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**TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND REALIZATIONS OF CRITICAL LITERACY: TENSIONS AND LEARNING THROUGH CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

by

**KELLY L. WINNEY**

**DISSERTATION**

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF EDUCATION**

2012

MAJOR: READING, LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Approved by:

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Advisor Date

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

*"Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world."*
*Friere and Macedo*

For over a decade much attention has been given to critical literacy and how to promote critical literacy with students. For example, the 1996 jointly published *Standards for the English Language Arts* by International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English clearly articulates the need for students to be "critical language users" (p.15). In Ontario, several recent Ministry of Education documents describe the need for students to move beyond the previous educational focus of literal comprehension to think critically about the messages in texts (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, 2006). The realization of classroom critical literacy for students requires teachers who understand and can implement a critical literacy curriculum, and so professional development to support teacher learning about critical literacy is needed. Suggestions about effective means for professional development for critical literacy teachers includes workshops and study groups (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002; Ritchie, 2010) and collaborative inquiry

that focuses on student work (Mills & Donnelly, 2001; Earl & Katz, 2006).

The present research study extends work in this area by investigating how teachers perceive critical literacy learning when they closely analyze how larger social ideologies are re-enacted in student talk and student work. The investigation foregrounds teachers' ideas about critical literacy learning and the tensions that teachers perceive in their ongoing work with critical literacy. In this way, the study documents the nature of teachers' critical literacy learning in the context of a collaborative inquiry project. Critical literacy learning is examined on a deeper level than in previous studies because the participants in this study were part of an established professional learning group of critical literacy teachers. This context supported teachers to articulate their perceptions of critical literacy and the tensions inherent in their work. The group of teachers had existing knowledge of critical literacy that prepared them to engage in critical discourse analysis to further their understanding of critical literacy learning.

## Overview of Literature Review

The literature review proposes four themes of critical literacy that emerge in the research and writing on

critical literacy and examines how these themes have evolved as new notions of critical literacy are enacted and uncovered. The themes of connectedness, power, dialogue and praxis that were introduced in the work of Freire (1970) have continued to expand and evolve in subsequent theories of critical literacy so that they can now be described as follows.

Connectedness involves making students' questions central to the learning (Vasquez, 2000, 2003; Shannon, 1985), honoring students' primary discourses (Gee, 1987, 2001, 2004, 2005) with situated practice (New London Group, 2000) and including everyday situations and events as texts (Vasquez, 2000, 2003). The multiple versions of the theme of dialogue include the engagement of both oppressors and the oppressed in efforts to understand how they are positioned in sociopolitical issues (Freire, 1970); using the language of critique (Gee, 1987) for questioning, challenging, and critiquing texts (Shannon, 1995; Vasquez, 2003), and seeking out and examining multiple perspectives (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002) that reflect who is empowered and who is disempowered (Janks, 2010). Power includes a focus on sociopolitical issues (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002), recognition that all texts are socially constructed (Luke & Freebody, 1999), deconstruction of

texts to see how they ideologically position people (Janks, 2010), and recognition of the different discourses at work in texts (Gee, 1987, 2001, 2004, 2005). Praxis relates to taking informed action (Freire, 1970) and promoting social justice (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002), acting in ways that demonstrate transformed practice (New London Group, 2000) and engaging in redesign (Janks, 2010).

The research literature supports the idea that these four themes are useful for defining critical literacy. The present study was designed to further investigate how these notions of critical literacy are learned by teachers. Trying to navigate the different notions or conceptions of critical literacy is a potential tension for teachers. The subtle differences in how these notions are described in theory are accentuated when critical literacy is implemented in classrooms.

These four themes are also evident in reports of classroom application of critical literacy. Several instructional approaches related to each theme have been documented in the research literature for their value in promoting critical literacy, e.g., connectedness is achieved through probelematizing everyday texts and events (VandeKluet, 2002), power is addressed by reading social issues texts (Heffernan & Lewison, 2000), dialogue is

promoted when teachers engage students in invitations to explore an issue more deeply (VanSluys, Lewison, & Flint, 2009), and praxis is achieved when teachers demonstrate possible actions for social justice (Shannon, 1995).

Throughout the literature there are calls for teachers to improve their practice with critical literacy by: reflecting on the literacy practices offered in their programs (Luke & Freebody, 1999); being responsive to the interests and questions of their students and the sociopolitical issues in their world (Vasquez, 2003); accessing a wider variety of discourses to promote extended dialogue with students that examines multiple perspectives (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002); and continuing develop their own critical literacy (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002). While there are calls for teachers to improve their understanding and practice with critical literacy, there has been little research to examine how this happens.

The research literature cites the demands made of critical literacy teachers, and a few studies also offer some insight into the tensions that critical literacy teachers experience. These tensions include dealing with students' disparaging remarks or challenging questions (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002), navigating the demands of parents and the school community (Ritchie, 2010), and

figuring out how forcefully to promote critical literacy when met with resistance (Heffernan, 2004). These tensions are mentioned in the research, but the current study aims to focus on teachers' perceptions of tensions to provide insight into how tensions are experienced and navigated by critical literacy teachers.

The research literature on professional development provides some insight into how critical literacy teachers continue to develop their understanding and practices with critical literacy. Workshops and study groups that support teachers' professional development of critical literacy understanding and classroom implementation include: hearing other teachers' stories of classroom critical literacy practice; receiving new information about critical literacy; and reflecting together on troublesome issues (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002).

Within the field of critical discourse analysis (CDA), there are calls for teachers to engage in the process of CDA to extend their understanding of critical literacy and how discourses are at work in classrooms (Rogers et. al, 2005; Gee, 2004, 2005; Luke, 2004). VanSluys, Lewison and Flint (2009) exposed critical literacy teachers to CDA as a way to examine the cultural models, identity positions and societal Discourses taken up by students in a classroom

conversation. In reflecting on the discourse analysis these teacher researchers learned that they must:

- More closely attend to societal Discourses touched on by students and make the study of these more explicit;
- Explore opportunities to bring issues of cultural hegemony into classroom learning; and
- Investigate alternative ways to examine students' social identities. (VanSluys, Lewison & Flint, 2009).

This study extends ideas from the research literature about teachers' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy, the tensions related to this work, and the potential of CDA for critical literacy learning and professional development.

## Value of the Study

Although some studies have addressed teachers' perceptions of critical literacy learning, few studies have sought to examine how these perceptions are impacted by collaborative inquiry and CDA, and few studies have centralized the tensions perceived by teachers in their ongoing work with critical literacy. In this study, teachers' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy are analyzed by comparing their ideas to two existing

typologies to examine how teachers perceive critical literacy learning compared to theorists' ideas about critical literacy.

Within the field of critical literacy there are limited examples of how teachers learn and develop their understanding of critical literacy, citing partnerships with universities, professional reading, working with critically literate mentors, and meeting with colleagues in study groups (Ritchie, 2010; Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002). Teachers' perceptions of critical literacy learning include their ideas about what critical literacy is and what it means to be critically literate. Teachers' realizations of critical literacy involve how teachers act to achieve teaching for critical literacy. The current research study builds on the existing literature by focusing on what happens to teachers' perceptions and realizations when they are in the process of engaging in collaborative inquiry into critical literacy learning, as opposed to reflecting back on how their critical literacy notions might have developed.

This study also extends the literature on teachers' critical literacy learning because of the depth of experience of the teacher group under investigation. The critical literacy teacher group has collaborated for the

past five years to dialogue about professional literature related to critical literacy and share resources, instructional strategies, and classroom experiences that support critical literacy learning. The established group of teachers had some new members so there was a variety of knowledge and experience with critical literacy, but critical literacy learning is an ongoing process so the variety of experiences different teachers brought to the group provided a lens for examining the commonalities of how critical literacy learning unfolds for teachers. The existing structures and supportive environment of the group allowed this study to delve deeply into working with CDA and the perceptions, realizations and tensions that teachers perceive in their work with critical literacy.

As explained in Chapter Two, tensions and challenges that face critical literacy educators have not been fully examined in previous research and writing on critical literacy (Janks, 2010; Ritchie, 2010; Heffernan, 2004; Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002). This research study intentionally foregrounds the perceptions of tensions in teachers' ongoing work with critical literacy to better understand the nature of the tensions, how they are negotiated, and the potential of the tensions for learning.

CDA has been a useful data analysis tool for educational researchers examining classroom discourse patterns and learning as it relates to social ideologies (Rogers, 2004; Rogers, 2005). This study responds to the call for further research into how shifts in discourse patterns can provide educators insight into classroom learning (Rogers, 2005) and critical literacy (VanSluys, Flint & Lewison, 2009). In the current research study the conditions of prior experience with professional collaboration and critical literacy of the teachers allowed for an introduction to CDA. This research study contributes to the limited research examining teachers' learning through engagement in CDA.

Another value of this study is the use of multiple analyses. Previous educational research has defined critical literacy with the use of a single framework. Teachers' perceptions and classroom practice have been analyzed using a framework of four dimensions (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002; VanSluys, Lewison & Flint, 2009) or the realizations of critical literacy (Janks, 2002, 2010). In this study, the analysis utilized these two frameworks for content analysis with existing typologies.

By examining teachers' perceptions throughout their work with CDA, and analyzing the data with multiple

methods, this study makes contribution to the fields of critical literacy, professional development, critical discourse analysis, and understanding of how teachers continue to develop their own critical literacy.

## Purpose and Research Questions

This study aimed to examine teacher perceptions and realizations of critical literacy learning in the contexts of classroom practice and the professional learning community where participants engaged in CDA. Two research questions guided this investigation.

1. How does teachers' inquiry into students' critical literacy learning and experience with critical discourse analysis inform teachers' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy?
2. When teachers have the opportunity to engage in critical discourse analysis, how do they perceive tensions in their ongoing work with critical literacy learning in both professional learning and classroom learning contexts?

## Overview of the Research Methodology

This study spanned four monthly meetings of the critical literacy teacher group in Ontario, Canada. Central to this study was the critical literacy teacher group's collaborative inquiry into students' critical literacy

learning and their engaging in CDA. Although the group of critical literacy teachers had worked together for four years with different foci, these teachers' interest in examining student work to see how broader social and political ideologies were recreated or disrupted in classrooms led them to investigate the potential of CDA for informing their instructional practice. Throughout the teachers' engagement in the collaborative inquiry, this study investigated teachers' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy learning and the tensions they perceived in their ongoing work with critical literacy.

A focus group of five teachers who were members of the critical literacy teacher group was selected for full participation in this study based on voluntary participation and previous exhibition of commitment to professional learning about critical literacy. The remaining 15 members of the group consented to participate so relevant data from large group discussions was collected.

Data sources included researcher fieldnotes of working sessions and classroom observations, digital recordings and selected transcripts of working sessions, fully transcribed recordings of focused group interviews and informal interviews, participants' teacher journals,

and artifacts from working sessions. These data were analyzed using multiple methods of grounded theory and content analysis with existing typologies.

## Findings and Implications

The findings demonstrated how CDA informed teachers' shifting perceptions and realizations of critical literacy. As they engaged in CDA, teachers experienced an initial tension related to recognizing discourses. This initial tension spiralled across learning contexts of the professional learning community, the personal lives of participants and their classroom experiences with critical literacy. Participants imagined and tested emerging ideas about discourses, critical literacy learning and their world. Recognizing Discourses also stimulated five other tensions. These tensions were each connected to six changes in how participants perceived and realized critical literacy learning.

The findings of this study confirm and extend existing ideas about critical literacy, CDA and professional learning in the research literature. Finally, implications for future research are discussed.

## Summary

This chapter has outlined the research questions and context of this study, provided an overview of the theories

and frameworks that guided this study, outlined the research design that was used, and previewed the findings that resulted from this study. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature on critical literacy and professional development to illuminate how the four themes of critical literacy emerge in both fields so that intersections between the fields are evident. Chapter Three describes the methods used in this qualitative ethnographic case study. Chapter Four documents the findings of this study with detailed descriptions supported by evidence. Finally, Chapter Five describes the implications of this study on the fields of critical literacy and professional learning.

# CHAPTER TWO

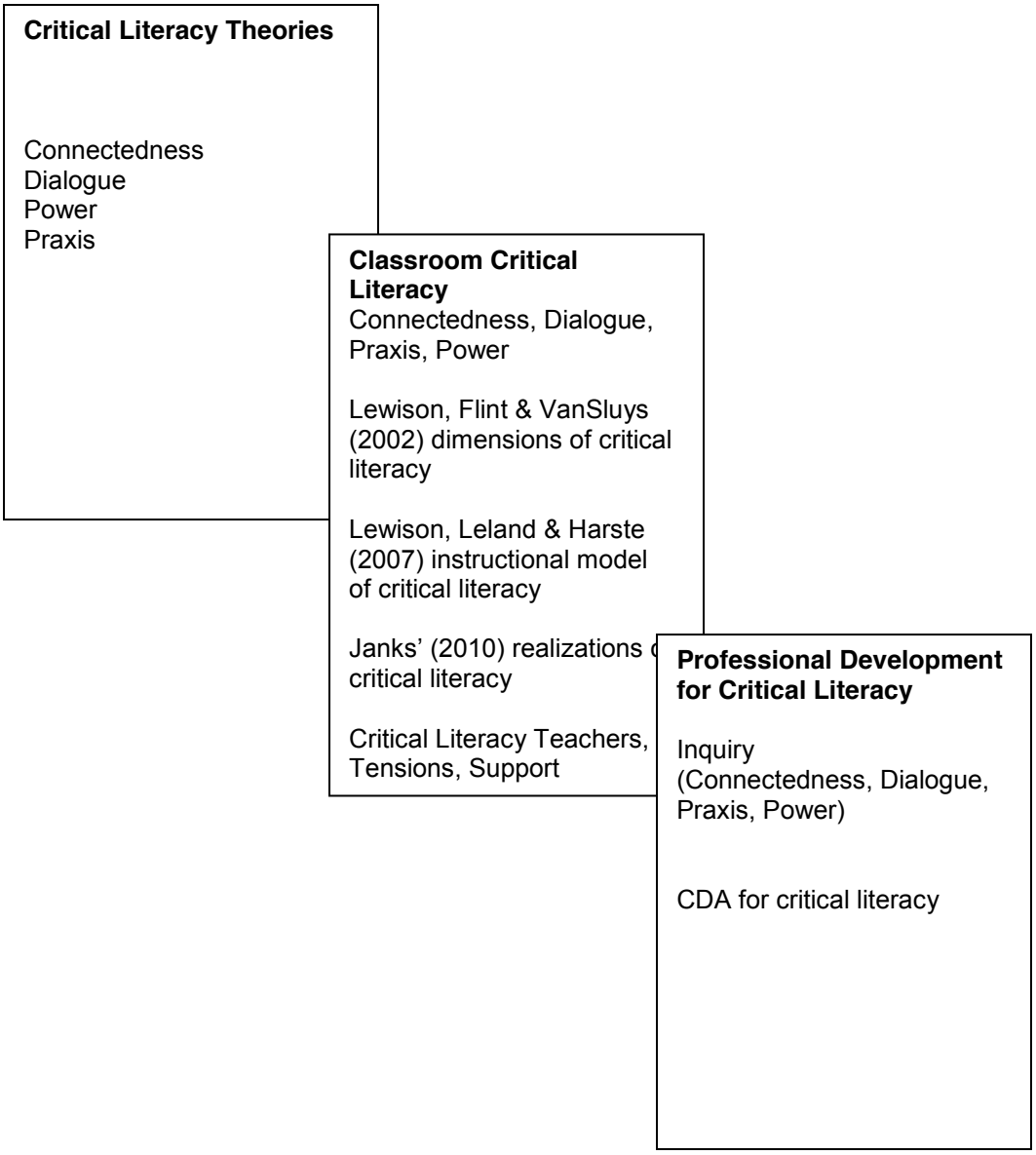
## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

*"It is teachers who, in the end, will change the world of school by understanding it."*
*-Laurence Stenhouse*

The above quote recognizes the related notions of understanding and change. Both these notions are prominent features of both critical literacy and professional development. This review of literature will illuminate the intersections of ideas from critical literacy and professional development in education. Three strands of the literature study inform the present study in this way: the theories that frame these teachers' work in critical literacy, the kinds of practices that they read about and apply to their classrooms, and the theories of professional development that frame the work of the professional learning community. Figure 2.1 provides an outline of the literature review. First, themes from the theories of critical literacy will be identified to point out the common notions of critical literacy and places where there are competing notions of critical literacy. Next, research and writing on classroom critical literacy will be reviewed to examine how the themes of critical literacy theory are realized in practice. Finally, the review will address how the themes of critical literacy are connected to the

principles of professional development for teachers of critical literacy.

**Figure 2.1: Graphic representation for the literature review**




As can be seen in the organization chart above, The themes of connectedness, dialogue, power and praxis

articulated by Freire (1970) inform research literature on theories of critical literacy, instruction and principles of professional development. Figure 2.1 depicts how Friere's notions are used to frame the review. The first section of the review will use the four themes of critical literacy identified in the literature to demonstrate how notions of critical literacy have evolved and continue to develop.

## Theories of Critical Literacy

Theories of critical literacy have emerged in response to theories of learning and literacy that assumed a socially neutral way of being literate. Critical literacy recognizes that texts are not neutral, but are socially constructed and serve to position readers in ways that reflect broader sociopolitical ideologies. Theories of critical literacy recognize that being "literate" involves the ability to negotiate the social and political positioning of texts. These theories emerged from the work of Paolo Freire (1970) who argued that education is the way to overcome oppression. The education he described included the notions of connectedness, dialogue, power and praxis. Without these, liberated groups of people would recreate systems of oppression. Each of the sections below will begin with a description of how Freire envisioned the

critical literacy theme and then will document how the theme has been envisioned by other critical literacy theorists.

**Connectedness**

Freire (1983) explains how "reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world" (p. 13). This relates to the idea of connectedness. In reading or making sense of texts, students need to be able to call on what they know about the world to understand and to see how broader issues are being presented to them. Students' learning, then, needs to be connected to both the students' world, with issues that relate to and interest them, and to the broader world and the social and political issues that exist within it. When educational plans have failed it is because they are based on the creator's view of reality and don't take into account the learners for whom the program was created (Freire, 1970). The idea of connectedness cannot be achieved when teachers "fill the students by making deposits of information which he or she considers to constitute true knowledge" (p. 57). Connectedness involves teacher and students collaboratively posing problems that relate to students' world. This idea of connectedness is evident in Freire's (1970) call for students to be

"increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, [so they] will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge" (p.62).

Connectedness, then, refers to learning that is relevant to the learner, the setting or context, and the wider world. Connectedness is expanded through the literature to include: learning that is related to the students' questions (Shannon, 1995); learning that begins with students' primary discourse (Gee, 1987, 2005) and involves situated practice (New London Group, 2000).

In order to achieve connectedness, some theorists define critical literacy as being centered on students' own questions to help them read texts, events and situations for how they position people ideologically (Shannon, 1985; Vasquez, 2003). In this realization of critical literacy, students are encouraged to ask critical questions. These questions about how things are in the world are pursued by students and teachers as they seek to better understand the world.

The theme of connectedness also emerges in calls for critical literacy learning that honours students' prior knowledge and experiences and situates new learning in familiar contexts (Gee, 1987, 2005; New London Group,

2000). A brief description of discourses here is important for understanding Gee's contribution to the theme of connectedness and the other themes of critical literacy.

Gee (1987) described literacy as a social practice that required readers to negotiate the ideologies presented to them through texts. Gee presented the idea of "discourse" to describe the different ways that individuals and groups utilize language socially in the world. A discourse is a way of using language that identifies oneself with a social group. It is a sort of an identity kit that allows one to be recognized as something (a golfer, a mother, a teacher) because of how one uses language.

Gee recognized that discourses are sometimes communicated in non-verbal means as well. Capital "D" Discourses are ways of being identified and recognized that incorporate other modes of communication (dress, one's place in a space, posture, facial expressions, movements, etc.).

Primary discourses are those that are acquired without formal instruction, but simply by being exposed to and included in the way of communicating. Primary discourses are "first languages" that are developed through interactions with others in practice. Secondary discourses

are learned. Conscious knowledge of secondary discourses is gained through explicit instruction where learnable parts of language use are presented by a more expert other. Secondary discourses are learned by building on what is known in primary discourses. It is a great advantage if one's primary discourse is in line with the secondary discourse being learned. The New London Group (2000) embraced this idea and called for literacy learning that included "situated practice" (p.33) where students have the opportunity to encounter new ideas in settings and language contexts that are familiar to them so that they may build on their primary discourse.

In response to the call for students' learning to be connected or situated in familiar language contexts, Janks (2010) introduces a dilemma. Critical literacy that foregrounds access aims to make the genre features of dominant discourses explicit so that they are available to students from marginalized discourses. The "access paradox" (Janks, 2010, p.24) is the challenge of providing access to dominant forms of language, while also valuing and promoting diverse forms of language.

Lewison, Flint and VanSluys' (2002) expand the theme of connectedness in one of their four dimensions of critical literacy, "disrupting the commonplace" (p.382).

Commonplace situations, the status quo, are sometimes overlooked as possible texts to "read" critically. Daily events that seem typical are perfect "texts" to analyze and critique because they carry messages about what it means to be "normal" and position us ideologically. Commonplace events and texts are inherently connected to the lives of students.

Connectedness is also addressed in Luke and Freebody's (1999) change in terminology from "roles" to "practices" that demonstrates that the competencies of code breaker, meaning maker, text user and text analyzer are not simply theoretical, but are part of the practice of learning that is connected to students and their contexts: "So for us, the shift from roles to practices was an attempt to represent more clearly the shift from psychological, individual models of literacy to models that describe substantive and visible, dynamic and fluid practices undertaken by human agents in social contexts" (p.2).

Freire's (1970) call for connectedness has been taken up by critical literacy theorists, but their definitions of critical literacy have also added new ideas to the theme. The concept of connectedness has been further defined in theories of critical literacy that call for: making students' questions central to the learning; honouring

students' primary discourses with situated practice; and including everyday situations and events as texts. This research study was designed to investigate how teachers perceive and realize connectedness for critical literacy learning in classroom practice.

**Dialogue**

Dialogue is a term presented by Freire (1970) which involves going beyond the blind acceptance of ideas from others, to seeking out alternative perspectives of an issue in order to more fully understand it. Dialogue promotes the freeing education for both the oppressed and the oppressor. Freire believed that it was not enough for the oppressed to develop critical understandings, but that the oppressors must also engage in dialogue to understand how they are positioned in sociopolitical issues and the consequences of this positioning.

Dialogue has been redefined by other researchers and writers as an inquiry approach that seeks out and examines multiple perspectives, gives consideration to a wide variety of discourses including the viewpoint of the oppressed and oppressor, and allows learners to practice the language of critique.

Lewison, Flint and VanSluys (2002) build on the notion of dialogue in the dimension of examining multiple

perspectives. Here readers ask questions and seek out alternative ways of thinking about the situation. They ask about whose perspective is presented and what other perspectives might be possible. For example, when reading about the "discovery of America", readers consider that the Eurocentric perspective presented in this story is not the only perspective. Other perspectives might include the native description of the arrival of the white man and the impact on their society. Examining multiple perspectives is further described below with ideas related to classroom critical literacy in practice.

Shannon (1995) offers another way to develop multiple perspectives with an "extended sense of dialogue" (p. 105) where readers seek out multiple perspectives to expand their understanding of a topic. Through the extended sense of dialogue, learners go beyond considering the multiple perspectives that they already have access to and are supported in seeing the situation or issues from other perspectives including that of the oppressed and the oppressor.

Gee's (1987) call for literacy learning that provides students with access to the language of critique fits within the theme of dialogue. As students seek out and examine multiple perspectives, or discourses, they develop

awareness of how to practice critique. Discourses are resistant to internal criticism because anything that is obtuse or different from the "way of being" redefines a person as outside the discourse. Discourse can only be critiqued from the outside. Literacy learning must involve attaining a meta-awareness of many discourses: the discourse being critiqued; competing discourses that offer alternative perspectives; and the discourse of critique.

The theme of dialogue is also expanded in Janks' (2010) realization of critical literacy that foregrounds diversity. Through dialogue, students are exposed to a wide variety of discourses and new modalities so that all learners' ways with words have a place (Heath, 1983), and new ways of thinking and being in the world are available for all. Janks goes beyond the call for examining multiple perspectives to include critique of texts to see how certain people are empowered or disempowered by this ideological view of the world.

New London Group's (2000) critical framing also aligns with the notion of dialogue because multiple frames are available for viewing and analyzing texts in a variety of different ways. This version of critical literacy promotes an inquiry approach to text analysis where readers recognize issues, pose questions, seek out alternative

viewpoints, and attempt to understand the complexity of the issue before acting.

Freire's (1970) notion of dialogue has continued to develop through the research and writing on critical literacy in different ways by different theorists. The multiple versions of the theme of dialogue include using the language of critique (Gee, 1987) for questioning, challenging, and critiquing texts (Shannon, 1995; Vasquez, 2003), and seeking out and examining multiple perspectives (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002) that reflect who is empowered and who is disempowered (Janks, 2010). The theme of dialogue within critical literacy has been expanded and redefined by these researchers. This study further explores this theme by examining how teachers engage in dialogue in classroom learning and with colleagues for their own critical literacy learning.

**Power**

The notion of power is central to Freire's idea of education. Freire (1970) argued for education for freedom as opposed to education for domination. Traditional education, he said, served to perpetuate unfair power distribution in society. His idea of education focuses on issues of power so that students learn to negotiate,

challenge and change the unfair power distribution in situations of oppression.

Power refers to learning that recognizes how readers are positioned by texts. The writing on critical literacy has expanded this idea of power to incorporate a focus on sociopolitical issues (Lewison, Flint, VanSluys, 2002), a recognition that all texts are socially constructed (Freebody & Luke, 1990), an ability to recognize different discourses at work in texts (Gee, 1987, 2005), and the ability to critique texts for how they are used to dominate (Janks, 2010).

The notion of power is evident in Freebody and Luke's (1990) expectation that text analysis involves understanding that texts are socially constructed and recognizing how texts position readers ideologically, representing certain view points and silencing others. Here readers would understand that a text that describes the "discovery of America" silences the viewpoint of natives who were not "discovered" (Freebody & Luke, 1990).

Lewison, Flint and VanSluys' (2002) dimension of "focusing on sociopolitical issues" (p.383) fits with the theme of power as it calls for learners to go beyond personal responses to texts to examine how sociopolitical systems shape perceptions and responses. Here readers would

understand how the "discovery of America" story connects with other Eurocentric accounts and serves to promote a Eurocentric view of the world.

The theme of power is also evident in Gee's call for education that provides all students with access to the dominant, or powerful, discourses. Access to dominant discourses (wealthy, Caucasian, North American, powerful) can lead to attainment of social goods. When people are recognized as belonging to a dominant discourse they benefit from privilege. One goal of democratic education then, is to provide all students with access to dominant discourses. This extension of the theme of power would support all learners to develop the Eurocentric discourse so that they can better understand the text, "discovery of America". The problem with focusing solely on access as the goal of literacy education is that it does not challenge or disrupt the uneven power distribution in society. Students who come to school having acquired a primary discourse that closely resembles dominant discourses are at a great advantage, and students who have not acquired a primary discourse that closely resembles prominent school discourses are at a disadvantage.

Janks (2010) explains how critical literacy that foregrounds domination examines and deconstructs texts to

see the choices made by the author in presenting a particular way of the world. Here critical readers ask, "Whose interests are served, who is empowered or disempowered by this language?" Readers focus on sociopolitical issues in questions about domination and empowerment and they seek out alternative views by considering who is disempowered. To continue with the example from above, readers here would consider how the Eurocentric version of the story empowers and disempowers different groups of people.

Throughout the literature, theorists have expanded Freire's (1970) notion of power so that the theme includes a focus on sociopolitical issues, recognition that all texts are socially constructed, a deconstruction of texts to see how they ideologically position people, and a recognition of the different discourses at work in texts. Although these theorists have closely examined how power is at work in texts, this study addresses the need for further research that examines how teachers' perceptions of power evolve with the support of a collaborative learning community.

**Praxis**

Praxis, another term coined by Freire (1970), is defined as action that is based on an understanding of the

situation in all its complexity; it is informed action. In order to be free from the force of oppression, "one must emerge from it and turn upon it: This can be done only by means of praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p.33). Beyond understanding, learners need to take action. Action that is not based in dialogue can often be "false charity" (1970, p.27) that serves to perpetuate unequal power relationships. For instance, making a donation to a charity that will provide temporary relief for people encourages their reliance on external support but the act of providing the people with the tools they need allows them to independently overcome their oppressive situation.

Praxis refers to informed action. Learners engage in praxis when they take action to promote social justice (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002), and when they go beyond critique to create socially just designs (Janks, 2010).

Lewison, Flint and VanSluys (2002) agree with Freire in their recognition that while action is an important feature of critical literacy, it is dependent on the other three dimensions:

> [T]his dimension [taking action and promoting social justice] is often perceived as the definition of critical literacy – yet one cannot take informed action against oppression or promote social justice without expanded understandings and perspectives

> gained from the other three dimensions [disrupting the commonplace, focusing on sociopolitical issues, interrogating multiple viewpoints]. (p.383)

While Lewison, Flint & VanSluys (2002) cite Freire's (1970) praxis in their definition of taking action and promoting social justice, the other defining points ("using language to question and exercise power", "analyzing how language is used", "challenging and redefining cultural borders", p.384) fit more within the themes of dialogue and power. While they describe the interrelated nature of their dimensions, they do not clarify what taking action might look like. Other theorists more clearly describe praxis.

Two ideas from New London Group (2000) relate to praxis. First, the instructional approach of transformed practice requires learners to go beyond understanding or supported practice and actually act in ways that show they have been transformed by the learning. Secondly, when learners engage in redesign, using the communication tools that are available to them in new and creative ways, they act to create alternative texts that present a more socially equitable view.

Janks' (2010) design conceptualization of critical literacy is concerned with the productive power of learners to change existing discourses. It is about creative action. Readers use the available semiotic resources for

representation, combine and recombine these resources in new ways to transform and reconstruct ways of making meaning. Janks and other theorists have thus extended Freire's (1970) notion of reflective action to include taking action and promoting social justice, acting in ways that demonstrate transformed practice and engaging in redesign.

The review of literature on the theories of critical literacy supports the idea that the four interconnected themes of connectedness, dialogue, power and praxis provide a useful set of criteria to define critical literacy. These themes are visible in theories of critical literacy, but research into how these conceptions of critical literacy are understood by teachers has been limited. The subtle differences in how critical literacy is defined in the literature is a tension itself, but it can also cause tensions for teachers trying to make sense of what critical literacy is and how to enact a critical literacy curriculum. The next section of the literature review focuses on how these interconnected ideas emerge in classroom practice with critical literacy.

## Classroom Critical Literacy

This section of the literature review will focus on elementary classroom practice with critical literacy. It

will address instructional approaches and successes in promoting students' critical literacy, will articulate some of the challenges in promoting classroom critical literacy and point to some of the gaps in the literature on classroom critical literacy. The instructional approaches for critical literacy that have been reported in the literature will be reviewed following the structure of the four themes of critical literacy that have been introduced and explained above. Then, the role of the teacher in classroom critical literacy will be addressed including the tensions that they sometimes face.

**Connectedness**

Connectedness emerges in classroom critical literacy when learning relates to issues and ideas that matter to students so that they can connect with their world and be critically literate in their classroom, their community and the world. Connectedness appears in the literature in the following instructional strategies: personal connections; students' questions; problematizing; creating space for the real curriculum and students' voices.

Vasquez (2003) uses ideas that students bring to the classroom to build critical curriculum. She refers to how Manning (1993) describes three curricula that play out in classrooms: the mandated curriculum, provided by the state

and district; the paper curriculum, consisting of curriculum guides, textbooks, and scripted programs; and the real curriculum, including the topics raised by students in classrooms. Vasquez states:

> This [real] curriculum and what children learn from it in terms of skills and content often intersect with the paper and mandated curriculum. It simply looks and sounds different. As the classroom teacher, I took it upon myself to keep track of ways in which this real curriculum complemented or connected with what was required by the school board. What makes the real curriculum sound and look different are the different ways of talking that are brought to bear on the issues raised by children. These different ways of talking or discourses, provide alternate frameworks through which children speak about the world around them. (p. 19)

Vasquez uses the diverse experiences and resources that students bring to the classroom to create opportunities to dialogue about diversity, and then encourages students to act on issues that are important to the group, "doing something about problems we face in the school community and beyond in order to contribute to building more democratic ways of being and doing at our school." (p.2). Creating this space for students' ideas and experiences connects school learning with the real world.

While Vasquez uses instructional strategies to go from students' ideas and issues toward class dialogue and understanding, VandeKluet (2002) uses instructional strategies in the opposite direction --- from issue to

personal connections towards problematizing and understanding. She encourages students to reflect on their own experiences with an issue by asking questions such as: What experiences have you had with this issue? What would happen if that took place here? When reading *William's Doll* (Zolotow, 1972), her grade two students responded with a Disney, happily-ever-after discourse saying that it would be ok if a boy wanted to have a doll in their class and they would all play together. VandeKluet problematized this response and encouraged students to test out their thinking by having boys from their class play with dolls outside at recess while the girls acted as researchers and took notes about what happened. When the boys were teased by other children on the playground, VandeKluet gathered the students together again to dialogue about what had transpired. From this experience, students learned to make realistic connections about issues in their world.

Similarly, Shannon (1995) puts students' ideas at the centre of a critical literacy curriculum by beginning with students' questions. For example, when his own children watched the movie, *Free Willy* (Warner, 1993) their questions about how the whale was able to do the stunts led the whole family to identify some intersections between economics and ethics that challenged their everyday

behaviours. He describes how learners' questions guided their expanded inquiry into complex issues:

> Our interest in *Free Willy* was always driven by our own questions, although at times our pursuit of answers meant that we had to address other questions as partial responses to our originals. In the end, we posed some larger questions that we will be addressing for the rest of our lives: Why do people treat other people, animals and the environment as commodities? What makes a family? Why are there poor people? (p.105)

These practitioners demonstrate how classroom critical literacy is connected to students' lives and the world. They provide examples of successful classroom critical literacy practice within the theme of connectedness.

**Dialogue**

Dialogue emerges in classroom critical literacy when students inquire more deeply into issues and seek out alternative perspectives. Dialogue requires learners to seek out and uncover tensions within sociopolitical issues. Research in this area documents how this can happen through critical questioning and critical inquiries.

Critical questioning is part of many reports of classroom critical literacy (Vasquez, 2003; Egawa & Harste, 2001; Heffernan, 2004; Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2000). Critical questions serve as prompts to respond to texts in ways that support critical conversations. These questions include

Whose voice/perspective is represented here?

Whose voice/perspective is missing?

Who is empowered or disempowered by this view of the world?

What alternate perspectives might there be?

These questions do not guarantee critical dialogue. Shannon (1995) describes dialogue in classrooms:

> Dialogue is more than conversation, and it cannot be scripted to lead toward some predetermined end. Rather dialogues are genuine, open exchanges among students and teachers . . . and are centered on helping all to illuminate and eventually to act on their realities. . . . participants help each other to clarify their thoughts and positions by probing contradictions and inconsistencies. . . Dialogue then afforded us the opportunity to express our thoughts, but it also required us to be responsible for them. (p.107)

Here Shannon offers a reminder that dialogue allows readers to explore inconsistencies in their beliefs and practices and extend their thinking about issues with different perspectives. Dialogue aims to deepen students' understanding, but it also encourages students to connect their understanding to the behaviours they observe in themselves and each other.

Vasquez (2003) refers to this extended dialogue in her classroom inquiry projects. Part of what students decided to do about the problems they faced in the school community included, "finding out as much as we could about an issue

in order to discuss and analyze it in a critical way" (p.2). Dialogue is really an extended inquiry into the issue to grapple with critical questions in personal and public ways.

VanSluys, Lewison & Flint (2009) observed classroom dialogue with small groups of students in invitations (Burke, 1998; VanSluys, Lewison & Flint, 2009) where small groups of students collectively inquire into common questions using their own experiences and other textual resources. When a topic or issue emerges in classroom conversation, the teacher asks students if they would like to explore the topic further through an invitation. In one example, the outside of the invitation folder includes a quote from author Eve Bunting about books that make young people think and ask questions. Students are encouraged to ask questions such as these when they read the books, photos, and work of their peers that are included in the folder: Why is it like that? Why do people think this way? What can we do? Could it happen again? What do we think? Can we help? Why did that happen? Is it important to our lives now? Students can write or sketch about their thoughts and questions. At the conclusion of each invitation time, students share insights, processes and new questions with the entire class through a mini-

presentation. This curricular venue allows text sets to be explored by small groups of students where their learning is scaffolded by the teacher with learning materials, but students are increasingly responsible for their own critical literacy practice.

**Power**

Power emerges in classroom critical literacy when reading focuses on sociopolitical issues. Several researchers claim that this focus can be accomplished when teachers and students read social issues texts, everyday texts and texts written for children to engage in critical conversations and examine how texts privilege some people while disadvantaging or silencing others.

Social issues texts are those that address topics such as race, gender, or class and offer different perspectives for classroom dialogue (Heffernan & Lewison, 2000). Reading a social issues text is not enough to promote classroom critical literacy because it usually only offers a single perspective of an issue. Other perspectives can be examined by having students share their own experiences, or by reading texts with alternative perspectives as Vasquez (2003) does.

Vasquez (2003) pairs everyday texts, such as brochures, posters, cereal boxes, etc., with books written

for children to offer alternate discourses to talk about these texts. “Everyday texts are texts that are spoken or written as part of everyday life, or texts that are so common that we don’t carefully take note of them” (p.19) Using everyday texts supports connectedness to students’ world, but pairing these texts with books written for children and deconstructing these texts can help students see how different texts represent different world views. Vasquez’s kindergarten class discussed the representation of males and females in an everyday text, a poster of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and then read other picture books that presented females in positions of power and other books that marginalized females. As a text set, these books offered a perspective from which to read other everyday texts such as magazine flyers, food packaging, toys and television shows.

O’Brien (1994) also used everyday texts with students to explore gender. Her class examined junk mail flyers prior to Mother’s Day to see how particular views of women were represented. The students then made connections to their own mothers to determine if the flyers reflected their experiences with mothers. Their inquiry led them to the realization that very few of the ways of being a mother reflected their own moms. The students created their own

Mother's Day flyers to represent alternative ideas about mothers.

Text sets, social issues texts and everyday texts have been used instructionally to focus on power and sociopolitical issues and also to support dialogue that explores alternative perspectives (Short, Harste & Burke, 1996; Leland et al, 1999; Vasquez, 2003; VandeKluet, 2002). Heffernan (2004) articulates the tensions involved in working with these texts in the classroom:

> I was uneasy about using the texts from the bibliography [of social issues texts] because many dealt with fairly serious social issue which I feared might frighten or upset students and raise concerns among parents about the books' contents. (p.2-3)

This study responds to the need for further research into how teachers navigate the tensions involved in developing their practice with reading social issues texts to understand power and positioning.

**Praxis**

Praxis emerges in classroom critical literacy when students take action based on their expanded understanding gained from the other three notions of critical literacy. Following are several examples of classroom critical literacy practice that demonstrate praxis. The teachers and researchers who promoted praxis in classrooms provided

students with support for action based on their own critical literacy awareness.

Vasquez (2003) engaged kindergarten students early in the school year in considering the possible actions they can take to address issues that are of concern to them. Their list included writing letters, doing research to find out more, meeting with individuals involved to make their concerns public, and reflecting on how they do and say things that may have contributed to the problems. Their investigation into cultural heritage and school library books that reflect the cultural diversity of the students in the class resulted in the class writing a letter to the school librarian about the marginalization of certain groups of people in the school library books, and their classroom also wrote a newsletter to parents about how different cultures are represented in books. Their action had impact too. The librarian began rethinking the decisions she made about which books to order and display based on who is represented and how they are represented in those books. Several families who read the newsletter inquired into how different cultures are represented in books at the local bookstore.

Another example of classroom praxis can be seen when Heffernan (2004) encouraged her students to take action by

writing their own social issues texts that provided alternate perspectives on issues that mattered to students. By extending critical literacy into writer's workshop, student writing changed from presenting a seemingly neutral personal anecdote to presenting a particular viewpoint of an issue as it unfolded in a personal experience. For instance, one boy changed his piece about getting stitches to a social issues piece about violence on the soccer field (Heffernan, 2004, p. 50). The actions of the students in Vasquez's and Heffernan's research are informed by the critically literate actions of these teachers.

In Shannon (1995), the actions taken in response to his family's investigation from their experience with *Free Willy* included personal acts to regulate their use of energy and resources, public acts of joining organizations, supporting boycotts, attending rallies and circulating petitions. While they have a deeper understanding of how their attendance at animal shows contributes to the sometimes cruel treatment of animals, they really enjoy animal shows and so are undecided about whether or not they will attend in the future. This uncertainty demonstrates two things. First, between understanding and action there is tension in trying to figure out how to act. Second, actions are not always big. They are sometimes small, and

sometimes learners decide not to change their actions, but they act with an understanding of how their participation affects others.

Shannon explains that for students to take social action requires demonstration. Students need to have action modelled for them so that they can access the discourse of action. One action undertaken by Shannon and his son is to confront their own biases about gender differences so that they don't turn social interactions into competition. This collaborative action with adult and child indoctrinates a learner into ways of acting in the world to make a difference, but this also requires the adult to be critically literate (Shannon, 1995). The present research study responds to the call for teachers of critical literacy to be critically literate themselves by examining how teachers' own critical literacy develops.

The literature on classroom critical literacy demonstrates how the instructional approaches described above contribute to students' critical literacy. Through reading social issues texts and everyday texts, asking critical questions, investigating issues in projects and inquiries, and taking action, students demonstrate the ability to see how texts position readers, pose critical

questions, seek out alternative perspectives, and take action to promote social justice.

It is important to note that the teachers in this study are themselves critical literacy learners and they share similar processes of learning with their students. Teachers shuttle back and forth from being immersed in the learning and stepping back into the teacher role for their students. Classroom critical literacy is a site for teachers' own learning.

**Critical Literacy Frameworks**

The review of research and writing on classroom critical literacy would not be complete without recognizing three frameworks that are useful research tools for examining critical literacy in practice. Lewison, Flint & VanSluys' (2002) four dimensions of critical literacy has been used to examine how critical literacy is conceptualized and practiced by teachers and teacher-researchers (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002; VanSluys, Lewison & Flint, 2009). Lewison, Leland and Harste's (2007) instructional model of critical literacy adds to the four dimensions, or "critical social practices" with ideas about about resources for critical literacy (personal experiences, social issues, popular culture / media, social issues books, etc.), and critical stance (consciously

engaging, entertaining alternate ways of being, taking responsibility to inquire, and being reflexive). They see critical literacy instruction as:

> a transaction among the personal and cultural resources we use, the critical social practices we enact, and the critical stance that we and our students take on in classrooms and in the world. (p.5)

Their multifaceted model can be used for planning and reflecting on teaching for critical literacy.

Janks' (2010) framework of interconnected realizations of critical literacy has been used to examine and sort how differences in critical literacy practice can foreground different notions of critical literacy. These three frameworks were useful for analyzing data about teachers' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy.

In the research on classroom critical literacy there are both gaps and calls for further research. Theories of critical literacy depict ideal outcomes for critically literate students. In real classroom contexts, these ideal outcomes are not the reality for all students. The literature on classroom critical literacy documents a few examples of success, but does not describe the learning outcomes that other students experienced. Vasquez (2003) describes the powerful learning that Jessica experienced, "of all the students in the class, Jessica seemed most

eager to take action against the inequities discussed in the classroom. She decided that she needed to show the Mounties what the poster should look like today. . ." (p.25), but we are left with questions about the critical literacy learning of other students.

Heffernan (2004) provides one example of a student who struggled in his learning with critical literacy. As students began to identify social issues themes for their writing, one student, Andrew, claimed that he was going to write about the time he got stitches, retreating to the kind of record-keeper kind of writing that focused on topics instead of social issues themes. These learning dilemmas are rarely reported in the literature on classroom critical literacy.

The gaps and challenges that emerge from the literature on classroom critical literacy – students who struggle with critical literacy learning and critical literacy learning that falls short of transformed practice – are tensions that are felt by teachers of critical literacy. The examination of these tensions has been missing from the literature on classroom critical literacy. This study was designed to examine this important area. The following sections will illuminate the role of the teacher in classroom critical literacy learning including what

theorists expect of teachers of critical literacy, the tensions that these teachers experience, and the learning experiences that support these teachers.

**Demands Placed on Critical Literacy Teachers**

Luke and Freebody's (1997, 1999) integrated model for literacy learning provides teachers with a map of literate practices that are important for students to acquire. This model is not intended to provide a prescriptive program, rather to allow teachers to reflect on the types of literacy on offer in their classroom; to keep these four roles/practices in mind as they plan, instruct, support and assess literacy learning that caters to the learning needs of individual students.

Luke and Freebody's framework is important for the current research study because Ontario's Ministry of Education instructional support documents expect teachers to consider these four roles/practices, citing the Luke and Freebody model (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004). Teacher participants in this research investigation were familiar with text analyzer practices and integrate them with code breaker, text user and meaning maker practices in their classroom instruction.

While the Ontario Ministry of Education encourages critical literacy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004)

Ministry documents also call for a balanced approach to literacy instruction (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). Shannon (1995) points out the problem with "balanced literacy" because what typically happens when teachers pragmatically create an eclectic mix of literacy practices, often the critical approaches are not fully understood nor embraced. The result is a classroom where the real curriculum is very different from the mandated curriculum or paper curriculum (Manning, 1993). The only solution is for teachers to fully embrace a critical curriculum where they teach students how to use their skills as code breakers, meaning makers and text users to inform their text analysis. They study language and texts to see how it positions them in the world. This kind of stance requires teachers to be critically literate themselves (Shannon, 1995).

Teachers of critical literacy need to develop their own critical literacy abilities in order to achieve connectedness with their learners and their context. There is no one way to do critical literacy (Vasquez, 2003). Teachers of critical literacy cannot follow a scripted program for what to do because they must be responsive to the interests and questions of the students, and they must

be able to connect classroom learning to the everyday texts and sociopolitical issues in their world.

Janks (2010) explains how teachers can improve their critical literacy by having access to a wider variety of discourses. This would allow teachers to better promote extended dialogue and examination of multiple perspectives with students. During a professional learning session, teachers responded to texts in ways that reflected only popular discourses. They were quick to identify sexism and racism in the advertisement for razors, but they were not as quick to realize how the ad could also be read as immodest, middle-class or heterogeneous. They knew how to challenge a text, but not how to use the range of discourses that they had access to as a group. Teachers must learn how to access a wider variety of discourse patterns. The present research study was designed to involve teachers in examining a wider range of discourses through critical discourse analysis to examine how teachers' perceptions of critical literacy change in the process.

While researchers call for teachers to become critically literate, teachers also express interest in developing their critical literacy abilities. Lewison, Flint and VanSluys (2002) found that new and novice

teachers of critical literacy wanted to continue to develop their own critical literacy:

> In short, they [the teachers] felt a strong need to further their education. This speaks to the tensions that critical pedagogy presented by expanding the curriculum content beyond the knowledge base of many elementary teachers. (p.391)

**Tensions for Critical Literacy Teachers**

Not surprisingly, teachers experience tensions in trying to enact a critical literacy curriculum. Lewison, Flint and VanSluys (2002) describe the tensions experienced by teachers who are newcomers or novices to critical literacy. These teachers describe challenges with how to respond to students' disparaging remarks such as, "that's so gay," or "I hate Black people", or how to handle difficult questions that emerge in classroom conversations such as, "Why would the Boy Scouts discriminate and not allow homosexuals into their group?", or how to determine if materials are appropriate for elementary students. They also struggle with issues related to the state's focus on standards versus a focus on individual students' learning and assessment practices that do or do not measure learning.

While these tensions are reported for teachers just beginning with critical literacy, experienced teachers also articulate tensions with critical literacy in practice.

Heffernan (2004) describes her hesitation when a student didn't select a social issue theme for his writing:

> I hesitated, wondering how forceful I wanted to be with my new focus on themes. I had always considered choice to be an essential condition of learning. At that moment, though, I felt that if I didn't push all students to choose themes over topics, the students might bail out, retreating to the record-keeping kind of writing of past workshops (p.50)

Lewison, Flint and VanSluys (2002) also describe their dilemma when they planned learning experiences for teachers. While they promoted the reading of social issues texts, they recognized that at the same time they were neglecting the issue of student choice.

Ritchie's (2010) research found that even teachers who had authored professional articles about their experience with critical literacy perceived tensions in their ongoing work with critical literacy. Challenges included the demands of parents and the school community and negotiating their interests without compromising the goals of critical literacy.

These tensions that are experienced by critical literacy teachers are documented occasionally in the literature, but little attention has been given into how these tensions are negotiated in a way that would provide insight for other teachers and their practice. The current research study extends this work by investigating the ways

that these teachers negotiate the tensions involved in their work with critical literacy.

**Support for Critical Literacy Teachers**

The research literature describes how some teachers of critical literacy are supported with professional learning and collaboration opportunities. These teachers are typically involved in university partnerships (Egawa & Harste, 2001; Vasquez, 2003; Heffernan, 2004) to support their work with critical literacy. One research study found that the most useful experiences for these teachers include workshops and study groups that contribute to their evolving understanding of critical literacy and ideas for classroom implementation (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002). The most useful components of the workshop sessions included:

- Hearing other teachers' stories of classroom practice with critical literacy;
- Receiving new information about aspects of critical literacy;
- Participating in literature circle discussions of social issues books;
- Having access to social issues books for their classrooms; and
- Reflecting together on troublesome issues. (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002)

One of the professional learning experiences that these authors called for as a next step for these teachers was to engage in critical language study. "In future workshops we

plan to address the ways in which language and popular culture position us in particular ways as raced, classed, and gendered people" (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, p.391).

In later work, these researchers engaged teachers in their analysis of classroom dialogue data using several analysis lenses including critical discourse analysis (VanSluys, Lewison & Flint, 2009). They wanted to share analytic processes with teachers to increase their familiarity with a variety of ways to analyze classroom discourse for their own inquiry projects. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) provided a way for teachers to analyze classroom discourse for issues of power, position and identity. CDA is a way of examining interactions to see how larger social structures and ideologies are being recreated or disrupted (Gee, 2005). VanSluys, Lewison and Flint's (2009) study involved engaging critical literacy teachers in CDA of a classroom interaction. They found that CDA provided a lens for better understanding critical literacy practice in classrooms. Unfortunately, the study did not document how classroom teachers' notions of critical literacy evolved through their work with CDA. The work of VanSluys, Lewison and Flint is extended in the present study in the examination of teachers' perceptions of critical literacy through their engagement in CDA. Since

CDA is an integral part of this study, this analytical tool is described here.

**Critical Discourse Analysis**

Classroom discourses are informed by larger social and political conversations (Fairclough, 1987). Critical discourse analysis, or CDA (Gee, 1987) is both a theory and a set of tools for understanding how larger social structures and ideologies are being recreated or disrupted in classroom discourse. Teachers who understand CDA can see how they are positioned by texts and by larger social structures. Rogers et. al. (2005) found that often larger social structures and ideologies position individuals and groups in ways that are self imposed. They limit themselves to the available discourses that confine them. Today there are many political agendas being played out in education. In theory then, teachers who can see how these political agendas are at work in classroom discourse are freer to disrupt these ideologies. When they see ideologies playing out in classroom discourse, they can make space for critical conversations so that as a community of learners (teacher with students) they can challenge this, question it, and perhaps provide alternative texts. CDA provides teachers with a lens for seeing critical literacy at work in their classrooms. It informs their assessment for

learning so that they can make informed instructional next steps to promote critical literacy.

Gee's (2005) discourse analysis outlines seven building tasks of language that are to be used in analysis for researchers to get a broad picture of how language is being used. These include how language is being used to make certain things significant, how language is being used to realize or disrupt certain identities and relationships, how language is being used to recognize the distribution of social goods, how language is being used to enact or disrupt certain activities, how connections or coherence is achieved through the text and how certain sign systems or knowledge is privileged in this situation. The researcher's resulting broad view of the situation and its relation to bigger social themes is a first step. From here the researcher digs deeper into the data using Gee's analysis tools as needed to explore certain ideas that have emerged in the broad picture of the situation.

Gee (2005) also describes thinking tools or inquiry tools to be used when analyzing discourse. Gee's thinking devices for CDA include: situated meanings (what certain words and phrases mean in a particular context, as in the meaning of coffee when we say, "I spilled the coffee, get a mop" or "I spilled the coffee, get a broom (p.94); social languages

(the style of language used for a particular purpose, as in the way to record meeting notes to share with work colleagues and the way to describe the meeting to a close friend); Discourses (enacting a socially situated identity, as in the way that a street gang member would dress and talk to be recognized as being part of that gang); Discourse models (everyday theories about the world to explain what is normal from the perspective of a particular discourse, as in the middle class notion that success can be achieved by anyone if they work hard); intertextuality (the references made to words that other people have spoken and written, like when we repeat a familiar line from a movie in a totally different situation); and Conversations (the themes, debates, or motifs that are familiar to most members of society, as in the societal debates about abortion, creationism, or terrorism).

## Professional Development

The previous section of this literature review examined research and writing about critical literacy, or the theories and classroom practice. Four themes of critical literacy, connectedness, dialogue, power and praxis can be seen throughout the literature on critical literacy theories and practice. The following section of the literature review will shine a spotlight on the

research and writing about professional development as it relates to the present study. First, key features of professional development will be presented, and then the key features will be compared with the four ideas of critical literacy.

Collaborative professional learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009) is characterized by teachers regularly meeting in learning teams to follow a cycle of continuous improvement: examining student data to determine the areas of greatest student need; identifying where educator learning is necessary; creating learning experiences to address these adult needs; developing lessons and assessments; applying new strategies in the classroom; refining new learning into more powerful lessons and assessments; reflecting on the impact on student learning; and repeating the cycle with new goals. This type of professional learning is different from more traditional workshops where teachers attended one-off sessions based on an instructional strategy that interested them but did not necessarily relate to the needs of their students. The workshop model of professional development also had very little effect on actual classroom practice or student learning (Joyce & Showers, 1996; Stein, Smith & Silver, 1999).

The report suggests four key principles for effective professional learning:

1. professional development should be intensive, ongoing and connected to practice;
2. professional development addresses the everyday challenges involved in teaching and learning specific academic subject matter;
3. professional development should align with school and board improvement priorities; and
4. professional development should build strong working relationships among teachers. (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2009, pp.9-10)

These principles of professional development are inherent in the collaborative inquiry that the participants in the present research study engage in.

**Collaborative Inquiry**

Collaborative inquiry involves teachers partnering in examining and improving their teaching practices (Brown & Sharkey, 2009) and increasing student achievement (Sagor, 1992). Through a systematic process of collecting, analyzing, acting on classroom data, and ongoing reflection and dialogue, classroom practice can be better understood and meaningful changes can be made.

Mills and Donnelly (2001) found inquiry to be an important avenue for professional development. Their weekly inquiry meetings focused on teachers' educational beliefs and practices and developed strategies for improving on

them. Their inquiry process grew out of the 7 processes in the cycle for inquiry (Short, Harste & Burke, 1996):

- Building from the known;
- Taking time to find questions for inquiry;
- Gaining new perspectives (through dialogue, transmediation, knowledge systems/ academic disciplines);
- Attending to difference/anomalies/new knowledge;
- Sharing what was learned;
- Planning new inquiries; and
- Taking thoughtful new action through reflection and reflexivity.

Collaborative inquiry allows teachers to celebrate successes, learning from excellent practices of colleagues, but it also provides a place to discuss inevitable tensions that teachers face and how those tensions can be resolved. The challenge is to find ways to bring in points of view that may be at odds with colleagues' perspectives, but "tremendous opportunities for learning grow out of exploring differences and complicating an issue by seeking to understand it in all its complexity" (Mills & Donnelly, 2001, p.52)

Mills and O'Keefe (2010) revised their notion that "kidwatching" (Goodman, 1978) was central to responsive teaching when their inquiry led them to realize that classroom talk was at the heart of truly responsive teaching. "When teachers make decisions based on their observations alone, they are *doing unto their students*. When they invite children into the process through conversation, they make space for *planning with and for students*" (Mills & O'Keefe, 2010, p.169). With this realization, three critical elements of collaborative inquiry are recognized: teachers knowing students; students knowing each other and the teacher as readers, writers, and learners; and students knowing/ getting in touch with themselves as readers, writers, and learners (Mills, 2005). Teachers who engage in collaborative inquiry are urged to invite children into the posing of questions about learning and the construction of new insights. It is a discourse of inquiry in professional development settings and classrooms that makes this possible (Mills, 2005; Mills and O'Keefe, 2010).

The four essential ideas of critical literacy that were described above are now useful for more closely examining some of the major ideas in the literature on professional development.

**Connectedness, Dialogue, Power and Praxis in Collaborative Inquiry**

Professional learning through collaborative inquiry is connected. Because collaborative inquiry is based on questions that emerge from classroom data it is connected to students' learning. Where it is most powerful, collaborative inquiry also adheres to the recommendation that professional development be aligned with system and school initiatives so that the instructional practices implemented are supported by schools and systems. Collaborative inquiry can also influence the school and system beliefs and actions when findings from the inquiry are shared publicly. Collaborative inquiry also allows professional learning to be connected to local contexts and communities. Teachers guide their own learning based on what is happening in their daily work in the classroom. Because they have autonomy over their learning, interests and issues that are important to their students can be explored.

Collaborative learning also aligns with the theme of dialogue. Teachers engaged in collaborative inquiry projects are less isolated because they share the challenges and successes of their work with colleagues. One important aspect of dialogue is the opportunity to pose and

grapple with challenging questions. Collaborative inquiry puts teachers' questions at the heart of their work. This community of learners also provides individual teachers with a variety of different perspectives about instruction and learning to help them better understand their work.

Collaborative inquiry involves action. Praxis is embraced here as teachers engage in a questioning, learning, acting, reflecting process that focuses on teachers' beliefs and actions in classroom practice.

The critical literacy theme of power – focusing on sociopolitical issues- is missing from the work of collaborative inquiry projects in the literature. While many professional development goals relate to "creating equity of outcomes for all students" and "narrowing the achievement gap" (Darling-Hammond, 2009) professional learning structures, such as collaborative inquiry, do not focus on the social and political issues that might be impacting student learning. If collaborative inquiry did include a focus on social and political issues with opportunities for teachers to examine how discourse patterns were at work in classroom meaning making, then collaborative inquiry would include all four ideas of critical literacy. The present research study can add to the body of research on professional development by

examining how the theme of power and critical literacy learning unfolds in the process of collaborative inquiry.

## Conclusion

This literature review has examined the four themes of critical literacy and how they have continued to expand with new notions of critical literacy. Throughout the literature, there are many ideas about what critical literacy practice should be, and what teachers of critical literacy should do, but little attention has been given to how teachers develop their practice with classroom critical literacy. The purpose of this study is to examine how teachers' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy evolve through their work with CDA and to investigate the tensions that they perceive in their work with critical literacy. The theoretical frameworks described in this chapter informed the development of the study's methodology, which is described in detail in Chapter Three.

# CHAPTER THREE

# METHODS

*"Conflict is the gadfly of thought. It stirs us to observation and memory. It instigates to invention. It shocks us out of sheep-like passivity, and sets us at noting and contriving. Not that it always affects this result; but that conflict is a 'sine qua non' of reflection and ingenuity."*
*- John Dewey*

## Introduction

This study aimed to investigate teacher perceptions of critical literacy learning in the context of a professional learning community engaged in an inquiry to advance critical literacy learning in their classrooms. Two research questions guided this investigation.

1. How does teachers' inquiry into students' critical literacy learning and experience with critical discourse analysis inform teachers' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy?
2. When teachers have the opportunity to engage in critical discourse analysis, how do they perceive tensions in their ongoing work with critical literacy in both professional learning and classroom learning contexts?

A qualitative design was used because the experiences of teachers cannot be easily operationalized, controlled, or

predicted (Spradley, 1980). The data were collected from qualitative designs because they have the potential for understanding participants' perspectives (Bodgan & Biklen, 2003). Interview data in conjunction with participant reflection journals and audiorecorded professional learning sessions provided descriptive data in the teachers' own words from which the researcher developed insights into how participants interpreted their world and their work (Bodgan & Biklen, 2003). A reflective research journal, field notes and artefacts were also collected to "serve as the stubborn facts that save the writing you will do from unfounded speculation" (Bogdan & Biklin, 2003, p.109). These data sources provided information about teachers' perceptions of their work with critical literacy across their collaborative learning with colleagues, their work in the classroom, and their own personal reflections. Ongoing collection of these data allowed for clarification and extension of ideas to be elicited from participants in subsequent interviews, and for changes in perceptions to be documented.

## Setting and Participants

This study took place in Ontario, Canada. The researcher is a Teacher Consultant with the local School Board who supports curriculum and professional learning for 60

elementary schools. The researcher has facilitated the critical literacy teacher group which has been in existence for the past five years. The investigation involved a total of 11 participants from the existing critical literacy teacher group of 20 teachers. A focus group of five teachers was selected from the larger group. Classroom teachers who participated in this study had prior learning and experience with critical literacy. The group worked together to dialogue about professional readings related to critical literacy, share social issues texts to use in the classroom and to share instructional strategies and classroom experiences that support critical literacy learning.

The group has always met once each month after school for two hours. Typically, the group would have read a professional article or book chapter about critical literacy prior to the meeting. In the past few years the group has read several books including *Getting Beyond, "I Like the Book"* by Vivian Vasquez (2003), *Critical Literacy* by McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004), *Critical literacy and Writer's Workshop* by Lee Heffernan (2004). Other articles on topics such as digital storytelling, social issues texts, and sketch-to-stretch had been read based on the interests of the teachers. The group has often compared

their work to the Four Dimensions of Critical Literacy (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002) to consider how different aspects of critical literacy are on offer in their classrooms. The meeting agenda typically involved a short time to mingle and eat dinner, time for small group dialogue to reflect on the responses to reading, and time for large group sharing of classroom experiences with critical literacy. The group usually finished by coming to consensus about their learning from the session, the questions they were still pondering, and the actions they planned to take before the next meeting.

Prior to this research study, we focused our learning on instructional approaches to promote critical literacy. We read about critical questioning, problematizing, drama, and writer's workshop and tried out these approaches in classrooms. We shared our experiences and some success stories. We developed a rubric for students' critical literacy thinking that aligned with Ontario's Language curriculum expectations. Our professional learning was guided by our interests in these instructional approaches. Two years ago, we wrestled with some concerns and questions.

First, while there were many stories of success for our students' critical literacy learning, there were also

questions about students who didn't demonstrate critical literacy learning, or didn't continue to demonstrate their critical literacy beyond a particular unit of study, or only demonstrated this thinking when working in groups, but not independently, or only in their oral talk but not in their writing or only during instructional times and not outside the classroom. We were left wondering about how to value these students' levels of literacy performance, and still scaffold their next steps in critical literacy learning. A provincial and school board initiative of Student Work Study reminded us of the importance of closely examining students' work and talk to identify the extent and limitations of their thinking. The group expressed an interest in using marker students to guide their work with classroom critical literacy.

Second, we often returned to the issue of how to balance our instructional focus on the learning goals that we determine and on the ideas and questions that matter to students. In critical literacy work we wondered about how to determine which sociopolitical issues to explore. I proposed to the group that we might be able to uncover the next steps for instruction based on the discourses at work in the classroom. The teachers in the group were interested in seeing how the analysis of discourses in student talk

and student work might inform their classroom critical literacy work. These two areas of interest also aligned with my own research interests of the role of tensions in teachers' work with critical literacy; and how critical discourse analysis informs teachers' perceptions of critical literacy.

The group's goals for their collaborative inquiry informed the development of the research design of the present study. They wanted to continue to read professional articles and book chapters related to current investigations. They wanted to continue to share their experiences with classroom critical literacy. They wanted to begin focusing closely on marker students to assess critical literacy thinking regularly and plan instruction according to their observations. They also wanted to work more in small groups because there was more depth in the small group dialogue than in the whole group sharing time.

At the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year, based on the teachers' input, we decided to inquire more deeply into students' critical literacy learning to make our professional learning more connected to student learning and our teaching more informed. We made plans to look closely at two marker students' talk and work to uncover their critical literacy thinking and consider instructional

next steps to scaffold further critical literacy learning. One way teachers were supported in this work was by collecting texts (student talk and student writing) from these students to use for critical discourse analysis (CDA). The current research investigation was negotiated with these teachers as we collaborated to examine student work through CDA, identified places for us to learn more, and engaged in ongoing reflection on our work.

Through the fall of 2010, the critical literacy teacher group focused their professional learning on using drama for exploring critical literacy and social issues topics through a partnership with the University of Windsor's Drama in Education and Community program. After the school winter break, the critical literacy teacher group began their collaborative inquiry into students' critical literacy learning. During monthly meetings, the teachers worked both as a larger group and in collaborative inquiry teams of three to five teachers of similar aged students. In inquiry teams teachers engaged in collaborative analysis of student work, sharing and strategizing about evidence of learning and possible instructional next steps. Teachers were encouraged to bring classroom texts to analyze including recordings of partner or small group talk, student journal entries, student writing samples, or even

teacher notes documenting class discussion points. Based on the analyses of these classroom texts, teachers shared ideas about the discourses at work in classroom meaning making, and how critical literacy learning can be stretched by interrupting, expanding, and probelematizing these discourses. In the larger group, teachers shared classroom experiences with critical literacy, read and respond to professional literature, and engaged in strategies that we thought had potential for promoting classroom critical literacy learning.

The professional literature was selected after our examination of student learning. A list of the professional readings distributed and discussed by the group over the course of this study is included in Appendix A). The first text for professional reading was related to critical discourse analysis. Other professional reading was determined based on what I, as the facilitator, felt would address the professional learning needs of the teachers so that they could meet the learning needs of their students. The large group sharing of ideas and discussion of responses to texts was similar to the large group work of previous years because powerful ideas for instructional approaches emerged in this format. In an effort to promote reflection on the impact of instructional practice on

students learning, teachers were prompted to share why they planned their instructional events and whether or not it resulted in the critical literacy learning they had hoped. This new layer of discussion supported the group's learning about the connection between student work and instructional practice, which is what they had decided to investigate. This discussion prompt also encouraged participant discussion that related to the research questions for this study.

## Participant Selection

During the March meeting of the critical literacy teacher group, the researcher provided the teachers with a brief description of the research study including the purpose, study procedures, benefits and risks, and confidentiality. Interested teachers self-selected themselves for participation in the research study and were asked to complete the informed consent form (Appendix B). The entire group of 20 teachers, a "naturally bounded population" (p. 115, LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) were invited to participate so that the researcher could capture the large group dialogue that revealed teachers' perceptions of critical literacy as they made connections between the observations of student learning, next steps

for instructional practice and connections to ideas about critical literacy.

Five teachers who consented to participate were selected as participants for the focus group. Selective sampling was used based on the commitment of the individual to attending group meetings, participating in group dialogue and maintaining a reflective journal. This participation was crucial for the collection of perception data. These practices have been part of the group's work for the past several years so the researcher was able to make this determination based on previous work with these teachers. Of the 20 teachers in the group who consented to participate, 10 were instructional coaches who were not teaching in a specific classroom, and so could not commit to working with marker students on an ongoing basis in ways that would support an inquiry into their critical literacy learning. For this reason, the 10 instructional coaches were not included in the focus group. Five other group members were not selected because they were regularly absent from meetings or were planning to be away at future meetings because of maternity leaves. That left four teachers and one vice principal/teacher (who will be referred to as a teacher in this document) who were in regular attendance at the critical literacy teacher group

monthly meetings, were committed to the inquiry into student learning, and had their own students.

A second criteria for participant selection was to be based on teachers who were working with different inquiry teams. Participants from different inquiry teams may have had different experiences with CDA and so their perceptions of critical literacy may have been different. The five teachers who were included in the focus group were members across two different inquiry teams, so this criteria was also met.

**The Researcher**

I am a 36 year old Caucasian female of middle class background. I first became interested in critical literacy in 2002 when I was a participant in a colleague's doctoral research study on drama and critical literacy. As a result of my exposure to critical literacy, I excitedly tried to implement critical literacy learning in my own classroom. I learned a lot with my students about probelematizing everyday texts, asking critical questions, engaging in dialogue and taking action.

Throughout my Master's of Education work at the University of Windsor and my doctoral course work in the Reading, Language and Literature program at Wayne State University, I have continued to develop my understanding of

critical literacy in course readings and projects. Through a research course with Dr. Poonam Arya at Wayne State University, I undertook critical discourse analysis (Gee, 2005) as a research tool for examining student interviews and children's picture books. The process of critical discourse analysis extended my own understanding of how social and political issues emerge in both seemingly innocent children's texts and in students' meaning making. The process helped me to realize how I had engaged in critical readings of texts in ways that narrowly focused on only a few discourses instead of the wider range of discourses available to me. I could see that the critical literacy teacher group was limited by this narrow critical reading too. I wondered how I might engage my critical literacy teacher group colleagues in critical discourse analysis to learn together about the potential of this process to extend our understanding of critical literacy.

My understanding of critical literacy has also evolved through my collaboration with the critical literacy teacher group. Although I am a co-founder and facilitator of the group, I am also a participant and fellow learner. I lead our group meetings, try to keep our discussions aligned with the questions we are pursuing, and bring new ideas and professional reading material to share. The professional

learning is always guided by our shared interest in understanding classroom critical literacy.

My position at the local School Board as a Teacher Consultant involves work in staff development to support Ministry of Education initiatives and school learning communities. I have learned in my experiences supporting the professional learning of teachers to be patient and excited for those moments when teachers experience tensions because it often means they are engaged in some challenging thinking, reflecting and hypothesizing that will lead them to new understandings. I am interested in uncovering more about the nature of the tensions teachers perceive in their work with critical literacy so that we can better understand how teachers delicately negotiate the tensions in professional development and critical literacy learning. The analogy of "dancing with the tensions" can be useful for imagining how teachers take into account the learning context, their students, their own ideas, and the wider world when teaching for critical literacy much like a dancer must work with the dance style, their partner, their own abilities, and the music successfully in their dancing.

**Subjectivity**

I have ongoing working relationships with the teachers who were participants in this study. LeCompte and Schensul

(1999) explain that researchers must take steps to minimize the impact of bias on their study. Prior knowledge of the teachers might impact how interviews are conducted, how data are reported and analyzed and how conclusions are found. The following strategies were employed to minimize bias.

1) Open-ended questions during semi-structured interviews (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999)
2) Use of a reflective journal to record researcher's subjective views and to monitor how they might bias the research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999)
3) Member checking (LeCompte & Schensul)

Interviewer bias can present itself when interviewers ask leading questions, or pose questions that include or suggest the desired response (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999). In the current research study, the semi-structured interview was comprised of open-ended questions to elicit responses from participants that did not guide them into a particular direction. Follow-up questions that were open-ended were also prepared and posed.

A qualitative researcher's reflection journal includes detailed fieldnotes with reflections on their own subjectivity to guard against their own bias (Bodgan &

Biklen, 2003). Throughout this study, I maintained a reflective research journal to record opinions, prejudices and other biases. This journal was also used to record instances of bias throughout data analysis and interpretation. Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte (1999) explain that ethnographers are required to "expose their own actions and interpretations to constant introspection, and all phases of research activity to continual questioning and re-evaluation" (p.277).

In order to ensure that the data and findings represented the reality of participants from their point of view, this study utilized member checking (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). I regularly shared emerging categories with participants in order to verify the accuracy of participants' thoughts and experiences with critical literacy learning. During classroom observation interviews, individual participants were asked to share their thinking about the emerging categories and to explain more about any vague comments that they had made. For example, the idea of creating safe spaces for critical literacy emerged as a theme in the entrance focus group interview, so during the March classroom observation interviews, participants were asked to describe how they had created safe spaces for critical literacy in their classrooms. Participants also

had the opportunity to provide input into the findings during the exit focus group interview. During this interview, the focus group examined the model that they had created during the entrance focus group interview, and made changes to it so that it reflected accurately their perceptions of critical literacy learning.

## Research Design and Timeline

This qualitative study was guided by ethnographic principles taking the view that, "ethnography generates or builds theories of cultures – or explanations of how people think, believe, or behave – that are situated in local time and space" (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p.8). Teachers' perspectives of critical literacy were examined through their collaborative inquiry into students' critical literacy learning. This research design aligned with the key characteristics of ethnography which are described below.

### Natural Settings

The first hallmark of ethnography is the commitment to documenting about events, "as they occur in their natural settings" (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 9). In this study, I did not manipulate or create situations that were not part of the regular activities of the group of critical literacy teachers. The exception to this rule is when

ethnographers use elicitation techniques, bringing a group to a single location to conduct research with them. In this study, the participants were asked to join a focused group for entrance and exit interviews.

**Intimate and Reciprocal Involvement**

Another defining feature of ethnography is that the researcher must "become intimately involved with members of the community or participants in the natural settings where they do research. Intimate involvement means building trust between the researcher and the participants and often calls for a special kind of friendship" (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p.10). In this study, I was already an insider with a role and relationships in the group which had been established over four years as a facilitator and participant in the group of critical literacy teachers. Because I had established friendships in the research site, there were expectations of reciprocity and participation in the community where I was invited and expected to share feedback with members of the community and to participate in developmental efforts (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

**Emphasis on Participants' Perspectives**

Ethnography is committed to accurately reflecting the views and perspectives of the research participants. The community of the critical literacy teacher group could not

be presented with a single perspective, and so this study included five participants. Perspectives of participants was collected through entrance and exit interviews, observations during working sessions, artefacts from these working sessions, classroom observations and informal interviews, and teacher reflection journals. These data sources are further described in the Data Collection and Analysis section below.

**Inductive, Interactive and Recursive Process**

A fourth feature of ethnography is the inductive, interactive and recursive process it uses to build theories that explain the behaviour and beliefs of the group being studied (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). In this study the researcher began with a series of research questions, hunches about tensions, and models of critical literacy (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002; Janks, 2010) which were investigated through interviews, working session and classroom observations and initial analysis. These initial patterns were tested through further data collection during working session and classroom observations and informal interviews. This process was repeated several times over the four working sessions and three classroom observations to "confirm a stable pattern where the model appears to be complete" (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). This recursive data

collection and analysis is referred to as "grounded theory" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) or domain and structural analysis (Spradley, 1979).

**Examines Behaviour and Belief in Context**

Ethnography views the elements under study as existing in a context which can influence the behaviours of individuals and groups. In this study, the researcher's close ties with the group allowed her to better understand the social, political, cultural and personal factors at work in this context. The recursive data collection process and member checking also allowed the researcher's interpretations of participants' perspectives to be considered and verified in light of the context of the study.

**Informed by the Concept of Culture**

The essential hallmark of ethnography is that the interpretation of what people say, do and believe is always guided by the idea of culture (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). In this research study, the concept of culture was made central by focusing on how this group of teachers think, talk, and behave in their learning about critical literacy. These thoughts, talk and actions were documented in data collected through various sources which are described in the next section.

## Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through teacher journals, researcher fieldnotes of classroom observations and informal interviews, researcher fieldnotes of working sessions, working session audio transcripts, artefacts from working sessions and classroom observations, entrance and exit interview transcripts, informal interview transcripts and a researcher journal. All data sources were used to investigate the two research questions. Following is a brief description of data collection and each data source.

### Focused Group Interviews

Focused group interviews are intended to permit participants "to describe what they do, why they do these things, and how they feel about them" (Schensul, LeCompte, Nastasi and Borgatti, 1999, p.91). The researcher conducted interviews in a group setting so that participants could respond to and build on each others' ideas and questions. Elicitation techniques of "freelisting" and "sorting" provoked interesting discussion about whether or not certain items belonged in the domain or category (Schensul, LeCompte, Nastasi and Borgatti, 1999, p.91 & 92).

A 45-minute focus group interview was conducted at the beginning and end of the study to collect baseline data. Another 45-minute focus group interview was conducted at

the end of the study to elicit participants' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy learning and how their perceptions might have been confirmed or challenged, and how their realizations had been enacted over the course of the collaborative inquiry. The interview questions are provided in the Appendix (Appendix C). Participants were asked questions so that they described critical literacy learning (How would you describe critical literacy learning?), their work with classroom critical literacy (What do you do to promote critical literacy learning?), their rationale for classroom critical literacy and their feelings about their work with critical literacy (How do you feel about your work with critical literacy?).

The entrance interview and the initial classroom observations were the first stage of data collection in the recursive process described above where the theories and hunches that the researcher brought to the study could be considered in light of the research questions.

**Working Sessions**

The working sessions occurred during the two hour monthly critical literacy group meetings. Each working session involved three actions:

1) Whole group sharing of critical literacy insights, questions and experiences– Participants were

prompted to share any insights and questions that had arisen since the previous working session based on their professional reading and classroom experiences with critical literacy (what was planned, what actually happened, student learning that occurred).

2) Small group CDA – Participants worked in inquiry teams to examine student work using CDA, considering the context for the students' words (background about the student, the critical literacy lesson and any other pertinent information about what was happening when the remark was said or written), the discourse that seemed to be at work, other possible discourses, what student learning we thought would be appropriate for a next step, and how we could orchestrate this learning; and
3) Whole group reflection– After we paused for reflection, each inquiry team shared insights from their small group work that added new ideas to the group's learning. The working session concluded by updating our audit trail with new insights, questions and connections. One electronic document served as an audit trail to record the questions

and insights that the group was thinking about. At each meeting the group read the insights, questions and connections from previous sessions and updated the audit trail to reflect any new thinking.

This outline for the working sessions was limited to three important actions so that there was room for group learning needs to be addressed as they emerged through the inquiry.

As facilitator of the group, I posed questions that encouraged teachers to think about and articulate how their observations of student learning and their plans for instructional next steps related to their notions of critical literacy. The intent of the questioning was to make teachers' thinking visible, which was important for collecting data on perceptions of critical literacy, and this was also an important feature of inquiry.

Recall from the description in Chapter Two that critical discourse analysis (CDA) offers tools for understanding how larger social structures and ideologies are recreated or disrupted in classroom discourse. Gee (2005) outlines building tools and inquiry tools for CDA. In this study, participants engaged in CDA using techniques that had been used previously by researchers and teacher-researchers (Gee, 2005; VanSluys, Lewison & Flint, 2009).

Following Gee's (2005) recommendations for discourse analysis, the group asked questions about several building tasks using the tools of inquiry.

Much like VanSluys, Lewison and Flint (2009), these teachers were interested in understanding how students construct socially situated identities and activities in their classroom meaning making, and so the CDA focused on a) situated meanings of the words, b) the social languages they enacted and c) the Discourse models used. The synthesized sets of analytic questions used by VanSluys, Lewison and Flint (2009) that were developed using components of Gee's (1999) model were used as a starting point for the CDA with the critical literacy teacher group.

During our first experience with CDA at the March meeting, the group reflected on the value of each of these questions for promoting dialogue and stretching our thinking. The list of questions was revised to include only the questions that we found useful for our learning. The group responded that they had good conversation based on their consideration of the questions about situated meanings and the Discourse models, but the questions about social languages didn't provide much conversation or insights into how Discourses were at work in their classrooms. Their revised list of questions for CDA

included a focus on situated meanings, a focus on the Discourse models at work in the student's words and a consideration of alternative Discourse models:

What are the key words or phrases in this text?

What do the particular words mean in this context?

What are the speaker/writer's underlying assumptions and beliefs?

What are the simplified storylines that one must assume for this to make sense?

What Discourse models does this speaker/writer believe?

What are some alternative viewpoints or Discourse models that could support a critical understanding?

At each working session, the use of these questions for CDA and considerations of next steps for student learning and instruction was guided by the use of an organizer (Appendix D). The group's input about the process of CDA also led to the use of shorter texts. We realized that the process of CDA was simplified, but just as powerful, when we used a single line of text that typified a discourse at work.

Working sessions provided an opportunity to collect data related to teachers' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy. Perceptions of critical literacy were how participants defined critical literacy or their notions of what critical literacy was. Their perceptions were articulated during the working sessions when they connected their observations of student learning with their notions of critical literacy. Teachers' realizations of critical literacy were the moves that participants made to achieve teaching for critical literacy. These realizations were articulated during working sessions when teachers shared plans for and experiences with classroom critical literacy.

The four working sessions were digitally recorded and transcribed. The researcher also kept fieldnotes of the working session as a back up to the audio recordings and to record activities that might not be captured on audio.

The audit trail's documentation of the questions and insights from each session provided data about perceptions, realizations and tensions. The insights that teachers shared provided information about how their notions of and plans for critical literacy learning were evolving. The questions provided data about tensions that teachers were experiencing with their ongoing work with critical literacy.

**Introduction of CDA.** The introduction to CDA during the March 7 meeting did not go as planned. The teacher group was introduced to situated meanings, social languages and Discourse models through a ten minute presentation of the terms, definitions and examples. The graphic organizer for critical discourse analysis (CDA) was provided to each group member so they could see where to record their ideas about situated meanings, social languages and Discourse models when they engaged in the CDA process.

Then small inquiry teams worked together using the CDA organizer to guide their thinking as they read a 10 page transcript of classroom talk from VanSluys, Lewison & Flint (2009). There was a lot of confusion about the task and how to respond to the questions that were part of the CDA organizer. When the group came together again, we determined that the length of the text and the fact that it came from a research article which the participants hadn't read in full made it hard to determine the discourses in students' talk. We also considered which CDA questions provided the most useful conversation. The group's input resulted in the revised list of CDA questions described above.

As a result of the group's confusion about CDA, the April meeting was dedicated to providing more support for the CDA

process. We practiced together using the picture book, *Voices in the Park* (Brown, 2000) and responded to the CDA questions for the first two "voices" in the book. We also examined several short phrases of student talk that had been shared at the previous meeting and responded to the CDA questions for each phrase:

- They'll turn you into gays if you go to that school.
- We were surprised that whites could only go to one school and blacks had to go to another, why did the whites and blacks have to go to two different schools?
- . . . the size of your mom, no wonder you are the way you are. (Meeting Slide, April 11, 2011)

After this practice, the group was more comfortable with the CDA process.

**Classroom Observations**

In between each of the four working sessions, the researcher visited each participant's classroom for a half day. Most observations were of critical literacy lessons, and there were only two classroom observation visits where participants considered that the lesson was not focused on critical literacy, but they made connections between what was happening and critical literacy.

The classroom observations focused on collecting data related to tensions and realizations of critical literacy. The ways that teachers posed questions, arranged for learning events, and responded to students revealed their actions for realizing teaching for critical literacy. The researcher entered into the observations to see how participants' realizations of critical literacy aligned with their perceptions of critical literacy and the two existing frameworks for critical literacy described in Chapter Two (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002; Janks, 2010). Tensions were observed when participants responded to students' questions and comments, or altered their lesson in response to students' reactions. The researcher noted how participants responded to students' questions and comments so that they could be discussed with the participant during the informal interview where they were asked if they changed their plans in any ways and why, and why they responded as they did to student questions and comments.

The classroom observation also involved an informal interview where the participant reflected on the critical literacy lesson and shared any other insights or questions about critical literacy learning (described below). This provided participants with the opportunity to articulate

their perceptions and realizations of critical literacy learning, the tensions they were experiencing and negotiating as they related to the working sessions and their classroom experiences. Participants were asked to expand on or clarify ideas that had emerged in working sessions, previous classroom observations or reflection journals.

**Teacher Journals**

Each participant was asked to keep an ongoing journal noting any insights that they had as a result of their participation in this study. The use of journals and other personal documents in qualitative research is useful for obtaining evidence of a person's view of experiences (Bogdan & Biklin, 2003).

**Journal Prompts.** These journal prompts were designed to probe participants' thinking as it related to the research questions.

A) As you inquire into students' critical literacy learning,

What insights do you have?

What ideas are being reinforced?

What questions are you pondering?

B) What tensions do you perceive in your ongoing work with critical literacy? How are you negotiating these tensions?

C) What are you learning about critical literacy through your work with CDA?

## Data Analysis

The data were analyzed with two different methods: grounded theory and existing typologies for content analysis.

### Grounded Theory

The process of generating theory from the data in this study followed a constant comparative analysis so that similarities and differences in the data could be seen (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Following the work of VanSluys, Lewison and Flint (2009), analysis was done through a three-level process of open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

During the first level of analysis, open coding, the researcher read the interview transcripts, working session transcripts, teacher journals, audit trail and field note data line by line to name and label important words and phrases that related, or potentially related, to the tensions or the professional learning inquiry process and CDA in some way. Following are some examples of the phrases that were labelled as important at this level of analysis. “I think it’s teaching the students that there’s different

perspectives, and voices" (P3, EntFGI, 3/7/11) was identified as a teacher's perspective of critical literacy:

> I also think it is teaching students to dig deeper, not to always just what's on the surface. That there's, umm, underlying issues, underlying perspectives, and messages that are not always right there in front of them. (P2, EntFGI, 3/7/11)

This comment was also labelled as a teachers' perspective of critical literacy.

"...creating a classroom, and having a relationship with students that makes them want to open up and share with you" (P1, EntFGI, 3/7/11). This comment was identified as a teachers' realization of critical literacy because it related to how this participant enacted critical literacy and supported students' critical literacy learning.

"How do you really handle the situation where a negative comment is made towards a particular group?" (P1, Reflection Journal, undated, collected 5/25/11). This question was labelled as a tension related to work with critical literacy because it articulated a challenge perceived by a participant.

During the second level of analysis, axial coding, the researcher developed categories and considered their relation to each other. Within the perceptions of critical literacy, the following categories initially emerged: Real World Connections; Questioning; Different Perspectives;

Reflection; Voice and Action; Conditions. Following is an example of data that related to each of these categories.

**Perceptions**

Real World Connections

> I think it prepares them for the real world too, like, that all the skills and how they critically analyze something are the skills they're gonna need, whether it be problem solving or working collaboratively with someone. They are going to need to use these outside the school walls, you know. They 're gonna need that as adults and whatnot. We are inundated with things with media and internet. It's just; we need to be even more critical now. (P2, EntFGI, 3/7/11)

Questioning

> And to, like, to question what's being presented to them as well, like, do I really need to follow this? (P1, EntFGI, 3/7/11)

Different Perspectives

> I think it's teaching the students that there's different perspectives, and voices. (P3, EntFGI, 3/7/11)

Reflection

> . . . and then, for me, thinking about what is my opinion on um, certain topics, and then encouraging that in students, to formulate what their opinions are and knowing that it is ok to change your perspective. (P1, EntFGI, 3/7/11)

Voice and Action

> And, also I think it is important for me to teach the students that they have a voice, that voice is different for all of us, and that, hmmm, I guess, when this is all said and done, that we're accepting of each other's ideas and I think that's a big part of their learning. (P5, EntFGI, 3/7/11)

Conditions

> My first thought when you asked that was about my own learning about, hmmm, what my understanding is of critical literacy because if I don't really understand it then I can't share that, or teach that to my students, and, hmmm, so I think that it is a big part of the process for me too, is my own learning. (P5, EntFGI, 3/7/11)

The same categories were used to sort participants' realizations of critical literacy because most of the realizations data fit into the perceptions categories. For example, during a classroom observation I observed an action that fit with the category of different perspectives. P1 asked students to recall the ideas that they had shared about poverty from their last read aloud and to consider why they might have had different answers (Classroom Observation Fieldnotes, 3/22/11).

There were some data that did not fit within the existing perspectives categories, but these data were all related to the idea of reading and responding to texts. This resulted in the addition of a realizations category – read and respond. This category included data related to how participants engaged students in reading and responding to texts. An example of data that fit with read and respond was when P3 read the picture book, *Fly Away Home* (Bunting, 1993), aloud to her class, then prompted the class discussion of homelessness by having students record their

ideas about what a homeless person thinks and what other people think of them on a graffiti wall (Classroom Observation Fieldnotes, 3/24/11). Further examination of this category revealed that the data were exclusively about reading social issues texts. The idea of reading a wide variety of texts from the real world was a perception of critical literacy that fit within real world connections, but realizations of critical literacy were about social issues texts.

After considering how these categories related to the research question about the impact of CDA, early perceptions and realizations were separated to see if there were changes from the beginning of the study, prior to CDA, to the end of the study, post CDA. This lens resulted in a few changes to the categories. I had put voice and action together in the same category but participants' inclusion of voice in their perspectives grouping when they initially organized their ideas of critical literacy showed how they saw voice as connected to perspectives and not to action. P2 asked, "what about accepting others' ideas? Is that perspectives too?" and P5 said that the group of ideas was about "Perspectives. It's about perspectives", to which P3 added, "And Voice" (EntFGI, 3/7/11). This change left action as its own category, and the data about classroom

practice was really about social justice projects so the category was renamed. Categories reflecting early perceptions and realizations included: Perspectives; Real World Connections; Reflection; Questioning; Social Justice Projects; and Reading and Responding to Social Issues Texts.

The data from after participants' engagement in CDA, included some new ideas. New categories were created to reflect the changes in perceptions and realizations. The category of Perspectives grew to encompass discourses as well. The category of Real World Connections grew to encompass the idea that we use connections to find tensions in competing discourses. The category of Social Justice Projects evolved as it regarded taking action as a practice that is connected to critical inquiries and understandings. The category of Reading and Responding to Social Issues Texts grew to reflect how participants were going beyond reading and responding in their classroom practice with critical literacy. The categories that reflected later perceptions and realizations were: Complex and Evolving; Examining Perspectives and Discourses; Recognizing Teachers' Own Bias; Finding the Tension through Real World Connections; Teaching Students and Learning from Students; and Taking Action as Connected Practice;

The initial categories related to tensions included:

Teacher Centered or Student Centered;

Critical Discussions;

CDA Confusion;

Personal Experiences;

What Other People Think;

What I Really Think or Feel;

Students' Learning Needs;

Protecting Students' Safety and Innocence; and

Lack of Depth.

There seemed to be overlap across these categories and distinct categories were difficult to pull out. For example, within the category of teacher centered or student centered, there were ideas about how teachers' perspectives fit, or didn't, with students' perspectives or the perspectives that were being explored in the classroom: "My own discourse is in conflict with some of their ideas" (P1, Classroom Observation Interview, 3/25/11). This fit in this category because it reflected a tension about whose learning was at the center of the classroom learning experience, and what the ideal outcome of this learning might be was still in question. Within this category were also ideas reflecting tension I perceived where teachers were promoting social justice projects, or where students

were pursuing action projects supported by their teachers. Through their work with CDA, participants began to remark about how social justice projects needed to be connected to critical awareness and they were noticing a tension when this didn't happen: "it's a fine line for teachers because it is our issue that we are bringing to them and saying it is important, but when they say it, it is their issue now and we need to do something" (P5, April Meeting, 4/11/11). This category eventually was separated into two categories: Conformity vs. Multiple Perspective; and Social Justice vs. Critical Literacy.

There were other changes to the Tensions categories. The categories of personal experiences, what other people think, and what I really think or feel were all folded into the category of Comfort vs. Bias. The early tension categories of students' learning needs, protecting students' safety and innocence, and lack of depth were all folded into the category of Safe vs. Stretched and "Right" vs. Real. The early category of Critical Discussions was determined to be more about the tension that was experienced from students' comments and not restricted to classroom discussions, so it was relabelled Responding to Student Comments.

The final categories were determined through this process of repeated rereading of the coded data, consultation with my peer debriefer, and through attempts at writing my findings. The final categories related to tensions included:

Recognizing Discourses;

Comfort vs. Bias;

Safe vs. Stretched, "Right" vs. Real;

Conformity vs. Multiple Perspectives;

Responding to Student Comments; and

Social Justice vs. Critical Literacy.

Some data did not fit into these categories. For example, Participant 4 expressed concern about parental viewpoints, "how will parents receive news of our classroom explorations of these issues, and how will students talk about it, will they share selectively about the viewpoints that were explored?" (P4, March Meeting, 3/25/11). Another piece of data that didn't fit into these categories was about concern for how provincial tests influence our goals for students' learning, "Is our goal for student learning to do well on the test or to do well in life? These are sometimes at odds" (P3, May Meeting, 5/9/11). These data did not fit into the categories, but there were only one or

two comments about these ideas which was not enough to justify adding more categories.

In the final level of analysis, selective coding, I checked on and confirmed initial coding schemes, and consulted related research to support an emerging theory.

**Existing Typologies for Content Analysis**

To further investigate the first research question, the raw data were also analyzed through content analysis using existing typologies for critical literacy: the four dimensions of critical literacy (Lewison, Flint, VanSluys, 2002) and Janks' (2010) realizations of critical literacy. Both of these models provided a view of critical literacy. The use of existing models or frameworks provides researchers with tools to help rethink practices and events by weighing data against existing categories to arrive at new insights (Short, 1999). Because critical literacy is about challenging existing literacy practices by interrogating multiple perspectives, critical literacy research should involve methodology that promotes multiple perspectives.

Data from interview transcripts, working session transcripts, the audit trail, teacher journals and classroom observation fieldnotes were coded according to how teachers' perceptions and realizations of critical

literacy fit within the dimensions of critical literacy (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002) and Janks' (2010) realizations of critical literacy so that participants' perceptions of critical literacy across the dimensions and the realizations could be examined. First the categories that emerged from the grounded theory analysis were coded for how they fit within a dimension or realization of critical literacy. For example, the category of Multiple Perspectives and Discourses aligned with the dimension of Examining Multiple Perspectives. This category also aligned with the Janks' (2010) realization of Diversity. Some phrases offered a perspective of critical literacy, but did not fit within the dimensions model or the realizations model. For example, the category of Finding the Tension through Real World Connections was not part of either model. Also, there were categories related to teaching for critical literacy that were not evident in either model.

**Trustworthiness**

This qualitative study attempted to establish trustworthiness using the recommendations of Lincoln and Guba (1985). The first technique used involved increasing the probability of credible findings through prolonged engagement, persistent observation and triangulation.

Prolonged engagement addresses a concern for the scope of findings. In order for the researcher to become oriented to the situation, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that sufficient time is spent to develop an authentic understanding of the context being investigated. Prolonged engagement also allowed researcher and participant distortions to be acknowledged.

Persistent observation is concerned with depth of findings. The 13 week time period was the naturally occurring time frame for this critical literacy teacher group's collaborative inquiry. In order to improve the trustworthiness, persistent observation of three classroom observations, three informal interviews, two formal interviews and four working sessions were documented to achieve depth of understanding of participants' perceptions of critical literacy learning.

Triangulation is another process for establishing trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe Denzin's (1978) modes of achieving triangulation: using multiple and different methods of data collection or design; involving multiple investigators; and working from multiple theories. This study attempted to triangulate with by utilizing multiple methods of data collection (interviews, observations, journals, working sessions) and multiple

sources (5 participants). This study was grounded in several theories of critical literacy including Lewison, Flint and VanSluys' (2002) four dimensions of critical literacy and Janks' (2010) realizations of critical literacy. In addition, peer debriefing was used in lieu of multiple investigators.

Peer debriefing is another technique to establish trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe three intended benefits of peer debriefing. First, it helps to ensure that researcher's findings are honest and truthful. It helps the researcher to see what she may not have been aware of. Finally, it helps the researcher to unload emotions that may negatively influence her judgement and actions. It is recommended that peer debriefers should not be someone in authority relationships to the investigator. Over the course of this investigation, the data collection and analysis, I dialogued regularly with a colleague who is a work colleague and a Master's student at the University of Windsor.

## Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. One of the limitations of this research is the amount of time that was available to observe these teachers engaged in their inquiry project before the end of the 2010-2011 school

year. By the end of the study, the teachers were gaining confidence with CDA but more time for additional working sessions and classroom visits would have been beneficial.

Generalizability is another limitation of this study. This particular group of critical literacy teachers may not have reflected other professional learning groups. The study of this group does not necessarily offer insight into the work of other groups as a typical case.

Another limitation of this research study is in the fact that the potential participants did not reflect socio-cultural diversity.

A final limitation relates to being a researcher working with a group of which I was a member. While there are advantages to this for understanding the culture of the group and having established relationships with participants, this familiarity left me with expectations of what could happen based on past experiences. While safeguards against bias were put in place, my closeness with the group was a limitation of the study.

**Ethical Concerns**

In order to address ethical concerns, this study had the approval of, and followed the recommendations of the Wayne State University Institutional Review Board (Human Investigations Committee). A protocol was also submitted

for Behavioural Committee review. All participants were informed of the study procedures and the expectations of them through the Informed Consent Form (Appendix B). I shared research objectives with participants plan to provide them with access to any research study reports.

**Summary of Chapter Three**

This chapter introduced and defended the methodology for this study. It included descriptions of setting, participants, the researcher, qualitative design, data collection and analysis, and trustworthiness for the investigation into how teachers' perceptions of critical literacy learning are informed through their collaborative inquiry into students' critical literacy learning. This study aimed to capture participants' perceptions of critical literacy learning throughout their inquiry and work with critical discourse analysis. Participant perceptions of the tensions involved in their work with critical literacy have been foregrounded to better understand the complexities of teaching for critical literacy. Chapter Four documents the findings from this study.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# FINDINGS

*"I like the CDA though because it challenges us, just allowing the tensions to be there . . . It's an uncomfortable process, a very uncomfortable process, but necessary for growth." -Participant 3*

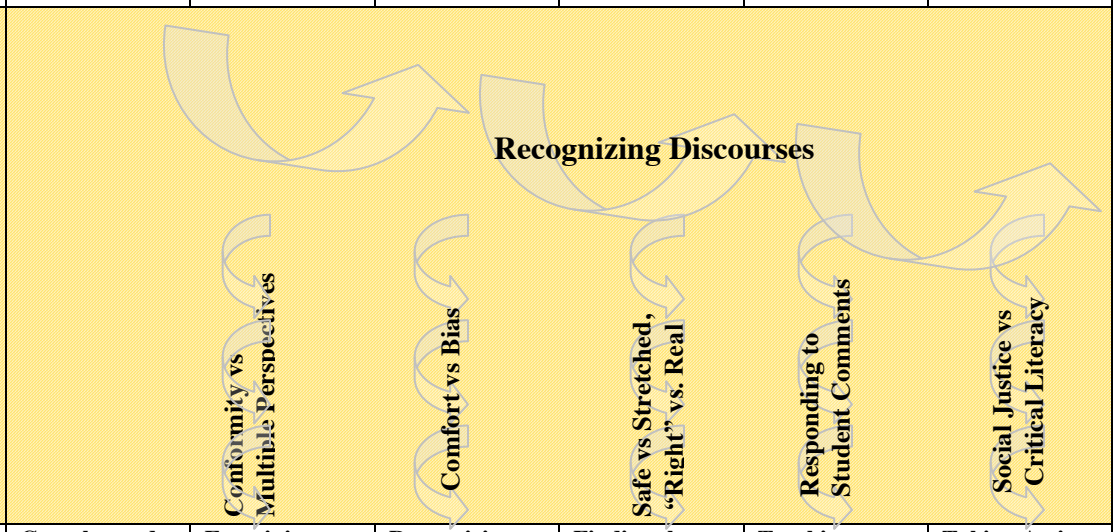
## Introduction

This research study documented participants' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy and the tensions they experienced in their work with critical literacy throughout their inquiry into students' critical literacy learning and their engagement in critical discourse analysis (CDA). The findings described in this chapter were based on the research questions that guided this investigation.

1. How does teachers' inquiry into students' critical literacy learning and experience with critical discourse analysis inform teachers' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy?
2. When teachers have the opportunity to engage in critical discourse analysis, how do they perceive tensions in their ongoing work with critical literacy learning in both professional learning and classroom learning contexts?

Figure 4.1 provides a visual for the perceptions, realizations and tensions of critical literacy learning that emerged in this research study. The shaded area represents participants' experiences with CDA and their inquiry into students' critical literacy learning across professional learning and classroom learning contexts. The tensions have been labeled over top of coiled arrows to represent how the tensions circled around and around across learning contexts as participants tried to make sense of ideas that didn't fit with their previous notions, and to overcome the challenges they were experiencing.

**Figure 4.1: Perceptions, Realizations and Tensions of Critical Literacy**

| **Perceptions and Realizations** | **Questioning** | **Real World Connections** | **Reflection** | **Perspectives** | **Reading and Responding to Social Issues Texts** | **Social Justice Projects** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Tensions in Inquiry, CDA and Classroom Critical Literacy Experiences** |  | | | | | |
| **New Perceptions and Realizations** | **Complex and Evolving** | **Examining Perspectives and Discourses** | **Recognizing Teachers' Own Bias** | **Finding the Tension through Real World Connections** | **Teaching Students and Learning From Students** | **Taking Action as Connected Practice** |

At times, these coiled arrows, or tensions, were compressed as participants were faced with dealing with the tension. The compressed coils were times of intense energy, or learning, and when the tension was resolved, the coil was released, and new understandings emerged. The tension, Recognizing Discourses spans across the field of participants' experiences with CDA and is overarching the other tensions to depict how participants' learning about recognizing discourses problematized aspects of their thinking and practice and contributed to the other tensions.

There were two key findings that emerged in this study:

1. Critical discourse analysis exposed tensions related to participants' work with critical literacy.
2. Critical discourse analysis contributed to the changes in participants' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy learning, in particular in how they recognized multiple perspectives, how they envisioned discourse in other aspects of critical literacy, and how they engaged in learning for critical literacy.

This chapter describes each of these findings in detail and documents the data to support each claim. First, the participants' initial perceptions and realizations are explained, and then the tensions that participants

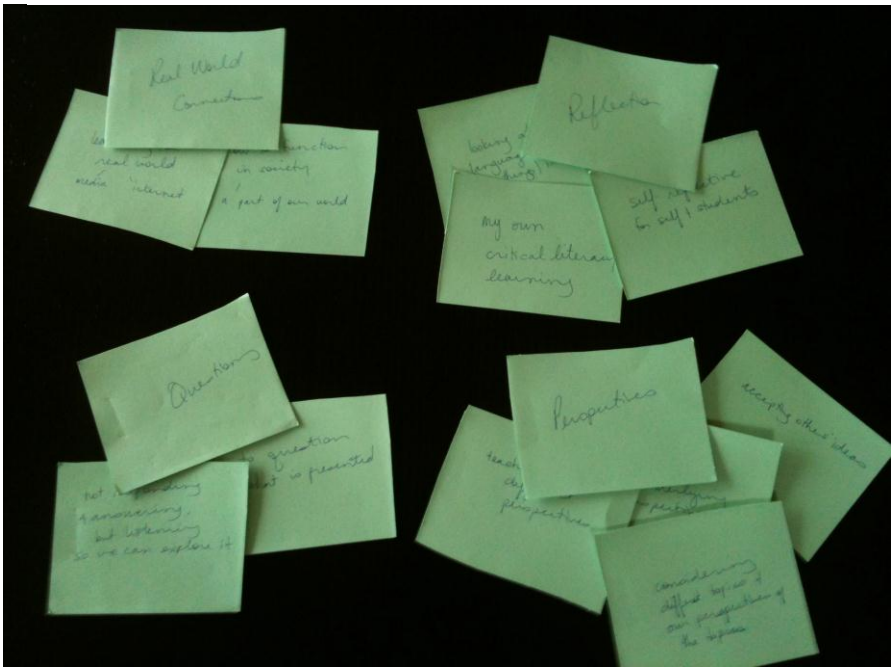
experienced in their work with critical literacy learning are discussed. The discussion of tensions begins with a description of the initial tension that emerged through the process of CDA, Recognizing Discourses. With the description of each tension, the corresponding shift in perceptions and realizations are described. The findings are presented in this order because the initial perceptions and realizations provide background information to understand the tensions that participants experienced. Then the tensions associated with CDA and Recognizing Discourses provide background information for how and why participants changed their ideas about critical literacy.

## Participants' Initial Perceptions and Realizations of Critical Literacy Learning

During the Entrance Focus Group Interview (EntFGI), participants were asked to list the ideas that they had about critical literacy learning. Their ideas were recorded on cue cards. Then participants were asked to arrange the cue cards with their ideas in a way that made sense to them. The arrangement they created became a concept map for the participants' perspectives of critical literacy. During the Exit Focus Group Interview (ExFGI), participants were asked to reflect on their concept map from the EntFGI and consider what changes or additions they might make. The

changes in their perceptions of critical literacy learning can be seen in their discussions about critical literacy from both interviews and in the changes in their arrangement of cue card ideas --- their initial and revised concept maps. Their initial concept map was arranged into four groups with these headings: Questioning, Real World Connections, Reflection, and Perspectives. Figure 4.2 shows the arrangement of their cue cards. Ideas under each heading included:

**Figure 4.2: Participants' Entrance Interview Graphic Representation of Critical Literacy**




Questioning
-to question what is presented
-not responding and answering but listening so we can understand it

Real World Connections
-learning for the real world (media and internet)
-how to function in society, a part of our world

Reflection
-looking at language and other things in use
-self reflective for self and students
-my own critical literacy learning

Perspectives
-teaching different perspectives
-considering different topics and our perspectives of the topics
-accepting others' ideas

More information about each category was evident in participants' talk during their initial description of critical literacy and in participants' talk as they arranged the cue cards.

**Questioning**

In their model, the category of Questioning involved challenging the messages from reading texts and letting student questions guide critical inquiry. Questioning was revealed to be an important part of critical literacy learning when it was the first category organized and labeled by the participants:

> Kelly: How would you organize those ideas in a way that might make sense to you as a group?
>
> Participant 5 (P5) : These two ['to question what is presented' and 'not responding and answering but listening so we can explore it'] are both about questioning right here so that could be a category. (EntFGI, 3/7/11)

During the EntFGI, P2 explained that critical literacy learning was about analyzing, "I also think it is teaching students to dig deeper, not to always see just what's on the surface, that there's underlying issues, underlying perspectives and messages that are not always right there in front of them" (EntFGI, 3/7/11). This idea of questioning and considering if we, as readers, have to follow the messages in texts, was brought up by P1, "and to

question what's presented to them as well, like, do I really need to follow this?" (EntFGI, 3/7/11). Later in the interview, participants were asked what they hoped students would achieve as a result of their work with classroom critical literacy. P3 responded that students will be able to "challenge the status quo, ask good questions, [like] why is it important?" (EntFGI, 3/7/11). Questioning, then, was about recognizing underlying perspectives and messages from texts, and challenging them.

The other idea within Questioning was inquiry, which was brought up when P4 explained how as teachers, we needed to listen to students' questions without providing answers so that their questions can guide exploration:

> I think, as a teacher, when engaging with these kinds of texts [our role] is to not respond to their questions, but just listen. Sometimes as a teacher it is difficult to not just give the answer . . . we shouldn't, but just explore it and allow them to explore it. (EntFGI, 3/7/11)

The idea of inquiry as questioning was about listening to students so that their questions guide the learning. Inquiry based on students' questions was brought up again later in the interview by P3:

> I let the students pose the questions sometimes as well, just some, I remember last year there was some talk about having Eva Olsen, who was a Holocaust survivor, in, and some of the kids asked what the Holocaust was . . . so when they had the question about that, I brought in some materials and we

> discussed it, and so it is answering any questions they have or giving them the means to find out more. (EntFGI, 3/7/11)

Students posing questions to guide the learning and asking questions to challenge the implicit messages in texts were both important ideas presented by participants within the category of Questioning.

**Real World Connections**

The category, Real World Connections, was labeled when two ideas: learning for the real world (media and internet); and how to function in society, a part of our world were put together in the participants' organization of critical literacy learning ideas.

These ideas of critical literacy connected to the real world were based on participants' comments about the relevance of critical literacy:

> I think it prepares them for the real world too, like all the skills and how they critically analyze something are the skills they're gonna need . . . they are going to need to use outside the school walls and you know, they're gonna need that as adults. We are inundated with things in the media and internet . . . we need to be even more critical now. (P2, EntFGI, 3/7/11)

P3 agreed that critical literacy skills need to be exercised outside the classroom and students need to be able to connect their learning to the real world:

> [Critical literacy] helps you function in a group and in society at large . . . it's just helping students to recognize that it's a part of everything, you know,

> that we're living. It's just so relevant in this day and age. (EntFGI, 3/7/11)

When they sorted their ideas of critical literacy, the participants quickly identified and labeled the category, Real World Connections: "These two ('learning for the real world' and 'how to function in society') are about the world here" (P1, EntFGI, 3/7/11).

**Reflection**

The category about Reflection quickly formed when three cue cards ('looking at language and other things in use', 'my own critical literacy learning' and 'self-reflective for self and for students') were grouped and P1 made this comment, "criticism, like reflections" (EntFGI, 3/7/11) which was confirmed by P3, "This one is reflection" (EntFGI, 3/7/11). The category of Reflection is comprised of three ideas: looking at language and other things in use; being self reflective; and one's own critical literacy learning. All three of these ideas are evident in P1's initial description of critical literacy:

> When I think of the students I think of them being self reflective . . . looking deeper into the meaning of what is going on, the language being used, looking at illustrations, looking at other things, and then for me, thinking about what is my opinion on certain topics and then encouraging that in the students, to formulate what their opinions are and knowing that it is ok to change your perspective. (P1, EntFGI, 3/7/11)

P5 also considers critical literacy learning as encompassing reflective practices for both teachers and students:

> My first thought when you asked that was about my own learning, about what my understanding is of critical literacy because if I don't really understand it then I can't share that or teach that to my students, so I think that it is a big part of the process for me is my own learning. (EntFGI, 3/7/11)

Reflection then involved three aspects --- recognizing implicit messages in texts of all types, seeing how we are positioned by texts, and having a meta-awareness of our own (students' and teachers') critical literacy learning so that we can continue to grow and learn. Reflection was really a disposition or habit of mind where readers recognize how texts work to position them and how their own critical reading of the world and actions in the world are developing.

**Perspectives**

The participants struggled a bit with their final category before they came to consensus. The group seemed unsure about how examining multiple perspectives, accepting others' ideas and having your own voice might fit in their categorization scheme. P4 initially suggested a name for the category, "How about 'accepting other ideas and perspectives'?", to which P1 quickly offered, "I think

that's the end goal" (EntFGI, 3/7/11). The tone of P1's response suggested that she was disagreeing with P4's idea for a category name. Perhaps P1 saw 'accepting other ideas and perspectives' as "an end goal"; something that readers arrive at after considering different perspectives and voicing their own perspectives. This comment showed how participants were aware that perspectives were important for critical literacy, but they weren't sure if other viewpoints should be "examined", "accepted" or "voiced", or whose viewpoints should be "examined", "accepted" or "voiced".

The participants continued to grapple with the ideas that were left and how to categorize them:

> P3: Perspectives (pause).
>
> P5: Perspectives and language.
>
> P2: What about accepting others' ideas? Is that perspectives too?
>
> P3: Or, you know what, learning for the real world and accepting others' ideas is part of being social, right?

At this point, the group paused for over 30 seconds, so I prompted them to recap their categorizations thus far.

> Kelly: Ok, so we've got Questions, Real World Connections, Reflection, and what is this one about (gesturing towards the fourth pile of cue cards that has been assembled by the group)?
>
> P3: Perspectives. It's about perspectives. And Voice.

To which the others readily agreed with nods, "yeah", "uh-huh" and "Wow. I think that's pretty good. [laughter] We're going on the road" (EntFGI, 3/7/11).

The Perspectives category included ideas about understanding that there are multiple perspectives of topics and exploring these multiple perspectives. P3's first ideas about critical literacy were stated as: "I think it's teaching the students that there's different perspectives, and voices" (EntFGI, 3/7/11). P5's description of perspectives included the idea of voice:

> I think it is important for me to teach the students that they have a voice; that voice is different for all of us and that when this is all said and done that we're accepting of each other's ideas. (EntFGI, 3/7/11)

Here, perspectives enveloped the idea that readers' own ideas are to be valued as much as the ideas presented in texts, and that while there may be disagreement between these voices, we should welcome differences of opinions from each other.

These initial categories of critical literacy described by participants were expanded throughout the study as new ideas of critical literacy either fit within the categories, or added something slightly different that still aligned with the original categories. By the end of

the study, participants had new ideas about critical literacy which resulted in changes to their concept map.

As they made the initial concept map and participated in working sessions, the participants also described their classroom practice, or realizations of critical literacy. In addition, I noted the participants' realizations during classroom visits. These initial realizations fell into three categories: Reading and Responding to Social Issues Texts; Engaging in Social Justice Projects; and Creating Safe Places for Critical Discussions.

**Read and Respond to Social Issues Texts**

When asked how they promoted critical literacy learning for students during the EntFGI Group Interview, a prominent part of their practice was reading and responding to social issues texts. Recall from Chapter Two that social issues texts provide readers with an alternative view of social and political issues in the world. In 11 of the 15 classroom observations, participants read a social issue text to their class and engaged them in responding to the text.

During the EntFGI, the actual texts that participants described using were both social issues texts, *Fly Away Home* (1993) by Eve Bunting and *Night* (2006) by Eli Wiesel. A complete list of the social issues texts that were

observed being read in classrooms or described by participants as having been read over the course of this study is included in Appendix E. Participants engaged students in responding to these social issues texts through conversations, where students shared their questions, connections and feelings in response to the reading, through drama, where students took on the role of characters in the text to explore their experience, or through writing, where students were asked to use information from the text and their own experience in a written response. P1 said that conversations following the reading of a social issue text were central to her work with critical literacy, "That's how I'm initiating a lot of these conversations, have the text available and then have the conversation" (P1, EntFGI, 3/7/11). Another participant said that she encouraged students to engage in discussions following texts by first having an essential question for them to respond to, "come up with that question, whatever, essential question, or guiding question, whatever you want to call it, just to spark that initial conversation and then go from there" (P5, EntFGI, 3/7/11). P3 explained how her class responded to texts by focusing on what they felt was important to remember: "We ask good questions now, based on Lee Heffernan's book, Why is it important? What is

important to remember about this text?" (EntFGI, 3/7/11). Lee Heffernan's, *Critical Literacy and Writer's Workshop,* (2004) was a professional text that we had read and reflected on together in this teacher group in the previous year.

Other participants said that they had used Heffernan's prompts in their classrooms too. For example, during the March meeting, P2 said, "We've used this sheet [holds up the organizer with the prompts from Heffernan's book] from the textbook several times and they [students] are just diving right in" (P2, March Meeting, 3/7/11). Responses to these prompts (Something important we want to remember about this book is; An anomaly --- Something that we did not expect or something that surprised us is; A question we have is; and A connection we have with our world today is) were used as starting points for whole class discussions about the text and the issue.

Questions that promote critical literacy thinking were also used to respond to social issues texts. P2 used an anchor chart of critical questions which was posted in the classroom with the following:

Questions to Promote Critical Literacy
Who is the author/producer?
What do you think are the author's values, attitudes, beliefs?
How do you think the author sees the world?
What do you interpret to be the author's intent?
Who is the target audience?
How do you know?
How might different people interpret the message of the text?
How does the wording influence meaning?
How do the features influence meaning?
Who is making money from the text?

Classroom Observation Fieldnotes, 5/18/2011

Discussions of characters' perspectives were also prompted through drama. P4 used role play to explore different characters' perspectives of events from *The Lorax* (Seuss, 1971) so students could experience the emotions that characters might have felt when their habitat was ruined or, alternatively, when they gained material wealth by exploiting the environment (Fieldnotes, Classroom Observation, 04/15/11). Several participants used role on the wall, an action strategy where a large outline of a character is drawn and students add the character's inner thoughts on the inside of the outline, and what other people think of this person on the outside of the outline. This strategy was deemed important as a starting point for discussions about perspectives, "Sometimes I'll do a role on the wall or graffiti wall, that was one that sparked a

lot of conversation . . . we will take a look at it and the conversation comes from there" (P3, EntFGI, 3/7/11).

Reading social issues texts was an important part of participants' realization of critical literacy. A comment made by P4 showed how much she valued reading social issues texts. While describing how much she appreciated the conversations during the monthly working sessions, she asked for a list of social issues texts, ". . . [I'd like to] explore new books, and, do you have a list of books that I can buy? I would take them all" (P4, Classroom Observation Interview, 05/25/11). This request for a list of texts made to me, the facilitator of the critical literacy group, showed that she saw reading social issues texts as central to teaching for critical literacy.

Their expressions of gratitude for the opportunities to hear from colleagues about the social issues texts they were using, and their expressions of interest in what other social issues texts were available both show how valuable the practice of reading and responding to social issues texts was to these participants.

**Social Justice Projects**

Often the reading of social issues texts would result in participants' leading their students to take action to promote social justice. P4 described how her students

engaged in social justice projects based on their reading of a picture book:

> . . . one book, *Fly Away Home* [Bunting, 1996], turned into, it turned into quite an elaborate [project], we have a ten people committee and we're working on a plan to green the public housing site near our school, and that was all a result of the kids wanting to, they wanted to, they wanted to get food for families, that didn't have any and that resulted in, but it didn't turn out, but it did result in a garden for a senior complex. That idea didn't pan out so we are planting trees . . . it's amazing. They are so empowered, right, knowing they are doing this. (P4, EntFGI, 3/7/11)

In this quote, P4 explained how she tried to follow the students' ideas for donating food for families in need, but when that fell through, the students still engaged in taking action by greening spaces. When I asked how that happened, "How did that happen, beyond reading a great book like *Fly Away Home* or *Night* [Wiesel, 2006), what instructionally did you do? (Kelly, EntFGI , 3/7/11). P4 quickly said that it was about "knowing the resources" that were available for students to "do something"; and "that was just one step and it just kind of snowballed." So realizing critical literacy was about harnessing students' enthusiasm for a cause and knowing what resources were available for students to be able to take action. In this example, the action didn't fit with the issue of homelessness that the students had initially expressed

interest in, but the participant had connected the idea of reading this social issue text with the action that students were taking for the environment. Her quick suggestion that teachers need to know the resources implied that had she known another option for taking action related to homelessness, she might have been better able to provide it to students.

Another participant described a social justice project on bullying that her students were engaged in, "These past couple months I have been working on this bullying project" (P5, EntFGI, 3/7/11). The students in P5's class created video messages about not bullying through Smart Notebook files, and presented these in primary classrooms in their school as a social action project to decrease bullying.

Participants' initial perceptions and realizations of critical literacy involved examining different perspectives; making real world connections; reflecting on our own critical literacy learning; questioning implicit messages; reading and responding to social issues texts; and engaging in social justice projects. Tensions that emerged during the process of working with CDA contributed to changes that came in the participants' perceptions and realizations. The next section describes the evolution of those tensions.

**Introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis**

As participants engaged in CDA, tensions emerged. The first tension was participants' struggle to recognize discourses at work. They found the process of CDA challenging at first, but learned to read discourses in their personal lives, in their classrooms and in professional learning contexts. As they negotiated this tension, participants had a heightened awareness of discourses across learning contexts that compressed this coiled arrow. Their emerging ideas about discourses were quickly tested, spurring on new ideas that were tested. There was energy in their negotiation of this tension. Recognizing Discourses at work was an overarching tension that, once eased, led to new thinking about critical literacy and set in motion other tension coils.

When participants initially engaged in CDA, they were confused about what they were being asked to do and unsure how to respond to the prompts that they were given. Participants were given an excerpt of classroom talk from the article, *Researching Critical Literacy* (VanSluys, Lewison & Flint, 2010), to read and consider how different discourses were at work in the classroom using several guiding questions. The following guiding questions were intended to facilitate a process of CDA:

1. What are the key words or phrases in this text?

   What do the particular words mean in this context?
2. What are the speaker/writer's underlying assumptions and beliefs?

   What are the simplified storylines that one must assume for this to make sense?
3. What Discourse models does this speaker/writer believe?
4. What are some alternative viewpoints or Discourse models that could support a critical understanding?

Participants were asked to notice which questions provided more or less discussion. When small groups worked on responding to and reflecting on the questions, they expressed confusion. P2 said, "This is challenging for me right now" (March Meeting, 3/7/11), and P5 agreed, "Me too."

Participants struggled with the instructions that asked them to circle the questions that they found useful and add other questions as necessary. P2 read these instructions and asked, "Useful in what respect?" (March Meeting, 3/7/11). They couldn't determine which questions were useful because they were unfamiliar with recognizing discourses.

Their challenge with the task might have been because they didn't recognize discourses at work. Alternatively, it may have been due to the fact that the classroom excerpt they were analyzing was long and dense. It was 12 pages of description and transcripts from classroom talk. It was also taken from a research article that the participants hadn't read in its entirety. I engaged in the task with one small group. It was also challenging for me to track the different discourses at work from this large piece of text. The comments about how confused they were by the task continued:

> P2: I am really sorry that I'm not contributing, but I don't want to just talk and talk, and I'm just trying to take this all in . . .
>
> P5: No, no. We are all trying here. (March Meeting, 3/7/11)

At this point the group tried to determine a simplified storyline that the speaker might assume.

> P5: To be honest, I'm getting a little lost and my eyes are bothering me, so . . .
>
> P2: I hope we take this up together.

When the whole group came together again, the participants shared their confusion about the task so I tried to walk everyone through the questions together. We determined that some of the questions seemed to promote more important dialogue about the discourses at work. I

hoped that the excerpts of talk from their classrooms would be easier to analyze, but we ran out of time during the March meeting. I left feeling worried that CDA might prove to be too challenging for our group. P2 whispered her worry to P5 as they were gathering their things to leave, "Today for the first time I really felt like a kid. We are using new vocabulary and I don't really understand and these questions!" (P2, March Meeting, 3/7/11).

Listening and transcribing the audio from this part of the March Meeting was disheartening. I had thought that the group would be successful with analyzing discourses and that it would help us to be more cognizant of discourses at work in participants' classrooms, but after the March Meeting, I wondered if the group had the ability to engage in CDA, and if they might be too discouraged to try again. I aimed to make our next attempt more successful.

During the April Meeting, we read a picture book, *Voices in the Park* (Browne, 2000), which tells the story of a trip to the park from the perspective of four different characters. After each character's rendition of the events, we stopped and worked through the set of CDA questions to consider possible discourse models. With this text, the participants began to experience more success with

determining the discourses they could see and hear in the book. P5 began by naming a possible perspective:

> P5: Well, the woman, the mom.
>
> Group Member (GM): I always took that as the dominant culture.
>
> Kelly: So how would you describe that?
>
> P: You know what, I've had the pleasure of, I've read that book, I love when you do more, when you start looking at both pictures and text. So for me, the dominant culture was all about the rules, and regulations of behaving and I love how in the illustration, everything is a line, and symmetrical. The trees are just on there so perfectly and the red hat. (April Meeting, 4/11/11)

As soon as this one group member shared an idea of a discourse at work, it was as if the other participants understood what they were being asked to do and they started sharing other ideas:

> P3: The trees, another thing that is, how they distort nature? How she, or the author, well, I'm reading into it, the author's intent in the illustrations, I think they are distorted by her voice by the dominance of her voice in the scenes and "frightful types", to me it's just the volume of all the things you've read, I've heard that expression, oh, this is frightful, I don't know. I'm thinking, like British 1800's, all those . . . (interrupted)
>
> P5: Someone very proper.
>
> P1: Or something that is unknown or that you don't associate with.
>
> GM: Yeah and there['s] definitely a line between her and, and what we don't know . . .

> P2: Look at the pole right here. Everyone else look at that?
>
> P4: What is that? A pole or is that a tree?
>
> P3: Almost like purposeful . . .
>
> GM: There's more space for her than for him.
>
> P5: He has the garbage. (April Meeting, 4/11/11)

In this exchange, P3 continued to build on the idea that illustrations can help readers to recognize discourses, noting how the illustrations were "distorted" by "the dominance of her voice", and how lines and space were used purposefully to demonstrate a discourse. As they played with these ideas, the group was developing insight into how words and illustrations demonstrated a possible view of the world. Then one group member shared her feelings about this view of the world:

> I know this isn't going to be popular, but, I think it is conservative view points are built on the necessity for law and order. And the economic structure that is being maintained, the lifestyle for all of us. Nobody wants to live in chaos. Nobody [everyone] wants to live in a world where there is some kind of norms, whatever those norms may be. (GM, April Meeting, April 11, 2011)

The group then considered how this viewpoint was depicted as wrong by the author because the mother character who had these ideals, was treated as cold and uncaring by the author. They were beginning to recognize how the discourses were at work in the text. They were also

becoming familiar with the language of critique for engaging in CDA.

When they were asked what other perspectives might be missing, one group member suggested, "Well, those 'frightful people'. What do they have to say about, you know, why are they being called 'frightful'?" (GM, April Meeting, 4/11/11). In this remark, a group member referred to a single phrase from the book that the group continued to analyze with regards to what would make other people "frightful". I remarked, "You know what I love [colleague's name], I love that you found, a phrase, and you can really do a lot of analysis from that one phrase. The power of a small phrase . . ." (Kelly, April Meeting, 4/11/11). We decided to focus our CDA of classroom talk on small excerpts of text – a single phrase, because it would be easier for us to focus on and dig into, and it would also be easier for participants to collect from the classroom talk. The idea that our investigation of discourses at work could be done with a single phrase or even a word had a lasting impact on participants' ideas of critical literacy too. Throughout their thoughtful descriptions of critical literacy, participants referred to the power of the word and how any text could be read for the discourses and biases implicit in a phrase.

The decisions to adjust the questions we used for CDA and the use of shorter texts were in response to participants' professional learning needs. As facilitator of this group, I was learning to listen more closely to what learners were saying and doing and be more responsive to their needs with the professional learning opportunities on offer. In addition, these adjustments to how we engaged in CDA influenced participants' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy.

After the April Meeting, participants agreed to have responses for the first two CDA questions (What are the key words or phrases in this text? What do the particular words mean in this context?) ready to share, which would begin our CDA process. The participants made decisions about what words or phrases we would analyze in our working sessions based on what learning was important to them and to their students. This practice also gave them an opportunity to share their classroom experiences with critical literacy with their inquiry groups, which the teachers had often said was a valuable aspect of their professional learning. Through the following three meetings, the teacher group explored the following phrases through CDA:

They will turn you gay if you go to that school.

> The size of your mom? No wonder you are the way you are.
>
> It's ok if a boy wants girl toys or a girl wants boy toys.
>
> I'm not rich!
>
> Panhandlers could just be faking it [being poor].
>
> Sorry for being mean and wasting *your* class time.
>
> We don't have money but that doesn't mean we're poor.

They also analyzed this list of what girls do and what boys do that was created in a whole class discussion in P3's classroom:

> Boys like Pokemon,
> They're gross at the dinner table,
> They don't listen very well,
> They have anger issues,
> They burp in front of others,
> They are lazy,
> They fix cars,
> They are messy writers,
> Boys are cool,
> Girls like to colour,
> They're pretty,
> They wear pink and purple,
> They know how to concentrate, and
> They listen.

Through their analysis of these student comments, participants examined multiple perspectives of several issues including: poverty; gender; bullying; sexual orientation; and body image. The CDA process encouraged participants to make connections to what they knew about these issues in the world. They developed a heightened

sensitivity for recognizing discourses in personal and professional contexts. CDA set in motion the spiraling tension of Recognizing Discourses.

## Tensions and Shifts in Perceptions and Realizations

The sections that follow describe the tensions of critical literacy perceived by participants and how each tension spiralled across learning contexts from initial work with CDA, through personal lives and classroom experiences as participants grappled with new ideas that had emerged from CDA and Recognizing Discourses. Each section is devoted to a tension and the connected change in participants' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy.

### Recognizing Discourses

This tension involved participants learning to move beyond their primary discourse to identify discourses at work in their classrooms and in their world. This tension spiralled around as participants identified discourses as part of their work learning together, recognized discourses in different contexts, struggled to align their ideals with their actions more closely to project a discourse they believed in, and developed their language of critique. This tension of Recognizing Discourses was not wholly resolved by the end of the study. Participants recognized that it

was a tension they would continue to grapple with as they interpreted texts and their world. This tension was connected to participants' end of study perception that critical literacy is "complex" and "always evolving" (ExFGI, 6/7/11).

CDA encouraged participants to seek out alternative perspectives as part of their practice. During one CDA discussion about poverty, the group's comments were limited to a discourse that viewed child labour as "bad". An alternative perspective became available when P4 shared her husband's perspective, "My husband sells rugs and he's been to India and he has been in villages where there are children [working], but their lives in these villages are far improved, than in the city life and that's always been his perspective" (P4, May Meeting, 5/9/11). In this case, because of her husband's work, P4 was able to share a perspective that others may not have considered previously. By prompting for other possible perspectives through CDA, the simplistic views of issues that were acceptable in our group's discussions in the past were problematized and participants were encouraged to seek out perspectives they might not have considered in the past.

Considering alternative discourses was not something that the group had pursued prior to this study, but they

quickly began to see the power of recognizing different perspectives. P3 compared P4's sharing of a new perspective to a stimulating conversation she'd had with a businessman who had a different world view:

> [At] our Christmas party, we were sitting there with our spouses and we have her husband and then we have another person's husband who is a big business owner, and we've got [me] the idealist who thinks we should all, you know, get along [laughing], and live in harmony and it was. I loved the conversation. It was fascinating, you know, because of all the different perspectives . . . through all of our debating and discussing and this and that, the holes that were torn right through, you know, the pretty little picture, and how it should be, I mean, I'll always stand behind my idealism in different things, where we can make a difference and this and that, and it's not enough for us to accept the status quo or whatever, it was really great to hear all those multiple perspectives and I have to say, there were some questions that I walked away with, well thinking, like, yeah, that's true, you know. (P3, May Meeting, 5/9/11)

The discussion about different perspectives in both the CDA discussion and the conversation with the businessman documented how P3 was learning to consider different views of the world, and how her own views fit within the variety of perspectives. P3 had positive feelings about these challenging discussions saying, "I loved the conversation" and "It was great to hear all those multiple perspectives." She also remained thoughtful after the conversation because she had gained insight into alternative perspectives, and yet her own views about

"making a difference" and "that it is not enough for us to accept the status quo" were reaffirmed. However, she also saw the validity of alternative viewpoints too, "I walked away, well thinking, like, yeah, that's true". She connected her conversation with this businessman to the work of CDA because it encouraged similar thinking about different discourses and how her own discourse fit.

In her reflection journal towards the end of the study, P3 described how the process of CDA prompted her to "look beyond the surface" for the "multiple viewpoints and assumptions" as she learned to recognize discourses:

> There are always more questions at the end of examining student work/ words/ texts than there are answers. That goes for all critical literacy. I like how your template [for CDA] guides the process of looking beyond the surface to see what can be discovered underneath. There are multiple viewpoints/ assumptions that need to be considered/ identified before acting. (P3, Reflection Journal, undated, collected on May 25, 2011).

This reflection noted how the process of CDA helped participants to consider the assumptions about the world that lay behind words, and how these discourses needed to be considered before moving to action. P3 acknowledged that this process brought about unresolved tensions because she was left with "more questions". Her choice of the words "discovered underneath" is interesting because in the Exit Focus Group Interview (ExFGI), participants explained how

their bias had an impact on their work with critical literacy learning. Their bias is said to be "slightly hidden" and "underneath" the other elements of critical literacy because it, like discourses at work implicitly in texts are the hidden, implied messages in texts. P2 reflected similarly on how recognizing discourses pushed her to consider how she was promoting stereotypes:

> Being part of this critical literacy group is helping me to think deeply, ask the right questions, and to be more critically aware. You brought up something that hit home for me: that we sometimes [fail] to recognize our own stereotypes, especially those closest and nearest and dearest to us. (P2, Reflection Journal, April 11, 2011).

Participants' engagement in CDA was crucial to their learning about uncovering multiple perspectives and recognizing discourses at work in their classrooms but also in the world, and as P2 said, "to be more critically aware".

**Recognizing Discourses across Contexts** CDA also impacted how participants recognized discourses in the real world. In the following example, P3 described an instance where she reacted to her father's protesting of the city's facility closures. She saw how her father challenged the powerful discourse of the politicians and it set a reminder of CDA "flashing neon lights" in her head:

> Just being aware of it [discourse] happening in my classroom and using this discourse analysis for the student learning and in my classroom, it's made me realize and use it in other instances. . . about what's happening you know, umm, in our city with some of the closures of the neighborhood facilities and things to open this Olympic pool, and I had the opportunity to hear from my dad; he went to some meetings and things to try and, whatever, speak up about how he thought that this was wrong and whatever, and he gave me a list of the questions that the powers that are, ummm, how they wanted the agenda set and how they wanted the meeting to go and I looked at this list of questions; he gave me a little bit of feedback and I had read some articles about it and stuff and I was just, like, CDA was, like, flashing neon lights in my head [laughing] because it was all how they wanted it to go and then as soon as somebody, my rowdy old father, I come by it honestly, umm, spoke up, and he said, no, you're not splitting us up in small groups and stuff because they just wanted to say all these questions so they changed the total, umm, arrangement, yeah, and the dynamic, or whatever . . . anyway, CDA just goes beyond, you know, just the classroom, so it's had other implications for me, looking at all these other things that are going on, whatever, politically, personally, you know, professionally and that. So it is such a significant part of our life and the relationships we have and the conversations that we are a part of, yeah, I know, I'm going to have to walk around with one of these green [CDA] templates. (P3, ExFGI, 6/6/11).

In this quote, P3 attributed how she recognized discourses at work in professional, personal and political contexts and she attributed this to her experiences with CDA.

**Recognizing Ideals and Actions in Conflict** When different perspectives were encouraged and expected as part of our discussions, we noticed places where our ideals and actions were sometimes in conflict. When considering the

different perspectives of panhandling, P5 recognized how her own donating practice of giving to soccer players who ask for donations at the grocery store, but not to anyone begging on the street was based on her experiences as a soccer mom, and that she couldn't relate to those living on the street (P5, April Meeting, 4/11/11). During this same discussion, P3 recognized the dilemma in having classroom competitions for who can raise the most money because it makes the act of charity about winning a prize instead of being charitable (P3, April Meeting). The Recognizing Discourses tension spiralled as participants saw how the discourses of their ideals and the discourses of their actions were sometimes in conflict.

I was a learner in this respect too as I recognized how my beliefs in equality for women was out of sync with my current behaviour with taking the full year of maternity leave, which could have been shared with my husband:

> I see myself, like, equal with my husband, like in parenting and everything else, and there's some things that I have to do, but I didn't even talk to him about, you know, "would you like to take some leave?", or you know, I just assumed, I make so many assumptions that it will be because I'm the woman. So do I live with things that are so indoctrinated in me that I am in the dominant discourse and I don't even see them. (Kelly, April Meeting, 4/11/11)

In this and other examples, the group began to see how the dominant discourse was influencing their ideas and actions:

> P2: It's so much of what we think is colored by our dominant perspective. How do we know how to approach it? [laughter from others]
>
> P1: 'Cause there is no right answer, right? And I think you answered that too, and gave multiple perspectives and initially we see, we take what we see, and we take someone else's perspective, but then there are, we just can't see someone else's perspective, we have to see everybody else's perspective. (June Meeting, 6/6/11)

In this exchange, P1 proposed a possible way to avoid being manipulated into thinking and acting in ways that are promoted by the dominant discourse. The solution is to "see everybody else's perspective". These comments were followed by a comment about how challenging it is to act in ways that align with our beliefs when we are outside the comfort of this group:

> P5: You know what I find interesting is we can come in here once a month and really dig deep into critical thinking about some amazing dialogue, but I wonder about if we step out here and no one knows about our business, right? And how much, and I'm not in critical literacy, I just wonder how much we take away with us and practice critical literacy and thinking about the lives and the everyday and you just get so wrapped up and talking about how we have our biases and. . .[interrupted]
>
> P1: My question tags on with yours. Is our comfort level any different out of this career? Is our comfort level higher and would it be different if we are on our own?

> P5: I think I'm, like I'm totally, like I totally believe that I was in a situation with my husband and two of his co-workers and I was sitting there and I was getting so angry about the conversation that was coming out and like I was trying to be strong and like trying to say, you know some other perspectives, but you know, it was like me against them. . . That conversation has stuck in my head for months now. I just couldn't believe some of the things they were saying. (April Meeting, 4/11/11)

This exchange brought up another spiral of this tension regarding how we project different discourses in different contexts. As we began to recognize how our actions and beliefs didn't always align, we noticed it for each other too. Challenging ourselves to notice our biases at work and the conflict between our actions and our beliefs became part of how we supported each other. In classroom observations, I prompted and questioned two participants about how their actions might be promoting a single discourse and participants encouraged each other to consider how their actions and ideas were out of sync. When P4 voiced her plans to tell her students that their pen pals were from an impoverished neighborhood so they wouldn't be shocked when they met their poorly dressed friends, P3 suggested to her that this was probably just meddling:

> I would think that it would be a great kind of social experiment just to step back and see what happens because if we put our things or your things, trying to

> orchestrate it in some way. Why not just put it out there and see how the kids react, because they've formed this bond through writing, who gives a shit what they're wearing? [aside] I swore, sorry. (P3, June Meeting, 6/6/11).

Engaging in CDA also pushed participants to recognize how their own discourses were at work in classrooms and in their lives. Through CDA, participants began to make connections between their perceptions of critical literacy and their realizations of critical literacy. They began to notice when their classroom practice did not align with what they believed critical literacy was and the outcomes they wanted for their students.

P3 explained how she was connecting her classroom practice more closely to her observations of students' critical literacy learning needs because of the work with CDA. Her journal provided an example of how she used students' words for CDA. During an indoor recess, she overheard three students sharing their ideas about socioeconomic status, "I'm not rich", "You have video game systems, a big house, clothes, go to Family Fun Centre, his parents drive an SUV", and "Its just 'cause both of my parents work and only one of yours does." She recorded these comments, and her group used them during a working session that focused on different perspectives of what it meant to be poor. This participant was an experienced

teacher of critical literacy whose practice before this study often disrupted dominant discourses by questioning seemingly neutral texts and reading texts that promoted alternative discourses, but CDA had problematized how her "alternative" discourse was also biased. During the June Meeting, P3 referred to how she used to listen to student comments, but now she saw more value in what they said to determine which texts to explore for critical literacy, instead of "putting her agenda first":

> I think I've always been kind of a fly on the wall, listening to their conversations and that, but maybe not taking as much value as what that's going to bring in. I've always valued what they wanted to discuss and that sort of thing, but I am also evolving from not just putting my agenda first, because when you had made your comments earlier with regards to that, I do have a lot of ideas and thoughts about how it should be, based on my upbringing and that too, and I want to expose the students and don't always stick to this, another pretty little picture book and it doesn't all get tied up nice and neatly. So I do encourage them to question, but, um, now, with doing this, I am looking more into their words and that's what really initiated this [investigation into poverty]. I've read other, you know, *Celebrations* by Byrd Baylor as well, you know, but this lesson particularly, was guided by their words. (P3, June Meeting, 6/6/11)

The impact of CDA on this participant's practice was twofold. First, it encouraged her to examine how her own biases were at work so that she could be decisive about exposing students to ideas as opposed to encouraging them to conform to her way of thinking. As a veteran teacher of

critical literacy, her practice had always involved reading social issues texts like, *The Table Where Rich People Sit* (Baylor, 1998) and *I'm in Charge of Celebrations* (Baylor, 1995) to promote a particular view of "being rich", but CDA had led her to question this practice because she recognized discourses to which her students subscribed and saw the potential for using their ideas as artifacts for critical literacy learning. Second, the way that she had previously decided to explore social issues was based on what she wanted to do, but because of her experiences with this inquiry and CDA, the topics were explored because of what she heard students saying about their world. This example demonstrated how P3 got better at recognizing discourses which planted the seeds of other tensions and realizations including how her practice might have been promoting conformity, how her own bias was at work in the classroom, and how uncomfortable student comments can be used productively for critical literacy. These tensions and perceptions that were alluded to were more fully articulated in examples that are included in the descriptions of other tensions.

**Developing the Language of Critique** Another loop in this tension coil was evidenced in how participants developed the language of critique necessary for describing

discourses. Participants' knowledge of analyzing discourses was reflected in their classroom instruction. P2 described how her students were developing the language to critique texts critically with "terminology" for analyzing and "looking at things through a different lens":

> What do I think they're learning right now? I think they're learning to read a text or image, just to begin to look at things in a different way. I think they still need support with learning how to write the questions or ask the questions, but I think they're getting that there is more than just the story, enjoying the story, or just reading the story for the sake of reading it. So I think they're starting to read between the lines. I think they are starting to understand the terminology, that we say, but I think they're really looking at things through a different lens. I think they are starting to. (P2, May Observation Interview, 5/18/11)

This insight hinted at the notion that language and ideas are connected. The language that we use represents the ideas that we have, but language also gives us access to these ideas for sharing (Gee, 1995). Having awareness and having the vocabulary for recognizing discourses were important for students' critical literacy, but also for teachers' own professional learning and critical literacy:

> In the last month, I have been talking to the teachers in the classrooms and it's amazing how many of our life experiences, you know, we look at them maybe in different ways or maybe we just have the vocabulary to write or talk about it now, but things that once seemed one sided now seem complex, and my husband says, you always wanna fight these things [laughing]. I'm just saying there's another side. (P3, April Meeting, 4/11/11)

With a common language shared by those who are critically literate, participants began to recognize themselves in the discourse of critique. They were acquiring the language for examining discourses that provided a new lens for reading texts and the world. This participant previously saw critical literacy as fairly straightforward, and now described how her awareness of how discourses are at work were driving her crazy, but that being aware was crucial:

> I like the growth process of critical literacy and how it helps us be more self-reflective as well and no matter how much tension that creates in my life sometimes with analyzing everything, ahhh. I think we can drive ourselves crazy if we do over analyze it, you know, but I think it's still to be aware, you know? (P3, ExFGI, 6/6/11)

The discourse of critique that participants learned to access made recognizing discourses easier to do, but led participants to view critical literacy learning as an ongoing process.

**Complex and Evolving**

The tension of Recognizing Discourses was connected to participants' perception of critical literacy at the end of the study because participants saw critical literacy as more complex and constantly evolving than they had

previously supposed. They described this shift in thinking during the ExFGI:

> Kelly: So now, if you had to look back and reflect on the past several months of work, talk to me about this organization [setting cue cards out as they had been organized in the EntFGI], and is there anything you would change or add?
>
> P3: Just put it all in one great big pile in the middle [laughing] This is great though because it looks like from these answers we could just put our thumb on every single one and this is what critical literacy learning is, and now, from maybe you know, going through this process or having, umm, looked into the CDA more deeply and stuff, now, it's not something we can exactly put our finger on. You know so much more and it's always evolving.
>
> P5: You know and it's making me think about, um, this phrase just keeps going through my mind. I keep thinking about the way we view the world, and so, it's kind of at this point in time, we talk about evolving right? So at this point in time the way we view the world as it relates to critical literacy is this, but then we are going to move along this path, and the way we view it six months from now is yet going to be another view, and it's this evolving aspect you talk about and I think it is hard just to come down with something definitive but where we are at I don't think we are never going to get there [laughing]. (ExFGI, 6/6/11)

In this description of critical literacy as "evolving", there are two key ideas that were not evident in participants' initial perceptions of critical literacy. Participants recognized that their ideas of critical literacy are changing, or are constantly in flux ("and the way we view it six months from now is yet going to be another view") and because we are always trying to

negotiate the discourses at work in texts and in our world, critical literacy is connected to how we view the world. Learning to be critically literate is never "done" and so it is important to continue to learn to be more critically literate. This idea was also evident when participants finally arranged their graphic representation in a 3D model instead of their initial 2D visual. This third dimension represented how participants' ideas about critical literacy were gaining different dimensions, where ideas were interconnected in complex ways. By the end of the study, participants considered critical literacy learning to be both complex and evolving because of how they were continuing to develop understandings by recognizing discourses.

The tension, Recognizing Discourses spiralled throughout the study. Participants continued to think about how discourses were at work in their personal and teaching lives which sowed the seeds of other tensions that emerged when discourses were more visible. The roots of each tension and the connected shifts in participants' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy stemmed from Recognizing Discourses.

**Conformity vs. Multiple Perspectives**

This tension was evident when participants recognized how different perspectives sometimes promoted a single discourse. They also grappled with how their practice was encouraging conformity instead of critical understandings. This tension was connected to the shift in participants' idea that critical literacy involved more than examining multiple perspectives, but also multiple discourses.

The idea that critical literacy involved teaching multiple perspectives was so important to participants early in the study that they made it into a category in the initial EntFGI. The importance of examining multiple perspectives was described by one participant:

> I think that students are often egocentric so I think it is very important that they are able to step outside of themselves and look at the world through different eyes and have a better understanding of other people. (EntFGI, 3/7/11)

Although the participants said that they wanted their students to examine multiple perspectives, there were places where it seemed that they had ideal outcomes in mind where students would arrive at the teacher's perspective of the issue. When participants said that their students were "getting it", there seemed to be a particular "it" that was being promoted, and it wasn't understanding multiple perspectives, but conforming to a popular viewpoint. In the

following examples participants guided students towards particular outcomes.

> Example One:
> Well I was kind of torn because I was like, ahh, well, I like that story, but it was for me, it was something I really liked, but I was talking about poverty and, do I really want to go into racism? So you know I was really fighting with that. (P2, Classroom Observation Interview, 5/18/11)

> Example Two:
> It's just, having them begin to think critically. We are going to be using the curriculum, the Smart Curriculum, looking at media awareness and I was going to pursue that, start that lesson today because eventually it leads to a TV turnoff. It is finding the things they can relate to. (P4, Classroom Observation Interview, 5/25/11)

> Example Three:
> This year I have been looking a lot more at the media and how it impacts their thinking and how it influences them. This is how I have been choosing to steer their learning, and their thinking about things out there, in the media. (P5, EntFGI, 3/7/11)

In the first example, P2 described how her class was focusing on poverty because it was an issue that she wanted to address, and that she didn't want to focus on racism, even when there were ideas about racism that emerged form the reading. In the second example, P4 shared her plans for a unit focused on media awareness, not to explore the varied perspectives of the issue and arrive at different conclusions about media, but to direct students to the conclusion that television and screen time were bad, so they would engage in a "TV turnoff" action. In the final

example, P5 wanted her students to consider how media influences their thinking in negative ways. She says that she will "steer" their thinking which implied that she had a destination where she wanted students to embrace a particular view.

There was a disconnect between the participants' assertions that multiple perspectives are important and my observations of their classroom realizations and participants' comments that indicated conformity. This conflict caused a tension for me. Participants expressed their hopes that students would "change their perspectives", which implied that their initial ideas needed to be changed. In one participant's journal, she explained, "[We] read the story, *Fly Away Home* (Bunting, 1993). The goal was to have students change or affirm their knowledge about homelessness and poverty." (P1, Reflection Journal, undated, collected 4/11/11).

In their initial description of what they wanted for their students, participants said that they wanted students to be empathetic, "[I hope students will] understand or know what empathy is" (P5, EntFGI, 3/7/11). "I wanted them [students] to make some connections between the stories that we have already read and have a better understanding of [what] an individual was going through [in]

segregation." (P3, Classroom Observation Interview, 3/24/11). While empathy is a reaction that seems to support the ideals of critical literacy, it is a particular outcome that was desired by participants. A desired outcome of empathy promotes different learning than a desired outcome of exploring multiple perspectives. Promoting empathy may not necessarily involve examining a variety of perspectives, or realizing how complicated issues and events might be.

The tension emerged for participants when they noticed that their students were conforming to their ways of thinking or popular ways of thinking:

> My goal in doing the good deeds recount was to help them remember that they have made contributions, that even though they are children, they could take action. However, by the responses I got, I see that I really set the students up to give me what I wanted to hear: I would help. (P1, Reflection Journal, 4/5/11)

When this participant noticed that she had encouraged her students to conform to her way of thinking she tried another approach that made other perspectives available for students to adopt. The idea that students give us the answer that we want to hear came from another member of the critical literacy teacher group:

> It bothers me that students that are younger or even older, they want to give you the answer to what you want to hear, it's just who they are so it's very

> difficult to get them to think deeper, push beyond that. (GM, May Meeting, 5/25/11)

While visiting P2's classroom in an impoverished area of the city, they read a text, *Geraldine, The Poet* (Banbara, 2004), with a message about how difficult it is to focus on school when you are being evicted from your apartment. There weren't any critical questions asked of the text, even though it seemed to me that these students might have a wide range of ideas about poverty or eviction. Leaving the text unquestioned was a tension for me. Then I noticed some tickets for a free roast beef dinner at a local church. These tickets were to be given out to the students. This was a text with messages about poverty that had potential for critical reading, but the implicit messages about poverty were being left unread. I had thought that our group's work with CDA would have led to classroom explorations of multiple perspectives, beyond the implicit messages in texts, but it seemed that P2 hadn't made the connection between our work and classroom practice.

Therefore, I prompted her thinking about different perspectives about poverty. I asked P2 about the tickets and how the discourse about poverty might be read in the text of the tickets. We talked a little bit about poverty

and how other teachers who are part of the critical literacy teacher group were exploring the topic as well, and about how most of the students in her class are living under the poverty line. I shared with her how another class's understanding of poverty has led them to raising money for donating to local charities. I explained that there was a discourse about poverty implicit in fundraising and donating that is often unexamined, but that her students might be able to critique:

> Kelly: I am in a position where I can give things to you. And you should appreciate it. And that is what society tells these guys. Instead of them having the power to, to take what they want, or leave what they want, or get what they want. Or what they are happy with, but to make a decision. Their decisions are made.
>
> P2: So what do you think we should do because I am loving what you are thinking. (Classroom Observation Interview, 4/7/11)

The remark about "loving what you are thinking" showed how P2 appreciated the "thinking" or access to this alternative view of poverty. As this discourse about poverty became clear to P2, she was eager to consider how to expose her students to these discourses wondering, "What do you think we should do?" We continued to discuss possible next steps where students could explore multiple perspectives of any issue. P2 explained an issue ("the thing") that might be worth exploring was education; that they had already talked

a bit about valuing education. I prompted with questions about the different perspectives that might be highlighted with regards to education, and P2 expressed how she felt about what her class had been doing:

> Kelly: Ok, so, what about education becom[ing] the thing [the topic of exploration]? So what are the different perspectives of that, because some people will tell you education is the most important thing, but we have to pay money to go to university.
>
> P2: A lot of money.
>
> Kelly: I don't know, I'm just wondering, how could they look at education and explore it a little bit more, like what are the different perspectives about education, because that text about Geraldine that you. . .
>
> P2: [interrupting] This is all so surface, this is surface. And you know what, we were finishing up with Geraldine [poverty text] and I didn't want, ahhh, and I thought to myself, ok, this is kind of neat you know, we're getting into media, so I'm not starting and stopping, but this is so surface, so, now what? (Classroom Observation Interview, 4/7/11)

P2's final comment here demonstrated how the tension of Conformity vs. Multiple Perspectives spiralled around her head, "this is all so surface", "we were finishing up with Geraldine", "I didn't want", "this is kind of neat" as she grappled with how her practice had not encouraged critical understandings about poverty, but had promoted conformity to a popular discourse. The beginning thought and ending thought were both about how reading and responding to the Geraldine text was "so surface" because it didn't allow the

issue to be explored in depth through a variety of perspectives and discourses. P2 and I continued to share ideas about how her students could be exploring multiple perspectives of the topics she was about to address. A few days later, P2 recorded her thinking in her reflection journal:

> I don't think I will ever be able to read in the same way. It's been an eye opening experience having the opportunity to self-reflect. Perhaps ignorance is bliss. I am learning about asking the right questions that open students (and myself) to multiple perspectives. (P2 Reflection Journal, 4/11/11)

Her journal comment showed how P2 had a significant change in her thinking. Her learning was guided by a similar process to the group's work with CDA. The questions I asked, the alternative discourses we considered and the support to think through some critical literacy lesson planning together supported changes in P2's thinking about her role in disrupting dominant discourses. The idea of accessing multiple perspectives to move beyond dominant discourses was reflected on by P2:

> Thank you Kelly for having me think deeply, challenge myself to access my own perceptions and experiences and begin to understand how they have everything to do with my teaching. (P2, Reflection Journal, 5/6/11)

The tension of Conformity vs. Multiple Perspectives was being experienced in participants' own practice with critical literacy in their personal lives. They were

noticing how dominant discourses were evident in issues that were portrayed as black and white, but were not always that simple and it was important to see the shades of grey that made an issue complicated instead of conforming to popular views:

> I know people that really think that way as adults and I, myself, find it really aggravating I guess at the best of times because I don't see things black and white, never have, perhaps, and so that thing about being here and there and sitting in the middle sometimes I feel it's great, but when you're dealing with personalities that are like that and stuff, it's very difficult, not because you want to change their mind, but difficult because that's not the way, just [only way] to see it. (P5, ExFGI, 6/6/11)

Here, P5 expressed the challenge of dealing with situations where an issue is explained away as simple, instead of allowing different perspectives to be explored. Participants recognized the value of considering competing discourses as they made sense of texts and their world. P3 explained how she appreciated books that explored different perspectives:

> . . . but it got me to think even to the books that I've read [and] perspectives. Even the *Building the Schools from Stones*, is the one I'm reading now. I like how it tells the story from both perspectives and how even thought the author is talking about his journey through all of it, that the stories are represented through all the people are in their words, and ahh, I don't know, hear, and it just helps me to get a better understanding of what's going on, especially when me and my dad have controversial conversations about the Middle East and things like that too. (P3, April Meeting, 4/11/11)

The tension of Conformity vs. Multiple Perspectives spiralled around recognizing how dominant discourses were promoting conformity in participants' personal lives, into how it was promoting conformity in their classrooms. They began to interpret how their own practices might be promoting conformity because of their own biased views of issues. They could see how their discourses were influenced by the dominant discourse with messages about what is "right". During the June meeting, P4 described how her class had explored the issue of poverty and how she had come at it from a "simple is better" perspective, to which another member of the group labels this a "privileged perspective":

> P4: Well we did talk about the *Fly Away Home* (Bunting, 1996) and stuff like that, and some did have, you know it was so long ago, thinking about it, we always explored it like, just like with running shoes, like, look at what kids do have, and sometimes we might have too much, and sometimes we might [say] simple is better and coming from it from that perspective . . .
>
> GM: That's interesting, that kind of a perspective is a privileged point of view though. I love that though, the let's focus on what we have so if you were in poverty and you didn't have a lot, your parents and the people around you always want to encourage you to focus on what you do have, but sometimes you will feel guilty when you are in a position, like, I have a good job and then to say, oh, I should really focus on the things I do have, sure, I can say that. I don't have the pang of not having it. (June Meeting, 6/6/11)

This discussion pointed out to P2 how her "simple is better" discourse about poverty was only one possible view that could be labeled as "privileged". This realization led her to consider that even though a focus on sociopolitical issue is recognized as a dimension of critical literacy (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002), in her case the sociopolitical focus was not promoting critical literacy, but conformity.

**Multiple Perspectives and Discourses**

At the beginning of the study, participants said that critical literacy was about examining a variety of perspectives, but in practice, participants were encouraging examination of different characters' perspectives, not competing discourses. Through CDA, they realized the differences between characters' perspectives and different discourses. Participants began to experience tension because their practice had been promoting conformity, which was partially due to their own biased presentation of ideas. By the end of the study, participants had changed their ideas about what it meant to teach multiple perspectives. They saw how multiple perspectives were sometimes not enough, and that multiple discourses needed to be available for critical reading. Here are several examples of this shift in thinking:

> Rather than having a set plan for each book/issue presented, I have been following some of the students' leads in exploring the big ideas farther. This has given me more insight into where they are in their development or acquiring critical literacy/thinking skills and we've had much richer class discussions. (P3, Reflection Journal, undated, collected 5/9/11)

P3's shift in thinking is about making room for students' perspectives in their inquiry into issues.

> And I think too, probably out of the group, allowing them to think and not putting my views on them, like what do you think?, you know? And I think that, that sort of opened up that. Yeah, rather than teaching. This year in general, and every year, I always say I'm going to talk less and have them do more, and so I feel that I've done it, I feel like I have let some control go, you know, and that's ok. (P4, May Meeting, 5/25/11)

P4's shift in thinking is about letting go of control over what she thought the views should be. P5's shift in thinking is about how she can be direct in asking students to consider different viewpoints:

> So maybe that's what I need to explore more, is being more direct with them and saying, so this is what you said, but this is what another perspective might be, can you see it that way? (P5, Classroom Observation Interview, 4/11/11)

P3 shared her reflection on how she had promoted a particular perspective because of the texts she chose to read, "With the social issues texts that we introduce and that, you know, I know I've been guilty of this, is the right way and the wrong way to think about it, or whatever" (P3, June Meeting, 6/6/11).

By the end of the study, participants were beginning to consider how their practice could go beyond reading social issues texts that promoted a particular discourse. They were encouraging students to consider how their own perspectives and experiences were different from the messages in texts, which could eventually support students' posing of critical questions too.

During the ExFGI, participants shared their evolving ideas about what teaching multiple perspectives meant to them, questioning their own roles as teachers in how much to lead to avoid teaching for conformity:

> P2: Are we teaching different perspectives? Cause I think we have gotten away from that, where we're opening them up to different possibilities and maybe bringing up topics but the idea of pre-setting and pre-teaching them what we think is the right response, I don't know.
>
> P4: [interrupting] Yeah, that's where I felt the last few months I wanted, and because, especially the more you know, or the more you learn, I feel, the less I know, so I don't want to put anything out there, you know, I don't want to put anything out there. I just want them to come to their own. . .
>
> P3: I think teaching from different perspective though, makes them more aware that there is a voice missing, so when I'm reading a text, an actual text with words [laughing], not the world and all of our routines and things, but maybe that too, umm, that's what I mean too by those perspectives that might be missing in the voices and things so I think we probably do, do it. (ExFGI, 6/6/11)

In this exchange participants pointed out that teaching multiple perspectives was not about getting students to arrive at the perspective they had, but letting go of that control to expose students to many different perspectives. They also pointed out how being able to examine multiple perspectives was necessary for being able to ask critical questions like, whose voice is missing? The idea that being able to examine multiple perspectives is necessary for questioning, and the way that participants were only learning to see multiple perspectives, helped to explain why questioning was not evident in their realizations of critical literacy.

The tension, Conformity vs. Multiple Perspectives depicted how participants' ideas about critical literacy shifted from promoting conformity towards really teaching different perspectives informed by student ideas and sometimes, models of alternative ways of viewing the world. The next tension to be described, Comfort vs. Bias relates to this tension because as participants realized the importance of examining multiple discourses, they began to see how their attempts to be comfortable with the texts and topics under investigation was restricting critical literacy learning for students.

**Comfort vs. Bias**

The tension of Comfort vs. Bias was about how participants' worked from a perspective that was comfortable to them, then recognized their own bias at work on certain issues. This tension was connected to the changed perception and realization that critical literacy involved recognizing teachers' own bias.

Participants expressed tension about how their own perspectives and beliefs supported or interfered with promoting critical literacy in the classroom. At the beginning of the study, participants felt it was important for them to be knowledgeable about a topic before exploring it with children. P5's first response to the question, "What does critical literacy learning mean to you?" was about how she needed to have some understanding to be comfortable exploring this learning with students:

> My first thought when you asked that was about my own learning about, hmmm, what my understanding is of critical literacy, because if I don't really understand it, then I can't share that, or, teach that to my students and, so I think that it is a big part of the process for me . . ." (P5, EntFGI, 3/7/11)

Other participants similarly responded that they needed to be comfortable with the text or issue under investigation if they were going to promote critical literacy in the classroom. P4 reflected back on her class's exploration of Black History Month, a topic that was somewhat

uncomfortable for her, and then their work with the environment – an area of passion for this teacher. Although she didn't realize at this point, she may have been promoting a biased version of each topic because different perspectives, including the students', were not mentioned:

> P4: It's easy for me now, easy or whatever, to differentiate between looking at Black History month and having an environmental focus for this month and my comfort level, and my ease. It's an amazing difference.
>
> P5: So, why do you think that is though? With comfort level?
>
> P4: Absolutely, and because of my background, and knowledge about it; because of my passion for it.
>
> P5: Do you feel though, just, do you feel that, no pun intended, but black and white, there is a lot of grey in there with the eco, like their not looking at people, their not looking at them as those people that aren't following eco friendly ways or anything like that. They don't look at them as much as an enemy as the white people that were oppressing the black people.
>
> P4: But I think again, in time, over time, I would be getting, I would feel more comfortable with it. And I feel like I went on too long with it. With the eco, I'm gonna take it to the next level, where we are going to write to the mayor. (EntFGI, 3/7/11)

P4 was more comfortable with a focus on the environment than on Black History because of her own comfort with the issue. When prompted by P5 to consider if her comfort might be because they hadn't explored the complexity of the perspectives around the environment, she didn't think it

was because the issue wasn't problematized, rather it was because of her familiarity with the issue.

In the examples above, participants seemed to take comfort in exploring critical literacy with issues they knew about and were passionate about. Although many participants said that they worked from students' questions and ideas, as described in their initial perceptions, there was some tension involved in the participants sticking with issues and ideas of critical literacy that they were comfortable with. Limiting the texts and issues to those that were comfortable for teachers resulted in their presenting particular perspectives, or biased versions of critical literacy and of social and political issues. P1 explained how she was experiencing this tension as a newcomer to critical literacy:

> I think I'm not there yet in my learning, so I'm just beginning, with the critical literacy, I have done things in the past, but I guess I haven't sat back and said, that was critical literacy that I was doing, there was no label to it yet, but going from the students' perspective, I'm not comfortable with that yet because I'm still trying to negotiate it myself, you know, how am I, how can I present it. . . [later in the interview] that was when we talked about how teachers put a lot of their discourse, and you know, kids are influenced by what *you say* and what *your* opinions are, so I thought, yeah, I guess, I figured well, I have been. And that's how I am initiating a lot of these conversations, with *my idea* or *a book* and I'm not really opening it up to, hmm, a wide range of response so I think that in grade two they see, that's what the teacher said and I'm gonna just work within

> that framework that those are going to be my answers. So this time I thought I'd just work backwards, and just say, what do you think? Here's a topic, you know, just to see what comes from them, *then* present something, you know, on it, have the text available, and then have the conversation . . . (P1, EntFGI, 3/7/11)

In this comment, P1 articulated how her perspectives can influence students' ideas, and can promote conformity. The participant's use of the word "yet" also implied that as teachers become more comfortable with critical literacy through exploration of texts and issues that are familiar, they can then engage in explorations of texts and issues that are less familiar to them, but more aligned to the interests of their students.

Participants also struggled with monitoring their own comments for bias. P5 shared, "[I feel] challenged in that I know I should monitor my comments as a check for biases, which realistically is not easy to do" (Reflection Journal, 3/7/11). The insight about reflecting on how teachers use words in the classroom is also connected to the work of CDA where participants had realized how powerful words and phrases can be for presenting a particular view of the world. Not only were students' comments packed with discourse, so were teachers' comments. Participants could now see their own discourses at work and were experiencing tension as they tried not to present biased versions of the

world. P2 addressed the same tension at the April Meeting, "Hmm, it's so much of what we think is colored by our dominant perspective. How do we know how to approach it?" (P2, April Meeting, 4/11/11). P3 shared a similar sentiment in her notes for the May Audit Trail, "Aaahh! How do we present these topics without presenting it with our own bias/emotion attached?" (Audit Trail, 5/25/11). Earlier in the meeting, this same participant caught herself presenting a biased view of videogames:

> Just looking into that [videogames] and trying to get the kids to see multiple perspectives from, 'cause, they are all just into videogames and even when you ask them why they use videogames, you know, they really don't have an answer to that, sooo, hmmm, getting them to realize video games is just one thing of many things that they could be doing. Then looking at my views, and why they are so against it too, so, hmm, and having them come in to the situation. (P3, May Meeting, 5/9/11)

P3 wanted students to "realize" that there were other, more productive ways to spend their time. She wanted them to explore alternative perspectives because she disagreed with their perspective. She caught herself and added the question about why her views were so against videogames. Participants were recognizing how their classroom practice of modeling a particular perspective had been biased. With their knowledge and passion for a topic came bias about the issue too. Later in the study, P3 reflected on this, "With

the social issues texts that we introduce and that, you know, I know I've been guilty of this, is the right way and the wrong way to think about it, or whatever."(P3, June Meeting, 6/6/11).

Because they were able to see their own discourse at work, participants recognized how their practice was sometimes biased, and they began to propose ways to resolve this tension. P5 offered a way of thinking about how our biases are always there, but we can be reflective about how they impact what we do:

> It makes you wonder, as teachers, you know, our words and the impact that we have and we talked about our biases coming though and what not, you know, we often spend too much time talking, and not enough time letting the students talk. So it makes you think about the power of words, right? (P5, April Meeting, 4/11/11)

**Recognizing Teachers' Own Bias**

Teachers' biases about issues and events influence how they speak, write and act in the classroom. Through the tension of Comfort vs. Bias, participants realized how important it was to be aware of their own biases and how they influenced what happened in their classrooms. The idea of teachers' bias was also included in the ExFGI graphic representation of critical literacy learning after some discussion about how to avoid promoting particular viewpoints when teaching different perspectives. They said

that teachers' biases were unavoidable, but recognizing discourses through CDA allowed them to be more aware of how their biases at work:

> P4: And I think, just going back to that [idea of pre-setting and pre-teaching the right responses], as much as I feel that I am, ahh, sharing less with them [students], I think I still, you have an outcome, right? That you want them to get to. Yeah, umm, I'm just wondering if I go back and take a look at certain lessons . . . [pause]
>
> Kelly: Does the critical discourse analysis change the outcomes that you want for students?
>
> P5: You know what I am thinking about this partly answers that question, is like our bias here, like, where do those fit in to this? Like, so, we are analyzing these discourses, but like, underlying all that are those kind of there somewhere that is influencing how we are thinking and what we are thinking and even what we bring to the table with our students.
>
> Kelly: What do you think?
>
> P5: Well I do think it's there, but, and I think we would like to say now, and now that I am learning about this I'm really open minded, and not that we are going around toting that and that, but sometimes you know, I think, the more you learn about this, you would like to think you are open minded, but it's hard to be.
>
> P3: So write 'our biases' and put it over here [in the centre with teaching students and learning from students] cause it's central as well [laughing] but it is under there, it's kind of hidden, just going with the visual [laughing].
>
> P5: It is there. You are right. It is under there [laughing].
>
> Kelly: So CDA is helping us to expose a little bit?

P2: Our value system. (ExFGI, 6/6/11)

P4 explained how she was "sharing less" with students to avoid influencing their reactions to texts, but also recognized how her ideal outcomes for students biased how she organized for and engaged in classroom instruction. The participants articulated how their biases and views of the world were a powerful influence on how they teach for critical literacy and have a prominent place in the center of the graphic, but slightly hidden – just as biases sometimes are.

The tension, Comfort vs. Bias was connected to the addition of "our own bias" or Recognizing Teachers' Own Bias in the revised model of critical literacy created by participants. Participants grappled with the tension around working with issues that were comfortable for them, then realized how their own bias might be coming through in their classroom practice. By the end of the study, they seemed to have come to a shared understanding that their biases are always going to impact their instructional practice with critical literacy, and that being aware of how they promoted a particular discourse would help to minimize the effects of their bias.

**Safe vs. Stretched and "Right" vs. Real**

This tension described participants' interest in keeping students safe from the ugly truths in the world, or protecting their innocence, versus providing them with information that, while ugly, might give students the skills for avoiding being manipulated. Safe vs. Stretched also referred to the challenges involved in keeping students comfortable and also pushing their thinking just beyond where they are currently comfortable. Safe vs. Stretched is a teacher tension related to meeting the learning needs of students. A possible resolution to this instructional tension is the idea that students need to be encouraged to go beyond giving a seemingly "right" answer that doesn't allow for better understanding, towards a "real" answer that puts alternative viewpoints on the table as artifacts for the group's learning. Safe is an idea that is considered "right" based in the dominant discourse's notion that childhood should be innocent.

"Right" vs. Real was a loop in the Safe vs. Stretched tension spiral that related to both participants' and their students' learning. When participants saw how the dominant discourse was affecting their students' responses to texts and their own responses to texts, they sought to push student thinking and their own thinking beyond these safe, "right" answers. Following is a detailed description of the

tension of Safe vs. Stretched, and then the spiral loop of "Right" vs. Real participants experienced after their work with CDA. This tension connected to participants' idea at the end of the study that critical literacy involves Seeking out Tensions from Real World Connections.

Participants' concern about keeping students safe was sometimes expressed as questioning what was "developmentally appropriate" for students:

> The vast majority of the class wants me to continue [reading *Underground to Canada,* (2003)]. I was doing a little bit of research last night whether, deciding whether or not it is appropriate and it wasn't so much that you were coming in, by any means, it was just, just is this too old? Too mature for them? [pause] I know that it [the book] gets pretty graphic, and I don't think I'd question it as much if they were in grade three, but they are in grade two, they are little, they are pretty young. (P4, Classroom Observation Interview, 3/30/11)

Here, even when her students were asking to continue reading a text to find out more about the Underground Railroad, the participant's concern with not exposing them to racism and the unfair treatment of slaves was strong. On the other hand, participants also remarked about wanting to expose students or give them information about issues. P4, while worried about exposing students to further reading of *Underground to Canada* (2003), was also interested in giving them the information they were seeking:

> ... And I thought, ok, what grade am I teaching here? We're talking about slavery, we're talking about Libya and I mean I love that they think they can talk to me and ask those questions because they feel like the conversation has been opened up. Hmm. Yeah, I like where it's going. (P4, March Observation Interview, 3/30/11).

P4 had positive feelings about talking with students about social issues. Later in the interview, she talked about how students felt respected when teachers shared information about issues with them:

> I mean the kids are bringing in information from home, watching the news, even newspaper articles of things that they are, I think they can handle it. It would be [like] talking to my son, I mean I talked to my son about this last night, who's five, and he craves that information, you know, he really does, but, and so do they [the students], and I think that one of the great things with this unit is the fact that the kids felt so respected, that we were talking about these big issues. (P4, March Observation Interview, 3/30/11)

A comment from P3's reflective journal conveyed her satisfaction with her students' exploration of social issues compared to what they might discuss while reading texts that didn't address social issues:

> Oppression was another topic that arose as a result also when a student related to the girls in her homeland not getting the same rights to an education just like the black children. I'm pretty sure that these types of conversations wouldn't be taking place if I was reading a month's worth of Robert Munsch or Jan Brett books. (P3, Reflection Journal, undated, collected 4/11/11)

This comment spoke to the idea that the social issues texts she had been reading were valuable for encouraging students

to make connections to issues in their world, unlike Munsch or Brett books – authors who write children's books with simple, safe messages. P3 was happy that her students were talking about students' rights to education which was an idea that stretched students' thinking from reading unsafe texts.

P4 remarked how going beyond what was pre-planned and safe had been good for her teaching:

> You know, I guess there's, I think I probably put the barriers up myself, but I'm thinking how, I'm thinking this far in advance, so I do, sort of stick within the walls, that I think are safe. Or what people want it to be safe. I've stepped beyond that and gotten good response. (P4, May Observation Interview, 5/25/11)

In these examples, finding the tension involved looking at social issues, but eliciting honest responses that were safe, because they came from the world that the students lived, and they stretched thinking because they provided students with some new information too. Safe vs. Stretched spiralled around with questions and comments about keeping students safe from graphic realities, but providing them with information about the world. This tension also presented itself when participants struggled with what Janks (2010) called the "access paradox" --- trying to work within students' primary discourse but also

stretching them to consider alternatives, including dominant discourses.

**"Right" vs. Real** Along with the idea of Safe vs. Stretched, participants expressed pressure about wanting to do the "right" thing, or being perceived to be doing the "right" thing. They wanted to act in ways that reflected a dominant discourse about teaching. Both sides of this tension were revealed when participants talked about being "right" but, because of their work recognizing discourses through CDA, they wanted their students to go beyond responses that were "right", or in line with a dominant discourse, towards responses that were real, and reflected honest, more private reactions. Participants' concerns about enacting critical literacy correctly were lessened after their work with CDA.

In the following examples, participants expressed concerns or confidence about doing what others might consider the "right" thing to do. P4 expressed how her experiences with the teacher group had made her more comfortable discussing social issues with students, but she was also cautiously aware of other people observing her in the open concept space where she teaches:

> It's probably the first year that I've really delved into it, with the two's and three's, the grade two and grade three always feeling that, you know, they were

> taught more in the junior and intermediate grades, so, um, obviously coming here, you know, made me more comfortable having these discussions, and we have open concept, so in theory, everyone who is walking by, hears you, I mean the conversations we've had in the classrooms.(P4, March Meeting, 3/7/11)

This statement shows how P4 was beginning to gain confidence with teaching critical literacy. She felt supported by the group of like-minded educators in the teacher group, but she felt tension when her work was on display for a more public audience, who might not consider her teaching for critical literacy as "right".

P3 described how talking with her own children about issues gave her more confidence to bring up these topics in the classroom. She saw herself as being right in reading social issues texts:

> Having the conversations with my own three children then, you know, who are school age, I think that's what gave me the confidence to go forward and bring in that text, you know, that might be questionable to someone else that isn't there yet. (P3, EntFGI, 3/7/11)

In this quote, the phrase, "someone else that isn't there yet" implied that she was further along or more advanced with the teaching of critical literacy than other colleagues. She didn't see her practice as wrong, but she was aware that other people, who were uncomfortable with reading social issues texts, have looked in at her practice and judged it.

During the EntFGI, P1 explained how she saw her own practice compared to really teaching critical literacy:

> I think I'm not there yet in my learning, so I'm just beginning with critical literacy. I have done things in the past, but I guess I haven't sat back and said, that was critical literacy that I was doing, there was no label to it yet. (P1, EntFGI, 3/7/11)

This comment reflected how P1 wanted to continue to grow as a critical literacy teacher, to be able to emulate what it meant to be a "teacher of critical literacy" and she was considering what that would entail:

> . . .but going from the students' perspective, I'm not comfortable with that yet because I'm still trying to negotiate it myself, you know, how am I, how can I present it? My question is, what is critical literacy and what could I be doing. That's where I am right now. (P1, EntFGI, 3/7/11)

She wanted to know what she could be doing in order to be correctly "doing" critical literacy. This tension also echoed how students must have been feeling in wanting to give their teachers the "right" response. This awareness was frustrating for the participants because they wanted the students to be more honest and real in their responses so that the variety of perspectives that they brought to the event or text could be explored. The idea of giving the answers that others want to hear so that we can be "right" rippled through students' responses and participants' comments.

Participants were also concerned about how they were perceived as a teacher by their students. Because of their work with CDA, participants could recognize how they were susceptible to messages about what was "normal", including what teachers were "supposed" to be like. They began to see how their own perspectives were sometimes out of line with the dominant discourse. There was a discourse for teachers that they saw themselves being part of, and their ideas about teaching for critical literacy weren't always in line with that discourse, which caused tension.

The tension about being "right" permeated through participants' observations of their students. They noticed how student comments were different in public spaces and private spaces. P3 explained how sometimes students are more comfortable talking about issues outside the classroom:

> . . . when I'm working one on one with a student or like, out of the classroom setting, that they're the kids that will bring up those conversations with me, or explore it a little bit more or ask a question that they didn't feel comfortable asking on the carpet, just to clarify their own understanding. So I think it's all valuable in being able to have those, those conversations as well as the ones in the classroom setting. (P3, March Observation Interview, 3/24/11)

Here P3 noticed that students needed more a more private audience to express some of their ideas that they couldn't share publicly.

P1 also noticed that her students could express their thoughts more freely in smaller groups:

> The other day we had a smaller class discussion and it was easier to see in the smaller classroom, smaller discussions, what they would really say, but with the whole big class I got different answers. (P1, May Meeting, 5/9/11)

This contrast was especially true for when trying to get students to express ideas that were different from the popular opinion. She explained how:

> I liked this approach [getting students to do free writing about their own ideas of poverty] because I had noticed a lot of repeating of others' ideas, or my think alouds in students' work. This assignment allowed students to think freely, though some were very hesitant to write because they had not been given any previous discourse. (P1, Reflection Journal, undated, collected 4/11/11)

If the dominant classroom discourse of responding in ways that were consistent with the messages in texts or the messages teachers were encouraging were to be disrupted, it would probably happen in small group sharing or independent responding first. Participants noticed how students shared their reactions and responses in different ways depending on the audience:

> P4: I do notice that a lot of children who in the past, like the first few months of school, did not share at all, they were much [inaudible].
>
> Kelly: So there is growth in how much they share?
>
> P4: Oh absolutely, and that's where I think the real growth shows, you know, that they do feel respected or

> don't feel put down in any way, or feel uncomfortable to do so. (P4, May Observation Interview, 5/25/11)

In this exchange, P4 explained how students sharing in class discussions demonstrated that over time they were less afraid of being wrong to express their private reactions in a public forum with their classmates. Participants were noticing how students were less inhibited by the expected responses in whole class sharing, or the dominant discourse in their classrooms. P5 also reflected that the tension involved in sharing publicly was true for both students and teachers:

> Even, you know, people [students] having the freedom to speak their opinions has a lot to do with the trust that they feel, so if you know, you are charting uncharted waters and you're not sure, let's say this group is just new here tonight and is being asked, Ok, what do you think critical literacy is? We probably would feel a little uncomfortable really saying what we feel. So I think it is a process, like you said, it depends on the context, so there's a lot of variables. (P5, March Meeting, 3/7/11)

This comment brought forward the idea that the tension with sharing publicly and privately involves several variables: the context; the amount of previous exposure to the idea; the audience members; and where a group might be in the process of learning to engage in critical discussions. These ideas affect what the dominant discourse is and therefore, how comfortable someone is with knowing

how to interact within the discourse and how comfortable someone is with disrupting it.

Thus there was tension both for participants, with regards to what they wanted to share publicly or privately, and with what they observed in their students, with regards to what they wanted to share publicly or privately. The process of CDA prompted participants to seek out alternative discourses so that they felt more confident sharing their private reactions. Private reactions were viewed as valuable within the professional learning discourse community for extending the group's understanding of a student's comments. As they were developing the language to engage in critical discussions through CDA, their ideas about teaching for critical literacy evolved.

The opportunity to meet with other teachers of critical literacy helped to expand participants' notions of teaching so that they weren't as anxious about how they were perceived. During the ExFGI, there was no mention of tensions related to how they were perceived by others as it had been in the EntFGI. The participants didn't express concern about other people's perceptions because they felt that they were doing the "right" thing.

The linked tensions of Safe vs. Stretched and "Right" vs. Real sprung from the CDA process and Recognizing

Discourses that forced participants to look beyond simplistic, safe, "right" discourses and towards the real, authentic, honest reactions to events and texts that stretch our thinking to better understand events and issues in deep and meaningful ways. Participants' learning through the CDA meant that they wanted this complicated examination to happen in their classrooms, and be part of critical literacy learning.

**Finding the Tension through Real World Connections**

At the beginning of the study, participants talked a lot about how they created safe places for their students to explore critical literacy, but by the end of the study, they also said that they were "seeking out tensions" so that students were forced to confront how a simplistic, singular view of an event or issue was problematic. The dominant discourse's perspective might be safe and considered "right" or "normal", but it didn't embrace the diversity of perspectives that students and teachers privately subscribed to. When participants made real world connections to different discourses through CDA, they were forced to consider how different perspectives were competing and realized the complexity of issues and events. It was this tension in particular that they were seeking out in their classroom realizations of critical literacy by

the end of the study. After they had engaged in examining competing discourses around different issues, participants began to appreciate the power of this tension for critical literacy learning.

P1, in particular, articulated the idea of seeking out tensions towards the end of the study. She began listening more carefully to her students' ideas about a topic to find places where their spoken ideas conflicted with their actions or where their ideas were easily swayed by a text or event. When these incongruencies in thinking and action occurred, she noticed it and called attention to it. For instance, when students said that it was ok for girls to play with boy toys or boys to play with girl toys, she made plans to provide princess books for a group of boys to read the following day so that she could see if their reactions were in line with what they had said (P1, May Meeting, 5/25/11). "I've tried to put them [students] in situation[s] so that they would, umm, be able to, umm, respond or think about their own thinking, self reflect, I guess" (P1, ExFGI, 6/6/11). In this way, the classroom space became a safe place for inquiry, where different perspectives and competing discourses were welcomed and encouraged as artifacts for everyone's understanding of a topic instead of "right" or "wrong" behaviours.

The idea of Finding the Tensions could also have been informed because this study's research foregrounded tensions and asked participants to document their tensions. Participants' reflections on the tensions they experienced may have enlightened themselves about how their tensions were connected to their learning, so they sought to uncover tensions with their students too.

**Responding to Student Comments**

This tension was seen early in the study when participants said they were uncomfortable when students made comments that participants didn't know how to deal with. This tension was expressed by many in the first month of the study:

> P5: . . . the challenge for me comes in when, I'm in the middle of something, I'm presenting something, something comes up from a student's comment, that I'm not sure what to do with, or what to say.
>
> Kelly: Can you think of an example of a student comment, anybody, that is a tricky one to deal with?
>
> P4: A student, like something they said, I think, the first books we read, they said, before we read the book, they said, how come Indians don't pay tax? That was the first question, this past month, and I thought, Oh-oh.
>
> Kelly: That is much like the comment that someone else shared tonight, that if you go to *that* school, what did they say, it will turn you gay?
>
> P5: The challenge of what to do next, what to do next, where to go with this, how to answer those questions that come up (EntFGI, 3/7/11)

These student questions and comments were uncomfortable because participants weren't sure how to respond to these views about Native peoples and sexual orientation, wondering "what to do next" or "where to go with this".

One other uncomfortable comment was described during the March meeting in reference to a marker student. ". . . because she makes comments, like a few months ago she was saying, "the size of your mom, no wonder why you are the way you are" (P4, March meeting, 3/7/11), to which other participants responded with gasps, "Awwww" and "goodness". P1 posed a question that illustrated this tension, "How do you really handle the situation where a negative comment is made towards a particular group?" (Reflection Journal, undated, collected 5/9/11).

Discomfort with these comments could have been because they projected a discourse that was in contrast to the discourse that the participants subscribed to. Prior to seeking out alternative perspectives and being open to competing discourses that happened through CDA, participants were uncomfortable with some of their students' perspectives of the world.

Beyond the examples of uncomfortable student comments, participants were also challenged by comments that came from parents through the students:

> I find that going back to that, when the idea or the attitude comes from parents, my mom says that and such, or my dad says that, so how do you challenge that? You know in your mind I just, I can't believe that that is what you are talking about or that is what you are thinking. How do you, you know, how do you handle that? (P4, EntFGI, 3/7/11)

Where participants might have felt they could challenge comments made by students and "enlighten" them with the teacher's world view, they were uncomfortable contradicting what parents had told their children about the world.

The tension around student comments was also observed in a classroom when a participant didn't respond to a student comment that I thought might be controversial and uncomfortable. While students were listening to a read aloud about Ruby Bridges, one student called out, "I'm telling you, white people just think they're better than others," to which the participant did not respond (Fieldnotes, March Classroom Observation, 3/24/11). I wondered why she had ignored this comment. Later, she reflected on what she heard:

> One student was pretty expressive about how he felt about the white people that were treating Ruby like that. And, ahhh, I don't know. I see certain behaviours come up sometimes when the topic gets, or

> the conversation gets a little bit deeper. (P3, March Observation Interview, 3/24/11)

Instead of viewing this comment as a possible perspective to be explored, the student's comment was viewed by the participant as bad behaviour.

P5 explained how she had tried to deal with an uncomfortable comment in the past, but she was still unsure about how successful her attempt had been:

> You are reminding me of an example when you said what your challenge was, I had a student in grade four, one day, I don't know how it started, she mentions that she doesn't like, hmm, I'm just trying to remember, I think she was Arabic and um, she went into this whole story about why she doesn't like Jews, about how somebody she knew was Jewish that she knew a couple years before, bad mouthed her and she went on to this tirade about, she basically clumped them all into one category just from this one experience and I was challenged that time because I wasn't, um, like, I posed some questions to her and I tried, and I gave her an example of what if you and I got into a disagreement on a certain thing, would you say that all teachers are bad and I was trying to find a way to let her see that it wasn't about Jews, it was about that particular situation, but that was a challenge for me and I don't really know how she walked away from that conversation and I don't really know what she thought after that. (P5, EntFGI, 3/7/11)

Although participants attempted to deal with these uncomfortable comments by not responding, or responding in an attempt to "get students to see" it their way, they still felt challenged about dealing with students' comments. This tension was evident in the first two months of the study, where participants seemed to be trying to

promote a particular perspective, or discourse in their classrooms instead of encouraging and welcoming different, opposing perspectives to better understand events and issues for more critical readings of the world. A shift in participants thinking about uncomfortable students' comments occurred when we used their comments for our CDA work. The section below describes how this shift occurred.

Because these student comments were problematic, we decided to use them for our CDA work. The process of CDA encouraged participants to explore multiple perspectives of the issues such as: poverty; panhandling; gender; bullying; sexual orientation; and race as they related to the students' comments. The exploration of multiple perspectives gave participants access to discourses that they may not have had access to previously. P1 reflected on how the teacher group experience with CDA informed her thinking:

> Through our small group discussions here today I see that there are a few more directions I could go with this. I have to admit that I am nervous at what could be said --- tensions that could arise, but I am also curious. I just need to get over it. Some comments that I will have to think about are: how do we get these stereotypes? What are the positive aspects? And reflect on my own actions and how I perpetuate stereotypes in my own home with my children. Why do we allow our daughter to be "sporty" and "girly" when we don't see our son wanting to do or play with "girl things"? (P1, Reflection Journal, undated, collected 5/9/11)

In this journal entry, P1 was considering the ideas that had emerged from the conversation with her colleagues and how she might prepare for these ideas being uncovered in her classroom. Some of these ideas pushed her to reflect on how her own actions as a parent might be inconsistent with her beliefs. This also showed how the tension spiralled across contexts of personal lives and teaching lives.

Paradoxically, exploring the comments and other discourses that were initially causing tension provided comfort to participants. Student comments that were a challenge when participants were seeking conformity were less challenging when participants sought out different perspectives. During the ExFGI, P1 explained how her emotions related to critical literacy teaching had changed:

> Ahh, well, in the beginning [I felt] fearful [sounds of agreement from others], because I didn't know how far to go with it or what to talk about. I think as I started taking baby steps with it, I am more comfortable, more comfortable, just by looking at students' answers and the discussions we're having. (P1, ExFGI, 6/6/11)

"Students' answers" were now a source of comfort. The comments that provided the most tensions became the most powerful for exploring and critical literacy learning. P1's experience provided a good example of how, by the end of the study, participants were not avoiding tensions, but

realizing how powerful they were for critical literacy learning:

> . . .that they [students] need to analyze it, and give me an opinion, but now I see that's not enough. You need to like, keep going a little further and further, and as I get comfortable with it, I am more comfortable making them, or should I say I am more comfortable in hmm, giving them the opportunity to give their opinion and accept the differences. To probe a little further and to let the tensions happen, it's like I didn't want to have any of those tensions. (P1, ExFGI, 6/6/11)

Here P1 explained how she pushed students to make comments in an effort to expose tensions that she had previously avoided. P3 related this idea of seeking out tensions to the learning that happened with CDA:

> I like the CDA though because it challenges us, umm, like you [said] as well in going through the tensions, and just allowing the tensions to be there and stuff. It's an uncomfortable process, a very uncomfortable process, but necessary for growth. (P3, ExFGI, 6/6/11)

The discomfort that participants had experienced when students' comments presented a different perspective went from being avoided to being embraced and sought out for their value in creating tension that led to learning. The tension that spiralled around Responding to Student Comments was resolved by the end of the study when participants learned to value discourses brought to the classroom by students. This connected to participants' idea

at the end of the study that critical literacy involved Teaching Students and Learning from Students.

**Teaching Students and Learning from Students**

The tension of Responding to Student Comments led to a shift in the notion that critical literacy learning involved teaching students, where the teacher is all-knowing, towards the idea that teachers are also learners in the classroom and gain insight from students' perspectives during critical explorations. One example of this shift was evident in P1's classroom when they explored the issue of gender. Her marker student's responses surprised her, so she tried to understand possible reasons for her remark instead of judging it according to her own perspective.

During the April Meeting, P1 described the context for how her students created a list of "boy things" and "girl things" which was used for a CDA discussion (April Meeting, 4/11/11). After reading *William's Doll*, (Zolotow, 1972), P1 asked her students to share ideas about gender with the question, "what are girl things and boy things?" Her marker student was said to be a "tomboy" (Classroom Observation, 3/22/11) so she expected her responses to demonstrate a non-stereotypical view that girls could play with toys and games that were traditionally viewed as masculine. Her

responses, though, were stereotypical. In other situations, P1 pushed students to share more authentic real world connections so that they could examine the tensions involved when discourses were competing. When she brought her marker student's comment for CDA analysis at our group meeting, her working group valued the student's comment for what it might teach them about the issue. We all considered why the marker student might have responded in this stereotypical way when I commented: "Maybe she knows better than most how challenging it can be to break outside the dominant discourse, and that there are unsaid rules for how to behave like a girl." (Kelly, April meeting, 4/11/11). CDA prompted participants to examine students' words for what they could teach them about their world.

At the end of the study, Teaching Students and Learning from Students became part of the participants' new graphic representation of critical literacy. When participants were asked about their ideas of critical literacy during the ExFGI, P3 shared:

> I think when we were asked this back in January [March], it was, what we can teach the students, that and I think from our answers that, umm, this evening, it's more about what we have learned through this whole process, as well, and what we have learned not so much what we have taught the students, but what we have learned from the students. . . (P3, ExFGI, 6/6/11)

Then the group organized their graphic representation to include this new idea:

> Kelly: We talked about learning from students and teaching students as two different things that have kind of come up. Where would you put them in this organization, or would you need to reorganize it to put those things in here somewhere?
>
> P3: I would put them [the initial four categories] all around, and put these two in the middle, for me, ok? Visual learner [laughing]. (ExFGI, 6/6/11)

During the same interview, other participants had similar ideas about making room for student voices and learning from them; being reflective about how student input informs their thinking.

> P2: . . . so it really made the kids think their voice does matter, and what they do is what I think, also making them feel like it's worthwhile and it's not just for a grade and not just for another assignment to knock off.
>
> P1: I feel a lot more comfortable with it now than I did in the beginning, they can't, they're too little, they're this, they're that, all these things, and now I say, ok, as soon as I pull myself back, and like you were saying, don't put your bias in, don't put your voice in and have your outcome and I'm going to make you dance this way to get to the end, you know, umm, but just kind of sit back and let them answer and, umm, even when I thought I was going to get the outcome I wanted, I didn't [laughing]. Then, why did that happen and I just think it makes me more self reflective too, and why am I doing this and where am I going with it, or what did I expect to see what I wanted to see? (ExFGI, 6/6/11)

In this exchange, the participants explained how they had changed over the course of the study to value the comments

that students make for recognizing who they are as people, not just students who are completing work for assignments, and for what they can teach us about ourselves and about the world. P3 also felt that when she carefully put her own bias aside, and listened to her students' comments, her instruction changed, and she learned too:

> As the teacher, I try to take a position of each student/group involved, but it is so difficult at times to separate my own biases or emotions. This year has been one of personal learning and growth in the sense that I've been able to "let go" of some of the control in order for students to teach me. (P3, Reflection Journal, undated, collected 6/6/11)

Teaching students and learning from students' multiple perspectives meant starting with students' perspectives to inform the inquiry into a topic or issue, but also teaching them or exposing them to alternative perspectives that might not have been available to them previously. Teaching students and learning from students meant engaging with students as co-learners in trying to understand topics or issues, and critically analyze the world. Participants' placement of Teaching Students and Learning from Students in the middle of their model was appropriate as it aligned with other data about how aspects of critical literacy learning are connected to what we learn with students.

**Social Justice vs. Critical Literacy**

At the beginning of the study, participants' realizations of critical literacy included the practice of social justice projects. By the end of the study, participants added the idea of Taking Action to their perceptions of critical literacy. Moreover, they underlined the importance that Taking Action must be connected to deeper understandings of critical literacy that were realized through questioning, examining multiple perspectives, connecting to the real world and reflecting. While there were no observable changes to how Taking Action was realized during the time frame of the study, participants were clearly considering how to connect Taking Action with critical understandings so that it was not empty charity.

Because I had facilitated this professional learning group for several years, I knew about the kinds of social justice projects that usually occurred in the participants' classrooms. I was surprised that Taking Action was not part of their initial graphic representation of critical literacy, so this omission was a tension for me too. In some of their talk during the initial focus group meeting, Participants referred to taking action as part of critical literacy. They wanted their students to be able to take action that was connected to their understanding of a topic

or issue. When asked what they hoped students would achieve as a result of their work with critical literacy, they responded: "to understand the history, but then to live it, and then to take action that is consistent with their new beliefs" (P4, EntFGI, 3/7/11); and "the confidence and courage to stand up" (P3, EntFGI, 3/7/11). Comments like these showed that they saw taking action as standing up when they witnessed injustice and when they had a clear understanding of the complexity of the issue.

In practice, these participants promoted taking action. During the study, participants' classes engaged in the following social action projects: visiting a seniors' home; greening the school grounds; raising money for a local shelter for battered women; raising money for Hospice; promoting an awareness of bullying at their school; food drives; and clothing drives. The lesson observed in P1's classroom in April was about encouraging students to see that they could take action:

> I wanted them to, in this lesson, relate to, you can do something, and you can take action. That was my goal, that's why I brought up everything that we've done in school [fundraising projects]. You were a part of it and you actually did it, look at you, you know, and what would you do here, what action would you take? (P1, April Observation Interview, 4/5/11)

Participants wanted students to take action, but in the beginning of the study the social justice projects were

critically uninformed. In the earlier sections on Conformity and Teacher Bias there were examples of specific social actions that participants wanted their students to engage in, as opposed to encouraging students to consider taking action in light of the new understandings that emerged when they had explored an issue from multiple perspectives. One example was how P4 pushed her students to engage in environmental activism.

Another example of a teacher directed social action project was P2's education project mentioned earlier in this chapter. P2 wanted her students to appreciate that they had access to education, "the value of education", when other children in the world didn't. This singular discourse was used to promote taking action that would "help these people":

> We talked about the value of education, and we talked about how some of the students don't care, don't do their homework, they sleep in class and these people really want to learn. We talked about, you know, do you value education, do you value, and we talked about that, and they looked at that as, and they felt like, they were so lucky, that they had this [education] and they wanted to help these people (P2, Classroom Observation Interview, 4/7/11)

This comment reflected the tension of Taking Action vs. Critical Literacy because it was unclear if the students were ever exposed to other views of education, and if the action they decided to take was truly informed or if

it was empty giving. In some places, taking action was more connected to social justice than to critical literacy. As a response to this observation, I shared my thinking during the May Meeting in the hope that the teachers in the group would consider how taking action should be based in understanding of the issue:

> This idea of examining multiple perspectives relates to social justice and how social justice and critical literacy are different things, social justice is part of critical literacy, but sometimes we can take action and not really understand what we are doing, and sometimes we can be giving blindly, with the students too, even with all the fundraising, do we really look at it? (Kelly, May Meeting, 5/9/11)

Realizing how they may be presenting a biased view of an issue resonated with some participants and they recalled how social action projects they engaged in were based on a biased presentation of the topic, not on a critical understanding of the complexity of an issue or event:

> In the past, I would teach social justice issues, ask open-ended questions, and create assignments/projects that I thought to be engaging. I trusted other voices, such as "Free the Children" and trusted their voice, their message, their perspective as the gospel truth. I am learning that the missing voice (those experiencing oppression, and poverty, must be heard). (P2, Reflection Journal, 5/6/11)

During the May Meeting this participant also reflected on how her students had taken action that might have been based on her own passion. The social justice projects that she had engaged students in reflected her beliefs in the

power of education. She grappled with this tension because she wanted her students to "have a better understanding" of the issues of poverty and education, but she also wanted them to subscribe to her ideas that students should value education and to take action that aligned with a discourse that said girls in the Middle East needed to be rescued by Western aid:

> I think, I think what I, my own understanding and where I am, and really trying to, ahhh self reflect, because I always think my intentions are so good, and to have a better understanding. . . I think we want our students to really care about learning and it is the opportunity. You see these girls in those countries, that want to go to school, and want to learn, and taken away from them. So I think sometimes I use it in that way, like you have no idea how lucky you are, not coming out and saying that, but you don't have to be worried about acid being thrown in your face or being killed because you are trying to get an education. But again, it's a lot about yourself that you are finding out, and I think that when you're really close to something, and when social justice issues is something that I am so passionate about, I am realizing how much of my own, yeah, it's eye opening (P2, April Meeting, 4/11/11)

In her comments, "it's a lot about yourself that you are finding out" and "social justice issues. . . that I am so passionate about", P2 realized how recognizing discourses uncovered the way her passion for issues impacted the social action taken by her students.

By the end of the study, Taking Action was problematized because "donating to others" was recognized

as a status quo action and response that needed to be challenged and understood in all its complexity. Through the CDA exploration of student comments about panhandling, participants considered a variety of different perspectives, and their own biases regarding charities and taking action.

> Kelly: I wonder if they explored the idea that [panhandlers] need to be there, that they don't have any other options, to even get them to learn about what some of the other options might be for those people, but also for the people who are giving the money to the panhandlers, like what other options are there to help solve the problem, that we would want them to explore or learn about?
>
> P5: To look at the bigger picture and consider ways to solve the problem because it is not really solving the problem. They are surviving, but it is not the underlying problem.
>
> P1: I think also with the actions we were describing too, not taking action is an action too. We don't have to give any money to them, if you do, that's your choice.
>
> P2: But it is in your face a lot, like I'm thinking of getting on to the bridge, every time at the corner there are always the same men, I've never seen a woman, but they are always standing there, panhandling, and I just wonder what goes through people's minds as they go by them everyday, and those people might just be immune to it, or that's just the ways it is as opposed to the occasional person who drives by and if they'd be more inclined to help or to give them money.(May Meeting, 5/9/11)

Up until this point, participants talked about the panhandling they witnessed in their own lives and some of their perspectives and questions about it, "it is not the

underlying problem", "we don't have to give" and "are people immune to it?". These responses are similar to the thoughts of the dominant discourse, but in the next section, P5 made a connection to children asking for donations that problematized the simplicity of panhandling as it was seen above:

> P5: It's no different from the kids who are at the grocery store or at your door who are asking if you'd like to donate to their soccer club or whatever.
>
> P2: Oh, that's a good point.
>
> P5: And always having to go, "ok, here you go". You know cause they're pretty aggressive compared to others who just ask and then say, have a nice day, and making the comparison to how they are out there asking for donations at Zehr's.
>
> P1: I'm even wondering about considering evidence and what makes them want to give. Is it seeing someone that is tattered, or is it seeing a little kid that is asking?
>
> P5: That you can relate to? A prime example for me was a soccer team and all my girls played soccer, so, ok, here you go, but baseball? I don't know anything about baseball so forget it. Sorry I don't have change today. So my parents were pretty poor growing up, and we didn't have a lot of money, but we certainly didn't go without. So I can't relate to being poor and not having food, so does that affect who I even choose to donate to? I'm not talking about the grocery store, but just generally speaking. (May Meeting, 5/9/11)

An interesting idea was presented here about how our donations were influenced by how we identified with the cause, and that we donated because we have experienced, or can imagine the experience of the person asking for money.

Next, the participants shared their insights into how they avoid being manipulated by texts that ask for money. Then they described how these same tactics are being used to manipulate students into giving in schools:

> P1: And so many charities rely on their tactics, and pulling on our heart strings a little bit, and we give, we may not give to this guy out on the street, but we give in lots of ways, cancer society, 60 day or 60 hour walk, Girl Guide cookies. So are we suckers or are we choosing carefully when we donate, when we give money?
>
> P2: I check to see how much goes to administrative costs and how much goes to the actual cause.
>
> Kelly: And do you realize the way that you are being played a little bit, but that's ok that I'm being played because I'm looking past that to the cause?
>
> P5: Or even in our profession, United Way comes along and you can give through your pay or with a check, but do you really know where those dollars are going? And sometimes I've thought I'd rather just choose who I want my money to go to. I know there are organizations that are in need, but how much is it really helping others?
>
> Kelly: You know this would be a really good topic to explore with the kids because in schools we do a lot of fundraisers and do we consider what we are doing when we are raising that money and what the messages are about that?
>
> P1: You know at our school one other teacher and I were saying that this is getting ridiculous because we do so much fundraising in school and whoever raises the most gets a pizza party and why are you giving a pizza party and making a contest when really what is the message, because we want something for ourselves or are we giving because we want to give to somebody.

> P5: You know it is interesting because I had this student working with me on the 'students taking action' project, are you familiar with that?
>
> Others: Yes (and) Uh-huh.
>
> P5: He wanted to raise money for Hospice, he decided more than I did that he would show a movie and it would be a donation, so but, we had a set donation, we worded it in such a way to the parents that you student has an opportunity to watch a movie in the gym and get some popcorn and water, and if you agree to donate $3, sign here, but some students [parents] did not give their child permission, and I didn't think long and hard on it then, but now I'm wondering if it was to donate to hospice or because maybe their child already saw the movie.
>
> Kelly: So what instructionally do we do if we want them to consider the ideas of charity and fundraising?
>
> P1: I think this is like a two or more [ideas], really adjusting their ideas about panhandling, the fundraising idea is just another extension that we could move on to. (May Meeting, 5/9/11)

In this exchange participants dialogued about the tensions related to taking action, how giving money doesn't necessarily address the real problem, how not giving is an option for taking action, and how we can be manipulated to give in different ways. These examples reveal how participants experienced tensions as they identified ways that they had promoted action that was disconnected from critical understandings, P1 shared some insight into her thinking about how to manoeuvre instructionally around the biased presentation of ideas for taking action.

> P1: So I think maybe we could consider, what action would you not take, just go in the opposite.
>
> Kelly: That is action too.
>
> P1: You're right, that is action too. Non action is action. (April Observation Interview, 4/5/11)

Participants had ideas about how they perceived taking action. They seemed to succumb to the dominant discourse about panhandling, seeing it as a social nuisance, and they were more likely to give to children asking for donations. Participants recognized how they, and their students, were manipulated in requests for donations and fundraising efforts. They realized how choosing to take action to give to panhandlers or donate to young athletes was greater when they knew more about the cause from their own experience or from information they had sought out. Participants were demonstrating their abilities to recognize a dominant discourse, consider different perspectives and recognize how their own ideas and actions in their personal lives and their identities as teachers had been influenced by messages about what is "normal". This insight is significant because the practice of reading of social issues texts about homelessness and the resulting social justice projects to "help the poor" that had initially been considered "critical literacy" was recognized for how it did nothing more than promote the dominant discourse, where

all students were considered middle class, needing to hear the messages from *Fly Away Home* (1993) about how poverty happens to good people too, and putting students in a position where they are expected to have the means to raise money and give to "others".

When participants added the idea of Taking Action to their graphic representation of critical literacy during the ExFGI, they insisted that it be central and connected to the other categories, and said that it was the result of deep understandings, connected to questioning, multiple perspectives, reflection, and real world connections. So while there was no evidence at this point in time that participants changed how they enacted Taking Action in their classrooms, there was evidence that they came to new understandings about what Taking Action entailed, and how it was related to critical literacy.

**Taking Action as Connected Practice**

Although they did not create a category for taking action during the EntFGI, two participants mentioned taking action in relation to other ideas about critical literacy. P2 built on the idea of Real World Connections with an example of when her students had taken action by writing letters to Bernie Madolf's foundation after they learned that he was embezzling money from other Jewish people. "So

really, I'm trying to do things that are real world." (P2, EntFGI, 3/7/11). Another mention of taking action was P2's hope that her students would have the courage to "stand up". This implied that students' taking action would be connected to their ideas of what was right, as in, standing up for what they believed in, so that taking action would be connected to a student's understanding of an issue.

Not only did the participants create a category for Taking Action to their graphic, but they emphasized how it connected to other areas such as Real World Connections. The connected nature of Taking Action was an important point made when participants added Taking Action to their graphic representation of critical literacy learning. The idea of Taking Action had emerged in the data from monthly meetings and informal interviews as a tension because of how action without considering the variety of different perspectives was not really part of critical literacy learning. When prompted during the ExFGI to consider where Taking Action might fit in their graphic representation of critical literacy, participants agreed that it needed to be connected to the other ideas of critical literacy, and placed it centrally in their model. When Taking Action was initially placed under the category of Real World Connections, P5 explained that action projects needed to be

"prompted by the students" where "they wanted to change something" as opposed to forcing them to engage in social action projects. The group continued to discuss how Taking Action might fit with other ideas of critical literacy:

> P3: It's definitely Real World Connections (inaudible)
>
> P2: But I really can't force students to have that passion or to want to take it to the next step or to, you know, ok, this is happening in our community, whatever it may be, what are we going to do about it, but if they don't care all that much, but there is a few of them that do, I like this article [referring to Vander Zaden & Wohlwend, 2011] again, there is so many things, it was the kids were writing letters, but not all of them had to write a letter, and sometimes as a teacher we're thinking, ok, is that going to be something I grade, well everyone has to write a letter, everyone had to, and you turn it into a lesson on how to write a letter and then it kind of loses that...[interrupted]
>
> P1: Your, umm, enthusiasm for it and you don't get your point across really, because you're, you are right, it's lost, hmm.
>
> P3: Yeah, the way we went about it this year was. (ExFGI, 6/6/11)

P3 recognized how her students' social action this year had been pushed too much by her own ideas and resulted in a lack of student voice, just as P2 described. Then, P5 suggested that Taking Action needed to be the result of the learning generated from their other categories of critical literacy, "It seems like it almost is like, umm, a by product of all these things". The others agreed:

> P1: Yeah.

> P5: These things to get to that, right? So it definitely fits, yeah, maybe . . .
>
> P4: Yeah. Somewhere in the middle.
>
> P3: It's actually 3D [laughing].
>
> P5: So maybe the Taking Action is the whole umbrella part and then all those things underneath. (ExFGI, 6/6/11)

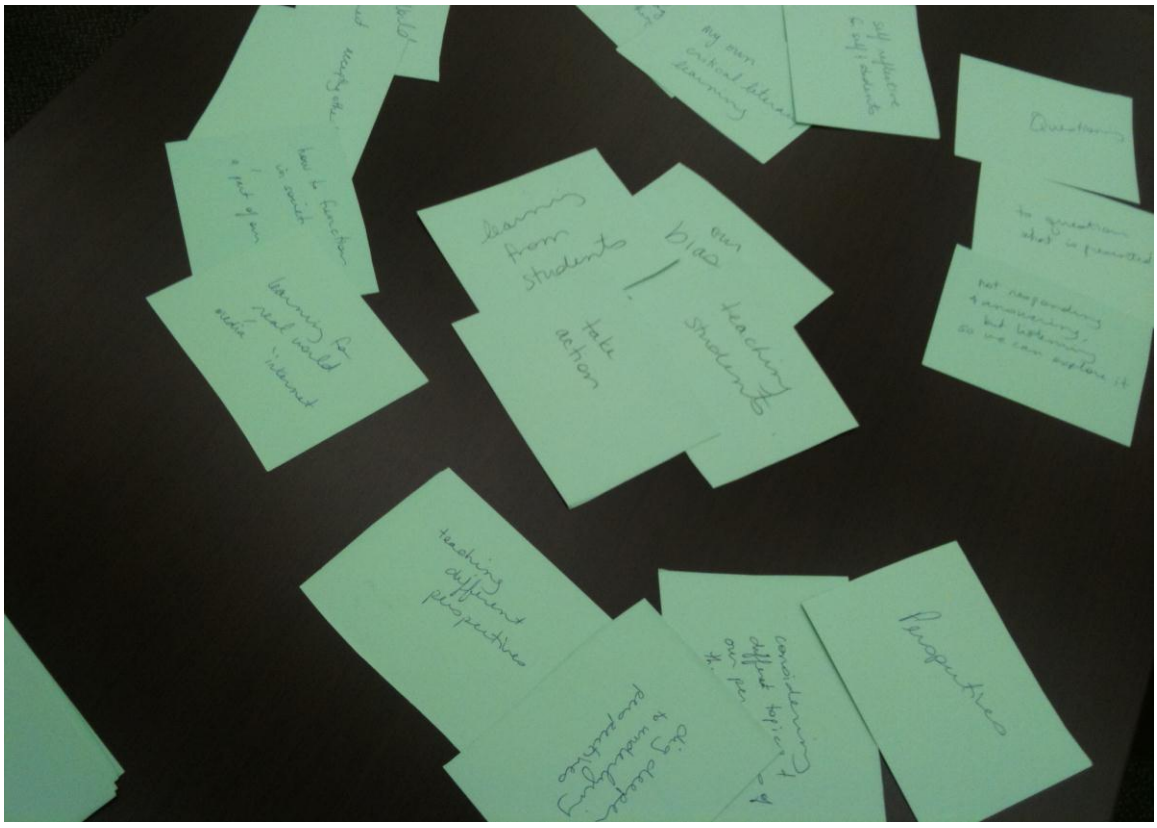
The participants made two key points about Taking Action. First, it was important to participants that Taking Action be student driven, and not part of a preconceived plan by the teacher. It must be an individual student's choice to act, or not, and how. Second, Taking Action had to be a result of the learning gained from engagement in the other four categories (Perspectives, Real World Connections, Questioning and Reflection); "a by product". Taking Action had to be student driven and based on critical understandings of the issue.

## The Participants' Revised Graphic Representation of Critical Literacy

Throughout the above descriptions of tensions that emerged from the participants' work with CDA, there were shifts in perceptions and realizations of critical literacy documented. The changes in perceptions and realizations have been described with a corresponding tension.

In their revised graphic representation of critical literacy learning, participants added three new ideas: teaching students and learning from students; our own bias; and taking action, which were all central and connected to the other four categories they had initially described (Figure 4.3).

**Figure 4.3: Participants' Exit Interview Graphic Representation of Critical Literacy**




These additions to their graphic representation and the participants' talk about how important these ideas are in critical literacy learning demonstrated how participants'

perceptions and realizations of critical literacy evolved over the course of the study.

So far, this chapter has presented and discussed the findings for the two research questions. It documented changes in perceptions and described the tensions experienced by participants as they engaged in CDA in both professional learning and classroom learning contexts. One participant's experience over the course of the study offers a salient example of the evolution of perceptions and the emergence of and relationships among tensions. Her experience is described next.

**Putting it Together: One Participant's Experience**

Many of the tensions and changes in perceptions and realizations were evident in one of P1's experiences during the study. The relationship among the tensions and changes in perceptions depicted in the visual at the beginning of the chapter (Figure 4.1) are also visible in her experience.

After exploring alternative discourses concerning poverty during a working session with CDA, P1 experienced the tension of Recognizing Discourses related to this topic. Across contexts of family gatherings, her classroom practice and personal reflection, she identified competing discourses and considered their impact on her classroom

practice. When P1's class explored the issue of poverty, she recorded in her reflection journal several different perspectives of homelessness that she had interpreted in a recent dialogue with her family:

> At my house --- During a family get together, my brother-in-law told us about a guy who stands on the corner of [two streets in the city] with a sign, "will work for food." He said that this guy has been offered jobs by two people my brother-in-law knows. Both people were rejected rudely by this man who said, "I won't work for less than $15/hour". An elderly couple who felt bad for him went a bought the man food, fast food. This guy threw it in the garbage. We all agreed that this guy was an absolute loser who thinks he's fooling others with his apparent "poverty". I have usually wondered about these beggars --- are they really poor? They probably have a nice house somewhere and are too lazy to get a job. I had seen this type of thing in Rome where half-clothed children ran around pick-pocketing and stealing everything in sight, only to later get picked up by someone in a very nice car. Hmmmm? (P1, Reflection Journal, 4/2/11)

In this reflection, P1 shared a popular discourse about how people who live in poverty are just lazy and that their conditions were not really dire. She was learning to recognize discourses concerning poverty. Her journal became a place to reflect on these discourses and her own shifting ideas about the issue. Interestingly, the perspective she explored in her journal was in contrast to the discourse promoted in the social issue text she had read with her class, *Fly Away Home* (Bunting, 1993). This text promoted an alternative view where a homeless father did work, didn't

beg, and was desperately looking for a place to live. P1 continued in her reflection to examine an alternative view of homelessness presented by her cousin:

> This conversation continued with my cousin relating a story about a homeless man in Toronto who was out on a bitter-cold day. She said it was one of those days that it was so cold you only went out if you really had to. You could see this man wasn't wearing anything warm and was shivering, obviously. She just had to give him something. So I wonder, do we give based on the level of suffering we see another person enduring? (P1, Reflection Journal, 4/2/11)

P1's reflection of two opposing perspectives about the issue of homelessness demonstrated how she was struggling because her ideas about homelessness had been problematized when competing perspectives were more visible. Her question at the end, "do we give based on the level of suffering we see another person enduring?" showed that she was still wondering about how her perspectives of homelessness were shaped. Recognizing Discourses at work left her with more questions and tension about discourses from the real world that related to issues she was exploring in her classroom. P1 experienced how critical literacy learning is complex and always evolving because of the issues and events we encounter as we read texts and read the world.

Because she was recognizing discourses, P1 recognized that students' responses to texts were "simple" and "right" answers that aligned with the popular discourse --- the

discourse presented in the text or encouraged by her. These were referred to as "cookie cutter" responses because they were copies of what others had already said and didn't reflect individual differences of opinions. She considered that these responses might have been because the students didn't have access to other discourses. She reflected on the response given by her marker student and considered what life experiences the student might be bringing to learning about the issue of homelessness:

> Her answer [marker student's] was really, you know, cookie cutter. It wasn't too, too deep today, you know, and she gave a bit of a text to self [connection], and she had a text to text [connection], and she erased it off of there, it wasn't really deep. There was no connection. So I'm wondering if she has had any, you know, experience with perhaps seeing someone who was homeless? (P1, April Observation Interview, 4/5/11)

In another example during a classroom observation, P1 experienced the tension of "Right" vs. Real where she noticed that her students were responding to the read aloud from *Lilly and the Paperman* (Upjohn, 2007) strictly in ways that echoed the discourse of the author – that they would give to the homeless man. Based on what she saw in students' responses, P1 decided to demonstrate an alternative perspective for a small group of students who were just entering the classroom: "After talking with Kelly and reflecting on this "cookie cutter" question/answer, I

decided to try something different with another group of students. I told them that I wouldn't do anything to help this homeless man" (P1, Reflection Journal, 4/5/11). P1 recognized that her practice of presenting a single perspective of the issue had promoted conformity instead of critical literacy, and she took the initiative to make a change by presenting an alternative discourse, problematizing the message in the text.

The tension of Safe vs. Stretched also contributed to P1's presentation of dominant discourses instead of alternatives. When she explained how she had exposed students to alternative views of poverty and homelessness, she articulated the tension of trying also to protect their innocence:

> I said I probably wouldn't help him out, I would say, forget it, you're a bum, you know, and so, you know and I struggle with that too, and for this age group, like maybe for the older, when they would be to have a better dialogue. But you know these are the kids that believe in Santa Claus and the tooth fairy, you know so how do I say that? It's like, oh my goodness, it's just, you're horrible Mrs.[initial]. (P1, May Meeting, 5/9/11)

She was cautious about exposing students to the unpopular idea of not helping, even though in reality, it is what she would probably do, and what she assumed many eight-year-olds would do.

P1 also experienced this tension as she considered how she had been "too careful" with the texts that she presented and the discourses she made available in the classroom because they weren't stretching her students towards critical literacy. She was trying to find that same sweet spot where the learning was not too safe for students so that they were pushed to new thinking:

> P1: Maybe I'm just too careful with what I choose too, tension wise, you know?
>
> Kelly: What do you mean?
>
> P1: I try to make sure that there's something that they can relate to first of all. And know that, hmm, a child, here's another child your age [referring to Andrew from *Fly Away Home* (1993)]. Can you imagine? You know so trying to pick something, pick a subject that they can give an opinion to, that is safe to start off with.
>
> Kelly: Which maybe has trouble for them to see the other side. Which means it may not stretch them to change their opinion. (March Observation Interview, 4/22/11)

She continued to wonder about how to provide instruction that was "just right" in terms of what students brought to the learning so that they were safe and stretched simultaneously. P1 recognized that it was the teacher's responsibility to encourage alternative perspectives and that selecting texts with messages that don't cause tension inhibits examination of multiple perspectives.

P1 also struggled with the tension of "Right" vs. Real herself because she felt there was a "teacher persona" that was what she should project, even when it wasn't what she truly felt:

> The "politically correct" responses/attitudes. What I'm teaching, or the "teacher" persona, isn't always what I really think or feel. Sure, I truly believe that we should help others. My religion even tells me to give to the poor. But when? And why? (P1, Reflection Journal, 4/5/11)

Here, P1 was struggling because her ideas about what a teacher should be, or her discourse for "teacher" was in conflict with her private thoughts and feelings. Participants' ideas about being "right" were challenged when their private views were in contrast to what they felt they should project publicly.

When P1 explored other issues in the classroom, she encouraged students to consider how they might respond privately to an issue, and how it could be in conflict with their public responses. For example, when her class read *William's Doll* (Zolotow, 1972) and responded with the idea that it was ok for boys to play with girl toys, she challenged this idea by providing a group of boys with books that were typically considered "girl books" about fairies for their reading material the following day. Another example was when her students agreed with an

opinion article message that panhandlers should be removed from city streets, so P1 presented them with several reasons why this was problematic, "What if they can't get another job" and "Maybe they can't afford to go to college or university".

CDA allowed P1 to feel more comfortable about what to do with her students' uncomfortable comments. In the examples above, she challenged students' safe responses with alternatives that created tensions. In the following example, P1 described how CDA allowed her to consider possible alternative perspectives that students might suggest, and how she was "curious" or eager to learn from her students as they explored discourses around the issue together:

> Through our small group discussions here today [CDA at the meeting], I see that there are a few more directions I could go with this. I have to admit that I am nervous at what could be said --- tensions that could arise, but I am also curious. I just need to get over it. Some comments that I will have to think about are: How do we get stereotypes? What are the positive aspects (of stereotypes)? And reflect on my own actions and how I perpetuate stereotypes in my own home with my children. (P1, Reflection Journal, undated, collected 5/25/11)

P1 made connections between the experience with CDA, her classroom practice, and her personal life as she negotiated assimilating to or accommodating discourses she hadn't previously considered. P1 also reflected on her own

beliefs and actions as a parent. The inclusion of this reflection here with comments about instruction was significant because it demonstrated P1's recognition that who she is as a teacher is connected to who she is outside the classroom too. By the end of the study, participants had articulated that they wanted their students to be able to think and act in ways that reflected a deeper understanding of issues, both inside the classroom and beyond the classroom. P1's exploration of discourses and their impact in her personal life reflected the kind of thinking and action the participants hoped to see in their students.

By the end of the study, these experiences with inquiry into critical literacy and the resulting tensions had led P1 to new perceptions and realizations of critical literacy. In the ExFGI, she described a change in her perception of critical literacy which she mentioned several times. She saw critical literacy as seeking out multiple discourses, "different viewpoints" that they "hadn't experienced before". She also saw critical literacy as bringing your own ideas about the world forward to see "where they fit" with the different views:

> With critical literacy, hmm, I think now, hmm, with this specific topic, I think they need to, hmm, with looking at different viewpoints, besides theirs, we

> are learning where they haven't experienced before, they are starting to get that experience, they are starting to, hmm, see where they fit with everything else, you know, that's not me, I'm not like that, how they see themselves, what are their perceptions. (P1, Classroom Observation, 5/11/11)

During the ExFGI, P1 talked about how her perception and realizations had changed from wanting students to conform to a popular way of thinking to wanting students to recognize the discourses at work "around you" with "open eyes" where they contributed alternative perspectives based on their real experiences in the world:

> I thought I was just opening minds and I was just understanding what their opinion was, change their opinion, and now I'm saying, it's like, now I look at it as this, take a look around you. Open your eyes, you know? (P1, ExFGI, 6/6/11)

P1's experience with CDA and inquiring into students' critical literacy learning prompted an initial tension of Recognizing Discourses that spiralled around her own exploration of discourses at work around the issue of poverty and led to other tensions. Students' responses to texts were problematized because they were safe in how they adhered to the dominant discourse and didn't reflect students' real world connections. This tension was addressed as P1 broke away from her practice that promoted conformity towards a practice that encouraged exploration of a variety of discourses including how students' real

world experiences conflicted with standard classroom responses.

## Conclusion

The chapter presented and discussed the findings for this study's two research questions. The evidence of the tensions and changes in perceptions and realizations in the example from P1's experience and from other examples in this chapter supported the key findings of this study:

1. Critical discourse analysis exposed tensions related to participants' work with critical literacy.
2. Critical discourse analysis contributed to the changes in participants' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy learning, in particular in how they recognized multiple perspectives, how they envisioned discourse in other aspects of critical literacy, and how they engaged in learning for critical literacy.

A discussion of the findings and description of the implications of this study will be described in Chapter Five.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# CONCULSION AND IMPLICATIONS

*"The Power of the Word"*
*-Participant 5, 2011*

## Introduction

This study aimed to examine teachers' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy, and the tensions involved in their work with critical literacy as they engaged in critical discourse analysis (CDA). It found that through CDA, tensions emerged and led to changes in teachers' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy, especially in how they recognized discourses at work in texts and in classrooms, how discourses informed other areas of critical literacy, and how recognizing discourses changed their perceptions of professional learning and classroom practice of teachers of critical literacy. The two research questions that guided this study were about how participants experienced tensions, perceptions and realizations of critical literacy when they engaged in CDA:

1. How does teachers' inquiry into students' critical literacy learning and experiences with critical discourse analysis inform teachers' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy?

2. When teachers have the opportunity to engage in critical discourse analysis, how do they perceive tensions in their ongoing work with critical literacy learning in both professional learning and classroom contexts?

There were two key findings that emerged in this study:

1. Critical discourse analysis exposed tensions related to participants' work with critical literacy.
2. Critical discourse analysis contributed to the changes in participants' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy learning, in particular in how they recognized multiple perspectives, how they envisioned discourse in other aspects of critical literacy, and how they engaged in learning for critical literacy.

Figure 5.1 shows how the tensions participants experienced in their work with critical literacy across professional learning and classroom learning contexts emerged from their work with CDA and led to changes in participants' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy.

**Figure 5.1: Color Coded Perceptions, Realizations and Tensions of Critical Literacy**

| **Perceptions and Realizations** | **Questioning** | **Real World Connections** | **Reflection** | **Perspectives** | **Reading and Responding to Social Issues Texts** | **Social Justice Projects** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Tensions in Inquiry, CDA and Classroom Critical Literacy Experiences** | **Recognizing Discourses**<br>**Conformity vs Multiple Perspectives**<br>**Comfort vs Bias**<br>**Safe vs Stretched, "Right" vs. Real**<br>**Responding to Student Comments**<br>**Social Justice vs Critical Literacy** | | | | | |
| **New Perceptions and Realizations** | **Complex and Evolving** | **Examining Perspectives and Discourses** | **Recognizing Teachers' Own Bias** | **Finding the Tension through Real World Connections** | **Teaching Students and Learning From Students** | **Taking Action as Connected Practice** |

There were three types of changes in participants' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy. Examining Perspectives and Discourses, shown in blue in Figure 5.1, was about recognizing discourses at work. Finding the Tension through Real World Connections and Taking Action as Connected Practice, shown in purple, were about how other aspects of critical literacy were perceived and realized differently because of teachers' work with CDA and examining multiple discourses. The new ideas of Teaching Students and Learning from Students, Recognizing

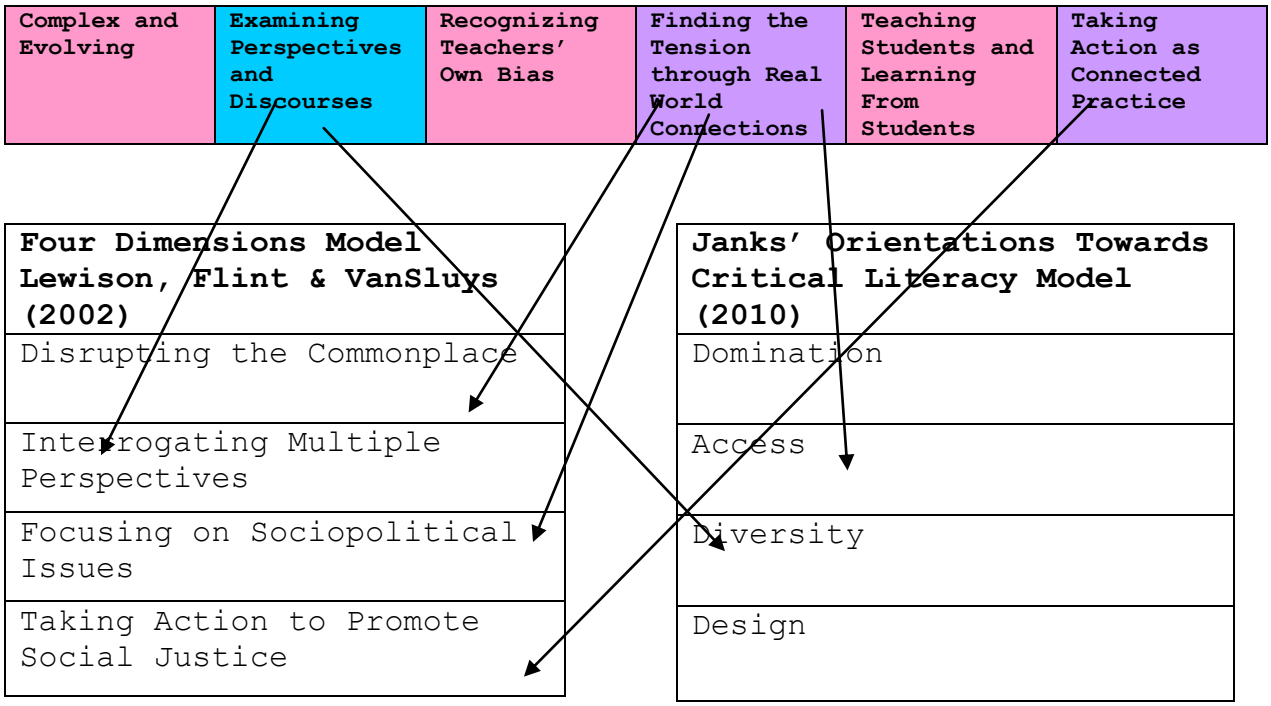
Teachers' Own Bias, and critical literacy being Complex and Evolving, coded in pink, were about learning and teaching for critical literacy.

These three key changes in participants' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy: Recognizing Discourses at Work; Discourses Informing Other Aspects of Critical Literacy; and Discourses Informing Professional Learning for Critical Literacy, and the related tensions are themes that will be described below with regards to how they confirm, disconfirm or extend the existing literature.

## Perceptions and Realizations Compared to Existing Typologies

Participants' recognition of discourses at work impacted their ideas and practice with other aspects of critical literacy. These perceptions and realizations were analyzed by comparing them to existing typologies. Figure 5.2 illustrates how ideas between participants' ideas of critical literacy connect with the existing literature.

**Figure 5.2: Perceptions and Realizations of Critical Literacy Compared to Existing Typologies**




**Examining Perspectives and Discourses**

Participants' notion of Examining Perspectives and Discourses aligns with Janks' (2010) realization of Diversity and the Lewison, Flint and VanSluys'(2002) dimension of Interrogating Multiple Perspectives because both call for readers to seek out and consider multiple viewpoints of events and issues for critical reading. However, this study's Examining Perspectives and Discourses extends the dimension of Interrogating Multiple Perspectives because it more clearly recognizes that "Perspectives" and "Viewpoints" are not always sufficient

for critical literacy, and that examination of multiple discourses is required. Examining Perspectives and Discourses also involved an idea that aligns with Janks' realization of Diversity where participants' recognizing how the wide variety of discourses that are available for understanding the complexity of any event or issue. This study's Examining Perspectives and Discourses demonstrate the connectedness of two components of critical literacy presented by different authors.

**Finding the Tension through Real World Connections**

Finding the Tension through Real World Connections relates to two of Lewison, Flint and VanSluys' (2002) dimensions. It relates to Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues because connections were made to events and issues in the real world. It relates to Disrupting the Commonplace when connections to real world experience that conflicted with simple, single discourse explanations and caused tensions were sought out.

Finding the Tension through Real World Connections also relates to one of Janks' realizations of critical literacy. This idea of critical literacy is related to the realization of Access, because students' real world experiences and ideas about discourses were valued for how they might present alternative viewpoints of the world, so

their primary discourses were valued. At the same time, consideration of the dominant discourse provides students with access to the discourse of power.

The overlap with more than one dimension and one realization again demonstrates the connectedness of other models' separate categories. Analysis of the participants' insight into this connection revealed the central role of recognizing discourses for all critical literacy.

**Taking Action as Connected Practice**

Taking Action as Connected Practice resembles Lewison, Flint and VanSluys' (2002) dimension of Taking Action to Promote Social Justice. Both articulate the need for Taking Action to be connected to critical understandings gleaned form other aspects of critical literacy. However, participants in this study extended this idea further when they demonstrated the complexity of this relationship by placing the Taking Action cue card and placing it as a third dimension umbrella overtop of the other ideas about critical literacy in their concept map. This placement showed how participants perceived critical literacy learning to be more complex than it is portrayed in existing models.

**Complex and Evolving, Recognizing Teachers' Own Bias, Teaching and Learning from Students**

The perceptions and realizations from this study coded in pink in Figure 5.1 and 5.2 relate to teaching and learning critical literacy and are not specifically addressed in the two models of critical literacy used for comparison above. Furthermore, the ideas that critical literacy learning is a Complex and Evolving process, that we must Recognize Teachers' Own Bias, and that critical literacy involves Teaching and Learning from Students extends the further developed model in Lewison, Leland and Harste's (2007) Instructional Model of Critical Literacy.

Recall from Chapter Two that their model was more involved in how it described Resources, Critical Social Practices, Critical Stance, etc, which suggested that critical literacy was complex. This study's idea that critical literacy learning is also always evolving contributes another layer to their model where critical literacy learning spirals from learning experience to learning experience, continuing to build on critical understandings that reflect "the way we view the world" (P5, ExFGI, 6/6/11) which changes so that "the way we view it six months from now is yet going to be another view". It was hard for participants to define critical literacy with specifics, "hard to come down with something definitive"

because they thought there would always be more to uncover, "I don't think we are ever going to get there".

Recognizing Teachers' Own Bias extends the existing instructional model of critical literacy. This feature calls for teachers to "entertain alternate ways of being" (Lewison, Leland & Harste, 2007), but also to be reflective about their own beliefs so they can problematize their own practice as a commonplace action to be disrupted.

Teaching and Learning from Students adds to the instructional model of critical literacy's idea of resources, so that "personal experiences" should be experiences of both teachers and students collectively. This perception and realization of critical literacy also extends the idea that critical literacy learning must be based in genuine inquiry so that teachers and students are learning with and from each other.

This study's focus on CDA contributed to changes specific to participants' perception and realization of Examining Perspectives and Discourses. Some of these ideas extend notions about discourse and existing models' notions of Examining Multiple Viewpoints or Diversity.

**Recognizing Discourses at Work**

While the research literature calls for critical readers to access a range of discourses to recognize how

certain discourses are either privileged or silenced, and to develop the discourse of critique, there has been limited research into how to support them to do this. In this study, CDA supported participants' critical literacy learning by exposing them to multiple discourses that allowed them to recognize discourses at work. By the end of the study, participants' practice with critical literacy went beyond examining multiple perspectives towards examining multiple discourses. This development involved seeking out different discourses to confront the tension of competing viewpoints, recognizing the dominant discourse, and using the language and discourse of critique so they could look in at their own discourse at work to recognize bias and conformity.

**Discourses Go Beyond Perspectives**

Examining multiple perspectives (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002) is not enough for critical literacy. Critical readers need access to multiple discourses (Freire, 1970; Gee, 1987, 2005; Shannon, 1995; New London Group, 2000). Prior to their work with CDA, participants had limited discourses available to them from their earlier work with the professional learning group and their life experiences. Their classroom practice reflected these limitations. At the beginning of the study their view of

multiple perspectives entailed examining different perspectives from the same discourse. For example, while reading *The Lorax* (Seuss, 1971), P4 had students explore perspectives of different characters, but the characters' views of the events in the story all subscribed to the same idea --- that the environment should be protected and not exploited in the interests of economic gain. Other discourses, including the perspective of economists, were not explored.

CDA supported participants to become more critically literate. Their ideas of critical literacy at the beginning of the study were based on the idea of exploring multiple perspectives, but the perspectives that they explored were restricted to a single discourse. They were restricted to their primary discourse (Gee, 1987; 2002). After participants' work with CDA and learning to recognize discourses, the participants realized that critical literacy must go beyond exploring multiple perspectives (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002) to explore multiple discourses.

**Multiple Discourses and Tension**

In this study, Real World Connections were used to recognize how competing discourses were at work in different contexts, and how even our own discourse might

change depending on where we are and who we are with. This is in line with Lewison, Leland and Harste's (2007) idea of a critical curriculum that moves between the personal and the social so learners can see how understandings are socially constructed, but in this study, these connections were aimed at uncovering tensions between personal and social reactions.

Through their work with CDA, participants described how Real World Connections provide a way to expose tensions from competing discourses. The idea of how competing discourses create possibilities for changing a discourse is not new (Gee, 1987, 2005), but in this study, teachers sought out these tensions, orchestrated classroom events to create them, and valued them for their potential for critical literacy learning. The value of tensions is described by Lewison, Leland and Harste (2007) as important for teachers' adopting a critical stance, where a critical lens allowed a teacher to recognize anomalies that didn't fit with her model of the world created tension that led to seeking out alternative approaches that did fit. Their idea of the value of tensions is stretched here to include the power of tensions for students' critical literacy learning too, so that classroom critical literacy involves finding places where competing discourses can be uncovered and

students learn to problematize simple views of the world that align with dominant discourses.

By the end of the study, participants recognized the importance of seeking out tensions by exploring competing discourses. P3 said that it was important to "go through the tensions" with CDA; that it was "an uncomfortable process, but necessary for growth" (ExFGI, 6/6/11). This stretches the call for critical literacy that explores multiple discourses (Freire, 1970; Gee, 1987, 2005; Shannon, 1995; New London Group, 2000; Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002). It was by uncovering and discovering, not just multiple, but contradictory discourses and experiencing the tensions that allowed simplified explanations of social issues to be problematized.

**Discourses are Marginalized or Favored**

At the beginning of the study, participants didn't recognize how they or their students were positioned by texts or influenced by dominant discourses. For example, P2 didn't recognize the messages about poverty in the vouchers for a free dinner from a local church. Participants were also frustrated by student' comments that opposed the dominant discourse in the classroom.

In contrast, later in the study, participants encouraged students to go beyond the dominant discourse –

the "cookie cutter" answers, and make connections to their world that creating tension by uncovering competing discourses. After engaging in CDA, participants recognized that dominant discourses or, as P2 named them, "the 'trusted voices' of Feed the Children" offered only one of many possible viewpoints of the world.

One of the discourses that readers should have access to is the dominant discourse (Freire, 1970; Gee, 1987; Janks, 2010). But this alone is not enough for enacting critical literacy. Participants' realizations of critical literacy early in the study involved providing students access to the dominant discourse, which became a tension for how it encouraged conformity to the teacher's or the author's perspective. Through their work with CDA, participants recognized how simplistic and "safe" their own ideas of the world had been.

**Discourse of Critique Accessed**

CDA allowed participants to try out different discourses and look in at their own discourse as though they were outsiders, and provided them with tools for analyzing discourses at work. They were aware of the different discourse options available to them for more conscious engagement (Lewison, Leland & Harste, 2007). Identifying key words and phrases, considering perspectives

from different, opposing discourses, and using the language of discourses supported participants' with their growing awareness of discourses at work in their world and in their classrooms. Towards the end of the study, participants recognized discourses at work in their classrooms, and became skilled at identifying words and phrases spoken or written by students that clearly depicted a particular discourse, and brought these snippets of texts to group meetings for CDA. They were also recognizing discourses at work in their personal lives that left "CDA flashing neon lights" in their heads. Participants' awareness and vocabulary for critiquing discourses was made possible through their work with CDA.

In this study, when participants engaged in CDA, they gained access to different discourses. They collected their own examples for group CDA analysis, shared instances where issues were oversimplified by friends' and family's primary discourses, and saw how their own practice privileged certain viewpoints. CDA facilitated their critical literacy learning so that they could recognize how perspectives and discourses were marginalized or favored, and they developed the discourse of critique.

**Discourses Informing Professional Learning for Critical Literacy**

CDA impacted what participants thought of and how they enacted critical literacy. It also impacted their ideas of what it meant to be a teacher for critical literacy. With the realization that critical literacy was Complex and constantly Evolving, participants recognized that being a teacher of critical literacy meant constantly inquiring to understand how they were being positioned with every reading of text and the world. New ideas about the discourse of "a teacher of critical literacy" then involved being an inquirer into their own critical literacy, learning from and with colleagues and their students, and going beyond their realizations of social justice projects and reading and responding to social issues texts.

**Teacher Learning as Complex and Evolving**

Participants brought up the idea that critical literacy was Complex and constantly Evolving during the Exit Focus Group Interview because they recalled how their ideas of critical literacy were easier to define earlier in the study. Later, their ideas of critical literacy were constantly changing because they were intertwined with how they viewed the world and how they negotiated texts in new and evolving ways. Lewison, Leland and Harste (2007) shared this idea when they claimed that their model of critical literacy wasn't static, but reflected their best thinking

at the time, implying that their ideas of critical literacy are evolving too. Shannon (1995) called for teachers of critical literacy to be critically literate. Because critical literacy is always evolving, it requires teachers of critical literacy to always be learning about their own critical literacy and about promoting critical literacy in their classrooms.

**Value of Tensions**

This study pointed to the value in focusing on tensions as sites for learning, encouraging teachers to share honestly about the ideas they were testing when they worked and when they didn't. Participants' realization that critical literacy was always "evolving" based on "how they saw the world" meant that they would never be done learning to be critically literate and there would always be new tensions as they continued to learn and read their world. They looked to each other for support, not to confirm their existing thinking, but to stretch their thinking with alternative explanations and viewpoints. The focus on tensions encouraged teachers to become more comfortable with the shifting sands of critical literacy learning.

This study confirmed that when we catch ourselves in incongruent and contradictory behavior, it is hopeful because it means that we are still engaged in the struggle

of trying on new identities and discourses (Kamler, 1999); it also extended this idea into the realm of professional learning. The participants in this study began to make this seeking out of contradictory ideas and behaviours part of their work together. As was evident in the tension experienced by participants regarding students' wanting to be "right", these teachers, too initially wanted to do critical literacy "right". They learned, however, that doing it right meant trying to get better at behaving in ways that truly reflected their beliefs. Colleagues became valuable resources for pointing out and questioning them when ideas and behaviours were inconsistent, pushing teachers to reflect and perhaps act differently. This practice extends and fleshes out the idea of praxis (Freire, 1970; Shannon, 1995) as it applies to teachers. The value of placing tensions at the center of collaborative inquiry (Mills & Donnelly, 2001) was confirmed. In this study, teachers engaged in a cycle of reflection, learning and action in their ongoing inquiry into what it means to be a teacher of critical literacy.

**Teaching and Learning with Students**

Another shift in participants' idea of critical literacy was how it involved both Teaching Students and Learning from Students. Reflecting on their ideas of

critical literacy from early in the study, participants noticed that their ideas had previously revolved around what they could teach students, but by the end of the study, their ideas were informed by what they learned from students. From students, participants learned about new discourses and gained insight about students' learning needs to inform instructional next steps. As participants listened more carefully for discourses at work in their classrooms, the idea of Kidwatching (Goodman, 1978) was extended to include listening and watching for discourses in observations of students' work with language and literacy to inform instruction. In this way, critical literacy instruction was based not only on students' questions or interests (Freire, 1970; Shannon, 1995), but on the discourses that students were not accessing and couldn't yet question. For example, when P3 overheard students talking about what it meant to be rich, she realized that students were only accessing a discourse that measured wealth in material goods. She knew that there were other discourses available for better understanding this issue that would allow readers to recognize a consumerist discourse that often manipulates students, so she planned to make alternative discourses that said "money can't buy happiness" or "the best things in life are free" available

through read alouds and role play. During their work with CDA, participants developed an ear for discourses at work in their classrooms to inform classroom practice.

Listening to their students also meant valuing students' perspectives to enlighten participants about alternative discourses. Students' primary discourses offered new ways of viewing the world for teachers. P1's marker student was described as a tomboy, but her responses to questions about gender roles aligned with stereotypical ideas. P1 was puzzled that this student's response didn't articulate an alternative discourse where it was ok for girls to play with perceived boy-type toys and do perceived boy-type things. In reflecting on the student's response, this teacher recognized that perhaps her student knew better than most that there were strong dominant discourses about gender roles at work in the world and in the classroom that made it difficult to promote an alternative discourse. P1 gained insight into a different discourse by listening and trying to learn from her students. She enacted what Burke (1984) described as an expert learner, who is truly a learner in the classroom with some expertise about how to learn, as opposed to a teacher, who has all the answers and doesn't engage in a reciprocal learning relationship with students. The tension of dealing with

students' disparaging remarks (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002) was resolved by the end of this study documenting the power of CDA for creating space for unexplored discourses in classrooms. CDA prompted participants to listen more carefully to students so their ideas about the world could inform classroom instruction and could support teachers in their own critical literacy learning.

**Four Dimensions Model and Professional Learning**

At the beginning of the study, participants' perceptions of critical literacy included four categories that aligned closely with Lewison, Flint and VanSluys' (2002) four dimensions of critical literacy. Participants' Perspectives category aligned with the Exploring Multiple Perspectives dimension, Real World Connections category aligned somewhat with the Focus on Sociopolitical Issues dimension, the Questioning category aligned with Disrupting the Commonplace dimension, and the practice of Social Justice projects aligned somewhat with the dimension of Taking Action and Promoting Social Justice. Participants' category of Reflection was the only category that didn't align with this model. This alignment was not a surprise because the group of critical literacy teachers had used the four dimensions model on several occasions to consider how each dimension was on offer in our practice with

classroom critical literacy. Any model can be useful for planning learning experiences or as a lens for examining practice (Lewison, Leland & Harste, 2007), but as this study shows, the sole use of a model also limits the possibilities for how critical literacy might be envisioned by teachers. In this group, participants' use of the model resulted in an interpretation of multiple perspectives that didn't include the idea of discourses.

**Perceptions vs. Realizations**

At first, participants' realizations of critical literacy did not always align with their perceptions of critical literacy. While they said that critical literacy was about Questioning, there was virtually no critical questioning happening in classroom practice. Participants were asking questions about texts that encouraged students to understand the discourse presented, but not to disrupt or question it. Questions such as "What would you do if you were [character in a book]?", or "What is the author's message?" were not truly critical.

Real World Connections were based on what the teacher felt the students could relate to. The teachers focused on sociopolitical issues such as poverty, bullying, racism, the environment, and the influence of social media because they thought students would be interested in these issues.

The category, Perspectives, was about encouraging students to conform to popular ways of thinking. This realization focused on perspectives within the same discourse instead of offering multiple discourses so that messages about the world could be critiqued. Taking Action was about engaging students in popular ways of acting.

Reflection was said to be about, "reflecting on my own critical literacy learning", but without access to multiple discourses, it was challenging to step outside their primary discourse to see where their individual's viewpoints "fit". At the beginning of the study, there was virtually no evidence of Reflection in classroom practice. Realizations of critical literacy involved Social Justice Projects and Reading and Responding to Social Issues Texts. These enactments of classroom critical literacy were partially informed by the critical literacy teacher group's use of the Four Dimensions model and the professional reading materials they had been exposed to which promoted reading social issues texts and taking action (Heffernan, 2004; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004; Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002). Again, exposure to limited ideas about critical literacy restricted participants' classroom practice with critical literacy. Reading and responding to

social issues texts does not, on its own, enact a critical literacy curriculum (Lewison, Leland & Harste, 2007).

Participants' practice was limited by the ideas for critical literacy that they had been exposed to, but also because they didn't have access to multiple discourses that allowed them to be critically literate themselves. CDA provided an alternative model for what critical literacy could be in action, and it exposed discourses that participants hadn't previously accessed.

At the beginning of this study, I was interested in using CDA to stretch the thinking of members of the critical literacy teacher group so that they could recognize discourses at work in their classrooms and adjust instructional practice accordingly. This study documented evidence that the impact of the work we did with CDA was greater than I had anticipated. Because they could recognize discourses at work, participants grew in their own critical literacy. As their understanding of discourses at work grew, it altered how they perceived and realized critical literacy in their lives and in their classrooms. They began to recognize how they were being manipulated by dominant discourses about panhandling and donation, and about the role of women and maternity leaves. They began to problematize friends' and family's simple explanations of

social issues because they recognized that there were multiple discourses to consider. In their classrooms, they recognized discourses at work in their students' comments about wealth and gender. They also recognized how their own classroom practice needed to go beyond presenting singular discourses and pursue multiple discourses on issues. Through their inquiry into students' critical literacy learning and CDA, participants listened more carefully to the discourses presented by students and became more responsive to the critical literacy learning needs of their students.

Similarly, as the facilitator of the group of critical literacy teachers, I learned to listen more carefully to the discourses presented in our meetings and our professional learning community became more responsive to teachers' critical literacy learning needs.

The impact of CDA on participants' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy has resulted in questions for further research and recommendations for this group of critical literacy teachers and other teachers, for the field of critical literacy and the field of professional development. These questions and recommendations are described next.

## Limitations and Implications for Further Research

The extent of the shifts in participants' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy may have been limited by the length of the study. In addition, since this study involved a particular professional learning group, the perceptions, realizations, and tensions that emerged here may or may not be similar to themes that emerge in other settings. Further research involving diverse groups of teachers that use CDA over a longer period of time is suggested.

The findings of the study raise several additional questions for future research. One idea that emerged from this study related to how participants' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy were informed and limited by the models of critical literacy they had worked with. A question to consider for further research is how participants' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy are impacted through their work with other models of critical literacy like Janks' (2010) Realizations of Critical Literacy.

The opportunity to engage in CDA with this group of critical literacy teachers impacted participants' discourse of what it meant to be a critical literacy teacher. As the field of professional development moves away from off-site workshops for professional development towards school based

collaborative inquiries for professional learning, a question to consider is, How might CDA with an entire elementary school staff inform teachers' ideas of literacy learning?

This study aimed to uncover changes in teachers' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy through their work with CDA, but did not examine the impact that teachers' work with CDA might have on students' critical literacy learning, nor did it examine how students' engagement in CDA might impact their critical literacy learning. These questions about students' critical literacy learning as it relates to their engagement in CDA or their teachers' engagement in CDA offers ideas for future research.

**Implications for Professional Development**

In this study, teachers' engagement in CDA impacted their own critical literacy learning and their classroom practice supporting students' critical literacy learning. CDA provides an alternative model for professional learning groups interested in critical literacy.

**CDA for Critical Literacy Teacher Groups.** This study's findings clearly point to the value of CDA for teachers to uncover discourses at work in classrooms and support each other in making sense of these discourses and navigating

instructional moves to support students' critical literacy learning. The impact of CDA on the critical literacy teacher group's understanding of critical literacy has implications for other critical literacy teacher groups. Teacher study groups are effective for supporting teachers with critical literacy (Lewison, Flint & VanSluys, 2002; Lewison, Leland & Harste, 2007). The opportunity to engage in CDA could have similar outcomes for other teacher groups, supporting their recognition of discourses at work in their classrooms, stretching their ideas about critical literacy, and connecting their professional learning to students' critical literacy learning needs. Beyond study groups that are already focused on critical literacy and incorporating critical elements into their classrooms, the opportunity to engage in CDA should be available to other teachers. If a critically literate teacher is required for critical literacy learning to exist in classrooms (Shannon, 1995), then all teachers could benefit from engaging in CDA to grow in their own critical literacies through recognizing discourses at work. This is especially true for teachers in Ontario where critical literacy is an expectation in the Elementary Language Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2006). The opportunity to engage in CDA offers the potential for teachers to access multiple,

competing discourses so that they can be recognized in texts and in classrooms, and to develop sensitivity to how their own views of the world affect the discourses that are promoted or silenced in classrooms, and how this relationship impacts student learning.

**Focus on Tensions.** This study's focus on the tensions experienced by teachers through their work with critical literacy demonstrated the value of foregrounding challenges in collaborative inquiry. Where learners experience tensions is where they are testing new ideas. Tensions are a site for learning. Professional learning that encourages teachers to address the tensions they experience in their classrooms offers support for the learning they need, not the learning others might think they need.

**Short Texts for CDA.** The findings of this study clearly point to the use of short texts for work with CDA. A final recommendation relates to the use of short texts for CDA. One of the strongest insights the participants developed was their appreciating how powerful words are. Even a single phrase can promote, challenge, or silence discourses. Literature on CDA suggests that this type of analysis begin with larger portions of text, and then identify powerful words and phrases to consider how they promote a particular discourse (Flint, Lewison & VanSluys,

2009; Rogers et al, 2005; Luke, 1995), but once participants in this study were familiar with CDA, short phrases of text, from books or from students' talk or writing, were powerful pieces for professional learning for critical literacy. Longer texts were too involved and proved to be too challenging for participants to make sense of as a whole, identify key words and phrases, and then continue to engage in thinking around the discourses at work and consider alternative discourses to arrive at considerations for student learning experiences. A recommendation to those interested in using CDA for teachers' critical literacy learning is to use short snippets of texts. A short phrase of a few words can be more powerful than a lengthy text.

## Conclusion

At the beginning of this study, participants were limited by the discourses they could access for recognizing how discourses were at work in texts and in their classrooms. They were also limited by the models for critical literacy that they had access to for understanding critical literacy and enacting critical literacy in their lives and in their classrooms. Working from Lewison, Flint and VanSluys'(2002) four dimensions of critical literacy had supported participants' perceptions and realizations of

critical literacy in line with these four dimensions. However, without access to multiple discourses or the discourse of critique, participants examined multiple perspectives, literally, of different characters without considering the alternative perspectives from various discourses. P5's remark about 'the power of the word' was enacted here on many levels. Participants realized how discourses could be noticed in short phrases of texts in students' words, in texts that were read in the classroom and in the world, and in their own words. The word, 'perspectives' was powerful too because it constricted participants' ideas and enactment of critical literacy so that they didn't seek out alternative discourses.

Through CDA, participants learned. They learned to be critically literate in new ways and how to promote critical literacy learning for students and their colleagues in new ways. This study demonstrated the power of CDA for critical literacy and points the way for continued professional learning.

**APPENDIX A**
**List of Professional Reading**

Senso, O. and Marshall, E. (2011). Save the Muslim girl. *Rethinking Schools Online*, *winter 2009-2010.* Retrieved from http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/24_02/24_02.muslim.shtml

Vander Zaden, S. and Wohlwend, K. E. (2011). Paying attention to procedural texts: Critically reading school routines as embodied achievement. *Language Arts, 88: 5,* 337-345.

VanSluys, K., Lewison, M. and Seely Flint, A. (2009). Researching critical literacy. A critical study of analysis of classroom discourse. *Journal of Literacy Research, 38: 2*, 197-233.

## APPENDIX B
## Behavioral Research Informed Consent

Title of Study: Teachers' Perceptions and Realizations of Critical Literacy: Tensions and Learning through Critical Discourse Analysis

Principal Investigator (PI): *Kelly Winney*
College of Education
*519 739 3413*

**Purpose**

You are being asked to be in a research study of teachers' perceptions of critical literacy because you are a participant in the critical literacy teacher group. This study is being conducted at Wayne State University and the Greater Essex County District School Board. The estimated number of study participants to be enrolled in the focus group is about five as well as about 25 from the larger critical literacy teacher group. **Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.**

In this research study, the investigator will examine teachers' perceptions of critical literacy learning. The purposes of the study are to find out about how teachers' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy are informed when they analyze student work with critical discourse analysis and to identify how teachers perceive and negotiate tensions in their ongoing work with critical literacy.

By examining teachers' perceptions of critical literacy, this study can make a contribution to the fields of critical literacy, professional development, critical discourse analysis, and to our understanding of how teachers continue to develop their own critical literacy.

**Study Procedures**

If you agree to take part in this research study, you will be asked to allow the researcher to audio record your comments during the next four monthly critical literacy teacher group meetings.

Additionally, if you are selected as a focus group member, you will also be asked to participate in an initial 45-minute focused group interview, maintain a reflective journal of your thinking each week as it relates to the study, allow the researcher to conduct three 90-minute classroom observations in your classroom, and participate in a final 45-minute focused group interview. During the interviews, you will be asked questions related to your ideas about critical literacy, the work you do to support critical literacy and your feelings about this work.

This study will last for four months. Your identity will be protected through the use of pseudonyms in all transcripts and written reports about this study.

**Benefits**

As a participant in this research study, there may be no direct benefit for you; however, information from this study may benefit other people now or in the future.

**Risks**

There are no known risks at this time to participation in this study.

**Study Costs**

Participation in this study will be of no cost to you.

**Compensation**

You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

**Confidentiality**

All information collected about you during the course of this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. You will be identified in the research records by a code name or number. Information that identifies you personally will not be released without your written permission. However, the study sponsor, the Human Investigation Committee (HIC) at Wayne State University, or federal agencies with appropriate regulatory oversight [e.g., Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), Office of Civil Rights (OCR), etc.) may review your records.

When the results of this research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.

If audiotape recordings of you will be used for research or educational purposes, your identity will be protected or disguised. The digital recordings collected in this research study will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research study. At any time, participants may indicate that they would like a comment removed from the digital recording and the researcher will delete their comment from the recording. Only the researcher will have access to the recordings. Personal identities will be disguised with pseudonyms.

**Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in the study you can later change your mind and withdraw from the study.] You are free to only answer questions that you want to answer. You are free to withdraw from participation in this study at any time. Your decisions will not change any present or future relationship with Wayne State University or its affiliates, or other services you are entitled to receive.

The PI may stop your participation in this study without your consent. The PI will make the decision and let you know if it is not possible for you to continue. The decision that is made is to protect your health and safety, or because you did not follow the instructions to take part in the study

**Questions**

If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact Kelly Winney or one of her research team members at the following phone number (519) 739-3413. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Human Investigation Committee can be contacted at (313) 577-1628. If you are unable to contact the research staff, or if you want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also call (313) 577-1628 to ask questions or voice concerns or complaints.

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. If you choose to take part in this study you may withdraw at any time. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by signing this form. Your signature below indicates that you have read, or had read to you, this entire consent form, including the risks and benefits, and have had all of your questions answered. You will be given a copy of this consent form.

_____ _____
Signature of participant Date

_____ _____
Printed name of participant Time

_____ _____
Signature of person obtaining consent Date

_____ _____
Printed name of person obtaining consent Time

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## NOTICE OF EXPEDITED APPROVAL

**To:** Kelly Winney
College of Education

**From:** Dr. Scott Mills S. Mills / (B3)
Chairperson, Behavioral Institutional Review Board (B3)

**Date:** January 11, 2011

**RE:** HIC #: 127210B3E

Protocol Title: Teachers' Perceptions and Realizations of Critical Literacy: Tensions and Learning through Critical Discours Analysis

Funding Source:

Protocol #: 1012009185

**Expiration Date:** January 10, 2012

**Risk Level / Category:** Research not involving greater than minimal risk

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The above-referenced protocol and items listed below (if applicable) were **APPROVED** following *Expedited Review* Category ( #6 #7 )* by the Chairperson/designee for the Wayne State University Institutional Review Board (B3) for the period of 01/11/2011 through 01/10/2012. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals that may be required.

- This protocol has met all criteria at 45 CFR 46.110 and 111 for expedited review approvals.
- Informed Consent Form, dated 1/7/11

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* Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. You may receive a *"Continuation Renewal Reminder"* approximately two months prior to the expiration date; however, it is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval **before** the expiration date. Data collected during a period of lapsed approval is unapproved research and can never be reported or published as research data.
* All changes or amendments to the above-referenced protocol require review and approval by the HIC **BEFORE** implementation.
* Adverse Reactions/Unexpected Events (AR/UE) must be submitted on the appropriate form within the timeframe specified in the HIC Policy (http://www.hic.wayne.edu/hicpol.html).

**NOTE:**

1. Upon notification of an impending regulatory site visit, hold notification, and/or external audit the HIC office must be contacted immediately.
2. Forms should be downloaded from the HIC website at ***each*** use.

*Based on the Expedited Review List, revised November 1998

## APPENDIX C
## Focused Group Interview Questions

**Entrance Interview Questions**

1. How would you describe critical literacy learning?
   1.1. What are the features of critical literacy learning? (record their responses on cue cards to be used in question 1.2)
   1.2. You've listed (include their responses here) as features of critical literacy learning. Can you sort these features in a way that makes sense to you all? (Provide their responses on a single set of cue cards so the group can collaboratively organize them, dialoguing about their thinking.)
2. What do you do to promote critical literacy learning?
   2.1. Can you provide some examples of instructional strategies you have tried? Any others?
   2.2. What professional learning helps you to promote critical literacy learning? Is there anything else that helps you? Can you say some more about that?
   2.3. What else do you do to promote critical literacy learning?
3. Why do you promote critical literacy?

3.1. What do you hope to achieve? What do you mean when you say (one of their ideas that require further description)?

3.2. What is most important about this work? Why is this important?

4. How do you feel about your work with critical literacy?

4.1. What feels uncomfortable or causes tension? Can you give an example of this?

4.2. What feels good in this work? Can you give an example of this?

**Exit Interview Questions**

1. How would you describe critical literacy learning?

1.1. During the entrance interview you listed (include their responses from entrance interview here) as features of critical literacy learning. Is there anything else that you would add, delete, or change to this list now?

1.2. During the entrance interview you organized the features in this way (provide a visual of the organization from the entrance interview). Now as you reflect on the past several months of work, talk about this organization. (Have ready their responses on a single set of cue cards so the group can

collaboratively organize them, dialoguing about their thinking again).

1.3. Through the collaborative inquiry, we have had the chance to engage in critical discourse analysis. Talk about this experience and how it informs your perceptions of critical literacy learning.

2. What do you do to promote critical literacy learning?

2.1. Can you provide some examples of instructional strategies you have tried since the entrance interview? Any others?

2.2. What else do you do to promote critical literacy learning?

2.3. What professional learning experiences have helped you to promote critical literacy learning? Can you say more about this?

3. In what ways has our process for professional learning informed your thinking?

3.1. Were there aspects of the process that were particularly useful for your professional learning? How?

4. Why do you promote critical literacy?

4.1. In the entrance interview you listed the following reasons (provide a list of participants' responses

from entrance interview). Is there anything about this list you'd like to add, delete or change?

5. How do you feel about your work with critical literacy?

   5.1. What feels uncomfortable or causes tension? Can you describe an example of this?

   5.2. What feels good in this work? Can you give me an example of this?

Further clarifying questions may be asked in both interviews depending on the content of the interview discussion such as, Can you tell me more about that? What do you mean when you say _____?

## APPENDIX D
## CDA Organizer

| **Date:**<br>**Analysts:**<br><br>**Text Source:** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Questions to guide our thinking** | **Next Steps for Critical Literacy Learning**<br>What thinking do you want these students to do next? | **Next Steps for Instruction**<br>How might you orchestrate for this thinking? |
| What are the key words or phrases in this text?<br>What do the particular words mean in this context?<br><br>What are the speaker/writer's underlying assumptions and beliefs?<br>What are the simplified storylines that one must assume for this to make sense?<br>What Discourse models does this speaker/writer believe?<br><br>What are some alternative viewpoints or Discourse models that could support a critical understanding? | | |

**(revised March 2011)**

## APPENDIX E

### List of Social Issues Texts

Bambara, T. C. (2004). *Geraldine Moore: the poet*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Baylor, B. (1986). *I'm in charge of celebrations.* New York, NY: Scribner's.

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Beaumont, K. (2004). *I like myself!* Orlando, FLA: Harcourt.

Browne, A. (1998). *Voices in the park*. New York, NY: DK Publishing.

Bunting, E. (1991). *Fly away home*. New York, NY: Clarion Books.

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Levine, E. (2007). *Henry's freedom box.* New York, NY: Scholastic Press.

Morrison, T. (2004) *Remember: the journey to school integration.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co.

Rappaport, D. & Collier, B. (2001). *Martin's Big Words: the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York, NY: Hyperion Books for Children.

Seuss, Dr. (1971). *The lorax*. New York, NY: Random House.

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**ABSTRACT**

**TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND REALIZATIONS OF CRITICAL LITERACY: TENSIONS AND LEARNING THROUGH CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

by

**KELLY L. WINNEY**

**December 2012**

**Advisor: Dr. Phyllis Whitin**

**Major: Reading, Language and Literature**

**Degree: Doctor of Education**

This dissertation examines teachers' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy learning as they engaged in collaborative inquiry into their students' learning. Participants used critical discourse analysis (CDA) of student writing and student talk to uncover the ideologies at work in their classrooms. This study also investigated teachers' perceptions of tensions related to their work with critical literacy. This study extends ideas from the research literature about teachers' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy and the potential of CDA for critical literacy and professional learning.

This qualitative study was guided by ethnographic principles to understand participants' perspectives through their experiences with CDA and critical literacy learning.

The investigation involved 11 participants from the existing critical literacy teacher group of 20 teachers. A focus group of five teachers was selected from the larger group to participate in focus group interviews, classroom observations and informal interviews. Data sources included interview data, classroom observation fieldnotes, participant reflection journals, and transcripts from teacher group working sessions provided descriptive data about teachers' perceptions of their work with critical literacy across professional learning, classroom practice and personal reflections. Data were analyzed with two different methods: grounded theory and existing typologies for content analysis.

Evidence from the data suggests that through CDA, tensions emerged that led to changes in participants' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy. CDA also contributed to changes in participants' perceptions and realizations of critical literacy learning, in particular in how they recognized multiple perspectives, how they envisioned discourse in other aspects of critical literacy, and how they engaged in learning for critical literacy.

This study raises implications for the use of CDA for critical literacy and professional learning, and the use of

short texts for CDA. This study also points to the value of focusing on tensions as sites for professional learning.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Kelly L. Winney is a Teacher Consultant with a school board in Ontario, Canada. She supports literacy and numeracy programs and professional learning for elementary educators.