“Porque Hací Ya Conocemos”: Dialogic Ways of Knowing Through Digital Learning Communities and Critical Coaching

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“PORQUE HACÍ YA CONOCEMOS”: DIALOGIC WAYS OF KNOWING THROUGH DIGITAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND CRITICAL COACHING

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

Language and Literacy

College of Education

University of South Carolina

2017

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DEDICATION

for

Kadence

(and the multitude of Kadences striving for

justice in educational spaces)


“The paradox of education is precisely this—

that as one begins to become conscious

one begins to examine the society in which

he is being educated.”

James Baldwin, “A Talk to Teachers” (1963)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ways of knowing are enveloped in acknowledgements, and I have many parties to thank for contributing to the ways of knowing that have helped me develop into the educator, scholar, and advocate that I am today.

To my students and their families: You showed me the importance of listening, questioning, and realizing that my way is not the only way—or even the best way. You awakened me to the mystery of the reading process and the role my identity plays in my instruction and my relationships with you. You are all developing geniuses.

To my school colleagues: The world of education can be an overwhelming and exhausting place, but you allowed it to be a world of joy, friendship, and never-ending growth. You opened your classrooms, challenged my thinking, celebrated accomplishments, analyzed difficulties, and showed me a better world through the work you are doing with learners every day. Many of you contributed to my own critical network, for which I am eternally grateful.

To my fellow literacy coaches (Nicole, Claire, Heather, Laura, Kelli, Shameera, Katrina, Lorraine, Dawn, and Susan): You were the “plot twist” in my professional career that I never saw coming, but I am so grateful you also chose to embark on this unexpected adventure. You have worked tirelessly to support teachers in the calling to invite all children into the “reading club,” but you have also made time for supporting
me in my professional development. Despite the great responsibilities in our daily lives
as coaches, you still made time to make sure I was progressing on my dissertation—and
to laugh, too. What happens in the litmobile stays in the litmobile.

To my University of South Carolina support system: You all have grown my
theories and interpretations of the world in ways I never imagined. Dr. Julia López-
Robertson, you have been a mentor to me not only throughout the doctoral journey,
but also in navigating the world beyond. I could not dream of a more supportive
advisor. Dr. Susi Long, Dr. Yang Wang, and Dr. Peter Moyi, thank you for serving on my
committee and providing feedback that stretched my thinking. Sarah Catto and
Elizabeth Bemiss, you went ahead of me and showed me that it is possible to survive the
Ph.D. journey—even with a little bit of sanity left over. Thank you for your support and
advice throughout this process.

To my family: Your love and support has been embodied in many and various
ways throughout my life, but it has never ceased. Thank you for raising me to love
reading, love learning, and love teaching. Robert, you made sure I had productive work
time, food to eat, and motivation to finish, even when I doubted myself. I can’t wait
until we are Dr. and Dr. Wells.

And finally, to Kadence: Thank you for inviting me into your classroom and into
your life. All your babies (as you lovingly call them) are so lucky to have you as their
teacher and advocate.
The purpose of this qualitative action research case study was to create dialogic, power-sharing spaces that recognized the diverse ways of knowing that teachers, families, and students brought to mutually-constructed learning environments through two strategies, digital learning communities and critical coaching. Specifically, the study explored how families, teachers, and students engaged in digital learning communities; how these parties exercised power in these digital spaces; and how critical coaching partnerships formed between teachers and literacy coaches. The researcher (a literacy coach) engaged in a critical coaching partnership with an early childhood educator over the course of four months. Engagements in this partnership included initial and final interviews, eight coaching conversations to engage in critical self-reflection and plan social justice-infused action and advocacy, and simultaneous construction of a digital learning community that engaged families with equal voices on a platform where all members could post, view, comment, and favorite media in a private, password-protected digital space.

The findings in this study suggested the ripe potential for creating critical learning spaces that validate the many ways of knowing of families, teachers, and students through critical coaching and digital learning communities. Thematic analysis, visual analysis, and critical discourse analysis were applied to the data collected through
observations, weekly participant reflections, coaching conversations, artifacts curated from the digital learning community, documents such as cultural memoirs, interviews, and surveys. Through this analysis, significant themes developed in both digital learning communities and critical coaching. Two findings emerged from digital learning communities: (1) families did have access to technology and the internet, especially via smartphones, despite the lower socioeconomic status of the school population; and (2) participation in digital learning communities depended on the unique needs and interests of families, teachers, and students. Additionally, two findings emerged from critical coaching: (1) self-reflection occurred through defining educators’ identities as cultural beings, as well as by naming and challenging assumptions; and (2) taking action occurred through critical networks, advocacy in public spaces, and planning culturally relevant pedagogy. Findings also yielded tips for forming digital learning communities and essential conditions of critical coaching.
PREFACE

hardly
dissertations are hard,
    they often said
so I entered, armor up
only to find that
dissertations aren’t so much hard
    as
    they are soft—
    softly uncovering edges undefined
softly unravelling
    like a spool of yarn that does not yet know its
end.
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And no amount of resources or pedagogical strategies will help us to provide the best opportunity for low-income students to reach their full potential as learners if we do not attend first to the stereotypes, biases, and assumptions we have about them and their families. (Gorski, 2013, p. 69, emphasis added)

Figure 1.1: coach.

The sun streamed through floor-to-ceiling windows in the district office meeting room and danced our faces. I looked around at these women, strangers for now but soon-to-be coworkers, soon-to-be literacy coaches. We were all on an unexplored path
together, coming from a variety of backgrounds: some of us were classroom teachers, district office specialists, or reading interventionists. One question silently sat among us, waiting for the bravest speaker to give it a voice: What does it mean to be a literacy coach, and what would we do as literacy coaches?

Almost three years have passed since this meeting in the fall of 2014, and I am still searching for answers to these exact questions. If a literacy coach helps teachers implement research-based (by whom?) best practices (for whom?) for students to grow as literate beings (as defined by whom?), this job is slightly more complicated than mere definitions make it seem. It gets even more complicated when educators—tired, overstretched, and underpaid—attempt to shift the weight of the monumental responsibility to help others grow as literate beings onto other parties, namely the students and their families. From kindergarten through fifth grade teachers alike, passing comments in data meetings about how students are not ready for reading because they do not yet know their letters and sounds are indeed part of my job, since these teachers’ beliefs that such skills precede meaning making reflect a common misunderstanding of the process of reading (Smith, 2006). But what about the comments about families using “Obamaphones,” about the families that “don’t care” enough to send in crayons but will send in candy to decorate milk carton gingerbread houses, about the families who lack literacy skills to help with reading and homework at home? Even though no one told me so when I was sitting in the literacy coach orientation meeting, I know those comments too are my job. Literacy isn’t just about letters, sounds, and words: it is about making meaning in the world (Freire & Macedo,
1987). Each of those comments simultaneously misrepresents and minimizes families’ possibilities for making meaning in the world, especially in the world of school.

And, as I said in Figure 1.1, I am a coach of literacy, words, and all.

Statement of the Problem

While education contributes to learning and knowing, the prevailing culture of school is not designed to recognize the diverse ways of knowing that students, families, and educators alike contribute to learning communities (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010; Nieto, 2009, 2013). Darden (2002) noted that "knowledge is dynamically produced and emerges out of our relationships with one another and the world" (p. 66); however, typically one way of knowing, as embodied in the standards and pre-made curriculum, is positioned as powerful, significant, and correct, while other ways of knowing are not acknowledged as valid and valued. The demographics of the overwhelming majority of teachers—White, middle-class females—also align with the mainstream norms that are intertwined with the standards and culture of school, making these norms seem invisible and universally shared (Gay, 2010; Jensen, 2005). However, these norms are definitely not invisible nor universal.

As a literacy coach, a significant portion of my job is to support teachers in their instructional practices; however, the support my position entails is often defined very narrowly, focused only on the day-to-day practices of literacy skills in the classroom and not on how cultural norms influence pedagogy. Because most teachers (myself included) come from backgrounds that mirror the dominant ideologies of society, we often do not name or problematize our tacit theories about the cultural norms or
abilities of minoritized (non-mainstream) students (Sleeter, 2013). With the increasing trend of diverse student populations—and the largely static demographic of teachers (Feistritzer, 2011)—this teacher/student cultural and ideological paradox poses significant challenges for equitable access to success in school for all students.

Furthermore, the culture and power structures of school impact opportunities for family engagement. The culture of school parallels dominant cultural norms, norms that all of the families the school serves do not share. Because of this association between school culture and mainstream norms, parents from dominant cultures may actively coach their children into succeeding in the culture of school (i.e., Heath, 1983). When these three cultural realms align—mainstream teachers, mainstream families, and mainstream schooling—power belongs to those who benefit from this alignment, including the school (Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Therefore, families are often positioned as passive receivers of information from the school, which ignores their voices and ways of knowing (Freire, 1970; Yosso, 2005). Additionally, minoritized families who do not culturally align with the school may be labeled mistakenly as uninvolved or unconcerned with their child’s education. While some teachers may be quick to impose such deficit-based labels, their true source is rarely questioned: the un-interrogated assumptions, socializations, and cultural norms of the mainstream teachers and the associated school culture.

To engage all families in equitable learning spaces, assumptions implicit in mainstream culture—including the culture of schooling—can be named, framed, and questioned. Kaur (2012) explained that teaching for social justice involves “caring about
[learners] and fostering relationships with them and their families and communities, getting to know their lives inside and outside the classroom, valuing and building on the experiences they bring with them into the classroom by making learning meaningful to their lives,” (p. 486) and other actions. I believe coaching for social justice involves the same considerations. Instead of viewing schools as sources of powerful founts of knowledge to deposit into the empty vessels of students and their families (Freire, 1970), educators and educational systems must recognize families from all backgrounds as experts in their own unique ways of knowing, or funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992). Creating multi-directional knowledge exchanges (Hughes & Pollard, 2006) creates problem-posing learning opportunities that (1) allow educators to examine their own social and political interests and identities that influence their teaching and, therefore, their students’ interests and identities, and (2) involve families as co-creators of a “reality in the process of transformation” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 12).

Research Purpose

Given the need to create school/home relationships that are equitable, dialogic, and respectful of the diverse ways of knowing all parties possess, this study considered the outcomes of building these relationships through two overlapping strategies: digital learning communities and critical coaching. I wondered how the photo-sharing site Flickr could create power-sharing spaces through collaboratively-constructed digital learning communities of families, students, teachers, and literacy coaches. Technology offers possibilities to build these equitable spaces because of how current Web 2.0 and
social media cultures position users as both creators and curators (Duggan, 2013). Furthermore, the multimodal and multimedia representations technology allows redefines the traditional, limiting view of literacy as solely print-based (Warschauer, 2003).

Through my role as a literacy coach, I have personally seen the need to create a new genre of coaching conversations, which I am calling “critical coaching.” Critical coaching focuses on the role of the literacy coach in naming, framing, and interrogating (c)overt assumptions and biases that may influence teachers’ beliefs, practices, and, in turn, students’ learning outcomes. Because critical literacy creates spaces for students who are traditionally silenced by mainstream literacies and power structures, awareness of power, justice, and equity are vital for teachers—and, therefore, for coaches (Rogers, 2014). I also recognize that the role of a literacy coach transcends improving teachers’ literacy practices and students’ learning outcomes; a coach is a public intellectual who inhabits a political space (Commeyras, 2002; Dozier, 2014). Jones and Rainville (2014b) note that as "literacy coaches position themselves as intellectuals in their in-between-ness, they can encourage, nurture, and participate in collaborative cultures that work on the side of the weak and unrepresented" (p. 187).

Furthermore, I was curious as to how digital learning communities and critical coaching related to my day-to-day role as an elementary literacy coach. I developed a partnership with one early childhood teacher named Kadence (a pseudonym she chose because as a young child, she wished this were her name) at the school where I serve as a literacy coach. Over the course of four months in the spring of 2016, we engaged
ourselves, students, and families as creators and curators in an online digital learning community as we simultaneously participated in frequent critical coaching conversations, which focused on discovering our families’ unique funds of knowledge, uncovering shadows of our own cultural backgrounds and socializations and how these elements of our identities influenced classroom practice, and recovering the humanity of ourselves, our families, and our students through critical action, enacted through planning culturally-relevant pedagogy.

**Type of Study and Research Question(s)**

To contribute to the body of work that addresses the creation of equitable home/school relationships through digital learning communities and critical coaching, this study used a qualitative design to ask:

1. Do families, teachers, and students choose to engage in digital learning communities? If so, how? If not, why?
2. How do families, students, and educators exercise power through digital learning communities?
3. How do digital learning communities stimulate critical coaching partnerships between teachers and literacy coaches?

**Significance of the Study**

The body of literature that examines the intersection of the factors presented above—family engagement, technology and multimodal communication, the institution of school that is entrenched in mainstream cultural norms, and the role of a literacy coach in combining these elements—is scarce, as I will document in the literature
Critical coaching offers an effective, job-embedded space for personal and professional development that (1) engages teachers in critical self-reflection, (2) creates positive, dialogic relationships between families and the school, and (3) moves toward planning responsive classroom instruction.

Digital learning communities provide previously unexplored opportunities to create positive and dialogic relationships between home and school. The Gorski (2013) quote opening this chapter establishes an urgent need to “attend first to the stereotypes, biases, and assumptions we have about [low-income students] and their families” (p. 69). If deficit assumptions begin with overgeneralizations of family backgrounds (García & Guerra, 2004), digital learning communities can serve as powerful tools for families to craft counternarratives about their own backgrounds and, therefore, interrupt deficit assumptions. Figure 1.2 presents the dialogic connections between home and school, as facilitated by the distinct yet interrelated concepts of digital learning communities and critical coaching.

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 1.2. Representation of home/school connections in digital learning communities and critical coaching.*
Furthermore, the use of critical discourse analysis (CDA) with technology and multimodality is a documented area of potential growth in the field. One established criticism of CDA is that this approach tends to focus more on written and spoken texts while largely ignoring other modalities (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Street, 1985; van Leeuwen, 2013; Wang, 2014). In a review of 69 empirical studies about CDA in literacy education, only eleven included digital and/or global technologies in the data set, and only three of these eleven analyzed multimodal data (Rogers & Schaenen, 2013). When analyzing visual multimodal data, researchers usually feature or create frameworks applied to professional work like graphic novels (Connors, 2011), picture news (Wang, 2014), or artists featured in children’s literature (Serafini, 2010, 2011), not digital media that non-professionals produce. While CDA has entered the field of social media in some limited cases (e.g., Dawson, 2012; Encheva, 2011; Lillqvist, Louhiala-Salminen, & Kankaanranta, 2016), further studies should focus on social media platforms other than Facebook (Lillqvist et al., 2016). The use of Flickr in this project is a unique melding of CDA, social media, and home/school communication that Rogers and Schaenen (2013) establish as an explicit gap in existing literature: "Future CDA research should examine synchronous and asynchronous communication in digitally mediated learning environments, the proliferation of virtual communities of learning, and the multiplying digital connections between classrooms and nonschool settings" (p. 135).

Finally, I argue that even though this study expands the boundaries of traditional coaching responsibilities, this expansion is necessary. Some research exists that positions classroom teachers and literacy coaches as collaborative action researchers
(Bintz & Dillard, 2007), but this research usually centers on classroom practice, not tacit theories based on the dominant/minoritized positionality of teachers, literacy coaches, families, and students. While collaborative action research utilizing CDA does provide a notable exception in this trend (i.e., Clarke, 2007; Rogers & Schaenen, 2013), this genre of research is relatively new and limited in output. In regards to integrating technology, the literacy coach plays a major role in advancing new literacies (Skinner, Hagood, & Provost, 2014; Vasudevan, 2014), especially “new practices of communication, representation, and accessing and sharing information using various digital media that are necessary in the 21st century” (Vasudevan, 2014, p. 237). As a coach, I am also expected to ground my conversations with teachers in the work of their students (Dozier, 2008; Sweeney, 2010). This digital learning community provides a portfolio of multimodal learning opportunities students, families, and educators will share at school, at home, and beyond. It is in these dialogic spaces where educators, students, and families can find their liberation—and their humanity (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

**Definition of Terms**

A brief list of significant terms, including my conceptualizations of “critical coaching” and “digital learning communities,” is below.

**Literacy coach.** A literacy coach is a school-based resource for job-embedded professional development for teachers (International Literacy Association, 2015). Through collaborative inquiry, a literacy coach works with classroom teachers to align instruction with best practices. See Ch. 2 for an in-depth discussion of literacy coaching.
**Critical.** I use this term not in terms of significance or negativity, but instead to refer to a questioning stance that does not take the status quo for granted (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

**Critical coaching.** I developed this concept to describe literacy coaching that centers critical, dialogic teacher/literacy coach partnerships that problematize and reframe teachers’ and coaches’ (c)overt assumptions about students, especially students from non-mainstream groups.

**Smartphone.** A smartphone is cellular device running an iPhone, Android, Windows, or Blackberry operating system that offers internet access (Smith, 2012a).

**21st century learning skills.** Warschauer and Matuchniak (2010) define these skills as “the broader set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are needed for success in today’s world” (p. 206).

**Critical discourse analysis (CDA).** Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is defined by “its concern with power as a central condition in social life, and its efforts to develop a theory of language that incorporates this as a major premise" (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 10). Additional information about CDA is in Chapter 3.

**Family.** I use this term not only limited to parents, but also to extended family and any live-in caretakers responsible for children’s well-being.

**Flickr.** Flickr is an online photo-sharing service hosted by Yahoo. Users can post visual media, such as photos and videos; include captions; comment on media; or mark media as “faves” by clicking a star on the media. More information about Flickr is in Chapters 3 and 4.
**Digital learning community.** I define a digital learning community as a dialogic space online where traditional home/school power norms are equalized by including families as equal participants.

**Dominant/mainstream.** I use the term “dominant” or “mainstream” to discuss White, middle class norms and the individuals ascribing to these norms (whether or not they are conscious of this participation in these dominant ideologies). However, I also recognize that using these terms reifies the dominant/mainstream status of this group, which is also problematic. For the sake of fluidity of writing, I use these terms with this caveat in mind.

**Minoritized/non-mainstreamed.** I refer to individuals whose cultural backgrounds are located outside of the realm of dominant ideologies as “minoritized” or “non-mainstreamed” to show that this label is often created for and imposed upon these groups.

**Deficit perspectives.** Deficit perspectives are often held about minoritized students. Because of their “different” status (as compared with dominant norms), teachers often regard minoritized students as having less potential, focusing on their limitations instead of their possibilities.

**Conceptual & Theoretical Framework**

As educators, we revel in the power of stories. Stories entertain, educate, and reveal (Bishop, 1990). They take us places: to great lands of imagination, to carefree summer days of childhood, to fascinating lives of others. Sometimes, however, stories
take us to unexpected places that shape our identities in unexpected ways (Short, 2012).

Three unexpected places my professional journey has taken me have irrevocably shaped my identity: (1) my literacy awakening, in which I realized that “the system” was not approaching literacy in a helpful manner for struggling readers, especially the disproportionate number of struggling readers of color; (2) my racialized awakening, in which I realized that I am White and benefit from my Whiteness—and the normalized Whiteness of public education—on a daily basis; and (3) my coaching awakening, in which I struggle to reconcile my position between the worlds of teaching and literacy coaching, while continuing my journeys of literacy and racialized awakenings. While these awakenings often appeared in specific moments in my life, I recognize that I am still in the process of awakening. I present each story with a different genre: Part One is a dramatic script, Part Two is a personal narrative, and Part Three is a collection of short poems. I recognize that literacy expressions take a variety of forms, and only a very specific, limiting form is typically accepted in academic writing. Therefore, I actively chose to use my positionality as a scholar to interrupt the oppressive expectations of academic writing that may inadvertently silence voices that deserve to be heard.

**Part one: Literacy awakening.**

Scene One

*June 2010: My apartment. Boxes are strewn all around. The movers have just called, and they are ahead of schedule. They will be there in 30 minutes. As I sit and marvel at all that I have left to do in an even shorter amount of time than planned, my phone rings again. It is my principal at Forest Hills (pseudonym), where I have just finished my first year teaching.*
PRINCIPAL: I hope your summer is going well! I just wanted to call about next year...

ME: (mind racing—oh no, did my position get cut? I know teacher jobs are in short supply, but I am moving to be closer to school. Today. What have I done??)

PRINCIPAL: ...so I hope it’s OK that you won’t be looping to 4th grade next year. We weren’t going to give you the same class of kids anyway. You’ll stay in 3rd grade, and you’re going to have a class of students who are one to two years behind in reading. We will use some specific reading instruction with them to get them caught up—kind of like a remedial class in reading...

ME: (mind calming down—I still have a job! I still have a job!!)

PRINCIPAL: So can I put you down to teach in 3rd grade again?

ME: Absolutely. Thank you! Actually, I need to run because the movers are coming in 25 minutes.

PRINCIPAL: Oh!! I forgot you were moving today. Good luck with that!

The call ends. My heartbeat attempts to slow to a normal pace, but the sea of boxes around me prevent it. At least I have a job. I smile for a second, and then return to stuffing final odds and ends into boxes.

Scene Two

August 2010: My second year teaching third grade at Forest Hills. It is independent reading time in my classroom. I sit in my chair, scanning the room.

BOY 1: (lays on his stomach in my reading area with a book in his hands, glancing nervously around the room)

BOY 2: (sits at his table, beating a pencil against the table and not reading)
GIRL 1: (sighs loudly and shifts her position)

ME: (moment of dreadful realization occurs: I have been given a class of 3rd graders who are not only behind in reading, but who also don’t like reading!!)

Scene Three

April 2011: A family friend’s daughters are visiting me on a teacher workday. One finds my class picture that has recently been returned from the spring picture day order.

MADDIE: (thoughtfully considers the picture) Um, Miss Melissa, why are most of the kids in your class dark-skinned?

ME: (pausing, because her question is valid and I want to answer it truthfully)

Maddie, that is a very good question. I’m not really sure why. I don’t think it’s fair, do you?

Moment of truth: I am sure why. I am sure that it is no coincidence that 10 of my 11 “behind” readers are Black. I am sure that it is no coincidence that I was forced to use a scripted reading program to “help” them as readers. It was, however, coincidence that I did not have to use this program “to fidelity” because of some curriculum development I was doing with a famous children’s author. In this coincidence, a door opened: I only had to teach the scripted program for two months in the fall and two months in the spring, and the rest of the time we engaged in independent reading and literature circles with REAL BOOKS.

Scene Four

May 2011: The last day of school. We are scheduled to walk to a local park for a fun activity as a class. But first... a surprise.

ME: Guys, I have really enjoyed my year with you. One of my favorite things has been reading with you. So, I have a treat for you. I am giving you two books: one is a picture book that you can read now. It is a just-right book for you. The other is a longer, more difficult book. I chose it so you
can “grow” into it as you become stronger and stronger readers. I picked both books based on what I knew about you as people and as readers.

STUDENTS:  *(Receive personalized book selections with a note in the cover from me. Delve into books with great excitement.)*

SHAYNA: Can we stay back from our field trip to read instead?

STUDENTS: Yeah!! Please???

ME: *(Heart skips a beat. Blinks back tears. Stands in humbled silence.)*

*My non-readers are transformed—not by a program, but by book love. How do I convince the Powers that Be that programs are not the answer? I do not know enough about the literacy process to validate this belief myself. I know it, but I can’t prove it outside of the walls of my classroom. It is time to learn more. I begin researching graduate programs in literacy.*

Final Scene

*October 2015: The check-out line at Wal-Mart. I approach the cashier, and I struggle to place the familiar face gazing back at me.*

CASHIER: I know you from somewhere. Did you teach one of my kids?

ME: *(Recognizing a smaller, younger face amongst this woman’s features):*

Yes! Shayna! Please tell her I still have that sweet note she wrote me when she was in 5th grade.

CASHIER/SHAYNA’S MOM: Well, she still got those books you gave her!

*And still, my non-readers are transformed.*

**Part two: Racialized awakening.** As I walk into the conference room at Forest Hills, my heartbeat quickens. It is my third year at Forest Hills, but now I am a kindergarten teacher. I wanted to learn more about literacy, so where better to go than where it begins in public schools? But classroom-based reading instruction is not the
only thing that “begins” in kindergarten: so do family/school relationships. Today I face the daunting task of appeasing an unhappy parent. Her daughter, Ariya, is a bright, caring kindergartener who frequently beams as she hands me “I love you” notes or short stories she has written by herself, or a yogurt snack from her own fridge one day as a gift for me. With her classmates, however, conflicts prevail. When Ariya’s requests for toys or specific roles in the home living center are not honored, she often responds by yanking objects away from other children, yelling “I don’t have to do what you say!” in their faces, and sulking in a corner while refusing to compromise. I feel like I am constantly intervening to protect classmates from Ariya’s emotional outbursts. I was writing notes to her mother almost daily explaining specific behaviors that were causing problems in class, usually relating to hitting or shoving friends, fighting over toys, and verbally intimidating her peers. Today is our conference to discuss my concerns with Ariya’s behavior.

Four of us cluster in the conference room: Ariya, Ariya’s mom, the assistant principal, and myself. I begin with my traditional praises for Ariya—her quick wit, her beautiful smile, her delightful notes she writes to me. But when I start to say that I love having Ariya in my class, her mother quickly cuts me off: “You don’t love my child.” Taken aback, I try to recover before Ariya’s mother delivers a fatal blow:

“The reason why you don’t like my child is because you’re racist.”

These words echo in my head as the room start spinning. I am vaguely aware of the vice-principal, dressed in a Superwoman costume following our school’s anti-bullying rally, ending the conference abruptly. I turn to Ariya, whom I do love dearly,
and tell her to have a good afternoon and that I will see her in the morning. I only hope she will not see the tears welling in my eyes, flooding their banks as soon she and her mother leave.

****

It takes me weeks to see the truth, but I finally see it: I am White. I grew up in a predominantly White neighborhood. All but one of my childhood friends were White. All of my teachers were White, except my third grade teacher. The books I read in school and beyond featured characters that looked like me and shared many of my experiences. I can turn on the TV to find commercials, newscasters, and sitcoms that relate to my White culture. Whiteness had surrounded me my entire life, yet I had never noticed it. I finally hear the message, loud and clear: Whiteness is the norm.

Suddenly, my Whiteness—something that used to be as invisible as the air I breathe—becomes suffocating. I see teachers repeatedly complimenting my blonde-haired, blue-eyed, bow-sporting student on how cute she looks, how pretty her hair is, how darling her dresses are, while ignoring my children who don the labors of love in beads and braids. I listen to teachers berate families, mocking their uses of non-standardized English. How has my Whiteness also caused me to misunderstand and mistreat my non-White students?

I can no longer let my Whiteness blind me, and yet it always will.

Part three: Coaching awakening.

whispers

for two whole days, I sat beside you
listening to the presenter with my eyes
(because we teachers know what good listening looks like)
and watching your whispers with my ears
(like a guard in the night, trying to keep out unwanted visitors)
whispers turned to notes, passed
as new weapons of persuasion
just think about it, you said, you’d make a great literacy coach
I’ll think about it, I said with my voice
no, I said with my thoughts

**echoes**

your whispers lodged into my thoughts
effectively-deployed weapons of persuasion after all
so I struck back with my own weapons, pencil and paper
to persuade myself against your persuasion

(because lists always know best)
but as the list that should have ended before it began
stretched beyond the confines of the paper
dwarfing the reasons to stay

your whispers echoed
loud and clear

**secrets**

I returned to my classroom, my mind convinced

but not my heart.

you’re back! little voices sang as they smothered me in hugs,
are you here to stay now?

how can little ones
know so much?

**the last note**

on pink hello kitty paper
with lines ignored and left edge tattered
(a reminder of the spiral home it once inhabited)
came the last note.
ECZEMA, your dimpled yet determined letters proclaimed
perched atop a girl with spotted face and a mother with lotion
(both diagnosis and prescription from your five-year-old efficiency)
in monochrome blue.
but what really got to me was your drawing
of elbows.
how could I leave all you developing geniuses behind?

counter-voices

you could be a literacy coach
right here, in your second home of school
it’s what you’ve been learning about
what a priceless opportunity

I am called to teach
to make a home for my 20-some kids
whom I pretend to teach but who really
what a priceless opportunity
teach me

listening to yourself

have you thought about what you want to do
in 5 years, or in 10? inquired the voice,
conveyed by the phone but belonging to my mother.
(her job, known to me
but not to her
was to tell me NO, you owe it to your kids to stay)
no, I shot back, I was planning on
waiting to see what opportunities presented themselves

a few seconds of silence echoed on the line before she said,
are you listening to yourself?

stuck #1

I am trapped between two worlds
am I Teacher
or am I Literacy Coach?
can I be both
or neither?
I am stuck in a land of unknowns.

waiting

work with those who ask for help,
they said,
go where you are wanted.
and so I
    waited
to be wanted

becoming outside

so, they ask, how is life
now that you don’t have a REAL job?
    and they laugh at the joke that is
    never funny
because they know that
sticks and stones may break my
bones but
    words will isolate me

un-meeting

you caught me outside the bathroom and said
    you needed help
    (but in different words)
I almost didn’t hear your confession
    because I was too busy thinking about
    scheduling a meeting
to realize we just had one

wanted

as I came closer, I saw you there
    waiting by my door
hey coach, you said,
I was looking for you.
    I need some help.
and some darkness lifted
    as my heart began to sing.

stuck #2

I miss it, I say
I miss being able to close my door
and do what was right for my kids
and their learning

    but just think, they say
about how many more kids you serve
    not just behind one door
locked out

can I come watch the magic you work with writers?
   I asked
   and asked and asked
no, our schedule is off today
no, we are leaving the room now
no, I will be at the beach then
   you said
   and said and said
the door to your room (and our former friendship) is locked
and I do not have a key

stuck #3

I stand in a glass box,
   spending half an eternity of watching
   all that occurs around me
   seeing it all
   except a way out
I find my voice
   but no matter what I say
   or how loud I yell
   no one can hear me outside of the
box

hope

you said you can’t,
   can’t conference because you don’t have time
   can’t conference because you don’t know how
but we see that you can,
   can conference because you can listen
   can conference because you can grow readers
I love this, one of your blonde-headed charges exclaims,
are we doing it again tomorrow?
   yes, but why do you like it so much? I inquire
   from another developing genius.

Oh, I dunno, she replies,
as she shrugs off your doubt with a smile.
being the mirror

when we refuse to look in the mirror
is it because we fear
what we might
see?

walls

you can only spend so much time
slamming into solid walls
before you have to find a ladder

stuck #4

the glass box and I are becoming
fast friends.
the box mimes me
and maims me.
but then, like a fracture of hope
I see the crack—

whiteness

best practices pile like fresh-fallen snow,
surrounding me in the school
for coaches.

but how do I coach?
I am searching for words
(meaningful words)
to share with my teachers.

my cry falls,
muffled among those mounds of Whiteness.

**Theoretical framework: Locating myself in theories.** In addition to my personal
and professional experiences, several main theories influence my perspectives and my
research. I locate my work at the intersection of two overarching assertions: (1)
Whiteness is the invisible norm in society and in public education, and (2) language embodies and creates power.

**Whiteness as the invisible norm.** The reality is simple: “Whiteness is the invisible norm” (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006, p. 35), especially for those who benefit from it. Whites carry a multitude of unearned privileges in our invisible knapsacks (McIntosh, 1990), but society teaches us not to see these privileges. Our power of Whiteness (Jensen, 2005) comes from the oppression of others (Gay, 2010; Hilliard, 2009; Howard, 2010). After considering the entrenched Whiteness in literacy education, I will discuss two theoretical frameworks in education that interrupt this oppression: culturally relevant pedagogy and critical race theory.

**Entrenched Whitenesss in literacy education.** Whiteness has been an invisible norm not only in society, but also throughout the history of education—especially literacy education (Gangi, 2008). The earliest roots of current practices in education relate back to four different schools of thought: Mental Discipline Theory (a philosophical approach, with contributors such as Plato and Aristotle); Associationism (a psychological approach, with contributors such as Aristotle and John Locke); Unfoldment Theory (with contributors such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel); and Structuralism (which branched off of cognitive psychology as an early scientific foundation of reading) (Tracy & Morrow, 2012). Each of these fields and prominent theorists show a clear, yet unproblematic, trend honoring Whiteness as the norm. Similar trends abound in the historical purpose of schools, which Spring (2011) defined as (1) ensuring all citizens could protect their economic and political rights; (2) teaching
certain principles to protect the power of the elite; (3) ensuring the dominance of one culture over another (specifically, the Protestant Anglo-American culture); and (4) educating the whole population. As educators, we are actors in an educational system designed to preserve the power of one dominant culture (Freire, 1970). In addition, researchers have documented a long history of deficit models, which assume that something is wrong with children from non-mainstream homes (such as Ruby Payne’s [1995] work on children living in poverty), that continue to impact pedagogical practices today (Delpit, 2012; Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010; Kunjufu, 2006).

Culturally relevant pedagogy. Historically, American education has focused on—and therefore, normalized—curriculum and teaching practices that benefit White, middle-class, English-speaking students (Long, Volk, Baines, & Tisdale, 2013). Dominant groups have written a myriad of stories to protect this normalized myth of meritocracy, especially to explain the consistent underperformance of non-Whites in the field of education. Howard (2010) provided five stories explaining differing educational achievement based on race and ethnicity: (1) the eugenics movement, which establishes Whites as superior based on genetics; (2) deficit-based thinking, which blames poor achievement of non-Whites on cognitive deficits; (3) cultural mismatch theory, which acknowledges that students have different cultural experiences that give them different abilities; (4) the opportunity gap, which admits that non-White students do not have access to the same resources; and (5) stereotype threat, which explains that students feel threatened to match their performances to their racial/ethnic group’s
stereotype. These stories blame the non-White victims themselves for their underperformance in White-normed situations.

Instead, numerous scholars (i.e., Delpit, 2012; Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009) advocate for culturally-relevant pedagogy. While most mainstream teaching caters to mainstream students socialized into mainstream cultural norms, culturally relevant pedagogy embraces the unique sets of experiences and understandings that all students bring to the classroom by “teach[ing] to and through their personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments” (Gay, 2010, p. 26). Such a focus allows teachers to focus not on what students cannot do, but rather what they can do. Gay (2010) described culturally responsive teaching as validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory, while being anchored in four pillars of practice: (1) teacher attitudes and expectations; (2) cultural communication in the classroom; (3) culturally diverse content in the curriculum; and (4) culturally congruent instructional strategies. An important part of culturally relevant pedagogy is recognizing the contributions of all students, not just those from mainstream cultures; however, socialization into institutions, including public education, often results in colorblindness, or the refusal to acknowledge differences based on skin color (Howard, 2010; Gay, 2005; Miller, 2010). While mainstream cultures may see colorblindness as a positive trait, this practice actually results in "dismissing one of the most salient features of the child's identity" (Ladson-Billings, 200, p. 36). Therefore, teachers—especially White teachers—must not ignore color (Paley, 1979).
Teachers must be especially cautious of how norms impact their identities and teaching practices. Howard (2010) noted that much of the correctional practices of teaching arise when students’ performances vary from the norm. Rogoff (2003) added that “we need to understand the coherence of what people from different communities do, rather than simply determining that some other group of people do not do what ‘we do’” (p. 17). Therefore, before we can help children develop strong self-concepts, we must be aware of our own identity profiles and how these identities impact our teaching (Gay, 2010; Harro, 2000b).

Critical Race Theory. In critical race theory (CRT), the lived experiences of minoritized groups are storied and validated by centering “the research, pedagogy, and policy lens on Communities of Color and call[ing] into question White middle class communities as the standard by which all others are judged” (Yosso, 2005, p. 82). Often, the approaches in this field defy traditional epistemological approaches, such as using stories as a method of research (i.e., Bell, 1992; Delgado, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Solorzano and Yosso (2002) identify five basic elements of CRT in education: (1) intercentricity of race and racism—that racism is permanent and is more than classism; (2) challenging dominant ideology—problematizing colorblindness, objectivity, neutrality, and meritocracy as a “camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups” (p. 26); (3) commitment to social justice—working to empower minoritized groups and eliminate oppressive structures; (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge—using stories to legitimize the lived experiences of people of color; and (5)
the transdisciplinary perspective—connecting racist themes in different historical and contemporary contexts.

In education, CRT serves an important role by critiquing deficit theorizing. Yosso (2005) asserted that “one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in U.S. schools is deficit thinking” (p. 75). This deficit thinking against students and families of color usually embodies itself in two assumptions: (1) that minority students enter school without “normative cultural knowledge and skills” (p. 75), and (2) that parents do not support or value their children’s education. When these assumptions interact with instruction, banking models of education become the relied-upon method of teaching, so as to “fill up” students with this supposedly missing knowledge. Educators who practice this deficit theorizing believe that the system of school is not flawed, but rather the families and community are and must change. Garcia and Guerra (2004) found that deficit assumptions in school usually begin with overgeneralizations about family background. To validate the many and varied strengths of Communities of Color, Yosso (2005) developed the concept of “community cultural wealth” featuring six forms of capital: (1) aspirational capital, which envisions hopes and dreams for the future; (2) linguistic capital, which refers to the skills resulting from communication in multiple languages or discourses; (3) familial capital, which acknowledges the significance of family history, culture, and memory; (4) social capital, which consists of networks of people as well as resources in the community; (5) navigational capital, which looks at the skills required to navigate social institutions, especially those built upon mainstream
norms and values; and (6) resistant capital, which recognizes the skills used to challenge inequality.

**Language embodies and creates power.** Because language is contextually situated, it is never neutral (Bakhtin, 1981; Freire, 1970; Gee, 2012). Three theories inform this statement: (1) critical literacy, (2) Freirean emancipatory frameworks, and (3) Gee’s Discourses and Bakhtin’s dialogism.

**Critical literacy.** Freire (1973) defined critical literacy as “an increasingly critical attitude toward the world” (p. 34). As a pedagogical approach, critical literacy found its roots in community and adult education to help learners critique the status quo, develop agency, and accomplish their own goals (Rogers & Mosley Wetzel, 2013). Authentic meaning and experiential knowledge are intrinsic parts of critical literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) proposed four dimensions of critical literacy: disrupting the commonplace, attending to multiple perspectives, integrating sociopolitical issues, and taking action. In addition, three major traditions in critical literacy education exist: (1) genre approaches, in which students analyze texts and structures; (2) multiple literacy approaches, which validate new forms of literacy through digital technologies and integration of learners’ literacies into the curriculum; and (3) social justice approaches, which take social action through posing and solving problems based on students’ concerns and interests (Rogers & Mosley Wetzel, 2013).

**Freirean emancipatory frameworks.** Freire (1970, 1973, 1987) was concerned with the liberation of the oppressed through literacy education. First and foremost, he
recognized that language did not exist in isolation as a set of written symbols: instead, “it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 29). He named two dimensions of emancipatory literacy: (1) students becoming literate with regards to their own experiences, histories, and cultures, and (2) students become literate with regards to knowing the cultures of dominant groups. Once a person can use language for social and political reconstruction, he considered them literate (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Freire (1970) problematized the banking model of education, which assumes the position of an authoritative “teacher” and a “student” as the empty vessel the teacher was to fill with knowledge. Instead, he proposed a problem-posing pedagogical model, in which teacher-student and student-teacher positionality are fluid roles. He believed that true literacy developed with critical consciousness, or the ability to see beyond one’s own limited realm of experiences (Freire, 1973). He also advocated for the importance of reflection and action, the combination of which he named praxis (Freire, 1970).

Another important concept in Freire’s work was humanization, which he stated was the vocation of all people. Humanization develops at the intersection of love and dialogue (Freire, 1970). Relationships ground humanization: “to be human is to engage in relationships with others and with the world” (Freire, 1973/2013, p. 3). Humans change their perceptions of reality and develop critical consciousness with active, dialogical communication that is loving, hopeful, and trusting. Freire (1970) recognized
the role dialogue based in love, humility, faith, and hope played in not only humanization, but also in naming and changing the world.

*Discourses and dialogism.* Gee (2012) differentiated two types of discourse. While “little-D” discourse was already understood to relate to systems of language in use, he introduced the concept of capital-D “Discourses” as embodying much more than language: Discourses are not just a way of saying, but also a way of being, steeped in cultural norms and expectations. Therefore, language and meaning-making are situated practices. Individuals will switch and adapt their Discourses to mirror the expected culture of a given context. Additionally, Gee notes that the Discourse of school differs greatly from the home Discourses of minoritized students.

Bakhtin (1981) developed the concept of dialogism, in which any spoken or written event responds to what has already happened in the past and plans for the future imagined audience (addressivity). Any text is subject to answerability, or the ethical obligation to respond. Bakhtin also perceived language as responsive: instead of one unitary language, he recognized that heteroglossia is a natural language state in which multiple speech varieties co-exist and continually evolve. The simultaneous existence of these many independent voices is called polyphony or multivocality. Heteroglossia, therefore, is a living, changing language.

According to Bakhtin (1981), ideological becoming, or a developing worldview, occurs as a result of an individual’s dialogue with culture. This internalized struggle between the status quo and forces resisting it is the result of conflicts between two types of discourses: authoritative and internally persuasive. Authoritative discourses
have one accepted meaning that listeners are expected to adopt, while internally persuasive discourses transcend a single meaning and give listeners the freedom to make up their own minds. Bakhtin characterized critical literacy as independent thinking, or “separation between internnally persuasive discourse and authoritarian enforced discourse” (p. 345). Carnivalization also challenges authoritative discourses by allowing for free and familiar interactions that transcend expected social norms without any consequences. These interactions may be in the form of eccentric behavior; humor or parody; misallianaces, in which two things are put together that do not normally belong together; or sacrilege, which profanes the sacred.

Conclusion

I began this chapter with a challenge from Gorski (2013) to attend to the “stereotypes, biases, and assumptions we have about [students] and their families” to help students reach their “full potential as learners” (p. 69). I echoed some of these same assumptions I hear on a daily basis in my work as a literacy coach in the opening poem (Figure 1.1). These assumptions break students and families down into pieces that do not validate them as whole, humanized beings with capabilities and possibilities. While I do not suggest that digital learning communities and critical coaching will be a panacea for all deficit-based assumptions, I do believe both spaces offer significant opportunities to develop dialogic, humanizing relationships with families. After all, "if it is in speaking their world that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings" (Freire, 1970, p. 88).
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Figure 2.1. echo.

To clarify my conceptualization of digital learning communities and critical coaching, I realized I would need to investigate several factors amongst the trails blazed by other researchers, as I mention in Figure 2.1. Because of my personal experiences and my own racialized awakening (Summer, 2014), I knew that engaging in critical conversations that centered race, power, and privilege with other mainstream educators was important. Did my role as a literacy coach permit me to have such difficult dialogues? Had anyone else already used their coaching conversations for this purpose? Were the assumptions I frequently heard about low-income students having no access to technology true, or were they simply continuations of deficit narratives? And finally, in what ways did multi-directional communication occur in schools that
allowed families to contribute their own sets of knowledge and experiences to learning communities? To gain insight into my wonderings, I reviewed literature related to three overarching topics: (1) literacy coaching, (2) technology and digital learning communities, and (3) home/school knowledge exchange. Following this review of the literature, I provide a critique of the echoing silences—the gaps and limitations—that I discovered.

**Literacy Coaching: Navigating Critical Roles**

To better understand literacy coaching and my role in leading critical coaching conversations, I reviewed literature about literacy coaching that fell into four categories: (1) the history of literacy coaching; (2) the traditional roles of a literacy coach; (3) coaching and family engagement; and (4) coaching and critical, dialogical reflection with teachers.

**The history of literacy coaching.** Since the 1950s, specialized literacy professionals have demonstrated three key trends over time: (1) changing titles, including remedial reading teacher, supervisor, literacy coach, and interventionist; (2) working with students and teachers to improve classroom literacy practices and student learning outcomes; and (3) leading school improvement efforts in literacy, assessment, and instruction (International Literacy Association [ILA], 2015). Due to the evolving roles and titles over time, the ILA defined three groups of literacy specialists in practice at this time: reading/literacy specialists work with students (preK-12) experiencing difficulties in reading and writing; literacy coaches support teachers’ learning to improve classroom
instruction; and school coordinators/supervisors develop, lead, and/or evaluate school or district literacy programs.

Literacy coaching became more widespread as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001’s Reading First initiative, which recommended that schools hire reading coaches to help teachers implement evidence-based best practices in reading instruction (ILA, 2015). This definition of a literacy coach’s role—based in improving teachers’ literacy practices to, in turn, improve student learning outcomes—has remained fairly consistent, and perhaps explains the trend of identifying literacy coaches as “experts” in literacy instruction.

**Traditional roles of a literacy coach.** While literacy coaches may have many different roles and responsibilities, some overarching trends and patterns do exist. Dozier (2008) explained, “Literacy coaches support teachers as they develop their professionalism” (p. 11). Specifically, traditional coaching responsibilities include: (1) providing teacher support by building trusting relationships, observing teachers’ differences and strengths, giving teachers feedback in supportive but non-evaluative ways, and helping teachers plan what comes next; (2) demonstrating strong content knowledge in literacy; (3) establishing a reputation as a strong literacy teacher; and (4) fostering professional learning communities that situate teachers and coaches as learners (Allen, 2005; Bean & DeFord, 2012; Buly, Coskie, Robinson, & Egawa, 2004; Coskie, Robinson, Buly, & Egawa, 2005; Dozier, 2008; ILA, 2005; Shanklin, 2006; Toll, 2005). In addition to these roles, Bean and DeFord (2012) acknowledged that coaches
must recognize their own beliefs and attitudes about teaching and learning, but did not delve into the deeper political nature of cultural biases and assumptions.

In addition, qualifications for literacy coaches tend to focus more on academic and practitioner concerns. Frost and Bean (2006) suggested that for a literacy coach to meet the “gold standard,” s/he would have the following qualifications: a master’s degree in literacy; an additional credential in coaching; successful teaching experience at the grade level(s) s/he would be coaching; experience working with teachers; excellent presentation skills; experience modeling lessons; and experience observing in classrooms. The International Literacy Association (2015) builds upon these qualifications in three domains: (1) professional experiences, which echo Frost and Bean’s (2006) suggestions, but add that four years of teaching experience should be the minimum expectation; (2) knowledge and skills of literacy, which adds an in-depth knowledge of literacy development, assessment, and instruction, along with knowledge about instructional transformation; and (3) knowledge of change processes, which involves understanding factors that lead to teacher change, applying adult learning theory when working with teachers, and understanding how to lead schools through the change process. Ippolito (2010) found that a combination of responsive and directive relationships with teachers seem to have the biggest impact on instigating change.

**Literacy coach training.** To fill these traditional roles, literacy coaches typically participate in preparatory training programs. These trainings tend to focus exclusively on literacy practices (i.e., Jones & Rainville, 2014a; Somerall, 2012). Gangi (2008) studied how these traditional literacy practices are steeped in Whiteness. She analyzed
children’s literature textbooks, booklists, order forms, and award lists to document the over-representation of resources by and/or about White people. Furthermore, she highlighted the lack of multicultural literature represented in many common professional literacy textbooks, staples in many literacy coaches’ professional book collections (see Table 2.1). Gangi asserted, "Lack of equity in representation places an unbearable burden on children of color" (p. 34).

Table 2.1  

**Multicultural Children’s Literature in Professional Literacy Textbooks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Professional Literacy Textbook</th>
<th>Multicultural Children’s Literature Represented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children</em> (Fountas &amp; Pinnell, 1996)</td>
<td>Of 2,500 recommended leveled book titles (p. 288-338), 10 authors of color are represented (1%).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Guiding Readers and Writers Grades 3-6: Teaching Comprehension, Genre, and Content Literacy</em> (Fountas &amp; Pinnell, 2001)</td>
<td>This text has more multicultural literature, but only 1 author of color is among the 44 author web sites in Appendix 54.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Words Their Way</em> (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, &amp; Johnston, 2004)</td>
<td>Of 49 children's books recommended in this text, none are authors/illustrators of color. Also, 43 pages of pictures in this text are of White children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mosaic of Thought</em> (Keene &amp; Zimmerman, 1997)</td>
<td>The entirety of this text recommends fewer than 5 multicultural books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Strategies that Work</em> (Harvey &amp; Goudvis, 2000)</td>
<td>In chapters about teaching specific comprehension strategies, few books by authors of color are mentioned (only 2 in Visualizing chapter; none in other chapters). Appendix B does have some high-quality multicultural literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Informal Reading Inventory/IRI</em> (Roe &amp; Burns, 2007)</td>
<td>In Appendix A (which helps teachers find books for students based on their tested levels), no books about/people of color are on the pre-primer level, two are on the primer level, two are on the first level, and one is on the second level.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Furthermore, traditional coaching training does not prepare coaches to deal with power relations in their positions. Hunt and Handsfield (2013) used positioning theory to see how three first-year literacy coaches encountered power, positioning, and identity during professional development engagements over the course of a year. These authors argued that literacy coaching is often defined—and thereby limited—by “fixed and oversimplified definitions of roles and how they should be enacted” (p. 52). Even though a great proportion of research on coaching focuses on roles, their work with these three teachers highlighted that coaching is more than a set of roles to fulfill: it is a part of an identity, even though this identity is not typically referenced in training. Hunt and Handsfield call for literacy coach training that will “openly acknowledge positioning, power, and identity and give coaches opportunities to grapple with these issues. It is not sufficient to provide literacy coaches with a ‘tool kit’ of ‘best practices,’ which assumes that knowledge is absolute and simply transmitted from coaches to teachers” (p. 73).

Another weakness in current coach training is the misalignment between training structure and intended outcomes. Mangin and Dunsmore (2015) followed four literacy coaches during a three-year literacy initiative that positioned coaching as a catalyst for systemic reform. They found that while the initiative framed coaching as a means for systemic change, the training itself framed coaching as a means for individual change by (1) working toward using common language to facilitate change, (2) focusing on communication skills, and (3) relying on the principal to fill a more evaluative,
directive role than the coach. One potential explanation for this mismatch could be that the roots of literacy coaching arose from peer coaching in the 1980s, which was designed for individual change. The coaches in this study seemed to view the summation of individual change as culminating in systemic change. The authors suggested that in order for systemic change to occur, literacy coaching must work toward both individual and systemic change at the same time.

**Coaching and family engagement.** While most of the discourse around coaching focuses on literacy practices in school-based contexts, some literature references literacy coaches’ role in family engagement. In Level 3 of “Coaching Activities of Specialized Literacy Professionals” (International Literacy Association, 2015), the final element was “facilitating school-community partnership work” (p. 11). In addition, one of the recommendations for specialized literacy professionals in this research brief, the ILA urged these individuals to “facilitate positive interactions among school and district administrators, principals, classroom teachers, reading specialists, students, and parents” (p. 17).

Mraz, Algozzine, and Watson (2008) conducted a mixed-methods study to analyze the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and literacy specialists regarding the role of literacy coaches in six elementary schools. While the survey revealed some perceptions about the literacy coach’s role as the coordinator of the reading program, a resource for teachers, an instructor to students, and an assessment leader, it also uncovered shared beliefs about the literacy coach’s role as a resource for parents and other community members. Literacy coaches and teachers wanted the literacy coach
role to include working with parent volunteers, coordinating events and workshops for parents, and finding community volunteers to help. While this is one of few studies that specifically address expectations for a literacy coach’s role that includes being a resource to family and the community, the knowledge flow in this role is still focused on uni-directional, banking models.

Kissel, Mraz, Algozzine, and Stover (2011) studied 20 early childhood literacy coaches, all of whom worked in “high risk” schools, at the end of four years’ experience to see (1) how the coaches defined their roles and (2) what suggestions they had to change their roles to be more effective in their literacy programs. With a survey and some participant interviews, they found that the early childhood literacy coaches viewed three aspects (coaches as content experts, coaches as promoters of reflective instruction, and coaches as professional development facilitator) as priorities in their roles, whereas a fourth aspect (coaches as builders of school-wide literacy communities) was a low-priority role. The authors found this low-priority finding ironic, since the very parties who could most strongly advocate for literacy coaches beyond the classroom—the administrators and the families—were not within the high-priority roles.

In some cases, literacy coaches were involved in very surface-level, monologic family activities. Vanderburg and Stephens (2010) examined how participating in the South Carolina Reading Initiative (SCRI) affected teachers’ practice, which included home/school engagement. This ten-year voluntary institute, which received state and federal support throughout different parts of its existence, believed that professional development should focus on people, not programs. The authors reported that three
Coaching and critical, dialogic reflection with teachers. Reflection on classroom practice is inarguably a central tenant of responsive literacy coaching (Dozier, 2008). The International Literacy Association’s (2015) research brief on specialized literacy
professionals recommended that these individuals "fulfill a professional role with respect for others, meaningful interactions with colleagues, and reflection on feedback from other educators and from experiences" (p. 17). For this reflection to be meaningful, coaches must intentionally disrupt traditional role definitions that position them as experts and instead move toward dialogic relationships, which empower coaches and teachers alike.

In order for critical reflection to occur in coach/teacher partnerships, the coach should avoid assuming the role of an expert while supporting teachers to name and frame their assumptions. In a one-year case study with lead literacy teachers and literacy coordinators in Toronto, Hibbert, Heydon, and Rich (2008) found that the ministry’s top-down initiative to train lead literacy teachers (similar to literacy coaches in the United States) positioned lead teachers as “sun catchers” who received knowledge, and the district team members as “rays” who sent the knowledge out. Because the ministry’s program "did not assist teachers in acknowledging their own knowledge and expertise nor did it push them to challenge their assumptions—a prerequisite for any meaningful change" (p. 314), critically reflective teacher development did not result from this initiative. For meaningful change, therefore, a problem-posing model of professional development that works with, not for, teachers by involving them in determining their own professional development would be more effective than the banking model of professional development that positions educators as “empty vessels” to be filled (Freire, 1970; Reilly, 2014; Skinner et al., 2014; Stover, Kissel, Haag, & Shoniker, 2011).
To challenge two major assumptions in traditional coaching models—that the coach is an expert, and that the coach must act to make their vision of success for the teachers they assist a reality—Stephens and Mills (2014) framed the South Carolina Reading Initiative (SCRI) through collaborative inquiry. Vanderburg and Stephens (2010) interviewed 35 teachers who participated in SCRI for three years, and found that teachers attributed several changes to working with literacy coaches, including being willing to take risks, using more authentic assessments, changing their beliefs and practices based on professional literature studied with coaches, and implementing a more student-centered curriculum. Stephens et al. (2011) administered surveys to teachers who participated in SCRI to measure change, and they noted that teachers’ practices became more aligned with the “best practices” as defined by the standards of the South Carolina State Department of Education. While SCRI was phased out in favor of creating training opportunities for curriculum coaches, not just literacy coaches, I have personally observed how parts of this model have been re-introduced through South Carolina’s latest reading initiative, Read to Succeed, which places a literacy coach in every elementary school across the state, and this initiative is responsible for my own literacy coach position.

However, a few counter-responses to SCRI highlight ways of creating more critical coaching spaces. Cahnmann-Taylor (2014) critiqued some contradictory claims in Stephens and Mills (2014)’s work. While collaborative inquiry was an important framework for SCRI, the teaching team members at the top of the learning structure determined readings and strategies for the rest of the learners—regional coaches,
school-based coaches, and teachers. When the literacy coach—or literacy coach trainers—is positioned as an expert, "knowledge is flowing to teachers rather than being produced amongst teachers" (Hibbert, Heydon, & Rich, 2008, p. 305). To disrupt this power structure, Cahnmann-Taylor (2014) suggested the use of two Boalean Theatre of the Oppressed techniques: (1) Rainbow of Desire, which represents multiple perspectives and readings of a situation, and (2) Legislative Theater, which rehearses transformation in policy decisions. Furthermore, the SCRI model made important gains by allowing for authentic dialogue between teachers and coaches, but Morrell (2014) challenged future initiatives to dig deeper into critical, problem-posing stances that interrogate teachers’ belief systems as “powerful shapers of not only practice but also attitudes toward learning and learners" (p. 209).

While the SCRI model situated collaborative inquiry as one means of interrupting traditional models of banking-based coaching, being aware of power relations—and acting beyond them—is also important. Jones and Rainville (2014a) analyzed the interactions of three literacy coaches with teachers through three theoretical orientations to power: poststructuralism, Bourdieu’s sociology, and Eastern philosophies. At the intersection of these theoretical orientations, they found that power relations could be navigated more successfully when the literacy coach acted with sensitivity to suffering (which may be embodied in anger, sadness, or resistance from teachers or coaches), compassion, and humility. Re-framing “resistance” and raising awareness of power relations—and how to transform them—lead to more successful partnerships between teachers and coaches.
Several studies focused on dialogic relationships between coaches and teachers. Wall and Palmer (2015) examined the role of instructional coaches to empower teachers through dialogic relationships using Freire’s (1970) five conditions for successful dialogue: love, humility, faith in humankind, hope, and critical thinking. An important finding from analyzing these conversations was in the importance of open-ended questions to counter “the prevailing rushed culture and provide moments of stillness that allow teachers to think deeply and find the answers on their own” (p. 629). Crafton and Kaiser (2011) looked critically at positionality through coach/teacher dialogue in Wenger (1998)’s communities of practice model. While coach/mentor dialogic interactions tended to follow a question/answer or initiation, response, evaluation (IRE) sequence with the coach assuming the power with a pre-determined agenda, the community of practice model featured community-oriented dialogue based on questions and concerns teachers posed, while the “coach” position became more of a facilitator role. Therefore, effective critical reflection with teachers may involve interrupting traditional coach positioning and moving toward a community of practice model.

Rogers (2014) advocated for coaches’ beneficial ties to critical literacy, which “holds the potential of supporting teachers as they rethink traditional assumptions about literacy, about learners, and about power and equity” (p. 243). She examined her role as a professor to coach eleven literacy teachers who were designing critical literacy instruction during a summer graduate course. While she realized her own role was to simultaneously support and challenge teachers, she found that the teachers designed
critical literacy practices through (1) explicit social justice approaches, such as questions instigating discussions, children’s literature with explicit social justice themes, or integration of community issues; (2) validating multiple literacies as students read their social worlds; and (3) utilizing a genre approach that analyzed discourses and their social functions.

**Technology and Digital Learning Communities**

I wanted to learn more about access to technology and engaging families in digital learning communities through this literature review. Because of the ever-changing nature of technology, I examined literature written predominantly in the past five to eight years (except for information on the digital divide, which required more historical context). The literature fell into three categories: (1) the digital divide: access and use; (2) engaging families with information and communications technology (ICT); and (3) digital learning communities.

**The digital divide: Access and use.** The “digital divide” refers to individuals who do and do not have access to the internet (Dutta-Bergman, 2005). Initially, the digital divide construct appeared from the U.S. National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) under the Clinton administration and described a divide between who did or did not have access to computers and the internet (Warschauer, 2003). With the emergence of home computers in the 1980s and 1990s, many of these devices were sold at prohibitive costs; therefore, equitable access—especially for low-income families—was a concern due to financial obligations (Celano & Neuman, 2010; Ching, Basham, & Jang, 2005).
In 2012, the Pew Research Center reported that one in five American adults did not use the internet (Zickuhr & Smith, 2012). The most common predictors of “digital differences” were education, income, and age: (1) having less than a high school education, (2) earning an annual income of less than $30,000, and (3) being over 65 years old. However, each of these three groups had significant increases in access rates since 2000: 19% of individuals with less than a high school education had internet in 2000, compared with 66% in 2015; 34% of individuals earning an annual income of less than $30,000 had internet in 2000, compared with 74% in 2015; and 14% of individuals over 65 years old had internet in 2000, compared with 58% in 2015 (Perrin & Duggan, 2015). Race and gender both proved insignificant when determining digital differences. For adults who do not use the internet, the two biggest barriers were perceived irrelevancy to their lives and cost of devices and/or high-speed broadband access (Zickuhr & Smith, 2012).

As part of a larger research project, Olmstead (2013) gathered information from 89 families of students in fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. Of these parents who responded, 93% said they had access to internet either at home or at work. Breaking down these results by dominant language revealed some discrepancies: 78 of 81 parents (96.3%) who spoke English as their dominant language had access to internet either at home or at work, whereas only three of five parents (60%) who spoke Spanish as their dominant language did. Of the 82 parents who responded to a survey question about household income, all parents who had an annual income over $50,000 had internet access at home, while about 67% had access if their annual income was below
$50,000. Breaking down data further, 75% of families whose primary language was English and earned below $50,000 annually had access to internet at home, while only 25% of families in the same income bracket whose primary language was Spanish had home access to internet. No information was included about the language in which the survey was administered, which could have limited the responses from families that were not English dominant. No breakdown of demographics of respondents was provided, but the author did admit that the respondents did not proportionately reflect the demographics of the school.

Access to the internet can be a form of social and human capital (Dutta-Bergman, 2005; Rainie, Brenner, & Purcell, 2012; Warschauer, 2003; Zhong, 2011). Bourdieu defined social capital as the accumulation of benefits by participating in social networks and structures; however, Yosso (2005) critiqued this conceptualization of capital as being centered in norms of Whiteness. In the current information economy, access to the information-saturated internet is an important source of both relational and norm social capital (Warschauer, 2003). While some scholars are concerned that the internet may weaken social capital by replacing face-to-face interaction (Warschauer, 2003), Rainie, Brenne, and Purcell (2012) found that people with access to the internet are more likely to be active in and satisfied with their communities.

While access is significant, internet use is also an important factor in equitable access to technology (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). Zhong (2011) asked adolescents to report on their own perceived digital skills and discovered that widespread access to information and communications technology was not necessarily
positively correlated to students’ responses to the survey. Duggan (2013) found that individuals making under $30,000 annually had higher participation rates than all other income groups for posting original photos and videos online, as well as sharing others’ digital media online. Warschauer (2003) noted, "What is most important about ICT [information and communications technology] is not so much the availability of the computing device or the Internet line, but rather people’s ability to make use of that device and line to engage in meaningful social practices" (emphasis in original, p. 38).

Digital, human, and social resources are necessary for this meaningful use of technology to occur. Warschauer (Warschauer, Knobel, & Stone, 2004; Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010) identified a large discrepancy not in the availability of computers and the internet in schools, but in the purpose they were being used: higher-income youth were often participating in more constructive, interest-driven activities, while lower-income youth were given more remedial skill-and-drill tasks. Warschauer and Matuchniak (2010) suggested that effective access and use of technology in schools “can help compensate for unequal access to technologies in the home environment and thus help bridge educational and social gaps” (p. 180).

**Mobile technology and the digital divide.** Mobile technology is shifting the digital divide (Li & Snow, 2012). Cell phones are powerful tools for internet access, especially for families from lower income levels (Yardi & Bruckman, 2012). Even though cell phones have provided internet access for many users over the past several years, this tool was not a recognized internet access point until fairly recently (Rainie, 2012; Zickuhr & Smith, 2012). In a study with low SES students at a middle school in Boston, Li
and Snow (2012) found that 90.3% of the students had access to cell phones at home, which was a higher percentage than access to computers, laptops, or tablets at home. Olmstead (2013) also found that 96.6% of the 87 survey respondents from fourth through sixth grade families owned cell phones, although she did not include this information in her data about “access to internet.”

Cell phone ownership—and, therefore, internet access—has been on the rise in the last decade. In 2012, 88% of American adults had a cell phone, and 63% of adults went online with these devices (Zickuhr & Smith, 2012). Furthermore, 46% of all American adults had smartphones in 2012 (Smith, 2012a). By 2015, 90% of American adults owned cell phones, and the proportion of smartphone owners already increased to 64% (Pew Research Center, 2015; Smith & Page, 2015).

For minoritized groups, “the rise of the mobile is changing the story” (Zickuhr & Smith, 2012, p. 2). Smartphones provide internet access that was not previously available to minoritized groups, people with less than a college education, and adults with lower household income levels—all categories that used to be on the other side of the “digital divide.” Of the 25% of smartphone users who went online mainly using their cell phones, the non-mainstreamed users (Black/Hispanic, annual household income of less than $30,000, and high school level of education) were more likely than their mainstream counterparts to use their cell phones as their main source of internet access due to their convenience, efficient usage, and bridging of access gaps (Smith, 2012b). Such internet users are known as “smartphone-dependent,” and people who have low income, have low education levels, are younger adults, and are non-whites are more
likely to fall into this category (Smith & Page, 2015). Lower SES families may choose to purchase cell phones instead of desktop computers due to factors such as entertainment, connectivity, and status (Yardi & Bruckman, 2012). Furthermore, of the cell phone activities reported by race/ethnicity, non-mainstreamed users (Black, non-Hispanic and Hispanic) were significantly more likely to participate in all reported activities, including accessing the internet, emailing, accessing social networking sites, and posting media online, than their White counterparts (Zickuhr & Smith, 2012).

**Critiques of the digital divide.** Because computers were the only mode of internet access when the discussions about the digital divide began in the 1990s, the “digital divide” literature revealed ongoing instances of conflating internet access with computer ownership (e.g., Becker, 2006; Celano & Neuman, 2010; Ching et al., 2005; Espinosa, Laffey, Whittaker, & Sheng, 2010; Huang & Russell, 2006; O’Dwyer, Russell, Bebell, & Tucker-Seeley, 2005; Olmstead, 2013; Vekiri, 2010). Because computers are no longer the only devices that can access the internet, the original conception of this digital divide has become outdated.

Additionally, the “have/have not” binary inherent in the original definition of a digital divide oversimplifies the issue of equitable access (Warschauer, 2003). A major critique of the historical construct of the digital divide argues that it frames technology alone as a “solution” to inequitable access without considering overarching issues such as social inclusion (Warschauer, 2003, 2004; Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). When considering social inclusion, four types of technology-related resources are essential: (1) physical resources, such as devices and connectivity; (2) digital resources, such as
content and language; (3) human resources, such as literacy and education; and (4) social resources, such as communities and institutions (Warschauer, 2003). Instead, a newer construct of a digital divide focuses on 21st century skills:

Today the digital divide resides in differential ability to use new media to critically evaluate information, analyze, and interpret data, attack complex problems, test innovative solutions, manage multifaceted projects, collaborate with others in knowledge production, and communicate effectively to diverse audiences... (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010, p. 213)

Furthermore, these 21st century skills encompass a wide variety of literacies, including (1) computer literacy, or basic operational skills; (2) information literacy, which involves formulating questions, seeking information in appropriate locations online, assessing source credibility, and citing information obtained; (3) multimedia literacy, which involves going beyond written text and constructing meaning from other sensory sources such as photos, videos, and audio; and (4) computer-mediated communication literacy, which involves writing and interpretation skills to communicate in digital communities (Warschauer, 2003).

Engaging families with information and communications technology. As Rainie et al. (2012) observed, “technology acts as a community builder” (p. 104). I was interested in how other schools had used technology to build community with families. I reviewed five studies published since 2010 that examined building such communities using information and communications technology.
Hohlfeld, Ritzhaupt, and Barron (2010) sought to bridge schools, families, and communities in Florida with information and communications technology (ICT). Over four school years from 2003-2007, they found that the study schools at all educational levels and SES groups increased their contributions for ICT access and educational opportunities for families and communities. Elementary schools in particular used ICT methods at increasing rates to communicate with families and communities. The authors called for more research about the content and quality of these communications to assess the accessibility of this information and the extent to which it empowers families and communities. They also suggested allowing students to check out devices and allowing families to access digital resources at school.

Lewin and Luckin (2010) compared two projects in the UK to provide suggestions for engaging families of elementary school students using technology. The first project intended to expand families’ access to technology by providing computers (some with internet) in homes, loaning laptops to students, and training families to expand technological skills. This project also aimed to expand home/school communication through digital cameras, school websites, emails, and texting. The second project developed interactive math lessons students could complete on tablets at school and at home. In comparing these projects, Lewin and Luckin noticed that technology could strengthen relationships between school and home, but simply providing support was not enough: “parents require support and effective communication with regards to the best ways in which they can engage with their children’s learning in the home” (p. 756). They provided helpful points to consider, including the importance of carefully-designed
parent support, the realization that school activities will not always transfer to home contexts (and vice versa), the use of technology at home in purposeful ways, and the ongoing nature of developing school/home relationships through technology.

Olmstead (2013) analyzed surveys from 89 parents of fourth- through sixth-grade students and conducted semi-structured focus groups with seven parents and seven teachers to see if technology helped with teacher/parent communication. She found that all teachers and 91.1% of parents thought it was important to use technology to communicate. Using technology allowed families to take advantage of limited time because they could access it quickly at their convenience. Emails, phone calls, and social media (specifically Facebook and Twitter) were the common technology tools both teachers and parents felt comfortable using. Parents preferred texting, but teachers did not want to give out their personal cell phone numbers. Most communication was used to push information out to parents, though bi-directional communication occurred via email, phone, or in-person conversations when a students’ academics or behavior were involved.

Brown and Grinter (2014) studied how families living in the United States used social networking sites to assist with transnational parenting of their adolescent children left behind in Jamaica. The authors recognized that the care network for these students included educators as well. In envisioning a social media solution for transnational communication among members of the care network, three key elements emerged: visibility, which also included accessibility of all members of the care network; transparency, which allowed information to be available to all members of the care
network who needed it; and privacy, which concerned who controlled access to information shared on social media platforms. While families and students preferred a system that would allow for frequent engagement (i.e., posting pictures and commenting), the educators wanted “more restrictive engagement and interactions” (p. 59) that would not consume extra time or change the formal relationship between school and home. All parties agreed that a platform that was accessible on a smartphone instead of computer-based would be easier to use. However, this study recognized the difficulty of balancing privacy, transparency, and visibility on existing social networking sites, which meant that most of the article imagined possibilities for new platforms that do not yet exist instead of discussing actual interactions on platforms that do exist.

Focusing on early childhood, Yost and Fan (2014) used semi-structured interviews to study how two center directors, seven childcare workers, and eight parents of children from three childcare centers perceived social media as a space for collaboration and communication. Reasons the participants did want to use social media included the speed and efficiency of communication, as well as the potential to receive additional details about the child’s school experience that may have been forgotten or omitted during drop-off or pick-up. Some participants did not want to use social media to communicate because of their dislike of certain platforms (such as Twitter) or their preference for face-to-face communication. Finally, privacy was an important consideration for both those who preferred using social media and those who did not. The participants noted that social media could be a helpful space for
communication between home and school as long as the photographs were uploaded into a private space that only the children’s parents could access, preferably with password protection.

**Practitioner perspectives.** In addition to the five studies above, I read several additional sources that did not qualify as studies, but still provided valuable insights into the lived experiences of families and schools regarding communication via digital tools. Patrikakou (2016) considered the relationship between parent involvement and technology. While the initial tools she mentioned (i.e., school websites and online gradebooks) assumed a one-directional information flow from home to school, she also recognized that “the school’s pivotal function in addressing important issues to enhance parent–child interactions and, therefore, to maximize student academic, social, and emotional learning continues to be ignored” (p. 20). Therefore, she called for additional research that considers the school’s use of social media to stimulate conversations among family members at home.

A school principal, Wejr (2014) commented on how he used social media to create “new avenues of connection to school” (p. 12). He suggested that schools use social media to become the “chief storytellers” (p. 13) of the school culture, which is often defined in limited ways by test scores and rankings. Providing a window for families into the school builds trust through transparency. In addition, Wejr recognized the limitations of communication “to” families (i.e., newsletters, websites, and other informational flyers) and promoted the importance of communication “with” families, which can be accomplished using social media platforms such as Facebook. One specific
example he provided was a situation where several families posed a question to him privately about the same topic of interest, so he wrote an explanation of the topic on Facebook to assist other families who may have the same question. Families then posted questions and comments on his post. This use of social media responded to a need expressed by the families, as opposed to the way many schools use social media as a high-tech way to continue communicating “to,” not “with,” families. Furthermore, Wejr stated, "By focusing on communication with parents, we not only increase our engagement online, we also foster enhanced face-to-face relationships with our families offline” (p. 14). While technology can be used to develop relationships with families, the significance of face-to-face relationships should not be overlooked.

However, some practitioner-oriented writings present the use of social media to communicate with families in ways that do not create true dialogue. For example, Magette (2015)'s guide to using social media in schools dedicates one chapter to communicating with families and other stakeholders. Even though the author recognizes that "social networking sites provide a level of two-way communication and social sharing that simply does not exist anywhere else" (p. 75), the examples provided illustrate a monologue that prioritizes the school as the source of information. For example, the chapter opens by asserting the “enormous benefits [of social media] to schools and school districts” (p. 73), which ignores the benefits for families. While the author encourages letting “fans” (which include friends and families) post on social media platforms, the reasons given were “creat[ing] great shareable content for the page manager to use on the fly and without a burdensome investment of time” and
“engag[ing] fans and followers as partners, contributors, and storytellers in our message” (p. 81, emphasis added). While the idea of letting fans post seems to create dialogue, the reasons provided are clearly school-oriented and, therefore, monologic: families are seen as receivers and advancers of the school’s agenda and information, not creators of their own worlds.

**Digital learning communities with families.** Finally, I was curious about studies published since 2010 that engaged students’ families in digital learning communities. Entering the search terms “digital learning community” and “family” into the digital databases ERIC and Education Source yielded no results applicable to the purpose of this study, nor did searching the terms “virtual learning community” and “family.” Only one article discussed family learning communities that integrate technology. Summer and Summer (2014) shared how the first author used Flickr to create a bi-directional family learning community in her kindergarten classroom. She used Flickr to position educators as anthropologists, invite families to share their expertise, support families as their children’s first teachers, and honor families’ unique home experiences.

**Home/School Knowledge Exchange**

In traditional communicative patterns between school and home, the school serves as the bestower of knowledge and families are the receivers, mirroring a banking model (Freire, 1970) and creating a monologue (Bakhtin, 1981). To learn more about dialogic school/home learning and communication, I reviewed literature that fell into three categories: (1) funds of knowledge, (2) knowledge exchange, and (3) family partnerships.
**Funds of knowledge.** The concept of funds of knowledge found its roots in Tucson, Arizona, in the early 1990s (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992). Through ethnographic methods, the authors constructed understandings of working-class, Mexican communities in Tucson, in hopes of providing high-quality, non-rote instruction for these children. They investigated household dynamics, classroom practices, and after-school teacher study groups. Households’ flexible, reciprocal exchanges depended on *confianza*, or mutual trust, and teachers were included in these trusting relationships in homes.

Teachers built this mutual trust while engaging in teacher-research home visits to identify and document knowledge in students’ homes (González et al., 1995). As a part of the teacher-led study groups to research and experience students’ funds of knowledge, educators visited homes three times for two hours each. The project resulted in (1) the development of teachers as qualitative researchers; (2) the formation of new relationships with families; and (3) the redefinition of households as places of important social/intellectual resources. Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1992) noted that these resources are tied to the unique history of U.S.-Mexican cultural identity and politics, which have been tied to conflicts over labor and resources. As a result, households developed wide ranges of knowledge and skills. Therefore, family histories are closely tied to their funds of knowledge, which serve as currencies of exchange between households and generations. In a later study that analyzed the Latino/Hispanic Household Survey and student achievement data, findings did validate Latino families’ contributions to students’ performance related to factors of social reciprocity,
household activities, parental educational philosophy, parental language acquisition, English literacy-oriented activities, and Spanish literacy-oriented activities, but labor history was not a significant factor, despite its prevalence in the funds of knowledge theory (Rios-Aguilar, 2010).

Recognition of the funds of knowledge of non-mainstream families and students is important in rewriting deficit narratives, especially in educational settings. Because the culture of poor and minoritized students has become equated with failure (i.e., a “culture of poverty”), merging anthropology and education allows educators to become familiar with their students’ cultures and funds of knowledge to minimize home/school cultural mismatches (González, 2005). Public schools often ignore students’ funds of knowledge from home, resulting in deficit-based instruction (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). New understandings of funds of knowledge can lead to changes in instruction. Suggested changes included moving away from lower-quality, skill-and-drill instruction and instead creating strategic social networks for teaching by tapping into family and community funds of knowledge (Moll, 1992); using potential-based assessments, cooperative learning, and teaching based in students’ funds of knowledge (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992); and creating participatory pedagogy based on the household knowledge teachers observed in home visits (Moll et al., 1992). However, continued work with the funds of knowledge model applied in contexts beyond Tucson revealed that aligning curriculum with children’s home literacies could be a challenge, which Cremin, Mottram, Collins, Powell, and Drury (2012) noted in their study with eighteen primary teachers in England. After teachers interrogated their own literacy histories,
participated in home visits (Learner Visits), and reflected on classroom practice, the authors noticed teachers’ concerns about their roles as researchers, limited changes in deficit perspectives of children and families’ literacy practices, and difficulties developing lessons incorporating these new understandings into classroom instruction.

**Knowledge exchange.** Recognizing that families possess unique funds of knowledge is one important part of building culturally responsive home/school partnerships, but another significant part is finding ways to participate in multi-directional knowledge exchanges. The knowledge exchange literature fell into two categories: literacy knowledge exchange and multimodal knowledge exchange.

**Literacy knowledge exchange.** The Home-School Knowledge Exchange (HSKE), a UK-based quasi-experimental action research project in four primary schools over the course of two years, examined how knowledge exchange between parents, teachers, researchers, and students impacted student achievement in literacy (Hughes & Pollard, 2006). The researchers extended Moll’s funds of knowledge concept by applying it to teachers and families. Researchers interviewed teachers and principals and sent questionnaires to parents to determine the existing home-school exchange of knowledge. The effects of the home/school knowledge exchange were measured with standardized tests and qualitative data analysis on six children. Artifacts produced in the qualitative portion of the data (such as diaries, drawings, and photographs of home and school learning events) elicited conversations in interviews. The researchers found that the project yielded deeper exchanges of knowledge related to primary literacy and numeracy between parents, teachers, and children.
Compton-Lilly and Gregory (2013) examined the reciprocity between school and home learning. They discussed how schools traditionally expect parents to replicate school learning due to issues of control, standardized testing, and lacking confidence in their teaching. Even though students use school literacy practices informally at home, teachers often do not recognize home literacies practiced at school, such as jump rope rhyme, digital media practices, faith literacies, or pop culture references.

Instead of the typical “one-way” home-school communication, Hughes and Greenhough (2006) proposed exchanging funds of knowledge with a video activity teaching parents about literacy instruction to increase school-to-home communication and a shoebox activity allowing students to bring home artifacts to school to increase home-to-school communication. Parents’ responses were mostly positive, though home literacy practices did not change. Teachers responded positively to learning more about students’ home lives and saw student improvement as a result. The authors also reflected on the control and threat issues inherent in home-school communication situated in a power relationship privileging the school.

Rowe and Fain (2013) studied how families responded to dual-language texts through family journals. In thirteen urban prekindergarten classrooms, multilingual families received backpacks with materials (i.e., a book translated into the family’s home language and English, CD recordings of book in English and home language, CD player, blank family response journal). The goal was for families to use funds of knowledge to engage in reading together and record responses in open-ended journals. The study
looked at participation in journaling, family roles in writing and drawing, family and approaches to story comprehension.

**Multimodal knowledge exchange.** Several studies used photography as a means of multimodal knowledge exchanges between home and school. Allen et al. (2002) created PhOLKS (Photographs of Local Knowledge Sources), an educator-led project to use student-taken photographs as a lens into their out-of-school lives. Children took home cameras on a rotating basis, photographed family members or things, and wrote about them. Family members also provided narrations to accompany photographs. The authors found that children used photography to author their lives, and teachers developed deeper relationships and re-envisioned children and families.

Yamada-Rice (2010) asked preschool children in Tokyo to photograph the media they used at home. The photographs of these media in use were put into a book, which was used as a dialogue starter with the children in interviews in an approach known as photo elicitation. The photographs, parent surveys, and interviews revealed that the preschoolers consumed primarily visual media: DVDs (100%), drawing (96%), picture books (93%), TV (82%), websites (61%), cameras (54%), mobile phone cameras (36%), drawing software (36%), visual email (22%), and webcams (28%).

Burnett and Myers (2002) provided disposal cameras to primary school children (aged 7-11) in the UK to document home literacy texts and events. Instead of studying adults’ perspectives on literacy, children’s voices were the focus of the project. In future discussions, the children interpreted the photographs and expanded on their views of literacy. Therefore, researchers worked with children instead of doing research
“on” them. They found that the students used literacy to maintain relationships, organize life, learn, reflect their identity, and have fun.

Moss (2001) asked children (aged 7-9) from 27 families to take pictures of things to read at home. Though Moss originally intended to investigate gender differences in leisure reading at home, the focus of this project turned to ethical concerns in analyzing data: the intrusive nature of home photography, the precarious power balance between school (which can define literacy practices for families) and home, the difference between material ownership and use, and subjects being photographed willingly or not.

**Family partnerships.** In the family engagement literature, two approaches emerged: family intervention programs and family partnerships. Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez, and Kayzar (2002) analyzed 39 articles describing 41 intervention programs for parents of K-12 students. To locate articles, they searched ERIC for all articles since 1960 matching the terms “parent” and “evaluation,” and then looked only at U.S. interventions directed toward parents. They found that due to design flaws—and omission of key variables, such as race, ethnicity, and parental education—in these studies, little evidence existed that parent involvement programs improved student achievement or changed the behavior of students, parents, or teachers. Therefore, I chose to focus this component of the literature review on family partnerships instead of family intervention programs.

**Building relationships.** Allen and Kinloch (2013) noted that it is more sustainable to build relationships with families and communities instead of relying on home-school
programs. To build these relationships, they suggested that teachers consider relationship building during team planning times and plan opportunities to involve families beyond thematic “nights.” To avoid intruding on families, they encouraged teachers to involve families in students’ learning by asking for advice, offering more than one way for families to participate, and avoiding regulating literacy activities.

Allen (2008) encouraged school leadership teams to critique family outreach efforts for their abilities to build deep relationships and/or support student learning. She named three approaches to family involvement that directly improve student achievement: (1) building respectful relationships with family funds of knowledge, teacher-parent partnerships for learning, and photographs of local knowledge sources; (2) engaging families in supporting learning at home with school-home reading journals; and (3) addressing cultural differences with cultural memoirs and cultural artifacts.

Henderson and Mapp (2002) completed a comprehensive literature review on family engagement. They reviewed studies in 3 areas: (1) the impact of parent and community involvement on student achievement; (2) effective strategies to connect schools, families, and communities; and (3) organizing efforts from parents and communities to improve schools. In these respective areas, they found (1) positive relationships between family involvement and students’ academic achievement, especially if involvement was linked to student learning; (2) successful programs were welcoming, addressed specific parent/community needs, respected cultural differences, and created partnerships; and (3) low-income communities were organizing to hold schools responsible.
Interrupting deficit narratives with family engagement. Building relationships involves challenging teachers’ assumptions, which are often deficit-oriented, about children and families from backgrounds that do not mirror their own. To begin interrupting these assumptions, López-Robertson, Long, and Turner-Nash (2010) situated teachers as learners in the community, outside of their classrooms. Five groups of preservice teachers and five groups of in-service teachers got to know families from a background different from their own in and out of school. Through weekly reflections and case studies, the authors gathered and analyzed data about (1) prior assumptions, finding that teachers often assumed African American children lived in the projects, Latina women were maids, and children from low-income households lacked experiences with books; (2) visits, finding that there was initial discomfort, but families needed to know that these visits were not like traditional home visits to judge families; (3) rethinking assumptions, especially about family engagement, home languages, family structures, and the presence of biases in all of us; and (4) continuing challenges, such as reverting to old assumptions and romanticizing long-term outcomes.

Riojas-Cortez and Flores (2009) created a four-year, school-based Family Institute for Early Literacy Development (FIELD) to examine the impact of family, school, and university on young Latino/a children’s success in school. Parents, teachers, and university faculty determined a topic of interest each year, and about 60 parents and their preschoolers attended each year for one week, two hours each day. FIELD promoted positive interactions among all parties and created opportunities for
educators to interact with families to establish positive parent-teacher partnerships and decrease deficit mindsets about parent involvement.

Comparing family and school literacies can sometimes establish deficit perspectives. Whitmore and Norton-Meier (2008) studied two mothers’ home literacy lives for two years through weekly interactions with them, interviews, and observations at home and at school events. They found two trends connecting these mothers to their children’s schools: (1) viewing literacy resources as funds of knowledge that exist in all households and (2) creating symmetric power and trust relationships.

Limitations of the Research

After reading the literature about literacy coaching, technology and digital learning communities, and home/school knowledge exchange, I noticed some significant limitations of the research in these categories.

While existing literature about reflective literacy coaching seems to focus mostly on instructional practices (i.e., Peterson, Taylor, Burnham, & Schock, 2009), studies that consider critical reflection on interactions and experiences beyond classroom literacy practices that may create, unveil, or inform teachers’ (c)overt assumptions and biases is scarce. Furthermore, many of these traditional roles position literacy coaches as “experts,” which is disempowering for the peers they serve (Crafton & Kaiser, 2011; Freire, 1970; Wall & Palmer, 2015). Even in the literature that discusses changes in beliefs (i.e., Stephens et al., 2011), none speak to the coach’s role in critical self-reflection with teachers (or the coaches themselves) to name and frame cultural biases and assumptions that may influence their literacy work.
The literature concerning technology and digital learning communities raised several concerns. Even though I limited my literature search to publication dates within the past decade whenever possible—which was quite challenging—to use the most up-to-date data and research, some claims upholding the historical conceptualization of the “digital divide” depended on outdated data: for example, Celano and Neuman (2010) used data from the 2000 U.S. Census ten years before to argue families with low incomes were less likely to have home computers. Similarly, very few studies actually acknowledged that the rise of cell phones was changing the deficit-oriented story told about minoritized people and access to technology. In the studies on engaging families using information and communications technology (ICT), the methods used to communicate with families were typically one-directional information deposits that operated in a school-to-family/community directionality and positioned the school as the distributor of information and the parents as receivers, creating an unequal power relationship (Hohlfeld et al., 2010; Olmstead, 2013). Finally, literature about family engagement in “digital learning communities,” “virtual learning communities,” or “family learning communities” was a noticeable void.

For home/school knowledge exchanges to function successfully, schools must invest in developing strong family partnerships that value families’ funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and variety of literacy traditions. While some of the knowledge exchange designs reviewed in this literature used photography (Allen et al., 2002; Burnett & Myers, 2002; Moss, 2001; Yamada-Rice, 2010), many involved extremely limited dialogic exchanges (i.e., asking students to take photos at home and then bring
them to school, which may be followed by a single interview) that built relationships and respect but did not necessarily build a dialogic community.

**Conclusion**

In this review of the literature, I searched for my path and considered “what has come before” (Figure 2.1) by aligning three distinct topics: literacy coaching, technology and digital learning communities, and home/school knowledge exchange. This body of research demonstrates the need for the present study, especially when considering limitations at the intersection of these three topics. Critical coaching relies upon dialogic relationships between coaches and teachers. Technology, especially in the form of digital learning communities, offers opportunities for multi-directional home/school knowledge exchange.

Creating digital learning communities and pairing them with critical coaching integrates these three topics as none of the existing literature has. Engaging with families in ongoing, dialogic digital learning communities humanizes families that may typically be subjected to negative stereotypes and deficit narratives that teachers may not yet realize they perpetuate, which in turn humanizes educators. Digital learning communities and critical coaching have the potential to be important tools for building critical relationships among teachers, literacy coaches, students, and families, yet the existing literature does not encapsulate these two concepts. As I mention in the poem opening this chapter (Figure 2.1), it is in these silences that our work begins.
As I explore in Figure 3.1, words are so much more than marks on a page; they are the essence of being and preserving meaning in the world. To delve deeper into the situated practice of language within and surrounding digital learning communities and critical coaching, I used an action research-based qualitative study design that featured
critical discourse analysis. Qualitative research provides ample opportunities to focus on lived experiences of the study participants, and critical discourse analysis analyzes language and power structures. Furthermore, pursuing action research allowed me to explore a topic of interest relevant to my actual role as a literacy coach. My research focused on three main questions:

1. Do families, teachers, and students choose to engage in digital learning communities? If so, how? If not, why?
2. How do families, students, and educators exercise power through digital learning communities?
3. How do digital learning communities stimulate critical coaching partnerships between teachers and literacy coaches?

I will describe (1) the overarching methodological approach of critical discourse analysis and (2) the study design.

**Methodological Approach: Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is defined by “its concern with power as a central condition in social life, and its efforts to develop a theory of language that incorporates this as a major premise” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 10). This focus on power, or the macro structures of culture and society, sets CDA apart from traditional discourse analysis, which focuses only on the micro structures of language in the specific interactional event at hand (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2005). Specifically, the term “critical” does not refer to negativity, but instead refers to a
questioning stance that does not take the status quo for granted (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

**Critical discourse analysis: A brief history.** CDA found its roots in fields such as critical social theory, sociocultural studies, and critical linguistics. The concept of “critical” as applied in CDA dates back to the Frankfurt School in the 1930s, which aimed to critique and change society instead of only understanding it (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). CDA began in the early 1990s after a meeting in Amsterdam with noted researchers such as van Dijk, Fairclough, Kress, van Leeuwen, and Wodak (Rogers & Mosley Wetzel, 2013; Rogers & Schaenen, 2013; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). With the development of new literacy studies (NLS) came a stronger emphasis on the social and cultural practices of literacy, and CDA was the methodological link between new literacy studies and traditional discourse analysis (Rogers & Schaenen, 2013).

Fairclough and Wodak (1997) established eight central tenets of CDA: (1) CDA addresses social problems; (2) power relations are discursive; (3) discourse constitutes society and culture; (4) discourse does ideological work; (5) discourse is historical; (6) the link between text and society is mediated; (7) discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory; and (8) discourse is a form of social action. Because it is a problem-oriented, interdisciplinary approach, CDA transcends a single methodology, theory, or discipline (Rogers & Schaenen, 2013; Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

Generally, critical discourse analysts believe that languages are social practices that are simultaneously determined by and influence social structure. Because texts are a product of social action and social action is entrenched in power dynamics, CDA looks
at power as a systemic element of society. Furthermore, critical discourse analysts consider hidden ideologies, or sets of beliefs, that we enact on a daily basis that may present themselves in language (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). CDA connects two different levels of language structures: (1) macro-level, which involves language use, discourse, communication, and verbal interaction, and (2) micro-level, which involves power, dominance, and inequality between social groups (van Dijk, 2001).

With regards to literacy education, Rogers and Schaenen (2013) called for CDA study designs to include reflexivity, context, deconstructive-reconstructive orientations, and social action. Because of entrenched power structures and hidden ideologies, researcher self-reflection is a vital component of study design (Rogers & Schaenen, 2013; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Context includes social, cultural, political, and economic domains beyond the language event itself. Deconstructive-reconstructive orientation refers to whether CDA simply breaks down or critiques power structures, or if it creates power by allowing people to see how texts position them. Though CDA is more known for its deconstructive tendencies, various scholars support focusing on reconstruction to note that power is also creative, not just oppressive (Bloome & Talwalkar, 1997; Luke, 2004). Finally, social action is a political commitment in the world and can include curricular changes, study groups, and text analysis.

**Critiques of CDA.** More recently, researchers have critiqued CDA and noted some potential areas for expansion, including digital technologies, transcendent home/school spaces, and multimodality. In a review of 69 empirical studies about CDA in literacy education, only eleven included digital/global technologies in the data set,
and only three of these eleven analyzed multimodal data (Rogers & Schaenen, 2013).

While CDA has been used some in educational spaces (i.e., Clarke, 2007; Rogers & Mosley Wetzel, 2013; Schieble, 2012), Rogers & Schaenen (2013) assert the need to redefine these traditional educational spaces:

In the sense that CDA helps explain the mutually constructive relationship between language and social practices, when educational sites are understood to be less centralized in schools, and when they are more spread across nonschool settings—families, homes, communities, cultural institutions, a digital world, an advertising world (all the places where people are learning things)—then CDA in education should be conceived in this larger sense of educational place. (p. 135)

Through the use of Flickr to create digital learning communities that transcend traditional home/school spaces and boundaries, this study will apply CDA to this larger sense of educational place.

**Multimodal discourse analysis.** In response to the critique that discourse analysis tends to focus more on written and spoken texts at the expense of other modalities (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Street, 1985; van Leeuwen, 2013; Wang, 2014), scholars created multimodal discourse analysis, or MDA (Machin, 2013). With the beginnings of New Literacy Studies (NLS) came not only an increased focus on social and cultural context, but also new theories on multiliteracies (Gee, 2012; Rogers & Mosley Wetzel, 2013). Multimedia discourse, therefore, became "discourse involving the interaction of multiple semiotic resources such as (spoken and written) language,
gesture, dress, architecture, proximity (and in film for example) lighting, movement, gaze, camera angle, and so forth" (O’Halloran, Tan, Smith, & Podlasov, 2011, p. 110).

Even though this work was new to linguistics, it already existed in fields like Visual Studies, Media and Film Studies, Journalism Studies, and Social Anthropology. Transferring these concepts to linguistics, however, was not always simple, since multimodal texts present different features and challenges (Machin, 2013).

**New media.** While the literature is relatively limited, some scholars have applied critical discourse analysis and/or multimodal discourse analysis to new media. Dawson (2012) used discourse analysis to analyze interactions of 63 university students using new media, including social media. Lillqvist, Louhiala-Salminen, and Kankaanranta (2016) studied dialogic interactions between consumers and businesses on corporate Facebook pages and found that even though Facebook appears to encourage dialogism, companies could create monologues by deleting negative posts or comments while promoting positive ones. Encheva (2011) used semiotic analysis to compare two photographic events from two distinct points in time, a birthday party celebration in 1947 and party photos from a public Flickr stream in 2007. While the 1947 photograph was an intentional documentation of a formal family celebration, she argued that current uses of digital photography allow users to control their appearances and choose how to respond to the camera in more narrative-oriented fashions that honor movement and change. Furthermore, she noted that multiple pictures in a series (like the Flickr photo stream) represent a "transference of the self from one context to the next, from a present into a future moment" (p. 155). Even though this work with new
media is sometimes referred to as “computer-mediated discourse,” Akkaya (2014) problematized the computer-based limitations of this term while confirming the relevance of Bakhtin’s concepts of polyphony, heteroglossia, multivocality, voice, and ownership in analyzing new media discourses.

**Visual Grammars.** Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) conceptualized Visual Grammars (VGs) to provide a framework for visual analysis. Building upon Halliday’s three communicative metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal, and textual), they proposed three dimensions: (1) representational, which relates to how meanings are expressed and consists of narrative and conceptual images; (2) interactive, which relates to how the viewer relates to an image and includes contact, social distance, and attitude; and (3) compositional, which relates to how visual elements are organized spatially and consists of information value, salience, and framing systems.

Additional frameworks for visual analysis exist. Serafini (2014) built on Kress and van Leeuwen’s work by organizing visual analysis around elements from three areas: visual art (including dot, line, and shape; color; size and scale; and position), multimodal ensembles (including orientation; typography; borders; and motifs and symbols), and visual grammar (from Kress and van Leeuwen’s framework). Liu (2013) designed a similar framework integrating semiotics, art, and visual grammars that consisted of four strategies: meta-interpretive strategies, which related to readers’ awareness of multimodal meaning making; perceptual strategies, which attended to design elements; analytical strategies, which looked at what objects meant; and sociocultural strategies, which look beyond the image itself to consider contextual factors.
While visual analysis frameworks have been developed for or applied to professional productions, such as advertisements (Janks, 1997), picture news (Wang, 2014), graphic novels (Connors, 2011), and children’s literature illustrations (McDonald, 2012; Serafini, 2010, 2011), visual grammars are not without their limitations, as Serafini (2014) established. Analytic structures describe “meaning potentials” for one context, but these might not be universal meaning. In addition, many of the elements of visual composition arise from art as it is conceived in Western culture, which ignores artistic traditions outside of this boundary. Finally, fine art analysis does not take into consideration the social, cultural, historical, or political contexts that may influence the use of artistic elements and their interpretation.

Participants

This study was completed in partnership with Kadence (pseudonym), an early childhood teacher, and her class, in the second semester of the 2015-2016 school year. Kadence caught my attention as an extreme case (Patton, 2002) during meetings with teachers over the summer of 2015, immediately before I officially assumed the literacy coach role as Meadow Mill Elementary (pseudonym). While other teachers’ only mentions of family relationships were deficit-based (i.e., complaining about the families’ “Obamaphones” and stating “our kids come from homes where parents can’t or don’t read, definitely don’t read out loud, and don’t have books” [field notes, 7/24/15]), Kadence was the only teacher who said that she wanted to do more with parent communication. I could tell this topic was of highest priority for her because it preceded her request for instructional help in her reading and writing instruction. During the
course of this study, emergent case sampling (Patton, 2002) determined three families with whom Kadence and I conducted semi-structured interviews about participation choices in the digital learning community. I introduce these focus families in the following chapter. All families in the class received a copy of the informed consent letter in either English (Appendix A) or Spanish (Appendix B).

Furthermore, Kadence believed strongly in creating meaningful, differentiated lessons with real-life connections, which required knowing her students in and out of school. Table 3.1 presents the demographic data for her class of 18 students.

Table 3.1

**Demographic Information from Kadence’s Class**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Description (% of class)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>10 girls (55.6%) 8 boys (44.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>10 Latino/a (55.6%) 5 White (27.8%) 2 African American (11.1%) 1 Multiracial (White/African American) (5.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Spoken in Home</td>
<td>8 Spanish-dominant (44.4%) 10 English-dominant (55.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Lunch Status</td>
<td>16 free lunch (88.9%) 2 full-pay (11.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAR Reading Benchmarks (beginning of year)</td>
<td>4 above proficiency (22.2%) 4 met (22.2%) 10 not met (55.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Context of the study.** The research took place in Meadow Mill Elementary (pseudonym), an elementary school serving students from kindergarten through fifth grade in Upstate South Carolina. I have chosen this site for two reasons: (1) as this school’s current literacy coach, it serves as a natural setting for action research, and (2)
this school’s demographics position it as an extreme case (Patton, 2002) when compared with the demographics of the rest of the district schools, the city itself, and the state.

History of Meadow Mill Elementary. To learn more about the history of Meadow Mill Elementary, I consulted several sources: a White teacher, who has taught at Meadow Mill Elementary for over forty years; a Latina office staff member, who grew up in the community and attended Meadow Mill Elementary before seeking employment there as an adult; the White principal, who began his principalship at the school in 2015 but lived in the Meadow Mill community while he was in high school; and the school website. I also participated in a community tour with the principal and the office staff member. I recognize that not all voices (especially from Trackway community members) are heard in some of these experiential anecdotes, but I offer these experiences as a brief orientation to Meadow Mill Elementary and its surrounding community.

In the early 1950s, Meadow Mill Elementary moved to its current location in the Meadow Mill community. Walking through the building reveals the history of expansions. The smooth, plaster walls signify the original part of the building, which consisted of approximately twelve classrooms and a cafeteria. The cinderblock walls arrived with the first remodel in 1984, which added extra classrooms, a cafeteria (allowing the school library to leave its temporary home in a trailer to inhabit the original cafeteria space), and a gym. Continuing the trend of cinderblock walls but adding colorful accents in the floor tiles, the final expansion took place in 2006 and
contributed early childhood and related arts classrooms. The building is currently filled to capacity, with two classrooms in trailers behind the school.

Located just outside of a major Upstate city, residents of the Meadow Mill worked for two local textile mills, and the original mill village residences are still inhabited. At the height of the mills’ operation, Meadow Mill Elementary saw a predominantly White (but not affluent) student population. Students of Meadow Mill residents earned a reputation for being well-dressed, hard workers from two-parent households. African American students began attending Meadow Mill Elementary in the 1970s. When the textile industry started to decline, the Meadow Mill area began to attract an international population because of the town’s close location to major interstates. As families from Brazil, South Africa, Venezuela, and other countries arrived to the Upstate for business-related jobs, they would often stay for one year and then move to a permanent residence outside of the Meadow Mill area. The final population shift at Meadow Mill Elementary occurred as a large number of Latino/a immigrants resettled in the area. While some of the Latino/a residents were legal residents, others were not. Because of its close proximity to major interstates, the Meadow Mill area was an easy place for smugglers to drop off the immigrants. Authorities recently began raiding one local store that served as a drop-off point for new immigrants that do not have legal status.

The Meadow Mill area borders another small town known as Trackway. Multiple railway lines traverse both communities, and train whistles can be heard as trains pass by throughout the day. Trackway is often seen as a struggling, “harder” community
with a White, African American, and Latino/a population. Trackway residents are typically lower-class families who stay rooted in the community, which tends to have higher crime rates than Meadow Mill. Wooded areas surround lots filled with families’ trailer homes, some of which are condemned but still inhabited. Certain streets in Trackway are known for selling drugs and prostitution, and several biker clubs are located nearby. My sources (again, who are not residents of Trackway) note that Trackway residents strive to “get out” as the first step in leading successful lives.

**Current demographics of the school.** In the 2015-2016 school year, over 450 students attended Meadow Mill Elementary. Approximately 94% of the students qualified for free/reduced lunch. Within the student body, 65% were Latino/a. Even though 35% of the student body was not Latino/a, Meadow Mill Elementary tended to be recognized only for the Latino/a population. The school’s demographics differed greatly from local and state-wide statistics from 2010, as shown in the Table 3.2.

Table 3.2.

**Comparison of School Demographics to Other Contexts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population Percentage</th>
<th>Meadow Mills Elementary</th>
<th>Nearby City</th>
<th>South Carolina</th>
<th>National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
<td>68.3%</td>
<td>72.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>&gt;0.1%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Meadow Mill Elementary was proud of its status as a community school. To facilitate communication with families who are Spanish-dominant, several employees were proficient in Spanish and English, including one Latina front office staff member. Phone messages and flyers usually went home in both Spanish and English. Meadow Mill Elementary engaged families in PTO programs, academic awards ceremonies every quarter, and family movie nights. Beyond students’ families, Meadow Mill reached out to the larger community with an annual health fair that featured local health-related businesses as well as adult learning classes for learning English, parenting, and earning a GED. With the daily instructional schedule, after-school programming for students, adult learning classes at night, and several summer school programs for students, Meadow Mill seemed never to sleep.

_Meadow Mill Elementary faculty/staff_. After a twelve-year tenure, the previous principal retired at the end of the 2014-2015 school year. The community respected him and the work he did to strengthen the school’s presence as a community center. The current principal, a former resident of the Meadow Mills community, served as an assistant administrator at another elementary school in the same district for three years immediately prior to accepting this new position. The assistant principal was a former guidance counselor and early childhood educator, and she had been serving in this administrative role for a couple of years. The previous literacy coach began working at Meadow Mill Elementary as an instructional coach in the mid-2000s, when the State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Two or more races</th>
<th>4%</th>
<th>1.8%</th>
<th>1.7%</th>
<th>2.9%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

_Note_. Source: School records; http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/00 (accessed 1/9/16)
Department of Education labeled the school as low-performing and intervened. During her time there, she filled roles ranging from instructional coach to assistant administrator. The former principal, former literacy coach, current principal, and current assistant principal were all White.

In the 2015-2016 school year, the instructional staff consisted of 22 certified classroom teachers in kindergarten through fifth grade. Additional certified staff included related arts teachers, ESOL teachers, speech pathologists, resource teachers, a guidance counselor, a school psychologist, and myself as the literacy coach. Furthermore, eleven paraprofessionals served as full-time kindergarten assistants, part-time first grade assistants, a reading interventionist, a library assistant, and a computer lab manager. The demographics of the faculty, however, did not mirror the demographics of Kadence’s class, as presented in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population Percentage</th>
<th>Certified Classroom Teachers (n=22)</th>
<th>Certified Teachers, Non-Classroom (n=13)</th>
<th>Paraprofessionals (n=11)</th>
<th>Faculty Total (n=46)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection Methods

To address the research questions, I gathered data from a variety of sources, including observations, weekly participant reflections, coaching conversations, artifacts
from the digital learning community on Flickr, documents, interviews, and surveys.

Table 3.4 demonstrates how each data source contributed toward each research question.

Table 3.4.

Research Questions and Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Primary Sources of Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Do families, teachers, and students choose to engage in digital learning communities? If so, how? If not, why? | • Surveys  
• Interviews—families, teacher  
• Artifacts from Flickr digital learning community |
| 2. How do families, students, and educators exercise power through digital learning communities? | • Surveys  
• Interviews—families, teacher  
• Artifacts from Flickr digital learning community  
• Weekly participant reflections  
• Coaching conversations |
| 3. How do digital learning communities stimulate critical coaching partnerships between teachers and literacy coaches? | • Interviews—teacher  
• Observations  
• Weekly participant reflections  
• Coaching conversations  
• Documents |

While the qualitative methodology of this study found its roots in critical discourse analysis, an important component of this methodology was context.

Therefore, data was gathered not only for explicit critical discourse analysis, but also to establish contexts for data collection. Table 3.5 describes how each component of data collection aligns with Rogers and Schaenen's (2013) four elements of critical discourse analysis studies in literacy education: reflexivity, context, deconstructive-reconstructive orientation, and social action.
Table 3.5.

*CDA Design Elements and Data Sources*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CDA Design Element (Rogers &amp; Schaenen, 2013)</th>
<th>Data Source in Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflexivity</strong> (researcher self-positioning)</td>
<td>Weekly participant reflections, Coaching conversations, Documents: cultural memoirs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context</strong> (social, cultural, political, and economic domains, ranging from microlinguistic to macrosocial)</td>
<td>Observations, Coaching conversations, Artifacts from Flickr, Documents: cultural memoirs, lesson plans, school documents, Interviews, Surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deconstructive-Reconstructive Orientation</strong> (critiquing power structures through deconstruction, creating spaces for power through reconstruction)</td>
<td>Artifacts from Flickr, Coaching conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Action</strong> (making a political commitment in the world)</td>
<td>Critical discourse analysis: coaching conversations, artifacts from Flickr, documents, interviews, Coaching conversations and resulting curricular changes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Observations.* Because of the action research nature of this study, frequent participant-observer notes were necessary. While I co-taught with Kadence, I took field notes and completed personal memos. Our co-teaching took many forms, such as my leading the instruction while Kadence observed; both of us contributing to instruction collaboratively; or Kadence leading the instruction while I observed. Also, I observed how families chose to participate in the digital learning community via turn-taking structures.
**Weekly participant reflections.** For our collaborative audit trail, Kadence and I entered our reflections weekly in a shared Google doc, which we used as a collaborative journal. In these weekly entries, we reflected on our perceptions of that week’s participation in the digital learning community and new understandings we constructed about ourselves and students’ families. This Google doc was available only to the two of us, which preserved confidentiality and collaborative reflection.

**Coaching conversations and transcripts.** I used the audiorecorder embedded in the Atlas-ti app on my iPad to record all my coaching conversations with Kadence. A list of the conventions I used for transcribing is in Appendix J. This app automatically stamped the date and time of each recording. Furthermore, the app allowed for comments on each recording, which I used to create quick notes about general topics discussed in each recording.

**Artifacts from Flickr.** I anticipated that most of the digital artifacts would come from the digital learning community on Flickr, which is a free photo-sharing site hosted by Yahoo. This site requires a Yahoo email account to log in. Flickr hosts three types of groups: public, which anyone can join; public, which require an invitation to join; and private, which require an invitation to join. Both public groups allow anyone to see the group’s posts and content, whereas the content in a private group is only accessible to members of that group. To protect families’ privacy, we created a private group for Kadence’s class. Multimodal participation options included posting photographs, videos, captions, and comments, as well as selecting “faves” (by clicking a star next to each piece of media). As the group administrator, the teacher had the authority to
moderate contributions. Though our initial plan was to focus exclusively on Flickr, Kadence and I eventually expanded our definition of the digital learning community to include digital artifacts from Class Dojo, as I will explain in the following chapter.

**Documents.** The most significant document to the data collection process was the cultural memoir that Kadence and I both wrote. Building on Allen (2008)’s conceptualization of cultural memoirs, I adapted an assignment that I completed in one of my graduate courses (Appendix C). We each wrote a 3-4 page memoir that reflected on (1) critical moments that affirmed or denied our cultural identities; (2) different aspects of our sociocultural identities, including gender, sexual orientation, race, and social class; and (3) ways to take action in our educational contexts. An additional form of documentation that provided context to our work was lesson plans, either pre-existing that we analyzed or non-existing that we co-constructed. Finally, I wrote personal memos and analyzed these documents. While I was open to the possibility of examining other school documents that convey tacit cultural assumptions (i.e., parent newsletters, behavior contracts that parents sign, content standards, report cards, and gifted/talented application forms), these documents did not become part of the data analyzed in this study.

**Interviews.** I conducted a semi-structured interview with Kadence at the beginning and end of the study. In addition, Kadence and I conducted semi-structured individual interviews with three case study families at the end of the study to gather more contextual information about families’ participation in the digital learning community. I defined participation as opting in as well as opting out. Kadence and I
determined these selected families via emergent case sampling (Patton, 2002) as trends in the data emerged. Table 3.6 contains questions from the semi-structured interviews.

Table 3.6.

**Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Type</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Initial Interview: Teacher** | 1. Why do you want to work on your communication with families?  
2. How do you currently communicate with families?  
3. What do you already know about your families?  
4. What role do families play in their students’ learning?  
5. What do you want the outcome(s) of this research study to be? |
| **Final Interview: Teacher**  | 1. What have you noticed as a result of this study?  
2. What new understandings did you gain about your students, their families, and yourself?  
3. What surprised you the most?  
4. What role do families play in their students’ learning?  
5. Do we need critical coaching? Why/why not?  
6. What will your next steps be? (As a teacher advocate? As a learner? As a researcher? Challenges that remain?) |
| **Case Study Family Interviews** | 1. How did you choose to participate in Flickr and/or Class Dojo and why?  
2. What photos/videos left the biggest impression on you?  
3. Did you benefit from using Flickr and/or Class Dojo? If so, how?  
4. What new understandings did you gain from using Flickr and/or Class Dojo?  
5. What do you think is the best way to communicate with the teacher?  
6. What kind of information do you want from your teacher? Do you only want to know things that are urgent (like dismissal information) or do you want to have open communication? |
Surveys. I administered two paper-and-pencil based surveys to families in this class: one at the beginning and one at the end of the study. Questions addressed home/school communication and access to technology. I kept the survey brief and offered a version in Spanish and a version in English. Some questions asked families to choose from pre-filled options, while other questions allowed families to fill in their own responses. The initial and final surveys are in Appendices D through G.

Organization of Data

I used the qualitative analysis tool Atlas-ti to organize my data. This program allowed me to add multimodal documents, including text, audio, photos, and videos, either by creating them directly within the app’s interface or by importing them from other sources. Within each document (regardless of modality), I marked quotations and create codes, which were then compiled into a codebook. After audio recording each coaching conversation or interview, I transcribed the entirety of each recording in Word and then saved the document as a PDF to import into Atlas-ti to code.

Data Analysis

I also used Atlas-ti to analyze my data. In critical discourse analysis, data collection is similar to grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in its recursivity throughout the data collection and analysis process (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Therefore, analysis was ongoing throughout this study. I specifically asked Kadence to reflect on episodes of significance or interest at the end of our research partnership. This joint analysis of data allowed Kadence to make some decisions about participation, but I completed the majority of the data analysis to avoid adding additional responsibilities to
her busy schedule. I applied three types of analysis: (1) thematic analysis, (2) critical discourse analysis, and (3) visual analysis. After analyzing the data, I used the themes and patterns to compose analytic poetry.

**Thematic analysis.** First, I immersed myself in listening to the audio recordings of interviews and coaching conversations, and then I read the resulting transcripts and other print documents repeatedly to look for key themes using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), which involves looking for differences in word use, events, participants, and settings between cases (Glesne, 2011). The constant comparative method was applied to the initial and final family surveys, our weekly participant reflection, interview transcripts, and our cultural memoirs. Because of the evolving nature of action research, I used mostly open coding as I followed the data. After the data collection ended, I revisited my open codes to analyze emerging themes and began axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to group specific codes from the data under these themes. I sorted and grouped quotes and themes in Excel to access thematic similarities easily across documents. This thematic coding was not the main focus of my study, but it gave important context that informed my critical discourse analysis.

**Visual analysis of photos and videos.** I used visual analysis on media of interest posted in the digital learning community. Kadence and I selected media to analyze based on the content, composition, and/or engagement (i.e., media that members of the digital learning community transacted with most strongly). As I analyzed these images using the concepts from Kress and van Leeuwen (2006)’s visual grammars and
other existing frameworks (i.e., McDonald, 2012; Wang, 2014), I found that no existing tool met the needs of this current study. Therefore, I created a chart to streamline the analysis process (Appendix H).

**Critical discourse analysis of dialogue and embedded ideology.** Finally, I used critical discourse analysis to analyze sections of interest in interviews, coaching conversations, our cultural memoirs, and our weekly participant reflection document in order to delve deeper into how our language embodies hidden ideologies and power structures. In my analysis, I utilized the basic theoretical tools Bloome and colleagues (Bloome et al., 2005) provided for critical discourse analysis in literacy education settings. Contextualization cues make the intentions of participants known and can be verbal, nonverbal, prosodic, or can involve the manipulation of artifacts. Examples include tone and volume shifts; pauses; eye contact; and syntactical shifts. A second tool for analysis considers boundary making, or how participants “[signal] to each other what is going on, the social relationships of people to each other, and what meanings are being jointly constructed” (p. 14). These boundaries are always changing and evolving during discourse and must be jointly negotiated. Third, analysis can evaluate turn-taking, not based on turn counts but on participation structures. For example, one common participation structure in classrooms is the Initiate-Respond-Evaluate (IRE) format. Typically, teachers initiate a topic or question, students respond, and the teacher evaluates the responses. An additional consideration of turn-taking is how speakers take and hold the conversational floor. A fourth theoretical tool involves thematic coherence, or “the organization of a set of meanings in and through an event”
(p. 33). Negotiating a conversational theme determines what a conversational event is about and may shift multiple times, provided the participants take up this change of theme. A final theoretical tool considers intertextuality, which connects texts from contexts outside of the conversational event. Because we also read the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987), I also consider connections to other events and life experiences under the idea of intertextuality. In addition to these theoretical tools, Bloome et al. recognized that analysis cannot always be confined to one procedure or method; instead, “the researchers' intimacy with what is occurring in the classroom needs to guide the adaptation of existing tools and the creation of new tools” (p. 100). Therefore, I adapted and created tools as needed in my analysis.

**Analytic poetry.** As qualitative researchers, we bring pieces of ourselves into our data collection and analysis (Peshkin, 1988). Therefore, I integrated my identity as a poet into the data analysis. Barone and Eisner (2012) described arts based research as “an effort to extend beyond the limiting constraints of discursive communication in order to express meanings that otherwise would be ineffable" (p. 1). For my own poetic writing process, I first analyzed the themes and patterns in the data using thematic, visual, and critical discourse analysis. I made notes of *in vivo* phrases or powerful images that emerged from the data, which wove themselves into the poetry I crafted to represent my findings. Therefore, I present a poem to frontload the content and findings of each chapter, and I analyze the poetry in the summary concluding each chapter in an effort to bring the reader on the same journey of discovery I traveled through the process of data analysis.
Trustworthiness, Triangulation, and Member Checking

As a researcher with a background in public education, I am also subject to socialized assumptions of which I may not be aware; as a result, I was also a “subject” in the research process as I named, challenged, and reformed many of my own tacit assumptions by participating in the same research activities Kadence did. I felt for the hot and cold places (Peshkin, 1988) to know when my subjectivity and positionality were enacted. I was attuned to spaces that raise my awareness of my own assumptions, and I recorded some of these critical moments in my own memos and weekly participant reflections.

Wodak and Meyer (2009) note that with critical discourse analysis, triangulation occurs as researchers switch among dimensions (i.e., from microlinguistic to macrosocial). I triangulated the data by looking at the textual level (in any mode) as well as the larger social, political, or cultural contexts. Additionally, Lather (1986) mentioned three other forms of validity that I felt were relevant and important to the design of this study: construct validity, face validity, and catalytic validity. Construct validity demands reflexivity as theories and data evolve with interactions with each other. Face validity requires frequent member checking of preliminary results. I engaged in member-checking in two significant ways: (1) through collaborative analysis of the data with Kadence, and (2) through interviews with emergent case study families. Finally, catalytic validity was entrenched in my conceptualization of critical coaching, as it raised the teacher’s self-understanding as well as my own through collaborative inquiry and reflection.
Furthermore, I designed my translation procedures with trustworthiness, triangulation, and member checking in mind. I translated all of the family communication in Spanish myself, and I subsequently asked a bilingual school staff member to check my translations for accuracy. Furthermore, I sent the passages I used in this research project home to families to check and, if they so desired, offer suggested revisions.

**Subjectivity and Positionality**

I participated in the dominant power-preserving system inherent in the culture of schooling without challenging it until the fall of 2011, when an African-American parent of one of my kindergarten students called me a racist (see Chapter 1). While I at first resisted this accusation, I quickly became aware of my “invisible knapsack” (McIntosh, 1990) of privileges I benefitted from on a daily basis as a White female. This critical moment forced me to begin naming and unpacking some of the tacit, deficit theories I held about my minoritized students and their families because of my life-long socialization into Whiteness as the invisible norm (Jensen, 2005). Ever since that time, I have been attentive to the ways I, along with other peers and coworkers, inadvertently use language to espouse deficit theories.

As for my positionality, my identity as a literacy coach places me in a unique position as a hybrid insider and outsider. As an insider, I have been an educator in the same school district for my entire teaching career, which started in 2009. Since I began serving as a literacy coach at Meadow Mill Elementary in 2015, I have had the opportunity to develop many relationships with my peers, which positions me as an
insider. On the surface, I appear to fit in with the majority of my school’s faculty: I am a White, middle-class, heterosexual, Christian female. On the other hand, this positions me as a member of the dominant norms I am attempting to examine. Therefore, I too faced the potential of being blinded by my own Whiteness in this study, and I monitored my own awareness of assumptions carefully.

However, I am also an outsider. Unlike many teachers at my school, I have perceived my racialized awakening (Summer, 2014), which causes me to be attentive to structures that enable or restrict equitable educational access for all—but especially minoritized—learners. I had to balance my passion for creating equitable spaces for all learners to ensure that this personal interest guided, but did not interfere with, my research. As a member of mainstream culture, I possess certain privileges that situate me as an outsider to the very perspectives to which I wish to listen. My ability to speak Spanish may help me communicate with some of the Meadow Mill families, but I still am an outsider to this community. My identity as a doctoral student also causes some of my co-workers to perceive me as an outsider. While untrue, the assumptions that I am a “literacy expert” and that I will use my doctorate to seek employment at the district level cause some of these teachers to be wary of building close relationships with me. Finally, since I am neither classroom teacher nor administrator, I can be perceived as an outsider. I regarded this perception of power carefully to position myself as a co-researcher and co-inquirer with Kadence. During the data collection process, Kadence and I both contributed our own wonderings and observations to direct the research process, though I completed most of the formal data analysis in the months following
the data collection process and asked Kadence to provide feedback on my analysis in an effort to respect her limited extracurricular time. Jones and Rainville (2014b) recognized this unique positioning of literacy coaches: "within this precarious and powerful position—the never complete insider, never complete outsider—we believe literacy coaches can stand up and be the important intellectuals we so desperately need in our schools" (p. 183).

**Ethical Issues and Reciprocity**

Gee (2012) argued that we have a “moral obligation to reflect consciously” (p. 216) on our theories, especially those that privilege our own groups while harming others. Therefore, I believe becoming aware of the implications of our cultural biases and assumptions is a moral obligation of educators, especially those who work with largely minoritized populations. However, very little research has engaged the teachers themselves in a collaborative process of deconstructing some of their own Discourses and embedded assumptions. It is in these spaces where we can interrupt our unconscious primary Discourses, develop meta-knowledge of them, and begin to change them or develop secondary Discourses (Gee, 2012).

Because I served as the literacy coach at this school during this study, I needed to be cautious of ethical issues due to this role. As a literacy coach, I did not serve in an evaluative role for teachers, which avoided one significant ethical concern. My data collection was clearly separated from my normal responsibilities, which gave Kadence the choice to withdraw from this study at any point in time if she needed to. My working relationship with teachers was vital to my success as a literacy coach, and I
carefully preserved a positive, trusting, and confidential relationship with Kadence in this study.

Reciprocity lay with two entities: the teacher and the families. Before designing this methodology, I met with Kadence to ensure reciprocity with her. Positioning her as a co-researcher and encouraging her to take ownership in the research process ensured that we both benefitted from this research partnership. Engaging with families in this qualitative study allowed me to listen to them and advocate for their needs. Finally, the digital learning community offered the potential to validate the community/cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) of all families, which previous teachers may not have recognized.

Risks and benefits. The tasks embedded in critical coaching, such as naming and challenging tacit assumptions that are typically products of our involuntary cultural socialization (Harro, 2000b), can be demanding, draining work. By participating in the same activities as Kadence, I revealed my own vulnerabilities and assumptions, and I engaged in the study as a co-learner to create more open, comfortable spaces for both of us. I worked to create a safe, supportive environment in which to explore these assumptions without passing judgments or labeling ideas and behaviors as inherently “good” or “bad.” With pseudonyms and generalities (i.e., referring to Kadence as an early childhood educator instead of by her specific grade level), I preserved the anonymity of participants carefully, which was important since a determined reader could trace me back to my current context.

The use of digital learning communities posed a few emotional risks as well. Deconstructing the traditional boundaries between school and home can be
uncomfortable for families and for teachers who are used to or benefit from this separation. In addition, all posts in the community were visible to all members of the community. While the use of closed groups in Flickr does preserve privacy by requiring the group manager (in this case, the teacher) to explicitly invite each member to join, visual media may be more realistic, personal, and emotional than text-based media. Though families likely posted with discretion because of this vulnerability, the group manager had the authority to delete inappropriate posts. This ability, however, was not be taken lightly, as it created a monologue instead of a dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981; Lillqvist et al., 2016).

I believe the benefits of this study far outweighed the risks. Freire (1970) asserts, “To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it” (p. 88). In order to name the world—and, subsequently, to change it—we must engage in dialogue. In this study, dialogue prevailed in numerous contexts: critical coaching conversations, our weekly participant reflections, turn-taking in the digital learning community, and interviews with the teacher and families. Perhaps most importantly, the digital learning community offered the potential to open up new spaces for dialogue that had not existed in traditional home/school communication by giving families the ability to post original visual media when responding to or initiating their own digital dialogues.

Likewise, Freire notes that the vocation of all people is humanization. I argue that above all else, digital dialogue humanizes. Flickr creates spaces for carnivalization (Bakhtin, 1981), which disrupts the traditional rules and hierarchies of social norms, by giving families, teachers, and students equal power to create visual media or responses
to visual media. This humanization, this changing of the world, can occur only in communities willing to reflect and act. It is through this praxis (Freire, 1970) that the participants of this study—myself as the literacy coach, Kadence as the teacher, her students, their families, and others in the school—could find liberation.

**Limitations and Considerations**

This study occurred in a microsocial context because it took place in one classroom setting, which gives it limited context (Rogers & Schaenen, 2013). By including families and the cultural institution of school, I expanded my interpretations and explanations of the data to larger institutional and societal contexts. Local contexts also define literacy coaching, which make it difficult to apply in other contexts (Hunt & Handsfield, 2013).

In addition, Kadence was selected by extreme case sampling (Patton, 2002) because she had already expressed a desire to strengthen her home/school communication. Therefore, she was a willing participant who had something to gain by participating as a co-researcher in this study. Teachers who may not be ready to recognize the community/cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) that all families possess might be resistant to critical coaching and its related challenges. Forcing teachers to participate in critical coaching also means that I would be entering their space with a specific agenda, which contradicts Jones and Rainville's (2014a) call for coaches to enter these spaces gently with a desire simply to understand. Further research with resistant teachers, if approached with an open mind and heart, may be beneficial.
Flickr may or may not be the ideal platform for a digital learning community, as I discuss in the following chapter. I selected it because families and students had equal rights to post digital media in a closed, invitation-only group. Even though I used Flickr to create a digital learning community in this study, I offer the caution that the digital tool should never overshadow the outcome. In this case, my goal was not to use Flickr, but to create power-sharing digital learning communities where participants could contribute equally, and Flickr happened to be a tool that offered this structure. While some platforms may offer similar accessibility (i.e., Instagram), many popular digital resources in education do not afford truly dialogic media posting rights to families (i.e., Class Dojo, Seesaw, and Remind). In the future, additional research could investigate the different types of digital learning communities that various tools allow.

Critical discourse analysis poses various limitations. Most significantly, I completed most of the analysis myself in order to protect Kadence’s limited free time. Even though I did ask for feedback from both her and the families interviewed, my positionality as a literacy coach and a researcher conveyed implied power that may have limited the feedback and voices that Kadence and the families felt comfortable sharing with me. I recognize that all of the findings I present are through the lens of my own perception and analysis, which provides only a single story (Adichie, 2009) of the events described in this study.

The visual analysis frameworks that accompany multimodal discourse analysis also present a variety of limitations. First and foremost, Rosenblatt’s (1978) transactional theory applies: my interpretation of visual media is just one interpretation
that makes meaning for me, which means there is no such thing as objective visual analysis (Connors, 2011; Serafini, 2014). Many of the frameworks that utilize visual grammar rely upon Western art analysis to inform their work (i.e., Serafini, 2011). In addition, visual analysis frameworks do not consider social, cultural, historical, or political context (Serafini, 2014). Future research that applies these contextual lenses or uses non-Western art analysis would reveal new perspectives.

Most significantly, “viewers interpret visual images and multimodal ensembles in specific sociocultural contexts based on their personal and cultural histories” (Serafini, 2014, p. 38). We bring our own backgrounds and experiences with us to our research, which may prevent us from seeing alternative perspectives (Rogers & Schaenen, 2013). Several months of critical coaching conversations may not be enough to open our eyes to other vantage points and experiences, without which we may not successfully create equitable educational spaces for all students.

**Timeline**

Table 3.7 outlines the flow of the data gathering, which includes the original planned content of each coaching conversation, and analysis process throughout the course of this study.

Table 3.7.

*Study Timeline*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August-December</td>
<td>Building community and relationships with the teacher; no official data collection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>• Preliminary planning; meet Kadence about research protocol</td>
<td>• Thematic analysis from observation field notes/memos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month</td>
<td>Tasks</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-------</td>
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</table>
| **February** | - Preliminary observations: Begin collecting data about classroom contexts  
- Initial interview with Kadence  
- Initial survey with families  
- Weekly participant reflections (Google doc)  
- Co-teaching: Introduction to Flickr (magnet unit)  
- Meet with families to sign up for Flickr, offer tutorial  
- Coaching conversation #1: “On a plate” (comic strip)  
- Coaching conversation #2: “Cultural knowledge in the classroom” (article)  
- Thematic analysis from observation field notes/memos; initial survey with families; initial interview with teacher  
- Transcribe initial interview, coaching conversations #1 and #2 (mark sections for potential CDA) |
| **March** | - Weekly participant reflections (Google doc)  
- Coaching conversation #3: Literature as mirrors and windows  
- Coaching conversation #4: Photo elicitation from Flickr (new learnings & surprises)—look at turn-taking so far  
- Write cultural memoir  
- Thematic analysis from observation field notes/memos; weekly participant reflections; cultural memoirs  
- Transcribe coaching conversations #3 and #4 (mark sections for potential CDA)  
- CDA of turn-taking in Flickr |
| **April** | - Weekly participant reflections (Google doc)  
- Coaching conversation #5: Analyze cultural memoir  
- Coaching conversation #6: Photo elicitation from Flickr (new learnings & surprises)—application to classroom practice  
- Thematic analysis from observation field notes/memos; weekly participant reflections  
- Transcribe coaching conversations #5 and #6 (mark sections for potential CDA)  
- Continue CDA of turn-taking in Flickr  
- Begin visual analysis of selected media in Flickr (choose case study families)  
- Begin CDA of cultural memoir |
| **May** | - Final interview with Kadence  
- Final survey with families  
- Thematic analysis from observation field |
Data collection ceased with the end of the school year in May. While some preliminary analysis occurred between February and May, the majority of the analysis took place from August through December. During June and July, I stepped back from the data so that I could gain fresh perspectives with the second round of data analysis starting in August. Member checking with Kadence occurred as I finished analyzing portions of data, and I obtained contact information from families during their individual interviews to reach out to them for member checking.

Conclusion

Dialogue depends on listening, responding, and turn-taking, and this study used critical discourse analysis of such exchanges within two contexts—the digital learning community and critical coaching conversations—to investigate how digital spaces can be used to create polyphonic, power-sharing communities that humanize all participants. Transcending traditional home/school communicative boundaries re-envisions a larger sense of educational space and fills a hole in the current literature about applying
critical discourse analysis in educational contexts (Rogers & Schaenen, 2013). Digital learning communities and critical coaching provide opportunities to see through ourselves, through “the stereotypes, biases, and assumptions we have about [students] and their families” (Gorski, 2013, p. 69) in humanizing, dialogic spaces. As I reflected in the opening poem (Figure 3.1), digital learning communities and critical coaching allow us to use language as a mirror, a weapon, and a tool to create spaces for all to be.
CHAPTER 4
PARTICIPATION IN DIGITAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

conocemos

how to capture my world

how to advocate for
who I am/
will be

how to find my
own space
to be

all you had to do was listen
through ears
and through
eyes

because we already know

Figure 4.1. conocemos.

Near the end of the last family interview came these magical words, which I almost missed because I was working hard to hear instead of listen. “Sí, es importante,” you affirmed the importance of digital learning communities where all participants—families, teachers, and students—have equal voices, “porque hací ya conocemos.”

Because we already know. In that moment, you were talking about one way of knowing, of knowing the cultures from your homeland of Mexico. How much more do you already know, you the families of our students, if we the teachers, if we the institution of school, create spaces to listen and to learn with and from each of you?
In Figure 4.1, I offer a synthesis and response to the findings of my first two research questions:

1. Do families, teachers, and students choose to engage in digital learning communities? If so, how? If not, why?
2. How do families, students, and educators exercise power through digital learning communities? Specifically, how does the media created manifest power through the use of Visual Grammars?

To carry the reader on the same journey through which I crafted this poetic synthesis and response, I will present data as follows: (1) re-defining digital learning communities based on the data collected about families’ experiences using two different platforms; (2) analyzing the data from the anonymous survey about home/school communication and technology access; (3) analyzing observed participation, which includes Visual Grammar analysis of selected images; and (4) detailing barriers to participation.

Because I will weave the stories of families I interviewed throughout the data analysis, I will introduce them briefly. Kyle’s, Esmeralda’s, and Ryasha’s families agreed to participate in the family interviews. Each interview involved at a minimum the student, a family member (all happened to be mothers, though Kyle’s older brother also attended the interview), Kadence (the classroom teacher), and myself. A school staff member fluent in Spanish also attended Kyle’s and Esmeralda’s family interviews to serve as a translator because each family trusted and knew this individual. Each family granted permission to use their child’s real name, so to protect the identity of the
families and maintain a student-centered approach in reporting data, I will use the students’ names to identify each family.

Kyle’s sense of humor made him a memorable student in Kadence’s class. While he did have a gift of making others laugh with his dry, sarcastic comments, these tendencies sometimes landed him in trouble for distracting peers. Kyle could communicate well orally in English, though I watched Kyle get visibly frustrated at times with his reading and writing in the classroom. Unlike Kyle, his mother was more reserved and soft-spoken. She was an active participant in the school community, regularly attending the parenting class offered one afternoon a week in Spanish. In the interview, I met Kyle’s older brother, who attends a local middle school. Their interactions revealed a close, yet jovial, relationship, with some friendly teasing. If Kyle started getting too silly with his brother, his mother would calmly tell him to stop, and he would listen. Kyle also verbally played with his mother. As the interview began, he divulged some personal information about her, which she redirected with a soft laugh and a quiet “Cállate” (“Shut up”). Kyle’s fun-loving spirit appeared to be consistent both at home and at school.

Esmeralda was a quiet student with a sweet smile and a helping nature. She had a strong circle of friends in her class and enjoyed assisting others. In addition, she was very independent, and she would take initiative to complete tasks above and beyond Kadence’s expectations. Her mother mentioned Esmeralda’s baby brother, but he did not attend the interview. While Esmeralda’s mother seemed most comfortable expressing herself in Spanish, she also made efforts to communicate with Kadence in
English: when I stopped to translate a few times, she switched to English and spoke directly with Kadence. Esmeralda quietly listened to much of the interview, and she easily jumped into the conversation when she felt she had something to add to her mother’s comments.

Ryasha also presented herself as very quiet in the classroom, but she quickly caught my attention as a critical thinker. One day in the classroom, we were researching pushing and pulls, and I noticed that Ryasha was playing a game on her laptop. Even though my first assumption was that she was off-task, I paused to talk with her. She explained that she used a kid-friendly search engine to find this game, which allowed her to control variables like friction and force and observe the outcome on the objects moving on the conveyor belt in the game. Despite her quiet nature, I observed her helping other students with their reading and writing tasks on a regular basis. In the interview with her mother, Ryasha became even shyer than normal, and her mother lovingly encouraged her to participate in the conversation at various points. When she would respond very softly or unintelligibly, her mother asked her to speak up or would interpret her response for Kadence and myself.

**Defining Digital Learning Communities**

Initially, the study design positioned Flickr as the sole platform for the digital learning community. This was partially due to my previous successful experiences using Flickr in my own kindergarten classroom from 2013-2015. Flickr provided unique, dialogic elements, such as providing families with equal posting rights as the teachers who administrated the group. Because Flickr was a platform that the school had not
used before, Kadence and I hosted an orientation session in her classroom at the beginning of the study. Five of our eighteen families chose to attend, and we arranged for a translator on our staff to attend as well. In this orientation, I showcased the capabilities of Flickr to view, “fave” (what many other social media platforms call “like”), and comment on media using photos we uploaded of students during our co-taught unit on pushes and pulls. I also showed families how to upload their own media to the Flickr group. At the end of the session, families could choose to sign up for a Flickr account and join the private Flickr group using their own devices, or by using the student laptops in Kadence’s classroom. One family decided to create their account at home, and we helped the other four families—who were Spanish dominant—start to create their accounts. Due to complications (such as forgotten passwords and limited storage space on two families’ smart phones), only one family was able to complete the entire process, including joining the private Flickr group, with our assistance that day.

However, I observed within the first month of the study that many families seemed more comfortable using Class Dojo. Originally launched in 2011, this increasingly popular service is available both as a web-based client and a mobile app. Class Dojo’s website states that it is used in 90% of K-8 schools in the U.S. (Class Twist Inc., n.d.). Initially, the app offered teachers a means of sharing reports of student behavior in school with families. While the Class Dojo website paints a rosy picture of its community-building use in the classroom for additional features outlined below, it fleetingly mentions this popular points-based behavioral system, which was the app’s only feature for the first three years of its existence. With this system, teachers can
award and take away points, and families can see the number of points their child earned by logging onto the app. An audible tone from the app sounds every time a point is awarded or taken away. The website talks about “encouraging” students and helping them to make “good choices,” but a common expression I have heard teachers use defines “Dojo-ing” students as taking points away. I did use Class Dojo in my own kindergarten classroom in 2014, but I made some intentional decisions to use it less as a punishment and more as a tool to help students reflect on their choices. For example, I designed a number line that my kindergarteners read at the end of each day during a private behavior conference with my assistant or myself. Based on the number of points students earned, they received a certain color on their folder that day. However, no material awards or punishments accompanied these points and colors; I simply helped students reflect on what went well on a blue day (earning 10+ points), or what we wanted to try again tomorrow on a red day (earning 1 or fewer points).

As Class Dojo has released abundant new features, I wonder if these updates attempt to interrupt the way some teachers have turned this app into a deficit-based behavioral system. The website sells Class Dojo as “the simple way to build an amazing classroom community” by “connect[ing] teachers with students and parents” (Class Twist Inc., n.d.). These new, community-building features continue to evolve and include direct messaging between teachers and families (a feature released in January 2014); Class Story, which allows teachers to share photos and videos of classroom experiences with families (a feature released in September 2015); and the newest feature, student portfolios, which allow students to add photos and videos to their own
portfolios (a feature released in July 2016). These portfolios were not an available feature during the study. Kadence’s use of Class Story is what positions Class Dojo as a potential digital learning community. Similar to Flickr, teachers can post media on Class Story, and families can view this media and like it or comment on it. Families, however, do not have the rights to post their own media to Class Story, like they do on Flickr. Due to the features—and limitations—of both platforms and families’ previous familiarity with Class Dojo, these findings recognize both Class Dojo and Flickr as digital learning community platforms.

In the definition of terms in Chapter 1, I defined a digital learning community as a dialogic space online where traditional home/school power norms are equalized by including families as equal participants. However, I discovered the need to add a qualifying phrase at the end of this definition: “in learning spaces.” Digital learning communities are not just about the ease of communication in digital spaces, such as through direct messaging on Class Dojo; they are about the learning communities amongst families, teachers, and students formed in these spaces.

**Survey Data**

I sent home two surveys for families to complete: one at the beginning of the study in February, and another at the end of the school year in May. Families completed both surveys anonymously. Questions on these surveys gathered data on two themes: (1) communication methods and strategies families already used or would be interested in using to facilitate dialogue between home and school, and (2) existing accessibility to technology for families, which included both device and internet access.
To account for the varying levels of literacy of our families in both English and Spanish, both surveys were offered in Spanish and English, and the questions were either structured to check provided options, or to allow families to write their own responses. To honor families’ linguistic agency, all written responses in the analyzed data are offered in their original language of response, along with English translations I crafted to preserve the original language choices of the family members. See Appendices D through G for both the initial and final surveys.

Out of eighteen families in the class, nine families completed the first survey, and fourteen families returned the final survey. Because of the higher response rate—and because the anonymous nature of the surveys prevented correlating overlapping responses between the initial and final surveys—I will focus on the data from the final survey. In addition, I made changes to the final survey based on responses to the first survey as well as observations throughout the study. For example, the initial conceptualization of a digital learning community focused exclusively on Flickr, but I realized that families used elements of Class Dojo in ways that also reflected a digital learning community. Therefore, I updated questions in the survey to include both platforms. Results of the final survey will focus on three distinct themes: modes of communication, access, and self-reported participation in the digital learning community.

**Modes of communication.** Families reported on the modes of communication they used with their child’s teacher during the current school year. On average, families used at least two distinct modes of communication throughout the year. Written notes
and direct messages with the teacher on Class Dojo were the most frequently used modes of communication, with 71% of families reporting using each of these modes.

Table 4.1 summarizes these findings. (Because the question allowed for multiple responses, the percentages do not add up to 100.)

Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of Communication</th>
<th>Number of Families Using</th>
<th>Percentage of Families Using</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written notes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text messages</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Dojo messages</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flickr</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone call</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even though no survey responses indicated the use of text messaging during the school year to communicate with the teacher, Kyle’s mom admitted in her interview that she wished the teacher could use text messages, but didn’t know if she could (personal communication, May 25, 2016, lines 140-142).

In addition to these modes, one response added “parent/teacher conference” [sic] under the response for “other.” Interestingly, Kadence reported that she conferenced with all but two or three of her families, due to being unable to get in touch with them or families not showing up for scheduled conferences. No other responses were written in the “other” category, so this discrepancy between families reporting that they attended conferences could be due to the fact that it was not a pre-filled option for them to mark. The parent/teacher conferences occurred during the
required school-wide fall conferences, and Kadence wondered if the families did not think of these conferences as communication due to their mandatory nature.

Another survey question explored the preferences of digital versus paper/pencil communication. Five families preferred digital communication (36%) and two families (14%) preferred paper/pencil communication. Another seven families (50%) preferred either digital or pencil/paper communication. Table 4.2 summarizes their rationale for these responses.

Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preferred Media of Communication</th>
<th>Rationale from Surveys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Digital</td>
<td>• “Es mas facil.” (It’s easier.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper/pencil</td>
<td>• “Proof.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>• “Both because things need different ways to be communicated.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “Creo que los dos estan muy bien por que si algun dia la tecnologia no sirviera usariamos papel y lapiz otra vez.” (I think that both are good because if one day technology doesn’t work we would use paper and pencil again.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “las 2 son muy efectivas.” (Both are effective.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “Both b/c it's good to do both no matter what.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These responses overlapped with the discussions we had with our three focus families. Kyle’s mom used them both, but she recognized the convenience of digital communication: “El Class Dojo es más rápido porque lo mando y… ya voy llega en la, eso [pointing to paper Kyle is drawing on] tengo que esperar la siguiente” (“Class Dojo is faster because I send it and… it already arrives, this [pointing to paper Kyle is drawing
on] I have to wait for the following”) (personal communication, May 25, 2016, lines 38-39). Ryasha’s mom and Esmeralda’s mom also commented on the benefits of instantaneous digital communication, specifically through messages on Class Dojo, in their interviews (personal communication, May 26, 2016).

Access. The final survey assessed accessibility families had to digital learning communities through two lenses: device access and internet access. Regarding device access, responses indicated that families owned, on average, approximately two technology devices. Everyone who responded had access to at least one device, and one response listed access through four different devices. In addition, families marked the devices they used to access the internet. Everyone who responded could access the internet on at least one device. The percentages of access by device ownership and device internet accessibility are in Table 4.3. (Because the question allowed for multiple responses, the percentages do not add up to 100.)

Table 4.3

*Device Ownership and Internet Accessibility*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Device</th>
<th>Percentage of Families Owning Device</th>
<th>Percentage of Families Accessing Internet on Device</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desktop computer</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laptop computer</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cell phone</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smart phone</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tablet (such as iPad)</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-reader (such as Nook, Kindle)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A clear majority of the families—79%—reported owning a smart phone and accessing internet through this device. This finding mirrors those of Boston, Li and Snow (2012), who found that 90.3% of the low-SES middle school students in their study had access to cell phones at home, which was a higher percentage than access to computers, laptops, or tablets at home. Some of the families in the present study owned laptop computers and tablets but did not use them to access the internet. This trend positioned the families in this study as “smartphone-dependent” (Smith & Page, 2015). In addition, the 79% of families who reported owning a smartphone surpassed the proportion of American adults who owned smartphones in 2015: of the 90% who owned cell phones, only 64% reported owning a smartphone (Pew Research Center, 2015; Smith & Page, 2015). Finally, the comparison of cell phone data and smart phone data yields further questions. Following existing literature (i.e., Pew Research Center, 2015; Smith & Page, 2015), I intended a smart phone to be an internet-based phone and a cell phone to be a more basic phone that might not provide internet access (i.e., a flip phone), but 36% of families said they did indeed use a cell phone to access the internet. Families may not have understood or realized the subtle differences in these two terms. Regardless, the data showed the widespread accessibility of cellular technologies, which Ryasha’s mom commented on in her interview: “[P]eople are always on their phones so it’s more easier [sic] to communicate with technology than it is paper... I think.” (personal communication, May 26, 2016, lines 140-144)

Self-reported participation in the digital learning community. In addition, the survey asked families to report how they chose to participate in the digital learning
community. Of the fourteen families who responded, three indicated that they participated in some way, though one of those responses said that they signed up but were never added to the private group on Flickr. Only one family who said they participated in the Flickr group marked specific ways that they participated, which included posting photos, posting videos, and writing comments. No families reported writing captions, favoriting media, or looking at media. However, several elements of these self-reported pieces of data conflicted with my observations. For example, three families indicated any involvement with Flickr, but only two families’ names appeared in the group, meaning the third self-reported participant did not complete the sign-up process. No families uploaded their own videos during our study, and no families directly uploaded images to Flickr. Instead, two families sent messages to Kadence via Class Dojo’s messaging system, and families granted permission for her to post them to Flickr on their behalf. Even though no families indicated favoriting or looking at media on Flickr, the digital learning community showed evidence of both modes of interaction.

Despite these discrepancies, family response to the digital learning communities was positive. 79% of families said they benefitted from using Flickr or Class Dojo, with only one family indicating that they did not benefit from this experience and two respondents leaving this question blank. Families explained that they benefitted by being involved more than usual, seeing what was happening in class, bringing happiness to their children as they saw pictures of activities in class, being able to follow their child’s behavior through the points they earned on Class Dojo, and communicating more quickly and directly with the teacher. Similarly, 79% of families said they would use
Flickr or Class Dojo—but some families said especially Class Dojo—again. The other 21% of families skipped this question.

**Observed Participation**

In addition to the surveys, observations of how families, teachers, and students engaged in the digital learning community provided another perspective. Sources of data included interactions with all families who chose to participate in the digital learning community, along with individual interviews with the three families introduced at the beginning of this chapter. While there were general similarities among families, teachers, and students and their use of the digital learning community, each group catered their participation in the digital learning community to their unique needs and interests.

**Families.** Families participated in the digital learning communities on Flickr and Class Dojo in slightly different, though mostly similar, ways. Their participation in Class Dojo was significantly more than in Flickr. Overall, families used the digital learning community for three recurring purposes: (1) virtual participation in classroom learning, (2) communication with the teacher, and (3) dialogic knowledge exchanges.

**Virtual participation in classroom learning.** I observed families creating spaces for virtual participation in classroom learning, as represented in the digital artifacts on Flickr and Class Dojo, by viewing, liking and commenting on media, especially in Class Dojo’s Class Story feature. In interviews and other observations, the most common interaction families participated in was simply viewing the pictures. Esmeralda’s, Kyle’s, and Ryasha’s mothers all commented on the significance of this feature, with the first
two mothers checking the Class Story at least once a day. Some families also participated by liking the pictures in the Class Story. Of the eleven families who liked media on the Class Story, the number of images liked ranged from one to twenty-five. On average, these families liked nine images. Esmeralda’s family liked a total of nine pieces of media (four from her dad’s account and five from her mom’s account), Ryasha’s mom liked fifteen pieces of media, and Kyle’s mom liked eighteen pieces of media. Finally, a few families chose to comment on pictures in the Class Story. Class Dojo updated its features to allow commenting in the midst of the research, and when this feature was released Kadence noticed that parents were not yet comfortable with this feature:

Kadence: …but I’ve notice none of my parents comment. They’ll like pictures?

But it is kinda funny, they only seem to like the pictures that their kids are in?

Melissa: But they can see everyone’s right?

Kadence: But they can see everyone’s picture, yes. But um, but they have, I haven’t gotten any comments on anything yet, so… (personal communication, February 23, 2016, lines 928-952)

By the end of our study, however, some families had discovered this new commenting feature and used it. Four images in particular received comments, as summarized in Table 4.4. (Note: Student names, other than Esmeralda’s, are pseudonyms. Additionally, comments have been reproduced exactly as families chose to represent them in their original context.)
Table 4.4

*Images on Class Dojo with Family Comments*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Image</th>
<th>Kadence’s Caption</th>
<th>Family Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students lined up in the hallway, with one foot extended to make a line of feet displaying new shoes. The image is composed with the camera tilted to give the viewer a slanted feel.</td>
<td>Making the hallways look colorful in our new shoes</td>
<td>Jordan’s mom: cool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jordan’s mom: cool (same caption appears to be accidentally posted twice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are seated in a desk group of 5. All students hold pencils and are writing on a piece of paper that appears to have a box at the top for an illustration and lines below for writing.</td>
<td>Working on our final drafts for persuasive writing!</td>
<td>Eliza’s mom: Good job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Class Dojo avatar, in the center of the frame, holds the string of a heart-shaped balloons. Other heart-shaped balloons float in the rest of the frame. Printed text reads “Happy Valentine’s Day!” in blue at the top.</td>
<td>Happy Valentine’s Day – hope your weekend is full of [heart emoji] Note: This image and caption were generated automatically by Class Dojo.</td>
<td>Esmeralda’s dad: thanks, miss Kadence God blees [sic] you Eliza’s mom: Cute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two girls are seated next to each other. One is using a red crayon to color in the flower outlines printed on her paper. The other reaches for a crayon to continue coloring the turkey outline in front of her.</td>
<td>We share in Ms. Kadence’s class</td>
<td>Eliza’s mom: Nice coloring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Through these comments, families began to create dialogic, power-sharing spaces in Class Dojo. Esmeralda’s dad used his comment to express his gratitude for Kadence and shared religious blessings. Even though church and state are typically separated, Esmeralda’s dad took the initiative to use his religious beliefs to show Kadence his appreciation for her work with his daughter. Eliza’s mom posted on three images, with the comments “Good job,” “Cute,” and “Nice coloring.” Each of these comments positively reinforced the content of the image. The “Good job” and “Nice coloring” comments directly complimented student work, which positioned Eliza’s mom in the role of an encourager of students, even without being physically present in the classroom. The contribution of Jordan’s mom, though minimalistic in the context of the comment itself ("cool"), was significant in the context of the relationship between home and school. In several of our coaching conversations, Kadence worried that Jordan was not receiving adequate support at home, which she thought contributed to some behavior challenges—such as defiance—at school. Kadence perceived Jordan’s family as uninvolved and unsupportive due to some failed communication attempts, but Jordan’s mom did take the time to comment on this image in Class Dojo, even though many other families did not participate in the digital learning community in this way.

Because only two families completed the registration process required to access the Flickr group, participation in this platform was less robust. The media Kadence and I posted received a minimum of zero views (the last image I posted at the end of the school year) and a maximum of thirty views (some of the earliest images we posted from our pushes and pulls research workshop). The only comment was one I added in
April to a photo Kadence posted of a recent field trip as a model of this feature for families. In late March, Esmeralda’s family marked one video as a “fave,” Flickr’s equivalent of Class Dojo’s “like.” In this 31-second video outside near the playground, I asked Esmeralda and Elizabeth what they did to make their toy car move, as part of our research workshop on pushes and pulls. Esmeralda started explaining what they tested when Eliza stepped in and demonstrated their test on video by rolling a toy car down the sloping concrete, which served as a ramp. While Esmeralda, Elizabeth, and Eliza ran after the car, Annabelle stayed behind to explain the role force and gravity played in the test. Kadence recalled, “Esmeralda did tell me on Class Dojo that her... parents and her mom. They only like pictures that she’s in” (personal communication, April 19, 2016, lines 68-69), and this pattern held true for Flickr as well.

**Communication with the teacher.** When families wished to communicate efficiently with the teacher, Class Dojo filled this need. As reported in Table 4.1, the messenger feature on Class Dojo, which allowed the teacher and families to send direct messages to each other, was extremely popular with families. Esmeralda’s mom mentioned in her interview that while she herself did not use this messaging system, her husband did when he “texted” to ask questions. Even though direct text messaging was not a communication method Kadence used with her families, the Class Dojo messaging system mirrored the feel of a texting platform. While Esmeralda’s mom explained that paper/pencil communication was easier for students to take home, she noted that digital messaging was easier while she was at work. Another benefit of messaging on Class Dojo for Esmeralda’s mom was “no se me olvida/I won’t forget” (personal...
communication, May 26, 2016, line 66). Even though Ryasha’s mom admitted she did not realize that messaging was available on Class Dojo, she said that she had to send letters several times and would have preferred messaging because it is faster (lines 52-56).

In addition, Class Dojo hosts another popular feature that allows teachers to keep families informed of their child’s behavior at school by giving and taking away points from students based on desired classroom behaviors. Families can log onto the app to see how many points their child earned that day. Kyle’s mom said she frequently used Class Dojo to see how Kyle was behaving, though neither Esmeralda’s nor Ryasha’s mom talked about using this feature. While virtual participation in classroom learning seemed to be the most beneficial aspect of the digital learning community for families, efficient communication was another benefit not to be overlooked.

While efficient digital communication was convenient, the families also used it as a power-sharing space through advocacy for their children. In all three interviews, families commented on the importance of communication to stay aware and informed. Esmeralda’s mom expressed the importance of knowing about classroom learning so that she could help her daughter complete at-home assignments, such as projects. A few days prior to our interview, Esmeralda had failed to mention that she had a project due the next day, which left her mother scrambling to support her daughter’s success on the project. She suggested that if she had received this information earlier, such as through Class Dojo’s messaging system, she could have supported Esmeralda more. Ryasha’s mother also discussed the importance of knowing what is going on in class,
especially related to her daughter’s progress in between report cards. Kyle’s mom wanted to know not only what was going on with her son’s learning but also with his behavior so that she could support his making good choices at school. This communication contributed to an awareness that allowed families to act as advocates for their children at home, in situations such as completing school work to the teacher’s standards, and in school.

**Dialogic knowledge exchanges.** Conversations within and around the digital learning community resulted in dialogic knowledge exchanges. For Ryasha and her mom, the digital learning community acted as a catalyst for conversations that allowed for dialogic knowledge exchanges between mother and daughter. When I logged onto Flickr to demonstrate the interface to both Ryasha and her mom, I asked Ryasha if she remembered something she really enjoyed learning in class to see if we had any pictures documenting that learning. Her mother immediately responded, “You really liked making the birdhouse” (personal communication, May 26, 2016, line 231). A few seconds later, we scrolled down and found the pictures and videos from the pushes and pulls research workshop.

Melissa: Umm… which group were you in when you guys were making theeeeee, the things for outside. Do you remember who you were working with?

Kadence: Do you remember the cars that we did? To see how fast they could go? Do you remember who was in your group? [3 sec pause] No?

Melissa: You don’t remember? Sooo, if you recall, here were some of the… if you click on those, it’s a video, some of the, um. The tracks you guys were
experimenting with? To, to see about force and friction and all those things? I don’t, was this your group? When you made the track with the walls? Yeah it was?

Ryasha: Mmhmm! [playing video] Me?

Kadence: There’s you!

Melissa: Yep, there you are!

Ryasha’s mom: [laugh] Are you testing?

Kadence: Mmhmm.

Melissa: Yeah! So that’s cool cause you can post videos and stuff like that so that. Your mom could see what you were doing testing the, the car. So. All kinds of fun things. (personal communication, May 26, 2016, lines 241-255)

Ryasha was typically a quiet student, and in the interview she became even more reserved than normal. Even though she only took one verbal turn in these examples, the digital learning community provided the context for rich meaning-making that united Ryasha’s experience in class and conversations she had with her mother at home.

The most profound example of dialogic knowledge exchanges surfaced in the interview with Esmeralda’s mom. Near the end of our time together, I asked her if she thought it was important or not for families to be able to post pictures and videos for others in the class to view. She replied, “[Y]o pienso que sí, es importante porque hací ya conocemos deeee otras culturas de las personas que tal vez nostros no lo hacemos, como mexicanos es diferente? Yo pienso que sí. Es importante” (“I think that yes, it is important because we already know about other cultures of people that maybe don’t do...
“it like us, like how Mexicans are different? I think so. It is important”) (personal communication, May 26, 2016, lines 353-358). I then asked if there was something from her culture that she wished the school knew. She explained:


There are many things that are different. For example in Mexico, it’s different. 

They celebrate the Day of the Child? It’s April 30. And here we don’t do it. There the most important thing is January 6. It’s when the children are given toys and everything. And here it’s not done. Of the Magi Kings. And there almost none of December 24? It’s not. There are many different cultures. (personal communication, May 26, 2016, lines 363-386)

After listening to Esmeralda’s mom, Kadence admitted she did not know about either one of those holidays. I myself had only heard about el Día del Niño in late April from an email listserv I joined as a part of NCTE. I was able to tell Esmeralda’s mom about el Día de los Niños y el Día de los Libros (The Day of the Children and the Day of the Books), which author Pat Mora founded twenty years ago to honor el Día del Niño in Mexico by reading books in English and Spanish in the United States. Because I learned about this day only about a week before April 30, I organized a simple recognition of the holiday by allowing teachers to sign up for me to come read one of Pat Mora’s bilingual books in
their classrooms. Talking with Esmeralda’s mom made me realize the importance of organizing events in future years that involved families in the celebration of *el Día de los Niños y el Día de los Libros*.

As our interview drew to a close, I reflected on the importance of dialogic knowledge exchanges between home and school.

Melissa: Y esto es mi proyecto! Porque yo creo que las familias? Tienen tanto información. (And this is my project! Because I believe that the families? Have so much information.)

Esmeralda’s mom: Mmhmm

Melissa: Queee podemos, um, compartir? Con la escuela. Pero muchas veces la escuela? Es... la... es el lugar? Que tiene la información. Sobre... umm... you know, la, um, aprendizo y cosas? Y es como escuela a familia. Pero necesitamos la familia a escuela la información los, los dos. (That we can, um, share? With the school. But many times the school? Is... the... is the place? That has the information. About... um... you know, the, um, learning and things? And it’s like school to family. But we need the family to school information, both.)

Esmeralda’s mom: Mmhmm, los dos. (Mmhmm, both.) (personal communication, May 26, 2016, lines 444-449)

Esmeralda’s mom knew she had much knowledge and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) to share with the school; all that she needed was a space to speak and be heard.
Teachers. For the teachers--both Kadence as the classroom teacher and myself as the literacy coach—both Flickr and Class Dojo were significant in the development of digital learning communities. I introduced Flickr to Kadence in the second half of the school year, and Kadence had been using Class Dojo since the beginning of the school year for two main purposes: (1) using the behavior management system to monitor student behavior and share this information with parents, and (2) using the direct messaging system so families could ask her questions and she could send information to the entire group with ease and efficiency. When Class Story was developed and released as an additional feature of Class Dojo after the school year began in September 2015, she also used this feature. We each participated more in the platform with which we were more familiar. For example, Kadence posted photos and videos to the Class Story media stream on Class Dojo several times a week, and she posted thirteen pieces of media on Flickr. I used Class Story to view media without posting any, and I posted 45 pieces of media on Flickr, mostly from our co-taught unit on pushes and pulls. On both platforms, we used the digital learning community for three purposes: artifacts, windows, and invitations.

**Digital learning communities as artifacts.** As educators, the primary use of the digital learning community focused on creating visual artifacts of students’ learning. Most of these artifacts centered on classroom life. We posted photos of students working on reading and writing, conducting investigations and taking notes, performing in the grade level Christmas play, and enjoying adventures on field trips. We posted
videos of students testing principles of force and motion using toy cars; exploring properties of magnets; and explaining their thinking and new understandings.

Because we used these artifacts to document learning, we also included captions with visual media to explain its context. Sometimes we used the built-in commenting feature on the Class Story and Flickr platforms, which placed text below the media. Kadence also used the Snapchat app to create a superimposed caption on top of the image, which she then uploaded to Class Story or Flickr. In one early memo, I began to wonder how to make linguistic decisions in these captions:

When I post, should I translate my posts into Spanish? Should I leave them in English only and watch how the families construct meaning? Will families choose to post in their home language once they see an authority figure from the school using this language? (Memo, February 16, 2016)

Despite my initial concern, I wrote all of my captions in English, as did Kadence. Kadence did not speak conversational Spanish, and I wanted the digital learning community to be something she felt confident maintaining independently. All of the comments families posted on our media were also in English.

While many of the artifacts documented learning from a standards-based orientation, I also recognized the need to validate students’ experiences at school beyond those limits. In our fifth coaching conversation, Kadence began talking about how much she enjoyed watching her kids at recess because “they show their true selves” (line 2044). As she reflected on their creative ability during recess, she showed me a picture on her phone:
Kadence: Like, I don’t know, I think like... that’s when they become like... the most creative, and that’s when like they... and then this was the other thing that they created. It was in the dirt as well, they drew a heart with an S? And then they all put their names

Melissa: Awww.

Kadence: and handprints and stuff inside of it.

Melissa: That’s sweet.

Kadence: Right? And I’m just like...

Melissa: You should put those on Flickr. Their families will love those.

Kadence: I should have. I should have.

I don’t know why I didn’t.

Melissa: You can still do it if you want to.

Kadence: So more kids joined in that one.

Melissa: Awwww.

Kadence: Yeah. And I just like... I, I, like I said, I think that that’s when they like become the most creative and they... like, they’re learning, even though they don’t realize they’re learning, they are! (personal communication, April 19, 2016, lines 2078-2093)

Kadence recognized that this photo captured a treasured example of her students’ creative, true selves, but at the time she did not think about sharing the photo with the digital learning community. In the final interviews, all of the families expressed interest in knowing more about the personal, day-to-day experiences of their children.
Capturing and sharing moments such as this one on the playground, which may seem relatively small and fleeting, are potential candidates for the type of communications these families desired.

In addition to artifacts of classroom learning, we used the digital learning community to collect learning artifacts our own personal lives. During the life cycle unit, we posted pictures of living things that were important in our own lives (Figure 4.2) and shared them with the class. (Note: Kadence’s picture with Champ has been modified from its original version to conceal her identity by blurring her face.)

![Figure 4.2. Living things in teachers’ lives.](image)

The students expressed great interest in these images and launched a series of questions, especially about one of Kadence’s dog. They wanted to know how old he was, how long Kadence had him, if that was the only dog she had, and other similar questions. These inquiries exemplified how posting artifacts from the teacher’s personal life outside of school contributed to equitable, power-sharing spaces. In typical home/school relationships, most of the power lies in the school. Transcending
these physical and symbolic boundaries interrupts some of this traditional power structure. To create spaces where students and families feel comfortable and valued in sharing their lived learning experiences, teachers must also share similarly of their own learning identities outside of school.

**Digital learning communities as windows.** A recurring in vivo code surfaced from conversations with Kadence: using digital learning communities to “see into [students’] home life situation[s]” (personal communication, February 11, 2016, line 135). She viewed this window as one-directional, allowing her to see how school influenced students’ homes: “I just wanna see what’s going on at home, what’s... what are they taking from school and taking into their home and things like that” (personal communication, February 11, 2016, lines 248-249). During a later conversation, a colleague entered Kadence’s classroom, and Kadence began explaining Flickr to her.

Kadence: OK, it’s like, it’s like... Class Dojo but without the behavior part. You know how we can post pictures?

Colleague: Mmhmm

Kadence: Well this is we can post pictures and parents can post pictures too. So that way you can get... home/school communication and you can—and you can see

Colleague: A seesaw text!

[all laugh]

Kadence: what they’re doing at home, yeah. (personal communication, March 24, 2016, lines 483-489)
Because no families uploaded images themselves to the Flickr group, seeing what families and students did at home was extremely limited. Pictures of two families’ dogs and Ryasha’s photo of her baby brother, which she sent on Class Dojo’s messenger, did provide small windows. During our final interview, Kadence stated her interest in trying Flickr again with future classes, continuing to express her desire to see what students are doing at home.

**Digital learning communities as invitations.** Finally, we used the digital learning community to invite families to share in learning beyond the four walls of the classroom. During the life cycle unit at the end of the school year, Kadence noticed students were taking their own initiative to bring physical artifacts from home to school, including living caterpillars. After solving the mystery of how caterpillars kept magically appearing in the classroom, we invited students to share animals and habitats they see at home and other spaces outside of school via digital media, instead of risking the lives of actual living things. Families seemed to participate more actively in Class Dojo, so Kadence sent a message home on Class Dojo’s messaging system asking families to share photos of important living things at home, and she asked permission to share these photos on Flickr so that everyone in the digital learning community could see them. She received photos from two students via Class Dojo’s messenger, and both images featured family dogs (Figure 4.3).
Figure 4.3. Living things in students’ lives.

On the last full day of school, we viewed the Flickr photostream of living things important in our lives together as a class and noticed that all of the contributions—including Kadence’s and my own—were of dogs. This commonality sparked lively conversation as students learned more about each other and made connections about their own pets, even if they did not have a photo to share.

Kadence also extended invitations for students to participate in the digital learning community as a form of group inquiry. During one of our after school meetings, we were planning the life cycle unit and how to integrate the digital learning community into this unit when a student brought Kadence a feather she found.

Kadence: What’d you find?

Student: A feather!

Kadence: You found a feather? Do you know what kind of feather it is.

Student: No.
Kadence: No? Are you on Flickr? The thing? Can you try and... see if you can take a picture of it and get your mama to send it to me on Dojo or something.


In this interaction, Kadence situates learning as a process driven by curiosity about the world around us which does not seek one universal truth or action, but rather a community to process new information together. Because this type of problem-posing education goes against more traditional banking methods of education (Freire, 1970) commonly seen in schools, Kadence needed to issue explicit invitations for students to engage in this kind of learning.

**Students.** In addition to families and teachers, students themselves participated independently in the digital learning community. This finding admittedly surprised me, as I had mistakenly made an assumption that the students would be too young to engage in this digital learning community with independent identities not tied to teacher or family involvement. Common uses of the digital learning community included (1) consuming and producing digital media and (2) building social connections.

**Consuming and producing digital media.** In the family interviews, each of the students—Ryasha, Kyle, and Esmeralda—excitedly commented on viewing the pictures, especially on Class Dojo. Esmeralda knew exactly which media on Flickr her family favored, even when her mother did not remember participating in the digital learning community in this way. When talking about the images on Class Dojo, Ryasha spoke up and said “I looked at all of them” (personal communication, May 26, 2016, line 279). Kyle was the only student who mentioned participating in the digital learning
community on Class Dojo by looking at the points earned for behavior, though he admitted that he looked at the pictures before he looked at the points he or his older brother earned.

Through the interviews, I discovered ways that several of the students took the initiative to interact with media beyond simply viewing the posts. Both Ryasha and Esmeralda admitted they themselves had clicked “like” on at least one photo on Class Dojo, specifically the Valentine’s Day image (Figure 4.4).

![Happy Valentine’s Day!](image)

**Figure 4.4.** Class Dojo Valentine’s Day.

My initial surprise at the students’ confessions that they, not their families, participated in the digital learning community in this way uncovered an assumption I had made about these young students’ abilities to function independently in the digital learning community. By showing this initiative and demonstrating their abilities, Ryasha and Esmeralda simultaneously interrupted my assumption and created a power-sharing space for themselves as equal participants in the digital learning community.
With regard to producing digital media, Ryasha and Kyle both expressed interest in this capability. Kyle did not post any media himself, but he said if he could, he would want to post pictures of his older brother cooking and helping out with other household chores. Meanwhile, Ryasha learned how to send a picture of her baby brother to Kadence using Class Dojo’s messaging platform when neither her mother nor her teacher knew about this technical capability. Ryasha explained how she discovered this feature.

Melissa: How did you learn how to send pictures on there.
Ryasha: It was a camera button, I took a picture and then it just popped up.
Melissa: And it just popped up on there? And were you using like a computer?
Or a phone? Or--
Ryasha: A phone.
Melissa: A phone? Your phone? [Ryasha shakes her head] Mom’s phone?
Ryasha’s mom: She probably had my, my phone is her phone. (personal communication, May 26, 2016, lines 38-43)

In this example, Ryasha demonstrated her identity as a digital native. She read the camera icon and knew the meaning behind it, so she synthesized her previous experience with technology to infer that this platform would behave in a similar way. Through this synthesis, Ryasha participated in the digital learning community as with equal power to other families and her teacher.
Building social connections. Two students commented on ways they used the digital learning community to build social connections with each other. Because Ryasha became shy during the interview, her mother began speaking for her about the importance of a digital community or network: “my daughter, um... likes her friends to know things she’s doing at home so I think that would be a good way for her to communicate with her friends and they’ll wanna know what she’s doing” (personal communication, May 26, 2016, lines 356-359). She saw this capacity of Flickr for all members of the community to post and view media as a benefit when compared to Class Dojo, which allows all members to view media that only the teacher can post.

Kyle shared multiple examples of social connections he built through the digital learning community. When I asked him what he would want to post or what he liked seeing other people posting, he immediately commented, “Eh, when, when Elizabeth showed her chihuahuas? Um, I really want to buy some” (personal communication, May 25, 2016, line 408), and he then talked about needing to save up money to buy the dogs. In addition, Kyle mentioned two times he used the digital learning community as a replacement for being a physical part of the classroom community. While Kadence and I showed Kyle’s mom how to write comments on photos in Class Dojo, Kyle attempted to enter the conversation with a memory about going to the doctor and being too scared to go on the field trip. The other people in the interview (including Kadence, his older brother, his mother, a translator, and myself) did not take up his entry attempt, so he tried again later when I asked him about his favorite part about Class Dojo.
Kyle: I like it that you see pictures when I’m not on the field trip.

Melissa: You like when you see—so you couldn’t go on the field trip?

Kyle: Two times. What? Or was it.

Kyle’s brother: One time.

Kyle: Oh yeah, yeah, it was, um, when they wented to [a local college] I didn’t went, and then um... and... that one I didn’t went cause I was too scared.

Kadence: Yeah.

Melissa: You were too scared? Well I’m sorry you were so scared. But you liked being able to see the pictures? Why did you like seeing the pictures?

Kyle: I like seeing the pictures because I think they’re real.

Melissa: You think they’re real? So it kinda helped you feel like it was real?

Kyle’s brother: And... memories.

(personal communication, May 25, 2016, lines 367-378)

When Kyle was unable to participate in two separate field trips, he turned to the digital learning community on Class Dojo to simulate being there for “real.” His brother identified the power of using these images to add to collective memory. When other students talked about experiences on the field trip, Kyle could use his reading of these images to situate himself in the experience and participate in this discourse as well.

**Visual Grammars Analysis**

In this study, I was particularly interested in how the media that families, teachers, and students created would manifest power through the use of Visual Grammars. While Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) include many graphics explaining their
theory, they do not provide any system to help organize comparative analysis of multiple images. McDonald (2012) began to construct such a system, though she isolated the three systems (representational meanings, interactional meanings, and composition) into three separate tables. Building their original work and McDonald’s (2012) application of Visual Grammars to analyze images in children’s literature, I designed a Visual Grammars Analysis Tool (Appendix H) to fill this gap.

To implement this Visual Grammars Analysis Tool, I will look closely at three images of significance for the families, teachers, and students involved in this study. For the families, they composed and shared two images for the life science unit, which Kadence posted on Flickr for the rest of the class to see. Because Elizabeth’s dogs came up in Kyle’s interview, I will analyze this image to represent the families’ power manifestation. For the teachers, Kadence served as a curator of moments in the classroom. In this role, she decided what to document and what to share with families, which is an inherent position of power. Feedback from surveys and interviews indicated that families transacted most with images depicting their child at school. Because our data also showed that families interacted with the images on Class Dojo more than Flickr, I scrolled through the Class Story and found Kadence’s images that had the highest number of documented interactions through “liking” or commenting on images. The most likes on any single image was nine, and two images earned nine likes: one of the class Christmas play, and another of the students wearing new shoes donated by a local church. A different photo of the new shoes event solicited a comment from Jordan’s mother, which was significant because Kadence perceived her as an
uninvolved, minimally supportive parent. Therefore, to represent how the teacher manifested power by documenting learning experiences in the classroom, I will analyze the shoe image that Jordan’s mother found significant. For the students, the Valentine’s Day image Class Dojo generated and posted on the Class Story was extremely powerful. Ryasha and Esmeralda both admitted to clicking “like” on this image themselves without adult assistance, which indicated their notable interest in this image.

Analysis of “Elizabeth’s Dog” image. In this image (Figure 4.5), Elizabeth sits on a gray painted step, grinning as she embraces two smiling blonde Chihuahuas. Behind her is a plain white door, which matches the white siding that extend beyond it. A yellow cord slips under the door and snakes to the left, out of the frame. On Flickr, this image received three views.

Figure 4.5. Elizabeth’s dogs.
A complete analysis of the Visual Grammars evident in Figure 4.5 follows in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

**Visual Grammars Analysis of “Elizabeth’s Dogs”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Image Title/Description:</strong> “Elizabeth’s Dogs”</th>
<th><strong>Representational Meanings</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>“The people/characters, places and things depicted in the image” (Kress &amp; van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 131)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants</strong></td>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objects, human/animal characters, parts of natural world</td>
<td>2 dogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Door</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yellow cord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vector</strong></td>
<td>Horizontal vector (as defined by lines drawn by steps, door, and siding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sight line that is horizontal, vertical, diagonal, curvy, visible, or invisible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interactional Processes</strong></td>
<td>All are connected by physical contact—Elizabeth sits on the steps as she hugs the two dogs in her lap.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions among and between participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shapes</strong></td>
<td>Mostly straight shapes (front steps, doorway and window); some curves from the yellow cord, Elizabeth’s torso curving into a hug with the dogs, and the dog on the right’s body curving down into a blurry tail, which may have been wagging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circular/curved (natural) or straight-edged (artificially made)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Symbol</strong></td>
<td>Door, step, and dogs could symbolize home for Elizabeth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objects, actions, or ideas representing something else</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Color</strong></td>
<td>White stands out in this image in the front door, siding, and dogs. The prominence of this color gives the image a light, playful feel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can connect with symbol</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interactive Meanings</strong></td>
<td>“Communicat[ing] with each other through images” (Kress &amp; van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 131)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact</strong></td>
<td>Both Elizabeth and the dog on the left demand the viewer’s attention by gazing directly at the camera. The dog on the right offers as it looks slightly to the right of the viewer’s gaze.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How participant/viewer gaze interact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- **Offer**: participant does not gaze at viewer, viewer chooses to look at participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How close/far participants are from the viewer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- <strong>Impersonal</strong>: long shot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- <strong>Social</strong>: medium shot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- <strong>Intimate/Personal</strong>: close-up shot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social/medium shot

| Attitude |
| Point of view and perspective |
| - **Subjectivity**: power relationship between viewer and participants |
| - **Involvement**: frontal angle |
| - **Detachment**: oblique angle |
| - **Low viewing angle**: participant power, looking down on viewer |
| - **High angle**: viewer power, looking down on participant |
| - **Eye level**: equality of power |
| - **Objectivity**: no point of view/power relationship (i.e., maps, charts, graphs) |
| - **Action orientation**: frontal angle |
| - **Knowledge orientation**: top-down angle |

Subjectivity
- Involvement through frontal angle
- Eye level point of view equalizing power between participant and viewer

Objectivity: N/A

| Modality |
| Degree of realism; high modality is more natural/real (strong color and lines), low modality is less so (soft color and lines) or too much so (exaggerated color and lines) |

High modality (image depicts reality)

| Composition |
| How people, places, things, and relationships are positioned within an image |

| Information Value |
| Arrangement of participants |
| - **Given/new**: known/familiar typically on left, unknown/new on right |
| - **Ideal/real**: ideal information at the top of the image, reality at the bottom |
| - **Center/margins**: most important information at center, secondary information near edges |

- **Given/new**: Elizabeth is the left-most living participant, and the viewer meets her two dogs by looking from left to right in the picture.
- **Ideal/real**: This image is more strongly weighted at the bottom (real), with both the presence of participants and the darker color of the steps. The predominately
white upper part of the image (ideal) creates a sort of “sky.”
- Center/margins: The living participants—Elizabeth and her dogs—are clearly situated at the center. The margins contain generic visuals that give a sense of place (like the siding).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salience</th>
<th>Part of image that grabs viewer’s attention the most (size, focus, contrast, human figures, animated participants, foreground or background, and color)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The center of the image, with Elizabeth and her dogs, grabs the viewer the most because of the contract with the white door and siding and the gray steps. Additionally, they are the living participants amidst non-living elements like the door, steps, and siding.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framing</th>
<th>Creates a boundary and focuses the viewer’s attention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This framing encourages the viewer to focus on Elizabeth and her dogs and eliminates extraneous information outside of these participants.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this analysis, the photographer’s strategic decisions exemplify the manifestation of power. In the representational meanings, the photographer captures a recurring horizontal vector, as seen in the natural surroundings behind Elizabeth. The image documents a close interactional process between Elizabeth and her dogs, and the light color in the background transfers a feeling of lightness to the viewer. With regard to interactive meanings, Elizabeth and one of her dogs issue a clear demand to the viewer to return their gazes. The medium social distance allows the viewer to see all of Elizabeth and her dogs without feeling too far away. Most significantly, the photographer chose to assume an eye-level angle with Elizabeth. Since Elizabeth is seated and most likely any photographer (be it an older sibling or an adult family member) would be taller than her, this decision seems to be intentional. The simplicity
of the composition—positioning Elizabeth and her dogs in the center and not offering distracting details in the margins—directly focuses the viewer on the living participants.

**Analysis of “New Shoes” image.** In this image (Figure 4.6), students line up in the hallway, with one foot extended to make a line of feet displaying new shoes. The tilted camera angle gives the viewer a slanted feel. On Class Dojo, this image received five likes and two comments (though both identical comments were by Jordan’s mom, which may be evidence of an accidental double-posting).

![New Shoes](image)

*Figure 4.6. New shoes.*

A complete analysis of the Visual Grammars evident in Figure 4.6 follows in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6

**Visual Grammars Analysis of “New Shoes”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image Title/Description: “New Shoes”</th>
<th>Representational Meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

145
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>“The people/characters, places and things depicted in the image”</strong> (Kress &amp; van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 131)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vector</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interactional Processes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shapes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Symbol</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Color</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interactive Meanings</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Distance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How close/far participants are from the viewer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| • Impersonal: long shot  
• Social: medium shot  
• Intimate/Personal: close-up shot | | • Detachment through oblique angle  
• High angle: viewer has power, looking down slightly on students |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modality</th>
<th>Information Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree of realism; high modality is more natural/real (strong color and lines), low modality is less so (soft color and lines) or too much so (exaggerated color and lines)</td>
<td>Arrangement of participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| | • Given/new: known/familiar typically on left, unknown/new on right  
• Ideal/real: ideal information at the top of the image, reality at the bottom  
• Center/margins: most important information at center, secondary information near edges |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How people, places, things, and relationships are positioned within an image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High modality (image depicts reality)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Objectivity:** N/A
From this analysis, the teacher’s strategic decisions as the documenter of student learning experiences emerge. In the representational meanings, Kadence chose to tilt the camera, which creates a diagonal vector. The demand/offer portion of the interactional meanings revealed that she did not request that students face the camera for the image—or, if she did, most chose not to follow this request. In fact, the students who offer demands stand out amidst their peers, who offer instead and avoid direct eye contact. She chose a social, or medium, distance to compose the shot, and she also created detachment through the oblique angle, and bestowed power upon the viewer from the higher viewing angle. While Kadence is naturally taller than the students she teaches, she chose to use this vantage point—which gives herself and any other viewers of her perspective power. Finally, she manifests power through composition by
interrupting traditional information value with the reversal of the given/new locations in this slanted image.

**Analysis of “Class Dojo Valentine’s Day” image.** In this image (Figure 4.4 above), the Class Dojo avatar, in the center of the frame, holds the string of a heart-shaped balloons. Other heart-shaped balloons float in the rest of the frame. Text printed in blue at the top reads “Happy Valentine’s Day!” On Class Dojo, this image received seven likes and two comments.

A complete analysis of the Visual Grammars evident in Figure 4.4 follows in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7

**Visual Grammars Analysis of “Class Dojo Valentine’s Day”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Image Title/Description:</strong> “Class Dojo Valentine’s Day”</th>
<th><strong>Representational Meanings</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The people/characters, places and things depicted in the image” (Kress &amp; van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 131)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants</strong>&lt;br&gt;<em>Objects, human/animal characters, parts of natural world</em></td>
<td>Class Dojo avatar&lt;br&gt;Heart-shaped balloons&lt;br&gt;“Happy Valentine’s Day!” text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vector</strong>&lt;br&gt;<em>Sight line that is horizontal, vertical, diagonal, curvy, visible, or invisible</em></td>
<td>Vertical, curvy vectors from balloon strings&lt;br&gt;Horizontal vector from text at top of page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interactional Processes</strong>&lt;br&gt;<em>Actions among and between participants</em></td>
<td>The Class Dojo avatar is holding onto a balloon.&lt;br&gt;The vertical, curvy vectors from the balloon strings give the viewer a sense of upward motion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shapes</strong>&lt;br&gt;<em>Circular/curved (natural) or straight-edged (artificially made)</em></td>
<td>More circular/curved shapes (the balloons, their curved strings, the avatar itself)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Symbol</strong>&lt;br&gt;<em>Objects, actions, or ideas representing something else</em></td>
<td>Class Dojo avatar represents the Class Dojo platform&lt;br&gt;Hearts represent love/Valentine’s Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Color</strong></td>
<td>Red/pink as colors representing love/Valentine’s Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Can connect with symbol</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interactive Meanings**

“Communicat[ing] with each other through images” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 131)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Contact</strong></th>
<th>The Class Dojo avatar faces the viewer and demands a return gaze.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How participant/viewer gaze interact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Demand</strong>: participant gazes at viewer, demands return gaze</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Offer</strong>: participant does not gaze at viewer, viewer chooses to look at participant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Social Distance</strong></th>
<th>Impersonal/long shot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How close/far participants are from the viewer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Impersonal</strong>: long shot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Social</strong>: medium shot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Intimate/Personal</strong>: close-up shot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Attitude** | Subjectivity:  |
| --- |  |
| Point of view and perspective | • Involvement through frontal angle |
| • **Subjectivity**: power relationship between viewer and participants | • Eve level for equality of power |
| • **Involvement**: frontal angle |  |
| • **Detachment**: oblique angle | Objectivity: N/A |
| • **Low viewing angle**: participant power, looking down on viewer |  |
| • **High angle**: viewer power, looking down on participant |  |
| • **Eye level**: equality of power |  |
| • **Objectivity**: no point of view/power relationship (i.e., maps, charts, graphs) |  |
| • **Action orientation**: frontal angle |  |
| • **Knowledge orientation**: top-down angle |  |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Modality</strong></th>
<th>Lower modality (bold colors, exaggerated curves on Class Dojo avatar and balloon strings compared to reality)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree of realism; high modality is more natural/real (strong color and lines), low modality is less so (soft color and lines) or too much so (exaggerated color and lines)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| <strong>Composition</strong> | How people, places, things, and relationships are positioned within an image |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Value</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arrangement of participants</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Given/new:</strong> known/familiar typically on left, unknown/new on right</td>
<td>• <strong>Given/new:</strong> From left to right, the first participants the viewer sees are the heart-shaped balloons (given, especially since the viewer knows the holiday is Valentine’s Day), and the “new”—the Class Dojo avatar—is introduced slightly to the right of these participants, but still slightly to the left in the overall image.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Ideal/real:</strong> ideal information at the top of the image, reality at the bottom</td>
<td>• <strong>Ideal/real:</strong> The Class Dojo avatar is located towards the bottom/real portion of the image, with the balloons floating toward the ideal/upper portion of the image. The “Happy Valentine’s Day!” text also inhabits the ideal portion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Center/margins:</strong> most important information at center, secondary information near edges</td>
<td>• <strong>Center/margins:</strong> The Class Dojo avatar and the balloon he holds are centrally located. Extra balloons, which support the theme but do not provide new information, are in the margins.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Salience                               |                                                                                                                                   |
| **Part of image that grabs viewer’s attention the most (size, focus, contrast, human figures, animated participants, foreground or background, and color)** | The animated figures, especially the Class Dojo avatar and the heart-shaped balloons, grab the viewer’s attention with their bold colors and lines, especially compared with the pastel-colored background. The deep blue text across the top also attracts the viewer because other than the purple balloon strings, this is the highest-contrast color in the image. |

| Framing                                 |                                                                                                                                   |
| **Creates a boundary and focuses the viewer’s attention**                                                                           | The image uses different-sized balloons (such as the largest balloon in the bottom-right corner and the smallest balloons to the left and right of the Class Dojo avatar) to create a depth of field that frames the Class Dojo avatar. Using the frame to cut off pieces of all the balloons near the margins shows the viewer that these participants are not the most significant in the image. |
In this analysis, several significant differences from the previous two images analyzed emerge. First of all, the Class Dojo app generated this image automatically; therefore, the viewers of this image in this context (the families, teachers, and students) had no personal connection with the producer of this image. With the representational meanings, symbolic meanings played a clearer role in this image than the two previous images: the hearts contextualized the Valentine’s Day temporal setting of this post, and the Class Dojo avatar represented the app that families, teachers, and students were familiar with using. In addition, the vertical vectors created by the curved strings of the balloons allowed the viewer to perceive an upward motion. With the interactional meanings, the Class Dojo avatar demanded interaction with the viewer, though this was the least personal shot of the images analyzed. This long shot allowed the balloons to create the sense of upward motion, but it also reminded the viewer that the avatar was not a living creature with personal connections to the viewer. The clearest contrast between this image and the previous two lay in modality: the bold colors and exaggerated curved lines portrayed a lower modality than other reality-capturing images. This difference is significant, especially considering families’ preference for images that show their own students. Not only are no students included in this image, but also the content clearly is computer-generated and not real. However, this image left an impact on students like Ryasha and Esmeralda, and perhaps its lower modality reminded them of cartoons and other animated visuals they associate with enjoyment. With regard to composition, the creator of this image utilized the real space to
introduce the participants (the Class Dojo avatar and some balloons) and the ideal space to send a “Happy Valentine’s Day” message.

One shortcoming of Visual Grammars analysis is its lack of consideration of any audience other than the specific viewer who consumes the image at a specific point in time. This analysis, for example, comes from my own perspective, which is inherently biased. However, Ryasha did comment on the “Class Dojo Valentine’s Day” image in our interview. When I asked why she liked that image in particular, she specifically mentioned the hearts, the balloons, and the green Class Dojo avatar, since her favorite color was green. Each of the elements significant to Ryasha was also significant in the completed Visual Grammars analysis, especially the representational meanings.

**Barriers to Participation**

Barriers to participation included device limitations as well as digital learning community platform limitations, such as misunderstandings or lack of awareness of how to use these platforms.

**Device limitations.** Two forms of device limitations surfaced while engaging in the digital learning community: device limitations at home and device limitations at school. At home, the most significant device limitation was insufficient storage on families’ smart phones to download and run the Flickr app. Two students shared this information with Kadence and me soon after the informational meeting that launched the Flickr digital learning community. In an early reflection, I commented on some of the accessibility assumptions I made:
I also uncovered another assumption I had made--two of the Spanish-speaking families I interacted with said that they do have smartphones with internet access, but both have no free memory. I hadn’t thought about this complication--I was so focused on internet access that I didn’t think about other factors that might complicate access to Flickr! (Weekly Participant Reflection, February 17, 2016)

Kyle also announced that his mother’s limited storage space forced her to choose between keeping the Class Dojo app on her phone and deleting it to download the Flickr app. She decided to keep the Class Dojo app because it allowed her to send direct messages to the teacher.

Another example of device limitation occurred in the classroom. I envisioned the digital learning community being an interactive trail of learning artifacts in the classroom as well, but I ran into a significant obstacle: the security settings on the student laptops blocked access to Flickr. In this 1:1 device setting in the classroom, these laptops were students’ only options as technology tools, so they had no means to view or post media to Flickr at school. While Kadence and I recognized that we should have done more whole-class work with media on Flickr, this mode of access would require dependence on the classroom teacher and limit the individual autonomy of students to view and create media at school.

**Digital learning community platform limitations.** Limitations of the digital learning community platforms themselves affected their use. Issues arose from
platform limitations of Class Dojo, platform limitations of Flickr, and user limitations with families not always being aware of all the capabilities of either platform.

**Class Dojo limitations.** While more families who chose to participate in the digital learning community did so through Class Dojo, there were a few issues that limited its use. Esmeralda’s mom told us at the end of the year that she had not been able to access Class Dojo in months because it was missing a code. Each class account on Class Dojo generates a specialized code to allow families to join their child’s specific class on the app. Without this code, families cannot access Class Dojo. This security feature is necessary, but it did cause challenges for Esmeralda’s mother. She obtained indirect access to Class Dojo because the app did work on her husband’s phone, which may be why she did not feel the need to ask for help getting access to the app again on her phone.

Another barrier to communal participation on Class Dojo lay in the design of Class Story. While the teacher could post media to Class Story, families played the role of consumers, being able to view, like, and comment on media the teacher posted. This level of access prevented families from posting their own media. Overall, these two observed limitations of Class Dojo did not seem to deter families from participating in the digital learning community using this platform.

One final drawback to Class Dojo’s Class Story feature affects the sense of community that extends beyond the academic year. When I tried to access pictures Kadence posted on Class Story the following fall, the class had disappeared. Several of the pictures were still accessible on the School Story feature, which combines pictures
from different teachers in a photostream. However, the sense of classroom community was lost. Kadence was not sure if this was a routine occurrence on Class Dojo since new classes are formed each year, or if her moving to a new school—which required her to delete her existing Class Dojo account—caused this lapse. This issue does not occur on Flickr, since the groups do not close until the creator deletes them. I personally experienced the power of this continuing community on Flickr when one of my kindergarten students moved to another school, and her mother continued to upload photos of her on Flickr so that I could see how she was doing. Similarly, I was able to continue the relationships I developed with my final kindergarten class in 2014, when I was pulled out from the classroom mid-year to assume my position as a literacy coach. Even though I was not physically with my students in the classroom anymore, I was able to view the media my assistant and the new teacher posted to the Flickr group, and I continued to share in the students’ growth throughout the year.

**Flickr limitations.** Flickr, on the other hand, presented several limitations that did prevent many families from participating in the digital learning community using this platform. Setting up a Flickr account was a relatively complicated process. First, families had to create a Yahoo email account. In the past, either Yahoo or Gmail email addresses could be used to create Flickr accounts, but Flickr stopped accepting Gmail-based accounts within the year prior to the study. Only after families joined Flickr could Kadence and I invite families to the private Flickr group. After that, families had to accept the invitation we issued. While this was a one-time process, only two families’
names appeared as members of the Flickr group by the end of the year, meaning they were the only ones able to complete this process.

After joining the group, uploading media then posed another set of challenges. While Kadence and I waited for families to join the Flickr group, we started curating learning artifacts on Flickr from the classroom. Kadence mentioned several times that this process of posting media on Flickr was confusing:

It’s... not very clear, like... they’ll have one place where you go to upload them, and then you have to go some—you have to take those pictures and put them onto your profile and make sure that it’s like private and all that... (personal communication, March 24, 2016, lines 70-74)

After researching the interface, I discovered that Flickr updated the uploading interface fairly recently. When I used Flickr to form a digital learning community in my own kindergarten classroom, the uploading interface was much simpler. After a month of extremely limited family participation in Flickr, I created a Flickr guide in both Spanish and English that Kadence sent home both in print and electronically through Class Dojo’s messaging system. This guide helped one family join the group, but no families uploaded media to this platform.

Another design of the Flickr platform limited the ability to see exactly who was viewing the media. Flickr does host a media viewing counter, but it does not give any information on who viewed the media. Therefore, I had no way to know which families chose to participate in the Flickr digital learning community by viewing the media posted. Additionally, the media viewing counter did not account for repeated views.
This limitation prevented knowing if views were from individual families or from repeated viewings from the teachers as Kadence and I scrolled through to look at the media viewing counter.

**Awareness of platform capabilities limitations.** In the family interviews, some families admitted they did not know what the capabilities of Class Dojo and Flickr were. In Class Dojo, Kyle’s mom did not realize that she could write comments on the media posted in Class Story. Ryasha’s mom did not realize that she could send messages in Class Dojo until right before the interview, when she found a message that Kadence sent her reminding her of the interview. When she found that message, she also discovered the message that Ryasha sent Kadence herself: the picture of her baby brother. This “conference” (as Ryasha’s mother called the interview) morphed into a learning session, and by the end she knew how to use Class Dojo’s points, media, and messaging capabilities.

Interviews with families revealed several misunderstandings or lack of awareness of the capabilities of Flickr. Kyle’s mom seemed hesitant about posting on Flickr because she did not like having pictures of her children on the internet in case other people could see. Privacy was a major concern of mine, which is why I created a private Flickr group that only members Kadence and I invited could join and see the media posted. When I clarified this privacy feature with Kyle’s mom, she accepted the idea of posting on Flickr. In addition, Ryasha’s mom commented that Flickr started later in the year and she didn’t ever “fool with it” (line 62) to learn how to use it. She did express interest in trying Flickr again, and she suggested that Kadence and I host a two-hour
group session to teach families how to use it. Even though we did offer an orientation session to set up Flickr accounts with families (which Ryasha’s mom was unable to attend), we did not offer any follow-up sessions, and this feedback was helpful.

Finally, I wondered if some limitations came from the nature of digital communication versus in-person communication. Despite a variety of digital communication options, several of the families waited until in-person interviews to voice concerns about their child’s school experience. Esmeralda’s mom worried about her daughter not being able to see the board, but she waited until a face-to-face meeting with Kadence, myself, and a translator to express this concern. Similarly, Ryasha’s mom brought up an uncharacteristically low grade that her daughter received in the past. In a memo preceding these interviews, I reflected on the relationship between people and technology in socially connected communities: “Does technology provide a digital barrier to these personal relationships that is hurting us more than helping us? Does technology serve more of a purpose in communities that are not as socially connected as ours?” (Weekly Participant Reflection, May 10, 2016). While the data highlights multiple instances of technology facilitating communication, the reality exists that some families might prefer in-person communication. Therefore, hybrid communication plans that combine digital and in-person forms of communication may be able to meet the needs of more families.

**Conclusion**

Participation in digital learning communities requires accessibility to relevant devices. Overall, all of the families in this study did have access to devices with internet
connectivity, mirroring the 2012 statistic from the Pew Research Center that reported only one in five American adults did not use the internet (Zickuhr & Smith, 2012). The majority of families having access to the internet through cell phones (79%) aligned with previous research finding that mobile technology, especially cell phones for families from lower income levels, is shifting the digital divide (Li & Snow, 2012; Yardi & Bruckman, 2012). Families equally preferred written notes and digital messaging on Class Dojo, with most families recognizing that both digital and paper/pencil communication had certain benefits, such as speed of communication with digital tools and ease of communication with paper/pencil tools.

Based on survey responses, interviews with three focus families, and observations of day-to-day interactions, participation in the digital learning community varied for families, teachers, and students. Families chose to participate in the digital learning community for three purposes: (1) virtual participation in classroom learning, which involved viewing, liking, and sometimes commenting on media in Class Dojo and Flickr; (2) communication with the teacher, which created opportunities for families to advocate for their children through awareness of classroom activities, progress and behavior; and (3) dialogic knowledge exchanges, which involved co-constructing retellings of classroom learning between families and students, and co-constructing understandings of cultural traditions and norms between families and teachers.

Teachers engaged in the digital learning community in three ways: (1) to share artifacts of learning as photos and videos, which also included artifacts from teachers’ lives outside the classroom; (2) to view into students’ home lives like a window; and (3) to
invite students and families to document and share learning beyond the four walls of the classroom. Finally, students used the digital learning community to consume and, at times, produce their own digital media, as well as to build social connections with their peers.

Visual Grammars analysis of three images of significance for the families, teachers, and students involved in this study revealed recurring trends. With representational meanings, popular interactional processes relayed social relationships: “New Shoes” (Figure 4.6) showed many students interacting with each other and their shoes, and “Elizabeth’s dogs” (Figure 4.5) showed a girl embracing her pets. Striking vectors also set these three images apart. “New Shoes” included diagonal vectors, “Elizabeth’s dogs” embedded horizontal vectors, and “Class Dojo Valentine’s Day” (Figure 4.4) depicted vertical vectors. Because interactive meanings involve “communicat[ing] with each other through images” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 131), this piece of the analysis contains the most power and potential for dialogic relationships between the viewer and participants. Through direct eye contact, these three images all included demands for interaction between the participants and the viewers. Most social distances were social, or medium shots, which allowed the viewer to focus on the main participants but also understand basic context for the image. In all three images, the attitude focused on the subjective—the power relationship between viewer and participants—instead of the objective, which would be relayed in charts, tables, and other similar graphics. Both “Elizabeth’s Dogs” and “Class Dojo Valentine’s Day” involved the viewer both through the frontal angle and the eye-level perspective.
Interestingly, “New Shoes” interrupted this trend: the oblique angle gave the viewer a feeling of detachment, and the high angle bestowed power upon viewers as they look down upon the participants (the students and their shoes). While the families were not trained in visual analysis, it is interesting to note that Jordan’s mother—who may have felt powerless in other aspects of her relationship with the school, based on the school’s assumptions of her as uninvolved and unsupportive—chose only this image, which gave power to her as the viewer, to comment on during the entire year. When considering composition, all three images used information value, salience, and framing to highlight the most significant relationships among participants.

Other families chose not to participate in the digital learning community for several reasons. Device limitations included not having sufficient space to download the Flickr app on smart phones or not having access to devices for students to use at school that could log onto Flickr. Digital learning community limitations varied by the platform: Class Dojo does not include an option for families to upload their own media to Class Story, whereas Flickr does offer this capability at the expense of a complicated start-up and media-posting process. Additionally, some families chose not to participate fully in the digital learning community because they were unaware of certain features, like commenting and messaging in Class Dojo, and privacy features in Flickr. These findings establish the importance of balancing digital learning communities with in-person communication, as individual families have different preferences and levels of comfort with various methods of communication.
Through digital learning communities, we listen and we know, or “conocemos” (Figure 4.1). Ryasha already knew how to capture her world through a picture of her baby brother. Esmeralda’s mother already knew how to advocate for her daughter’s needs, ranging from needing to see the board to needing the teacher to recognize and understand her own cultural traditions. Kyle’s mother already knew how to prioritize her own spaces: her silence on Flickr was due to her choice to participate in Class Dojo instead so that she could both view media and communicate directly with the teacher. Other families’ silence was also a form of communication. They found their own space to be, which did not necessarily require participating in the digital learning community. Without listening to conversations with families, survey results, and media posted in Flickr and Class Dojo, assumptions based on age, language, and lack of involvement may have prevented the realization of the rich ways of knowing our families already embody. Because, as Esmeralda’s mother so beautifully said, hacía ya conocemos.
CHAPTER 5

CRITICAL COACHING

(dis)covering

like an invisible blanket
you
cover
us

with your words
(your own and adopted)
your past
your loves
your losses

but once you find
yourself

you can find
us
too

and we will all be
(dis)covered in
love

Figure 5.1. (dis)covering.

In Figure 5.1, I offer a synthesis and response to the findings of my third and final research question: How do digital learning communities stimulate critical coaching partnerships between teachers and literacy coaches? To explore the data related to this question, I will first consider the relationship between critical coaching and digital learning communities.

To be fully effective, I view digital learning communities as modified one-way mirrors: they simultaneously fill the roles of window into other worlds and mirrors
reflecting back onto oneself. However, instead of each side of the one-way mirror hosting one of these features, digital learning communities allow both sides to see each other’s worlds and reflect upon themselves. I argue that digital learning communities and critical coaching are distinct, though interrelated, concepts. Viewing into families’ funds of knowledge and lived experiences can inform classroom practice, but critical transformation cannot take place unless teachers reflect on their own culture, assumptions, and backgrounds that (c)overtly influence their pedagogy.

Just as digital learning communities are not the only ways teachers build networks of communication between home and school, they are not the way to step into the world of students and families. In fact, Kadence and I discovered that the small moments of daily classroom life—the conversations among students as they worked or played at recess, the interactions with families in conferences, even exchanges with co-workers—influenced our frame for critical coaching. Isolating our understandings gained from digital learning communities alone would be artificial, as it is only one way of knowing our students and families, a single story (Adichie, 2009) of their lives. Therefore, I present the findings of our overall critical coaching partnership, including but not limited to participation in the digital learning community.

**Critical Coaching**

The topic and design of the current study arose from a gap I experienced myself as a literacy coach: I was given training in the basic operations of literacy and helping students acquire it, yet there is a noticeable void when it comes to considering the role of (c)overt assumptions educators hold about students, their culture, and their literacies
in regards to classroom literacy practices. Therefore, no existing model for critical coaching informed my work; instead, Kadence and I observed how our work together evolved over time to figure out what constitutes critical coaching.

Most of our coaching conversations followed a similar structure. We met in Kadence’s classroom, where she sat at her desk in the front left corner of the classroom and I sat at the student desk nearest her desk. Both desks faced the door. This orientation allowed us to turn our chairs to face each other without any physical boundaries, such as a desk, between us. I opened most conversations with a reading I curated from either professional articles or digital texts with real-world, timely significance. Then, our conversations organically evolved as we explored these shared readings. We frequently contextualized these conversations with retellings of encounters with students or families, encounters with other educators, or reactions to real-world events. This open dialogue allowed for a trusting relationship to develop over the course of our partnership. Appendix I includes outlines of each of our coaching conversations, including the texts that opened our sessions.

In addition, we both approached critical coaching as learners. Kadence was an expert on her students, her families, and lived classroom experiences; I had more experience in critical theories, social justice, and how these ideas related to our identities as educators. As conversations evolved, I introduced Kadence to terminology and ideology including the status quo, mainstream and nonmainstream, humanization, dialogue, cultural mismatch, discourses, systemic racism, and counternarratives. I felt that critical coaching became an “apprenticeship” for Kadence to try out some of these
critical theories with my assistance. Kadence introduced me to children’s literature I did not already know, social media platforms with which I was not familiar (such as Snapchat and Instagram), and terminology related to a critical aspect of her identity. We each recognized the other’s strengths and areas of specialty, which allowed for intentional power-sharing between us.

Throughout our work, two overarching components of critical coaching emerged: studying ourselves and taking action. I realized as we began this work that my initial conceptualization of critical coaching, which described “literacy coaching that centers critical, dialogic teacher/literacy coach partnerships that problematize and reframe teachers’ and coaches’ (c)overt assumptions about students, especially students from non-mainstream groups,” was missing one vital component: public action. While some form of action may be implicit in the terms “problematize” and “reframe” in my original definition, these actions tend to be more personal or private and may not move to a more public sphere of enactment. Reflecting on and modifying our own assumptions as literacy educators, especially those assumptions that may paint students and families in a deficit-based light, is an important first step; the real change, however, comes from how we live these changed mindsets and advocate for students and families with them. Therefore, I present the data in light of these two components of critical coaching—studying ourselves and taking action. Within these two categories, I will analyze significant episodes from the work Kadence and I did through critical discourse analysis of our coaching conversations. Appendix J provides a key to the transcription symbols I used.
Studying Ourselves

Studying ourselves as educators was the first step in the journey toward taking action in our critical coaching partnership. This self-study aligned with Rogers and Schaenen (2013)’s critical discourse analysis (CDA) study design elements of reflexivity, which includes the researcher; context, which considers social, cultural, political, and economic domains; and deconstructive-reconstructive orientations, which involves both critiquing power and creating spaces for new power structures. Analysis of the critical coaching conversations revealed themes about how Kadence and I enacted our identities as cultural beings as well as naming and challenging the (c)over assumptions we held about our students and their families. Finally, I will use CDA to analyze the “Family Letters Episode” to see how our identities as cultural beings influenced our assumptions of students and families, along with our work together to challenge these assumptions.

Identities as cultural beings. As Kadence and I engaged in critical coaching over the course of four months, our identities as cultural beings surfaced in a variety of contexts and conversations. Looking back on all of our discussions, our identities seemed to be particularly shaped by three key elements: family, education, and critical moments.

Family. As those we love and trust are our earliest sources of socialization (Harro, 2000b), it came as no surprise that we wove our own family experiences into our conversations, though Kadence discussed her family far more than I discussed mine. Kadence and I both came from families that did not align with mainstream definitions of
families: my parents divorced when I was in high school, and she was adopted when she was two days old. This element of Kadence’s identity played into her careful consideration of labels, as she explained labeling her “biological mom” versus her “real parents”: “They’re not my real parents, but they’re my parents, but my, my friends. They would always call them my adopted parents. And I’m like... no, they’re not my adopted parents, yes they adopted me, but they’re my parents” (personal communication, May 6, 2016, lines 369-375). Kadence transferred her awareness of the power labels possess to her word choices with students and families. During one interaction with our principal, Kadence explained that she did not want to call students Mexicans unless she knew they actually were. This interaction stood out to me because conflating Latino/a and Mexican is a common misunderstanding, yet Kadence intentionally interrupted it.

Kadence shared stories of her family that showed how much they loved her and wanted to support her, despite having limited resources. Even though her parents did not make much money and her father struggled with his health, they made an effort to help her with homework routinely. Kadence contributed her grades in school with her ability to secure scholarships, which allowed her to attend college despite her family’s limited finances. Therefore, Kadence recognized the immense capital embedded within this support her family offered through homework help. Both of her parents grew up in a mill village and recognized the value of commitment and hard work. Likewise, both parents loved learning, and Kadence wondered if her own love of learning tied back to her parents’ culture.
At times, Kadence’s existing family culture contradicted some of her own beliefs about how a family should function as a social unit. She observed from an early age that her dad assumed a position of dominance in the family while her mother submitted to him, which her family said was according to their religious beliefs. Kadence believed that men and women were equals and should be treated as such. In addition, she shared that her family often did not talk about topics of personal natures, such as feelings and health situations, in an attempt to protect each other, yet this practice resulted in Kadence feeling like she did not have a close, trusting relationship with her parents.

…[M]y parents? Weren’t very big on being open and talking about your feelings and talking about, um... things that you like, things you don’t like, what’s going on? And that bothered me as a kid? So I try to make sure now to let my kids know that they can come to me about anything, and they can talk to me about anything—feelings, good, bad, things that are scared, things that happen at home, anything, and it’s pretty interesting, some of the things that they actually come up and tell me, and um... it’s also made to where I feel like my classroom, my kids... they’re not scared to have discussions. They’re not scared to talk out in front of the class and things like that because they know that I’m not going to... put them down for it. (personal communication, February 11, 2016, lines 274-282)
Clearly, Kadence’s identity as a cultural being was shaped by interactions with her family, and this culture directly affected decisions she made to build a strong classroom community that resembled a close family unit.

One significant element of Kadence’s identity that created tension in her family related to her sexual orientation. In her opening sentence of her cultural memoir, she wrote, “Have you ever had a moment in your life where you were not accepted for who you are? I have, and no it was not by my peers, but by my parents.” Ever since she came out to her parents in high school, her parents have struggled to reconcile their love for their daughter with their religious beliefs, especially relating to sexual orientation. While this lack of acceptance led to strained relationships at times, especially with her dad, she did not blame her parents for their beliefs. She knew their devout religious beliefs strongly shaped their worldview, and they also had limited opportunities for education—neither parent went past the tenth grade in school. She explained in her cultural memoir, “I also realized that my parents were not necessarily wrong, they were brought up to believe something and were never given the opportunity to discover other possibilities and perspectives.” When Kadence went to college, she realized that “it is OK for me to think differently” (personal communication, May 6, 2016, line 740), and that while her parents had socialized her into one way of being and perceiving the world, she was free to follow her own beliefs.

Education. In our conversations, both Kadence and I referred to various experiences that situated education as a major shaping force in our identities. In our
initial interview, Kadence reflected on two of her teachers early in her educational career:

I had a teacher who... um... she... was never in a good mood, it seemed like. It seemed like every little thing we did was wrong. Everything that we turned in, if it was not perfect to her exact... specifications? It was horrible to her. And that... it, it made me, cause she was one of my, she was, um, taught, I’m pretty sure I was in 2nd or 3rd grade? And um... she taught writing a lot. And it actually pushed me away from writing for a while because I felt like my writing was never good enough. I felt like I couldn’t make her happy ever. And so that... that made me to where I want to constantly motivate my kids and constantly let them know that I’m proud of what they’re doing, and at least that they’re trying. And um... but some things that I did like is um... I had a teacher who read to us every day before we left. And she would get so into the books that it just... I couldn’t keep my eyes off of her, I couldn’t stop listening to her, like I wanted her, like we’d want her to keep reading. We didn’t want to leave school. And so that reminded, and that type of things, that’s what I want. I want my kids to want to stay, to want to keep learning and things like that. (personal communication, February 11, 2016, lines 343-355)

I noticed shadows of these two teachers in Kadence’s identity and its enactment in her classroom. Earlier in this same conversation, Kadence described herself as a “positive person... big on... not purposefully putting kids down... [and] constantly motivating them” (lines 262-264). Numerous times in our conversations, Kadence said she was not
a writer, and she often deflected my compliments on her writing with worries about the correctness of her word choice or grammar. She admitted that her own insecurities as a writer affected her comfort with teaching writing. However, she recognized the importance of encouraging students to take risks and supporting them instead of belittling them. She also centered literacy instruction, especially reading aloud, in her classroom.

Both Kadence and I made numerous references to our experiences as students beyond high school. For Kadence, education—especially her experiences as an undergraduate student—influenced her as a cultural being because she recognized that learning “opens your mind” (personal communication, May 6, 2016, line 1644). In addition, Kadence made many correlations between going to college and getting a job. Likewise, my identity as a doctoral student greatly shaped me. In our conversations, I referred multiple times to texts that had influenced my philosophy as an educator, literacy leader, and scholar, such as Black Ants and Buddhists (Cowhey, 2006) and Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 1970), as well as other theories and practices, such as culturally relevant pedagogy.

In addition to our relationship to education as learners ourselves, we also participated in education as people who educate others. We both frequently contextualized our conversations in three major realms: student/family stories, teacher conversations, and world events. While the last realm represented our identities beyond school settings, the first two embodied our personal experiences as educators. We related to each other during conversations by talking about our previous
experiences as classroom teachers, which also humanized our work by putting specific names and faces on our conversational themes.

Interestingly, we both struggled with keeping our identities as educators and our identities as cultural beings beyond school settings separate. I reflected on my previous ability to compartmentalize my identities as a literacy coach and a graduate student, which became more complicated when my graduate student identity infiltrated my literacy coach role through research with Kadence: “...I think that’s part of this whole [research] process, is, why have I been keeping it in a box. It’s to keep me safe” (personal communication, April 19, 2016, lines 1317-1318). I found a safe community with my peers and faculty members in my graduate program, yet I knew that some of the social justice-oriented ideas and theories that I embraced as a graduate student would not be as easy for some of my work peers to accept. Kadence was also searching for safe spaces, and she realized that maintaining some explicit separation between her personal and professional lives was necessary but also carried risks: “[P]eople don’t know everything about my personal life. So I don’t want them to judge me based on the little bit that they may find out” (personal communication, May 31, 2016, lines 152-153). We both recognized that our personal and professional lives greatly shaped our identities as cultural beings, but we were concerned that merging the two posed potential threats to job security and relationships with co-workers. However, part of this tension likely resulted from the impossibility of our attempts to compartmentalize our identities, since personhood (Bloome et al., 2005) implies that “there is no
separation of people from what they do, from the events of which they are a part” (p. 4).

**Critical moments.** Before beginning this study, I wondered if critical moments—such as my encounter with Ariya’s mother, who called me a racist, when I taught her daughter in kindergarten—had to precede the type of work addressed in critical coaching. This conceptualization of critical moments aligns with the waking up stage of Harro’s (2000a) cycle of liberation. In one conversation with Kadence, I wondered if “you have this critical incident and all the sudden you start seeing things... [that have] been here this whole time” (personal communication, March 24, 2016, lines 292-298). I continued to develop this idea: “Because if you [don’t] have that, kind of that critical moment? Of feeling like you don’t... belong. That something... doesn’t add up? You’re not going to attend to it” (lines 621-625). This state of disequilibrium—of realizing that what I had assumed to be true about myself as a non-racist person was not necessarily the entire truth perceived by others around me—was necessary to attend to others’ lived experiences and perceptions of the world.

Because I already expanded upon my own critical moment in the conceptual framework, I will focus here on Kadence’s perception of her own critical moment. When I first brought up this idea of critical moments, Kadence could not “think of [one] off the top of my head” (personal communication, March 24, 2016, line 204), and went on to say she had not had any trouble with parents in her career thus far. Because I had just shared my own critical moment with Ariya’s mom, she focused on critical moments regarding parent/teacher relationships. As we began discussing the structure of our
cultural memoirs, however, it became clear that Kadence had indeed experienced a critical moment when a specific element of her enacted identity—her sexual orientation—conflicted with the expectations of mainstream culture. Despite her sexual orientation being a significant piece of her identity, she was hesitant to share this aspect of her identity for several reasons, including fearing others would look at her differently and worrying about maintaining her job. In her cultural memoir, she explained how her sexual orientation influenced her identity as a cultural being, especially amidst varying realms of socialization.

My sexual orientation has always been a battle in mind, with my parents, with my church and in society. My parents taught me that only male and female are to be together. My church taught me only male and female are to be together. Society taught me that you will be looked at differently, made fun of even, if you are to date the same gender. My mind taught me that love is love.

Because Kadence had lived experiences of not being accepted and loved for who she truly was, she recognized the importance of loving and being comfortable with oneself. Her love of students showed in her desire to build strong, safe relationships with them.

I hate hiding, having to hide who I am, and that’s what I don’t want [the students] to do. I want them to know that it doesn’t matter who you are, it doesn’t matter what you like, what you don’t like, whatever, I don’t care. Tell me about it, you know? Let it out. And that’s what I love because my kids, they come up, I feel like last year I had relationships with my kids? But not like I do this year. And the things that they tell me—and that, I mean it’s not, nothing
you know bad or anything like that, but they tell me about their lives. (personal communication, March 24, 2016, lines 626-631)

Kadence’s critical moment occurred when she realized that a vital aspect of her identity was not safe to share with her family, some friends, and most co-workers. In hiding herself, she realized that she was forced into an oppressive position to conform to—or at least conceal herself within—mainstream cultural norms, and she did not want her students to suffer the same fate.

However, I also realized that the nature of our critical moments caused us to attend to certain factors while being blinded to others. For example, I realized in one of our conversations that I approached critical coaching through a very specific lens of race because of my own critical moment, in which Ariya’s mother called me a racist. While I had initially planned on us constructing racial development autobiographies (Laughter, 2011), I recognized before we began this task that I had limited our cultural identities to the singular lens of race, and I re-designed the writing to be a cultural memoir instead.

As I realized in a memo near the end of our critical coaching partnership, critical moments may be one piece of the critical coaching puzzle, but they are not a panacea for assumptions.

Even though we have awakenings, we are not immune to making assumptions in the fields in which we are awakened, and especially not in other fields that we might have less personal connections with. I think it’s important to realize that a critical awakening is not a magical fix-all—it is the start of a critically reflective
mindset, a positionality to be questioning, naming, framing, and making changes.

(Memo, May 12, 2016)

Once we identified significant components of our identities as cultural beings, our next step was to move toward naming and challenging assumptions that we held in spite of our critical moments and awakenings.

**Naming and challenging assumptions.** Throughout our conversations, our implicit assumptions often surfaced. Though most of our assumptions appeared woven into other topics and, as such, are presented throughout the findings, a brief focus on assumptions is warranted, including an analysis of the family letters episode.

I made plenty of my own assumptions. First and foremost, I assumed that Kadence shared many of my cultural identities because she was a White female teacher. However, I attributed my own cultural norms to her based on external appearances only. I registered surprise when Kadence told me about two critical aspects of her identity: her sexual orientation and her family structure, which involved her own adoption. This surprise was due to my own covert assumptions, which lurked beneath the surface of my own cultural norms. In addition, I made assumptions of our students and families. One specific example occurred when I looked over the initial survey results, and I noticed some families did not complete the short answer questions. My first thought was that the Spanish-dominant families lacked the literacy skills needed to decode and respond to these questions, but I noticed that this trend did not confine itself only to our Spanish-dominant families. While skipping written responses could be tied to literacy skills, it could also be related to lack of interest in the topic, or simply lack
of time. My assumption unfairly positioned Spanish-dominant families as less literate. When I caught this assumption as I analyzed data at home, I told Kadence about my assumption and how I had revised my thinking in our next coaching conversation.

As a literacy coach, I encounter assumptions from educators and myself on a daily basis, especially relating to minoritized students and families. Figuring out how to help teachers name and challenge these assumptions was integral to my role in critical coaching. In our initial interview, I told Kadence that we would be talking about assumptions together. I invited her to share any thoughts she had on assumptions at that point in time. The ensuing interaction between Kadence and myself, as well as the accompanying analysis of our discourse, is in Table 5.1. (Note: Additional line breaks appear in the transcript to allow the analysis to align with relevant pieces of the transcript.)

Table 5.1

_Transcript and Analysis of Initial Assumptions_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lines</th>
<th>Transcript (February 11, 2016; original lines 160-179)</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kadence: Umm... like I, I hate assuming that just</td>
<td>Theme: #1 Appearance conveys family status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>because of a way a child dresses, or looks that</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>maybe it makes me think, oh, they must not come</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>from a very good family because they’re not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>getting... I, like I have some students who come</td>
<td>Contextualization:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>and they still have dirt on their hands and, and on</td>
<td>Pause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>their faces, and things like that, and of course it</td>
<td>Boundary making: “Of course” indicates assumed alignment between K &amp; M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>makes me automatically assume, well this child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>hasn’t had a bath, and so... why? Like are parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>not bathing them, or are they trying to put theirs—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>are they not THERE? Cause sometimes I, I even</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>have a child who, they tell me that their mom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>works all night, and so that makes me think, OK,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>are they getting fed? Are they getting dinner? Are</td>
<td>Stress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
they getting bathed? And, and things like that, and um, so it makes me automatically assume the worst?

**Melissa:** Mmhmm

**Kadence:** And, um, I also, it makes me… wonder, are these kids getting help at home with homework, with reading? Um... I know a lot of the parents like I said are Hispanic and can’t read English, but are they at least supporting them and at least trying to help them? And of course when you see a child come to school who’s not prepared? Or maybe doesn’t have a bookbag, or doesn’t have something that they should have every day, that automatically makes me assume parents aren’t checking after them, you know, and things like that, so... not the best assumptions, but...

**Melissa:** But you’re... very attuned to your assumptions.

Kadence established boundaries that did not isolate her assumptions as being unique to herself, but rather shared by others through phrases such as “of course” (lines 7 and 24), which positions her reactions as common for the situations she constructed. I upheld this inclusive boundary in my final turn by asserting that all people, not just Kadence and myself, hold assumptions. Kadence established a theme at the beginning of this interaction of how appearance conveys family status, which she re-shifted to...
focus on how family jobs can convey—and limit—family status, such as supposedly not having time to attend to the physical needs of children. I recognized that these two themes—assumptions of families based on appearances and economic status—were common assumptions, and I intentionally chose to change the theme to awareness of assumptions when I took the floor in line 32. In this move, I did not align with or stray from the assumptions Kadence articulated, which were some of the same assumptions I held myself earlier in my teaching career.

Kadence voiced assumptions about students’ home lives that many educators working in Title I schools share; therefore, the assumptions transcend individual status and become systemic. I was particularly interested in the language used to introduce assumptions. Because I played a role as a listener or question poser in many of these conversations, each of these key phrases come from Kadence. However, I know I have used these key phrases in conversations myself, even though they may not be documented in transcripts of the present study. While Table 5.2 presents key phrases, contextualization, and interpretation as isolated events, there was ample overlap among these components. To highlight these overlaps, I will emphasize both the focus key phrase and any additional key phrases used in each quote.

Table 5.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Phrase</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Implication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’ve seen</td>
<td>“I try not to jump to the worst? I try to gather everything I’ve observed? And then try to make at least a [sic] educated assumption, I guess you</td>
<td>Kadence relies on her own observations to inform her assumptions, though these may overlap with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Also: I’ve observed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I’ve noticed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Overlaps:</td>
<td>I've heard</td>
<td>assumptions she has heard from others.</td>
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<td>---------------------------</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>I've heard</td>
<td>“I don’t wanna be stereotypical, but it’s just what <em>I've seen</em>. And for the past two years, <em>I've noticed</em> that... girls? Are very quiet? Very reserved, very... they don’t want to speak up? They don’t... want to be loud and things like that? But boys, on the other hand, Hispanic boys, they’re very loud. They’re very... willing to express their... like opinions, and very willing to be more like active and things like that, and <em>I've noticed</em>, or <em>I've heard</em> that it’s because boys are allowed to be more... you know, not wild, I don’t wanna say that, but um...” (February 23, 2016, lines 360-365)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I've heard</td>
<td>“[inhales] I <em>have!</em> <em>Heard</em>, and I <em>don’t know</em> if this is true or not. Because [inhales] I <em>noticed</em> that Mexican men. Teem, seem to stare more. Than... any other... culture and thing like it, things like that. And, um, <em>someone told me</em>. And I <em>don’t know</em> if this is true or not. But I <em>heard</em> that in Mexico. It’s almost like... a sign of like... I don’t know. Um, endearment? Or like... [inhales, exhales] Like it’s a good thing.” (May 19, 2016, lines 683-687)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Also:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kadence has heard assumptions from others: other teachers, her own students, or unnamed “others” (i.e., generalized “they”). However, she modifies these “I’ve heard”-informed assumptions with the recurring phrase “I don’t know,” which acknowledges her assumptions are not always based on first-hand observations or experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone told me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>They say</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I don't know</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I noticed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I know</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Well that’s like, um... [inhales] <em>I've heard</em> some teachers say before, like, our kids don’t... realize that they’re... poverished. They... because <em>everyone</em>, or almost everyone that they’re always around, everyone in their community, lives very similar to what, to the way they do. And <em>they say</em> a lot of times our kids think how they live is completely normal until</td>
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they get to middle school.” (March 10, 2016, lines 251-258)

“Umm... I knew a lot of my kids—now like I said, I don’t know what specific streets my kid’s on? But just like from where I’ve heard them talk and things like that. I do know a lot of my kids live in trailers?” (April 12, 2016, lines 8-11)

“And things like that and. I don’t know, especially like when they, when like... [a student] told me that she has all those people who live in a house with her and I’m like. OK, well, it kinda makes sense now why [inhales] sometimes her hair’s really greasy and why she you know has a lot of dirt under her nails, I’m like well maybe she doesn’t get to take as many baths because there’s so many people in the house and stuff and. I... and I, I just, I don’t know.” (April 12, 2016, lines 223-229)

I don’t know

“Umm... maybe they... I don’t know. Maybe they don’t live in a home that’s nice and clean? And that might affect them getting, um, like doing their homework, getting up early, you know, um, coming to school and actually being clean and things like that?” (February 11, 2016, lines 135-144)

“I don’t know. It just really hits to how our kids are when you think like, when my kids tell me this person, this person, and this person, like when they tell me all these people who live in their home and how they tell me, “I tried to do my homework and I didn’t understand it and mom was cooking, Kadence introduces doubt into her assumptions with the phrase “I don’t know,” which she repeated frequently and partnered with incomplete sentence and thought patterns.
dad was at work, brother was doing this—“and you know, it’s just like... I don’t know. It just... it just shows you... they can’t help it, but... it’s... I don’t know.” (February 16, 2016, lines 507-511)

“I have wanted to drive around and actually see where they live? Cause I personally don’t know what it, what their houses look like? And some of ‘em I can, I can kind of... assume? Which I hate assuming?” (February 11, 2016, lines 128-130)

“So it just... [sighs] I don’t know. I don’t know how it is at home for her? I don’t know if she’s more supporting at home, I don’t know. But just seeing that in front of me, it kind of makes red flags pop up, you know.” (February 16, 2016, lines 499-501)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I know</th>
<th>“That’s a big thing for me, is I know some of these kids don’t get attention at home? So I wanna make sure that I give them attention that they need and things like that.” (February 11, 2016, lines 273-274)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Also: N/A</td>
<td>A few times, Kadence did use the phrase “I know.” However, this quote does not include proof for how she knows. She used the phrase less frequently than “I don’t know.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overlaps: N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To look at how some of these key phrases interact to inform Kadence’s assumptions and possibilities for revisions, I present one additional transcript excerpt in Table 5.3. This excerpt occurred after I asked Kadence what she hoped to gain from participating in the digital learning community on Flickr.
### Table 5.3

**Transcript and Analysis of Revision of Assumptions with Flickr**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lines</th>
<th>Transcript (February 23, 2016; original lines 682-689)</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Kadence</strong>: Um… well, cause it’ll… it will… show us</td>
<td>Show=&quot;I’ve seen&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>what it is like at home, it will sh—at their homes,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>hopefully [short laugh]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Melissa</strong>: Yeah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Kadence</strong>: and um, [short laugh] it will show us</td>
<td>Show=&quot;I’ve seen”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>kind of like what their culture is like and maybe some of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>those assumptions that I may have? Maybe I can…</td>
<td>Revision of assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>either… they can be proven? Or maybe disproven?</td>
<td>from what she sees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>And, um, just… it kind of… maybe I can take what</td>
<td>Changing classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>they do at home and try and pull it more into my</td>
<td>practice from revised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>classroom? Cause, yes, I, I say yes I know their</td>
<td>assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>culture, I know they’re Hispanic and, you know,</td>
<td>I know vs. I don’t know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>things like that… but I don’t know what goes on at</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>home exactly. I don’t know what their parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>teach them. I don’t know what’s the norm for</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>them. And so it’d be kind of interesting to see</td>
<td>Seeing = revision of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>what it is like at home, and what their culture is</td>
<td>known/unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>like and how maybe I can take that and bring it into</td>
<td>Changing classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>the classroom.</td>
<td>practice from revised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>assumptions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Kadence, seeing is believing (lines 1-3 and 5-6), and she seems to hold seeing as the strongest informant of her assumptions and beliefs. This finding relates to her goal of participating in the digital learning community as a window into students’ lives, which was explained in the previous chapter. However, Kadence displays a willingness to revise her assumptions—and, in turn, her classroom practice—if she is provided with sufficient evidence.

As Kadence mentioned in her memoir, parents, school, society, and church were critical sources of socialization. I echo her recognition of the significance of these
entities in my own life. Because socialization involves communities of shared values and assumptions passing on the shared values and assumptions they themselves were socialized into, it is not productive to blame these sources of socialization for our own assumptions; instead, we begin to recognize these socializations and assumptions and choose a direction for change (Harro, 2000b). Throughout our conversations, Kadence and I both embodied numerous assumptions, but we needed each other in a critical coaching partnership to create a trusting relationship in which we could challenge each other’s belief systems and assumptions, especially when they limited the potential autonomy and power of students and families.

**Family letters episode.** One noteworthy event that allowed us to name and challenge our assumptions that limited our students and families arose in the family letters episode. As Kadence and I began planning for increased family engagement in her life cycles unit that ended the school year, she also expressed interest in integrating letter writing as a genre. After she had incorporated opportunities for peer pen pals with another class on the grade level, I initiated the family letters episode by asking if she would be interested in having her students write letters to their families too. At first, Kadence seemed to take up this idea, but a pivotal moment occurred when she clarified the purpose of the letter-writing, which would include families responding to the letters. Table 5.4 includes the transcript (with student pseudonyms, except for Esmeralda) and analysis of the family letters episode. (Note: Additional line breaks appear in the transcript to allow the analysis to align with relevant pieces of the transcript.)
Table 5.4

Transcript and Analysis of the Family Letters Episode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lines</th>
<th>Transcript (May 11, 2016; original lines 806-927)</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kadence: So are you saying with their families, like</td>
<td>Theme: #1 Family letters (clarification)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>their families respond to them?</td>
<td>Contextualization: Overlap (agreement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Melissa: Mmhhmm!</td>
<td>Contextualization: Tone shift (disagreement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kadence: [flatter voice] I don’t know if that’ll happen.</td>
<td>Theme, re-negotiated: #2 Doubt of participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Melissa: Why.</td>
<td>Theme: M does not take up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Kadence: For one? I have some kids in here who say their parents do not know how to read or write. Two... I can barely get back a signature.</td>
<td>Contextualization: syntactical shift (“for one,” “two” = argument)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Much less a whole letter.</td>
<td>Intertextuality: Student conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Melissa: Is a letter different than a signature?</td>
<td>Theme, re-negotiated: #3 Families’ lack of literacy, not participating by signing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>...Like a letter that your kid wrote to you different than a signature?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Kadence: But I feel like they would... they might take it and read it... I mean--</td>
<td>Contextualization: Overlap (disagreement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Melissa: Who is they. The parents</td>
<td>Contextualization: Pause as K modifies thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Kadence: Yeah.</td>
<td>Contextualization: Overlap (disagreement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Melissa: might take it and read it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Kadence: The parents might take it and read it.</td>
<td>Turn taking: K takes floor by aligning with M’s turn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>And then the kids would probably say... now you gotta write me back, and I can hear it, like Neveah’s mom tells her she doesn’t have time to write h—t—her initials. On her behavior chart. So. I mean, we, I, we can more than likely try it—I just don’t want some kids to come back and not have letters.</td>
<td>Intertextuality: Imagined based on previous encounters with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Is the only problem.</td>
<td>Theme, re-instated: #3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
27  Melissa:  Mmhmm.  Could they choose who to  
28  write to?  And maybe if Neveah’s mom, if she  
29  knows her mom wouldn’t have time.  Does she  
30  have... a sister.  She can write to.               
31  Kadence:  Kiera.  
32  Melissa:  Yeah. Does she have a grandma. Does  
33  she have—  
34  Kadence:  Neveah thinks Kiera hates her.  
35  Melissa:  Really.  
36  Kadence:  Yeah.  
37  Melissa:  Aww.  
38  Kadence:  Neveah’s all the time, “I do so much for  
39  Kiera, and she doesn’t tell me she loves me, she  
40  doesn’t tell me thank you, she’s like, I love her so  
41  much and she don’t love me.”  
42  Melissa:  Aww.  
43  Kadence:  Yeah, it’s really sad. I don’t know, I just  
44  don’t want, like that, I know they’re getting a  
45  response.  
46  Melissa:  Absolutely.  
47  Kadence:  Because [another teacher] is going to  
48  make sure—  
49  Melissa:  No, I think we should still do both.  
50  Kadence:  But I just don’t, I just get worried with  
51  their families that... what if they don’t get, what if  
52  they tell them, “Sorry, I don’t have the time.”  
53  Melissa:  Mmhmm  
54  Kadence:  “I can’t do that right now.”  You know?  
55  Melissa:  And I’m curious to see if they approach...  
56  a letter written to them by their child to invite a  
57  conversation?  Differently than a form to be signed  
58  that’s sent by the school.  
59  Kadence:  And they may!  They may com--do it  
60  completely differently.  
61  Melissa:  That’s, that’s my curiosity.  
62  Kadence:  I just... it just you know. It just worries  
63  me.  
64  Melissa:  Right.  

Families’ lack of literacy, 
not participating by 

Theme, re-instated: #4 
Family participation 

Contextualization:  
Interruption 
(disagreement) 

Intertextuality:  Student 
story 

Boundary making:  
School as reliable space 
for response 

Boundary making:  
Concerns of other 
teachers on grade level 
Contextualization:  
Overlap (agreement) 

Theme, re-instated: #4 
Family participation 

Contextualization: 
Overlap (agreement) 

Theme, re-instated: #3 
Families’ lack of literacy, 
not participating by
Kadence: I just don’t want them coming in here, [higher, softer, sadder voice] “My mom wouldn’t write me back.” Or anything.

Melissa: Right.

Kadence: You know?

Melissa: Yeah.

Kadence: So. That’s just my only thing. Or their parents writing back in Spanish and them not being able to understand it [laughs] That’s another thing.

Melissa: But who wouldn’t be able to understand it. The kids? Or...

Kadence: The kids or I. Some kids they, like Esmeralda can read and write in Spanish. And speak Spanish. But then I’d have some kids who... their parents speak Spanish? They don’t even speak Spanish. And some who speak Spanish, but don’t know how to read Spanish. Or write it. And I’m not trying to make excuses, I’m just sitting here thinking about what I’ve noticed and what I’ve seen throughout the year and what my kids have told me. And I just wanna make sure—

Melissa: So...

Kadence: --that they get a response.

Melissa: So I’m hearing that the concerns with the response? Would be who would respond.

Kadence: Who would respond...

Melissa: So what would be a way we could work around that? We’re thinking letting them maybe choose.

Kadence: Choose, yes, which might can help

Melissa: who can write.

Kadence: Yeah

Melissa: Umm... the second concern you have is the language?

Kadence: Mmhmm.

Melissa: What are some ways we could work around that. Because if we expect families to write in English, some families won’t feel like they can contribute.

Kadence: Exactly, they won’t.

Melissa: Umm...

Kadence: Cause I get, most of my notes I get in here from Hispanic parents? Are in Spanish. And I know E, I know Spanish enough to where I can signing

Contextualization: Tone shift

Theme, re-instated/modified: #3a Families’ lack of literacy in English

Contextualization: Overlap (disagreement)

Boundary making: Who needs to understand

Intertextuality: Student stories

Turn taking: M takes floor to respond to concerns

Theme, re-instated: #4 Family participation

Contextualization: Overlap (agreement)

Theme, re-instated: #3a Families’ lack of literacy in English

Intertextuality: Family stories
figure out exactly what they say

Melissa: Mmhmm

Kadence: Cause most the time it’s talking about transportation and stuff like that. So that’s not a big deal. But... like I’ve had a letter before from who, I think it was from Celia’s mom? And it was in Spanish? But it wasn’t about transportation? And I asked her if she could read it for me and Celia was like—

Melissa: Celia couldn’t?

Kadence: And she had no clue.

Melissa: OK.

Kadence: Yeah.

[ Custodian enters room; side conversation for 2 minutes. ]

Melissa: So if we want families to feel comfortable communicating. It sounds like the... the, I was gonna say the burden. For understanding. Is actually back on us. So what ways, if families feel comfortable communicating in Spanish, what ways could we help ease that communication... if they’ve written a letter in Spanish?

Kadence: Well I can’t translate. So.

Melissa: So what other options do we have.

Kadence: Well we have Maria [a bilingual front office staff member], but she’s so busy during the morning time, I would never dare ask her to translate those letters.

Melissa: OK, so, so we have the potential of Maria? But worried about taxing her.

Kadence: Mmhmm

Melissa: Um, you said--

Kadence: I—

Melissa: --one of your students is--?

Kadence: Esmeralda has, I’ve seen, cause she wrote a Mother’s Day card?

Melissa: Mmhmm

Kadence: And for her mom, she wrote it in English and in Spanish.

Melissa: That’s cool!
This episode follows the evolution of, and conflicts among, four major themes. The very first theme, family letters, is short-lived because it simply contextualizes this episode as it immediately follows our brainstorming of the family letters project. Kadence then shifts to the second theme, doubt of participation, which swiftly evolves into the third theme focused on families’ lack of literacy and lack of participation. Kadence specifically characterized participation in line 9 by getting a signature. She surmised that since some families did not provide a signature, a very brief act of participation, their
participation in a more extended product, like a letter, was improbable. Interestingly, Kadence mentioned that families did not always sign papers she sent home in several other conversations, which seems to indicate that Kadence perceives providing a signature as a significant form of participation. I introduced the fourth theme, family participation, in line 11 by contrasting the participation opportunities inherent in signatures and letters. For the rest of our interaction, Kadence and I continue to develop these two themes. When Kadence took the floor, she challenged my theme or reinstated her own, and I did the same when I took the floor. However, a significant change occurs in line 152. For the first time in this episode, Kadence took up the theme of family participation based on something she has seen work in her own classroom: Esmeralda’s bilingual assets. Again, because seeing was believing for Kadence (as established earlier in this chapter), modifications of assumptions were based on her prior experiences.

After we negotiated and resolved some of Kadence’s concerns with students writing letters to families, we searched for a way to integrate life cycles, social justice, and family engagement. Earlier in the same conversation, we correlated life cycles and ageism, since we wondered if all participants—students, teachers, and families alike—had experienced times in their lives where they could or could not do something because of their age. Kadence suggested that she model a mini-lesson where she wrote a letter to her own parents about a real time in her life she felt limited by her age, and she came up with some guiding questions for students to consider as they wrote letters to their families (i.e., Was there ever a time that you felt like you couldn’t do something
because of your age, or you weren’t allowed to do something because of your age?
What are things that you can do now that you’re older that you couldn’t do when you
were younger? When do you feel like the best years of your life were, are, or will be?).
Though the main focus of this family letters episode in the current context was naming
and challenging assumptions, the writing samples exchanged between students and
families offer ample opportunities for future analysis.

Taking Action

The second component of critical coaching moved toward taking action, which aligned with Rogers and Schaenen (2013)'s critical discourse analysis (CDA) study design element of social action, or making a political commitment in the world. We made this commitment in three separate areas: critical networks; advocacy in public spaces; and culturally relevant pedagogy.

Critical networks. Learning is social, and critical coaching is no exception. In addition to the private network Kadence and I formed through our coaching conversations, I also recognized the significance of extended critical networks. These critical networks came from three sources: social media, communities of co-workers, and children’s literature.

Social media. For me particularly, social media became a critical network. While I used both Facebook and Twitter to build my collection of readings and resources, Kadence closely guarded her digital presence on social media, using only Instagram. She deleted her Facebook account in high school after a friend blackmailed her into coming out to her family using her social media posts. Being able to find a safe digital space was
a privilege aspects of my cultural identity allowed me to enjoy, but was not an option for
Kadence. I participated in Facebook and Twitter very differently: I saw Facebook more
as my personal outlet inhabited by my friends and certain coworkers, whereas Twitter
was more of a professional network I built by choosing whom to follow, including
researchers and others with whom I had limited or no connections in real life. However,
I told Kadence that on both platforms I was able to “expand my horizons when I... see
people posting different sides of things... and that really has helped me... try to
triangulate my views” (personal communication, May 31, 2016, lines 1721-1725).

Even though I considered Twitter to be my professional network, two of my
Facebook friends in particular became part of my critical network due to their
frequently postings of critical digital texts. One was a Black young adult (who is not
straight, but I do not know how he would choose to identify himself) I met through a
mutual acquaintance in the local music community, and another was a Latina female
who helped supervise college students (including myself) participating in a semester-
long study abroad program in Italy. While I do not have incredibly personal
relationships to either of them in real life, they unknowingly mentored me in digital
spaces by using their posts to share links to news articles and counternarratives with
social justice themes. I often collected these resources, and I used several of these links
to initiate critical coaching conversations with Kadence because of their timely nature
(most were very recent publications that referenced current events) and because of her
lack of safe access to Facebook. Despite my relative safety in social media spaces, I
struggled to find my voice on Facebook more so than on Twitter, which I will explore in more depth with regard to advocacy in public spaces.

**Communities of co-workers.** In addition to the critical networks I participated in on social media, I discovered the critical nature of networks in communities of co-workers. In our penultimate conversation, I called it a “subversive little network” (personal communication, May 19, 2016, line 1355) because challenging the status quo to move toward equity for groups that are often minoritized or oppressed can be uncomfortable, and therefore avoided, work, especially for individuals who benefit from the existing system. For this reason, finding networks of educators who are willing to do this difficult work builds a sense of community that can support each other.

Similarly, these critical networks with co-workers connected me with new resources and community groups. For example, a co-worker at the school told me about a local community group whose mission was to help the community see differences as collective strengths. They offered events such as book clubs and performances of plays, which also included group discussions, or talkbacks, afterward. This co-worker invited me to attend a play this group sponsored, which was based on transcripts of local trials about activity of the KKK in the 1870s interwoven with the actors’ experiences with discrimination in their own lives. While this play was a powerful experience, I also became frustrated at my lack of awareness of community resources.

This week has made me feel quite small and uninformed. How can I have spent months collecting data, only to find out that an organization such as [this one]
exists in my community? If I am just finding out about it, who else doesn’t know about it? If we surround ourselves with like-minded thinkers, are we building our capacity, networks, and advocacy community, or are we doing “easy work” with those who are already willing to listen? (Memo, May 20, 2016)

I realized later that my frustration proved the significance of critical networks: as individuals, it is impossible to be aware of every resource available, but joining together in these critical networks links our shared experiences and allows all participants to benefit from what I called a “community of knowing others who know” (personal communication, May 31, 2016, line 232). My relationship with this co-worker has continued to serve as a critical network for me as we both search for spaces to advocate for students amidst tumultuous political climates. However, these critical networks cannot be comprised solely of like-minded individuals. Instead, critical networks surround members with a variety of perspectives that stretch the horizons and worldviews of all members of the network.

**Children’s literature.** While the previous two critical network sources have utilized personal relationships with individuals, the final source of critical networks for us was in children’s literature and its power to offer readers—including ourselves—windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990) as we reflect upon our own lived experiences and peer or step into the lived experiences of others. Though I had already planned on focusing on critical analysis of children’s literature in some of my conversations with Kadence, she actually brought it up herself in our first coaching conversation.
[Another teacher and I] were talking about how... most books, especially like um, the easy readers? How they’re geared towards more middle class? And how it’s kind of hard for our kids to get into those books because they can’t hardly relate to them and we expect them to read it but they can’t even relate to it to begin with. ‘Cause it’s... not... not what they see every day and not what they’re used to and things like that, so. Yeah, we were talking about how there should be, you know, books that are different, and why are books so mainstream, middle-class—obviously, it’s because of our society, but... (personal communication, February 16, 2016, lines 219-230)

Kadence recognized the danger of having books, especially for developing readers, that did not reflect some readers’ lived experiences. Prior to our third coaching conversation, I asked Kadence to brainstorm a list of books she had used in recent mini-lessons or read-alouds in her classroom. Several of the books she mentioned were from the March Book Madness reading list, which was global initiative for classes to read and network via Twitter that Tony Keefer and Scott James started in 2015. I input these titles into a chart I designed called “Voices/Perspectives in Read-Alouds.” We worked together to analyze some of the books together, as shown in Figure 5.2.

As we filled out this chart, I was surprised by the amount of negotiating and text-dependent analysis we engaged in to arrive at our conclusions. For example, in *Last Stop on Market Street*, one of the students assumed the main character C.J. was Hispanic because he had brown skin. In my reading of the story, I assumed he was African American because of his skin color and because of some of the African American
Figure 5.2. Voices/perspectives in read-alouds.

Language reflected in the dialogue between him and his grandmother. Kadence initially thought he was Hispanic, but then revised her theory to mirror my own after I showed her evidence in the text informing my transaction. Kadence challenged me to revise my theory regarding C.J.’s socioeconomic status. Whereas I assumed C.J. came from a lower SES because he was using public transportation, did not own his own iPod, and seemed familiar with a housing area with a soup kitchen, Kadence pointed out that the clothes C.J. and his grandmother were wearing looked fairly nice. In addition, Kadence’s students further challenged my theory because they pointed out that he could still be poor and serve in a soup kitchen: such service was not exclusive of those in lower SES groups. Even though we did not complete the entire chart together, the joint transactional process was enlightening and deepened both of our perceptions of the books we analyzed.
In addition to the titles listed in Figure 5.2, we referenced children’s literature numerous times in our conversations. Table 5.5 presents a brief look at some of the titles that proved most significant in our critical coaching engagements.

Table 5.5

*Children’s Literature in Critical Coaching Conversations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Book</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Last Stop on Market Street</em> (de la Peña, 2015)</td>
<td>I selected this book to model a lesson with Kadence’s students to highlight the assumptions we as readers may be prone to make about characters. In addition, I engaged students in complex analysis of characterization, especially focusing on C.J. Finally, I also modeled how as the teacher, I had implicit power to influence students’ transactions, and I needed to be careful of this power (i.e., choosing C.J. instead of Nana for character analysis, or that I wanted students to notice that C.J. was African American on the first page, yet students instead noticed that he liked to dance).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Librarian of Basra: A True Story from Iraq</em> (Winter, 2005)</td>
<td>As Kadence reflected on her own religious beliefs, we agreed that religion should not be forced upon other people. I connected this conversation with a memory of working with a fifth grader who discovered this book and made sure to teach me what one of the Arabic symbols meant in his language—Allah, or God. I went to the school library to see what books reflected this student’s Muslim culture, and there were no books to serve as mirrors, windows, or sliding glass doors. Kadence agreed that sweeping generalizations—like the mistaken conflation between Muslims and terrorism that probably resulted in no books being available in the school library—were hurtful for students, such as saying, “Get all the Mexicans out!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>My Princess Boy</em> (Kilodavis, 2009)</td>
<td>As we discussed the messages implicit in children’s literature, I remembered this title and related it to one of my kindergarten students, a boy who liked wearing pink and dressing up as a princess. This title became extremely significant in my relationship with Kadence because she admitted later that when I shared this title with her, she knew she could trust me to know about her sexual orientation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Hey Little Ant (Hoose & Hoose, 1998)**
As I showed Kadence some of the media in the digital learning community on Flickr I formed with my kindergarteners in the 2014-2015 school year, I reminisced on the bug unit that began our interactions on Flickr. My kindergarteners debated whether to keep a mysterious five-legged bug that flew into our room, and we used this title to think about two significant perspectives: that of the bug (which is smaller in size and power) and that of the child (which is greater in size and power). We later used this book in Kadence’s bug study with her own students, which transformed their instincts to squish bugs to protect them at recess.

**Everything on Olvera Street (Coleman, 2002)**
Kadence discovered this book and was using it for small group reading. This title became significant for us because of assumptions we both made: Kadence assumed the characters were Hispanic due to the presence of tamales and mariachi bands in the neighborhood, but I assumed the characters were African American because of their hairstyles in the pictures. We discussed the book’s stereotypes of Latino food, culture, and SES, and we also researched the author (Evelyn Coleman) to see if we could discover her cultural background, which appeared to be African American but not Latina.

**Separate is Never Equal (Tonatiuh, 2014)**
While I was talking about languages being abused to trick readers into believing the book is culturally authentic (i.e., the Spanish words used in the stereotype-laden *Skippyjon Jones* books), Kadence made a connection to this title, which she had seen a student reading. She expressed her initial confusion about the book having Spanish in it but also referencing Martin Luther King, Jr., and we both realized that the only segregation experiences our school experiences addressed was the black/white segregation, not the segregation of Latino/a students this book mentions. This title also received a Pura Belpré award, which I told Kadence was an award for outstanding Latino/a literature that she should add to her classroom library.

Through each of these books, we challenged our own assumptions and stereotypes, learned more about what we thought we knew and did not yet know, expanded our
awareness of literature that portrays lived experiences beyond the mainstream, and equipped ourselves to offer rich literature that served as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors for students. Through the voices and perspectives chart (Figure 5.2) and the titles we discussed (Table 5.5), my goal was to build a critical network of literature-based resources that Kadence and I could integrate into literacy instruction, which also could begin to interrupt the prevalence of Whiteness in traditional literacy practices (Gangi, 2008).

**Advocacy in public spaces.** In addition to establishing and continuing to develop critical networks, critical coaching also involved advocacy in public spaces. As educators, these public spaces ranged from formal contexts at school such as scheduled meetings with peers and administrators, to impromptu conversations in less formal settings, such as the playground. School settings, however, were not the only public spaces for advocacy; social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, also provided platforms for advocacy beyond the physical boundaries of school. The first step was finding our voices.

**Finding our voices.** Both Kadence and I shared numerous examples of encounters with other educators, including co-workers, which involved assumptions about shared cultural norms, often with deficit views of students and families. Over time, we discovered a four-part, non-linear pattern in our responses to these situations. I called this pattern an “action trajectory of finding voices,” and I created a visual to represent this trajectory in Figure 5.3.
Silence involved the initial lack of response to an instigating event. Typically, haunting thoughts followed silence, as Kadence explained: “Like afterward, I could not stop thinking about it” (personal communication, March 24, 2016, line 1222). Haunting thoughts may have also included a feeling of guilt for not speaking up. After the initial paralysis of silence and haunting thoughts, we moved toward action by first privately rehearsing potential responses and then bringing these responses to an external rehearsal. This rehearsal usually occurred in a community of trust, such as the critical coaching partnership for Kadence and myself. The result of this action trajectory is public action with a rehearsed and refined response ready to implement when a situation similar to the instigating event arises again. This process tended to follow this order of elements, but it was not strictly linear; the process of finding voices may skip certain elements or pursue them in a different order. Once this process was completed for one specific initiating event, such as a stereotypical or microaggressive comment, the rehearsed responses became part of an arsenal of responses ready for future
encounters similar in nature. If different stereotypical or microaggressive comments are encountered in the future, this process begins anew. The overall trajectory from silence at the initiating event toward the implementation of rehearsed responses in public was a form of taking action in our critical coaching data. As we worked to find our voices, three episodes during our critical coaching partnership stood out: the night class episode; the innovation team episode; and the recess episode.

*The night class episode.* An illustrative example of this process occurred after the night class episode. The night classes for adults in both English and GED preparation were offered in partnership with a community organization; therefore, instructors were either teachers at the school or separate individuals employed through this community organization. One of these night classes occurred in Kadence’s classrooms two evenings each week, with the instructor being employed by the community organization, not the school. Several times, the arrival of this instructor ended our coaching conversations to allow her to prepare for the class. In one such instance, we had just finished completing the analysis of voices and perspectives in read-alouds (Figure 5.2), and Kadence told this instructor a little bit about our work regarding multicultural children’s literature. This instructor responded with an unexpected comment, implying that only heterosexual family structures should be represented in children’s literature. Kadence and I both reflected on this experience (hers based on the direct encounter, and mine based on conversations with Kadence immediately afterward). Complete with analysis of elements of finding voices, Kadence’s response is in Table 5.6, and mine follows in Table 5.7.
Table 5.6

*Kadence’s Response to the Night Class Episode*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lines</th>
<th>Kadence’s Response</th>
<th>Elements of Finding Voices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>After our discussion yesterday about the lack of multicultural books in children’s literature, I had a night teacher come to my room and ask what we were discussing. I filled her in on the article and some comments Ms. Wells and I made about the article. I explained to her how we agreed with the article, that there are not very many multicultural books and the ones they do have are extremely stereotypical and do not display what families truly look like. The night class lady completely agreed with us and added to the conversation about some books. Then, to my surprise she makes a random comment stating, “well you know they have those families where there’s a mommy and a daddy but mommy looks like daddy.” All I could do was freeze in complete and utter shock. I was shocked and at a loss of words for several different reasons. The first reason was she called them mommy and daddy and mommy looks like daddy, she couldn’t even use a politically correct term or say exactly what it is. She is an adult and cannot even use adult words to describe it. Then of course I was shocked because she continued to say, “we know it is out there in the world but I would never dare bring books about it into my classroom.” Once again, I was frozen with no idea how to respond, I simply went back to typing my lesson plans and just ignored it. Then, I ran to Ms. Wells to share what had happened. We discussed it and were both in disbelief. I continued to reflect on the situation because I could not get it out of my head. I should have said something and spoke out for anyone who does have homosexual parents, but I didn’t. After thinking about it a lot, I realized I should have simply said, “what if you have students who do have homosexual parents? Why shouldn’t they have the opportunity to connect...”</td>
<td>Silence</td>
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</table>
with books just as students with heterosexual parents?” If it ever happens again, I know I will respond in a respectful manner but regardless I WILL RESPOND!

Kadence’s response followed the overall progression from silence to action outlined in Figure 5.3, but the specific elements are in a slightly different order. For example, Kadence jumps from silence in line 27 immediately to public rehearsal in community of trust in line 29 because of the context: she knew we had just finished discussing this exact topic, and she knew I was still in the building. After our conversation, her process of finding her voice followed the trajectory in Figure 5.3 as she moved from silence to haunting thoughts to a private rehearsal of a specific response.

Table 5.7
Melissa’s Response to the Night Class Episode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lines</th>
<th>Melissa’s Response</th>
<th>Elements of Finding Voices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>We talked about other characteristics like gender, religion, sexuality, family composition, and SES, and I think that really led to some intriguing conversations, especially about assumptions based in religion, sexuality, and SES, both in children’s literature and our own lives. So what are the odds that the night program teacher would make that comment about books with dads and moms that look like dads?? It brought back memories of when I first started really listening and seeing some of these judgmental, stereotypical comments. My first reaction was always internal: “Wait, what? Did they really just say that??” and then I would remain in a state of shock for a few seconds too long to actually come up with a response. Many times, this is still my first response. It’s really frustrating for me.</td>
<td>Silence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
because I feel that I need to respond, I have a responsibility to respond, but I also want to do so responsibly and responsively. I can’t reply with anger or a snippy response, since that will offend the speaker. (Though the rebellious voice in my head says, “Well, THEY started it, so why shouldn’t they be as offended as they are offensive??) In the long run, though, my goal is to help people think beyond themselves, and I need them to listen and think longer and deeper than they would if they are offended. So after those critical seconds have passed and I have missed the opportunity for a powerful, poignant response, it weighs on me. I rehearse the moment over and over again in my head, coming up with the perfect response that is simply too late, and I hate that I remained silent, since silence actually is a statement that upholds the status quo. But what really struck me today was that Kadence sought me out. She texted me, emailed me, and finally came to find me as I wrestled with a bulletin board in the hall. And, of course, this is all near 6 PM! And then we exchanged some text messages where she rehearsed a response too. This really struck me because another teacher recently did the exact same thing—in a situation where her practice was challenged, she offered a response in the moment but then emailed me later with a response she wish she had said. Is this trend highlighting a sense of community, a sense of team-like-mindedness that brings us bravery in critical moments? Is it simply my position as a coach to be that sounding board, or does it go deeper? Is this why I have felt so alone in my own attempts at critical reflection and teaching, that I didn’t have this network in my own setting?

My own response to the night class episode followed the overall trajectory portrayed in Figure 5.3, though I spent some time cycling through silence and haunting thoughts. As I noted in lines 52 through 54, this response could be due to my own context: I was not
used to having a community of trust for public rehearsals of responses, so I was more accustomed to silence, haunting thoughts, and, after sufficient reflection, private rehearsal of responses.

The innovation team episode. Another critical episode occurred in an innovation team meeting that our principal organized. Kadence and I were both in the early grades meeting, which included one teacher from each grade level K-2, a related arts teacher, our vice principal, and myself as the literacy coach. While the purpose of this meeting was to come up with innovative ideas for our school’s instruction and programming, I quickly became aware of numerous assumptions and stereotypes that resulted in deficit-based thinking about our students and families. I used our weekly participant reflection document (May 2, 2016) as a think-aloud, which modeled for Kadence some of my thoughts that influenced my reactions to suggestions in the meeting. Specific quotes that troubled me during the meeting and my analysis of them are in Table 5.8.

Table 5.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote from the Innovation Team Meeting</th>
<th>Melissa’s Reflection/Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Our kids need to learn to give back, not just to receive.”</td>
<td>My main reservation with this statement was the word choice behind “our kids.” I am wondering (based on shared context) if the implication here was that because “our kids” “receive” a lot (i.e., the new shoes from New Spring, free backpacks from Costco, etc.), they need to learn to give back, not just take. However, I have two responses to this: (1) all kids need to learn to serve humanity, not just our kids; and (2) these “services” are often assumptions-based and not requested by our families. New Spring decides to come give shoes to everyone because they think “our kids” “need” them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statements</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do our families accept them? Of course. What other choice do they have?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Not all kids are college material.”</td>
<td>In some regards, I agree with this statement. We do need people in our world who collect trash, who clean tables in restaurants, who add beauty to our communities in non-traditional ways. But who are we as teachers—especially elementary teachers—to determine which kids are/aren’t “college material” based on their families or cultural backgrounds? Instead, we need to be conscious about validating a wide range of professions as valuable contributions to our society, not just focusing on college-dependent careers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“So many of our kids drop out in high school. What if someone had told them in elementary school that they were good at certain skills?”</td>
<td>I see where the teacher who said this is thinking that kids drop out because they can’t find themselves in high school, but really I would argue they drop out because they do find themselves in high school—and realize the system is not designed for them to succeed. Is assuming that “our kids” will only find success in skill-based professions related to stereotypes about Latino/a communities finding more success as housekeepers and farmers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I wish [a local applied technology center] would take kids in middle school.”</td>
<td>Same argument as above. I’m surprised to hear conversations about tracking being pushed younger and younger. Or is it a convenient way to pass off the kids we don’t really feel comfortable reaching and teaching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We want our kids to have better jobs than their parents.”</td>
<td>All parents want their kids to be successful. I just wonder how many teachers really know what students’ parents truly do? I know I didn’t know what all my students’ parents did when I taught. Now that I’m thinking about it, I remember one kindergarten student’s dad who always came to school for events dressed sharply in a suit. His dad worked at a local funeral home. He stood out to me because I assumed that none of my African American dads would dress like this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Our kids don’t have so many experiences. They don’t even know how to play games like Candy Land.”</td>
<td>No, “our kids” might not have the same experiences we do, but it doesn’t mean they don’t have experiences. If they haven’t played Candy Land, what other games have they played? If they haven’t been to the zoo, what other experiences have they shared with their families that we would never dream of? (Aside: I define “we”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this same entry, I continued to reflect on the exhaustion of these types of meetings: “I am so tired. I feel like I am fighting an uphill battle to validate our families’ stories.” I also realized that this moment became an impromptu opportunity to implement critical coaching beyond my partnership with Kadence. According to my initial definition of critical coaching as “literacy coaching that centers critical, dialogic teacher/literacy coach partnerships that problematize and reframe teachers’ and coaches’ (c)overt assumptions about students, especially students from non-mainstream groups,” the work I did in this meeting by speaking up to interrupt deficit narratives and offer instead counternarratives of possibilities was indeed critical coaching in a small group setting. Interestingly, my use of this reflection to privately rehearse a response helped me find my voice immediately in the school year following my work with Kadence when a teacher commented, “Our kids need to learn to give back.”

Kadence and I discussed this meeting and my responses to these selected quotes in our next critical coaching conversation. She admitted that she stayed quiet for most of the meeting because it felt uncomfortable, but she did notice when I entered the conversation and was glad I did so at strategic moments. When I asked if she transacted negatively with any of the quotes I shared with her, she noted that the Candyland quote was a trigger for her.

Well it was like—like you said, like it’s Candyland. And then, they’re kindergarteners. Like. There’s probably a whole slew! of games. That they have
no clue how to play. You know? Like. [small laugh] They have to learn how, you
know? But like my thing is, is I was like... well... instead of getting them to play
that game, why don’t you let them create their own game. Or why don’t you let
them play it how they see it. You know? Like why does it have to be that one
way. Like that was what I was thinking in my head. (personal communication,
May 6, 2016, lines 2612-2621)

Even though Kadence kept silent, she was simultaneously engaging in a private
rehearsal (“Like that was what I was thinking in my head”). Earlier in the same
conversation, Kadence offered a reflection on her silence (Table 5.9). (Note: Additional
line breaks appear in the transcript to allow the analysis to align with relevant pieces of
the transcript.)

Table 5.9

Transcript and Analysis of Reflection after the Innovation Team Meeting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lines</th>
<th>Transcript (May 6, 2016, original lines 2504-2532)</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Kadence</strong>: I’m glad none of these quotes were</td>
<td>(previous theme: quote analysis)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>from me. [laughs]</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Melissa</strong>: No, they weren’t--</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Kadence</strong>: I kept my mouth shut pretty much</td>
<td>Theme, re-negotiated: #1</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>the whole time. [laughs]</td>
<td>Silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>Melissa</strong>: They weren’t—you did keep your</td>
<td>M takes up change of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>mouth shut the whole time. Umm.</td>
<td>theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><strong>Kadence</strong>: I’m just not... [inhales] I don’t know,</td>
<td>Contextualization: inhale,</td>
</tr>
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<td>9</td>
<td>in settings like that, like... yes... I know who</td>
<td>incomplete thoughts, pause</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>each everyone is? But I don’t know. I get</td>
<td>(expressions of doubt)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>nervous to speak up.</td>
<td>Theme, modified: #1a</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td><strong>Melissa</strong>: Yeah.</td>
<td>Silence in unfamiliar groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td><strong>Kadence</strong>: Into things like that. And then...</td>
<td>Contextualization: inhale/exhale, laughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>[inhales, exhales] I don’t know, I just... it just</td>
<td>(expression of doubt,</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>worries me. [laughs]</td>
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</table>
Melissa: I get nervous too. And... that’s I think a journey I’m still on? Because I sit there and have this internal dilemma with myself.

Kadence: Mmhmm

Melissa: Of... it’s much more comfortable for me not to speak up right now, but do I have a responsibility because... Of... my research. Because of my interests. Because of my advocacy for families?

Kadence: Mmhmm

Melissa: Do I have a responsibility to speak up right now.

Kadence: To speak up. Mmhmm.

Melissa: And advocate for families by... questioning. Your assumptions.

Kadence: And also—I also get nervous cause everyone... I am young?

Melissa: Mmhmm

Kadence: But... that’s like, that’s the thing. They’re always [higher pitch] you’re just—you’re so young, you’re so young. [regular pitch] And so I’m always like... if I speak up? Is it really gonna...

Melissa: Yeah.

Kadence: Even matter? You know?

Melissa: Yeah.

Kadence: Like, are they gonna listen to me or anything?

Boundary making: M aligns with T’s nervousness

Theme, re-negotiated: #2

Responsibility to advocate Boundary making: M creates exclusive boundary (“my research”)

Contextualization: Overlap (agreement)

Theme, re-negotiated: #3: Limits due to age

Boundary making: Shared assumption of “they” as other (experienced) teachers

Contextualization: Tone shift

For Kadence, two major obstacles prevented her from finding her voice: not knowing her audience deeply (Theme 1a: silence in unfamiliar groups), and not believing she had any authority due to her age (Theme 3: limits due to age). These findings coalesced with other conversations. For example, Kadence admitted she could easily find her voice with her grade level team because she knew them, their personalities, and even their families. In addition, she commented repeatedly on her perception of the inferior positionality of early-career teachers, which she experienced starting with her student
teaching at this same school when her co-workers would laugh at her new ideas and not support her implementation of them. After I introduced Theme 2 (responsibility to advocate), Kadence did not take up this theme and instead introduced Theme 3 (limits due to age). However, I created a boundary that excluded her from this theme by tying responsibility back to my research and my positionality as a literacy coach, which includes more inherent power than that of a classroom teacher.

The recess episode. Finally, a critical episode occurred while Kadence was outside with her class at recess near the end of the school year. This episode had significant contextual roots in world events, specifically North Carolina’s recent passage of House Bill 2 (or HB2), which, among other things, placed legal restrictions on public bathroom use based on one’s gender assigned at birth. In May 2016, President Obama passed legislation to protect the rights of students to use the bathroom aligned with their gender identity, even if this identity differed from the one printed on their birth certificates. Soon after this political event, Kadence said she needed to talk to me about something that happened at recess, and she pulled me into her classroom with the lights off and door closed to begin retelling the incident. I invited her to write in our weekly participant reflection document until we could meet after school.

Something very interesting and kind of heart wrenching happened during a discussion with [some other teachers] on the playground on Friday. We were sitting on the bench watching our kiddos play when the subject of a student with blue hair was brought up. All the teachers (including myself) thought it was a little too much to have bright blue hair at school. My students stare at it going
down the hallways, so I can imagine it would be distracting in class. I think people should be able to express themselves however they please (even through hair color) but sometimes it is too much for others to deal with while in a school setting. I believe they should definitely be able to have it if it is more subtle so students are not distracted and of course during the summer time. Anyways, this hair subject somehow turned into a comparison of; if transgender kids can choose what bathroom they go in, students should be able to choose hair color. To me, these are two totally different topics and should not be compared but for some reason, the teachers thought this was a logical comparison. Our research has been a lot about how to take action in situations where people may need to view another perspective or simply be educated on the topic more. I, of course, sat in silence as I was afraid to make a statement to three teachers who all believed the same thing. I did not want to receive backlash or be looked at differently for stating my opinion. So, I stayed quiet and literally turned away from the conversation while keeping an open ear. They began stating how disgusting transgender people are and how wrong it was and how they should have to use the bathroom that goes along with the “part” they have. How do you speak to 3 strong minded teachers without causing an uproar? How do you take up for transgender people without making them think you are crazy or have a wrong opinion? How do you educate them in a way that will not offend them? These were questions I pondered through my head as they spoke such derogatory comments about transgenders. I am hoping through our research I
can find ways to pose questions or make statements that will simply make them think and open their mind to a new perspective.

Despite the discomfort of this situation, Kadence made some intentional decisions in both her response and the wording of her reflection. First of all, the aligned with the teachers at first as they discussed the disruption they perceived the blue Mohawk to cause in learning environments. However, when the teachers shifted the footing to introduce the theme of transgender bathroom rights, Kadence intentionally did not take this up—she physically distanced herself by turning away and ending her participation as a contributor to the conversation, though she did continue participating as a listener. In this case, Kadence’s silence seems to be influenced by fear. She feared being outnumbered among three teachers who seemed to share beliefs about transgender individuals being inferior or “disgusting.” She also feared being “looked at differently for stating [her] opinion,” which she feared the other teachers would perceive as “wrong.” Again, Kadence’s identity as a “gay teacher” (a term she used in her cultural memoir) conflicts with what she perceives expectations from coworkers to be, including their assumption that she shared the belief that transgender individuals were inferior. She also feared speaking up in an attempt to educate the teachers would offend them, but yet she mentions a specific tactic she wanted to use to find her voice: asking questions that would make the listeners think and consider new perspectives. She reiterated these thoughts when we debriefed later that afternoon, when I asked her what she wished had gone differently.
Umm... [clears throat] Of course just wishing that I could’ve, you know, came up with something. To say of course. Or at least ask them questions that would make them think. A little bit differently and. [inhales, clears throat] Just open up their... perspectives and stuff like that. But uh... just in a way that wouldn’t offend them. Either. Or make myself... I don’t know, like... I don’t want them to look at me differently either. (personal communication, May 19, 2016, lines 21-31)

Kadence did not routinely clear her throat in our conversations, which led me to believe this was a marker of her discomfort as she replayed this painful situation in which she could not find her voice but wished that she had.

Because the recess episode left Kadence trapped in stages of silence and haunting thoughts about how to speak up, I created an opportunity for public rehearsal in our coaching conversation that afternoon. Kadence re-enacted her own position, and I pretended to be the other teachers that participated in the recess episode so that she could publically rehearse some responses she felt she could not try out in the actual event. After our brief re-enactment, she reflected on how she worked to find her voice.

I was thinking of more of, I didn’t want to make... statements? I wanted to ask questions? And see where? You were getting your opinions and your comments from? And seeing like what made you, what drove your decision to make those statements and comments? So more of just like... I guess, just being curious of why you’re thinking that way. Just so I could get more on your side, I guess you could say. (personal communication, May 19, 2016, lines 1519-1525)
Kadence demonstrates an alignment with asking questions as a means of understanding—and even empathetically aligning with—what she called “your side.” Our jointly-constructed boundary understood this phrase to mean the other side, namely the other teachers on the playground but represented by me in the re-enactment. I interrupted Kadence to validate what she was trying to do: “…I think [what you just did] is huge! Because we talk about the whole concept of humanization. Just realizing we are all people. Um, realizing where people are coming from? Is a, a big part of that” (lines 1528-1532). In this response, I named Kadence’s moves to understand and empathize that would lead to humanization. In addition, I had given her a resource from Teaching Tolerance designed to help teachers speak up at school by echoing, interrupting, educating, and questioning (Teaching Tolerance, 2012). I named several of the discursive strategies she enacted, especially questioning and educating. However, even with validation and extra resources, Kadence was not ready to take up public action after this episode, admitting she would speak up outside of school but not at school. This episode illustrates how finding voices as advocates for students and families is an ongoing process. Even though Kadence and I had been working together on finding our voices for several months, this interaction presented a new argument—one significant to her and her sexual orientation—that she had not yet had an opportunity to rehearse for, so she therefore responded to the situation with silence.

This episode was also significant for me as an observer who was not directly involved because I began to assert to myself the importance of critical coaching as an integral responsibility of my job for ethical reasons.
I find myself more and more convinced that as a literacy coach—as an instructional leader who works alongside teachers to create equitable learning spaces for all students—this is my job. It might not be my job to make everyone think like me, but it is my job to invite people to think beyond themselves. Again, the sense of community is vital. How do you create a network, a safety net, of people who can be the equity fighters, working to infiltrate the outspoken and often-heard voice of oppression? How do you help these individuals—who typically mean well and are not out to hurt others—see that their beliefs translate into actions that restrict the rights of others? …Critical coaching has the potential to instigate change by stretching minds. And if we want teachers to be reflective practitioners, does this not include our own beliefs and assumptions? (Memo, May 17, 2016)

Critical coaching, therefore, offers opportunities for instructional leaders to work with teachers to create equitable learning spaces for students that transcend pre-existing beliefs and assumptions, which may inadvertently limit possibilities for students and families, by allowing educators the opportunity to see—and act—beyond themselves.

**Advocacy on social media.** Social media became a critical network for me, but I found my own voice inconsistently in this digital public space. As I found thought-provoking digital texts, I did not hesitate to share links that I felt could inform critically-minded educators on my Twitter account. On Twitter, I knew no co-workers followed me, and the people I did follow or who followed me aligned with my critically-oriented philosophies. In fact, I intentionally constructed my Twitter network to follow people
who would help me grow as a critically-minded educator. This trend aligns with
Kadence’s willingness to speak up in situations with people she knew personally, such as
her grade level teammates or her friends outside of school, but not with people she did
not know as well. On Facebook, however, I frequently hesitated to share the exact
same digital texts. I began reflecting on what responsibility I had to use my voice in
digital spaces.

As a receiver of information, is social media a safe, anonymous space to explore
without judgment? To seek multiple perspectives and vantage points? Does this
go with the progression too, that we must be immersed in receiving information
before we feel comfortable dispersing it? Will I ever feel comfortable, or is that
beyond the point? (Memo, April 11, 2016)

I began to recognize that just as silence signified different ways families chose to
participate in the digital learning community, silence on Facebook and other social
media could be similar. Even without reposting or commenting, I continued to read
digital texts I discovered on social media and expand my repertoire of resources and
responses. I remained in the first two stages of voice finding: silence and haunting
thoughts, as I debated my responsibility to repost selected digital texts.

Over the summer of 2016, several events in close succession caused me to find
my voice on Facebook. On July 5 in Baton Rouge, Alton Sterling was shot at point-blank
range while being pinned to the ground by two officers. On July 6 in St. Paul, Philando
Castillo was shot at a traffic stop while reaching for his license and registration after
informing the officer that he had an open-carry permit and a firearm in the car. On July
7, a lone sniper killed 5 police officers in Dallas before the police killed him by sending in a bomb on a robot. Frustrated with the recurring patterns of injustice, I posed a link to a previously-published piece (“This is what white people can do to support #BlackLivesMatter”) by a White author who used her space to publish the voices of various leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement. I accompanied this article with my own words: “Read, listen, think, and act.”

In the days that followed, I analyzed the responses. Eight people liked the article. Three were my coworkers: one a Black teacher at my previous school, one a White co-worker with whom I consider a member of my critical network, and one a White district office leader. Admittedly, I was surprised she clicked like. We had one discussion last spring about how my research was going, and I had to be rather vague to preserve privacy, but she did share a personal experience she had that week of a district office co-worker making fun of names that sounded non-White. She felt surprised and offended, but felt she had no voice to speak up because of who this person was. She did not say who, but I felt like it was someone with more power or status than she felt she had. The day after I posted the link, my uncle left a comment that criticized the “liberal” article and called the Black Lives Matter movement “racist” and laden with “violence, looting, and other lawless acts.” After spending some time in the private rehearsal stage of finding my voice as I composed, deleted, re-wrote, edited, and re-read potential responses, I moved into a public action by posting a response and awaiting feedback in the form of a reply. I decided not to challenge some of the explicitly judgmental comments in his response, and instead focused my reply on de-
escalating the situation by challenging him to think beyond his perspectives and finding a common point of agreement—not using violence, as the article did not in any way encourage the use of violence to support the movement.

While this exchange upset me, I was also dismayed by the discourse—or lack thereof—with my fellow educators around this digital text. One of my former co-workers posted that she “agree[d] 100% with every word of [my uncle’s] post.” But other than this comment, my educator Facebook friends were predominantly silent. I even attended a reading conference a few weeks later with some teachers from my school and overheard one saying to another, “Have you seen what she’s been posting on Facebook lately?” as I walked back to our group table, but the conversation ended abruptly upon my arrival. I reflected on this voice-finding experience in a memo shortly after posting the article on Facebook.

I wonder what my co-workers think of me now, if they will trust me or see me as less a part of their mission in life. But this isn’t about me. And just as others have been my invisible, self-created community of voice-finding on Facebook, what if I can be that for someone else? What if they see my posts and read them, even if they don’t react? What if I am someone they know and trust, and then they start to consider what these articles share because of their relationship with me? But I am still scared. I am angry. I felt bullied by my uncle, by my own family. And while my heart raced and my blood boiled, I realized this was a sacrifice I had to make. In the grander scheme of life, these few moments and days of heart racing and blood boiling were nothing. I am still
White. I am still privileged and recognized, and safe. My job is safe. My resume is safe. My life is safe. (Memo, July 11, 2016)

Despite my discomfort, my safety—and my privilege—create a space for me to advocate, a space that I have a responsibility to act within as a both a literacy coach and empathetic human being. Literacy transcends the decoding of print; it is about enacting who we are in this journey toward making meaning in our worlds. On social media, we carefully craft enacted identities through words, photos, videos, and links to other media. I struggled—and continue to struggle—with crafting this identity, particularly on Facebook, that reconciles my responsibility of using my voice for social action with my responsibility of developing trusting relationships with co-workers who hold different systems of beliefs. As I reflected in the end of my cultural memoir, “in the end, is it not with great love that we must advocate not only for those who share our cultural identities, but also those who do not?” Those who do and do not share our cultural identities include not only students and families, but also co-workers. Taking action by advocating in public spaces, even during uncomfortable situations where silence is easier, must be pursued in love.

**Culturally relevant pedagogy.** The final space Kadence and I engaged in as a form of taking action involved culturally relevant pedagogy. While advocating for students and families in public spaces—such as conversations on the playground, in meetings, and on social media—was important, advocating for their cultures and their ways of knowing in the classroom has an immediate impact on their learning, identities,
and lives. Therefore, I consider both planning for and the enactment of culturally relevant pedagogy to be forms of critical classroom-based action.

As Kadence and I planned culturally relevant learning experiences for students, two challenges came into play: recognizing students’ funds of knowledge, which were sometimes obscured by our own cultural identities, and moving beyond the oppression of standardization in education. Finally, I will analyze our work to plan culturally relevant pedagogy through two episodes: the life cycle planning episode and the tamale episode.

**Funds of knowledge.** At times Kadence and I let our own culture, socialization, and resulting assumptions limit students’ learning possibilities, as evidenced in the family letters episode. Kadence recognized how both teachers’ assumptions and the assumptions embedded in standards affected perceptions of students’ abilities.

> Because of the standards, because of what we’re required to teach, we expect them to have these background knowledges [sic] and these experiences and when they don’t, we’re like, “Oh, they don’t know anything,” but it’s not that they don’t know anything, it’s just they have different experiences and different background knowledge that... we just don’t—I personally just don’t know how to, I guess, get into, I guess you could say? (personal communication, February 16, 2016, lines 77-83)

In this exchange, Kadence observed one challenge of early attempts to integrate culturally relevant pedagogy: not only recognizing students’ myriad funds of knowledge
as strengths to build on, but also how to merge these ways of knowing into content-area instruction for a group of learners.

The key informants into students’ funds of knowledge are their families, and for this reason meaningful family engagement is a vital component of culturally relevant pedagogy. Because families in high-poverty, linguistically diverse schools may not be perceived as experts and assets in their children’s lives, I deliberately framed activation of funds of knowledge or family engagement as I planned learning experiences with Kadence. In fact, I have expanded this focus beyond our critical coaching dyad: in the school year following my work with Kadence, I asked teachers to consider how to tap into students’ prior experiences and families’ funds of knowledge as they plan units of study. As a result, teachers in various grades planned units that asked students how they used light and mirrors at home in a science unit; introduced democracy by asking families to share symbols representing their home countries and traditions related to important celebrations; and studied cultural contributions through family interviews.

Oppressive standardization. Often in educational settings, the standards seem to carry more importance than the living worlds of knowing embodied in each student, and Kadence recognized the oppressive nature of standards.

And, um, it, it also comes to like, we’re... we’re required to, like, we can’t, teachers can’t help that it’s went to... [inhales] standards, standards, standards, you know. And things like that. Like we... if we don’t teach those standards, then when they do go on to the test, it’s like... well they, they didn’t get this because you didn’t, you know, teach that or whatever, and so it gets to where
we’re having to teach to the standards even though we shouldn’t, but when it comes to those tests, it’s... [short laugh] (personal communication, February 23, 2016, lines 304-317)

Despite her positionality as an early childhood educator who does not teach in a “testing grade,” Kadence still felt obligated to teach to the standards so that she does not limit students on future testing. She constructed educators as oppressed victims who “can’t help” working in this era of standards and testing.

The tension between letting students guide their own learning and also covering the required content in time arose several times in our conversations. For example, she told me about an inquisitive student who has an unending supply of questions about the world, and sometimes she felt that she had to stop his questions to move on to other content. Through our discourse, I helped Kadence challenge this sense of standards-based oppression by sharing some of my own experiences as a kindergarten teacher (Table 5.10). (Note: Additional line breaks appear in the transcript to allow the analysis to align with relevant pieces of the transcript.)

Table 5.10.

Transcript and Analysis of Melissa Explaining Student-Centered Planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lines</th>
<th>Transcript (April 19, 2016, original lines 2122-2146)</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Kadence:</strong> And I’m like... I, we’ll have to research that later, or we’ll have to, or I’ll try and look it up really quick or, and I’m just like</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Melissa:</strong> Right</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Kadence:</strong> I wish I could go off of that and start teaching them things. But I have all these... you know?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Boundary making: Shared understanding of standards Theme: #1 Desire for freedom from standards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Melissa: There’s ways around it. It’s harder the older you get because, you’re one of the last grades that’s not tested though.
Kadence: Yeah.
Melissa: So that gives you some space.
Kadence: That is very true.
Melissa: But... I found that, especially in kindergarten. A lot of their natural curiosities would fit into the standards.
Kadence: Mmhmm!
Melissa: In one way or another.
Kadence: Yeah
Melissa: Like we had one group one year that... got obsessed with the moon! And I was like, well this is not in our standards, that would be in first grade. Umm... so what I did is I just worked in some literacy standards? And, some math standards? And, some science mapping?
Kadence: Ohhh!
Melissa: And then I contacted first grade and said hey. What do your kids struggle with. That you wish they knew coming to you. About the moon. And we just frontloaded them.
Kadence: Oohhh!
Melissa: So... we worked stuff in.
Kadence: See that’s smart.
Melissa: You know? But you really have to know your standards and trust that... kids will ask the questions and you meet them. Where they are.

In this episode, intertextuality was significant. In providing specific examples of how I had escaped the oppression of standardization in my own kindergarten class, I was able to show Kadence possibilities that she could begin to imagine in her own classroom. However, when she moves to take the floor in line 34 by overlapping and aligning with my message unit, I maintained the floor to reiterate the importance of knowing standards in order to follow where students’ learning interests lead. In critical coaching,
coaches should be cognizant of the real and oppressive threat standards pose to non-standardized approaches such as culturally relevant pedagogy and be prepared to support teachers as they implement and defend student-centered practices.

Life cycle planning episode. The most extensive co-planning Kadence and I completed involved planning a unit about life cycles. Kadence selected this topic because it was in the standards and the grade level long range plan, but students also were expressing interest in this topic: they were wanting to squish bugs, including caterpillars, at recess, which caused a debate among students in the class as to whether to kill the bugs or let them live.

In co-planning, my intent was twofold: to augment family voices and funds of knowledge, and to incorporate social justice themes in culturally relevant pedagogy. For the first goal, Kadence asked families to send her media via Flickr or Class Dojo’s messenger to show living things that students encountered in their daily life. The two images families shared were presented in the previous chapter. But for the next goal, incorporating social justice and culturally relevant pedagogy, at first I was stumped. I had already brainstormed a lesson incorporating Hey Little Ant and issues of power and rights of living things to build on the bug squishing episode at recess, but moving beyond this topic to life cycles was a challenge for me. To get ideas, I visited the Teaching Tolerance site and perused their lesson plans. One lesson included a discussion about age and assumptions, which led me to consider studying ageism as a potential way to achieve all of these goals. I was surprised to find several resources on this theme, including an article about addressing ageism through children’s books and
an entire blog devoted to the topic of ageism. When I shared these ideas with Kadence in our planning meeting the next day, she also made an interesting connection among age and power based on students’ interest in the bug squishing episode.

‘Cause we could even break that into like a caterpillar’s? Kind of like... not a... child? But kind of like a child? And then the butterfly’s like an adult? So is it OK to do things to... children? But not... adults? Maybe I’m going way too far into it. (personal communication, May 11, 2016, lines 181-188).

Kadence’s idea reflected deep thinking, yet she offset this contribution with a clause indicating doubt (“Maybe I’m going way too far into it”). I noticed this trend several times in our exchanges, especially early in our conversations where decision making was involved. At first, I would offer a choice, Kadence would defer with a statement such as “I don’t know” or “It doesn’t matter to me,” and then I would make a decision for us. However, later in our critical coaching relationship, I altered this communication pattern slightly: instead of making a decision for us, I would either validate Kadence’s contribution (like I did in the previous example), or I would defer back to Kadence with another question. As a literacy coach, my position comes with embedded power: coaches may be perceived as “experts,” even though I constantly try to situate myself as a co-learner. Therefore, critical coaching involved making intentional decisions to re-negotiate this power through shared decision making.

**Tamale episode.** In this episode, I realized the importance of smaller-scale, impromptu versions of culturally relevant pedagogy. Just like in critical coaching, critical listening is crucial in culturally relevant pedagogy. Critically listening helps us find the
spaces where students are sharing pieces of themselves and expressing interest in learning about each other and our different cultures and worlds, just as Kadence’s students did in the tamale episode. Before depicting and analyzing this episode, I offer one caveat: culture is incredibly complex, and food is just one manifestation of cultural identities. While this episode does focus on students’ interactions around the conversational theme of tamales, the students whose cultural backgrounds include tamales—not Kadence, whose cultural background does not—initiated and sustained this theme, which is significant.

As writing workshop neared its end, Kadence gathered the students on the rug for a group share time. The students had been working on letters to their pen pals in another class, and they buzzed with excitement about their writings and what their pen pals would think and how they would respond. Elizabeth took a seat in the “Author’s Chair” to share her first pen pal letter with the class. For most of the time she was reading, her eyes were glued to her paper as she faced the class. But when she got to one specific part of her letter in which she announced that she loves tamales, she paused briefly and turned to smile at Kadence before she continued reading. At the end of her reading, Elizabeth accepted questions and comments from her peers. One student asked why she liked tamales and Elizabeth responded, “In México [pronounced as in Spanish], that’s what they eat.” Another student had never heard of tamales and asked what they are, and Elizabeth said, “Stuff that has things inside. Green things. Wrapped in stuff.” Elizabeth’s share time ended shortly thereafter, and the conversation went from tamales back to pen pals. A few minutes later, however, yet
another student took up the tamale theme again as she shared a personal experience with tamales at the “laundry place” her family frequents, which has a “cart” selling tamales. Clearly, tamales were a shared interest among multiple children—even the one student who had never heard of or tasted tamales before.

For me as a teacher, moments like this were the “spark” where project-based learning, inquiry, and culturally relevant pedagogy began. However, this critical listening can be more challenging than it appears. A few passing comments, especially if a teacher has one agenda for learning and those comments’ topics aren’t on that agenda, are easy to ignore, on purpose or on accident. For me, that is the hardest part of critical listening: putting aside my own ideas and perspectives and being willing to share the power of negotiating conversations and learning opportunities with students.

When I critically listened to these students, I realized tamales could be a topic Kadence could use to plan culturally relevant pedagogy. I emailed the librarian to find books about tamales, and she pulled both books in our library about tamales. As I flipped through the second book—a collection of cooking poems in both English and Spanish—I wondered about opportunities to engage families by sharing recipes with the class, using math to measure and make tamales (with an expert parent’s support!), sequencing steps to make tamales, sharing stories about personal experiences with tamales (as several students did on their own in the writing workshop share time), and talking about goods and services and where the ingredients from tamales originate.

As the tamale episode unfolded, I had the luxury of being a participant observer with no agenda other than to learn with and from all of the inhabitants of Kadence’s
classroom; therefore, I saw a rich learning opportunity that she may not have noticed.

In our coaching conversation following this episode, I utilized a common literacy practice of “thinking aloud.” Just as teachers think aloud to model their own strategic moves as readers and writers, I explicitly explained my musings and strategic decisions in the moment of the episode to make my thought process transparent (Table 5.11).

Table 5.11

Transcript and Analysis of Reflection on the Tamale Episode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lines</th>
<th>Transcript (May 19, 2016, original lines 200-234)</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Melissa: Um. So yeah. Um. But yeah, I just</td>
<td>Theme:  #1 Planning culturally relevant pedagogy with tamales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>like to try to find books about the topics and</td>
<td>Intertextuality: M’s previous experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>um. That kind of stuff when I’m going through</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>it. And I brainstorm some, some ways to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>include other... kinds of content through...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>tamales if they continue to express interest in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>that.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Kadence: Mmhmm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Melissa: That’s kind of what I’ve learned is just</td>
<td>Boundary making: Shared understanding of reality of standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>to listen to the kids? And then realize OK,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>that’s what they want to learn, how can I align.</td>
<td>Maintaining theme #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>What I have to do as a teacher. Because the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>state wants me to teach these</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Kadence: To meet—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Melissa: things.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Kadence: To meet their interests as well.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Melissa: Exactly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Kadence: Yeah.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Melissa: So. That was kind of... I realized, it’s</td>
<td>Theme, re-negotiated: #2 Critical coaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>kind of almost coaching into... culturally</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>relevant pedagogy, which I’m not sure a lot of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>literature... out there has talked about. Um.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Would you have thought anything about the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>tamales... tamales?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Kadence: Um... like what do you mean.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Melissa: Like—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Kadence: What about them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Melissa: If I hadn’t said something about</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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As I established the first theme of planning culturally relevant pedagogy, I also invited Kadence into this space through the shared boundary of standards. Standards are a reality in education, but they do not have to exercise oppressive powers over teachers and students. After I briefly changed the theme to reflect on my responsibility in critical coaching to make the planning process behind culturally relevant pedagogy transparent, Kadence took the floor through student stories and introduces a new theme, tamales in her classroom culture. Interestingly, the student-initiated event in the classroom that
day (line 37) established a boundary that included the students as active contributors to this theme, even though they were not physically present in our conversation. The students themselves found spaces to exercise creativity and ownership over their own learning even while Kadence felt the pressures of oppressive standardization, which provided important hope and trust in the monumental learning outcomes that result from following children as leaders of their learning.

Conclusion

Critical coaching involved two critical components: studying ourselves and taking action. As Kadence and I studied ourselves, we first framed our own identities as cultural beings, especially related to our families, education, and critical moments. We then used this framing to name and challenge our own assumptions, which developed as part of our socialization into different social groups. We took action in three substantial ways: (1) developing critical networks, which involved significant others on social media, subversive communities of co-workers, and interactions with children’s literature; (2) advocating in public spaces, which involved finding our voices in an evolving process of silence, haunting thoughts, private rehearsal, and public rehearsal, and also finding our voices as public intellectuals (Rogers, 2014) on social media; and (3) planning and implementing culturally relevant pedagogy, which involved recognizing and channeling students’ funds of knowledge into instruction and resisting the inherent oppression of standardization.

Kadence and I discovered the critical importance of trust in this work. Critical coaching cannot succeed without this key element. Children’s literature, open
conversations, fluid positionality of both teacher and coach as learners, and transparency all contributed to the trust we built. However, Kadence and I held very similar ideologies and beliefs, which may create a more natural setting in which trust can thrive. A willingness to participate in open dialogic relationships, even with those whose ideologies differ from one’s own, without judgment or intent to “convert” others is necessary in this kind of work. In addition, I preserved Kadence’s trust by maintaining upmost confidentiality of our work. In conversations with co-workers about our partnership, I let Kadence decide how she would like to describe it, and she frequently talked about the digital learning community more than critical coaching.

Critical coaching is an apprenticeship into naming the ways socializations and identities impact actions educators take in learning spaces, ranging from instructional planning advocating for students and families. As I mentioned in the poem opening this chapter (Figure 5.1), this socialization becomes an invisible blanket woven from all the prior experiences and social groups that informed our identities, cultural norms, and assumptions. This blanket of socialization may (c)overly cover others. Once we see the threads that join together in this blanket of socialization, we can see how these threads also tie our own identities as cultural beings to our performed identities as educators. Naming these pieces of ourselves, reflecting on how they impact students, and re-weaving these threads to discover new worlds of possibilities with and for students and families is indeed an act of humanization and love.
CHAPTER 6

BEGENDINGS: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSION

Act 2, Scene 1. It is the year following my work with Kadence. I sit in a classroom—ironically of the same grade Kandace taught, but now she has moved to another school—waiting for the teachers to drop their students off at their respective related arts so we could begin our grade level planning meeting. As I wait, an educator enters the room to ask a question about creating a digital newsletter on a class website instead of sending a paper copy home each week. Her concern, she admits, is not knowing which venue families would prefer, or if enough families would have reliable access to the internet to read the digital newsletter. When she asks for my suggestion, it is simple and immediate: “Have you tried asking the families?” Her answer is no.

Act 2, Scene 2. I am in a classroom to help a teacher prepare a blog for her students to recommend books to each other. Then she shares that she and her team were wanting to plan a service project for the students to complete because, as she observes, “They are given so much, and they need to learn to give back.” My mind flashes back to the exact same comment being made in an innovation team meeting I attended with Kadence that past May, and I recalled some of the responses I had rehearsed after that event through reflection and conversation with Kadence. I respond, “Well actually, all students can benefit from learning to give back. Have you tried asking them what needs they have seen that they’d like to address in the community? And
remember, none of these kids ask for the free things that are given to them—others just assume that they need them.” The teacher looks a little surprised that I did not instantly support her service project idea, as all of her peers have. After she admits that no, she was going to choose a project for the students, I press her again into letting the students have a voice. “I don’t think they’re ready for that,” she responds.

Yet a few minutes later, she walks back over to me and apologizes for her assumptions.

These two scenes are actual events and conversations I faced in Act 2, the year following this study. For me, recurring moments such as these remind me of the importance of the findings of this study. In this chapter, I briefly summarize the study and then discuss the major findings, implications for practice, and spaces for further research.

**Summary**

For four months in the spring of 2016, I created a critical coaching partnership with Kadence, an early childhood educator. She participated in an initial and final interview, along with eight coaching conversations during the course of the survey. Simultaneously, we constructed a digital learning community on Flickr that would engage families with equal voices on a platform where all members could post, view, comment, and favorite media in a private, password-protected digital space. The purpose of this study was to create dialogic, power-sharing spaces that recognized the diverse ways of knowing that teachers, families, and students brought to mutually-constructed learning environments through two strategies, digital learning communities and critical coaching. I based my research in the exploration of three questions:
1. Do families, teachers, and students choose to engage in digital learning communities? If so, how? If not, why?

2. How do families, students, and educators exercise power through digital learning communities?

3. How do digital learning communities stimulate critical coaching partnerships between teachers and literacy coaches?

Because I wanted to see what correlations existed between my job as a literacy coach, I designed this study as an action research case study. When Kadence asked me for help during the summer of 2015 with strengthening her communication with families, she presented herself as an extreme case (Patton, 2002). The data I collected and analyzed during this study included observations of interactions in Kadence’s classroom and the digital learning community; weekly participant reflections by Kadence and myself; coaching conversations and the resulting transcripts; artifacts from the digital learning community, both from Flickr and Class Dojo; additional documentation, including our cultural memoirs, lesson plans, and my personal analytical memos; semi-structured interviews with Kadence at the beginning and end of the study and with three focus families at the end of the study; and surveys administered to families at the beginning and end of the study about home/school communication and access to technology. I analyzed this data with critical discourse analysis, which also considered thematic analysis for contextualization of the data and visual analysis to reflect the unique challenges of working with multimodal texts.
Major Findings and Implications for Practice

To present the major findings and related implications for practice, I will look at digital learning communities and critical coaching separately and how my definitions of each evolved as a result of the study. For both, I will offer a brief synthesis of the major findings, followed by a section of tips for future practice.

**Digital learning communities.** Initially, I conceptualized a digital learning community as “a dialogic space online where traditional home/school power norms are equalized by including families as equal participants” (cited from the definitions provided in Chapter 1). During this study, I discovered the need to revise this initial definition by adding the phrase “in learning spaces” to the end of this definition to emphasize the importance not just of dialogic communication, but of dialogic learning amongst families, teachers, and students. While I had originally intended this community to develop on Flickr, I realized from the data collected in this study that Flickr may or may not be the best platform for a digital learning community. Despite offering the capabilities for all members of the digital learning community—families, students, and teachers alike—to have equal rights to view, post, comment on, or favorite media in private, password-protected online spaces, the families experienced significant struggles accessing the Flickr group. This finding caused me to expand my analysis of artifacts in the digital learning community on Flickr to include artifacts from Class Dojo as well. This decision displayed responsivity (Bakhtin, 1981) to the families, who were voicing their preference for this platform by their ongoing participation in and use of it to communicate with Kadence and view, like, or comment on the classroom
activities documented in the Class Story. However, Class Dojo does not provide a fully
dialogic experience because only the teacher had access to post media on Class Story.
One future accommodation that could allow educators to use Class Dojo more
dialogically would be to invite parents to send pictures and media to the teacher via
preferred methods, such as email, texting, or direct messages within Class Dojo, which
the teacher could then post to Class Story on behalf of the parents. Though this still
positions the teacher and families unequally because the teacher would continue to
donimate the posting rights, there is no other solution in the current design of Class
Dojo. An additional solution involves Class Dojo updating its app to allow parents to
post to Class Story while providing the teacher administrative rights in case anyone
accidentally or intentionally posts inappropriate material. While Lillqvist et al. (2016)
recognized the potential monologue such administrative censorship could create, Brown
and Grinter (2014) found that teachers wanted “more restrictive engagement and
interactions” (p. 59) in digital spaces with families, and both potential solutions I
present—the teacher posting media families create on their behalf or an update of the
Class Dojo app that would allow families to post with administrative access for the
teacher—demonstrate the potential tension between restrictive digital spaces and
potential monologues.

Next, I will synthesize the findings related to access to technology and
participation in digital learning communities before considering implications for practice
in the form of tips for forming digital learning communities.
**Access to technology.** According to results of the final survey (Appendices F and G), all responding families had access to at least one technological device, and all families could access the internet using at least one device. 79% of families reported owning a smart phone, which positioned the families in this study as “smartphone-dependent” (Smith & Page, 2015). These findings were significant because of the existing literature on the digital divide, which suggests that families with limited economic resources are less likely to have access to the internet or digital devices (Celano & Neuman, 2010; Ching et al., 2005). The findings of the present study craft a powerful counternarrative to the limiting narrative of the digital divide.

**Participation in digital learning communities.** Families, teachers, and students engaged in the digital learning community in ways that matched their unique needs and interests. Families used the digital learning community for virtual participation in classroom learning, communication with the teacher, and dialogic knowledge exchanges. Families participated virtually in classroom learning through viewing, liking/favoriting, or commenting on media in Class Story or on Flickr. According to visual analysis, families seemed especially drawn to like or comment on images that displayed high modality (since they liked pictures showing their children in action in the classroom), strong vectors (such as the parallel vector in “Elizabeth’s Dogs” and the diagonal vector in “New Shoes”) and demand (such as Elizabeth’s direct, smiling contact with the camera in “Elizabeth’s Dogs” and the students who are looking at the camera instead of each other in “New Shoes”). Regarding communication with the teacher, families enjoyed Class Dojo’s direct messaging feature that allowed for quick digital
communication. Families used this messaging system to gain information relating to their child’s behavior or upcoming events or assignments. Some families envisioned using messaging to advocate for their child’s needs, as Esmeralda’s mother wanted to ask about her daughter’s ability to see the board. Finally, families used conversations around media on the digital learning community to create dialogic knowledge exchanges. A photo of students building a birdhouse on a field trip became a catalyst for interactions between Ryasha and her mom about classroom learning experiences.

Regarding technology, Patrikakou (2016) recognized “the school’s pivotal function in addressing important issues to enhance parent–child interactions and, therefore, to maximize student academic, social, and emotional learning continues to be ignored” (p. 20), yet Ryasha and her mother did exactly that—instigated an interaction based on a digital text her teacher created. Similarly, Esmeralda’s mom created a dialogic knowledge exchange to educate Kadence and myself about cultural traditions and celebrations important to her family that often are not recognized in American school settings.

As teachers, Kadence and I engaged in the digital learning community as artifacts, windows, and invitations. We used both Flickr and Class Story to capture significant moments of classroom life. Many of these artifacts depicted learning activities that Kadence aligned with state standards, but we also discussed the importance of documenting the smaller moments too, like the heart students drew her in the dirt at recess. We also used the digital learning community to create artifacts our own lives outside of school, as we did by posting living things important in our lives
during the life cycle unit (Figure 4.2). In addition, we also used the digital learning community as a window into students’ lives. Both Wejr (2014) and Yost and Fan (2014) echo this metaphor for social media, though they both framed the window from the perspective of families looking into the classroom, not teachers looking into students’ lives. However, Brown and Grinter (2014) did report teachers feeling the need to see into the home lives of students in transnational parenting situations in order to more deeply understand students’ situations and plan instruction and relationships accordingly. Finally, we used the digital learning community to invite families to contribute to learning experiences, as two families did during the life cycle unit by sending pictures of the family dogs (Figure 4.3).

Students used the digital learning community to consume and produce digital media and also to build social connections. Admittedly, these finding were the most surprising to me, as I had made some subliminal assumptions that early childhood students would be unable to engage in the digital learning community in any other role than observers. Ryasha and Esmeralda both admitted to “liking” the “Class Dojo Valentine’s Day” image (Figure 4.4), which visual analysis found to be different from any other piece of media in the digital learning community due to its low modality, with bold colors and exaggerated curved lines that do not depict reality. Ryasha synthesized her knowledge of how other apps worked to learn how to send Kadence a picture of her baby brother, even though her mother and her teacher did not know how to use this feature. Finally, students used the digital learning community to build social connections. One significant example occurred when Kyle was unable to attend a field
trip, so he viewed the media posted to document the field trip so that he could share in the experience.

Several barriers to participation created issues and concerns. Device limitations affected both home and school: at home, a couple of families ran out of space on their phone and could not download the Flickr app, and at school, the network blocked Flickr as a social media site, so students could not access Flickr independently. Both platforms displayed limitations as well. Class Dojo provided occasional challenges for families who tried to access it without a functional class code, which would allow them to access Kadence’s class privately. In addition, Class Story denied posting rights to anyone other than the teacher, and the class ceased to exist the following year, meaning families could no longer access the media from the previous school year. While Kadence and I are unsure if this feature is universal or was due to her moving to a new school and needing to delete her account to start a new one, the potential of losing access to media challenges the potential for continued shared membership of this dialogic space. Flickr displayed the most limitations, as only two families were able to create an account and join the private group by the end of the year. Furthermore, posting media privately involved following a series of detailed steps. In addition to the platform limitations, another limitation surfaced when families were unaware of what each platform could do.

**Tips for forming digital learning communities.** Based on the data collected from families, the observations I made while participating in a digital learning community
with Kadence’s students and families, and the body of literature I reviewed, I offer the following tips for forming digital learning communities.

1. *Pick a platform that creates private, dialogic spaces where families have equal voices.* Because teachers tend to want to exercise more control over the interactions in digital spaces among themselves, families, and students (Brown & Grinter, 2014), most popular communication tools do *not* engage families as equals in digital spaces. An example of a non-dialogic space is Remind, an app that allows teachers to push out information to families, yet families cannot respond to these messages. Instead, strive to find digital platforms that can host private, password-protected spaces (Brown & Grinter, 2014) for educators to communicate “with,” not “to,” families (Wejr, 2014). By granting all members of the community equal posting rights, Flickr presents many opportunities for dialogic digital spaces, but other platforms can and should be considered as long as they host the capacity to build private, dialogic spaces.

2. *Pick a platform with an established history.* Technology is ever-changing, and choosing a platform with a proven track record is important. As I researched alternatives to Flickr during the study, I discovered several options suggested in a message board years ago that no longer existed. While new technologies may be exciting and pose great potential, they may or may not experience their anticipated success. Therefore, using platforms like Flickr, Facebook, and Instagram that have millions of users and years of history may promise more future success.
3. **Start them at the beginning of the year.** Ryasha’s mom offered this suggestion in her interview. Starting digital learning communities from the very beginning of the year allows them to become an important part of the classroom culture from early on. Once families have gotten into comfortable patterns of interactions with their child’s new teacher, they may be less interested in trying a new form of communication, such as a digital learning community.

4. **Meet with families and demonstrate what the platform can do.** Because families likely have not participated before in private, dialogic digital learning communities between home and school, offering additional support is necessary. Kadence and I met with families at the beginning of the study to set up Flickr accounts, but we did not meet with families again about the digital learning communities until the interviews with focus families at the end of the study. Offering several workshops a year would allow refresher tips for families who choose to participate in the digital learning community and also give families who do not have the interest or access to be active participants in the digital learning community to be involved.

5. **Protect privacy.** Before building a password-protected, private digital learning community, make sure students have permission to be represented in digital spaces. My school requires all families to sign a release form giving or limiting permission for school personnel to feature students in pictures and videos for school or district publications, including the website. In addition to such release forms, the initial information meeting explaining the digital learning community
to families should obtain permission for their child to appear in media shared on the digital learning community and distinctly explain the privacy controls on the platform on which the digital learning community is housed. Likewise, what educators do with the knowledge gained from windows into family spaces on digital learning communities should be for mutual benefit. Using the information to gossip with co-workers or to provide proof to uphold deficit assumptions are examples of not using the knowledge for mutual benefit; however, using information gathered about funds of knowledge and planning culturally responsive instruction are examples of using the knowledge for mutual benefit.

6. **Model their use in the classroom so that students can be tech leaders at home.**

Even young children are digital natives, and their skills can be used to help their families, who may be digital immigrants (Patrikakou, 2016). All three of the focus students interviewed exercised autonomy in the digital learning community: Ryasha sent a direct message to Kadence with a picture of her baby brother, Ryasha and Esmeralda both “liked” or “favorited” media, and Kyle viewed pictures of his peers on a field trip when he was unable to attend so that he could still share in the experience. While we may assume that age limits students’ technical abilities, these three students and others like them remind us that these assumptions are often not grounded. Modeling the use of the digital learning community also engages students who may not be as comfortable using technology.
7. Use the information you gather from digital learning communities to plan culturally relevant instruction. While the finding that Kadence and I used the digital learning community as a window into students’ lives mirrored existing literature (i.e., Wejr, 2014), simply viewing into students’ lives is not enough. Instead, educators can use these windows to make informed instructional decisions. Educators should seek windows in other spaces too, such as family interviews or open conversations with students, so that families’ funds of knowledge can be the foundation of instruction, even if they chose not to be active participants in the digital learning community.

8. Ask the families. When in doubt, ask the families. Kadence and I thought we had planned for all the troubles families might have with internet access by asking them to come into her classroom to create Flickr accounts using school devices, but the families introduced a new problem we never considered—not having enough space on a smartphone to download a new app. By asking families about their access to technology, we learned that 79% of responding families did have access to a smartphone, and all responding families reported access to the internet on at least one device. In addition, educators can ask families what they would like to see in the digital learning community so that it meets their personalized needs.

9. Use digital learning communities as one form of dialogic relationships. Digital learning communities should be in addition to, not in place of, face-to-face relationships. While some families may prefer the convenience and immediate
access a digital learning community provides, others may prefer in-person communication (Yost & Fan, 2014). Ryasha’s mom and Esmeralda’s mom both waited for our face-to-face family interviews to share specific classroom concerns. Wejr (2014) recognized, "By focusing on communication with parents, we not only increase our engagement online, we also foster enhanced face-to-face relationships with our families offline" (p. 14). These relationships, whether online or in-person, are the ultimate goal of any partnership developed between home and school.

**Critical coaching.** Initially, I conceptualized critical coaching as “literacy coaching that centers critical, dialogic teacher/literacy coach partnerships that problematize and reframe teachers’ and coaches’ (c)overt assumptions about students, especially students from non-mainstream groups” (cited from the definitions provided in Chapter 1). During the data analysis process, two essential components of critical coaching emerged: self-reflection and taking action. While the terms “problematize and reframe” in my initial definition carry a hint of action, these actions are more relevant to self-reflection in private spaces than advocacy in public spaces. Therefore, I offer the following revision to my initial definition of critical coaching: now, I see it as “literacy coaching that centers critical, dialogic teacher/literacy coach partnerships that problematize and reframe teachers’ and coaches’ (c)overt assumptions about students, especially students from non-mainstream groups, in order for educators to take action by joining critical networks for continued growth and reflection, advocating for students...
and families in public spaces, and planning culturally relevant instruction that centers students’ many ways of knowing.”

My critical coaching conversations with Kadence occurred in her classroom, at the end of the school day. During these conversations, we frequently began with a shared reading I collected from either professional articles I read as a graduate student or digital texts I discovered on social media with real-world, timely significance. After we each read the text, our conversations steered in various directions, depending on how we each transacted with the text. Our open dialogue, the intentional preservation of the confidentiality of our conversations, and the positionality of both Kadence and myself as learners built a trusting relationship.

I will synthesize the findings related the two major components Kadence and I practiced in our critical coaching partnership, self-reflection and taking action, before considering implications for practice in the form of essential conditions for entering critical coaching partnerships.

**Self-reflection.** Self-reflection aligned with Rogers and Schaenen (2013)’s first three design elements of critical discourse analysis: reflexivity, context, and deconstructive-reconstructive orientations. While Kadence and I did some explicit work with our identities as cultural beings, such as the writing of our cultural memoirs, much of our self-discovery was embedded in our coaching conversations. Our identities were particularly shaped by three elements: (1) our families, which did not fit mainstream norms for families (I came from a divorced family and Kadence was adopted), and which also challenged Kadence’s acceptance of her own sexual orientation; (2) our educational
experiences, which shaped Kadence’s identity as a classroom teacher who encourages students to take risks with open minds and shaped both Kadence and my identities as life-long learners, even though we struggled to keep our personal and educational identities separate; and (3) our critical moments, which occurred for me when Ariya’s mom called me a racist (as I explained in Chapter 1), and which occurred for Kadence when she came out to her family in high school, amidst messages she received from her parents, her church, and society that her sexual orientation was wrong.

A second piece of our self-reflection was naming and challenging assumptions. As educators in Title I schools who have been socialized in mainstream norms, Kadence and I uncovered many assumptions that are not simply personal, but rather systemic. For this reason, I was more interested in the language behind these assumptions and how we collectively navigated them in our conversations. Kadence used several key phrases when introducing assumptions, such as “I’ve seen,” “I’ve heard,” “they say,” “I don’t know,” and “I know” (Table 5.2), though seeing for herself seemed to be the most influential informant of Kadence’s assumptions and beliefs. One illustrative case of collective navigation of assumptions occurred in the family letters episode, in which Kadence held to a theme of families’ lack of literacy and ability to participate while I maintained my own theme of families being able to participate. Kadence modified her thematic cohesion to take up my theme when she realized Esmeralda’s bilingual skills—which she had already seen demonstrated in her classroom—could solve some of the problems she perceived with communication with Spanish-dominant families.
Taking action. Kadence and I took action in three areas: critical networks, advocacy in public spaces, and culturally relevant pedagogy. We benefitted from membership in critical networks from three sources: social media, communities of co-workers, and children’s literature. Social media was especially powerful for me, since Kadence limited her activity on social media to Instagram. Even though I viewed Twitter as my professional network and Facebook as a personal one, two Facebook friends in particular posted frequent digital texts that were thought-provoking and critical of the status quo, and they became significant members of my critical network on social media. Communities of co-workers allowed Kadence and I to find a small group of educators at our school who were willing to challenge the status quo in favor of equitable learning opportunities, especially for minoritized students. These communities were helpful for processing micro-aggressive comments other co-workers made, or to learn about new resources. One member of this community of co-workers introduced me to a local community group that aimed to help see differences as collective strengths through community events such as book clubs, performances of plays, and discussions. Finally, children’s literature wove its way into many of our conversations. Because Gangi (2008) challenged the implicit Whiteness in many aspects of literacy curriculum and practices, I developed a voices and perspectives in read-alouds analytical chart (Figure 5.2) to complete with Kadence. We found that filling out this chart was not as objective as I anticipated; rather, we each brought with us certain assumptions and understandings that affected our transactions and subsequent constructions of meaning. Because progressive educators "experience a great deal of
resistance and conflict, which can cause enormous stress, particularly for new teachers" (Darder, 2002, p. 136), critical networks provide a support system for this challenging, yet necessary, work.

Advocacy in public places began with finding our voices, which was not as simple as I initially thought. Even though I discovered an action trajectory that began with an instigating event and then traveled through silence, haunting thoughts, private rehearsal, public rehearsal, and, finally, public action, this trajectory was not necessarily linear, nor did it always end with public action. For example, Kadence’s response to the night class episode (Table 5.6) did begin with silence, but then she jumped to the fourth step in the trajectory, public rehearsal, before cycling back to haunting thoughts and private rehearsal. My response to the same event (Table 5.7) spent two rotations between silence and haunting thoughts before moving to private rehearsal, returning to haunting thoughts, and ending with an external rehearsal. Despite intentional work to find our voices, public action was not always the outcome. Following the innovation team meeting episode, I debriefed my attempts to interrupt some of the deficit assumptions other teachers in the meeting voiced, and Kadence admitted that she intentionally remained silent because she did not know these teachers as well as her own teammates. Thus, another condition to the trajectory emerged: personal familiarity with other participants in the conversation. The recess episode and Kadence’s discomfort following it solidified my perception of my responsibility to speak up in situations where teachers may feel they do not have the power to find their voices. This process was not simple for me either; when I found my voice on social
media in the summer following this study, I received pushback from my own family and noticed the resounding silence of most of my co-workers. Darder (2002) echoed the importance of shared processing of actual events: "Through experience, self-reflection, and dialogues with one another, teachers build their ability to respond critically to the actual conditions at work in their schools, rather than according to some prescription of action that is totally irrelevant to the moment" (p. 65).

The third form of taking action through critical coaching occurred with culturally relevant pedagogy. After recognizing students’ funds of knowledge and the pressures from oppressive standardization, I worked with Kadence to model planning for student-centered instruction by presenting examples of ways I had met this goal in my own kindergarten class, making my thought process transparent during the tamale episode, and engaging in joint planning with Kadence during the life cycle unit. These moves allowed Kadence to participate in somewhat of an apprenticeship of planning culturally relevant pedagogy.

**Essential conditions for entering critical coaching partnerships.** Based on the data collected from interviews and coaching conversations with Kadence and the body of literature I reviewed, I offer the following essential conditions for entering critical coaching partnerships.

1. *Deliberate power-sharing between coach and teacher.* Because the positionality of a literacy coach comes with implicit assumptions of power, deliberate moves to address this power can create more equitable, power-sharing spaces between literacy coaches and teachers in critical coaching partnerships. I navigated this
space with Kadence by negotiating decisions (i.e., the response pattern of my question, her response, and my final decision early on, replaced by the response pattern of my question, her response, my deferment, and her final decision later in the relationship); positioning myself as a learner and co-participant (i.e., completing readings alongside Kadence and engaging in discussions; writing my cultural memoir as she wrote hers); and making my process transparent whenever possible (i.e., highlighting my own assumptions based in my socializations; explaining how I responded at the innovation team meeting; and breaking down my process of planning student-centered culturally relevant pedagogy).

2. **Willingness to engage in critical self-reflection.** Just as Rogers and Schaenen (2013) recognized the importance of reflexivity in critical discourse analysis, our work as educators—which is entrenched in the power of words as we work with and through students and co-workers—also relies upon critical self-awareness. Through candid conversations, reflections, and written cultural memoirs, Kadence and I identified significant sources of socialization—including critical moments that highlighted mismatches between our socializations and others’—that contributed to our cultural norms and assumptions, which may or may not mirror those of the students we serve. We also collaboratively engaged in navigating spaces where our assumptions initially blinded us, such as in the “Family Letters Episode,” when Kadence initially worried her families would not be able to participate in the project but eventually modified her stance after I
helped her consider alternative forms of participation. In engaging in this critical self-reflection as educators, we create opportunities for others, for “a humanizing education is the path through which men and women can become conscious about their presence in the world” (Darder, 2002, p. 34).

3. **Critical networks.** Because learning is social and we grow by surrounding ourselves with more experienced others, critical networks are key. While the critical coaching partnership itself is a critical network on a micro level, critical networks can branch out beyond this partnership. For Kadence and myself, three sources of these critical networks were social media, which provided digital texts for reflection and proposed action; communities of co-workers, which provided connections with new resources, community groups, and subversive networks of support within the school setting; and children’s literature, which allowed us to consider literature that served as windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990) into the lived experiences of ourselves and others—and how literature did not serve these purposes. Reflecting on Freire’s work, Darder (2002) recognized, “Through the building of ethical communities for struggle and change, we can develop the critical strength, reflective ability, political knowledge, social commitment, personal maturity, and solidarity across our differences necessary to reinvent our world” (p. 29).

4. **Engagement resources to stretch our thinking.** For Kadence and myself, critical networks and engagement resources were intertwined. I often curated digital
texts from my critical networks on Facebook or Twitter to share with Kadence at the beginning of our coaching conversations. Similar tapping of resources from critical networks embodied by co-workers or children’s literature also informed our critical coaching partnership. However, resources came from other sources as well. I remembered learning about Teaching Tolerance, a website with a myriad of social justice-oriented teaching resources, in one of my graduate classes, and it was on this site that I discovered both inspiration for the ageism focus of the life cycle unit and the “Speaking Up” guide that I shared with Kadence as she struggled to speak up in some deficit-oriented conversations. These resources, often provided by participating in critical networks, instigated conversations during the shared reading experience, which positioned both teacher and coach as learners reflecting on how these resources impacted our respective educational roles and contexts.

5. **Trusting spaces for finding our voices.** As Kadence and I collaboratively unpacked situations that were difficult for us to find our voices (such as the night class episode, the innovation team meeting episode, and the recess episode), we uncovered an action trajectory of finding our voices (Figure 5.3). After the instigating event, the trajectory tended to move from silence to haunting thoughts, then to private and external rehearsals before being able to take public action in subsequent situations similar to the instigating event. Even though this trajectory from the initial event to public action did not require following each step consecutively, trust was an underlying factor in this work.
Kadence and I used our critical coaching space to rehearse potential responses and receive feedback to revise these responses before implementing them in public spaces. Furthermore, finding our voices required a great deal of critical self-reflection, which also required trusting spaces. Kadence admitted she trusted me with a critical aspect of her identity as a gay teacher because she knew I would preserve the confidentiality of our work, and because I had already demonstrated what she perceived as an accepting stance through earlier discussions, especially related to children’s literature such as *My Princess Boy* and other titles (Table 5.5).

6. *Awareness of current events and/or global context*. As Kadence and I contextualized our conversations, we often alluded to student/family stories, stories of interactions with other teachers or co-workers, and stories of real-world events. Therefore, critical coaching depends on awareness of current events on a global scale that may impact classroom instruction culture in expected—or unexpected—ways. For example, the recess episode related directly to House Bill 2 (HB2), the recent legislation passed in North Carolina that curtailed the rights of individuals who did not identify as the gender printed on their birth certificate, including the right to use the bathroom of the gender with which they currently identified. Planning culturally relevant, social justice-oriented instruction that addresses current events also requires an awareness of global context. An example occurred after the study ended, as I listened to three teachers gathered for their weekly planning meeting. As they struggled to
brainstorm teaching activities to help students understand the different perspectives of the Native Americans and the early settlers, a memory of something I heard on the radio on the way to school flitted through my mind.

“You know, that reminds me of something going on right now in our lives with the pipeline in North Dakota. I wonder if we can relate that to the differing perspectives of the Native Americans, who were there first, and the explorers, who want rights to resources. Let me see if NewsELA has any articles on this topic” (field notes, October 27, 2016). My awareness of a relevant world event that aligned with their teaching needs, along with a possible source of readings for students, allowed me to steer these teachers toward a learning experience that had far more significance for students than any pre-published curriculum guide could offer.

7. **Realistic urgency.** In the words of my principal, “How do you move toward change in an ever-changing world of education? And how do you wait for change when the need is now?” (personal communication, October 26, 2016).

No, critical coaching will not enact systemic change overnight, or even in a year. But if we recognize the urgency of our work—centering the strengths and capital our students and families do bring with them, which our system might not be equipped to recognize—we stay focused in our strategic daily actions. Kadence and I both felt the urgency of the work we completed in our critical coaching partnership, especially relating to family engagement and planning culturally relevant pedagogy. However, we also recognized the daily realities of public
education, such as standardization, and the challenges these realities posed to our work. Freire recognized indispensable qualities of progressive teachers, among them humility, courage, tolerance, and the tension between patience and impatience. In this tension, Freire recognized the impatience of urgency but the required patience to reflect and take thoughtful action (Darder, 2002). In this tension between patience and impatience, or realistic urgency, is also the ethical responsibilities of engaging in a critical coaching partnership. The work is challenging, self-reflective and evolving, and, for the most part, beyond the status quo of public education. Therefore, this work has the potential to place educators in vulnerable positions, and the literacy coach in the partnership must recognize the ethical responsibility to support the educators engaging in this work.

**Spaces for Further Research**

Both digital learning communities and critical coaching communities were novel concepts in this study. Therefore, several limitations in this study offer rich spaces for further research.

Because this study occurred in a population with a high percentage of English language learners, another space for additional study concerns the linguistic decisions families make when their dominant language is not English. For example, translanguaging occurred in some of the family interviews. Deeper analysis of which language families choose to use—their home language or English—and why would provide interesting insights. Similarly, I debated how my own linguistic decisions about
posting on the digital learning community in English or Spanish would affect families’ subsequent linguistic decisions in the digital learning community. Future studies could examine how the teachers’ decisions to post in English or in families’ home language influence families’ linguistic choices in digital learning communities.

A limitation of visual grammar analysis is that viewers of the media—in this case, myself—are limited to their own transactions with the media, meaning that this analysis is subjective. Further research could engage students, teachers, and families in the process of visual grammar analysis to compare a variety of perspectives within a shared community. In addition, these interpretations could be compared with the thought process of the creator of the media.

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, the platform for a digital learning community needs to be chosen carefully. Neither Flickr nor Class Dojo offer perfect solutions to create private, dialogic digital learning communities. Further research can consider additional platforms—or new uses of Flickr and Class Dojo not included in the present study—to search for ideal platforms for this work.

While the current study was designed to focus on engaging families in digital learning communities, further research should analyze family engagement in dialogic, non-digital spaces, as I briefly considered in Summer and Summer (2014). As Wejr (2014) observed, engaging families in digital spaces allows us to “build community and effective relationships both online and in person” (p. 15). The nature of these in-person interactions could depend on the needs of the researcher, teacher, and families. For example, in my kindergarten classroom, several families expressed interest in learning
more about how to support their emerging readers and writers, so I planned a family night where we jointly constructed an understanding of literacy and shared ways to support it at home (Summer & Summer, 2014). Ongoing efforts to grow relationships with families in digital and face-to-face contexts would allow the families to have a more prominent place in the research, which I feel was a limitation of the present study.

Critical coaching offers several opportunities for further research. I offered some analysis of the discourse Kadence and I used in our coaching conversations, such as the specific episodes I analyzed in Chapter 5, but additional analysis of the turn-taking structures in critical coaching conversations would be needed. Similarly, further analysis of the discourse Kadence and I used as we negotiated planning culturally relevant planning is of interest but beyond the scope of the present study. Further studies that implement critical discourse analysis in classroom settings involving culturally relevant pedagogy are needed. For example, events similar to the tamale episode that occurred in Kadence’s classroom during writing workshop share time offer ample opportunities for rich discourse analysis among students and educators.

Finally, Kadence and I both wondered if critical coaching would be possible with a teacher who might be perceived as resistant to such work. Because Kadence had already asked me for help strengthening her home/school communication, she was a willing participant who was personally invested in the outcomes of the study. Kadence approached the work with critical awareness and a willingness to learn, which might not be qualities of teachers forced into critical coaching partnerships. Jones and Rainville (2014a) called for coaches to enter teachers’ spaces gently with a desire simply to
understand, and forcing teachers to enter critical coaching partnerships violates this call.

Working with teachers who are perceived as resistant without forcing them to engage in critical coaching could be an interesting source of data, though it may be a challenging space to find. Alternative forms of critical coaching, such as the interactions I had with other teachers in the innovation team meeting, may be spaces ripe for further research, though group and individual coaching conversations are different in nature.

**Conclusion**

*And no amount of resources or pedagogical strategies will help us to provide the best opportunity for low-income students to reach their full potential as learners if we do not attend first to the stereotypes, biases, and assumptions we have about them and their families.* (Gorski, 2013, p. 69, emphasis added)

It seems fitting to end where we began, attending to the challenge Gorski (2013) issued. It is our ethical responsibility as educators to help *all* students reach their full potential as learners; however, “whether we are conscious of it or not, teachers perpetuate values, beliefs, myths, and meanings about the world. Thus, education must be understood as a politicizing (or depoliticizing) institutional process that conditions students to subscribe to the dominant ideological norms and political assumptions of the prevailing social order” (Darder, 2002, p. 56). Therefore, just as it is our ethical charge to help *all* students reach their full potential as learners, it is also our ethical responsibility to recognize the inherently political stance we all inhabit as educators socialized within the dominant ideological norms and employed within an educational system that embodies them.

Critical coaching provides a means to name and frame the dominant ideological norms that many teachers (c)overtly possess; challenge the assumptions these norms
influence, especially when these assumptions position minoritized students in deficit narratives; and move toward public action that creates new possibilities for educators, families, and students alike through critical networks, public advocacy, and culturally relevant pedagogy. Digital learning communities create dialogic spaces where traditional home/school power norms are equalized by including families as equal participants in the production and consumption of media capturing learning experiences. Freire believed that it is “impossible to teach without educators' knowing what [takes] place in their students' world” (Darder, 2002, p. 46), and digital learning communities offer one potential window into the funds of knowledge and ways of knowing students and families gain from their world.

I am convinced that critical coaching is not beyond my role as a literacy coach; it is my role. Reading the world and reading the word are two inseparable events, as Freire and Macedo (1987) attest.

Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world.... In a way, however we can go further and say that reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of writing it or rewriting it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious, practical work. For me, this dynamic movement is central to the literacy process. (p. 35, original emphases)

Furthermore, Darder (2002) reminded us that "knowledge is dynamically produced and emerges out of our relationships with one another and the world" (p. 66). Critical coaching and digital learning communities both provide opportunities for educators,
families and students to read, write, and rewrite their worlds to recognize and honor the diverse ways of knowing we all share with each other and each other’s worlds.

In closing, I end with one final poem (Figure 6.1) to celebrate not a destination, a completion, but rather a journey very much still in progress.

begendings

and so we end where we began
   with questions
   with hopes
   with ideas--
      (tried, used, left, and kept)
   with ways of knowing known and not

but we do not start in the same place
for we have journeyed far and close to ourselves

endings are beginnings too
   if you turn around to see

Figure 6.1. begendings.
EPILOGUE

The crisp, fall air fulfills its invigorating promise yet again, but something else fills the air today. “I’m in your group!” several young voices chant, serenading me with smiles and hugs—some of the same smiles and hugs that greeted me last year in my action research partnership, just one year older.

As I accept the folder from the teacher containing all the answers for emergencies, a pang of sadness hits me. I miss this. I miss the excitement of preparing for field trips. I miss the energy of learning with and from the world around us. I miss the looks of amazement as new learnings unfold. I’m not done being a teacher yet. But perhaps being a literacy coach, a truly effective literacy coach, requires this teacher heart to empathize with teachers and students alike.

Unlike the majority of the passengers, I board the bus quietly, and I watch. I notice how friends from last year’s class choose to stick together as friends one year later, especially Ryasha and Tish. Ryasha, who showed us her brilliance in quiet ways last year, has struggled to connect with her new teacher this year. Her quiet brilliance has succumbed to silence for now, and she is choosing to express herself instead with drawn hoodies and even a stealing episode. I know Ryasha’s heart, and I make a point to speak to her whenever I see her in the hallway, or to advocate for her in conversations with her teacher. Critical coaching, after all, involves knowing ourselves and our students.
As little bodies squish three to a seat, I am relocated to the front of the bus, a privilege I have never had before as a teacher. Elizabeth and a student new to our school this year sit in the seat next to me, each immersed in her own tablet. “Hey, Ms. Wells,” Elizabeth suddenly says. “I want to show you something on my tablet.” She stares intently at the screen for a few seconds, looking for what she wants to share. While her neighbor continues to play her game, Elizabeth smiles triumphantly when she finds what she seeks. She turns the screen to me and says, “Look, these are my dogs.” I see two familiar furry faces and inquire if these are the same dogs Elizabeth posted on Flickr last year. She confirms that yes, they are indeed the dogs from the picture she shared with the class, and then turns to a friend who is singing a song from their upcoming school play and begins recording the performance with her tablet.

I smile, because I see. I see the power Elizabeth finds in her tablet to share pieces of herself with others—and capture pieces of others to share with herself. I see afresh the connections we made last year in our digital learning community, the moments that may have seemed small and insignificant—like posting one picture of the family dogs—but yet continue to be reference points in our knowing each other’s lives. I see that even though life marches on—through teachers moving and students advancing to new grade levels—relationships last, and relationships matter.

Relationships are critical to humanizing and truly seeing ourselves and others. Critical coaching, then, lies in these relationships. These relationships rely on trust, honesty, and bravery to look in the mirror (at the beautiful and not-so-beautiful moments) and invite others to take this journey to uncomfortable places with us. We
must look in the mirror to see beyond it—and we must see beyond ourselves to craft worlds in our classrooms that validate the gifts our students and families share with us every day.

I turn back to gaze out the window, that optical illusion of glass that can either reflect or, with just the right amount of illumination and focus, reveal the world beyond. And I smile, and I see.

*Porque hací ya conocemos.*

Because we already know.
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APPENDIX A – INFORMED CONSENT LETTER (ENGLISH)

Dear Families,

My name is Melissa Wells. I am the literacy coach at your child’s school, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Education Department at the University of South Carolina. I am working with your child’s teacher during a study. I am studying how digital learning communities on Flickr (a free service through Yahoo) can help teachers learn more about their students and plan meaningful instruction.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be able to participate in three ways:

1. You will be asked to complete two surveys (one in February and one in May) about home/school communication and technology use.
2. You will be asked to participate in a private digital learning community on Flickr. In this community, you may post photos and videos, comment on photos and videos, and “favorite” photos and videos. Only families in your child’s class will be added to this digital learning community. Other people will not be able to see what is posted on our digital learning community. To respect all families, please follow these rules:
   a. We will share what we are learning in school with you on Flickr. You may post photos and videos that show you and your child extending this learning at home, or you may share family learning experiences that are not related to our current unit at school.
   b. Identify your child and other family members by first name or initials only.
   c. Do not share other families’ photos or videos outside of our digital learning community on Flickr.
   d. Post responsibly. Do not post anything that could embarrass or hurt someone.
3. You may be asked to meet with me and your child’s teacher at the end of the school year (May) for an interview. We will talk about home/school communication and how you chose to participate in the digital learning community on Flickr. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to. The interview will take place at school or another place we agree on, and should last about 30 minutes. The interview will be recorded so that I can accurately reflect on what we discuss. The recording will only be reviewed by
myself and your child’s teacher to transcribe and analyze them. They will then be destroyed.

Other families from your child’s class only will see what you post in the digital learning community on Flickr. As detailed in the procedures above, we ask that you and all other group members respect the privacy of everyone in the group.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your express written permission, unless required by law. The information will be securely stored in locked files and on password-protected computers. The results of the study may be published or presented at seminars, but the report will not include your name or other identifying information about you.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free not to participate, or to stop participating at any time, for any reason without negative consequences. In the event that you do withdraw from this study, the information you have already provided will be kept in a confidential manner. If you wish to withdraw from the study, please call or email Melissa Wells. There will be no costs to you for participating in this study, and you will not be paid for participating.

If you would like to participate, please tell me or your child’s teacher during our meeting at school on Wednesday, February 17. If you have questions, you can send them to Melissa Wells (phone number and email provided but redacted for confidentiality). If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please send them to the Office of Research Compliance at the University of South Carolina (803-777-7095).

Thank you,

Melissa Wells

(phone number and email provided but redacted for confidentiality)
APPENDIX B – INFORMED CONSENT LETTER (SPANISH)

Queridas Familias,

Me llamo Melissa Wells. Soy la “literacy coach” (una maestra que trabaje con todas las maestras con la instrucción de leer y escribir) de la escuela de su hijo/a, y soy una candidata doctoral del Departamento de Educación a la Universidad de Carolina del Sur. Estoy trabajando con la maestra de su hijo/a durante un estudio. Estoy estudiando como “comunidades de aprendizaje digitales” en Flickr (un servicio de Yahoo que es gratis) puede ayudar a las maestras para aprender más sobre sus estudiantes y para planear instrucción significativo.

Si decida participar en este estudio, tendrá tres formas para participar:

1. Se le pedirá que termine dos encuestas (uno en febrero y uno en mayo) sobre comunicación entre la escuela y la casa y el uso de tecnología.
2. Participará en una comunidad de aprendizaje digital privada en Flickr. En esta comunidad, puede enviar fotos y videos, escribir comentarios en fotos y videos, y marcar como “favoritos” fotos y videos. Solos las familias en la clase de su hijo/a puede unirse esta comunidad de aprendizaje digital. Otras personas no pueden mirar las cosas que son enviadas en nuestra comunidad de aprendizaje digital.

Para respetar todas las familias, por favor sigue estas reglas:
   a. Compartiremos las cosas que estamos estudiando en la escuela con Ud. en Flickr. Puede enviar fotos y videos que muestra Ud. y su hijo/a haciendo un extensión de estas cosas en casa, o puede compartir experiencias de aprendizaje con la familia que no tienen una relación a nuestras unidad de estudios a la escuela.
   b. Identifique a su hijo/a y otros miembros de la familia solamente con nombre (no apellido) o iniciales.
   c. No comparta los fotos y vídeos de las otras familias afuera de nuestra comunidad de aprendizaje digital en Flickr.
   d. Hacer una publicación de forma responsable. No envíe nada que puede avergonzar o lastimar a nadie.

3. Hay una posibilidad que yo le pida que venga a platicar conmigo y la maestra de su hijo/a en mayo, al final del año escolar. Hablaremos sobre la comunicación entre la escuela y casa, y como escojé participar en la comunidad de aprendizaje digital en Flickr. No tiene que responder ninguna pregunta que no quiere. La
entrevista va a ocurrir en la escuela o en otro lugar que estamos de acuerdo, y durará 30 minutos. Voy a grabar la entrevista para reflejar con exactitud en nuestra discusión. Solamente yo y la maestro de su hijo/a va a escuchar a la grabación para transcribir y analizar. Serán destruidos después.

Otras familias de la clase de su hijo/a puede ver las cosas que envía a la comunidad de aprendizaje digital en Flickr. Como ya se ha dicho en los procedimientos arriba, le pedimos que Ud. y todos los otros miembros del grupo respeten la privacidad de todas las personas en nuestro grupo.

Cualquier información que viene de este estudio será confidencial. La información se almacenará segura en archivos bloqueados y computadoras con la protección del contraseña. Los resultados del estudio pueden ser publicados o presentados en conferencias, pero los resultados no incluirá su nombre o otra información de identificación.

La participación en este estudio es voluntaria. No tiene que participar, o puede terminar la participación a cualquier tiempo, sin consecuencias negativas. Si termina su participación en este estudio, la información que ya fue obtenida será confidencial. Si quiere terminar su participación en este estudio, por favor llame o envíe un correo electrónico a Melissa Wells. No hay ningunos costos para participar en este estudio, y no recibirá pago para participar.

Si quiere participar, dígame o dígale a la maestra durante la reunión a la escuela el miércoles 17 de febrero. Si tiene preguntas, puede enviarlas a Melissa Wells (phone number and email provided but redacted for confidentiality). Si tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos como un participe, puede enviarlas a la Oficina de Conformidad de los Estudios en la Universidad de Carolina del Sur (803-777-7095).

Gracias,

Melissa Wells

(phone number and email provided but redacted for confidentiality)
APPENDIX C – CULTURAL MEMOIR FRAMEWORK

1. **Description of critical moment**
   Consider your life’s experiences based on how you were excluded, included, affirmed, or silenced as you moved through different sociocultural worlds. Begin with a critical moment that reflects an experience that significantly affected your cultural and linguistic identity. This event could be positive or negative.

2. **Your sociocultural identity**
   Consider how this moment and other moments in your life represent aspects of your sociocultural identity. Consider other specific incidents and experiences that have significantly affected this facet of your cultural identity. Think about core social institutions (family, peers, community, religion, media, and school) and how they influenced your identity. You may want to interview family/friends and research family/community history. Focus on **three aspects of your sociocultural identity**: 
   - **My beliefs** (religion/spirituality/secularism) - What values and perspectives guide your life? Where and from whom did you receive messages that led to those values/perspectives? Where do you feel comfortable/valued/supported in those beliefs? Where do you feel uncomfortable/ostracized/marginalized because of those values? What impact do those beliefs and others’ reactions to them have on you as a student?
   - **My gender** - What messages did you/do you receive about the roles of males and females in your family? Your religious/spiritual communities? Your schooling experiences? Other areas of society?
   - **My sexual orientation** - What messages did you/do you receive about your sexual orientation in your family? Your religious/spiritual community? Your schooling experiences? Other areas of society?
   - **My language** - What messages did you/do you receive about your language in your family? Your religious/spiritual community? Your schooling experiences? Other areas of society?
   - **My social class** - What messages did you receive about your social class in your family? Your religious/spiritual community? Your schooling experiences? Other areas of society?
   - **My race/ethnicity** - What messages did you receive about your race/ethnicity in your family? Your religious/spiritual community? Your schooling experiences? Other areas of society?
• **My physical ability**: What messages did you receive about your physical ability? Your religious/spiritual community? Your schooling experiences? Other areas of society?

3. **Closing: Taking Action**
   Once you know what your experiences were and understand what they mean, you need to consider what you will do with your understanding. What does this mean in terms of your work as a teacher researcher?

**Note**: This adapted Cultural Memoir comes from an assignment in EDRD 811 with Dr. Susi Long at USC and was informed by the work of her colleagues: Dr. Gloria Boutte, Dr. Erin Miller, & Dr. Tambra Jackson at USC; Dr. Andrew Austin at the University of Wisconsin; and earlier work in the Sociological Imagination by C. Wright Mills (1959).
APPENDIX D – INITIAL FAMILY SURVEY (ENGLISH)

Home/School Communication & Technology Survey

*Please answer these questions to help us learn more!*

1. How have you communicated with your child’s teacher/school in the past? Check all that apply.
   - [ ] Written notes
   - [ ] Email
   - [ ] Text messages
   - [ ] Class Dojo message
   - [ ] Phone call
   - [ ] Other (please describe):
   _______________________________________________________________________

2. If you could change one thing about communication between home and school, what would you change?

3. Do you prefer digital or paper/pencil communication?  
   - [ ] Digital
   - [ ] Paper/pencil
   Why?

4. Are you currently a member of your child’s Class Dojo account?  
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No
   Why/why not?

5. Are you interested in participating in our class Flickr account?  
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No
   Why/why not?
6. How do you use technology to communicate (with the school, your family, friends, etc.)?

7. What devices do you have at home? Check all that you have.
   - Desktop computer
   - Laptop computer
   - Cell phone
   - Smart phone
   - Tablet (iPad)
   - E-reader (Kindle, Nook)

8. How do you get on the internet? Check all that you use.
   - Desktop computer
   - Laptop computer
   - Cell phone
   - Smart phone
   - Tablet (iPad)
   - E-reader (Kindle, Nook)
   - I don’t have internet

9. How do you access the internet at home?
   - Wireless internet
   - Wired internet (Ethernet)
   - Data
   - I don’t have internet

10. I have used a computer for ___ years, a cell phone for ___ years, and the internet for ____ years.

11. Other comments?
APPENDIX E – INITIAL FAMILY SURVEY (SPANISH)

Encuesta sobre comunicación entre casa y escuela y tecnología

Por favor responda a estas preguntas para ayudarnos aprender más!

1. Cómo se ha comunicado con la maestra de su hijo/a en el pasado? Marque todos que aplican.
   □ Notas escritas   □ Correo electrónico   □ Mensaje de texto
   □ Mensaje por Class Dojo   □ Por teléfono   □ Otro (por favor, describa):

2. Si Ud. puede cambiar una cosa sobre la comunicación entre la casa y la escuela, que cambiaría?

3. Prefiere comunicación digital o comunicación usando papel y lápiz? □ Digital   □ Papel/lápiz
   Porque?

4. Es Ud. un miembro del Class Dojo de su hijo/a? □ Sí   □ No
   Porque/porque no?

5. Tiene interés en participar en nuestra cuenta en Flickr con nuestra clase?
   □ Sí   □ No
   Porque/porque no?
6. Cómo usa Ud. la tecnología para comunicarse (con la escuela, su familia, sus amigos, etc.)?

7. Que dispositivos tecnológicos tiene en casa? Marque todos que tiene.
   - Computadora de escritorio
   - Laptop
   - Teléfono celular
   - Smart phone
   - Tableta (iPad)
   - E-reader (Kindle, Nook)

   - Computadora de escritorio
   - Laptop
   - Teléfono celular
   - Smart phone
   - Tableta (iPad)
   - E-reader (Kindle, Nook)
   - No tengo el internet

9. Cómo obtiene acceso al internet en casa?
   - Internet sin cables
   - Internet con cables (Ethernet)
   - Datos celulares
   - No tengo el internet

10. Yo he usado una computadora por ___ años, un teléfono celular por ___ años, y el internet por ____ años.

11. Otros comentarios?
APPENDIX F – FINAL FAMILY SURVEY (ENGLISH)

End-of-Year Home/School Communication & Technology Survey

*Please answer these questions to help us learn more!*

1. How did you communicate with your child’s teacher this year? Check all that apply.
   - [ ] Written notes
   - [ ] Email
   - [ ] Text messages
   - [ ] Class Dojo message
   - [ ] Using Flickr
   - [ ] Phone call
   - [ ] Other (please describe): ________________________________

2. How would you like to communicate with the teacher next year? Why?

3. How can the school engage families as resources better next year?

4. Did you participate in the digital learning community on Flickr?  [ ] Yes  [ ] No
   If yes, check all the ways you participated.
   - [ ] Posting photos
   - [ ] Posting videos
   - [ ] Writing captions
   - [ ] Writing comments
   - [ ] Favoriting photos/videos
   - [ ] Looking at photos/videos

5. What was your favorite photo/video you posted or viewed on Flickr or Class Dojo and why?
6. Would you use Flickr and/or Class Dojo again? [ ] Yes  [ ] No

7. Did you benefit from using Flickr or Class Dojo? [ ] Yes  [ ] No
   Explain.

8. How did your communication with your child’s teacher/school change because of Flickr and/or Class Dojo?

9. Do you prefer digital or paper/pencil communication? [ ] Digital  [ ] Paper/pencil
   Why?

10. How do you use technology to communicate (with the school, your family, friends, etc.)?

11. What devices do you have at home? Check all that you have.
   [ ] Desktop computer  [ ] Laptop computer  [ ] Cell phone  [ ] Smart phone
   [ ] Tablet (iPad)  [ ] E-reader (Kindle, Nook)

   [ ] Desktop computer  [ ] Laptop computer  [ ] Cell phone  [ ] Smart phone
   [ ] Tablet (iPad)  [ ] E-reader (Kindle, Nook)  [ ] I don’t have internet
13. How do you access the internet at home?

☐ Wireless internet  ☐ Wired internet (Ethernet)  ☐ Data

☐ I don’t have internet

14. I have used a computer for ___ years, a cell phone for ___ years, and the internet for ____ years.

15. Other comments?

Thank you for your time and help! We have enjoyed working with you this year!
APPENDIX G – FINAL FAMILY SURVEY (SPANISH)

Encuesta de fin del año sobre comunicación entre casa y escuela y tecnología

Por favor responda a estas preguntas para ayudarnos aprender más!

1. ¿Cómo se ha comunicado con la maestra de su hijo/a en el pasado? Marque todos que aplican.
   - Notas escritas
   - Correo electrónico
   - Mensaje de texto
   - Mensaje por Class Dojo
   - Usando Flickr
   - Por teléfono
   - Otro (por favor, describa): ____________________________

2. ¿Cómo le gustaría comunicarse con la maestra durante el próximo año? Por qué?

3. ¿Cómo puede la escuela involucrar mejor a las familias como los recursos durante el próximo año?

4. ¿Participó en la comunidad de aprendizaje digital en Flickr? Sí □ No □
   Si sí, marque todos los modos que participó.
   - Publicando las fotos
   - Publicando los videos
   - Escribiendo las leyendas
   - Escribiendo los comentarios
   - Marcando por favoritos los fotos/videos
   - Mirando a los fotos/videos

5. ¿Cuál fue su foto/video favorito que Ud. publicó o vió en Flickr o Clase Dojo y por qué?
6. ¿Usaría Flickr y/o Clase Dojo de nuevo?  □ Sí □ No

7. ¿Benefició del uso de Flickr o Class Dojo?  □ Sí □ No
   Explique.

8. ¿Cómo cambió su comunicación con la maestra/escuela a causa de Flickr y/o Clase Dojo?

9. ¿Prefiere comunicación digital o comunicación a través de papel y lápiz?
   □ Digital □ Papel/lápiz
   ¿Por qué?

10. ¿Cómo usa Ud. la tecnología para comunicarse (con la escuela, su familia, sus amigos, etc.)?

11. ¿Qué dispositivos tecnológicos tiene en casa? Marque todos que tiene.
   □ Computadora de escritorio □ Laptop □ Teléfono celular
   □ Smart phone □ Tableta (iPad) □ E-reader (Kindle, Nook)

   □ Computadora de escritorio □ Laptop □ Teléfono celular
   □ Smart phone □ Tableta (iPad) □ E-reader (Kindle, Nook)
   □ No tengo el internet
13. ¿Cómo obtiene acceso al internet en casa?

- Internet sin cables  
- Internet con cables (Ethernet)  
- Datos celulares

- No tengo el internet

14. Yo he usado una computadora por ___ años, un teléfono celular por ___ años, y el internet por ____ años.

15. ¿Otros comentarios?

¡Gracias por su tiempo y ayuda! ¡Hemos disfrutado de trabajar con ustedes este año!
APPENDIX H – VISUAL GRAMMARS ANALYSIS TOOL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image Title/Description:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Representational Meanings</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The people/characters, places and things depicted in the image” (Kress &amp; van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 131)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objects, human/animal characters, parts of natural world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vector</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sight line that is horizontal, vertical, diagonal, curvy, visible, or invisible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interactional Processes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions among and between participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shapes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circular/curved (natural) or straight-edged (artificially made)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Symbol</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objects, actions, or ideas representing something else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Color</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can connect with symbol</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interactive Meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Communicating with each other through images” (Kress &amp; van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 131)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How participant/viewer gaze interact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Demand</strong>: participant gazes at viewer, demands return gaze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Offer</strong>: participant does not gaze at viewer, viewer chooses to look at participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Distance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How close/far participants are from the viewer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Impersonal</strong>: long shot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Social</strong>: medium shot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Intimate/Personal</strong>: close-up shot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Point of view and perspective</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| • **Subjectivity:** power relationship between viewer and participants  
  **Involvement:** frontal angle  
  **Detachment:** oblique angle  
  **Low viewing angle:** participant power, looking down on viewer  
  **High angle:** viewer power, looking down on participant  
  **Eye level:** equality of power |  |
| • **Objectivity:** no point of view/power relationship (i.e., maps, charts, graphs)  
  **Action orientation:** frontal angle  
  **Knowledge orientation:** top-down angle |  |
| **Modality** |  |
| **Degree of realism:** high modality is more natural/real (strong color and lines), low modality is less so (soft color and lines) or too much so (exaggerated color and lines) |  |
| **Composition** | **How people, places, things, and relationships are positioned within an image** |
| **Information Value** |  |
| **Arrangement of participants** |  |
| • **Given/new:** known/familiar typically on left, unknown/new on right  
  **Ideal/real:** ideal information at the top of the image, reality at the bottom  
  **Center/margins:** most important information at center, secondary information near edges |  |
| **Salience** |  |
| **Part of image that grabs viewer’s attention the most** (size, focus, contrast, human figures, animated participants, foreground or background, and color) |  |
| **Framing** |  |
| **Creates a boundary and focuses the viewer’s attention** |  |
This analysis tool is based on the work of Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) and McDonald’s (2012) summarization of their work.
APPENDIX I – OUTLINE OF CRITICAL COACHING CONVERSATIONS

Coaching Conversation #1

2/16/16

- Text: [http://thewireless.co.nz/articles/the-pencilsword-on-a-plate](http://thewireless.co.nz/articles/the-pencilsword-on-a-plate)
- Connections to school-wide literacy professional development session
- Introducing Google Doc: Weekly Participant Reflection
- Flickr
  - Creating an account before we meet with parents tomorrow
  - Any other questions/concerns we need to address before that meeting
    - List for emails to invite families
    - Log on to computers to create Yahoo accounts here
- Family survey: Draft feedback
- Pushes & Pulls Inquiry Unit
  - Debriefing thus far: what have you noticed from your learners? (brief overview of data)
  - “Big-picture” assessment for next week
  - Plans for next week

Coaching Conversation #2

2/25/16

  - How does this article relate to our teaching? Our students? Our project?
- Analyze Flickr permission forms already returned
- Analyze preliminary Flickr data

Coaching Conversation #3

3/10/16

- Text: [https://www.psdschools.org/webfm/8559](https://www.psdschools.org/webfm/8559)
  - Literature as windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors

- Additional resources if needed/interested:
  - https://scottwoodsmakeslists.wordpress.com/2016/01/30/28-black-picture-books-that-arent-about-boycotts-buses-or-basketball/
  - #weneeddiversebooks, #1000blackgirlbooks

Unpack our reading of *Last Stop on Market Street*
- Our transactions
- Our responses to students’ transactions

Recent read-alouds: *Abe Lincoln’s Dream, My name is Truth, Float, Blackout, Imaginary Fred, Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus, Junie B. Jones*
- Whose voice is heard? Whose voice is not heard?
  - Race, gender, religion, sexuality, family composition, SES
- How is the story shaped by these voices (or not)?

- Flickr vs. Class Dojo

**Coaching Conversation #4**

3/23/16

- Text: My article (Summer & Summer, 2014)
- Flickr vs. Class Dojo update
- Introduction to critical discourse analysis
  - Joint analysis of excerpts from Coaching Convo #1 (“Crying Episode”) and in vivo code of “home life” in conversations so far
- Introduction to cultural memoir

**Coaching Conversation #5**

4/19/16

- Flickr analysis
- Taking action

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Finding our voices

- My article (Summer & Summer, 2014)
- Word choice: “I call them Hispanic because I don’t want to call them Mexican unless I know they are”
- How to respond to microagressions?
  - In education: http://www.tolerance.org/publication/speak-school

Engaging families

- Family literacy night booth
- Ask students what they have learned from their families; ask families what they have taught their students?
- Upcoming units
- Use Class Dojo to send pics to post on Flickr? (be clear up front)

Coaching Conversation #6

4/12/16

The principal took us on a tour of the community surrounding the school before Coaching Conversation #5. We later decided to count this as our second critical coaching conversation in April.

Coaching Conversation #7

5/6/16

- Discuss our memoirs
- Reflecting on our innovation meeting
- Planning culturally relevant pedagogy
  - Details for engaging families in the bug study via Flickr/Class Dojo
  - Life cycles—butterflies, ladybugs, frogs, chickens
- Plan rest of study
  - Topics of interest/research questions?
  - Pick out some families to interview in the next few weeks & establish protocol
    - Protocol:
      - Let them pick a location (school, home, other location: ____)

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What time works for you May 16-20?
30 min.
We will come up with questions
Send home letter

Coaching Conversation #8

5/19/16

Quick debrief: tamale and recess episodes
Preparation for field trip to Latino store across the street
  What do we want to get out of it?
  What are we feeling & why?
Field trip
Post field trip reflection
Finding our voices
  Pocket guide and longer document from Teaching Tolerance
    http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/Speak_Up_at_School.pdf
    http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/speak_up_pocket_card_2up.pdf
  Role playing some situations (chose from this list):
    Recess situation from Friday
    Our kids have so much given to them that they need to learn to give back.
    So many of our kids drop out of high school--what if they had been told in elementary school that they were good at certain skills and we had suggested certain non-college-based careers for them?
    Our kids don’t even know how to play Candy Land.
    Our families don’t support their kids’ education.
    Our families don’t have any books at home.
    How can they have such an expensive car?
    Why do they have a new cell phone when we’re giving kids free breakfast, lunch, and dinner?
    It’s not fair that teachers have to pay for food when these kids don’t and obviously they can afford it.
    Why don’t they just learn English?
    They have such gaps, they will never catch up.
Planning case study interview with families
Invite more people?
What do we want to know?
  Melissa’s original questions:
  • How did you choose to participate in the digital learning community and why?
  • What piece of visual media left the biggest impression on you?
  • Did you benefit from this digital learning community? If so, how?
  • What new understandings did you gain from this community?
  • What do you think is the best way to communicate with the teacher? Do you only want to know things that are urgent or do you want to have open communication?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘underlined text’</td>
<td>simultaneous talk by two speakers, spatially represented on page as spoken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘…’</td>
<td>brief pauses in speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘?’</td>
<td>rising intonation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘.’</td>
<td>falling intonation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘italic text’</td>
<td>stress or emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘voooonowels’</td>
<td>elongated vowel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘[....]’</td>
<td>transcriber description of actions/sounds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>