrutinized my behavior
in relation to the larger scope of the well-being of those around me. My expectations to
be transformed as a result of this experience became true (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). I
want to believe I am now a better and—hopefully—wiser human being, who is capable
of taking advantage of the learning opportunities this study has afforded me. In a way,
self-exploration allowed me to acknowledge my own humanity (Freire, 2000). It
positioned me as fallible human being and gave me the tools to better understand the
forces behind my positioning as privileged or oppressed and what I could do to challenge
that reality. Consequently, I can see now how this dynamic, generative, reflective
process (Stronach, Garratt, Pearce, & Piper, 2013) affected my emerging research self while it permeated my work.

**My political stance.** My political self-provided a framework through which I was able to look at the experiences of minoritized children and recognize the ways in which systems of power perpetuated deficient views of them. As well, it made evident my responsibility to take action (Freire, 2000). Foundational to this framework was my recognition of Whiteness and all races as social constructions (Titone, 2000). I realized that all my life I have enjoyed privilege, not because I earned it, but simply because I was White and therefore unmarked (Jensen, 2005). Although as an Ecuadorian in the United States I am now part of a minoritized group, I cannot ignore the fact that in Ecuador I always enjoyed White privilege. This acknowledgement gave me the opportunity to reconcile the different facets of my life, understanding that my personal identity and professional endeavors were inexorably attached (Titone, 2000).

**My moral responsibility.**

*Sin que me vean/ Without being noticed*

¡Qué fría mañana! / What a cold morning!

Better not show

¿Qué me espera hoy? / What’s gonna happen today?

Better not think

¿Cómo le digo que no entiendo? / How do I tell her I don’t get it?

Better pretend

¿Cómo le digo que no me siento parte? / How do I tell her I don’t fit in?

Better not show

¿Quién se burlara hoy de mí? / Who’s gonna make fun of me today?

Better not think

¡Pero si aquí estamos mejor! / But we are much better here!

Better pretend . . . . (Author, 2014, personal communications)

About a year and half ago, while working at a local school in a project for one of my doctoral classes, I had the opportunity to meet a fourth-grade, Latino American student. I
wrote the poem above as my reflection of the struggles she had to confront every day. She made me aware of some of the ways in which educational systems and structures are part of the bigger machinery of power that perpetuates inequity (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). She also made me feel compelled to do something to interrupt the cycle. I saw my work as my moral responsibility to the children whose cultural backgrounds deserve to be acknowledged and appreciated as well as to the teachers who deal on a regular basis with children whose cultures they do not understand. I believe we come to recognize and value other ways of being when we are confronted with them, which sometimes requires an intentional effort and the willingness to see. Consequently, I thought it was my responsibility to notice and make evident the cultural heritage that children brought with them to the classroom, regardless of their origin. My expectations were that by noticing and naming the commonalities and differences among children, we, teachers and researcher, would be in a better position to find the tools to positively respond to the cultures they brought to the classroom. I am convinced it is crucial to recognize the uniqueness of each child while at the same time we learn to identify the commonalities they share with other children—commonalities that we all share as humans.

**Monitoring my positionality.** Acknowledging our weaknesses and biases is not enough to guarantee the quality of our work (Noblit et al., 2004). It is necessary to constantly “direct our attention beyond our individual or subjective selves… attend[ing] to our subjectivity in relation to others [emphasis in the original]” (Madison, 2012, p. 10). Thus, I made a conscious effort to engage in constant reflection of my work through a personal diary where I jotted down my detailed observations as well as my own ideas about what I was encountering. I also wrote
analytic memos (Saldaña, 2013) to make sense of the experiences I was living and keep track of my own behavior and responses. I believe they all helped me keep my subjectivities in perspective and see where they aligned, juxtaposed, or intersected with my participants.

**The Site and Participants**

My work as an instructor and supervisor for undergraduate students in the Elementary Program of the College of Education at a large university in the South of the country gave me the opportunity to be in contact with several teachers at various grade levels and school settings. One of those experiences, during a curriculum integrated class, took me to a school I will call Myrtle Elementary. Myrtle Elementary offered a partial immersion program in Spanish; students spent half of their days learning in English and the other half learning in Spanish. Myrtle Elementary is located in an urban area of a medium size city in the southern United States.

In May 2014, when searching for an appropriate site for my study, I contacted the Principal of Myrtle Elementary. I purposefully selected (Patton, 2002) this school because of the partial immersion Spanish program they used. I wanted to conduct my study in a bilingual setting since this type of education is one of my areas of expertise, and I felt I could contribute my perspectives. Ms. Waller (pseudonym), the principal at Myrtle Elementary, was very accommodating. She told me that my ideas about conducting a collaborative ethnographic case study, with the intention of co-constructing and co-implementing culturally responsive curriculum, aligned with the goals of the school. She suggested contacting two second grade teachers working together in the same classroom and the ESL teacher assisting them with emergent bilinguals (Garcia &
Kleifgen, 2010). The Spanish-speaking teacher, Ms. Ana Bravo (pseudonym), worked with me in a project part of a class I taught at Myrtle Elementary two years ago. She was a young Latino American from Texas in her fifth year of teaching at the school. The English-speaking teacher, Ms. Hellen Franklin (pseudonym), a European American from Pittsburg in her early forties, was an experienced educator in her 11th year of teaching at Myrtle Elementary. Ms. Connelly, the ESL teacher, excused herself from participating in the study due to personal reasons. Ms. Waller contacted me with the teachers by email, and a week later, I met Ms. Bravo and Ms. Franklin to discuss the project.

**Methods of Data Collection**

Methods are fully embedded in the theories we hold; they are more than tools to carry on a study (Jordan, 2003; Quantz, 1992). The decisions we make regarding the methods we use to produce data and the way we analyze it give account of our beliefs and are related to our epistemological orientations. Hence, we must pay constant attention to the different ways in which our personal biases affect the decisions we make, the way those biases are fueled by existing systems and institutions, and the ways our cultural context affects the questions we make and how we interpret the data we find (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). I chose to conduct a postcritical ethnographic case study because it required the consideration of multiple perspectives. Also, the study involved collecting data over a long period of time, which insured that I had not only “sufficient qualitative but sufficient quality [emphasis in original] data with which to work” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 16). I collected data primarily via participant observations. I also conducted interviews, and collected documents and artifacts for analysis.
Observations. Observations give researchers the opportunity to capture details of the worlds they wish to understand. In an ethnographic work, observations play a particularly important role since they are one of the sources from which to create thick descriptions of the community of practice we aim to understand and be a part of (Geertz, 2006). In the context of my study, I used different kinds of observations with different purposes.

Participant observations. Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte, (1999) defined participant observation as "the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting" (p. 91). This type of systematic observation was the main source of data collection in my study. By immersing myself in the world of the classroom, I felt better equipped to learn with this community.

Beginning in August 2014, I visited the classroom as regularly as possible, usually twice a week from 7:30 a.m. until noon, although sometimes I stayed until 3:00 p.m. (See Appendix A for a timeline of the study and my collaboration with teachers). I typically participated in the different activities planned for the class and assisted teachers in their duties. The purpose of this period of participant observation was to get to know the children and teachers in the context of the classroom as well as to learn about the school culture and the different requirements mandated by the district. I worked directly with students in a variety of activities, but particularly in literacy due to my interest in reading and writing processes. I continued with participant observations until the end of the school year in May. I wrote descriptions of what I observed and my comments and reflections about those observations. I kept my notes
in a private journal. I was the only one who had access to it. I kept it with me all the time and preserved it in a locked drawer in my personal desk at home.

In mid-November, the teachers and I held a long collaborative planning session. During this meeting, we discussed our beliefs about teaching and learning and the organization of the classroom. We also planned a small unit to be implemented in December. My plan was to meet systematically with teachers for approximately two hours a week throughout the duration of the study. However, these collaborative periods never took place due to teachers’ busy schedules and other circumstances. From November to early February we met almost every other week with teachers in Mexico to discuss activities and plan engagements for children.

From January to May, I was in the classroom three full days a week, from 7:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. I audio recorded most of each day the first week. I did not videotape because I felt teachers were not comfortable with it. I kept a record of what happened during my observations in my personal journal and identified literacy practices that helped me understand the impact of the curriculum on students’ learning. After the first week, I only recorded the literacy practices I identified as rich sources of information, which were mostly the time I individually worked with the small group of students the teachers had suggested. Miller and Goodnow (1995) refer to everyday events as practices that “come packed with values about what is natural, mature, morally right, or aesthetically pleasing” (p. 6). I define literacy practices as those everyday events that take place in a classroom that involve reading and writing. My intention was to capture children’s conversations and interactions as well as interactions between teachers and children and between the children and me.
I audiotaped and transcribed our long collaborative planning session in November. In order to ensure trustworthiness of the data, I shared with teachers the transcripts as I wanted to gain their perspectives (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994). I received comments about the transcripts from Ms. Bravo. Ms. Franklin did not share her perspectives with me.

I also audiotaped informal conversations with teachers, children working at stations and with me, and teachers teaching during morning meetings (see Table 3.1 for a summary of hours of audio recordings). I selected from my files those conversations and engagements I believed portrayed the teaching style of Ms. Bravo and Ms. Franklin as well as their perspectives about our work and, by extension, about culturally responsive practice. From the small group of children teachers suggested, I ended up working more consistently with three of them, Aurora, Carl, and Norton (pseudonyms).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of recording</th>
<th>Number of hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meetings with teachers</td>
<td>13 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers during morning meeting or mini-lessons</td>
<td>12 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with children</td>
<td>11 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with principal and district coordinators</td>
<td>5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of hours of audio recordings</strong></td>
<td><strong>40 hours</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Passive observations.** Passive observations were my second way to obtain thick descriptions (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999). I used them to observe children outside the context of the classroom, mainly during recess time and lunch. Twice, I also
followed the two Latino American girls who attended ESL and special math sessions. These observations helped me learn more about them as learners and identified some of the structures that were contributing to or interfering with their learning.

**Interviews.** Interviews are an important tool for qualitative researchers. The type of interview one chooses is closely tied to the type of information one wishes to obtain. I used two kinds of interviews: unstructured ethnographic and dialogical interviews, and semi-structured dialogical interviews (Roulston, 2010). Although my plan was to conduct unstructured ethnographic interviews with both teachers, it was only possible to engage in these conversations with Ms. Bravo. I found them quite productive since they allowed me to explore “the meanings that [she] ascribe to actions and events in [her] cultural worlds, expressed in [her] own language” (Roulston, 2010, p. 19). I believe these interviews and conversations helped me understand Ms. Bravo as a teacher and as a human being as well as the intricacies of her belief system and how it affected her practices. At one point at the end of the semester, our conversations turned into dialectical reflexive practice that brought us together (Denzin, 2001). As a collective, we sought to find ways to transform our classroom engagements into culturally responsive ones.

I also informally interviewed students from the small group of students in order to learn more about their lives and learning processes as well as their perspectives regarding the activities we planned for them. It was important to get their viewpoints and use them to inform our teaching. I started these interviews in January, once I was granted authorization to conduct my study, and because I felt by then they considered me another member of their community and were comfortable around me.
The second type of interview, the semi-structured dialogical interview, is designed to engage the interviewee and interviewer in dialogue that goes beyond opinion (Roulston, 2010). The intent is to develop knowledge and not simply convey experience (Brinkmann, 2007). I used this type of interview with Ms. Waller, the principal of the school. I wished to learn about her philosophical underpinnings and understand how she made sense of the structures in place at her school. By engaging in dialogue, I tried to understand the logic behind certain district decisions, the reasons for starting a partial immersion Spanish program at the school, her criteria for hiring teachers, and her perceptions of teachers’ work. I also used this type of interview with Ms. Franklin at the end of the school year when she accepted my invitation to talk with me.

**Documents and artifacts analysis.** I collected documents and artifacts such as the lesson plans we generated, some class materials produced for learning centers, and some students’ productions. Unfortunately, most of the materials teachers produced were electronic and available to students through their iPads. I could not have access to them since there were restrictions to the district network. Therefore, I took notes of the engagements teachers planned. I commented about the ones Ms. Bravo designed. I also asked Ms. Franklin about hers, but did not get details that could help me understand her thinking behind them.

I also analyzed the district webpage and the portion of it dedicated to World Language Programs, which included partial immersion ones.

**Participants’ Risks**

Qualitative research requires from the researcher a constant reflection of her actions; this includes any ethical issues involved in data collection such as informed
consent procedures, confidentiality of participants, and storing data in a secure place (Creswell, 2007). With these considerations, I sent a letter to all parents and guardians explaining the objectives of my study and what it meant for their children. The letter explicitly stated students could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. I also asked teachers to sign a letter of consent for the study; they could, however, withdraw at any time with no consequences.

To protect research participants from any harm, qualitative researchers commit to confidentiality. Confidentiality is important because it “provides the foundation of trust and rapport that allows researchers gather valid data to promote understanding of the human condition” (Palys & Lowman, 2000, p. 163). Confidentiality implies keeping information from participants in a secure place. Above all, it is important that only the researcher and people in the research team can identify the information or responses of participants. To guarantee confidentiality in my study, I picked a pseudonym for each one of my participants with their consent. Thus, in this dissertation, the names of all people and places have been replaced with pseudonyms. I kept all data collected in password secured files. I transferred to an external memory all recordings and videotapes and kept them in a secured location in my home along with all the field notes I collected during the study.

**Data Analysis**

Schensul and LeCompte (1999) believed the analysis of data begins in the mind of the researcher “as a conceptual and cognitive process” (p. 149). Because researchers might not know much about the community they wish to understand, these authors suggest engaging in several levels of analysis. They caution researchers about the fact
that an overall picture will not be clear right away, but that it will slowly emerge from the data. I lived this process as I collected my data. My political and moral dimensions pushed me to look and reflect not only about the classroom practices that I encountered, but to situate them in the big scope of the time and space where my fieldwork took place. Additionally, I am aware that my interpretations were and always be colored by my personal perspectives and beliefs.

When analyzing the data generated in this study, I followed the main constructs I made explicit in my research questions (Weston et al., 2001): What characterizes the co-construction of a culturally responsive curriculum? What characterizes the co-implementation of a culturally responsive curriculum? What is the impact of a culturally responsive curriculum on teachers, students, and researcher? I first organized my data according to these questions and the sources I used to respond them (see Table 3.2).
Table 3.2

*Data collection design matrix* 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</th>
<th>DATA SOURCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers</strong></td>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What characterizes the co-construction of a culturally responsive curriculum?</td>
<td>Collaborative planning meeting in November; informal planning meetings with Ms. Bravo; meeting with teachers in Mexico: audio recordings, field notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 What are the structures at the district level that could foster or hinder collaboration?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 What are the structures at the school level that could foster or hinder collaboration?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What characterizes the co-implementation of a culturally responsive curriculum?</td>
<td>Participant-observations: three times a week. Audiotapes and field notes from morning meetings and mini-lessons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What is the impact of a culturally responsive curriculum on teachers, students, and researcher?</td>
<td>Interviews: Ms. Bravo: – one at the beginning of the study and one at the end of it. Ms. Franklin: one at the end of the study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Table adapted from EDRM 740 class materials.
According to Saldaña (2013), “in qualitative data analysis, a code is a research-generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory building and other analytic processes” (p. 4). I read and reread my data in order to make sense of the lived experiences and then I stared assigning codes to our first long collaborative meeting in November. I started with this meeting because I was searching for patterns that could help me organize my next steps of data analysis.

Given the uneven collaborative effort to produce culturally responsive curriculum, I traced teachers’ trajectories throughout the time we spent together. The analysis of the path each teacher took throughout this study helped me understand the complexities of collaboration and the diverse factors that affected teachers’ responsiveness to my invitation to collaborate to create a culturally responsive curriculum. Thus, I focused my analysis on the process (and lack of process) of collaboration as well as the places where my collaboration with Ms. Bravo allowed for culturally responsive practices.

My first coding cycle included simultaneous coding (Saldaña, 2013). I used *in vivo*, a word or a short phrase from the actual language of participants (Saldaña, 2013), and values coding in order to capture the thoughts, attitudes, values, and beliefs teachers held regarding teaching and learning. Simultaneous coding allowed me to use words from teachers (in vivo coding) that at the same time represented their thoughts, attitudes, values, and beliefs (values coding).

A second coding cycle allowed me to look at my data corpus as a whole, focusing on each teacher at the same time and then in those instances when collaboration happened between Ms. Bravo and me. For this second cycle, I used pattern coding. According to
Saldaña (2013), this type of coding emerges from collecting similarly coded passages from the data corpus to assess their commonalities in order to assign various pattern codes. He suggests using patterns of action, the interrelationships or theoretical constructs from the data and pattern codes to stimulate the development of descriptions of major themes (see Appendix B for final codes I assigned to my data).

In the process of data analysis, I also used analytic memos to document and reflect on the choices I made in terms of the process of inquiry itself and the patterns, categories, themes, and concepts that I saw emerging from the data. As Weston et al. (2001) stated, there is “a reciprocal relationship between the development of a coding system and the evolution of understanding a phenomenon” (p. 397). I also used memos as a way to reflect on the experiences I was living and in some occasions to my release my frustrations.
Chapter 4: The Story of My Research Process

Telling stories, narrating our lives, is a basic and enthralling human activity (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012). There are many appealing traits in narrative. Probably one of the most significant of them is that narrative can be used to describe our personal and material realities (Daiute, 2014).

The use of narrative has a long tradition, particularly in anthropology. Scholars and researchers have narrated with different purposes, beginning with the omnipresent anthropologist, who offered us his “unbiased” interpretation of the lived experiences of the peoples he attended to, and narratives that acknowledged their partial representation of the world “our” past and recent events (Ochs & Capps, 1996). Narratives have been used to strive for social justice. Critical theorists and researchers claim narratives “provide a language to bridge the gaps in imagination and conception that give rise to the different. They reduce alienation for members of excluded groups, while offering opportunities for members of the majority group to meet them halfway” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 51). Narrative is also a powerful practice to socialize us into the cultural structures of our societies (Duranti, 1997; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984). Through narratives we are introduced to the particular world views of the social groups to which we belong. We learn to make sense of our lived experiences through the lens of those narratives and problem-solve as we attempt to give our narratives a chronological order to guarantee connections between events that otherwise might appear disconnected or without sense (Ochs & Capps, 1996). In narrating the story of my research process, I
provide an ethnographic description of myself, the research site, the study participants, and the interactions among us. I do so in order to describe the ways in which personal histories, school, and district structures as well as social conditions, circumscribed teachers’ responses to my invitation for the three of us to incorporate a culturally responsive stance into classroom practices. As Wortham (2001) stated, “one must study how social, cultural and relational contexts play a central role in producing the meaningfulness of experience” (p. xii). Using narrative also makes visible my personal perspectives as a Latina educator as I attended to the temporality, sociality and place (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) where our experiences occurred. My narrative is also a place to heal, to acknowledge my own humanity, and give myself hope to encounter the future and my place in the world of education.

The Beginning: Gaining Access

Narrating how I was granted access to the site where I conducted my study helped me understand some of the factors that shaped subsequent outcomes. I was able to trace my efforts to establish trust and rapport with the teachers who agreed to participate. Sharing the beginning also provides the reader a context in which to understand those who assented to be part of my study.

The principal. I met Ms. Waller, the principal at Myrtle Elementary, two years before initiating my research study. I had taught a preservice teacher education class every other semester at her school from 2012–2014. Two of those classes required me to pair preservice teachers with students in one of the second grade classrooms at her school. For one hour a week, the pairs spent time engaged in reading and writing. In May 2014, I emailed Ms. Waller about my study; she responded promptly and we met a
week later to discuss my project. During our meeting, I detailed my plan to co-construct and co-implement culturally responsive curriculum with one of her teacher teams. I explained that the study required willing teachers who were committed to learning more about culturally responsive practices. Ms. Waller told me that the study aligned with the school’s goals and she offered to email me the names of some teachers in the partial immersion Spanish program who could be a good match for my study. She said there were two teachers per grade level who needed to collaborate between themselves. That seemed to be an ideal situation. She also thought such a classroom would be a good match because Spanish is my native language and I could assist the Spanish teacher in her daily duties. I got an email from Ms. Waller a few days later, giving me the names of three teachers who, according to her, were interested in my study. The teachers were the team working in second grade and the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher. One of them, Ms. Bravo, had worked with me before, so I felt we already had a place to start developing a closer relationship that could better support our work together. Ms. Waller gave me the teachers’ email addresses and suggested I meet with them in June, 2014, before the end of the school year.

My co-researchers My first contact with the teachers was through email, as Ms. Waller recommended. I sent a message to all three of them to introduce myself and ask for possible dates to meet. Ms. Franklin responded and, after a short exchange of messages, Ms. Franklin, Ms. Bravo and I agreed to meet at Myrtle Elementary on June 18 at 3:45 p.m., after a professional development activity they had to attend. Ms. Conerly, the ESL teacher, could not stay due to personal reasons. Later, she excused herself from participation.
When I arrived at Myrtle Elementary, teachers were just finishing their training on a new program called The Leader in Me; an adaptation for elementary schools of Steven Covey’s (2004) leadership program portrayed in his book The 7 Habits for Highly Effective People (Covey, 2004). Teachers briefly shared with me about the program. They showed me the materials they got: A guiding book and workbook for each child. They had to introduce the 7 habits one by one and make them common language in their classrooms as well as in the school. The program was a district initiative they had to implement during the 2014–2015 school year.

We met for approximately 1 hour. Ms. Bravo and I reconnected and shared with Ms. Franklin our experience working together. Both teachers shared with me the new arrangement for the following school year. Ms. Bravo explained: “This is all new to us. We will work together in a classroom with 39 students” (field notes, June 18, 2015). They had been placed in a classroom with opened walls to allow a more fluid transition from the English to the Spanish spaces and vice versa. We discussed the purpose of the study and what it would entail. I explained my goal was to plan together two or three units with a culturally responsive lens. I shared my excitement about the study. They agreed to participate. They seemed enthusiastic about the project and our learning together. We decided we would meet again in August to talk more about the details of the project.

The district. Myrtle Elementary is part of Steuben school district. Steuben serves more than 25,000 students from pre–Kindergarten to grade 12 through 30 schools, 17 of which are elementary. It covers 360 square miles—48% of the county’s 750 square miles. Steuben serves 121,030 students, 46% of the students in the county. During the
2014–2015 school year, Steuben’s student population was mostly European American (76.19%). African Americans represented 10.47% of the population, Latino Americans 7.12% and others 6.2%. The District offered a World Languages Program, which included language acquisition and partial immersion programs in four languages: Spanish, French, Chinese (Mandarin) and German. The language acquisition program was designed for students in third to fifth grades and included three or four Spanish lessons a week. The partial immersion programs were for students in K to fifth grades. They were designed as a means of acquiring a second language through content matter instruction; students received instruction in the target language half of the day. On the district webpage, the philosophy of these programs was described as being based on the following tenets:

- Languages are acquired, not taught.
- Language acquisition takes place through a process linking language to meaning.
- In order for languages to be acquired, students must be exposed to comprehensible input— and a lot of it. (The teacher must use the language at least 90% of the time for grades 3–12 and 100% of the time in immersion classrooms, while helping the learners understand the input through strategies and methods that will help develop meaning for the learner).
- Good language instruction involves students using the language for real purposes and not just learning about the language.
- A child who functions in one language is already a candidate to function in others.
- A child is always benefitted by beginning language study as early as possible.
- A child will not exceed in his second language, the ability he or she has in his first language.
- Linguistic accuracy is a destination, not a point of departure.
- Proficiency in a language is attainable; mastery of a language is not.
- Authentic assessment involves a variety of performance standards and requires the child to use language purposefully to meet a need or solve a problem.
- Language learning is for all students regardless of abilities or challenges.

Registration for partial immersion programs happened online once a year and was available only for Kindergarten students. No students were accepted beyond Kindergarten unless they already had command of the target language. During a conversation I had with Ms. Roman, the Language Programs Coordinator (recording, March 9, 2015), she explained the district held several meetings in January to explain the beliefs listed on the website. Parents also could access a flyer with information from the district’s webpage. When they attended one of the informational meetings, the parents received a letter with the programs’ features as well as names of studies that supported the use of bilingual programs. The letter also referred to studies that credited the learning immersion programs as a means to closing the achievement gap (Collier & Collier, 2012; Haj–Broussard, 2003). All the information and the meetings were in English.
The school. Myrtle Elementary is located in an urban area of a medium size city in South Carolina. According to the South Carolina State Department, Myrtle had 560 students in K–5 during the 2014–2015 school year. Forty-three percent of students received free lunch and 13% received reduced lunch. The number of students who received this service had increased 17.96% since 2006.

Myrtle Elementary was one of the schools in the district that offered a partial Spanish immersion program. Children in the program received Math and Science instruction in Spanish and Language Arts and Social Studies in English. During the 2014–2015 school year, the district hired three native Spanish speakers to work at Myrtle Elementary. They joined a group of three teachers whom already were teaching Spanish at the school. Each Spanish teacher worked with an English partner. Some of them shared a big classroom with designated spaces for English and Spanish; others worked independently in their own rooms.

The district had a strict policy regarding language use. Spanish teachers could only speak in Spanish with children and among themselves. This meant that all math and science instruction was in Spanish. One of the standardized tests children had to take in second grade was the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP), which assessed students in their knowledge of Language Arts and Math. Students took this test in English.

As did every other state in the nation, South Carolina used standardized test scores to evaluate public schools. Myrtle Elementary’s performance was average during 2012 and 2013 school years. This explains why since the beginning of the 2014–2015 school year, the focus of the school was on increasing standardized test scores. Most professional development and teachers’ meetings focused on this particular issue or tied
desired learning outcomes with the requirements of the tests. Thus, meetings were planned to address the particularities of each of the scheduled tests (see Table 3.1). This was the mindset during the time of my study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Myrtle Elementary Standardized Tests Schedule</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standardized Tests</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAR Testing 4th and 5th Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIDA Access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beacon EOY Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIBELS Next</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT Aspire Writing, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT Aspire Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT Aspire Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT Aspire Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCPASS Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCPASS Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring MAP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before taking the MAP test, the whole school immersed itself in a campaign to improve their results. For instance, a group of teachers created a video with both students and teachers dancing and chanting about improving MAP scores (See Figure 4.1). The video was shown to the entire student body in the cafeteria during lunchtime. Additionally, a week before the test, students had personal meetings with someone from the administrative team to explain what their previous scores had been and how they planned to improve them. The picture to the bottom right shows children in line to conference with Ms. Waller.
Figure 4.1. Video produced by teachers and personal conferences with students to support the idea that students need to prepare for MAP testing.

**School regime.** Teachers at Myrtle Elementary made efforts to maintain a quiet atmosphere in the school. Children were not allowed to talk in the halls. In general, very few children were in the hallways by themselves and there was usually an adult in each of the halls. She or he made sure children walked quietly and interrupted any conversations that might have been taking place. The policy was very clear. There was also a no talking policy in the cafeteria. Children arrived according to the schedule the school determined for each grade; the cafeteria could not accommodate all the students at the same time. Once in the cafeteria, children who were eating the daily menu got their cafeteria cards and then made a line to get their food. They were not allowed to talk. Those who brought their own lunch boxes, went directly to the tables and started eating. Most of the time, the children were allowed to chat while the ones who were getting their food
arrived at the table. Once everyone was at the table and ready to eat, an adult, usually a teacher, put music to signal everyone was expected to be quiet and eat their food. They will also put the music on if they noticed children were getting loud. They used the same music every day. Children usually had around 20 minutes to eat their lunch. If they needed to go to the bathroom, get a spoon, or more water, they had to ask their teachers for permission to leave the table. When lunch was over, children got in a line, and they either returned their tray or threw any garbage they produced. They left the cafeteria the same way they came in, quietly, in line.

At the end of the day, the dismissal procedure followed the same lines. Children got in line after the daily announcement that reminded everyone the day was over and they needed to get ready to go home. They all knew where to go: to the bus lines or with a teacher whose responsibility was to take them to their parents. The bus group lined up at certain spots in the school. They were dispatched as soon as the bus was outside. Children who were to meet their parents followed their assigned teacher and, once outside, they waited quietly for their parents to arrive. When a car stopped to pick up a child, the teacher in charge opened the car door, let the child in and sometimes helped with the seat belt. Exchanges between teachers and parents were scarce. Once the child was in the car, the teacher closed the door and the next parent would come. The idea was to dispatch as soon as possible every child. Children who were going to extracurricular activities somewhere else by bus were required to wait in the halls in line the same way everyone else did. They were not allowed to talk, play, or read. They had to pay attention and be ready to leave when the teacher called their names.
I had previously understood that it was important that students were quiet and orderly. I got to understand this more deeply in January when the students came back from their winter break. Teachers announced during their morning meeting that at 9:00 a.m., they were going to practice how to walk around the school as well as practice the behavior they were expected to demonstrate in the different spaces they use during the day. Ms. Bravo stated it was important for them to review these procedures. She asked the children why they thought it was important to walk silently when they were in the halls. Children said things like: “Because you have to be quiet. Because others are in class. Because you don’t want to go to Mr. Rogers (one of the assistant principals). After a brief discussion, Ms. Bravo added: “We could be good leaders in the hall and let other kids watch” (field notes, January 7, 2015).

When it was time to leave, children got in line and went first to one of the school halls. There was a teacher waiting for them. She asked them to show her a good line and then picked two children to demonstrate to the others, which was the appropriate way to walk in the halls at Myrtle Elementary. The rule was they had to pay attention to an imaginary line on the floor making sure they always stayed on the right side of the hall. Their hands could only be placed on the sides of their body or behind it. She also demonstrated the best way to move their feet to avoid making unnecessary sounds. All children practiced after the instructions until they mastered the procedure. The next stop was in the music room. There they practiced a mock dismissal procedure. The most important part of it was to be quiet, paying attention to the instructions teachers in charge of the process gave. Children needed to understand they had to pay close attention to the instructions because if they did not they could miss the teacher’s call and that would
harm the procedure. Children also practiced how to conduct themselves in the cafeteria and in the bathrooms. They practiced for three hours until it was time to eat their lunch.

I have to admit these procedures got me by surprise and made me question the purpose of education. My past experiences at educational institutions wherein respect and good citizenship were not the product of these behavioral restrictions made me examined these practices in more detail. I believe that schools in which the voices of children can be heard and where transitioning freely through public spaces is not interpreted as disorderly but as a common fact of school life is the basis of a democratic school. I believe in schools where children learn to respect each other not because of fear to the consequences of not following rules, but due to an understanding of the rights other members of the community have and of their role in the maintenance of a productive community of practice.

The 2014–2015 School Year at Myrtle Elementary: Getting Acquainted with the Community

In August 2014, prior to the official beginning of my study, I asked Ms. Waller about the possibility of my being in Ms. Bravo and Ms. Franklin’s classroom as a helper, a few hours a day, two days a week. I wanted to get to know the teachers, the children, and the school community. Ms. Waller agreed. From August to December, on average, I attended the school twice a week and stayed for most of the day. Meanwhile, I worked on my proposal for the district and submitted it for their consideration. On January 12, 2015, I got a phone call from Dr. Rogers. She was the head of the research committee in the district. She explained the committee reviewed my proposal and they thought they did not need a study for the Spanish program. Instead, they needed someone to work
with the teachers in a partial immersion program in Chinese. She asked me if I was interested in developing such a study for them. I explained my study was about culturally responsive practices in the context of a bilingual classroom. I also explained it had already been approved by my committee and the university IRB and that starting a new study would delay my graduation by a year. She offered to consult again with the other members of the committee. I received an email on January 26 that said my study had been approved.

**The class.** There were 39 children and 2 teachers in the 2nd-grade Spanish-immersion class at Myrtle Elementary. Ms. Franklin was the English teacher and Ms. Bravo was the Spanish teacher. For whole group instruction they functioned as one class; however, each teacher was responsible for and made decisions that affected only her group. Of the 18 students in Ms. Franklin’s class, there were 7 males and 11 females; three students were African American, three were Latino-American, 11 were European American, and one self-identified as being of mixed race. Ms. Bravo’s class included 10 males and 11 females. Two students were African American, 18 were European American and one self-identified as being of mixed race. There were no students reported with special needs in either class.

The routine of the class stayed mostly the same throughout the year, with some changes implemented during the second semester. Both teachers arrived at 7:00 a.m. every morning and used the fifteen minutes before the children started to arrive to plan for the day and get copies or materials as needed. Children who came by bus got to the classroom around 7:15 a.m. Those who came with their parents arrived around 7:35. In Ms. Bravo’s class, as students entered the room, first, they chose their lunch for the day.
(unless they brought it from home). Then, they got their agendas and wrote their goals for the day. After finishing these tasks, the children could use their iPads to play a math game or complete some of the math worksheets Ms. Bravo had available for them.

In Ms. Franklin’s class, the routine was almost the same. Children wrote their goal for the day and then could freely decide to read, play with their iPads, or just chat. Students that arrived late (after 7:40 a.m.) had to get a tardy pass from the office. In general, children who were late missed writing their goals for the day, but would need to do so before they left for the day. These students joined the group in whatever activity was happening at the time, which was typically a mini-lesson on math or language arts.

The next activity was to work on one of the 7 habits of the program *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 2004), an initiative the district implemented for the school year. Each child had a workbook, in which they completed lessons related to the habits. The first lesson of the year was the habit Be Proactive. The habit read: “Be Proactive: I am a responsible person. I take initiative. I choose my actions, attitudes, and moods. I do not blame others for my wrong actions. I do the right thing without being asked, even when no one is looking” (Teacher guide, p. 4). Teachers incorporated the habits in their daily language. For instance, one morning early in the year, Ms. Bravo said to one of the girls: “Thanks Ollie for being proactive. She shows me how she is proactive without me having to say anything” (field notes, October 9, 2014). After finishing the habit’s worksheet for the day, children sat on the carpet and waited for teachers to recite their shared vision. The shared vision was a statement all children in the class contributed with at the beginning of the year. It expressed what they wanted to accomplish as a class. Children stood up, held hands, and recited their share vision. Both
groups participated in this activity as one class. They recited the shared vision alternating languages. One day they recited it in English; the next day they did it in Spanish. Next, children returned to the carpet where the lesson of the day started. They usually congregated on one side of the big room. Ms. Bravo generally started the lesson with announcements and attendance information. Then, she gave a math lesson, although sometimes Ms. Franklin gave a language arts lesson too. The lesson was delivered in the language of the teacher.

Mini lessons lasted approximately 20 minutes. Once the mini lesson was over, teachers gave children a couple of minutes to complete an organizational sheet they called the menu. The menu had spaces where children had to list the order in which they thought they wanted work on the different stations. During most of the first semester, children freely decided the stations they wanted to work at first. There were usually eight stations available, four in English on Ms. Franklin’s side of the class and four in Spanish on Ms. Bravo’s side of the class. Children moved freely from one side of the room to the other when teachers signal it was time to change stations (see Figure 4.2). Two of those stations were run by the teachers. They used them for small group instruction. Ms. Franklin covered language arts topics and Ms. Bravo math lessons. They called children according to their performance level. Children’s favorite activities were those that required the IPad; for instance, math games, reading eBooks or searching for information. Thus, as soon as they were dismissed, they quickly went to get them and tried to secure a spot in one of the station were they could use their IPads. Children worked at stations for one and a half hours.
At 10:00 a.m., children lined up and went outside for a 15-minute recess. After recess, children returned to the class to eat a snack while either Ms. Franklin or Ms. Bravo made an announcement or read a story. The next activity was to complete the stations they did not work at before recess. Stations ran for another hour and half until 12:00 p.m. when it was time to go to lunch. Teachers required the students to organize and tidy up the classroom before getting in line. This procedure took up to 10 minutes and sometimes, when someone was particularly restless, even longer. It was not uncommon for the children to have to go back to collect things and make sure the class was in order. Each class congregated on its side of the room depending on who their homeroom teacher was. Ms. Bravo’s class had to go to the carpet and wait until she called them to line up according to their cafeteria menu choice. Those who brought lunchboxes were usually the last ones. Once in line, Ms. Bravo appointed a leader, generally the first one in line. The procedure in Ms. Franklin’s class was similar. The students congregated on the carpet. Ms. Franklin picked a leader who decided the order of the line according to how
quiet her classmates were. In both classes, the leader was responsible for conducting the class to the cafeteria. She or he had to stop at each intersection, make sure everyone was standing in straight line, look at the teacher, and get her approval to continue to the next intersection. The procedure continued until they got to the cafeteria. After lunch, depending on the day of the week, children went to their related arts class, which lasted until 1:30 p.m. After related arts, they returned to their class for the last 45 minutes of the day. During the first semester of the year, teachers used those 45 minutes to work on a current project. Around 2:10 p.m., the children had to return to the carpet with their agendas and folders and had to explain what number they thought better represented their behavior. A 3 was for people who demonstrated remarkable behavior throughout the day, a 2 for those who had minor issues such as playing when they were supposed to be working, and a 1 for those who did not accomplish anything productive according to the teachers. Nobody picked 4 because that implied they had been perfect, which teachers thought was never the case. Children had to explain their choice out loud to the class. If a child could not decide on a number for her or his behavior, the teacher asked the child to consult with his friends. By early November, the teachers developed a rubric to help children decide what number they were. When a child could not make a decision about his number the teacher assigned a number. For instance, Ms. Bravo said to Maureen, “You have to tell me if you are a 1 or a 2. Write on your agenda you were a two because you were playing. If you don’t know what number you are, read the rubric. The rubric describes the things you should have done to deserve that number” (field notes, November 10, 2014). Children recorded their chosen numbers on their agendas and the teacher recorded it on a big chart she kept to determine the pattern of behavior for the
class that day. At this point, she gave children any communications to take home or homework they needed to complete. Children were dismissed at 2:20 p.m. They had to get in line and calmly walk to their designated spots to either take the bus or be picked by their parents.

**Between helper and intruder.** During the first semester of the year, I primarily helped the teachers with whatever they needed. Sometimes I subbed for them during lunch duties, recess or dismissal; this enabled me to observe children in other settings. If one of the teachers was absent, I led the activities she planned for the day. There was always a substitute teacher, but she supported me especially when children were working at stations. Most of the time I subbed for Ms. Bravo. She often was out of the classroom for meetings, professional development outside of the school, or personal reasons.

Before the official beginning of the school year, which was on August 18, the teachers notified me about a meeting with parents. The purpose of the meeting was to inform them about classroom procedures and collect the materials teachers requested for the year. The meeting was held on August 14. It was scheduled to begin at 8:00 a.m. I arrived at the school at 7:45 a.m. and went directly to the classroom. In the classroom, Ms. Franklin was finishing organizing things. Ms. Bravo had left the room before I arrived. Teachers prepared stations for parents around the classroom. At each station, they could access instructions on how to proceed through Quick Response (QR) Codes (two-dimensional bar codes that contain information about a particular item). I greeted parents as they started to come in explaining I was a volunteer who was going to help teachers during the year. Parents had to take their child’s IPad to read the QR Codes at each station. They had to complete an activity, which purpose was to explain a procedure
of the class, and then move to the next station. Some parents were not familiar with the use of an iPad. I helped them read the QR Codes and if someone felt insecure or frustrated, I just explained what they had to do so they could keep moving to the other stations. Once parents completed the activities at all stations they left. Around 8:30 a.m., Ms. Bravo came back to the classroom. She also helped parents read the QR Codes and greeted some of them. By noon, all parents had left. Teachers cleaned up the classroom and went to a faculty meeting.

By mid-September, I was acquainted with the routine of the class and children seemed to feel comfortable with my presence. From August to December, I arrived around 7:30 a.m. and stayed until children were done with lunch and went to their corresponding related arts class. Sometimes if teachers needed my help during dismissal time, I stayed until the end of the day. I took advantage of these opportunities to ask about plans for the next day or about an activity that I had not clearly understood. Although our conversations were very brief, since most of the time the teachers had something else to do, I found these informal conversations useful. They helped me to get to know the teachers, particularly Ms. Bravo. It was very uncommon to see Ms. Franklin after dismissal. When she was in the classroom, she was usually very busy getting things ready for the next day, which made it difficult for us to talk. If I had a question, she would answer it while she continued with her chores. Although Ms. Franklin was always very accommodating to my requests for time to work with children, I had the feeling my presence was a disruption to her. She seemed very uncomfortable when children came to greet or hug me and I felt uncomfortable because I thought I was the reason for her uneasiness.
Planning our collaboration. Having a better understanding of the district, the school, and the classroom procedures also led me to conclude that finding time to plan with teachers was going to be a challenge. Besides the 15 minutes teachers had at the beginning of the day, there was no other time for them to plan, except for the days marked in the calendar when they got together with the other second grade teachers to discuss what they had been doing. When children were in related arts classes, most of the time, teachers had to attend meetings. I decided to bring the issue to Mrs. Waller. She was very supportive and even agreed to give us a full day in mid-November to plan.

During this meeting, we discussed our beliefs, talked about classroom organization, made plans to change some of the procedures in place, and developed a short unit to offer children a glimpse about other ways of being. We implemented this unit in December.

In general, I thought the meeting was a successful one. I left with the feeling that our collaboration was going to be a success. I knew there were many things to work on, but I was confident that we had a place to start and that through questioning our practices and reflecting on them we were going to be able to respond to the needs of children. Nevertheless, collaboration did not take off as I expected. Many of our agreements during this long meeting never found a place in the classroom. In Appendix C, I included the major agreements we reached, who raised the topic and if those agreements materialized or not during the time of my study. My intention is to offer the reader an overall picture of our meeting and bring to her attention the role each one of us played during our encounter.

My perceptions of teachers’ ways of being. When I developed my questions and designed my study, I understood my questions could only be addressed
collaboratively. However, it turned out that the conceptions that the two teachers and I had about what we meant by working collaboratively differed substantially. I came from a school where collaboration was the norm. As the principal of a school affiliated with the International Baccalaureate, it was my responsibility to create spaces for teachers to work collaboratively. Teachers at my former school had collaborative meetings once a week per grade level. They had to register their agreements on minutes and placed them in a Google Drive so they and I could easily access them. I envisioned my collaboration at Myrtle Elementary as a systematic approach to curriculum planning; we would discuss what was happening in the classroom and share our thinking about how to address the particular needs of children. It appeared though that Ms. Bravo and Ms. Franklin had a different understanding of what collaboration meant. Both teachers cared about what they did and acknowledged the effects of their actions on student learning. At the same time, their ways of approaching teaching and learning varied from each other as did their stance towards authority and their role as teachers. It was this combination of factors that marked our work together and affected the degree of collaboration between each other and with me. To make evident, the characteristics of our co-construction and co-implementation of a culturally responsive curriculum and its effects on students, teachers and researcher, I created portraits of the two teachers. I used the dialogue and expressions from audio recordings to create a multivoiced narrative, which focused on them as collaborators in this study. By analyzing their discourses and classroom practices, their stance toward district and school structures, and their own trajectories in the world of the classroom, I hope to give the reader enough information to understand the local reality that shaped the role each one of them played during the time of this
study. I also hope to give the reader the opportunity to decipher the different forces and personal views that connected me with Ms. Bravo while distancing me from Ms. Franklin.

**Ana Bravo.** Ana Bravo, a single Latino-American from Texas in her late twenties, was a Spanish teacher at Myrtle Elementary. At the time of my study, Ms. Bravo was in her fifth year at the school. Ms. Bravo’s home language was Spanish. Nevertheless, she felt more comfortable talking and reading in English. In the fall of 2014, Ms. Bravo was taking a master’s level class at a local university. The class was in Spanish. When I asked about it, she said: “It’s the first time I take a class in Spanish. It’s been really hard. Sometimes I think I don’t get all I was supposed to” (field notes, October 10, 2014). My conversations with Ms. Bravo were mostly in Spanish only because it felt more natural between us. Whenever Ms. Franklin was present, we switched to English to make sure she felt comfortable and included in the discussion. Ms. Bravo claimed she spoke Spanish because of her mother. She explained:

We speak Spanish because of Mom. She is always speaking in Spanish to us and when we were little she insisted that we learned the language. Not everyone in my family is like that. My aunt, for example, she doesn’t speak to her kids in Spanish. They don’t understand a word, but we do. Mom feels very proud of her language. (field notes, October 10, 2014)

Ms. Bravo spoke freely about her educational and personal beliefs. For instance, when discussing about what we wanted for students during our November meeting, Ms. Bravo and Ms. Franklin had this exchange:
Ms. Bravo: I want them (her students) to be critical thinkers. To think that learning is fun. It’s not work. I want them to know that learning happens all the time.

Ms. Franklin: and everywhere.

Ms. Bravo: That they have the ability to…

Ms. Franklin: Not stop and just give up. It’s too hard. No, you’ve got skill. It’s what you know.

Ms. Bravo: That’s a big cultural thing, though. A lot of us here are taught, like a society, if it’s not easy, oh well, I won’t do it! For instance, the other day we were talking about this with a friend and he said: ‘In Nicaragua this isn’t a thing.’ Because there’s no other option, you have to work to survive. You have to work to eat. They are not aware that there’s something else. There is no other option. You want food? Go out and make it happen. (planning meeting, November 19, 2014)

Later on in the conversation, Ms. Bravo said:

Right now and, I’m sure there have been times in history before, but right now it just seems completely silly to be teaching kids things they can look up, I mean this is the information age, right? So why do we teach them something that they don’t necessarily need? I think they need skills now because a lot of things and truths that were true before are not true anymore; they are irrelevant. You know this information from history classes, but why would you need to sit there and study all this stuff when you can just search it. But they do need to know how to
look for it. They need to know where, what sort of thing, what is viable versus, you know how to believe and what not to believe on their own, like how do they know, the how and the what behind the actual knowledge of it. So, I do have this general idea. At the same time, I think, we should be teaching in elementary school some basic structures of math, you know and literacy. When we look at the new standards, you can see they are breaking them down, and breaking them down, and breaking them down to the point where there is a standard that says “students will use periods, commas and quotations” at a certain place in their writing. So, I go oh my God! Yes, period end of the story that’s what you teach and you move on. Why are we making a big deal about this one thing instead of thinking about the whole idea?

My students get really excited when I talk about things they care like videogames and Norton stealing a pen. You have to get to what they care about otherwise nothing changes, nothing happen. (planning meeting, November 19, 2014)

On numerous occasions, Ms. Bravo proposed changes to the classroom organization or introduced new ideas. For instance, discussing with Ms. Franklin about how to improve children’s literacy skills she proposed, “What if every day you gave the lesson first in English and I gave it again a second time in Spanish?” (field notes, November 24, 2014). A version of this initiative became effective in January 2015. Teachers never taught the same lesson in both languages, but they each taught a lesson in their language every morning. Ms. Bravo usually taught a math lesson and Ms. Franklin a language one.
As a response to my request to include in our classroom practices a culturally responsive lens, she responded: “What if we plan a small unit in December…that might be a really great unit to do around Christmastime. It would be an extension of the communities. We know our community, now let’s go out” (planning meeting, November 19, 2014).

In general, during the first semester of the year, Ms. Bravo seemed to enjoy her work at Myrtle Elementary, particularly the fact that she could find spaces to try new things and felt she had support from Ms. Waller, her principal:

I don’t think I could have worked for anybody but Ms. Waller. She gave us freedom and flexibility. Principals aren’t typically like that. From what I hear, especially in our district, some teachers have to have a notebook opened on their desks that shows where they are every minute of the day. (planning meeting, November 19, 2014)

There was though an undercurrent of tension between Ms. Bravo and the rest of the staff. Ms. Franklin provided an example of this when she suggested that Ms. Waller agreed with Ms. Bravo’s ideas because they were good ones and not due to favoritism on her part. The following conversation took place in November during our planning meeting when we were discussing about the possibility of Ms. Bravo and Ms. Franklin looping with their children:

Priscila: Is there a way you could loop or you don’t want to?
Ms. Bravo: No, I love this group. That will be fine but…
Ms. Franklin: No, I would, no problem, I don’t think
Ms. Bravo: There was a lot of drama about me doing it last year… teachers.
Ms. Franklin: Because she will come up with great ideas and Ms. Waller says, “No problem go for it” and everybody goes “Oh, teacher’s pet. Why do you get to do this? Why do you get all the favoritism?” Ms. Waller said to the whole staff: “I don’t have favorites.” I remember this conversation with the whole staff. “I don’t have favorites. People come to me and present things and I think it’s great and I tell them go for it.” (planning meeting, November 19, 2014)

In addition to this report about Ms. Bravo, I subsequently learned that the World Languages and Immersion Program coordinators in the district office took a less than positive stance towards Ms. Bravo. During an informal conversation I had with Ms. Connor, one of the coordinators, she admitted: “Ms. Bravo does not always say appropriate things. She questions everything we say and doesn’t show a positive or respectful attitude. But Ms. Roman, her coordinator, knows how to control her” (field notes, February 9, 2015).

I subsequently attended a mandatory professional development meeting and, during one of the breaks, heard from Ms. Bravo about an interaction she had with Ms. Roman. Ms. Roman had approached her and asked to stop talking with me during the meeting. Ms. Bravo explained that she and I were commenting on the material presented, and received a sharp response: “Just stop talking.” Ms. Roman told Ms. Bravo she was going to approach me after the meeting. I decided to approach her. I explained we were commenting on the presentations to which she responded: “That’s OK, not a problem” (field notes, March 4, 2015).
My sense was that Ms. Roman and Ms. Connor had identified Ms. Bravo as a disruptor. Taking into account that models of identity are the product of social identification processes and that they emerge in the mist of events that take place in a given context (Wortham, 2006), it is possible to understand the emergence of such identification. Ms. Bravo’s questioning of policies and mandated practices were interpreted by Ms. Roman and Ms. Connor as disrespectful. During a conversation with Ms. Roman regarding the lack of commitment of teachers to district initiatives she explained:

I have (a good relationship) with some schools and I’d be honest, even with Bravo. It’s funny because somehow people have said things to me, Brenda Mathews, she and I are good friends, we taught together at Rose Garden Elementary. She said something (about Ms. Bravo and I) and I was. “I don’t have any problems with Bravo. Bravo might think I have problems with her, but my problem with Bravo is that she is not respectful in meetings and she doesn’t come to meetings.” (recording, March 9, 2015)

From my conversations with Ms. Bravo, I came to believe she was aware that there were differences between her beliefs and the beliefs of the districts, for example, her stance regarding standards:

When we look at the new standards, you can see they are breaking them down, and breaking them down, and breaking them down to the point where there is a standard that says “students will use periods, commas and quotations” at a certain place in their writing. So, I go oh my God! Yes, period end of the story that’s what you teach and you move on. Why are we making a big deal about this one
thing instead of thinking about the whole idea? (planning meeting, November 19, 2014)

Explaining the politics affecting the school environment and her own perception of the district, Ms. Bravo said, “Roxana (a new teacher) is under Brenda’s swing (one of the school coaches). I’m her mentor, but she is hearing the district. She is hearing Brenda” (planning meeting, November 19, 2014).

Within these subtle and not so subtle tensions, there was a classroom incident in which Ms. Bravo’s response was considered by her peers to be inappropriate. This contributed to a decline in Ms. Bravo’s comfort level and her eventual decision to leave the school at the end of the year.

Camden was a very active boy who could be harsh with his friends and sometimes was aggressive when he did not get what he was looking for. It was Ms. Bravo’s understanding that Camden told his mother Ms. Bravo yelled at him and made him look bad in front of the other kids. As a consequence, Camden’s mother requested a meeting with the teachers and administrators. The day of the meeting, Ms. Waller was not in the school. Ms. Sutherland, one of the assistant principals, Ms. Franklin, Ms. Bravo and the school psychologist attended the meeting. Ms. Bravo told me it did not go well. She said that, during the meeting, she felt attacked an unsupported and that everyone looked at her as if she was the one to blame. They did not seem to acknowledge the child’s behavior. Because of the meeting, Camden was not allowed to be in Ms. Bravo’s room unless he had direct supervision and she could not be alone with him at any time. Camden felt the changes. When it was time to work in small groups he usually did not have a group. As he told me, “I don’t have a group. I do I want to do” (field notes, March 18, 2015).
Bravo was frustrated with the situation. I approached her to discuss my concerns about Camden. I felt he was not learning anything and that we needed to do something about it. She explained:

> Cuando yo traté, nadie me apoyó. Al contrario siento que cuando yo trato de hacer algo todos se me echan encima. Entonces digo, bueno mejor lo dejo. Ya hablé con Ms. Waller porque no siento que tengo nada más de control. Y cada vez que yo trato de hacer algo las cosas se vuelven peor. En esa reunión Franklin no dijo nada, solo para decirmee que yo tengo que tener una mejor relación con él, en frente de la mamá. [When I tried, no one supported me. On the contrary, I feel that whenever I try to do something everyone is against me. So, I say well better to leave it like that, I talked to Ms. Waller about it because I feel I have no control. Every time I do something things just get worse. During the meeting Franklin didn’t say anything, except to say I needed to have a better relationship with him, in front of his mother]. (recording, March 27, 2015)

A second meeting with Camden’s mother, which included Ms. Waller, did not improve the situation. Ms. Bravo continued to feel unsupported and things did not change for the child. Camden was not allowed in her side of the room unless he had another adult supervising. That adult was usually me whenever I was in the class or Ms. Franklin if it was a group activity. During stations time, Camden remained in Ms. Franklin’s side of the room unless I worked with him. At the end of year, Ms. Bravo resigned and started looking for a job at a different institution. Ms. Bravo explained: “No es la escuela en la que nosotros empezamos, está tomando una dirección que no nos gusta.” [This is not the school we started at. It’s taking a direction we don’t like]. (recording, June 4, 2015)
**Ms. Hellen Franklin.** Ms. Hellen Franklin was a married European American woman from Pennsylvania in her early forties. Her husband was a Chaplain in the National Guard. She had two teenaged children, both of whom attended Myrtle Elementary when they were elementary students. Ms. Franklin was a certified K–8th grade teacher with almost twenty years of experience. She was in her 11th year at Myrtle Elementary. The year I conducted my study, it was the first time Ms. Franklin had teamed up with a Spanish teacher in the partial immersion Spanish program. Ms. Franklin was a monolingual English speaker. Ms. Franklin seemed to care about the wellbeing of children. For example, consider her comments when the three of us were discussing in November what we wanted for students:

Ms. Bravo: What do we want our students to be? What do we want them to remember? I want them to think that learning is fun. It’s not work. I want them to know that learning happens…

Ms. Franklin: everywhere… Even Connor (a student) and the hole he’s digging in his backyard, there’s got to be some trial and error that he went through to become really good at digging a hole.

Ms. Bravo: What do you want for your students?

Ms. Franklin: I think I want to know that they are strong. They can work through and have endurance through hard times, hard issues, something to do with having a relationship with me. Do you know what I mean?

In the same conversation, Ms. Franklin agreed with what Ms. Bravo and I were saying about learning being a never-ending process:
Priscila: I’m always thinking about how I would love for the kids to become lifelong learners and understand that knowledge is an ongoing process. It’s something with the way the system has been. It’s like this is the unit. It’s finished, done, moving on.

Ms. Bravo: Put it away!

Ms. Franklin: We’re going to continue to use that same skill and knowledge.

Priscila: Exactly!

Ms. Franklin: But in a different way.

Ms. Franklin expressed how much she valued being responsible. During the same conversation, she shared with Ms. Bravo and me about her daughter’s responsibility towards school work. She also shared her fear for her daughter not being able to deal with the pressure:

Ms. Franklin: Coastal Middle School is taking a step in the right direction. It’s amazing. Laura, when she came to me crying because her project didn’t go through on Prezi, it was on the internet and she was supposed to send it but only the first three slides went through, she was devastated to tears. I’m like: “What can I do? Can I email? Can I call your teacher right now?” She’s like: “No, no, it’s my responsibility. I have to get this right.” I’m like, “OK, wow, you go. Do you want mommy to fix it?” “No, no, no, I have to do this!”

Ms. Bravo: That’s awesome it’s also really good to know that you can back up that it’s OK if you don’t. It’s OK if you fail.
Ms. Franklin: And that’s when I’m like: ‘I better go upstairs with her and sleep with her through the night so she doesn’t make a different choice.’ She knows. About the whole suicide (someone in their church congregation had committed suicide a couple of weeks before). She thinks it’s very selfish. ‘This is ridiculous. There are so many other people involved. That’s so selfish.’

Ms. Bravo: That’s a big thing in our culture, too. In Mexico, there’s not suicide everywhere. We’re super Catholic. In Catholicism, uh-huh, you don’t do that.

Ms. Franklin: You won’t go to Heaven if you commit suicide. (planning meeting, November 19, 2014)

Ms. Franklin’s words might be interpreted as her way to convey her moral judgment toward the recent situation she lived with her congregation, the suicide of a young member. Maybe it was her way to describe an irresponsible behavior. Ms. Bravo seemed to align with her point of view emphasizing shared moral standpoints across cultural difference. However, although Ms. Franklin shows alignment with the doctrine both their religions shared regarding suicide not much was said about cultural orientation. I kept wondering about the implications of what she did not say.

On another occasion, Ms. Franklin talked to the students about being responsible and complying with the different jobs assigned to them in the classroom: “Everyone in this class has a job. If you don’t remember what it is, check the card with your name. It is your responsibility to do your job” (field notes, December 10, 2014).
That same day teachers were upset because for three days in a row someone put a roll of toilet paper in the toilet. Ms. Franklin talked about it and referred to Ms. Cardigan, the janitor, who worked really hard to keep the school clean: “Ms. Cardigan was very sad and I was sad about this too. If I am sad, the class is sad” (field notes, December 10, 2014).

Ms. Franklin was always on time ready to teach. She complied with all the expectations her administration established. She was known at the district level as someone who did what she had to do. Ms. Roman, one of the language coordinators in the district, said about her: “Hellen is very nice. A very responsible person” (field notes, March 3, 2015).

Ms. Franklin cared about the opinion of her superiors. When discussing classroom practices, she shared about a visit she had that week:

Shannon Brews came and observed Monday, when we just implemented the new centers, right. Day one and she’s like, no, no, no this is what Ms. Waller wants. This is exactly what she wants. She needs to come in and see this, yeah. She was… yeah. It was small groups, because Ms. Waller said there should be no more whole group instruction. Now, of course there are times when whole group instruction is needed. So Shannon was very thrilled that we had these small groups.

When I referred to the uncertainty of the future and how education should take that into consideration, she said:

Priscila: We don’t know how the world is going to look like when this group of children graduates.
Ms. Franklin: and Ms. Waller is aware of that. (planning meeting, November 19, 2014)

Ms. Franklin’s main concern was to cover the standards for her grade level; she did this because it was a priority for her school administration. Whenever she explained something to children, she clarified what standard her instruction was related to and emphasized the importance of remembering the standard. For instance, during one of the multiple morning meetings Ms. Franklin conducted, she made specific reference to the standards they were covering:

Ms. Franklin: We are going to continue what we started last Tuesday. Our standard is: Asking questions at different stages in the story. Questions such as who, what, where, when, and why. It is Standard 2.1. What questions could we ask?

Jodie: We could ask: what is this book about?

Ms. Franklin: Could you zone it a little more?

Mark: Who are George and Martha?

Ms. Franklin: Once you have your question, you find the answer while you are reading and then you write the answer to it. The other standard we have to cover is beginning, middle and end, Standard 2.5. So far we’ve learned about plot, setting, characters, feelings and moral. Write or find the standard in your ILP (individual learning plan). Once you find it write the date, read, then you do it. (field notes, October 9, 2014)

Her reference to specific standards was a pattern in her teaching. I asked her about this
practice:

Priscila: I have a question for you regarding the unpacking of the standards. Do you have to do that? Why do children have to know them so precisely?

Ms. Franklin: Because their learning has to be transparent.

Priscila: Tell me more about that.

Ms. Franklin: They need to know what is expected for them to learn and know.

(Planning meeting, November 19, 2014)

Except for our meeting in November 2014 where Ms. Franklin shared her thinking more openly regarding her beliefs, during our conversations she usually did not say much. She asked for specific instructions regarding the activities we were planning as well as about the organization of the classroom. She left the decisions to Ms. Bravo even during our November meeting. The following excerpt from that conversation related to the organization of centers (stations where children had specific tasks to work on) exemplifies her stance:

Ms. Bravo: This is the center of inquiry then that relates to the other centers.

Priscila: The idea would be that all centers promote inquiry and not only one center.

Ms. Bravo: Got it.

Priscila: It also depends on how comfortable you feel with it. You can be transitioning to it. Hopefully, by the end of the year, we will have gained enough experience so that all centers can be inquiry based and fit one to the other. Does that make sense?
Ms. Franklin: Mm-hmm.

Priscila: But if you don’t feel comfortable right now, it could be one where they go and inquire. Then you keep adding stuff as you feel comfortable and you feel that things are manageable. It all depends on how you want to do it.

Ms. Bravo: How do you want to do it?

Ms. Franklin: I don’t know.

Priscila: She hates when we put her in that position [Laughs]. (planning meeting, November 19, 2014)

Near the end of the year, Ms. Bravo suggested discussing with Ms. Franklin the possibility of initiating a project that could be meaningful for children. This seemed to be an appropriate petition considering Ms. Franklin had expressed she finished covering all the standards. I asked her about it:

Priscila: Ms. Bravo told me you’re done with the standards for the year.

Ms. Franklin: Right

Priscila: Would you mind if we do an author’s study then? I think it could be fun.

Ms. Franklin: Sure! (field notes, May15, 2015)

Ms. Franklin was always very polite; she never confronted or argued with anyone. While the incident with Camden affected her relationship with Ms. Bravo., they never had an open conversation about it. Ms. Franklin also never talked about it with me. She did not share what she was doing on her side of the classroom. All I knew was that she was covering the standards. As she noted in November: “I’ve done all my standards, except
that they need to be proficient at it.”

This was the pattern during the whole time of my study. At the end of the year, once she knew Ms. Bravo was leaving, I asked her what she was going to do the following year since Mr. Bravo was the one who make all the decisions:

Ms. Franklin: I don’t know at the beginning of the year I think it’s important for both of us to come to consensus with both groups. This is our SOP we are one team here. So I want to start off the same kind of way but maybe…

Priscila: So what are those things that you would do with her to get things organized, because now you are in charge, you are the one who has the experience.

Ms. Franklin: So I’ll probably go through our whole year and tell her bits and pieces of what worked and what didn’t and what we should have done at the beginning of the year kind of to give them more structure. (recording, June 4, 2015)

In 2015–2016, Ms. Franklin continued working at Myrtle Elementary. She had a new partner in the second grade Spanish–immersion program.
Chapter 5: The Nuances of Our Collaboration

When I started crafting my study, my objective was to engage in a collaborative approach to co-construct and co-implement culturally responsive curriculum with teachers. My previous experiences at my former school taught me that when collaboration takes place it is possible to develop a sense of community that fosters positive change. However, although one might be tempted to believe that collaboration is a common objective of all stakeholders in an educational setting, this is not always the case. My work at Myrtle Elementary showed me that like many educators across the nation (Howard, 2010; Nieto, 2010) the teachers at this school felt the pressure for tangible results, usually equated to high scores in standardized tests. Collaboration did not seem to be a priority even when it might have been a way to reach their objectives. Instead, my sense was that most of the teachers in Myrtle Elementary focused their efforts on covering the curriculum in an individualistic fashion. They seemed to believe that covering the curriculum, as opposed to focusing the attention on the learner and the learning, was a task that carried with it the promise of better scores.

A culturally responsive curriculum has been described by several authors as one that responds to the particular needs of a learner (Gay, 2010; Nieto, 2010; Sleeter, 2011)—a curriculum that considers the cultural background of students and teachers who strive to find connections to make the learning meaningful to their students. This is the type of curriculum I intended to collaboratively design with Ms. Bravo and Ms. Franklin. Because it was possible that these teachers assume a culturally responsive curriculum
implied developing special lessons for students of diverse cultures or planning big events to celebrate the diversity of cultures present in the community (Nieto, 2010), I shared with them my perspectives. My beliefs are grounded in Gay’s (2010) definition of culturally responsive curriculum. She defines it as one that considers the background of students, their language, culture and race and embeds these perspectives in the regular activities of the classroom. Such a curriculum has the potential to benefit all students, because everyone has the opportunity to learn about other ways of being. It makes visible the fact that we are all different, which implies that being different becomes acknowledged as the norm and not as the exception (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). The following is an excerpt from our November meeting, where I stated my position:

Regarding the second point about culturally relevant pedagogy, how do we incorporate this lens to what’s going to happen in the classroom? We tend to essentialize people and kids. We’re all so different. We’re both Latinas and still we’re different. You’ll find that you’re an American and you’re super different from tons of Americans, because you are you. That’s why it’s so important to get information of each child and observe them. We must try to incorporate their interests and their cultural heritage into what we do through stories, activities, and examples. We need to think about the landscape of the classroom and what could help every child. It’s not about, “You are Latino American so I have to do this stuff for you differently.” It’s to incorporate what they bring into the classroom. Or, “You’re African American, so I have to treat you in this special way.” I think that’s counterproductive, we are putting kids on the spot. It’s not about that, because he might be African American and have more things in common with an
American without the African than any other African American. See what I mean? It’s not about that. It’s about what you bring with you. Now, don’t get me wrong. I think race matters. Unfortunately, it still matters. So when we are working with African American or Latino American kids, I think we need to pay double attention and make sure we are incorporating their culture into what we do. What I don’t think we should do is single them out because it creates even more differences. (planning meeting, November 19, 2014)

I also recognized that developing such a curriculum was not an easy task. It required knowing students well, orchestrating learning engagements that responded to their particular needs, and collaboration among the teachers involved in the process. Therefore, my intention in this study was to offer Ms. Bravo and Ms. Franklin, an opportunity to collaborate to produce culturally responsive curriculum. In richly describing my work with these teachers, I give account of the multiple forces that shaped our relationships and fostered or hindered our collaboration. As I kept refining my thinking throughout the process of data collection, I came to understand that a culturally responsive stance is the result of a series of personal and socialization processes that lead educators to develop consciousness of their classroom practices. Teachers’ personalities, material circumstances, and educational beliefs, all play a role in adopting a culturally responsive stance or not. At the same time, the way we interpret culturally responsiveness varies according to our material circumstances, ways of being, and life agendas. Thus, I started paying attention to the personal experiences, societal discourses and district and school structures that affected the stance Ms. Bravo and Ms. Franklin developed towards culturally responsive practices. In this process, my own position
towards the experiences I witnessed played an important role. It was my acknowledgment of the many contradictions that surrounded and were part of my experiences that pushed me to reconsider the data I collected from different angles and perspectives. In many ways, the research process itself molded my study and the ways in which I came to make sense of my data.

**Tracing the Absent Presence**

My efforts to understand what characterized my experiences at Myrtle Elementary included thinking with my data and then using it to think with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). I found in Derrida’s (1997) concept of absent presence a way to understand what the teachers and I said in our initial conversations without verbalizing, but that marked later our collaboration. Derrida’s absent presence rejects the assumption of binaries, acknowledging that what we call events are never definite, and never have a static center or a fixed origin (Derrida, 1997). Using absent presence to think with my data also includes relying on Derrida’s concept of deconstruction. Spivak (1967/1997) described deconstruction as a process “to locate the promising marginal text, to disclose the undecidable moment, to pry it loose with the positive lever of the signifier; to reverse the resident hierarchy, only to displace it; to dismantle in order to reconstitute what is always already inscribed” (p. lxxvii). As I immersed myself in the search for those moments when deconstruction happened in my data, I kept an attentive eye and ear to become aware of those signs I could miss (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). At the same time, I recognized that because events do not always conform to a given structure, it becomes impossible to be aware of all the signs that mark the presence of the absent. Thus, I started “the experience of the impossible” (Derrida, 1992, p. 200), the deconstruction of
two conversations that helped me trace what these moments produced—what I interpreted as the forces that shaped the stance each one of us took towards culturally responsiveness as participants in this study. Such a process was never a static or an orderly one. It looked different in every one of us and affected our classroom practices in diverse ways.

I also reflected on an event that marked the relationship between teachers as well as my relationship with them. I presumed this event was rooted in the absent presence I traced and marked a turning point in my study. It was from this moment on that collaboration took off for Ms. Bravo and me, even as it broke with Ms. Franklin. However, collaboration, or the lack of it, was never straightforward. There were times of discontinuity, contradiction, and failure as well as camaraderie, solidarity, and hope. This exploration helped me to look at my lived experiences as unfinished moments that will continue to have an effect on who I am and what I do.

**An absent presence: Beliefs about culture.** Cultural responsiveness has been associated with a caring stance among educators that denotes an understanding of people in the context in which they live and function (Gay, 2010). Transposing this stance to teaching implies understanding how the ways of being of students are a reflection of their culture and using that knowledge to guide our actions (Bowers & Flinders, 1990). Being culturally responsive also implies moving from the simplistic assumption that a given lesson or the institutionalization of celebrations of heroes or cultural icons equate to cultural responsiveness (Nieto, 2010). As Nieto (2010) stated, “Sometimes, multicultural education is seen as little more than a way to promote self-esteem, or simply as a curriculum that substitutes one set of heroes for another” (p, 217). My intentions of co-
constructing and co-implementing a culturally responsive curriculum were rooted in the assumption that culture, race, socio economic status, gender and many other identity factors play a role when designing activities for students. Thus, becoming culturally responsive cannot be about an isolated lesson or celebration, but as a stance anchored in our belief that we are all different and deserve to be acknowledged in our differences.

The following conversation took place in early November, in the classroom, during a short break teachers had while children were at their related arts classes. I was proposing that the teachers think about what culturally responsive pedagogies implied.

Ms. Franklin: So what do you mean? What am I supposed to do?

Ms. Bravo: I think it is about discussing things about race and culture.

Ms. Franklin: With the kids? No, we can’t do that.

Priscila: I don’t think you need to say “Ok, today we are going to talk about race.” To me it is more embedded in the decisions you make regarding what you read with them and the learning engagements you plan. For instance, do the learning engagements you plan consider the different cultures of children?

Ms. Franklin: I’m all about that. I am all about poor kids and helping them. That is what we do in our church.

Priscila: How do you decide the stories you are going to read to them to address the culture of children?

Ms. Franklin: I have tons of books. I’ve been collecting them all my teaching life.
Priscila: So, let’s say for instance that you want to read *The Ugly Duckling*. How would you address the fact that the book talks about a black duckling – implying being black is being ugly – that later transforms into a beautiful white swan – implying being white is being beautiful and that everybody will love you?

Ms. Franklin: Oh, I just won’t read that. I’ll let you do that. (field notes, November 13, 2014)

I read Ms. Franklin’s stance towards culturally responsive practices as one of resistance. Her question: “With the kids?” blocked the possibility of her own consideration of what culturally responsive practices might look like. She stated her own ideas about what children can know or talk about and at the same time, what she was willing to know or practice as a teacher. She performed protection of children towards what she considered were inappropriate subjects while protecting her from having to deal with them. It seemed to me she was resisting the idea in practice and, by extension, rejecting the concept of cultural responsiveness. Her comment: “No, we can’t do that.” demonstrated her authority to speak for others. She used “we” rather than “I”, which provided camouflage for her and her possible discomfort. Using “we” implied including her fellow coworkers and avoided any implication that it was making a personal choice.

Ms. Franklin’s comment “I am all about poor kids and helping them” problematically positioned children as in need and therefore, as deficit. It seemed as if the only possibility children had was to be “saved” by her. Additionally, her remark that she had been collecting books all her teaching life can be read as sending a clear message about her legitimacy and longevity as a teacher, her ability to teach, and her rejection of
the idea that something had to change. Finally, her last statement “Oh, I just won’t read that. I’ll let you do that.” signaled her stance towards race as not being her responsibility but mine, perhaps because I am a person of color or the one inviting her to use culturally responsive pedagogies.

There is another way to read Mrs. Franklin’s response. Using Jackson and Mazzei’s (2012) analogy of thresholds as places that contain “both entries and exits; they are both/and… a threshold [as] the space in which something else occurs: a response, an effect” (p. 6), it is possible to read her response from the threshold as one of a deskillled teacher (Wong, 2006) confronted with the necessity to act on her own. Her reaction to my questioning on how to approach culturally sensitive topics could have been a reaction based on fear, discomfort, anxiety or even a defensive response to something she perceived as a threat to her teaching practices. Her reaction also might have been to the idea of entering an unknown territory, which she might not have known how to approach. Ms. Franklin knew how to follow the rules her administration established. She declared herself as having been effective in unpacking the standards: “I’ve been unpacking those standards for years. I know how to do that” (field notes, December 9, 2014). She was well organized and responsible. She also did not know how to handle race or cultural issues. She was both avoiding and displacing responsibility while relying on her activities at church to show that she cared. I interpreted this moment in my data as one where deconstruction happened – a moment that depicted the complexity of being in the world.

On the other hand, one can read Ms. Bravo’s comment: “I think it is about discussing things about race and culture” as one that depicted comfort or acceptance of
the topic. After all, she belonged to a minoritized group and had been exposed to cultural diversity throughout her life. Nevertheless, the fact that she did not say anything else regarding it throughout the conversation led me to consider her silence as an absent presence. Her silence spoke beyond words (Mazzei, 2007), perhaps to signal her own insecurity on how to address the topic or even her stance towards cultural responsive practices.

**An absent presence: Children’s categorization.** My first months as a helper or maybe intruder at Myrtle Elementary allowed me to understand its culture, some of the structures its administration tried to put in place as well how the teachers organized their classrooms. As I revisited and thought with my data, I realized that some of the conversations during our planning meeting in November illustrated teachers’ categorization of children (absent presence) that marked our work together across the next six months.

Ms. Bravo: Well, here is what I noticed. I think that there is ah, we have a very wide range of learners, obviously, which is fine, because you are going to have that in any classroom. Hum, some of them can take responsibility and are a little bit more self-directed and can go, that’s great. Some of them no – ha ha, and those that can’t also are having trouble with the content that they are being required or asked to do independently, because they are not, they are just not at that level. I mean like Gina cannot do things independently, she is just not there [uh hum]. And so, those students that can’t often
cause disruptions among the whole group because they don’t know what to do with themselves maybe or you know?

Ms. Franklin: They can’t work independently on their own.

Ms. Bravo: So while we are in a small group and they are out, it’s kind of hard to manage all at the same time. So we restructured it. Now they have centers, fixed centers, and we’ve been kind of trying for a whole 30–minute period, you should go to the center. And they can go to a center, and the centers should be 25 minutes’ worth of activity, and you complete it and then everybody comes back and goes to the next center, everybody comes back and goes to the next center. We’ve been reflecting with them, some of the activities have worked really well; some of them so, so.

Ms. Franklin: So, I’ve been reflecting also and I think mine is too much. So, I have writing, words, and reading and within those they have their own menu to pick and choose from. They don’t bother. I’ve noticed: they just jump right in even after saying: ‘go to your center, open your schedule, write down where you are, and what you are doing.’ They can’t do it. They just want to go and do it and work.’

Ms. Bravo: And I do think: that maybe that is that we’ve asked them to do too many things that don’t involve actual learning [Ms. Franklin: right], because they have to make, which is fine, they have to make a plan and then keep track of the plan, and then they have to keep
track of where they’re going to go, and then keep track of
standards associated with the activities. So I mean, it could be, and
then on top of that not everybody is necessarily proficient within
those standards, so they are not even getting the why.

Ms. Franklin: To work on their own, however, when they are in a small group,
it’s very good instruction; they are doing a lot; they are learning a
lot. It is very focused and in depth.

Priscila: Does that mean that you are with them, in small groups?

Ms. Franklin: Yes, [Bravo: so we do like them to be in small groups], it’s just
this independent learning time that we are afraid they don’t know
how to do yet. (planning meeting, November 19, 2014)

Teachers references to students “with diverse needs,” who were not able to “take
responsibility” or who “can’t work independently” because they are “not at that level”
can be read as classifying children as high or low achievers. Underneath those
categories, rested the assumption that some children were capable of learning while
others were not. Later on in the year, this classification became more evident as those
“low achievers” remained in that category despite their progress. An example of such
classification was Aurora. Aurora was a Latino American girl I worked with and with
whom I learned more about bilingualism and reading and writing processes. Aurora
received ESL classes all year long because Spanish was her home language. Every day,
the ESL teacher picked her up from the class to work with her and another girl
independently. ESL classes were not connected to the activities in the class. Their main
intention was to provide children with English language skills. Her reading and writing
skills were very similar to other children in the class who were not considered with special needs. She was able to communicate at ease in both English and Spanish. She could work with her peers in projects and activities. However, despite my efforts to remove her from ESL classes, she continued in them. Standardized test scores kept Aurora in ESL classes. Aurora’s communicative repertoires – “the collection of ways individuals use language and other means or communication (gestures, dress, posture, accessories) to function effectively in the multiple communities in which they participate” (Rymes, 2014, p. 9) were not acknowledged.

I considered teachers classification of children into those who are capable of learning and those who are not as an absent presence that permeated their decisions, in different degrees and levels all year long. It was not a straightforward process, and it looked quite different for each one of them. Mrs. Franklin’s initial categorizations seemed to hold across the year. She commented to a teacher who was subbing for Ms. Bravo, “The problem with these kids is they are poor” (field notes, March 30, 2015). I interpreted this comment as her positioning of children as deficit, which seemed to align to her comment back in early November when she said, “I am all about poor kids and helping them” (field notes, November 13, 2014). For the most part, I could only infer from my observations what Ms. Franklin was doing on her side of the classroom because she rarely shared her thoughts with me. Her approach followed the same pattern all year long. She focused on covering the standards. When working with small groups, she completed the same activity with everyone. This aligned with my inference in early November that she believed nothing needed to change.
When teaching whole group, Ms. Franklin either used a YouTube video or read a story to make a connection. For instance, one day in February, I noted:

Ms. Franklin started her mini lesson talking about folk tales, Standard 2.2. She explained they are stories that come from different places. Next, she read The Boy who Cried Wolf by Aesop. She said the folk tale illustrates point of view. She didn’t explain how. (field notes, February 25, 2015)

By early April, when I asked Ms. Franklin about the possibility of starting a project with children she responded: “We can plan whatever, I don’t mind. I’m finished with standards” (field notes, April 2, 2015).

For Ms. Bravo, the process was different or at least it seemed different because we were able to talk about it and discuss possibilities. She seemed to start noticing more the needs of children and thinking about those needs when planning.

While the classifying of children was a pattern in teachers’ talk, some of their language also suggested they considered alternate explanations for children’s performance. In the excerpt from our November meeting cited above, I noticed in Ms. Bravo’s language a sense of responsibility for what was happening when she said: “Maybe that is that we’ve asked them to do too many things that don’t involve actual learning.” During the same conversation, Ms. Franklin’s use of the adverb “yet” at the end of her last sentence, functioned as a linguistic feature to index possibility. This also illustrates the complexity of looking for deconstruction. As Jackson and Mazzei (2012) stated, “assuming a deconstructive stance is to both use and trouble categories at the same time” (p. 20). Thus, it is fair to say deconstruction is never static, which is why it presents some challenges to identify when it is occurring (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012).
Another excerpt provides insight into the absent presence that hunted “truth-telling, understanding, and the arrival of (deferred) meaning” (p. 22). The conversation was related to a project children were completing:

Ms. Franklin:  This is the third, fourth, fifth time we’re going to be going back to the drawing board.

Ms. Bravo:  I think the problem with that is … this is awesome. They get to a point where they’re not understanding what I’m trying to say because it’s an abstract thing. ‘Oh, it’s going to be ball, cool! Tell me how this ball is going to work.’ They have no idea what I’m asking them. That’s when they hit that ceiling of language. When I’m trying to elicit more from them they’re like, ‘It’s a ball. It’s a ball,’ because that’s all they know how to say.

Priscila:  Then, I guess, it’ll be good to say, ‘OK, explain it to me in English so that I can understand it. I can help you with some vocabulary in Spanish that you can use to explain it later.’

Ms. Franklin:  You do that when we’re in whole group, both groups, and you pose a question to what’s her name and she sits and stares at you. You asked three boys: ‘What are you doing walking around doing nothing?’ You’re like, ‘No, no, in English. It’s OK. In English.’ They were able to answer much better.

Priscila:  That’s the whole point of language, that it helps you convey meaning. If you cannot do it in this other language, because you
don’t have the vocabulary, it’s not that you cannot think. It’s that you don’t have the vocabulary. I think that’s totally acceptable. Even in writing, if you don’t know a word in Spanish, put it in English. Put it in what you know so you don’t lose your train of thought. Then you can add on later.

Ms. Franklin: That’s how spelling is for kids. Just write. I don’t care how it’s spelled. We’ll go back later and figure it out.

Priscila: Right, absolutely.

Ms. Franklin: Camille’s spelling is horrific.

Ms. Bravo: This is interesting. Camille yesterday was filling out her planner. She wrote “hill” like this (g–i–l–l). I said, ‘Camille, what sounds are you hearing?’ She was trying to tell me in Spanish. She said: ‘I hear [makes sound].’ I said: ‘No, in Spanish [makes sound] is this.’ I was like, ‘No, tell me in English what sounds you’re hearing.’ [makes sound]

I was like, ‘Yes, H, hill. Then what are you hearing?’ She said $E$. In Spanish this is an $E$. I’m like, ‘Do you mean this one or this one? ($E$ or $I$)’ She was like seriously processing and thinking. She said, ‘That one ($I$).’ I said. ‘Yes.’ Then she said the $L$. I said, ‘Yeah, and for some strange reason there’s another $L$ there at the end too.’ I’m like, “Where did you get that from hill? How?’ I don’t even know what sounds she was associating there. That was interesting, the whole dynamic of languages and sounds.
Ms. Franklin: It is very interesting. Do you think that she could be doing that? Is she cognitively able to mess that up that way? (planning meeting, November 19, 2014)

Teachers’ comments reflected possibility and flexibility towards children’s responses and struggles. At the same time, Ms. Franklin’s last question: “Is she cognitively able to mess that up that way?” offered a glimpse to trace the absent presence, the classification of children that remained.

As I continued thinking about our collaboration and the places where it was interrupted, the absent became present. Aurora and Camille transgressed and destabilized established categories. Aurora was able to produce texts in English teachers did not expect and unfortunately did not acknowledge (see Figure 5.1).

**Figure 5.1.** Aurora’s writing sample included in her Life Story Project.
Camille was able to engage in discussions and arrive to plausible conclusions although by then (mid-November) she was already considered a low achiever. Both girls forced new perspectives and interpretations, but those perspectives were constrained by well entrenched beliefs, the categorization of children (the absent), that marked their permanence in the category of “lower achievers.”

**A turning point.** After Christmas break, some of the changes we agreed on during our long planning meeting in November 2014 were implemented and some never were. Ms. Bravo added more literacy engagements in Spanish such as the calendar during morning meetings. She decided to write on the board the following statements and randomly picked a child to complete the sentences (see Figure 5.2).

| Buenos días, hoy es ________________, ______ de _________ de __________. Ayer fue ____________, mañana será ______________. |
| Good morning. Today is _____________________________. |
| Our class is going to focus on _____________________________. |

*Figure 5.2.* Morning meeting board used by Ms. Bravo to increase literacy engagements in Spanish.

Teachers revised their shared vision in an effort to have a fresh start with the kids. The new, shared vision read: “We are the leaders of our immersion class. We promise to live and lead with the 7 habits, be safe, helpful and calm.” This change did not affect the main component of their disciplinary system. In the morning, children continued writing a goal for the day in their agendas and putting a number next to it at the end of the day to
assess their behavior. They rated their behavior privately though and not in front of the whole group. Centers had a simpler organization and more specific instructions. The activities mostly implied working individually although children moved from one center to the other in groups. My notes on January 14 explained how teachers organized their centers:

The new centers in the classroom are the following: Center with Mrs. Franklin – they are working on identifying the main idea and supporting details. She gives children a worksheet with a short passage and they have to underline the main idea and three supporting details. Words center – children have to create a booklet that starts with “A New Me” (I wonder what is wrong with the old me!). They have to record their goals for the New Year. Listening center – children listen to a story and they write their thoughts about it. Puzzles center – they put together a puzzle and when it’s ready they have to take a picture with their IPads. Math center – children use their IPads to play math games. Center with Ms. Bravo – math lessons on a specific topic, now addition.

The last 45 minutes of the day also changed after Christmas. Teachers decided to implement reading and writing workshops, which was one of our agreements during our planning meeting in November 2014. They set up an organization that suited their teaching preferences. The first 10 minutes teachers either used mentor texts to illustrate a particular point children should focus on or a mini lesson. Then children had around 20 minutes to write. During this time, Ms. Bravo usually worked with children who needed help with writing and Mrs. Franklin stayed at her desk working on something else. When children approached her asking for help, she stopped what she was doing and
helped them. The days I was in the classroom, I used this time to have conferences with some of the children, particularly with three Latino American girls. Our conferences were mostly in Spanish although they were about their writing in English. Sometimes children were required to write in Spanish. I suggested giving children a choice. Most of the time they were told what to do; in this way, they complied with the standards teachers needed to cover.

Tuesdays were different. My students from a literacy class paired with a child or two and engaged in literacy activities with all 39 children as we agreed during our November meeting. Their main goal was to help children find joy in reading and writing. They read together different favorite books and had conversations about what they read. They also worked with children in a life story project. Children brought pictures of their favorite people and places and together with their Tall Teachers wrote short narratives, poems, songs or any type of text they found appealing to convey meaning of the pictures they brought. At the end of the semester my students wrote their own life stories, added them to their Small Teachers’ and shared the final product with children as a present for letting us read and write with them (See Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3. Aurora’s life story produced with one of my students as part of a class project.
Up until late February, the organization of the classroom remained mostly the same. Teachers used their 15 minutes at the beginning of the day to plan and since the pattern was the same, I had no difficulty in following it. Finding time to plan collaboratively continued to be a challenge difficult to overcome. Generally, our planning meetings were informal. Our conversations were either on our way to the cafeteria or Tuesdays while children were in their related arts class; that was the only day teachers did not have to attend school meetings during related arts. Conversations were mainly with Ms. Bravo. Mrs. Franklin usually had something else to do and on rare occasions when she was present in the classroom, children were not there. However, if I had a question regarding events during the week or a child in particular, she would always answer my question and provided the information I requested.

In late February, the event with Camden occurred and the subsequent meeting teachers held with Camden’s mother and their administration marked a turning point both in the relationship between teachers and my relationship with Ms. Bravo. Ms. Bravo and I discussed the situation:

Ms. Bravo: Lo que pasa es que lo que yo digo se tira, ya no es importante….

Yo empecé muy bien el año con la mama de Camden. Yo si estaba en comunicación hasta cuando cambiamos de clase, cuando Camden empezó allá y yo no lo veía cada mañana. Yo le dije a Franklin, esto es lo que yo tengo que hacer todos los días con Camden ahora te toca a ti y ella no lo hizo y la mamá ya no tuvo más comunicación, ella pensó que era mi culpa. Todos dijeron que era mi culpa y yo dije, aquí no, I’m done. Porque cada vez que
estábamos en los centros y Camden no estaba haciendo algo bien, yo le decía para y Franklin le decía ven tu siéntate aquí has lo que quieras, [me consta]. Esto viene de algo más... No puedo trabajar con ella. (What happens is that what I say doesn’t matter. It’s disposable. I started the year with Camden’s mother very well. I was in communication with her. It was when Camden started there and I didn’t see him every morning. I told Franklin, this is what I do with Camden every day, now it’s your turn. She didn’t do it and his mother didn’t have more communication, she thought it was my fault. Everybody said it was my fault. I said, no more, I’m done. Because every time we were at centers and Camden did something wrong, I told him to stop and Franklin said go sit over there and do what you want [I had witnessed that]. This comes from something else... I can’t work with her.)

Priscila: Es evidente que hace falta que se pongan de acuerdo. (It is evident you need to come to agreement.)

Ms. Bravo: Yo pensaba que estábamos de acuerdo. (I thought we were in agreement.)

Priscila: Yo también… (Me too…)

Ms. Bravo: He tratado de decir vamos a hablar del problema pero no quiere, dice todo está bien (I’ve tried to talk about the problem but she doesn’t want to. She says everything is fine). (recording, March 16th, 2015)
The tension between the teachers was obvious, which became more evident when it was time to start a project about animals they had previously agreed upon. Ms. Franklin started a literacy lesson referencing her previous teaching about text features. She had decided to start a different project on animals on a day Ms. Bravo and I were absent. It seemed to me she was concerned with a standardized test approaching and felt the need to teach children about text features. I could tell Ms. Bravo was frustrated, because her plan was to start the animal project in April closer to a field trip planned to the Zoo. Ms. Franklin said:

Stand up if you remember reading with me about chapters 1, 2 and 3 on animal classification. It has the objective of covering the standard Text Features – heading label, bolded word, footer, subheading, under heading. You are going to continue with that today. (field notes, March 18, 2015)

When children broke up into small groups to start working on centers, Ms. Bravo noticed children did not know what they were supposed to do. She asked Ms. Franklin what exactly the children needed to learn. Then, she explained again what the purpose of their work was and used an example we created to clarify how children could inquire about their animal. I wrote in my field notes, “There was a lot of tension. It seems they can’t agree on what to do.” (field notes, March 18, 2015) Later, I discussed the animal project with Ms. Bravo. I wrote in my journal:

I talked to Ms. Bravo about the second animal project. She was really frustrated, because we can’t manage to communicate with Ms. Franklin. She has her own agenda and doesn’t share it with us. It seems she wants to finish with the standards. I tried to talk about the issue, but she stopped me. She said everything
was fine and she had something else to do. She is just not willing to talk about it. I’ll try to do something else, but I’m not sure what. (field notes, March 18, 2015)

In the end, children worked on two animal projects at the same time. The first one was mostly an activity in one of the stations. Ms. Franklin provided them with some worksheets they had to complete related to a zoo animal. In the afternoons, children wrote a book about an animal of their choice. Ms. Bravo researched about sea turtles in South Carolina and presented the information to the kids in a booklet we created together as a model for them. She also developed a rubric with the children. This project took a couple of weeks. Children had to research about their animal, write a first draft, and then a final copy with drawings. Ms. Bravo gave them the option to write it in English or Spanish. Some of them, like Aurora and Lili, chose to write the booklet in both languages. Each one of them presented their booklets to the class.

These types of situations repeated throughout the semester. Teachers exchanged emails with ideas about what to teach, but then something happened and things did not get done the way they were planned. Ms. Bravo shared with me her frustration in several occasions. For instance, she sent me an email when a lesson they planned turned to be a complete fiasco. I was at the time out of the country. She said:

No entiendo, no entiendo, veo a Franklin enseñar y me quiero morir… sorry que estoy complaining pero I needed to get it out porque si no empiezo a llorar del coraje. (I don’t get it. I don’t get it. I see Franklin teaching and I want to die… sorry I am complaining, but I needed to get it out or otherwise I’ll start crying in anger). (Ms. Bravo, personal communication, April 17, 2015)

I understood that it was painful for Ms. Bravo to observe Ms. Franklin teaching and that
she felt the original purpose of the shared lesson was not honored.

The Realities of Our Collaboration

What seemed to be a promising meeting in mid-November turned to be a good conversation but not the beginning of collaboration. What I had envisioned, systematic planning periods where reflection and discussions could take place, never happened. In spite of this drawback, the class in general was organized differently and we were able to implement some collaborative projects. For instance, in early December, we implemented the short unit on culture we agreed on during our planning meeting in November. The main idea was to help children understand people have different ways to be in the world. We invited several friends from different countries to share about their communities, traditions, and language with the class. I shared information about my country and culture as well. Visitors came after recess and stayed until it was time to go for lunch (see Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4. Saad Bushala sharing Libyan traditions with children during a unit on Cultures, implemented in December 2014.

Children kept travel journals to record their thinking and learning from the places our visitors taught us about. Teachers gave children a template that had specific information they should get from the visitors such as the language they spoke, a cultural tradition and
information about the weather in their countries. They also asked them to come up with questions they would like to ask the visitors. They recorded the questions and answers. Ms. Bravo marked in a big map she kept in the class the different places we learned about. Each student also had a map in their journals so they could mark those places.

After winter break, we started working with a class in Mexico. We had a few meetings in November to get to know each other, but December proved to be a complex month to collaborate so we decided to start our collaboration after winter break. We agreed to Skype with teachers in Mexico every Tuesday. We met for around 20 minutes each time. We held meetings in English to make sure Ms. Franklin felt incorporated in the discussions. Most of the time, it was Ms. Bravo who asked the questions or made proposals. Ms. Franklin listened quietly and agreed with what we said. During one of our first meetings with the teachers in Mexico, they agreed to share an inquiry unit they were starting with their classes. The unit was about time and how it affects people and things. As the summative assessment of the unit, children had to design devices that showed the passage of time. I wrote in my journal: “Ms. Bravo seemed excited with the unit, we are going to discuss about it later. Ms. Franklin did not say a word. She just said OK” (field notes, January 13, 2015). Later, we discussed our conversation with our Mexican friends. Ms. Bravo explained it was a good unit and a good project, but that not all children had help from home. She did not think some of them were going to be able to complete the project. I explained most of the project was done in class, but we did not have materials to use and she insisted that certain parents might not help with the project. We decided to turn one of the stations in a place to think about time. I suggested giving children pieces of paper to brainstorm what they knew about it. They wrote words,
phrases and made drawings to share their thinking. Ms. Bravo also added books to the station and gave children the opportunity to use their IPads to research about time. She also gave them a device to measure time. Meanwhile, with the teachers in Mexico, I planned Skype sessions during which their students shared their devices with our class. Presentations started in early February. We met for two weeks on Thursdays after recess. Children in our class observed the presentations and asked questions about the devices. It was a good opportunity for them to practice their Spanish and learn more about time. I also used this opportunity to reflect with them about the topic. I was responsible for setting up and running our Skype conversations. Ms. Franklin and Ms. Bravo helped with the organization of the groups. They divided children in groups of five. Ms. Bravo also offered help to set up the conference room and she made sure a new group came to the conference room upon the return of the previous one. I believe the experience was a positive one, although I was disappointed with the fact that our children were just spectators and not producers.

Looking back and reflecting on this particular experience, I believe it is an example of the ways in which the absent was present. I interpreted this situation as the convergence of both a certain posture toward culturally responsive practices and children’s classification. When Ms. Bravo discussed with me how difficult it was for parents to collaborate, her explanations made me think she had the idea that parents were not interested in helping. I also read from her words that it was probably too complex for certain children to complete such a project. Her stance as well as Ms. Franklin’s regarding parent involvement became clearer to me during a conversation I participated in by accident.
I wrote in my journal:

When I walked into the room, Ms. Bravo and Ms. Franklin were talking to the ESL teacher and the psychologist. They were concerned about Aurora and her cognitive abilities because her standardized test scores are very low. They also thought something was wrong at home because she came with a scratch on her face and according to Ms. Collins, the ESL teacher, Aurora was nervous when she asked about it. As a result, she decided to ask the social worker to visit the family to find out if everything was fine. The report from the social worker was a good one. Apparently everything is well at home. I was very irritated with the assumption though. Why did they think the mother was abusive? There was no pattern of such behavior. On top of everything, Ms. Franklin said she thought parents were not interested in school. Ms. Bravo agreed. I was really irritated. I said: ‘I know sometimes we assume parents don’t care about school, but believe me if they come to this country it is because of their children. They want them to have a better education and future.’ There was silence after my comment. Then, Ms. Bravo said she is puzzled by Aurora’s responses and the fact that she doesn’t get basic things.

I’m not sure what kind of mess Aurora has in her head. I’m going to follow her to special classes to see what is going on there. I might be able to figure out the source of her confusion, which not necessarily is her lack of cognitive ability. (field notes, February 24, 2015)

I believe this discussion demonstrated how teachers classified children when it was time to discuss about performance. Children classification was an absent presence that
permeated many decisions in the classroom. As I stated before, by early March, the incident with Camden had affected the relationship between Ms. Franklin and Ms. Bravo to the point that they shared information via email and not personally (field notes, March 24, 2015). This situation also created the conditions to bring me closer to Ms. Bravo. It was a moment were deconstruction happened. Derrida (1997) explained:

Deconstruction is made of not the mixture but the tension between memory, fidelity, the preservation of something that has been given to us, and, at the same time, heterogeneity, something absolutely new and a break. The condition of this performative success, which is never guaranteed, is the alliance of these to newness. (p. 6)

The following excerpts taken from a conversation with Ms. Bravo and my field notes illustrates how newness found a way into Ms. Bravo’s classroom practices. It was not a specific event or a specific conversation that marked the construction of what I interpreted as a new perspective. It was more of a path constructed through time and reflection that I hope is still in motion even when our work together is finished.

Ms. Bravo: Estoy pensando, si el proyecto se basa en tener que enseñarle a otra persona, por ejemplo como jugar futbol, pero en eso entonces va a tener que escribir, va a tener que tener ciertas cosas en su escritura, también va a tener que usar las matemáticas. Por ejemplo, va a tener que enseñar si tú tienes tantos puntos y el otro equipo tiene tantos puntos y así se incluyen los estándares que hemos aprendido. O puede hacer una gráfica de su equipo favorito, de futbol, no sé. Me siento mucho más preparada ahora que ya he
pasado más tiempo con ellos, creo saber cómo trabajar con cada persona… (I’m thinking, if the project is based on teaching someone something. For example, how to play football, but they’ll have to write, do certain things with writing and also use math. For example, you’ll have to show how many points you have and how many points the other team and in that way they include the standards we’ve learned. Or they can make a graphic of their favorite football team, I don’t know. I feel much more prepared now that I have spent more time with them. I think I know how to work with each person…) 

Podemos terminar esa unidad en la que pueden presentar lo que quieran pero estamos pensando en los skills que hemos aprendido para que lo puedan aplicar. (We can finish this unit and they can present whatever they want. We are thinking about the skills that we’ve learn so they can use them.)

Priscila: A mí me parece que ahí valdría la pena hacer un recycling de las cosas que hiciste de geometry. (I think this might be a good time to recycle some of the things you did with geometry.)

Ms. Bravo: Sí, me gustaría hacer, I don’t know (Yes, I’d like to do that. I don’t know.)

Priscila: Que tuvieran que diseñar algo. Por ejemplo, si Carl tuviera que diseñar su field para futbol, ¿cuál es el shape? ¿qué tipo de figura es? ese tipo de cosa le permitiría incorporar lo que le gusta. (If
they could design something. For example, if Carl (pseudonym) had to design his own football field, what shape? What type of figure is it? that type of thing. He could incorporate what he likes.)

Ms. Bravo: Sí, ¿cómo mides 100 metros? Sí, poder hacer esas conexiones más explícitas. Lo que si me preocupa es que, como van a ser 38 no sé, necesitan un template para tener como áreas que yo sé que van a incluir varias cosas. (Yes, how do measure 100 meters? If we could make those connections more explicit. What worries me is that they are 38. We need a template so we could have different areas they have to include.)

Priscila: Un template podría ser para que les ayude a guiarse, pero ponen el tema que ellos quieren. Ahí estaría lo que necesitan tener, las cosas que deben incluir. Sí, y hacer una rúbrica con ellos, como lo hiciste me pareció que estuvo súper chévere. (A template could help guide them, but they pick the topic. It could have what they need to have, what they have to include. Yes, and construct the rubric with them. What you did was really cool.)

Ms. Bravo: Sí, hacer las rubricas así juntas para los proyectos. (Yes, make the rubric for the projects.)

Priscila: Sí, les das el template y cuando les das el template haces la rúbrica al mismo tiempo, o sea este es el proyecto que tienes que hacer y vamos a hacer la rúbrica para que sepas que son las cosas que
Our conversation had several implications. Ms. Bravo was considering the different needs of children and she was trying to find a way to help them see that learning was meaningful and real. It was also an opportunity to advocate for children such as Carl, an African American boy who was constantly in the margins, and a chance to offer all the students a more coherent learning experience. I was pleased to see that Ms. Bravo considered it important to prepare things in advance. Unfortunately, the project did not take off.

The tension between Ms. Bravo and Ms. Franklin continued. I was hoping Spring break, in early April, was going to allow things to calm down, but not much changed when we returned. They kept communicating by email and talking only when it was strictly necessary. In terms of classroom organization, few changes were implemented on either sides of the room. The routines were the same. There was whole instruction in the
morning for 20 to 30 minutes. Ms. Bravo started with a math lesson and then Ms. Franklin continued with a language arts one. In May, Ms. Franklin started giving math lessons, because the MAP tests were approaching and Ms. Bravo asked her to teach children some concepts and vocabulary in English to prepare them for the test. Next, children worked in stations for one hour and half, went to recess, came back to continue working in stations, went to lunch, to related arts and the last 45 minutes children worked on a current project and, three days a week on writing workshops.

During stations time, both teachers worked with a small group. Ms. Franklin usually gave children a worksheet with a particular topic such as how to find the main idea in a paragraph. Ms. Bravo worked on math skills. She used hands-on activities and helped children with their specific needs. The days I was in the classroom, I usually worked with the Latino American girls. I generally repeated the morning lessons using other materials and approaches trying to make sure they all got a good understanding of the topics teachers covered. At least once a week, I asked them to pick a book to read together. We had great conversations about the books they chose.

Ms. Bravo and I continued the contact with our Mexican friends. We decided to organize book clubs. Children in both classes, Mexico and the U.S., read the same books and then we had conversation via Skype during which they shared their thinking about the book they were reading. Children wrote reflections about one of the books we had read and sent messages to their friends in Mexico. I took the reflections and messages with me when I visited Mexico in May. The class in Mexico also gave me their reflections and messages, which I brought back to our children.
This time of tension provided Ms. Bravo and I with more opportunities to talk and informally discuss the needs of children. She listened to my opinions and reflected on my questions. Our last project was a success among children. As we started planning it, I wrote in my journal:

Today Ms. Bravo proposed an idea I thought was brilliant! We are going to study different authors. She said it was a good opportunity to address the different reading preferences of children. She gave me some ideas about what types of authors children might prefer based on what she knows of them. I offered to collect books from the local library and bring them next week to class. Children are going to rank them according to their preferences. We are going to make a list of the “best” books and send it to our friends in Mexico as suggestions of interesting books to read. I’m excited! (field notes, May 14, 2015)

When I brought the books to the class, they all seemed very excited. I organized piles of books of the same author and asked children to first peruse them all and then decide on an author they wanted to explore more in depth (see Figure 5.5). Ms. Bravo organized the groups based on children’s choices and helped monitor the work. Once groups were organized, children started reading the books. There were at least four of each author. Our instructions were they had to read one book at a time (they could negotiate what book to read first) and have conversations about the book. We gave them a simple rubric to rate the author’s books and gave them plenty of time to read and chat. The project lasted two weeks. We used either the period after recess or the last 45 minutes of the day to read and talk about the books.
Although Ms. Bravo and I came with several other initiatives, such as selecting books to read with children that we considered relevant to their cultural backgrounds, working individually with children who needed extra support, and rethinking procedures and certain stations, changes in the structure of the classroom were very difficult to implement. The lack of communication between the teachers and between Ms. Franklin and me circumscribed changes to the Spanish side of the classroom. We did not get any information from Ms. Franklin regarding her thinking behind the activities she selected for the stations. Most of the time what I did was walked around the room for a couple of minutes trying to figure out what children had to do.

During my final conversation with Ms. Franklin I asked her what had been the hardest part for her during year, she said:

Ms. Franklin: The constant communication we needed to have as teachers together. That was hard.
Priscila: Why do you think it was hard?

Ms. Franklin: Like, maybe because I needed details and she wasn’t driven by details.

Priscila: [uhm, ok]

Ms. Franklin: Or ah I wanted to know more but never did and lack of time is the time issue

Priscila: [Yeah, it is]

Ms. Franklin: I mean we trusted each other to get what needed done, I don’t know…

Priscila: So what suggestions do you have for me, how could I make things work better in the future?

Ms. Franklin: Uhm, just what we said before, kind of clear long-range plan and working backwards with the end in mind. You being more forth fore with what you wanted to do and expected. (recording, June 4, 2015).

It became apparent to me the lack of communication was something that affected Ms. Franklin, although she never felt comfortable enough to address the issue with Ms. Bravo or with me. I also understood she was expecting instructions of what to do and I did not provide them. I did not realize then she was more of a follower expecting to be told what to do. Our perceptions of collaboration differed. I wanted to construct a curriculum with both teachers, but that was something Ms. Franklin was not used to doing. She was part of a regimented system where following the rules was a must and not complying with them was interpreted as a disruption. After our conversation, I started reflecting about
what she said. I believe that perhaps what I construed as no interest to collaborate with me, might have been the result of Ms. Franklin’s interpretation of my proposal for collaboration as a project that lacked structure and purpose. This might have become a source of frustration for her.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I gave account of the multiple forces and material circumstances that shaped my collaboration with the teachers who participated in my study. I shared what I know is a partial perspective, which can hardly be considered the only truth. I intended to trace the absent presence that affected our thinking and ways of being by problematizing my own interpretations, knowing that my inexact memory will continue “to interrupt and deconstruct the present in its recounting of the past” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 23). I also kept track of what happened after a deconstructive event, in order to trace the new, the possible, and the juxtaposed, from my partial and positional interpretation (Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004).

It is important to acknowledge the locality and temporality (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990) of the events I narrated. Tracing those events in the context of the school implies recognizing the structures that affected what teachers were able to do or not. In many ways, the culture and focus on standardized tests determined the scope of teachers’ actions. Thus, understanding the complexity of what we lived, implies the recognition that social life is never simple or rational.

I also want to acknowledge the very personal nature of my inquiry, recognizing that narrating my lived experiences has a social, political and epistemological connotation (Noblit, Flores & Murillo, 2004). As I thought with my data and then with theory, I was
able to connect my personal experiences with the voices of the authors that spoke to me.

I felt what Freire (2000) meant by reading the world in my praxis.
Chapter 6: Insights and Implications

Becoming a culturally responsive practitioner is by no means an easy and straightforward process. On the contrary, it is a never-ending journey full of contradictions and regressions. My purpose in undertaking this project was to contribute another perspective to understand the complexity that engenders becoming culturally responsive. I wanted to understand if, through collaboration, it was possible to co-construct and co-implement curriculum with a culturally responsive lens and to think with teachers about possible ways to respond to the needs of the array of children that populate our classrooms. However, collaboration proved to be more complex than I anticipated. Not even two months later after we held our first and last collaborative planning meaning, collaboration among the three of us started to break down. Eventually, I ended up working in a collaborative fashion with only one of the teachers. This limited the impact of the culturally responsive engagements we planned.

Given the uneven effort to collaboratively produce culturally responsive curriculum, I analyzed the process of our planned collaboration as well as its intersection with culturally responsive practices. By tracing teachers’ trajectories throughout the time we spent together, I thought I could underscore the complexities of collaboration and understand the diverse factors that affected teachers’ responsiveness to cultural differences. My reflections included the different scales, micro, macro and intermediate levels (Collins, 2012) at which discourses and classifications circulated and how they percolated classroom practices. Noticing the structures in place at the different
levels helped me keep in mind the context of this inquiry and better understand teachers’ responses to my invitation to collaborate.

As I revisited my data and the categories and themes, I started theorizing about the reasons underneath the stance Ms. Franklin and Ms. Bravo took toward collaboration and, by extension, toward culturally responsive practices. I concluded that a positivist paradigm continuously permeating life at Myrtle Elementary. The positivist paradigm privileged standardized tests, determining what counted as knowledge and its production, and functioned as a means to deploy power. Positivism permeated classroom instruction and teachers’ stance toward diversity. It functioned as a catalyst to fixate teachers’ beliefs about teaching and learning. This paradigm was an absent presence (Derrida, 1997) that guided Ms. Franklin and Ms. Bravo’s decisions at different levels. Within this context, Ms. Bravo’s willingness disposition to find alternatives to better respond to the needs of children through projects, her questioning of her own teaching practices, her reflections about my questions and her decision to adopt an inquiry stance, understood as “a collaborative process of connecting to and reaching beyond current understandings to explore tensions significant to learners” (Short, 2009, p. 12) acted as a resisting force.

It is important to note that becoming culturally responsive is equally complex for everyone, even if one belongs to a minoritized group (Ladson–Billings, 2009). Eurocentric, patriarchal, and elitist ways of seeing the world permeate our societies affecting each one of us in different ways, sometimes obscuring our own privileges and making us insensitive to the oppression of others. Thus, it is only possible to start questioning the systems that oppress us and interrupt their materialization in our lives when we notice their existence and the ways in which they affect us. My lived
experiences in Ms. Bravo and Ms. Franklin’s class led me to believe that in order to notice and be able to name the different circuits of power, educators must assume an inquiry stance.

However, this stance alone is not enough if educators do not pair it with a critical eye, for inquiry must be critical inquiry. And it is only when educators are willing to see beyond the obvious, and start tracing the ways in which the structures in place oppress them—as well as those they are supposed to benefit—that we will be able to challenge those structures and find suitable alternatives. A critical inquiry stance requires us to constantly interrogate the world as well as our work, knowing that “this interrogation itself becomes an act of critical intervention, fostering a fundamental attitude of vigilance rather than denial” (hooks, 1994, p. 53). It is precisely such attitude that allows us to notice, trace, and contest the structures that oppress us. From a critical inquiry perspective, it is our responsibility to interrogate the world with our students.

The Positivist Paradigm

Although a positivist paradigm has been questioned for decades, particularly its inappropriateness to understand social and cultural life (Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004) and by extension classroom practices, it is still in force in our schools and classrooms. Disguised under the claim of objectivity, children are classified and labeled based on the results of standardized tests that ignore cultural differences, privilege certain ways of knowing, and mark their possibilities for the future (Kincheloe, 2008; Macedo, 2006).

Additionally, a positivist paradigm requires the use of a behaviorist model of teaching and learning (Skinner, 1976). Thus, the use of a positivist paradigm not only classifies children, it determines how teachers organize their classrooms and what they
teach. My experiences at Myrtle Elementary led me to think that a behaviorist model, in different degrees of implementation, guided Ms. Franklin and Ms. Bravo’s classroom practices and the practices of the school (such as imposing a culture of silence). Such a culture guaranteed a certain environment where a skill–based approach could be implemented. The constant monitoring of children’s behavior and everyday practices tailored to manage them, demonstrated that the teachers might have believed that a quiet environment would support learning. Bowers and Flinders (1990) defined this stance as a “technicist approach” (p. 7), which comes from models such as the one proposed by Tyler (1949), who defined education as “a process of changing the behavior patterns of people” including thinking and feelings (pp. 5–6). Such a model requires “the specification of the behaviors to be changed (to be expressed as behavioral objectives) and a systematic approach to evaluating whether the objectives had been attained” (Bowers & Flinders, 1990, p. 7). Bowers and Flinders (1990) asserted that “the emphasis on behavioral objectives gives special legitimacy to the technological pattern of thinking, while at the same time making the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the classroom appear even more illusive” (p. 8). The use of a technicist approach seemed to be Ms. Franklin’s model of teaching. She seemed to hold a behaviorist worldview that assumed that learners are passive beings waiting to be shaped by positive or negative stimuli. She seemed to equate being quiet to being ready to learn. This, despite the fact, that a good number of children were quiet, but not connected to the world of the classroom. The following notes exemplify this assertion:

Children are on the carpet listening quietly. Carl, Brian and Steward are not paying attention. They are playing with each other. Ms. Franklin asks Carl to
move to a different spot although Brian was the one who started asking him things. Brian goes to the bathroom. Carl tries to pay attention. He stops and covers his face with his hoody. (field notes, February 2, 2015)

Interpreting Ms. Bravo’s teaching model proved to be more complex. In several instances, her behavior suggested a constructivist approach to teaching and learning (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Vygotsky, 1978). For example, she implemented stations so that students would have choices. However, her dominant classroom management procedures responded to those institutionalized at the school. She and Ms. Franklin both used a disciplinary system rooted in a behaviorist model. They asked students to use numbers to categorize their behavior each day and used leading the line to the cafeteria or to recess as a reward for obedient behavior or for becoming examples of the 7 Habits (Covey, 2014). The way these behaviorist practices were institutionalized was quite straightforward. If it was an initiative from the district such as the 7 Habits, teachers received professional development at the beginning of the year and a scripted program to follow. If it was a procedure established at the school, teachers received the instructions from their administration and then opportunities to practice its implementation; such as the time after winter break when children and teachers practice for three hours how to walk in the hallways, use the bathroom, the cafeteria and dismissal procedures. Teachers were expected to fully implement initiatives and procedure in their classrooms and at school. As a result, they passed the instructions to their students and made sure they complied with the expectations. Teachers became “vehicles of power via their practices of control” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 59), while also responding to forces above them.
Another way a positivist paradigm materialized in the classroom was through teachers’ teaching practices. Ms. Bravo and Ms. Franklin framed their teaching around standards on which children were tested in compliance with the school’s objective to improve standardized tests scores, as is the current national trend in the U.S. (Howard, 2010). There was a difference between them though. Whereas Ms. Bravo was willing to try different means to help students learn and was looking for hands-on activities, Ms. Franklin followed the scripted programs provided by the school and based on the district’s policies. Following scripted programs meant that Ms. Franklin seldom tailored her teaching to the interests of children or envisioned different possibilities for her classroom practices aside from the ones already in place. Even during small group instruction, she used a scripted model that guaranteed the covering of the standards. The urgency to cover the content present in standardized tests also fostered an individualistic approach to planning. I believe collaboration was hard to attain, particularly with Ms. Franklin, because she felt she had more control working individually; even though the classroom was shared and our original commitment as a team had been to collaborate. Perhaps not having to question her practices or justify her thinking made working individually comfortable and familiar. Additionally, test results at Myrtle Elementary affected each teacher individually, which meant the results also functioned as a sign of success and recognition or as a sign of failure.

A positivist paradigm might also justify an orientation of cultural neutrality (Bowers & Flinders, 1990). If teachers were to be objective, they could not consider the particularities of children. They would deliver the same content, in the same way to all children. This was evident to me in Ms. Franklin’s teaching. Her constant references to
standards guaranteed a certain “neutral” approach that did not give room to the incorporation of the cultural backgrounds of children. There was no space for differentiation or considering different learning styles. Standardization became at Myrtle Elementary a source to oppress teachers and children; a means to exercise power and the materialization of a positivist paradigm.

**A Critical Inquiry Stance**

Gay (2010) defined culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p.31). She also asserts that, culturally responsive teaching is validating, comprehensive (teaches the whole child), multidimensional (includes curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student–teacher relationships, instructional techniques, classroom management and performance assessments), empowering, transformative and emancipatory (pp. 31–38). Practicing culturally responsive teaching is complex, despite one’s race, class, sexual orientation, or material circumstances. Just because one identifies with or is positioned as a member of a minoritized group does not mean one is immediately prepared to respond to the cultural needs of children who differ from what has been established as the norm, which, in the United States, is a European American, middle class student.

During my time at Myrtle Elementary, there were differences between the two teachers relative to becoming more culturally responsive. I came to believe that these differences rested on the stance each one of them had toward teaching and to life in general. Whereas Ms. Franklin could be described as a reliable follower, she presented
the information her administration required and never questioned procedures or programs. Ms. Bravo was more of an inquirer; she consistently looked for new approaches to use in her teaching. She questioned the system and even bent the rules imposed upon her, such as the “only Spanish” policy, so that she could better serve the children.

Ms. Franklin was genuinely concerned with the well-being of children. However, I did not notice and, she did not share with me, instances of reflection about the implications of assuming a more culturally responsive stance. Most of the time, Ms. Franklin evaded the topic of culturally responsive practices and referred to her activities at church. Doing so could have been a way for her to insulate herself from examining her individual role in the perpetuation of a system that does not use the cultural background of children, positively and productively, in everyday pedagogy (Nieto, 2010). For instance, Ms. Franklin shared with me on different occasions that she had hosted for a couple of days a child at her house whose father had been abusive or that she kept herself busy in activities that involved collecting things for people in need. However, her efforts at addressing a child’s safety and health and inequity were not channeled to the world of her shared classroom. She was willing to find clothes for Norton, an African American boy who frequently came to school with dirty clothes, but she never seemed disposed to alter her classroom practices to help him learn in culturally responsive ways. Her expectations to get instructions from Ms. Bravo or me, as opposed to finding alternatives to her practices or collaborate constructing together responses to the challenges the classroom presented, somehow did not allow her to evolve into becoming a culturally responsive practitioner.
The context in which Myrtle Elementary functioned required a certain type of teacher. One who did not question the practices of her leaders, but followed and complied with what was established—a teacher who, in the words of Peirce (1955), fixated her beliefs through authority. This seemed to be Ms. Franklin’s way, but not Ms. Bravo’s.

Ms. Bravo was always asking for explanations, findings new ways for her instruction and proposing changes. It was precisely Ms. Bravo’s inquiry stance that I believe allowed her to start questioning her own practices and noticing the needs of children. Perhaps such a stance even made visible some of her privileges and helped her become more sensitive to the needs of children. Ms. Bravo was very critical of herself. When discussing the school year, she said:

“Este no fue un buen año. Hay tantas cosas que cambiaría. No me siento contenta con lo que hice.” “I don’t think this was a good year. There are so many things I could have done differently. I don’t feel happy with what I did.” (field notes, June 2, 2015)

I believe it was Ms. Bravo’s inquiry stance towards life and knowledge, for instance, by continuing her education that marked the difference and made possible her journey to becoming a culturally responsive practitioner. Ms. Bravo’s reflective stance and thirst for knowledge played an important role in the awakening of her critical eye. Ms. Bravo seemed to fixate her beliefs through inquiry (Peirce, 1955). Her constant search for new alternatives to deliver content, eventually led her to question her own stance toward the role of culture in her classroom.
Adopting an inquiry stance is never easy or free from complications. I believe it was precisely this stance that dangerously positioned Ms. Bravo in the midst of what Foucault (1972/1980) called a “cluster of relations” (p. 199) that ended up pushing her out of the school. Once a principal’s favorite in the eyes of other teachers, Ms. Bravo’s supposed flaws became apparent when her administration concluded she was not able to control one of her students. She was caught up in a cluster of relations in which the only way she found to resist was through her resignation. I do not believe the event with Camden was the only reason Ms. Bravo left the school. I think it was one of the reasons that contributed to her decision and perhaps a detonator. At least to my knowledge, she did not get messages from her administration that explicitly or implicitly requested her resignation. My interpretation was she felt hurt and maybe even betrayed by her administration and her teaching partner. She found herself displaced from the position of the exemplar teacher who has innovative ideas to the teacher who could not handle a student. If so, this may have been detrimental to her personal image in her community and, subsequently, a source of great stress and frustration.

Both teachers were constrained by the system. The heavy burden of district and state mandates had an enormous effect on the decisions they made and the way they related to children. At the same time, it was the stance each one them took toward those mandates that determined their willingness to collaborate with me and think together to find alternatives to better serve children.

**Scales and Reproductive Processes**

Becoming a culturally responsive practitioner is not a static practice. There is not a final stage to reach. On the contrary, it is a constant process of becoming (Deleuze &
Guatarri, 1987). Bearing in mind that cultural manifestations are the product of socio-historical practices that circulate in a circumscribed locality and time (Agha, 2007), it is virtually impossible to be acquainted with all possible indicators of a given culture, not even our own. Pretending to be fully aware of the history and practices of different cultural groups could even be counterproductive. We might find ourselves trapped in essentializing people—assigning a unique essence to a particular group—(Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), based on our own perceptions. Additionally, it is crucial to pay attention to the different scales at which discourses and classifications circulate that conjoin to affect a particular setting. Knowing that schools and classrooms are places that reflect the culture of the context in which they are immersed, it seems appropriate to assert that a quest for cultural responsiveness must include consciousness of the social, cultural, and linguistic dimensions of social reproduction that take place at the level of the school and classroom. There is a need to understand schools as social institutions that require multi-level analyses linking their internal processes with wider societal contexts (Collins, 2011, 2012); analyses that consider learning “integral and inseparable of social practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 31).

My data suggests connections between local practices at the level of classroom and school structures and wider social categorizations and discourses. For instance, the pervasive idea that standardized tests give account of the cognitive competence of children paired to the belief that all one needs to do is work hard and have a plan, is an idea that still circulates among our society (Howard, 2010). This was evident when Myrtle Elementary was preparing itself for MAP tests. The message that circulated among teachers and children was that high test scores proved children were either smart
or not. It was common to hear teachers talking about “smart students.” For instance, Ms. Bravo’s reference to Stuart, as someone who always gets high scores because “he is so smart” (field notes, May 19, 2015), could be interpreted as having a two-dimension effect. On the one hand, she was responding and perpetuating the discourse circulating at the school and society-at-large, that high scores in standardized tests was equivalent to being smart. On the other hand, her use of the word “smart” gives account of her own belief that it is desirable to be recognized as such and that it equates to the scores one can produce.

Additionally, the fact that children had to present their plan on how to improve their test scores to the administration not only put the responsibility of improvement on children’s shoulders, but ratified the idea that each one of us is responsible for our future. Standardized tests were a way to make children accountable for their commitment to improvement and a materialization of the beliefs that sustain the American Dream.

Another practice that seemed congruent with current societal discourses was the implementation of a half-immersion Spanish program at Myrtle Elementary. An article published by The New York Times titled “Why Bilinguals are Smarter” (Batthacharjee, 2012) gives an account of the current trend of pro-bilingualism. However, the bilingualism that is promoted considers the augmentation of the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) of children from middle and upper classes and does not necessarily serve children who are already bilingual, but belong to lower socioeconomic strataums. In a class of 39 children, the fact that only three were Latino American supports this perspective. Moreover, the way children were selected to participate in the program was an important indicator. Parents were informed of the program and received details of its
advantages. Unfortunately, that information was communicated only in English, which meant that parents who were not fluent English speakers did not learn about the program or make an informed decision.

There were also “numerous intermediate scales” (Collins, 2012, p. 206) worth considering that illustrate the complexity of the social processes that took place in the classroom and that revealed the ways in which the many faces of resistance and social reproduction intertwined. For instance, Ms. Bravo’s proposal to give math lessons both in English and Spanish was a way to bend the rule that forced Spanish teachers to give math instruction only in Spanish. Her decision that children could express their ideas in whatever language they could was another practice that contrasted with the district’s Spanish only regime. For example, when children were working on a project about animals, and Freddy could not find a word in Spanish, Ms. Bravo told him, “Escribelo en inglés, luego yo te ayudo a escribirlo en español. (Write it in English and then I’ll help you to write it in Spanish)” (field notes, April 30, 2015). At the same time, the bilingual productions of children, such as Aurora’s, were not always recognized. She continued attending ESL classes despite the fact that her written and oral productions in English were equivalent to those of her peers.

Cultural manifestations, such as the idea that working hard is what we need to be successful, found their way into the classroom via YouTube clips, which teachers shared with children as part of their lessons. For instance, Ms. Franklin’s way to inspire children to pay attention to her instructions and follow the rules was using a clip entitled Kid President Pep Talk (SoulPancake, 2013), in which an African American boy shared his
perspectives about life at school that aimed to inspire children to take action. Here is one excerpt:

What if Michael Jordan had quit? Well, he did quit. But he retired, yeah that’s it, he retired. But before that? In high school? What if he quit when he didn’t make the team? He would have never made Space Jam. And I love Space Jam. What will be your Space Jam? What will you create when you make the world awesome? Nothing if you keep sittin’ there! (minutes 1:18 – 1:39)

These discourses signaled to children that, despite a system that kept marginalizing some of them through practices such as standardized tests, which considered only their weaknesses and ignored their strengths, only they were responsible for their progress. Nevertheless, it is important to notice the complexity of the events in this classroom. Teachers and children were immersed in an avalanche of discourses and practices as a positivist paradigm permeating life at Myrtle Elementary. At the same time, Ms. Bravo’s attempts to challenge this model, sometimes intuitively through her inquiry stance, proved to be a way to resist the restrictions of the system and find her own way to agency.

Implications

My ethnographic findings suggest the need for an all-encompassing approach that considers the different forces that shape and levels at which beliefs come to be (see Figure 6.1). In order to become culturally responsive practitioners, teachers need to develop a critical inquiry stance. Such a posture allows educators to question the decisions we make and pushes us to engage in metacognitive reflective processes that make evident the connections between societal discourses and the ways they are reflected
in our classroom practices and, vice-versa, the ways in which classroom practices keep filling societal discourses. A critical inquiry stance might also make possible for teachers to find the courage necessary to examine well-entrenched biases and beliefs about children from minoritized groups and put in practice a pedagogy of caring that focuses on caring for students instead of about them (Gay, 2010).

One challenge for educators is the role that identity markers, such as race, gender, class, sexual identification, and physical abilities play in the way children are perceived. Teachers cannot claim cultural neutrality (Bowers & Flinders, 1990), while also pretending to be equitable. Instructors must acknowledge these differences exist and design learning engagements that do not essentialize anyone. Zentella (2005), speaking about connection between teachers and their Latino students’ families, explained that such relationships should be “based on mutual respect for our cultural differences,
without exaggerating them to the point that they obscure our shared humanity and dreams” (p. 29). This process encourages life-long learners into becoming culturally responsive, critical inquirers, who maintain a holistic view of teaching and learning—teachers with the skills and abilities to allow children to read the word and to read the world (Freire, 2000). The process also implies a commitment to collaboration—an understanding of the social nature of learning and a commitment to a stance of critical inquiry that considers the identity markers of our students—and finds ways to acknowledge them, while developing learning engagements. Teachers who embrace a culturally responsive critical inquiry stance are able to respond to individual student needs. This can make a tremendous difference in children’s lives, and may prove particularly beneficial for students from minoritized groups.

As an administrator, I wish to bring to the school setting the perspectives I have gained through this study and open spaces for teachers to find their own ways to agency (Gunzenhauser, 2004). In order to accomplish such a task, I believe administrators need to focus our attention on those things we can control, such as structures at the intermediate level. These structures become the important as well as the urgent, if we want to promote change. Nevertheless, we also need to pay close attention and question structures at the national, state and district level. We should keep ourselves involved in changing those big structures that affect our daily practices. This includes offering our support to teachers so they can notice and name the ways in which societal discourses permeate to their classroom and structures affect their teaching.

Focusing our attention on structures at the school level includes deliberately supporting teachers’ in the exploration of different ways to improve their classroom
practices by enriching their perspectives and adding new ones. This means providing appropriate and relevant professional development. However, as some studies have shown (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000), professional development is a strategy that contributes to the improvement of teaching practices when it starts with what teachers need and not with what administrators believe they need. Thus, it is important to include teachers in the decisions about professional development.

One of our priorities as administrators should be the development of a culture of inquiry (Delong, Griffin, Campbell & Whitehead, 2013) in our school settings. Such a culture has the potential to create the conditions to foster a critical inquiry stance that considers the cultural landscape of the community. Including a culturally responsive dimension to whatever we do is one way to respond to the actual needs of our students. To guarantee its sustainability, a critical culture of inquiry also requires certain structures, which are based on the particular needs of a community and give an account of the stance administrators adopt as culturally responsive critical inquirers.

Administrators can adopt a culturally responsive critical inquiry stance by engaging in inquiry processes in their respective settings that reflect the particular needs of the context in which they serve. Administrators willing to engage in processes of inquiry that forefront the role race, sexual orientation, physical ability, class and many other identity markers play in our classroom and school practices have the potential to foster more equitable school environments. Such stance might be more productive than isolated ethnicity-centered programs and schools that claim to better serve students of color (Antrop–González & De Jesús, 2006; Rivera & Pedraza, 2000) but that limit their
efforts to those with the possibility to access such institutions. Culturally responsive administrators can use the strengths of their communities to advance a social justice agenda. They can make serving all children a priority by establishing as part of a school agenda the commitments and practice to meet students wherever they might be in their learning.

**Reflections on Collaboration**

Creating a culture of inquiry that is culturally responsive implies a great deal of collaboration among all stakeholders at a school setting. Collaborative spaces can function as a springboard to reflect on the ways in which a culturally responsive stance can be woven into classroom practices. This is evident in some of the learning engagements Ms. Bravo and I created in her classroom. In order to make collaboration a common practice among leadership teams, teachers, students and parents, schools must develop structures that not only support collaboration, but that also make visible the advantages of thinking and reflecting together. Such structures might include (1) a system to methodically assess the needs of the community; (2) spaces for systematic collaborative planning and reflection, for both the leadership team and teachers; (3) opportunities to engage in research processes that respond to the needs of the community, both at the school and classroom levels; and (4) spaces to make the voices of all stakeholders audible, including students and parents.

Because each community has its own particular needs, it is advisable that the structures proposed above are tailored to the particularities of the setting in which they are intended to be used. It is only possible to establish a framework when each community can make decisions regarding the best ways to promote the culturally
responsive critical inquiry stance. It is important to notice that adopting a culturally responsive critical stance becomes the responsibility of each individual teacher. However, my experiences at Myrtle Elementary helped me recognize the importance of an administration and school structure that promotes and establishes ways to enact a culturally responsive inquiry stance. I believe it is collaboration that generates such a stance as it pushes educators to think together and find culturally responsive alternatives to better serve all children.

**Limitations of the Study**

Qualitative research is a flexible process that involves constant reflection at every stage of it (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). It requires reflection because the researcher is the interpreter of the lived experiences as well as the narrator of the research story. As Noblit, Flores, and Murillo (2004) stated, “postcritical ethnographers acknowledge that our biographies, cultures, and historical contexts, matter; these determine what we see and don’t see, understand and not understand, our ability to analyze and not analyze, to disseminate knowledge adequately or not” (p. 34). I acknowledge the fact that what was presented in this dissertation responded to my personal identity factors and my political and personal views of education and teaching and learning. Research is always partial, positional, and political (Noblit, Flores & Murillo, 2004). Positivists might argue that this is a limitation. However, I believe it is, in fact, its strength, as it does not pretend to present the “right” interpretation of anything but to present alternatives to be considered. This work is informed by my positionality and guided by my interpretations. The narration of my research process attempted to give account of the complexity of collaboration due to the inextricable relationship between local, intermediate and large
structures that influenced the discourses and categorizations that circulated in the classroom where I conducted this study. I also asked Ms. Bravo to offer me her perspectives in the portions of this work that concern her. I hope I provided enough details to allow readers to see what perhaps I cannot, and to develop their own interpretations of the story I narrated.

Qualitative research provides a source of reflection and has the potential to help us envision alternative realities. The results of this study are not reproducible since they are constrained by the context in which this study took place. However, they might be a source of reflection. I do hope that although the results of this study are limited in their application to other settings, no matter how similar they might appear, the idea of supporting teachers in becoming culturally responsive critical inquirers might resonate with the expectations of educators and postcritical ethnographers.

**Future Research**

This study represents my initial efforts to understand the potential of collaboration to produce culturally responsive curriculum that could be implemented in elementary classrooms. As I immersed myself in the process of data collection and later of data analysis, new questions came to mind which require a systematic analysis in order to understand the relationship between collaboration and adopting a culturally responsive inquiry stance.

The findings of this study suggest the need to prepare teachers and administrators to develop a critical eye capable of identifying structures and practices that respond to positivist paradigms and behaviorist models of teaching and learning. While I have suggested some strategies to establish a culture of inquiry where culturally responsive
practices could be enacted, future research might explore these suggestions to determine if in such an environment teachers can actually develop an inquiry stance and promote teaching practices that acknowledge the cultural differences of children. There is also a need to identify if, through collaboration, it is possible to foster among practitioners a reflective mindset that can support a critical inquiry stance. At the conclusion of this study, I find myself wondering about the conditions under which a critical inquiry stance can flourish. My experiences with Ms. Bravo and Ms. Franklin led me to believe it is possible to become culturally responsive critical educators if one has the willingness to try and a support system. As with any complex situation in life and particularly in education, I do not believe there is an easy or unique path to becoming culturally responsive. I am convinced the paths to developing such commitment and investment are not as clear as one might hope they would be. They are conditioned by the realities of the community in which we would like to see cultural responsiveness enacted.

Finally, I hope the findings of this study can become a source of reflection and cause some in the field to rethink professional development and make spaces for more action-research in schools. As an administrator, I will embrace a culturally responsive inquiry stance as my commitment to social justice. I intend to construct with my colleagues the necessary structures to support collaboration and foster a culture of critical inquiry.
References


Appendix A: Timeline of the Study

August-December 2014
Getting to know the community

November 2014
Long planning meeting

December 2014
Teachers from South Carolina & South America met each other

January 2015
Collaboration started

February 2015
Collaboration broke with Ms. Franklin

February - June 2015
Collaboration continued with Ms. Bravo
Appendix B: Codes After Second Coding Cycle

TEACHERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ms. Bravo</th>
<th>Ms. Franklin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Cultural Responsiveness</strong></td>
<td><strong>1. Cultural Responsiveness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Beliefs from personal experiences</td>
<td>a. Beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(discourse):</td>
<td>- Rooted in Christian values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Family</td>
<td>- Providing for the poor—colonizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- University classes</td>
<td>through compassion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Fixed mindset vs growth mindset</td>
<td>- Collecting funds (iPads for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Practice (December – June)</td>
<td>Mexican children)–the White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Unit on cultures (offering perspectives)</td>
<td>savior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Noticing needs of children</td>
<td>- Not willing to talk about race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Making curricular decisions to support learning</td>
<td>b. Cultural responsive practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Noticing inconsistencies</td>
<td>- Considers the topic inappropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Practice</td>
<td>for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August – December</td>
<td>- Challenges and resists the concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Improvisations</td>
<td>of cultural responsive practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Structure did not support independent learning (lack of</td>
<td>- Discomfort with the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scaffolding)</td>
<td>- She knows how to teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Objectives not always clear</td>
<td>- Having a collection of books in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Those who can learn vs those who can’t</td>
<td>her shelf reflects her cultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January – June</td>
<td>responsiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Modeling – personal connections</td>
<td>- Places the responsibility on me as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Connections with real life scenarios</td>
<td>a person of color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Learning</td>
<td>2. Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Discourse</td>
<td>a. Discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Critical thinkers</td>
<td>- Learning happens everywhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Learning should be fun</td>
<td>- Learning implies trial and error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Learning never ends</td>
<td>- There is a right way to do things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Support growth mindset</td>
<td>- We are wired in a certain way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- It’s OK to fail</td>
<td>- Those who can learn vs those who can’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sensitive to the needs of children</td>
<td>b. Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Practice</td>
<td>- Standards guide teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August – December</td>
<td>- Makes personal connections to help unpack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Improvisations</td>
<td>standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Structure did not support independent learning (lack of</td>
<td>- Follows scripted program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scaffolding)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Objectives not always clear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Those who can learn vs those who can’t</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January – June</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| - **Project with Mexico** – relevant context for learning  
- Use of rubrics  
- Noticing the need for group work  
- Small group teaching – addressing particular needs | - **Connections between curriculum and engagements not always clear**  
- Inquiry equates to letting children move  
- Small groups – following a certain format (story, strategy, practice)  
- Station – independent work, worksheets, leveled books |
|---|---|
| c. **Parents**  
- Open to change  
- Acknowledges their need to know about their children – parents complained about children being anxious | c. **Parents**  
- Differs to power of parents  
- Knows parents need to be informed |
| **3. Media Influence**  
a. Her version of the American dream  
b. Using media to support teaching  
c. Media discourse to explain people’s perspectives | **3. Media Influence**  
a. Uses media resources during morning meetings (Alaska, commercials, African American boy – class president)  
b. The American dream |
| **4. Perception of the school**  
August – December  
a. Principal offers a flexible environment  
b. Allowed to try new things  
c. Feels support from principal  
January – June  
d. The school doesn’t align anymore to her beliefs  
e. Feels lack of support in front of parents (situation with student)  
f. Coaches are only concern with test results  
g. Finds inconsistencies between requirements (Spanish only) and standardized test in English  
h. Questioned Franklin’s practices | **4. Perception of the school**  
a. Principal offers a flexible environment  
b. All have the same vision  
c. Spanish immersion should be more consistent  
d. Bravo has principal’s support because she has good ideas |
| **5. School structures**  
August – December  
a. Didn’t agree but complied with all procedures  
b. Reinforced culture of silence  
c. Shared vision – fixed mindset  
January – June  
d. Questioned procedures (practice after Christmas)  
e. Questioned district PD  
Decides to leave school | **5. School structures**  
a. Feels she needs to comply with everything the way admin requires it  
b. Doesn’t question the system  
c. Supports culture of silence – strict rules in the classroom  
d. Follows all the rules and requirements  
\- Communications  
\- Students discourses before MAP  
\- Report cards  
e. Focuses on standardized tests – standards  
f. Willing to help maintain order – situation with student, she offered to take care of him  
g. Never questioned procedures  
h. Never questioned the district |
## COLLABORATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal challenges to collaboration</th>
<th>External challenges to collaboration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Time (field notes)</td>
<td>1. High accountability: report cards, meetings, standardized tests (conversation with Mrs. Waller)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Accountability towards commitments (field notes – literacy talks; memos: 1/12/15; 1/14/15; 2/16/15)</td>
<td>2. District &amp; school structures: meetings, policies, use of language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Between teachers (Bravo’s emails, field notes)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Between teacher &amp; researcher (memo 1/12/15)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My presence seen as a disruption–counterproductive? (field notes – children approaching me)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Constructions of race (11/18/15; 05/23/15, memo same date)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Being White as normative (effect on judging children’s behavior)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Avoidance of discussions/confrontations (defensiveness, field notes, conversation with Bravo, classroom recordings)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media influence (long conversation in November, conversation with Bravo)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When present – Bravo and I (field notes; conversation with Bravo 04/03/15)</th>
<th>When absent (field notes, memos January, February, March, April)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Clear goals</td>
<td>1. Improvisation about the materials selected for the day (also August – December)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Meaningful learning engagements</td>
<td>2. Activities may lack purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Student identities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Latina students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Materials to respond to the needs of children (example: using glasses)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Sense of accomplishment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix C: Long Planning Meeting in November

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main topic of conversation</th>
<th>Raised by</th>
<th>Agreement reached</th>
<th>Implemented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Responsibility is placed on students | Ms. Bravo  
Ms. Franklin supported it | | |
| Rethink organization of the classroom | Ms. Bravo  
Ms. Franklin supported it | Simplify centers’ instructions | Yes |
| Interventionists are disturbing | Ms. Bravo  
Ms. Franklin supported it | Give them more precise instructions (Ms. Franklin) | No |
| Reflect on shared vision | Priscila | Rewrite the share vision with them | Yes |
| Parents are trained to get specific information about children behavior | Ms. Franklin  
Ms. Bravo – offered a different perspective | Use a different format to help children reflect on their behavior & communicate with parents | No |
| Lack of continuity – not all teachers in the immersion program hold the same philosophy | Ms. Franklin  
Ms. Bravo supported it | Find ways to share with other teachers what we learn through the study | No |
| Include other teachers in what we do | Ms. Bravo | Share our practices with other teachers | No |
| Position regarding standards | Priscila | Ms. Franklin explained her position regarding standards (supports it), Ms. Bravo offered a different perspective (does not support them) | Same stance all year long |
| Learning has to be meaningful | Ms. Bravo  
Priscila supported it, Franklin supported it | Make meaningful connections to help children learn | When Ms. Bravo or Priscila implemented an activity |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept-based learning</th>
<th>Priscila Ms. Bravo supported it</th>
<th>Explore the idea to use concepts and not themes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Priscila will be three days a week in the classroom</td>
<td>Priscila Ms. Bravo supported it</td>
<td>Have a more consistent structure to work with a small group of children</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priscila’s class working with the children – one on one, small groups</td>
<td>Priscila</td>
<td>My students will work from 1:30 – 2:15 every Tuesday</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging language repertoires</td>
<td>Priscila Ms. Bravo supported it</td>
<td>Create spaces to work with Latino American girls</td>
<td>Yes – when Priscila worked with Latino American girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini lessons first in English then in Spanish</td>
<td>Ms. Bravo</td>
<td>Mini lessons in both languages</td>
<td>Yes – Each teacher taught a different lesson using her target language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do test scores reflect authentic learning?</td>
<td>Ms. Bravo Priscila supported it</td>
<td>Children show what they know in different ways</td>
<td>No Limited to the expectations of teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do we prepare children for the future?</td>
<td>Priscila</td>
<td>Meaningful learning – help children make connections</td>
<td>No Only at the end of the year when Ms. Bravo took initiative and developed more meaningful activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally relevant pedagogies - What do you want for students?</td>
<td>Priscila Ms. Bravo</td>
<td>Explore ways to include it in the curriculum</td>
<td>Only Ms. Bravo and Priscila the last portion of the year. Activities were isolated and not integrated into the curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV shows – supporting the idea of the American Dream</td>
<td>Ms. Franklin</td>
<td></td>
<td>All year long</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District closely prescribes what teachers should do – Ms. Waller gives them more flexibility</td>
<td>Ms. Bravo Priscila made connection with the need for autonomy</td>
<td>Flexibility from principal was the same, but structures in the school to better support standardized tests increased</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A mini unit to explore different cultures</td>
<td>Ms. Bravo Ms. Franklin supported it because it related to standards</td>
<td>Develop a mini unit to implement in December</td>
<td>Yes, we had several guests to talk about their countries, language and life style.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find stories to respond to the cultural needs of children</td>
<td>Priscila Ms. Bravo supported it</td>
<td>Find out what is relevant to children</td>
<td>Partially – Priscila interviewed several kids, kept the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Ms. Franklin action</td>
<td>District initiative action</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priscila will be in the classroom Wednesday, Thursdays &amp; Fridays</td>
<td>Priscila</td>
<td>Respect this organization</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District initiatives – Tie guy, a motivational speaker</td>
<td>Ms. Franklin</td>
<td>Accommodated her activities to respond to school’s administration requirements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halliday’s learning the language, about the language &amp; through language and Cambourne’s conditions for learning</td>
<td>Priscila, Ms. Bravo asked questions, Ms. Franklin supported the ideas</td>
<td>Incorporate these ideas into teachers’ activities</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children have trouble being creative</td>
<td>Ms. Bravo</td>
<td>Modeling for children, giving them opportunities to connect school to real life</td>
<td>Partially, when Ms. Bravo planned her activities at the end of the year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simplify stations’ organization</td>
<td>Ms. Bravo</td>
<td>Find an easier to follow organization for stations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on meaningful projects</td>
<td>Ms. Bravo, Priscila supports it</td>
<td>Plan projects where authentic learning could happen</td>
<td>Partially at the end of the year when Ms. Bravo and Priscila planned together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve quality of learning engagements for stations</td>
<td>Priscila, Ms. Bravo supports it, Ms. Franklin supports it</td>
<td>Make sure learning engagements are meaningful with clear objectives</td>
<td>Partially at the end of the year when Ms. Bravo and Priscila planned together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use performance tasks to check understanding</td>
<td>Priscila, Ms. Bravo supports it, Ms. Franklin supports it</td>
<td>Develop performance tasks to assess students at the end of a unit</td>
<td>Partially at the end of the year when Ms. Bravo and Priscila planned together</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>