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“We Don’t Have Conversations Like That in the Faculty Lounge”:
Equity and Accountability in Teacher Inquiry

by

Alexis T. Martin

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Glynda Hull, Chair
Professor Evelyn Nakano Glenn
Professor Laura Sterponi

Fall 2013

“We Don’t Have Conversations Like That in the Faculty Lounge”:
Equity and Accountability in Teacher Inquiry

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Alexis T. Martin

Abstract

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Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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Professor Glynda Hull, Chair

At a time when widespread education reform is greatly affecting teachers’ daily work, this study explores the potential of social-justice focused teacher inquiry to assist educators in improving their teaching practice. The culmination of one year of data collection with a group of K-12 teachers, this study investigated: (1) the effects of a group inquiry process on teachers’ understandings of their own practice with regard to issues of equity; (2) the conditions under which the inquiry process translated into shifts in teaching practice; and (3) the ways in which institutional constraints of schooling and accountability affected teachers’ efficacy in bringing about education for social justice, and how the inquiry process affected teachers’ abilities to navigate these constraints.

This study was informed by the literatures on urban educational inequity, social reproduction theory, teacher inquiry, and multicultural pedagogy. While a significant body of scholarship has examined the outcomes of educators’ attempts to enact social justice-based pedagogies, and much research has documented impacts of the teacher inquiry process, this research combined these two arenas while also incorporating a consideration of the daily demands present in the teaching profession. This framework thus integrated the lived realities of current educators’ perspectives while simultaneously outlining the ways in which the inquiry process could serve to provide a space for agency and increased teacher self-efficacy.

This project utilized an ethnographic methodology, based on intensive participant observation and the analysis of inquiry group meetings and classroom observation fieldnotes, interview transcripts, teaching artifacts, and focus group and survey data. Findings demonstrated significant tensions between current policy demands and what teachers actually felt able to do within their daily classroom challenges. The study also illustrated current manifestations of teacher resistance and agency as related to equity and student needs. The research presents promising cases of educators negotiating the complex intersection of equity, social justice, test preparation, caring, and rigor. Findings also revealed the ways in which the

teachers worked together to share strategies and reflectively navigate constraints through a structured professional learning community. The research demonstrates that inquiry group meetings served as a beneficial space between constraints and what could be undertaken in the midst of accountability struggles.

This work informs policy considerations related to accountability mandates and teacher practice, and contributes to the literature on educational equity and teacher inquiry. Because this study is grounded in the lived realities of educator experiences, it adds to emic understandings of current teacher challenges. Moreover, this study interrupts the ubiquitous conception of teachers as beneficiaries of academy-generated knowledge and instead views them as creators of practice-based knowledge.

Lastly, this research demonstrates significant potential benefits in the implementation of teacher inquiry processes within school-based educator professional development and intellectual learning communities. This project found that with the right type of supports, teacher inquiry can inform reflective understandings of social justice, assist teachers to collaboratively transform their practice, and ultimately result in improved student achievement.

Dedication

To Grandma Frances, Mama Nona, Uncle Joe, Bud, Larry, Aunt Judy, Grandpa Paul, Sami, Boo-Boo, Zip, and everyone else who passed their wisdom and love to me. You helped me reach this accomplishment, and I miss you.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The sounds of jazz music and an espresso maker hum in the background of the café, as a group of seven educators from different schools pore over and discuss each other's pressing questions about their teaching. One teacher wants to know how she can engage her 3rd graders with a more multicultural curriculum, another asks for feedback about how to explain social justice to her middle school students, while another teacher explores how to discuss issues of socioeconomic status with her 12th grade class. As the teachers dialogue about the classroom data they have each collected, and as they work together to examine potential strategies for shifts in their pedagogy, a familiar theme emerges yet again: the teachers feel stymied by constraints relating to current accountability mandates. As they attempt collectively to negotiate these struggles, each member of the group shares insights with one another on ways to improve their teaching for equity and social justice while dealing with difficulties emerging from larger external pressures. Eventually, after a long meeting, the educators get up, exchange hugs, and continue to share ideas, goals, and feedback as they leave the café together, navigating their way through the parking lot and into the rest of their school year.

The above vignette describes one of many teacher inquiry group meetings that took place throughout the 2009-2010 school year among a group of northern California teachers and upon which this study is based. At the heart of these meetings were questions about pedagogy, equity, external accountability constraints, and the role of teacher research and learning communities in the context of professional development. Given the tensions, contradictions, and struggles with which educators presently contend, this ethnographic study provides insight into the potential of social-justice focused teacher inquiry, in the setting of a historical moment laden with widespread education reform measures that profoundly impact teachers¹. The dissertation is the culmination of one year of fieldwork with a group of teachers as they structured and carried out individual research projects examining issues of race, multicultural education, and equity in their classrooms and their teaching practice². This opportunity for educators to look deeply at their own practice- while simultaneously engaged in “teacher talk” on issues of equity in an ongoing dialogical group with their colleagues- is a form of *praxis* that may be beneficial for all teachers (Freire, 1970). Thus, this dissertation investigates the teacher inquiry process as a strategy to assist educators in transforming their pedagogy. It also examines the lived tensions and struggles that social-justice oriented teachers face in the current era of ubiquitous rhetoric and demands around accountability, leading to policies that greatly affect teachers’ daily practices.

¹ This dissertation utilizes the terms “social justice,” “equity,” and “multicultural education” interchangeably; this decision- as well as the terms themselves- will be addressed in chapter two.

² Pseudonyms are used for all people and specific places throughout this study.

Context of the Problem

Approximately 83 percent of United States teachers are White, while the 100 largest U.S. school districts educate a student population that is 63% African-American or Latino (NCES, 2011; Sable et al., 2010). A significant body of literature demonstrates that cultural conflict between teachers and students has been shown to contribute to inequitable educational outcomes, wherein students of color underperform their white peers, as documented in test scores, grades, and college attendance (Delpit, 1995, 2012; Michaels, 1981; Ogbu 1987; Philips, 1970, 1983; Valenzuela, 1999). Moreover, the “hidden curriculum” of schools remains a widespread socialization process that cues youth into their place in the racial and socioeconomic hierarchy of larger society (Apple, 1990). Much scholarship posits that subtle messages about racial difference are ubiquitous in American classrooms (Lewis, 2003; Pollack, 2004). Through everyday processes of social and cultural reproduction, schools function as powerful racializing institutions in American society, with teachers serving as social actors who can either reinforce or disrupt these processes through their own agency (Althusser, 1974; Bourdieu, 1977; Lewis, 2003).

To complicate this problem, much of the research on issues of equity and race in schools has been generated by the academy, which is problematic in that this represents one particular perspective rather than a diverse range of understandings. While a fair amount of participatory action research has been undertaken, which involves researchers working closely with participants to undertake a collaborative study (e.g., Fox, et al., 2010; Lindo & Barndt, 1985; Maguire, 1987; Powers & Allaman, 2013; Williams, 2000), there remains a lack of widespread classroom-based studies generated by teachers. Therefore, this dissertation study sought to develop transformative practitioner-focused knowledge on issues of equity and teacher practice, grounded in day-to-day lived realities and challenges emerging from constraints relating to present mandates. Much ethnographic research has demonstrated the tensions between teachers and students with regard to equity and the culturally diverse classroom (Delpit, 1995, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Noguera, 2008; Noguera & Wing, 2006; Valenzuela, 1999). Indeed, a great number of teachers may in fact be ill-equipped to develop and enact equitable pedagogies and social justice-based classrooms. However, a large number of teachers yearn to deepen their understandings of equity and race in the classroom (Ayers et al., 2008; Wiedeman, 2010). One need only look to the language used in many of today’s K-12 schools, that oftentimes describe themselves as focused on equity, social justice, and multicultural education, to see that the intention is present, even if the implementation is lacking. Nonetheless, much education research conceives of teachers as agents of social reproduction (Althusser, 1971; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Unfortunately, there is a dearth of research examining the potential of educators who attempt (in this case through a rigorous inquiry processes and peer support) to *improve* their teaching practice and to ultimately bring about more equitable classrooms. Though it is certainly useful to consider a structural lens when analyzing schools and society (Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 1988; Willis, 1977), which reveals links between student outcomes and

larger social structures, it is also vital to consider teachers as potential agents of change (Anyon, 2005; hooks, 1989; Freire, 1970). Social structures are not static nor should they be solely considered as mechanistic and deterministic; indeed, teachers have agency, and can produce acts of micro-resistance (Collins, 1990; Giroux, 1983; Gutierrez, et al., 1995). Indeed, more and more new young teachers are emerging from credential programs with strong intentions to create equitable classrooms (Achinstein, 2006; Picower, 2007). Thus, rather than producing additional research that criticizes them for not yet having all the tools to do so, this study privileges the experiences, realities, and perspectives of educators attempting to develop their teaching.

In the midst of considering teachers as potential change agents and sources of new pedagogical knowledge, fundamental challenges remain. The current context of education nationwide is in a state of upheaval; as Chapter Two will explicate, present laws and mandates relating to teacher accountability, student outcomes, evaluation, and assessment are being continually negotiated, explored, and revised in the contentious, contested terrain of education reform at the beginning of the 21st century.

Research Questions

This research was initially conceived as an examination of the ways in which teachers utilize the inquiry process to make shifts in their classroom practice as related to equity and social justice. However, after observing the extent to which pressures around accountability were so clearly a salient, pervasive component in the daily lives of the teachers in this study, it became clear that it was crucial to document these lived struggles, in conjunction with the means by which the inquiry process assisted these educators to navigate these constraints in order to teach for equity and justice.

Through a grounded theoretical and methodological approach³ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1983, 1994; Picower, 2007), this study investigated the following research questions:

- (1) When educators from culturally diverse urban schools participate in a group inquiry process, what happens to teachers' understandings of their own practice with regard to issues of equity?
- (2) When, and under what conditions, does the inquiry process translate into shifts in teaching practice?
- (3) How do the institutional constraints of schooling and accountability affect teachers' efficacy in bringing about education for social justice in this historical moment, and how does the inquiry process affect teachers' abilities to navigate these constraints?

³ This approach will be further discussed in chapter three.

Significance

On September 23, 2013, California Governor Jerry Brown signed Assembly Bill 484, ending the traditional standardized tests taken by every California student since 1999. In their place, different computer-based tests will be developed based on the Common Core, a new set of national curriculum standards. These events transpired even in the face of threats from the federal government to revoke California's education funding. Further, on a national level education policy is also in great flux, as incentives, funding, mandates, and enforcement go through multiple changes while various reformers continually attempt to shift policies surrounding teacher and student evaluation and accountability (McNeil, 2013). These shifts continually impact classroom teachers, and- as this study will show- particularly impact the efficacy of educators attempting to improve their teaching practice in order to work for social justice and equitable outcomes.

Hence, this dissertation seeks to inform these current nationwide policy shifts. While a fair amount of research on high-stakes accountability policy has occurred (Christensen, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Gunzenhauser, 2008; Ingersoll, 2003; Ravitch; 2010; Rothstein, et al., 2008), little ethnographic research exists that closely documents the day-to-day lived experiences of teachers navigating these mandates. Moreover, this study complements previous scholarship on teacher inquiry, social justice teaching, and multicultural pedagogy. Ultimately this work contributes to research on conditions around which educators may develop more nuanced understandings of equity issues in their teaching practice.

Furthermore, this study posits that teachers can be social actors capable of effecting change rather than solely cogs in a traditionally mechanistic and deterministic social reproduction analysis (Giroux, 1983). Unlike other works on multicultural education that disparage teachers as reproducers of the status quo, this research focuses on what *can* be. Moreover, this study disrupts the notion of teachers as *recipients* of top-down university-generated knowledge and instead considers them *producers* of practitioner-created knowledge, grounded in lived realities and everyday challenges (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001). As this dissertation will demonstrate, teachers can *construct* knowledge on equity issues in the classroom, rather than solely *consume* knowledge from university researchers. This conception "assumes teachers generate valuable knowledge from critically studying the phenomena of their own teaching practices, students, and classroom settings" (Stokes, 1999, p. 4). Thus, this dissertation explores how teachers can powerfully dialogue about issues of multicultural education and equity in an open format with their colleagues, specifically through ongoing group consultations on their structured classroom-based research projects that attempt to address these issues as related to practice.

Not only does this project inform current discourse around accountability policy, it also contributes to research on equity-focused group inquiry as potential in-school professional development. The research sheds light on this type of support process for teachers who want to complicate and increase their understandings and practices of multicultural pedagogy and educational equity, particularly in a context of external constraints. Most importantly, because this work is grounded in

practitioner-centered knowledge and the lived realities of everyday teacher experience, it contributes to emic perspectives on issues of equity in the classroom. Ultimately, the study has relevance for practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and teacher educators.

Outline of Dissertation Chapters

This introductory chapter has explored the problem, context, and significance of the dissertation. Chapter Two provides a theoretical framework and a review of related literature. Chapter Three describes the methodological procedures of the research and presents background information on the study participants and inquiry group. Chapter Four examines demands of the teaching profession in this historical moment, including day-to-day pressures and challenges. Chapter Five, which focuses on the inquiry meetings and key participants' classrooms, describes current practices of social justice teaching in the era of accountability and testing. Chapter Six investigates teacher inquiry for equity, including the tensions of undertaking inquiry while negotiating outside constraints, and explores the potential of the inquiry process for assisting teachers to navigate these pressures. Chapter Seven provides a summary of the study findings and recommendations for practice, as well as study limitations and areas for further research.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Review of the Literature

This study is informed by four areas of scholarship: 1) urban educational inequity, 2) social reproduction and agency, 3) multicultural and critical social justice pedagogy, and 4) teacher inquiry. The literature of urban education inequity provides a context for the study and illustrates present teaching challenges. Social reproduction theory frames a larger background for the study, in exploring notions of educators as social actors attempting to enact resistance and agency. Research on multicultural and critical social justice pedagogy demonstrate the aims and goals held by the study teachers. Theories of teacher inquiry provide the tools utilized by teachers as they grappled with acts of agency in their practice.

Urban Educational Inequity

This research draws upon the scholarship of urban educational inequity in order to contextualize the conditions in which the educators in the study were teaching. The literature of urban education and educational inequity examines the material circumstances, social structures, and school mechanisms that construct and result in disparate education outcomes for children of diverse racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This scholarship explores issues of achievement, culture, resource allocation, education policy, and opportunity in order to understand the circumstances contributing to racial and class inequalities in the U.S. public school system. A majority of this research places teachers at the center of these debates; hence, the literature of urban educational inequity informs the goal held by the teachers in this study to increase equitable outcomes. Working from the individual student outward all the way to federal policies, this section will examine the key literature that contributes to understandings of urban educational inequity.

The Achievement/Opportunity Gap

At the individual student level, inequitable outcomes in achievement were historically theorized, beginning in the 1960's, by deficit perspectives wherein differences in academic attainment were attributed to biological inheritance of IQ's through genetics or to "cultural deficits" such as nonstandard English or a "culture of poverty"; the proposed solution was exposure to White middle class culture (Herrnstein, 1994; Jensen, 1969; Lewis, 1959). This tradition of scholarship was debunked by a series of arguments, detailed below, that looked to schools as the source of deprivation, rather than blaming students and families.

Ogbu (1987) argued that the culture and identity of students he termed "involuntary minorities" (who were historically brought to the United States against their will or were colonized) stand in opposition to the nature of American schooling and teaching, unlike "voluntary minorities" (those who immigrated to the United States for greater opportunity), who may view schooling as a pathway to success. Ogbu asserted that involuntary minority students' attainment is lower than that of their peers due to this mismatch. Ogbu and Fordham (1986) maintained involuntary minorities hold an oppositional frame of reference about schools, and

develop “oppositional identities” against the language, culture, rules of behavior, and social identity of the dominant White culture that controls the public schools. This oppositional framework causes involuntary minority students to reject dominant beliefs, including the idea of education as a route to social mobility. On the other hand, voluntary minorities were thought to attain higher achievement due to their belief in education as a pathway to success. Ogbu and Fordham argued that voluntary minorities see cultural differences as barriers to be overcome in order to succeed in schools and employment, rather than as threatening to their own culture, language, and identity as in the case of involuntary minorities.

Ogbu’s work was very influential at the time it was written, as it contributed to theoretical conversations around the nature of culture and identity being in contrast with school culture. However, Ogbu’s seminal study was critiqued for being incomplete and not allowing for individual differences, by not taking into account those students who are both oppositional and high achieving, as well as for replicating previous “culture of poverty” arguments to a certain extent. For example, Noguera (2003) argues that Ogbu fails to take into account students who find ways to avoid choosing between academic success and their racial identity. Much recent research demonstrates high-achieving students of color can succeed in school and simultaneously feel racial pride by adopting multiple identities (Carter, 2005; Conchas, 2006; Noguera, 2003, 2008). Carter (2005) contends that students can be “cultural straddlers,” in that they are able to both anticipate teacher expectations and also preserve a strong racial identity. Carter asserts solutions to the achievement gap lie in shifts in school power relationships, rethinking testing and grouping practices, infusing culturally relevant pedagogy, and changing institutional norms.

While historically, cultural theories of achievement located the source of inequitable outcomes within students rather than educational institutions, currently researchers are looking to the organizational, structural, and cultural make up of schools as the source of achievement gaps (Delpit, 1995, 2012; Noguera & Wing, 2006; Olsen, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999). Moreover, this “achievement” gap has been recently reconceived as an “opportunity gap” or an “education debt” which places the onus on school structures reinforcing privilege, and on larger structural inequities, rather than individual students (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Ravitch, 2012).

Cultural Conflict and The Hidden Classroom Curriculum

A significant body of research cites cultural conflicts between teachers and students as a key factor in the source of inequitable educational outcomes (Anyon, 2005; Delpit, 1995, 2012; Lewis, 2003; Olson, 1997; Pollock, 2004; Valenzuela, 1999). Researchers argue that the racial makeup of the United States teaching force, which is 83% White, and the lack of specific approaches to address cultural differences, contributes to achievement disparities for students of color (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2000). According to this body of literature, achievement disparities can be linked to alienating experiences with teachers (Valenzuela, 1997), cultural disconnect in language and interaction style between teachers and students (Delpit, 1995; Olsen, 1997), and colorblind ideologies wherein teachers

unintentionally reinforce racist practices by ignoring the material circumstances of a racialized society (Lewis, 2003; Pollock, 2004).

Delpit (1996) proposes the notion of cultural conflicts in the classroom, arguing that issues of power are played out in classrooms, and that there is a “culture of power” wherein particular unwritten rules, or “codes of power,” which reflect the dominant culture, are enacted. Delpit advocated for explicitly teaching these codes of power to students of color so that they can succeed in the culture of power. Delpit asserts that teachers should value expressions of language and allow students to work and write in their own dialects in school, but also make sure students know how to speak in a Standard English dialect, what Delpit coins the “language of power.”

Valenzuela’s (1999) influential research on caring in the classroom provides an analysis of cultural disconnections in schools, which therefore “subtract” from students’ experiences and contribute to lowered achievement. Valenzuela’s ethnography of a predominately Mexican-American high school posits that schools subtract resources from students through a lack of authentic caring (in teaching concepts but not prioritizing relationships between teacher and students) and through assimilationist policies and practices that diminish students’ culture and language. Valenzuela argues that students therefore experience schools as “uncaring” and alienating, hence producing lower achievement outcomes. Valenzuela proposes schools should instead establish “additive schooling,” wherein students are assimilated through a bicultural process and a maintenance of community and through dual language instruction.

Similarly, Olsen (1997) describes an Americanization process in schools that marginalizes immigrant students and discourages development of their home language. Olsen’s ethnography describes teachers who felt no need to “accommodate” these students and resisted becoming trained in second language acquisition. Teachers in this study reinforced their belief that school is a meritocracy, but most of the students were not getting sufficient preparation for academic success. Furthermore, in the tradition of Delpit, Olsen documents specific cultural clashes wherein White, middle-class styles of interaction are considered the only acceptable mode of school interaction.

Lewis (2003) builds upon these theories of cultural conflict in proposing a framework for thinking about how so many White teachers describe themselves as “colorblind,” and for whom colorblindness is something to strive toward in one’s teaching. Lewis asserts that while schools don’t explicitly “teach” racial identity, they serve as a setting wherein students come to understand the current “rules” of racial classification. Teachers either affirm or challenge previous racial attitudes and understandings, and through pervasive colorblind ideologies many educators unintentionally reinforce racist teaching practices. Lewis argues that language patterns, cultural capital, and communication issues play a major part in student-teacher interactions. As a result, race is constructed and negotiated in the lived experiences of students attending schools.

In addition to race, language, and culture, research also points to socioeconomic status as a source of teacher-student classroom conflict. Lareau (2005) posits that unlike working-class families, middle-class families have a

particular child-rearing logic that contributes to certain types of cultural capital, student feelings of entitlement, and students learning how to navigate the “rules of power.” As a result, children from working-class families experience more constraint around schools and are less likely to advocate for themselves. Similar to Delpit’s arguments, Lareau places importance on the need for students to learn to navigate particular patterns of power in schools in order to succeed.

Weinstein (2002) sees a different type of student-teacher conflict as fundamental in student achievement; Weinstein asserts low expectations from teachers are a key factor in disparate outcomes. Fleeting comments made by educators can take on profound significance in the minds of young learners, creating barriers to achievement. Children rely on these clues to develop their ideas about their place in the classroom achievement hierarchy. According to Weinstein, changing these outcomes requires interventions that transform teachers’ expectations.

The concept of a “hidden curriculum,” which subtly instructs students on the social order of school and society, mirrors the above theories with regard to various forms of classroom ideologies. A hidden curriculum refers to implicit messages about race, class, and gender in classrooms, an unspoken set of rules that “teaches” students about social hierarchies. Noguera (2008) argues the hidden curriculum affects students’ identity formation in that children learn about race even when teachers do not explicitly talk about race and racial issues. In other words, “descriptions, discussions, and representations in textbooks, curriculum materials, course content, and social relations embodied in classroom practices benefit dominant groups and exclude subordinate ones” (McLaren, 1995, p. 191). Particular concepts of legitimate culture and values tacitly enter into curriculum and are presented as universal (Apple, 1990). McCutcheon (1997) posits that students receive messages about people of color through this hidden curriculum, with respect to teacher actions, textbooks, or everyday school practices. When the hidden curriculum is fully acknowledged by the teacher, however, students and educators together can potentially begin the process of challenging and resisting it.

School Structures and Mechanisms

At the school level, researchers propose that a number of school mechanisms and structures construct failure or achievement for certain groups of students. A significant body of scholarship has examined the ways in which school practices produce lower academic outcomes for low-income students and students of color. These practices tend to be subtle, complex, and deeply ingrained.

In looking at the organization of schools, Noguera and Wing (2006) find that gatekeeping courses and master schedules operate as sorting mechanisms. School practices isolate and separate children on the basis of race, class, and gender; this sends important messages that impact identity construction (Noguera, 2008).

Certain school structures reinforce patterns of disadvantage or privilege, and students lacking in social, cultural, or economic capital in order to successfully navigate these structures may end up with inequitable academic outcomes.

Key to the discussion of sorting mechanisms in schools is the literature that examines the common practice of tracking and ability grouping. Defined as the process by which students are divided and sorted into class assignments, tracking has had consistently negative effects on students of color and low-income students (Noguera & Wing, 2006; Oakes, 1985). Specifically, effects of tracking on graduation and college preparedness impacts students' long-term educational outcomes and attainment. This is greatly manifested in the debate over 8th grade Algebra, considered a "gatekeeper subject" in determining high school schedules and advanced coursework (Moses & Cobb, 2002). In general, despite ability, students of color and low-income students are more likely to be tracked into lower level classes, and subsequently are less likely to be enrolled in advanced coursework.

Oakes' (1985) pivotal work on tracking, which has been greatly utilized and built upon in recent decades, examines the harmful effects and unequal practices produced by tracking. Oakes finds that high-track students, who are overwhelmingly white and affluent, are taught "how to learn" through lessons on critical reasoning and mathematical ideas. Oakes posits teachers in high-track classes spend more time on instruction and have higher expectations, whereas in low-track class, which are overwhelmingly comprised of low-income students of color, students are taught "how to shut up" (e.g. worksheets and repeated mathematical procedures). These classes tend to place less emphasis on the development of inquiry, problem solving skills, and active engagement in learning. Oakes also finds students' self-perceptions and aspirations in low-track classes to be tempered, as students develop low-achieving identities. Furthermore, Oakes asserts that students tend to stay in the same track from 6th grade onward, and that the decision makers regarding course selection are counselors and teachers rather than students and parents. Similarly, present groupings based on language also serve to keep students apart and helps construct racial and cultural boundaries between students (Noguera, 2008). While some time has gone by since Oakes' original study, much follow-up research has documented that these practices are still pervasive (Noguera & Wing, 2006; Rubin, 2008; Watanabe, 2007), producing comparable disparate academic outcomes.

Discipline has been proposed by scholars as another school-based mechanism responsible for inequitable consequences. As an early means of social control, schools used discipline to create "docile bodies" (Bowles & Gintis, 1975; Noguera, 2008). Current disparities in discipline reflect a widely accepted "normalization of failure" (Noguera, 2006, 2008), in which there is an expectation that specific subsets of students will consistently become troublemakers. This norm ignores larger structural problems and instead looks at individual problem behaviors. However, certain school structures contribute to behaviors that can be labeled as defiant (Noguera, 2006, 2008.). Responsible for countless missed hours of school time, inequitable disciplinary outcomes have a particularly great impact on African-American males (Ferguson, 2000; Noguera, 2008). Decades of research demonstrate that students of color are disproportionately disciplined in school (Noguera, 1995; HCRP, 2000; Skiba et al., 2000). These disparities in discipline serve to reify inequitable academic outcomes.

Hence, schools are theorized as contested territory in struggle with whether they will serve the democratizing purpose of inclusion or serve as institutions that reproduce current socioeconomic, racial, and language relations. However, though much of the literature on school mechanisms privileges the position of school in young peoples' lives, in reality school is just one of many structures, processes, and networks that young people negotiate on a daily basis.

Accountability and Testing-Based School Reform Policies

Students, teachers, and communities are greatly impacted by ever-changing local, state, and federal school reform policies. While it is beyond the scope of this study to analyze the vast impact of present-day education policies, it is important to briefly contextualize the ways in which urban educational inequity has been theorized to be a result of these recent policy shifts. The predominant stance of many school reformers is that in today's era of high-stakes accountability⁴, improved education can be linked to high scores on standardized tests. However, much literature points to standardized testing, which is a core required component of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act, as being rooted in racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic biases. Though the exact form NCLB will take going forward is presently under debate⁵, and many states have recently been granted two-year waivers of NCLB requirements⁶, standardized testing is nonetheless still considered the universal foundation for measuring student achievement. This is problematic for underserved students and underresourced schools, as it can contribute further to urban educational inequity. Many researchers assert standardized tests measure "not what students were taught in school, but rather what these students brought to school...because students' scores on most of today's accountability tests are heavily dependent on students' inherited academic aptitudes and what a child has learned outside of school as a function of the child's socioeconomic status...The use of inappropriate accountability tests frequently fosters classroom practices that harm children" (Popham, 2004, p. 167).

One of the most well-known opponents to the emphasis on testing is education scholar Diane Ravitch, due to her profound theoretical shift from being a vocal proponent of these policies to later radically transforming her perspective. While she previously believed that "testing would shine a spotlight on low-performing schools" (2010, p. 3), she came to understand that testing has "become a central occupation in the schools and is not just a measure but an end to itself" (p. 12). Furthermore, she asserts, these reforms that she had once supported "had

⁴ High-stakes accountability refers to state and federal scrutiny of student achievement through standardized testing, with the threat of penalties for schools and districts that do not meet certain performance benchmarks.

⁵ NCLB has been up for reauthorization since 2007. In the meantime, the Obama administration granted competitive Race to the Top education funding to states that promise school reforms, and several NCLB rewrites have been recently proposed in Congress.

⁶ Approximately 40 states have applied for and been granted two-year NCLB waivers, which will allow for more state control over measurement of proficiency levels and a more flexible timeline for meeting annual performance targets.

everything to do with structural changes and accountability, and nothing to do with the substance of learning” (p. 16), because “test scores became an obsession...test-taking skills and strategies took precedence over knowledge” (p. 107). In terms of equity, Ravitch maintains “in urban schools, where there are many low-performing students, drill and practice became a significant part of the daily routine” (2010., p. 107). This argument is echoed by a significant number of researchers, who assert that an emphasis on standardized testing leads to one-size-fits-all teaching with a focus on test preparation rather than high-quality education (Guisbond & Neill, 2004), and that this form of accountability cannot demonstrate whether schools are performing satisfactorily (Rothstein, et al, 2008), doesn’t best serve English Language Learners (Collier & Thomas, 2010), leads to students internalizing failure and questioning their abilities (Christensen, 2012), discourages teacher agency (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006), and leads to a “de-skilling” of the teaching profession (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

These testing-based reform policies, while emerging from positive intentions for students, have nevertheless been greatly debated as contested experiments in struggles over control, equity, and ideological positions, and much research illustrates their negative impacts. As illustrated in this study, the outcomes of these decisions greatly impact schools, students, teachers, and communities.

Myth of Meritocracy

The ubiquitous notion of schools as a meritocracy plays a fundamental role in the reproduction of urban education inequities. The myth of meritocracy is the foundation for education reform policy, macro-economic policies, and decisions about school structures and mechanisms such as sorting and testing. Historically, the concept of American public schooling as the “great equalizer” began in the 1830’s with Horace Mann’s push for “common schools” that would theoretically give all students, regardless of income and background, access to education and hence, a chance at the American Dream (Oakes & Lipton, 2003). The idea, which has persisted to this day, that American society is open, fair, and full of opportunity, is pervasive among educators and school reformers, and sees individual success based on one’s merit. Outcomes in attainment are viewed as being due to differences in ambition and ability, and individuals are believed to have attained their social and economic status- regardless of the fact that most Americans wind up in similar positions as their parents, and socioeconomic status is reproduced from one generation to the next. This is deeply problematic in that this notion of a meritocracy emphasizes the individual, and de-emphasizes the responsibilities of school and society. In other words, low-income individuals are poor because they did not do well enough in school and have not “earned” the right to obtain greater status and wealth (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Reformers may look to Barack Obama or other individual success stories in order to claim the U.S. is in a “post-race” society or that, in the tradition of Horatio Alger, students can simply lift themselves up by their bootstraps, but the reality is that for every individual success story, there are in fact thousands of low income students- predominately students of color- who are struggling against structural and institutional inequities in the face of a myth of

meritocracy that claims if they just work hard enough, they can theoretically succeed. This belief therefore rationalizes and justifies racial and class inequity, as well as educational disparities, by attributing outcomes to personal success or failure rather than larger social structures (Chang & Au, 2007).

Macro-Economic Processes and Resource Allocation

School funding and macro-economic processes also greatly contribute to urban educational inequities. With fewer resources, under-served schools and communities are at the receiving end of decisions and policies that drastically affect them, ranging from debates about property taxes and local control for schools, to per-pupil spending differences between affluent districts and more marginalized districts. These urban school funding issues are the result of the exodus of affluent people from cities after the Great Depression (Anyon, 1997, 2005). Oftentimes current school funding policy leaves school districts that have the largest concentration of low-income students with substantially less per-pupil spending and fewer resources to allocate to student learning than wealthier districts (Darling-Hammond, 2004). One of the consequences of this funding divide is great disparity in availability of advanced coursework, technology, facilities, and teacher expertise. For example, teachers in schools serving the highest percentages of students in poverty are more likely to report that facilities are a major challenge (WestEd, 2011). Kozol's well-known work on educational inequities resulting from unequal distribution of funds, "condemning children to unequal lives," demonstrates the extent to which school finance reform remains a vital component of conversations around urban educational equity (1992, 2005).

Anyon (1997, 2005) asserts economic and political systems must be more effective, otherwise long-lasting change won't happen in urban schools. Anyon's key assertion is that broader economic reforms are needed before school reform will be profoundly transformative, and that until larger economic issues are addressed, school reform efforts will be unsuccessful at helping create equity in larger society (Anyon, 1997, 2005). However, a significant number of scholars contend that even in the midst of under-resourced schools and communities, teachers can still be active agents of social change through transformative classroom practice (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1989; Nieto, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999). The notion of teachers as social actors capable of change is fundamental in the chapters that follow.

Social Reproduction and Teacher Agency

This study relies on the concept of educators as social actors attempting to enact resistance and agency within a larger socially reproductive context. Education scholars often look to the various iterations of social reproduction theory in order to explain how schools contribute to the reproduction of inequality. Furthermore, "social reproduction theory explains how societal institutions perpetuate the social relationships and attitudes needed to sustain the existing relations of production in society" (MacLeod, 1995, p. 9). These theories also investigate how structures and

institutions distribute people into a hierarchical social order, and how these inequities are reproduced from one generation to the next.

Althusser (1971) asserted schools serve to perpetuate inequality and the interests of the ruling class, positing the concept of the “ideological state apparatus” (ISA), wherein the state provides the means for the ruling class to maintain power through ideological repression. As an ISA, the school teaches “a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology...so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class” (1971, p. 132). It, like other state apparatuses, “teaches know-how, but in forms which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology” (p. 133). Althusser argued for “structural causality”, in which social structures determine human outcomes. He maintained that “ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of life” (Morrow & Torres, 1995, p. 148). In other words, there is limited possibility for individual autonomy, as subjectivity is determined by ideology.

Building off this idea of schools as institutions that imbue individuals with particular ideologies, Bowles and Gintis (1976) argued for a theory of correspondence between schools and the labor demands of capitalism, contending schools function in ways that mirror the division of labor and class stratification. Dominant classes, according to Bowles and Gintis (1976), hold two objectives for the education system: “the production of labor power and the reproduction of those institution and social relationships which facilitate the translation of labor power into profits” (p. 129). Specifically, similarities can be seen in: the organization of power and authority in schools and workplaces; the role of rewards in schools and wages in workplaces; the student and worker lack of control; and the competition among students as well as that of workers. For example, the organization of power and authority in schools is similar to that of the workplace, in that students and workers are trained to be docile and submit to authority. However, Bowles and Gintis contend this occurs more frequently with students of lower socioeconomic status, as they are being prepared to become workers, while children of the affluent class are given looser supervision and are allowed to make more independent decisions, which in turn teaches them to be supervisors in the workplace. Schools in working class neighborhood were proposed as being more regimented, emphasizing rules and behavioral control, while suburban schools offer open classrooms with more student participation. Bowles and Gintis also looked to the role of grades in schools as mirroring the role of wages in the workplace, wherein they both serve as external motivators. Throughout this corresponding process, students are introduced into roles necessary for the workplace, and are socialized to occupy same position in class structure as their parents.

Bourdieu (1985) introduced culture as significant in this reproduction process through his theory of “cultural capital”, which “represents ways of talking, acting, and socializing, as well as language practices, values, and styles of dress and behavior” (McLaren, 1988, p. 198), or is the general cultural background, knowledge, disposition, and skills that are passed from one generation to the next. As argued by Bourdieu (1985),

Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the *embodied* state, i.e., in the

form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified* state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the *institutionalized* state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee... The notion of cultural capital initially presented itself...as a theoretical hypothesis which made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes by relating academic success...to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes (p. 84).

Through the school-based mechanisms and processes outlined in the previous sections, schools translate these social distinctions into academic success. In other words, “only these characteristics and practices of the dominant paradigm will facilitate academic achievement within mainstream schools that reflect the dominant exclusionary ideology” (Giroux, 1983, p. 218). Cultural capital is “inherited” by way of the socioeconomic status of one’s family. Therefore, children of the dominant class inherit different cultural capital than do working-class children (Giroux, 1983). Bourdieu asserts there is an unequal distribution of cultural capital, and the education system reinforces rather than redistributes it (1977). Cultural capital also has ‘symbolic value’ that marks a person’s higher social standing. In other words, “only these characteristics and practices of the dominant paradigm will facilitate academic achievement within mainstream schools that reflect the dominant exclusionary ideology” (Giroux, 1983, p. 218). The symbolic value of cultural capital can be used to attain advanced academic credentials, which in turn allow social privileges and power. Because one’s cultural capital eventually translates into economic capital, schools, according to Bourdieu, can be implicated in the perpetuation of inequities (1977). Bourdieu asserts education “contributes to the maintenance of an inegalitarian social system by allowing inherited cultural differences to shape academic achievement and occupational attainment” (Swartz, 1997, p. 190). Furthermore, Bourdieu argues schools reinforce the idea that the cultural capital needed to excel is universal and available to everyone. However, according to Bourdieu, in reality it is students from the affluent classes that have access to this cultural capital. Because schools require knowledge of the dominant forms of culture in order to achieve academic success, marginalized students will more likely have unequal outcomes.

These theories of social reproduction were originally used as lenses for contributing to understandings of how schools play a part in the perpetuation of societal inequalities. However, in recent decades, responses arose that are critical of these frameworks for multiple reasons. Apple (1982) and Giroux (1983) assert these theories are too rigid and deterministic, giving no place for agency, change, contradiction, or resistance. Giroux (1983) argues, “each approach has failed to develop a theory of schooling that dialectically links structure and human agency” (p. 75). These models do not account for the power of individuals to make choices, and rarely allow consideration of schools as potential spaces for opposition to

dominant practices. Notions of deterministic reproduction reinforce the idea that there is little educators or students can do to change their circumstances. Apple (1990) argues that students and teachers frequently reinterpret and reject dominant social structures. For that reason, “schools need to be seen in a more complex manner than simple reproduction” (p. 13). Willis (1977) demonstrates social reproduction as embedded in the lives of real people and, through the notion of cultural production, adds agency to these other more deterministic theories. Apple (1990) argues that individuals frequently reinterpret and reject dominant social structures; for this reason, “schools need to be seen in a more complex manner than simple reproduction” (p. 13). Acts of micro-resistance (many of which described in the following chapters) contradict the concepts of reproduction and hegemony (Collins, 1990). Structure, culture, and agency all play their part in both the reproduction and the disruption of inequity. The following chapters are informed by the notion that even within socially reproductive structures such as schools, teachers are in fact capable of working towards becoming change-agents.

Multicultural and Critical Social Justice Pedagogy

In her review of the various perspectives and theoretical orientations that constitute the multiple definitions of “social justice education,” North (2008) describes undertaking an ERIC and Amazon.com search of published scholarship with the words “social justice education” in the title, which ultimately produced over 2,000 sources. Part of the reason for the vast number of citations, North argues, is that social justice education “has been associated with different beliefs, practices, and policies across time” (p. 1883). Furthermore,

It becomes clear that social justice can and does encompass a wide range of educational objectives, procedures, and processes... Educational scholars continue to use additional terms to describe their work for positive social transformation. These educators and researchers, many of whom are associated with multicultural education, democratic education, critical race theory, critical pedagogy, postmodernism, feminisms (e.g., feminist poststructuralism), (dis)ability studies, postcolonialism, and/or queer theory, promote “radical structuralism,” “democratic citizenship,” “antiracism,” “anti-imperialism,” and “antioppression,” to name just a few... In short, a critical examination of the current literature on social justice education can bring into relief the strengths and weaknesses of *various educational approaches aimed at eliminating, or at least diminishing, the pervasive social inequality in U.S. institutions and the larger world* (North, 2008, p. 1184, emphasis added).

Picower (2012) describes the extent to which the term social justice education is interchangeable with similar concepts including critical pedagogy, multicultural education, and culturally relevant teaching. Picower argues “there are many ways to center on issues of equity, access, power, and oppression” (2012, p. 4).

This dissertation therefore utilizes the term social justice education

interchangeably with terms such as multicultural education, critical pedagogy, or culturally relevant teaching, all of which fall under the umbrella of the above argued “educational approaches aimed at eliminating, or at least diminishing, the pervasive social inequality in U.S. institutions and the larger world” (North, 2008, p. 1184). My study draws upon the arguments of seminal works by this segment of education researchers, who generally theorize there are various levels of teachers’ conceptions around race and culture (Banks, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2000). This continuum begins at one end with a “colorblind” approach, wherein teachers argue they do not need to acknowledge their students’ race, since they see “people, not colors” (Lewis, 2003; Pollack, 2004). This is problematic in that it ignores the material circumstances of a racialized society. Then, moving towards a “heroes and holidays” approach, teachers may begin injecting multiculturalism into the curriculum through an additive and superficial practice, resulting in students becoming aware of various foods, holidays, and accomplishments of individuals from diverse backgrounds (Sleeter, 1996). This stance is also problematic, as it does not address unequal power relations present in schools and society, thus severely limiting substantive change. Instead of an add-on approach, multicultural education has more recently been theorized as a broad system of teaching and learning that works at critically understanding society. Ultimately, multicultural educators working for social justice must take a critical position in explicitly uncovering historical and present-day inequities as they exist in classrooms and broader structures, connecting education with broader political issues (Sleeter, 1996). Banks (1999) and Nieto (2000) argue for curriculum *transformation* rather than curriculum *infusion*, as well as a social action teaching approach in which students address relevant community issues as a fundamental component of their schooling.

Ladson-Billings (1995) argues for a “culturally relevant pedagogy” rather than the “culturally assimilationist” pedagogy common to many classrooms. Research has demonstrated culturally relevant approaches to teaching diverse populations of students (Delpit, 1995, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2000; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Pollack, 2008; Teel & Obidah, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999) as a promising practice for closing achievement gaps (NEA, 2007; California P-16 Council, 2008). Culturally relevant pedagogy is based on the principle that if learning is grounded in a cultural context that is familiar to students, there is a greater potential for increased achievement (Allen & Boykin, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1992). A large body of literature argues that cultural discontinuity between home culture and school context negatively affects student outcomes (Allen & Boykin, 1992; Au, 1980; Irvine, 1991; Philips, 1970). When young people enter school, they may encounter new forms of socialization and language usage (Farr, et al., 2005); culturally relevant pedagogy therefore aims to utilize cultural referents in order to impart knowledge and skills. Culturally relevant pedagogy assumes that when academic knowledge is situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, it is more meaningful, promotes greater interest, and is learned more easily and thoroughly (Gay, 2000). Ladson-Billings’ framework outlines three tenets as critical to successful outcomes: (1) Students must experience academic success, (2) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence, and (3) students must develop a critical consciousness through which

they challenge the status quo of the current social order (1995).

This mode of teaching places the perspectives and experiences of diverse students at the forefront, and it emphasizes an authentically caring rapport between teacher and student (Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999). Furthermore, it bridges home/school discourse and linguistic forms (Lee, 1995) and affirms cultural identity in pedagogical style (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Curriculum that is culturally relevant and social justice-based also recognizes and challenges inequity (Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Tate, 1995) and constructs conditions for students to have a thoughtful analysis of society and community issues.

Similarly, Delpit (1996, 2012) maintains that if educators, regardless of their race, class, or culture, truly wish to transform the circumstances for “other people’s children,” then their pedagogy must reflect several key features. First, teachers must not only recognize, but also purposefully incorporate dominant cultural and linguistic “codes” into the curriculum. Second, they must honor the prior knowledge and experiences each student brings, and use this knowledge to build new structures. Giroux (1983) echoes this notion, positing, “a pedagogy of student experience must be linked to the notion of learning for empowerment...curriculum practices must be developed that draw upon student experiences and both a narrative for agency and a referent for critique” (p. 149). Third, educators must recognize and challenge societal inequity. They must name and openly discuss the ways that everything from school to media reproduces privilege and inequity. The teachers in the following chapters oftentimes attempted to enact these particular pedagogical strategies.

Social justice educators tend to see schooling as a cultural and political activity, deeply rooted in historical context, which must be analyzed in terms of race, class, and gender. These kinds of theories emerged to critique assumptions of schools as meritocratic, and utilize a structural analysis as a means of understanding differences in outcomes, rather than an analysis based on deficit. Morell and Duncan-Andrade (2008) posit that teachers must create a collective text of student experiences in understanding problems in social contexts. Thus, teachers must be seen as agents who, through their own micro-level practice, can effect social change at various levels (Nieto, 2000; Sleeter, 1996). Anyon (2005) expands on this concept, contending schools should be the center of struggles for democratic change, and in order to create more equitable public policies educators must organize social movements that include teachers, students, parents, schools, and community members.

At a basic level, however, social justice teaching in practice can in fact simply be providing students with the tools to achieve in a traditionally low-achieving school, and creating richer learning environments and instruction to bring about educational success for higher numbers of underserved students (Morell & Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Sleeter, 1996). Picower (2012) describes the context in which current educators who wish to teach for social transformation contend with barriers that cause “teaching in a state of fear,” such as mandated curriculum and standardized testing (p. 56). Researchers must take into consideration these lived daily struggles of K-12 educators attempting to teach for social justice (North, 2008). That is, in attempting to define teaching for social justice, scholars must

remember that “critical theorists think teachers should be doing all manner of things, but most teachers are just trying to survive the school day. The changes that these teachers make in their curriculum, in their pedagogy, and in their interactions with students and their families represent real change and may be all that is possible in REAL classrooms” (Ladson-Billings, 2004, p. xiv). Teachers in the following chapters often believed that making those types of changes, and assisting their students to successfully achieve, are in themselves forms of social justice pedagogy- ones that are realistic and sustainable given current constraints.

The Practice and Potential of Teacher Inquiry

My research is additionally informed by the literature examining teacher inquiry processes and outcomes. As explicated in the previous chapter, *teacher inquiry*- also known as *teacher research*- is defined as a combination of individual research projects alongside ongoing reflective group dialogue. It is “a collaborative process by which teachers themselves critically examine their classrooms, develop and implement educational interventions, and evaluate the effectiveness of those interventions” (Henson, 2001, p. 819). When teachers engage in inquiry, they do so from the “inside,” using their own practice as the focus for their study. They pose a question, systematically collect and analyze data about the question, draw conclusions, and present their findings to peers for ongoing feedback (Brandes & Kelly, 2004). Teachers doing research in this manner are engaged in an intentional ongoing interrogation of their own practice. This inquiry “provides teachers with a method for viewing their professional decisions systematically and deciding on them rationally...it is a model that guides the teacher in improving his or her teaching strategies” (Parsons & Brown, 2002, p. 6). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) argue that the inquiry process has the potential to provide support for all teachers, stating, “teachers and students who take an inquiry stance...generate local knowledge, envision and theorize their practice, and interpret the theory and research of others” (p. 288). Teacher inquiry groups allow for teachers of differing experience levels to offer vital practical expertise to one another (Levin & Rock, 2003). Teacher research has also been defined as “inquiry that is intentional, systematic, public, voluntary, ethical, and contextual” (MacLean & Mohr, 1999). Hubbard and Power (1999) argue the two fundamental principles that define teacher as researcher are: (1) Teacher research is based upon close observation of students at work, and (2) Teacher-researchers depend upon a research community. Teacher research is initiated and carried out inside classrooms and schools, and is a “significant new contribution to research on teaching...and a source of systemic reform” (Hubbard & Power, 1999, p. 2). Thus, in this process, teachers ideally are given a space for development, reflection, and transformative growth- all with a fundamental goal of increasing student achievement.

While significant research- much of which is outline below- has emphasized the merits and contributions of teacher inquiry, it is not without critique. Indeed, several problematic issues may arise when educators study their own classrooms (Zeni, 1996). For example, Scribbling (2013) argues that it can be difficult to “introduce teachers to the methods and issues inherent in teacher research while

simultaneously expecting them to conduct a study using these methods” (p. 4), recalling teachers who cannot see long-term benefits of utilizing teacher research methods in the context of a school culture that primarily values quantitative assessment data. Moreover, Scribbling asserts, ethical issues can result from teachers conducting research on students in their classrooms, since it is ethically complicated to record children’s actions, even when consent forms are signed by parents, particularly because “teachers are in a unique position as participants in their own research and must consider the relationships that are established in school settings” (2013, p. 6). Furthermore, Zeni (1996) maintains that ethical issues can be a challenge in teacher inquiry, as there are particular safeguards when an outsider is conducting research, but when educators are doing so, they may be “diverted from their goal of open collaboration with colleagues, students, and parents...teachers researching their own classrooms can anticipate ethical dilemmas quite distinct from those of the outsider doing research” (p. 31). Stocker (2012) similarly contends that ethical issues exist in teacher research, stating:

Some teachers may take the view that research on students is a natural part of educational development, of benefit to teachers, students, and society alike; therefore, no consent is needed, or collective oral consent is sufficient. Teacher researchers should nonetheless consider the basic human rights issues posed by their research (p. 52).

Hence, educators employing inquiry methods in their own classrooms must contend with these dilemmas and must be cognizant of unfailingly making ethical decisions, consistently keeping in mind and prioritizing the relationships between themselves and their students. However, in spite of the above critiques, teacher inquiry is widely regarded as a fundamentally useful tool for educators to systematically reflect on and improve their teaching practice, as illustrated in the sections that follow.

In recent years, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) have proposed rethinking how teacher inquiry is defined. By describing it as a “stance” rather than solely a finite project, teacher inquiry becomes a lifelong educational philosophy wherein practitioners utilize an inquiry-based lens to examine the education system in order to work for social justice and equitable student outcomes (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Hence, the trajectory of scholarship on teacher research has shifted to a broader worldview and conception of how to think about education and interrogating one’s own practice, in the context of “trying times” that challenge teachers to continually revisit their inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

Teacher inquiry to increase teacher efficacy

Much research has demonstrated the efficacy of teacher inquiry, particularly as a means of professional development (Henson, 2001). Boudah and Knight (1996) illustrate the positive outcomes due to participation in teacher inquiry as related to improved teacher attitudes, increased self-efficacy, and increases in effective student/teacher interactions. Devlin (2003) finds that teachers can do their jobs

"better and more efficiently and faster by becoming reflective practitioners who do teacher research....being involved in teacher research helps teachers teach what they teach better." However, in order for it to be effective, inquiry cannot be something extra that teachers have to do; if it is an add-on, busy teachers won't be able to undertake it (Devlin, 2003). Instead, it needs to be thoroughly incorporated into teaching, professional development, planning, and all aspects of the school day, making research an integral part of what educators do (Anderson, et al., 1994).

Teacher inquiry for agency and resistance

Teacher inquiry can provide educators with a critical reflective foundation for individual agency (Bieler & Thomas, 2009), a key component needed for teachers to effectively navigate present mandates- as illustrated in the chapters that follow. In fact, this sense of agency is crucial for educators to do their best teaching, as explained by Ingersoll (2003), who states, "Having little say in the terms, processes, and outcomes of their work may undermine the ability of teachers to feel they are doing worthwhile work — the very reason many of them came into the occupation in the first place — and may end up contributing to turnover among teachers" (pg. 236). Achinstein and Ogawa (2006) describe the ways in which participation in this type of professional learning community can empower teachers to utilize their agency to enact micro-resistance, or to "solidify what they internally want to do... their resistance could not be sustained alone; rather, they needed to be supported by a strong community that reinforced their alternative perspectives" (p. 58). Similarly, Curry, et al., (2008) point to the degree which inquiry group dialogues can substantially integrate a focus on strategies teachers may utilize in order to "examine possible avenues to affect change given the constraints of their institution" (p. 671). Curry et al.'s study findings reveal that teachers leveraged their inquiry projects and the solidarity gained from participating in an inquiry group into a platform from which to undertake transformative action, and "teachers were engaged in a practice with their inquiry communities that apprenticed them into becoming change agents" (.p 672). Thus, the inquiry process can result in an increased sense of agency for participating teachers, and a space for exploring potential acts of resistance to current constraints. This theme is woven into the experiences of teachers in the chapters that follow.

Teacher inquiry contributions to education research

The results of the inquiry process greatly contributes to the body of practical knowledge on teaching, from an emic perspective rather than the etic theories too often proposed by researchers who may not have been inside a classroom in many years. As Lytle and Cochran-Smith (1992) argue, "Teacher research is a way of generating both *local knowledge* and *public knowledge* about teaching--that is, knowledge developed and used by teachers for themselves and their immediate communities, as well as knowledge useful to the larger school and university communities" (p. 450). Further, because it is situated in the lived experiences of teachers, it is, as Lytle and Cochran-Smith posit, "well-positioned to produce

precisely the kind of knowledge currently needed in the field” (p. 466).” Teacher inquiry can be considered a bridge connecting research, practice, and policy (Rust, 2009), and a means by which teachers can be producers rather than solely consumers of research, wherein research shapes their practice and vice versa. It also “informs scholars and policy makers regarding critical issues in the field” (Rust, 2009, p. 1882) from a unique insider vantage point (Anderson, et al., 1994), and it results in a two-way rather than a one-way influence of research on practice (Parsons & Brown, 2002).

Unfortunately, many scholars and policymakers may not consider the outputs of teacher inquiry as “real” or “rigorous” research. Anderson and Herr (1999) maintain that for many in the academy, teacher research is outside of accepted forms of scholarship. Furthermore, “teacher research presents a challenge to existing forms of academic knowledge in that the insider stance of teacher researchers, the foci of their inquiries, the ways in which their data are collected, and the validity of their findings challenge more traditional norms...For many academics, the acceptance of practitioner research is given only on the condition that a separate category of knowledge be created for it” (Rust, 2009, p. 1884). Hence, no matter the extent to which teacher inquiry may produce theoretical and empirical products that could greatly inform academia, unless and until it gains widespread acceptance in research communities, it remains most utilized solely by practitioners. In fact, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) go so far as to argue that transforming K-12 schools into knowledge production sites will require transformation of universities as well. Moreover, “until academics are willing to address the material conditions of teachers’ work and help bring these worlds closer together, their promotion of practitioner research will sound hollow” (Anderson, et al., 1994, p. 41). However, increased use of teacher inquiry in teacher education, in professional development, and in assessing impacts of education policy has recently increased its visibility (Rust, 2009).

Teacher inquiry for equity

A growing number of teacher inquiry groups nationwide are moving toward a primary goal of working for social justice and equity. For example, Picower (2007) describes the critical teacher inquiry groups she facilitates with new teachers, aiming to “help them negotiate their contexts in order to realize their vision of teaching as social change within the constraints of under-resourced urban schools” (p. 3). Picower’s findings demonstrate that the support and motivation inquiry groups provide participants keeps them focused on the goal of making a difference in their students’ lives (2007). Similarly, Rogers et al. (2005) found that as a result of a social-justice focused inquiry group, participating teachers were able to “reconstruct the stances through which they constructed knowledge” (p. 356). Duncan-Andrade (2004) facilitated groups of teachers in Los Angeles as a vehicle to support teachers in providing social justice education. The goal was “to powerfully address the needs of their students while they are engaged in their own professional growth” (Duncan-Andrade, 2004, p. 340). In this group, teachers discussed issues faced by their students, linked these issues to relevant literature, and developed

curriculum based on these dialogues. Caro-Bruce and Klehr (2007) describe the ways in which Madison Metropolitan School District instituted district-sponsored equity-focused teacher inquiry groups as a professional development activity, wherein themes of achievement, race, and equity were key components of the dialogue and research. Through this description, Caro-Bruce and Klehr provide a potential model for all districts to integrate a teacher-driven push for equity informed by grounded practice. Picower (2007) maintains social-justice focused teacher inquiry groups provide a unique space, one which can “stop educators from *falling into the trap of becoming teachers who give up on their students and the profession, and push them to become educators who play a role in improving the conditions of urban education*” (p. 21, emphasis added). In the chapters that follow, teachers in this study individually and collectively examine how to best play a role in improving urban education, while navigating current constraints affecting their teaching practice.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter will begin with an explication of the methodological approach employed in this research. I will then describe the background and context of the study, as well as the data collection and analysis methods used. The chapter then gives an overview of the participants and focal teachers. Lastly, my own subjectivity and positionality will be explored.

Methodological Approach

This work used an ethnographic methodology and drew upon a grounded theoretical methodological orientation. With an ethnographic lens, data collection involved one year of intensive participant observation in order to understand the processes of teacher inquiry, navigation of external constraints, social justice teaching, and collective pedagogical strategic support, with a focus on interpreting the ways in which the teachers made sense of their day-to-day lives (Erickson, 1986).

Drawing upon grounded theory- in which concepts, findings, and theories emerge based upon the data- my investigation emerged organically from the data collected; hence, research questions and coding categories were developed and updated over time (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1983, 1994; Picower, 2007). This framework aimed to have the data itself inform the analyses; furthermore, this approach provided deeper understandings of the study phenomena.

Background and Context: Project ACTION

This section will provide background and context on the inquiry process and the Project ACTION inquiry group. The section also describes the meeting structure and teacher research activities.

Project ACTION

As described in the previous chapter, teacher inquiry begins with a practice-based question for examination and moves into formal data collection and analysis, which oftentimes also includes simultaneously meeting with colleagues in an “inquiry group” of fellow teachers for reflective dialogue and ongoing consultations. This dissertation research took place within the context of “Project ACTION,” a teacher inquiry initiative that was housed in a Northern California university. The project was initiated in 2003 by several teacher education professors, who received grant funding from multiple foundations in order to support teacher inquiry communities with a particular focus on novice teachers. Grant funding was renewed year to year; however, over time there were fewer personnel available to work on the project and its final cohort of inquiry groups met during the 2009-2010 school year. Project ACTION aimed to provide instructional and professional support to communities of local teachers who participated in biweekly inquiry group meetings.

Each year approximately six to eight groups of teachers participated in Project ACTION, and while many were from a single school, there were also cross-school inquiry groups (including the one on which this study is based) made up of teachers from multiple schools. Each group consisted of approximately four to ten teachers, with a range of teaching experience. The goals of Project ACTION were: “(1) To engage teachers in classroom inquiry aimed at improving their practice and making schools more equitable and socially just and (2) To provide intellectual, professional, and personal support to meet the particular needs, interests, and challenges of urban teachers” (Project ACTION Mission Statement). Project ACTION focused on professional learning communities in emphasizing the importance of teacher professionalism, social justice, and inquiry. Project ACTION also conceived of teachers as “intellectuals and change agents capable of advancing systemic change aimed at creating more equitable schools” (Curry et. al, 2008, p. 672).

During the academic year, Project ACTION teacher inquiry groups met twice a month, for approximately two hours per meeting. Each participant crafted his or her own inquiry question and spent the year collecting and analyzing data. The inquiry projects focused on the specific problems around pedagogy and learning that the teachers faced in their classrooms and schools. Meetings generally included one or two “consultations” on group members’ inquiry projects, which involved all the teachers’ critical evaluation of classroom artifacts and data as well as sharing constructive feedback on the projects. In addition, participants attended quarterly network-wide events for all the inquiry groups, which featured presentations by veteran teacher researchers. The final annual network day showcased all the Project ACTION teachers’ inquiry projects, which were then published in an annual anthology. As an incentive, participating teachers received a \$1,000 stipend and were eligible to receive college credit for involvement in Project ACTION⁷. While this may have positively impacted the level of commitment and follow-through of the teachers who chose to participate, versus a solely voluntary or mandated model, it was nevertheless a useful experiment that can inform the various models for voluntary, mandated, and incentivized teacher-inquiry based professional development. This study is based off of one year of data collection with one particular Project ACTION teacher inquiry group.

The Inquiry Group

“It’s hard to find a space to tackle these huge issues.”

“Teachers talk about this stuff sometimes but aren’t going deeper.”

“It’s a hard thing to study on your own.”

“It’s like I’m on my own island, I want to know what other teachers are doing around this issue.”

⁷ It is important to note that as an alternative, equity-focused teacher inquiry can also take place in a professional development setting, in which teachers from a school can participate in an inquiry group together, and/or equity-focused teacher inquiry can occur in pre-service teacher training. Research on those models would be separate studies, but my findings can ultimately inform new theoretical, pedagogical, and methodological directions for social justice-based teacher inquiry professional development and credential programs.

The above quotations are from an April 2009 focus group of Project ACTION teachers when asked what kinds of conversations, if any, occur amongst faculty in their schools about issues of multicultural education and equity in the classroom. Their sentiments are supported by research demonstrating that many U.S. schools have minimal formal discourse around issues of race and equity (Lewis, 2003; Pollack, 2004). This inquiry group was designed to provide a space for this type of dialogue, and to offer structured support in order to assist teachers in bringing about change in their teaching practice through individual classroom-based research projects.

During the 2008-2009 school year, I facilitated a teacher inquiry group through Project ACTION at a local middle school. That group was broadly organized without any specific focus; I then recognized it could be powerful to organize a themed cross-school inquiry group where the individual research projects would focus on addressing issues of equity, race, and multicultural education in the classroom. That spring of 2009, at one of the network-wide events, I conducted a pilot focus group of six Project ACTION teachers in order to gain greater understanding of the needs of educators who wished to explore these issues more deeply. I then worked with Project ACTION to finalize development and recruitment for an equity-themed cross-school inquiry group for the following 2009-2010 school year. Though teachers filled out an application to participate in this group, and were therefore self-selecting, this aligned with my research goal of determining a possible support structure for teachers who want to work towards improving their practice to bring about more equitable classrooms.

While Project ACTION recruited broadly⁸, with the aim of having a group as diverse as possible in terms of race and gender, to a great extent the applications ultimately mirrored the previously explicated racial and gender trends of the United States teaching force, with a majority White and Asian applicants, and 100% female⁹. However, this dynamic resulted in findings that can inform the myriad other school settings that have similar demographics.

There were seven teachers in the inquiry group, which met approximately every two weeks from September 2009 through May 2010, and had two “reunions” in the fall of 2010. Meetings were generally held in the classroom of one of the group members; the meeting location rotated several times but most meetings were at one particular classroom, as it was most central for all the teachers involved. Several times the group also met at coffee shops and two of the teachers’ homes. I served as external facilitator, assisting group members to craft and undertake inquiry projects. As facilitator, I brought prepared agendas with a variety of activities to each meeting for the year, which were developed collaboratively with the teachers¹⁰. Also, all group members received a binder containing resources and materials on teacher inquiry, data collection, data analysis, and the Project ACTION

⁸ Recruitment efforts, materials, and presentations took place at K-12 schools, teacher credential programs, and across diverse networks of local teachers.

⁹ Specific participant demographics will be described later in this chapter.

¹⁰ See Appendix A: Sample Meeting Agenda

process.

Each meeting began with the group members sharing what was generally going well for them and what was challenging them. Then, for the first few meetings, we worked on building community, discussing each teacher's classroom and school, developing inquiry questions and classroom data collection methods, and ongoing text-based dialogues on equity and social justice education. Readings included articles from Pollack's (2008) *Everyday Antiracism: Getting Real About Race in School*, Au's (2009) *Rethinking Multicultural Education: Teaching for Racial and Cultural Justice*, and Singleton's (2006) *Courageous Conversations: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools*, all of which are collections of essays designed for practitioners grappling with social justice issues in schools. Each text included pedagogical strategies as well as theoretical considerations. Meeting agendas included prompts to generate discussion around these texts and to focus the dialogue on the teachers' practice; for example, the group might reflect on how a particular reading related to their classrooms and schools, and what specific portions group members found most salient.

In addition to text-based dialogue, activities to facilitate discussion, reflection, and deeper understanding of educational equity issues took place throughout the year¹¹, as well as activities focusing on how the teachers' own experiences with these issues may show in up their teaching practice. During the first several meetings, the group worked toward a common understanding and definition of equity-related terms, including a quick-write activity, in which teachers wrote about their own meaning of educational equity followed by a share-out conversation. We also completed a "gallery walk" where the teachers dialogued on butcher paper about the following questions:

- What is educational equity?
- Why does the achievement gap exist?
- What is multicultural education?
- What is culturally relevant teaching?
- How will educators know when they are experiencing success in their efforts to narrow the racial achievement gap? (beyond test scores)
- Do you believe that the knowledge and skills to educate all students already exist in education?
- What evidence (if any) is there of institutionalized racism existing in your school?
- What evidence (if any) is there of equity existing in your school?

After answering each question, group members stood by particular posters that struck them, and held mini-discussions on what they saw written on the poster.

Another activity that group members found powerful and salient was a "racial autobiography" in which they each completed a quick-write for five to ten

¹¹ While I planned and facilitated the majority of the group activities, members also collaboratively developed several of the activities, including the "racial autobiography" which will be described shortly.

minutes responding to the prompt, “When did you first notice race in your life?” Each member then shared with the group some or all of what they had written. We then continued with another free-write and share-out on two more prompts: (1) “With regard to your teaching, in which situations and circumstances do you believe yourself to be most racially aware?” and (2) “With regard to your teaching, in which situations and circumstances do you feel you would benefit from having greater racial consciousness?” After the activity and a long discussion, all the teachers shared that this was an extremely powerful activity for them, as they were rarely able to talk frankly with colleagues about these experiences. In fact, this particular activity, as well as other community-building activities, seemed to help strengthen the comfort level and create an honest and authentic space for dialogue, as indicated by their reflective comments upon completion. This sense of comfort with one another is likely what made it possible for difficult, passionate, and emotional conversations about equity, justice, accountability, and teaching to take place on a regular basis¹².

About a month into the year, the teachers began to formulate individual research project questions. The goal was for them to examine tangible, practice-based questions that were based at the classroom level, but were ultimately salient enough for larger implications. Group members gave each other feedback on potential inquiry questions, and slowly refined their questions until they had developed a final question for investigation. I then facilitated exploration of various data collection and analysis methods, based on Project ACTION resource materials as well as my own research methods coursework and experience. Teachers were given worksheets to help them think about what might be the most useful inquiry questions to examine, as well as which potential methods would be most appropriate for their projects, including: interviews, surveys, observations, field notes, videotaping themselves teaching, analyzing student work and assessment data, looking at classroom setup, and using teaching journals. Over the course of the project, teachers implemented whichever methods they chose, and reported back on the progress of their data collection and analysis at each meeting¹³.

Approximately halfway through the year, meetings began to include group consultations on one or two group members’ inquiry projects, during which the other teachers shared critical feedback using formal protocols¹⁴. Each consultation lasted approximately 30-45 minutes, and- depending on which protocol that particular teacher had chosen to utilize- could include probing and clarifying questions, written comments, reviewing student work, and other forms of constructive feedback from the group. Teachers discussed a variety of inquiry-related issues, including: choosing an inquiry question, identifying focal students, determining data collection methods and sources, data analysis, and any other classroom challenges and dilemmas relating to curriculum, student engagement, race,

¹² Because the group developed a high level of comfort with one another, occasionally teachers used profanity during their conversations. In order to maintain the accuracy of the dialogue, I have kept the profanity intact when quoting participants in several instances throughout this dissertation.

¹³ See Appendix B: Typical Meeting Structure

¹⁴ See Appendix C: Sample Protocol Guide

social justice, equity, and improving one's own teaching practice through reflective research.

In addition to the formal consultations, during each meeting group members also shared updates on their project progress and developed action goals to meet before the following convening. At the conclusion of each meeting, teachers reflected on what they gained, learned, and/or would have changed. Our last few meetings of the year focused on how to move their research from individual shifts in practice to potentially impacting larger school policies, by bringing what they learned to their schools through presentations to their administration. Several teachers ultimately chose to do so, and several others had informal discussions with their colleagues and administrators about their project findings.

At the end of the year, teachers also each wrote a short paper (approximately three to five pages) in which they presented their findings, reflection, and future steps¹⁵. The papers were then published in an annual collection of teacher research articles from the multiple Project ACTION sites¹⁶. At the final "network day" for the year, they also presented their findings to the larger group of all Project ACTION teachers from other sites.

Because the above methods are relatively similar to the teacher research projects that are assigned throughout some teacher credential and induction programs, this study is applicable to those groups and provides insight into barriers, strategies, and practices for this type of teacher support.

Data Collection

I collected data for this dissertation study for a period of one year. While primarily ethnographic in nature, data also included quantitative survey responses. My data sources included the following:

- **Meeting fieldnotes and transcripts.** Over the course of nine months, from October 2009 through June of 2010, I audio recorded and transcribed biweekly two to three hour Project ACTION meetings, and took extensive detailed fieldnotes after each meeting. I also audio recorded and took fieldnotes on two "reunions" the group organized in fall 2010.
- **Interviews.**¹⁷ I conducted formal interviews at the beginning of the school year with all group participants in September 2009. I then conducted mid-year interviews in January 2010 with three of the teachers. All interviews lasted approximately one hour, and were audio-recorded and later transcribed. The interviews were based around open-ended questions that explored participants' experiences with the inquiry process, their conceptions of educational equity, teaching philosophies, relationships with students, student achievement, and social justice. I also held multiple

¹⁵ See Appendix D: Final Paper Guidelines

¹⁶ See Appendix E: Sample Final Paper (places/names replaced by pseudonyms)

¹⁷ See Appendix F: Initial and Mid-Year Teacher Interview Protocols

informal interviews and conversations with all the teachers throughout the year.

- **Classroom observation fieldnotes.** In order to get to know all the group members, I visited each teacher’s classroom in September 2010 to establish initial relationships and get a sense of their teaching. Then, upon focal teacher selection, for a period of five months from January 2010 through May 2010, I visited Sarah and Laura’s classrooms approximately twice a week for one to two hours per observation. During these visits, I observed and helped out in the classes. During and after each observation, I took detailed fieldnotes.
- **Artifacts.** I collected various artifacts for analysis during the year, including:
 - Applications for the inquiry group, with narrative statements indicating the teachers’ background in inquiry and equity.
 - Artifacts from the teacher inquiry meetings, such as journals, free writes, butcher paper dialogues, worksheets, teacher-created handouts and powerpoint slides from their consultations.
 - Final end-of-year papers for all group members, as well as transcripts from audio recordings of their final presentations.
 - Student work brought in by teachers, as relating to consultations around inquiry projects.
 - Email communications from all of the group teachers.
- **Memos.** Approximately once a month, I wrote up analytic and reflective memos about initial analysis and coding impressions, potentially relevant theories, descriptions of events, and various observational, reflective, and analytical insights.
- **Survey.**¹⁸ Project ACTION conducted an evaluation survey of all teachers upon completion of the school year. Survey responses were analyzed in order to produce descriptive statistics and narrative themes.
- **Focus Group.**¹⁹ Project ACTION also conducted focus groups of all teachers upon completion of the school year. A different Project ACTION facilitator conducted the focus group for my inquiry group members, in order to ensure maximum candor for program improvement. The focus group was based around open-ended questions that asked about participants’ experiences with the group and the inquiry process. The focus groups, which lasted approximately 40 minutes, were audio recorded and later transcribed.

The following table quantifies all data sources:

Table 1: Summary of data collected

Data Source	Number of Items	Number of Audio Hours (if applicable)
Meeting fieldnotes	15	

¹⁸ See Appendix G: End-Of-Year Survey

¹⁹ See Appendix H: End-Of-Year Focus Group Protocol

Classroom observation fieldnotes	26	
Transcripts of group meeting audio	14	30
Formal interview audio transcripts	10	8
Formal interview notes	10	
Informal interview notes	9	
Survey	1	
Focus group audio transcript	1	1
Final papers	7	
Transcripts of presentation audio	6	3
Inquiry group applications	7	
Meeting handouts & worksheets	21	
Student work	16	
Relevant email communications	11	
Memos	6	

Because I triangulated my sources by conducting formal and informal interviews, participant observation, and collection of material artifacts, I was able to gain comprehensive and varied data and was able to effectively bolster validity (Denzin, 1989). Since my research questions were focused on educator experiences rather than external perceptions, I intentionally chose to collect data that would reflect teacher perspectives.

Data Analysis

As I collected data, I began the process of initial analysis. On an ongoing basis, I wrote analytic memos and transcribed all audio recordings. Following the year of data collection, I reviewed all fieldnotes, memos, transcripts, and artifacts, in order to identify and develop thematic codes and sub-codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Using HyperRESEARCH qualitative data analysis software, I applied codes to all data sources in a grounded approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Rather than selective coding, I employed “open coding” methods in order to gain a more complete understanding of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 2007). My broad groups of codes included: demands of the teaching profession; social justice teaching; and teacher research in the current era. Each of the three clusters of broad codes had approximately six to eight sub-codes per group, including such codes as: “accountability constraint”, “inquiry to navigate teaching conditions”, and “inquiry to learn about equity”, among others.

These analyses uncovered patterns that developed into the arguments explored in the following findings chapters. For example, after exploring and coding data, analysis showed that teachers independently utilized the word “push” in a high number of instances to describe the effects of the inquiry project on their teaching and reflection²⁰. These kinds of factors emerged from the analyses into claims and findings. Throughout the following findings chapters, I have privileged teacher voices, as it is their understandings that this study sought to investigate. I have also

²⁰ This phenomenon will be examined further in chapter six.

chosen to keep participants' language intact as it was originally spoken²¹; this ultimately provides authentic representations of experiences and greater insights into educator perspectives.

Participants, Projects, and Focal Teachers

The Project ACTION inquiry group upon which this study is based consisted of seven teachers from six different schools. Collectively, these teachers had an average of nine years of teaching experience; one was in her first year of teaching, four were in their fifth and sixth years of teaching, and two had 15 or more years of teaching experience. All were women, and four out of the seven were of Asian descent, two were White, and one was Latina. Table 2 gives specific background information for each participant and their inquiry project.

Table 2: Inquiry Group Teachers

Teacher	Years teaching	Race	Grade taught	Subject taught	Student demographics²²	Inquiry question
Abigail	6 years	White	4th	Elementary multiple subject	FRPL ²³ : 80% ELL ²⁴ : 51% API ²⁵ rank: 2 Latino: 72% Af-Am: 7% White: 6% Asian-Am: 15%	What happens to student responses when I supplement the reading program with poetry, writing, and targeted comprehension lessons to engage my ELL students?
Charlotte	1 year	Mexican-American	9 th /12 th grades	English and British Literature	FRPL: 27% ELL: 10% API rank: 4 Latino: 42% Af-Am: 3% White: 41% Asian-Am: 12%	How does student writing change over time with the implementation of daily journal writing?
Elizabeth	5 years	Chinese-American (1 st generation)	1 st grade	Elementary multiple subject	FRPL: 56% ELL: 35% API rank: 6 Latino: 58% Af-Am: 4% White: 17%	How can the implementation of a Film Club be a supplemental tool in the language arts

²¹ I removed “um” and “like” throughout most of the data, for readability. Other than that, the data presented is exactly what was spoken.

²² (School-wide) Source: California Dept of Education DataQuest/California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System

²³ Free/Reduced Price Lunch (according to federal poverty guidelines)

²⁴ English Language Learners

²⁵ Academic Performance Index (1=low, 10=high)

					Asian-Am: 16%	curriculum and help increase reading comprehension skills for English Language Learners?
Felicia	6 years	Korean-American	3 rd grade	Elementary multiple subject	FRPL: 68% ELL: 40% API rank: 4 Latino: 55% Af-Am: 6% White: 10% Asian-Am: 27%	What happens to student participation when I supplement my current English-Language Arts curriculum with additional literature that are more culturally and personally meaningful to my students?
Laura	25 years	Chinese-American (1 st generation)	7 th /8 th grades	English Language Development	FRPL: 71% ELL: 19% API rank: 2 Latino: 48% Af-Am: 23% White: 12% Asian-Am: 13%	If I plan and facilitate a meta-cognitively based rigorous social justice reading curriculum for a group of Latino Title I long-term English Learner 7th grade students, what would happen with self-awareness, empowerment, reading commitment, and achievement?
Sarah	15 years	White	7 th /8 th grades	ELL & Literacy coach/AVID & Reading Digital Arts teacher	FRPL: 71% ELL: 15% API rank: 2 Latino: 44% Af-Am: 12% White: 9% Asian-Am: 30%	What does motivation look like for students in Reading/Digital Arts, how does this compare to their English Language Arts classes, and in what ways might motivation affect

						students' reading and writing achievement?
Yolanda	5 years	Korean-American (1 st generation)	4 th /5 th grades	Elementary multiple subject	FRPL: 68% ELL: 40% API rank: 4 Latino: 55% Af-Am: 6% White: 10% Asian-Am: 27%	What happens to student engagement when I use culturally relevant literature to teach reading?

Every teacher came into the group and their project with various personal and professional experiences, orientations to social justice teaching, and ideas for inquiry projects. The following section will briefly give further background about each participant and their project.

Abigail

Abigail taught various elementary grades for six years before teaching 4th grade, at the same predominately Latino and English Language Learner (ELL) elementary school. Abigail's inquiry project focused on engaging ELL students in reading comprehension in order to assist them with rigor and literacy. In terms of her comfort discussing race, Abigail shared:

I have become very aware of being the white teacher, and it feels a little awkward to me... I think its important to think about, you know, what has happened before and what has changed, and what there is still to do, and we've had some of these conversations but I do become aware of being, you know, it just feels sometimes a little odd, to be the person teaching them about it. And...sometimes I feel hampered by my own schooling, because I didn't learn about a lot of stuff growing up, you know like, different cultures or different racial backgrounds, it doesn't pop right up in my head when I'm doing history teaching or talking about different things, so that's when I kind of wish I had more, you know. It just isn't something that I know very well so it doesn't come up unless I really kind of look for it and plan for it so I just wish I had a better grasp of that (meeting fieldnote, 1/30/10)²⁶.

Thus, Abigail placed herself on a somewhat novice end of the group members' continuum around comfort with discussing race and equity. She came into the group wanting to gain tools for more effectively engaging her students and becoming more comfortable and knowledgeable participating in these kinds of dialogues.

²⁶ I inserted key sections of transcribed group meeting audio recordings into fieldnotes that were submitted for Project ACTION research records; therefore, direct quotes are oftentimes ascribed to fieldnotes throughout this study.

Charlotte

A first year teacher completing her master's degree, Charlotte initially indicated her desire to "have the support of a group of colleagues who are focused on the issues of race and culture that present our diverse classrooms with both challenges and great opportunities" (inquiry group application, 9/09). Because her school district was focused on improving classroom equity, Charlotte had a fair amount of support in terms of working to build relationships with her students and working on her own racial awareness. For example, Charlotte shared one instance in which her students were talking about race during one of her 9th grade classes. She told the inquiry group that she felt she "could have improved" how she addressed the racial comments that they made in class. As she described it, "I may be missing out on a great opportunity, because they want to be talking about it, but I am not sure if I know the best way to lead them" (meeting fieldnote, 1/30/10). Partially because of this sense she held about lacking knowledge around discussing race with her students, Charlotte's inquiry project focused on her goal of relationship-building through student journal writing in order to better understand and relate to her students. She stated,

My project is about wanting to find a way to get to know more about my students, and giving them an opportunity to get to tell me more about themselves, and to get to have more freedom in their writing in class, and to give them a voice so that someone was hearing what they have to say (meeting fieldnote, 1/27/10).

Elizabeth

Elizabeth viewed her 1st grade classroom as a microcosm of society and strived to work for social justice in her teaching. A sixth-year teacher, she emphasized equity through the building of classroom community. She explained,

I address social justice issues through social behavior, so it's a community in here. I try to teach them that we play together, and you don't say 'you can't play with us', and I think socially that's how I have tried to address those equity issues. Academically they come the way they are, and I try to help those that need extra help through afterschool intervention programs, talk to parents that have language barriers, that kind of thing... I try to teach them that I don't care how you look, I don't care how you dress, I don't care if you can read or not, but everyone is treated fairly, has the same right, the same voice (interview, 9/28//09).

Most of the teachers at Elizabeth's school were White, and, as Elizabeth stated,

There are teachers that have been here for decades, but the student population is changing, and I noticed that was a shock for them. To them, there are more and more Latino kids and not enough English speaking

parents anymore. We try to adapt, but what are we doing systematically as a school? I don't know. We just don't have that leadership right now, that discussion about how to best assist these students. We talk about test scores, but we talk about it very generally, but we don't talk about how to address specific kinds of students (interview, 9/28//09).

Elizabeth therefore yearned for more discussion of how to best serve the needs of diverse groups of students. Elizabeth's family immigrated to the U.S. when she was a child, which greatly impacted her viewpoints and experiences as a teacher of color, and helped her to connect with her students. She shared,

I come from an immigrant family so I feel like I understand a lot of immigrant families, and even though they're not Asian, I understand the immigrant life, and the parents who don't speak English, and I can kind of connect to the lifestyle where they come from, where the parents can't help with the homework, can't come to parent conferences, and I get that, and it's not foreign to me, and in that way I feel like I know the background they are coming from. And then specifically, racially, I feel like Asian students, particularly Asian girls, the few that I have, they just connect to me, and like me a lot. I think its because we look alike, and they ask a thousand questions, and they stay in at recess, and they come after school, and its just kind of this funny connection, and it's because I look like them. And I wonder what schools would be like if more teachers look like the students that they serve (meeting fieldnote, 1/30/10).

Elizabeth's inquiry project focused on how to boost reading comprehension skills for her ELL students. She saw many of them struggling to meet grade-level benchmarks, and, in looking for ways to address this issue, she endeavored to use film as a learning tool for strengthening reading comprehension skills. Elizabeth's final paper explains,

The film club was specifically designed to improve my students' appreciation and knowledge of film while also sharpening their writing, critical thinking, reading comprehension, and responsibility skills. The "movie watching" portion was a buy-in for students, but I believed that if I used it correctly, films could provide a concrete focus for instruction...I hoped that I could provide a new learning experience and a dynamic supplement to the traditional lecture or textbook formats.

Felicia

Similar to Elizabeth, Felicia sensed that because her colleagues were predominately White and her students were predominately of color, she felt that "being racially aware is just the norm for me, more than the other teachers." As a fifth-year teacher, she worked to build relationships with her students through the ways in which she set up her classroom, and through sharing information about

herself and her experiences with her students. Nevertheless, as an Asian-American teacher, Felicia still felt she needed to become more comfortable and aware of the needs of her Latino students. She explained,

I think where I need greater consciousness is, um, because I work with mainly one group of students, I feel like there are many other groups of people that I am just unaware of, so when it comes to family life, or discipline, that's been the greatest challenge to me, so I just need greater racial consciousness. And also I feel like, I don't live in the community where my students live, so while I can still identify with my students, because they are an immigrant or whatever, I feel like, because I don't live in the community, that's really different (meeting fieldnote, 12/15/09).

Thus, Felicia wanted to be more cognizant of her own racial awareness through participation in the group; moreover, through her inquiry project she sought to integrate a more multicultural, meaningful selection of literature into her curriculum in order to better reach all her students. She shared, "I want to introduce my students to different literature than they are used to so that I can teach them using texts that they can personally relate to, and see if it has any impact on their attitudes toward reading and eventually their performance in reading" (meeting fieldnote, 12/19/09).

Yolanda

Yolanda taught at the same school as Felicia; in fact, they had submitted their inquiry group applications together. Much like Felicia, Yolanda's project aimed to use multicultural literature with her English Language Learners in order to increase their engagement, motivation, and academic outcomes. Like the other group members, she crafted an overarching inquiry question, but she also developed sub-questions as well. Her overall question for investigation was "What happens to student engagement when I use culturally relevant literature to teach reading?" and her sub-questions were: (1) "How does using culturally relevant literature and literature circles affect English Language Learners' engagement, self-awareness or overall performance in English Language Arts (ELA)?" and (2) "When using culturally relevant texts that are derived from student backgrounds, how will English language learners respond in ELA?"

Yolanda's inquiry interests emerged from the frustration she had around the lack of dialogue about equity at her school. She described in her application,

Multicultural education is somewhat discouraged and is omitted in most of our instruction. Many times, we implement superficial multicultural education. We need to put forth more thought and time to develop meaningful multicultural curriculum so that our student population may feel a strong connection to their heritage. By doing this, we may empower our students and allow a safe environment for them to voice and share their history...As classroom teachers, we must ensure that all children regardless

of their gender, economic status, family background, parent education, language, or social-emotional needs will learn and become critical, independent, productive, and responsible citizens.

Similar to Elizabeth, Yolanda's family came to the United States when she was 10 years old, and she felt a connection with her students who were learning English. She stated,

I share a lot about my experiences in learning English as a second language, and how my parents had to work a lot so they couldn't come to a lot of school functions and they couldn't help me with my homework, so I think my students feel really comfortable talking about their families with me...Most of my students are Latino, and so we talk a lot about the truth, and who writes these stories, who writes history, and the kids are like, 'but its from the book' and I think its really important to have them question their thinking. And I think with a lot of our history books, it's written from the whole, um, the Western, Europe perspective, and I think we have to challenge our students to think about that. And students are shocked when they find out that things in the book aren't true. I think its good to have these conversations. And being a classroom teacher, its one of the things I really enjoy doing with my students (interview, 9/28/09).

Interestingly, although Yolanda initially expressed familiarity and comfort with classroom equity issues, there were several instances during the inquiry group meetings when she made remarks that seemed to be rooted in a deficit mode of thinking about students and their families. There were also moments when Yolanda communicated discomfort during group conversations about race and social justice teaching. These occurrences will be described in the chapters that follow.

Focal Teachers

I chose Sarah and Laura as focal teachers because they stood out from the group in that they had: (1) a high degree of comfort and expertise around discussing and working for educational equity, and (2) they were also the teachers with the most years of experience. Both of these traits were aligned with my research goal of determining the efficacy of the inquiry process for teachers who are working for social justice and want to improve their teaching practice as well as participate in ongoing reflective dialogue with other teachers around issues of race and equity in schools.

Sarah

A fifteenth year teacher, Sarah had a great deal of teaching, academic coaching, and equity committee experience in schools. She was an ELL specialist, a participant on equity and English language acquisition committees at the district

and school site level, and was responsible for staff development and instructional coaching around ELL teaching.

Sarah's educational equity background

Sarah entered the teaching field because of her goal of working for social justice in education. She reflected on her own strengths and challenges in this arena, saying:

I think equity and diversity issues have been a focus for me. I started teaching at a school that was mainly Latino and African-American, and the staff there was always working on diversity and tolerance and that kind of stuff, so I think I had some really good training... When I think about my first day in the classroom, and I worked in San Francisco and walked into a room that was like half African-American and half Latino and I couldn't understand anything that anyone was saying [laughter from inquiry group], so I know I've come a long way from that teacher, you know, I feel like I'm very open to my students, I have a good rapport, I try and be very validating and stuff like that, but I still, um, I still feel like I have such ignorance, sort of, about our student groups' racial and ethnic histories, and actually, you know, when Cesar Chavez Day came around and I was trying to talk a little bit about what he had done, I realized I had like an elementary school level, I never have read a biography, or read about the labor movements, other than like a fraction about a grape boycott. You know, I don't know anything about Filipino history, and I was talked to a colleague today and I was like, Manila, yeah, I kinda get where that is, but, I mean, it's just embarrassing. And I don't have a second language, and its been a goal of mine for a long time to work on Spanish, so I would not only be able to converse better with my student and my students families, but to just have that experience. And I think a really big thing too is, I might have some of the academic stuff, but want the student perspective, like how they're perceiving our school, and the White spaces or not White spaces" (meeting fieldnote, 1/30/10).

As a result of this self-reflection, Sarah dedicates a significant amount of time and energy to equity work at her school and district. She remarked, "Mainly we [the school equity team] have been trying to raise people's awareness of racism and white privilege and our students experiences and what their perceptions might be...and the way we have defined inequity is the racial predictability of achievement in students, so the goal of our equity work is to eliminate the racial predictability in academic outcomes (meeting fieldnote, 10/31/09). In terms of classroom practice, the way in which Sarah defines social justice education is "reaching those groups that haven't been reaching their potential, and teaching in a way that is going to engage them, whether you are reading a biography of Michael Jackson because he was in the news and your students asked about it- which we did last week- or you are incorporating high-interest motivational things, like using computer technology, or you are really conscious about how you scaffold assignments so you can make all

the assignments doable and understandable by everybody” (interview 9/14/09).

Sarah’s school, and the equity committee on which she participated, had made several attempts to work towards increased equity. Unfortunately, as she stated, “we have certainly made progress but we are far from closing or even fully understanding the persistent racial achievement gap. Now that funding has become scarce, this district-wide equity work is at risk of stalling and so this Project ACTION opportunity comes at a very timely juncture” (inquiry group application, 9/09).

Sarah’s inquiry project

Sarah joined the inquiry group because, as she said, “I have just finished my masters degree and I very much miss the opportunity for inquiry, teacher action research and collegial discussion and reflection that was an integral part of my degree program...Unfortunately, since graduating and returning to work, I have been reminded that although the inquiry and reflection process is vital to an educator’s growth, it is a vulnerable practice that is all-too easily buried at the bottom of the educator’s infinite ‘to do list’” (inquiry group application, 9/09). Hence, Sarah craved the reflection, dialogue, and inquiry that she had appreciated so much in her graduate program.

Sarah developed an inquiry question that was rooted in her work with ELL students. She wanted to investigate the effects of a newly-developed technology-based 8th grade reading intervention class that was designed to help students with academic literacy, by using expository texts that culminated in digital projects (e.g., Powerpoint presentations, podcasts, iMovies, Comic Life, etc.) English teachers referred students who were deemed as struggling readers, and the class also consisted of long-term English language learners who were moving into mainstream English classes. Sarah specifically looked at how the Reading/Digital Arts class impacted English language learners’ motivation, reading, and writing, so that she could potentially modify and replicate the class as a broad intervention for that particular student population.

Sarah viewed this inquiry project as relating to equity in that the class served a demographic of students who tend to traditionally face intervention programs that are, as she argued, “more of the same’... double math, double English, Saturday or summer school” (final paper, 05/10). Her class was designed to engage students by using “digital media as well as high interest or culturally relevant reading materials” and she wanted to explore how to improve it in order to replicate the course throughout other schools in the district. In the following chapters, Sarah’s inquiry project and teaching practice will be examined in further detail.

Laura

To describe Laura, it is simplest to begin by sharing a portion of a fieldnote from my first visit to her classroom. It was toward the beginning of the school year, and after starting off the class, she then warmly introduced me to the students:

Laura was wearing a Latinos Unidos graffiti style T-shirt and was very animated. She spoke clearly, emphasizing certain words for the clarity of her language learners. Starting with going over the school daily bulletin, she went over a variety of school events and announcements, paying attention to the Latinos Unidos and Polynesian student club meeting announcements. She went over which islands are part of Polynesia, and said she would wear her Poly Club T-shirt next week. She also mentioned a meeting of the Gay Straight Alliance, "a club that keeps this school safe for everybody." She also mentioned Hispanic Heritage month, and discussed Jaime Escalante from Stand and Deliver, including pulling up a photo of him online that she projected onto the screen in front of the room. She then reviewed a lesson she had given the day before about the words Hispanic/Chicano/Latino. Then, the students went around the room introducing themselves to me, including where they were from. Most students were from Mexico, with a few having immigrated from Vietnam, China, two from Ethiopia, one from Bosnia, one from Guatemala, one from El Salvador. As they did so, she asked where in each of these countries they were from. Some could answer and some could not. The classroom had murals across one wall, with MLK Jr, Raza, etc. Laura was consistently very careful and transparent about equally calling on boys versus girls. After class, she remarked, 'I like working here because there is a possibility for change' (fieldnote, 9/26/09).

A veteran teacher with 25 years of experience, Laura was extraordinarily conscious around issues of race and equity. Her inquiry group application stated, "I have been engaged in the issues of race, biculturalism, and equity from the beginning." Laura grew up in Chinatown in Los Angeles, earned her master's degree in Education, taught elementary school, and then moved on to teach middle school as well as coach teachers on English Language Development strategies. She served as a supervisor for in-service teacher candidates and as mentor teacher for the local large urban school district. She has also participated in curriculum development, equity committee work, and facilitated a group of educators at her school exploring ways in which to best serve the needs of the ELL student population.

Laura's educational equity background

Laura had previously been part of a coalition at her school that was working to train teachers on culturally-responsive theory and practice. However, because the group didn't ultimately continue, she was drawn to Project ACTION. As she described,

Our purpose was to work together to study, identify, practice, and share culturally responsive strategies and lessons. The work was well-intentioned but fragmented and short-lived. Upon finding out about Project ACTION, I was immediately drawn to the sustained focus of the teacher research professional inquiry groups. Because I have experience in equity work, I am clearly aware of how vital it is to keep it in the forefront of my teaching; how

difficult, challenging, and rewarding it can be to talk with other teachers about equity; and how much more my colleagues and I could learn and practice...I want to focus and deepen my learning into facilitating concrete positive results for the students of color at my school (interview, 9/26/09).

In fact, although Laura had extensive expertise in thinking, learning, and training about race in schools, she was nonetheless very self-reflective in determining ways in which she could become even more racially aware. Laura was critical of her own lack of knowledge around her Latino students' experiences, language, and background. For example, during an interview, she shared:

Even though I've had all this ELL experience, ask me how bilingual I am! I am a level one on a Spanish CELDT²⁷. I'm a level one still! And my one kid who is a newcomer, Gerardo, he understands everything I say in English! He's way more advanced than I am, so, realizing, you know, these guys are way ahead of me in terms of the language and how bilingual they are...So, part of where I am right now, is I have had to surrender a lot of authority, like, 'you are the experts in the bilingual thing, you are the experts of living in Mexico, because, guess what, I don't know anything about living in Mexico, because when they tell me, you know, 'I was born in Mexico', I go, where? Please teach me the names of the states! So I now know a few more, like Jalisco, and I can even spell some of them, so it's kind of like surrendering some of my authority in areas that they are total experts in. So it's just been kind of an interesting evolution. It's gone from, like, 'I'm the teacher authority', to 'I gotta surrender some authority' so that I can be more racially responsive (interview, 1/27/10).

This self-reflection and willingness to further confront her own shortcomings around culturally relevant teaching led Laura to yearn for a structured ongoing inquiry process. During our first inquiry group meeting, she remarked, "I'm here because I believe in collaboration, I believe in learning from other people, and I believe that I need work in teacher inquiry...and I have facilitated a lot in my own work, so I would like to just take a backseat and not facilitate and just do my own learning" (meeting fieldnote, 9/30/09).

Laura's inquiry project

Laura's school was designated Title I²⁸, so she was part of a team that identified 100 low-performing students in need of extra resources. The majority of those students were long-term English language learners. The school provided

²⁷ California English Language Development Test

²⁸ Title I is a federal program that provides financial assistance to schools with high numbers of low-income children, to provide extra instructional services and activities which support students identified as failing or most at risk of failing performance standards in mathematics, reading, and writing.

activities for these groups of students once a week after school, which included teacher mentorships and homework assistance in order to build relationships and engage students more with academics. Laura was working with one of these small groups; thus, for her inquiry project, she “wanted to craft something that would be more effective with these students.” The goal, as she described it, was:

I wanted put together a reading program that is not dumbed down, and see if students could read well if I put together an interesting reading program. And part of the rigor- which I thought would be interesting to these students- is social justice. And as a teacher I should listen to their lives, so that I can strengthen relationships with them (interview, 1/27/10).

For this project, Laura specifically wanted to examine literacy development while focusing on motivation and social justice. She wanted to “become a better teacher of students who remain at an intermediate ELL level, to encourage and better ensure these students better opportunities and chances at positive successes in their adult lives” (final paper). Each Tuesday, for approximately one hour after school, she and a group of six long-term ELL students “discussed, read, wrote, and connected on readings and issues around four introduced strands. These four strands helped organize curriculum and reflections: identity, language, reading, and social justice” (final paper). Laura’s inquiry project will be explored in more detail in the following chapters.

Subjectivity and Positionality

I served as both the facilitator and researcher of the inquiry group. In this role, I guided the teachers in the inquiry process, arranged logistics, located relevant readings, structured activities and discussions, facilitated and planned meetings in collaboration with group members, offered feedback, and documented the process and experiences of participants within the project. Because of my role, I was able to easily gain access to the teachers at their schools in order to undertake participant observation and conduct interviews. While these relationships may impact my “subjectivity,” I believe this position in fact allowed greater opportunity to observe and participate as an educator and co-inquirer rather than solely as an outside university representative. Also, I contend that the notion of “neutral” observer is false, as all researchers bring with them their own subjectivities (Fine, 1994). In order to counter the temptation to infuse my own preconceived notions into my interpretations, in addition to triangulating my data sources I also informally checked in with individual group members on a regular basis to describe what I was seeing and have them reflect on initial analyses.

As a white woman, I join other white anti-racist scholars working toward equity and justice in schools and larger society (e.g., McIntosh; Sleeter; Wise). As is true for all researchers, my positionality informs how I view, interpret, and make sense of data, and my whiteness is part of that positionality. While I do not purport to be an “expert” on the lived experiences of students of color, nor do I speak “for” communities of color, I consider myself an ally in solidarity with social movements

for equality. Much like the teachers in this study, my hope is to effect change and to deepen my own understandings of social justice and multicultural pedagogy.

Chapter Four: Pacing, Testing, and Mandates: Teaching Demands in this Historical Moment

“We have a committee around cultural competence type things but I think it just got lost in all the other stuff we have to do” (Abigail, interview 9/25/09, when asked how teachers at her school work toward social justice).

This chapter explores the nature of educators’ work in the present era as they face particular challenges and demands. Teachers currently confront unique and unprecedented constraints when attempting to implement shifts in their teaching practice around increased equity and justice. In the case of this study, as teachers reflected on their teaching practice through ongoing structured inquiry projects, they consistently tried to enact changes but oftentimes their efforts were either stymied or had to be somewhat covert. This chapter begins with a discussion of these specific accountability struggles, including time and pacing obstacles, surveillance and policing, and other current barriers to social justice based pedagogy. It then moves on to investigate current manifestations of teacher resistance and agency with regard to equity and the needs of students.

Accountability Constraints

Abigail: “They’re doing it because, we need to do everything on the test, and its like, someone decided- someone who doesn’t teach –decided, they can do it! They can cram a whole year’s book into the month of May!”

Sarah: “Yes, you just kind of imagine these people in Sacramento making these decisions who have never stepped in a classroom” (Project ACTION meeting conversation, 4/14/10).

Abigail and Sarah’s frustration demonstrates a chasm between what current policy demands of teachers and what they actually feel able to do within their day-to-day classroom challenges. This section will illustrate the lived realities of teachers struggling to enact equitable and socially just classroom practices in light of present education reform policies, including No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and state-mandated accountability, pacing guides, scripted curricula, and extensive testing requirements. As will be shown below, as teachers reflect on their careers, current teachers face a tremendous amount of pressure, policing, lack of agency, and –perhaps the most challenging aspect- a severe sense of dread around standardized test scores.

Laura’s professional trajectory illustrates the changes that have transpired for classroom educators over the last 25 years:

When I first started teaching, I don’t think there were benchmarks that are required of late, like STAR²⁹ testing the way it is now, and when I started a long time ago it was like, we did what we wanted and we taught how we

²⁹ STAR: Standardized Testing and Reporting, the California statewide assessment system.

wanted. We had books, like Houghton-Mifflin, and I used those, but I also had a choice- so we had textbooks to base some of our teaching on, but we also had choices, and standards weren't so much in the forefront at that time. Not that those are bad things, I'm just saying that's the way it was when I first started teaching. So I didn't necessarily have to follow the book, but I could... And I think about twelve years ago, the standards and all these things started being more in my face (interview, 2/17/10).

In fact, even as Laura tried to enact a socially just pedagogy in her after-school program, she was still forced to work with her students on test preparation, explicitly utilizing a sheet of released answers from the California Standards Test (CST) for Grade 7 English Language Arts during one of my classroom observations. As I will examine in the following chapter, while many educators feel that successful test preparation is itself a form of social justice, not having any option can be stifling and frustrating for teachers and students alike.

For some of the teachers who are newer to the profession, this level of accountability can be surprising and challenging in their first years. Felicia's final paper describes her early difficulties navigating these mandates:

The year I began teaching in my school was the same year that the district approved and purchased new English-Language Arts curriculum, which is one of the major state adopted curricula. This was my first introduction to teacher's manuals, anthologies, sound-spelling cards, selection tests, practice books, and the like. I was instructed to use only these materials to teach reading to my students... As a student teacher, I had never worked with master teachers who use the scripted material, so when I came into my own classroom and I was given boxes and boxes of this curriculum to use, and I'm supposed to use it to teach reading, grammar, and writing to my students it was a really big shocker for me. One of the first difficulties I faced as a teacher was the challenge of reading the selections in the anthology with my students. I was disheartened that my students' perception of reading amounted to reading from the district-mandated, state-adopted anthology. To them, "reading" literally meant taking out their anthology. This is when I made a deliberate change in my teaching early on to incorporate related literature and extension activities for each of the stories we read.

Felicia's initial excitement about teaching was deflated when she faced policy realities and experienced a lack of agency with regard to scripted curricula. Yolanda similarly shared that her school had district-mandated curriculum; therefore for math and social studies they used Scott Foresman, and for Language Arts they used Houghton Mifflin. She described how "one year teaching I was very frustrated with the math curriculum because it just wasn't very cohesive, and they would try to teach one lesson per day, one concept, like place value, ok students are supposed to get place value like in one lesson? I wanted to take more of a conceptual understanding approach, but we have pacing that we have to follow, we have district assessments, so I wanted to be creative but we have to use the mandated

curriculum" (interview 9/25/09, emphasis added). This level of high-stakes accountability can result in "a crisis of the educated self, because it authorizes practices and conditions that constrain opportunities for educators and students to constitute themselves" (Gunzenhauser, 2008, p. 2225). Occasionally, teachers were given a bit of freedom to work with their own creative curriculum, which could feel like a relief. Felicia shared how, on the occasions when she worked with English-only students (rather than EL students³⁰), her district allowed her some creativity for 40 minutes at the end of the day. She stated, "right now we are just building community, building relationships, they are working on writing me letters about themselves, and we aren't even bound to our curriculum. I can do whatever I want! I can do whatever, in literature or writing or something like that, so that gives me the opportunity to try new things" (meeting fieldnote, 1/27/10).

However, while teachers were at times able to carve out a small amount of curricular and pedagogical agency, they still contended with the ever-looming standardized test. It seemed that educators had to continually assess whether to enact a creative, culturally-relevant pedagogy or to simply prepare their students for standardized tests. Laura's description of her after-school social justice-oriented student program illustrates this bind:

We're just reading things that are kind of outside the normal curriculum, and some are controversial, and they are not Prentice Hall, they're not Houghton Mifflin...in light of the social justice curriculum, it's focused on reading, it's supposed to be rigorous, it's on social justice and culturally relevant materials, and I'm working with a group of long-term EL's, how am I going to show success? How are they going to become more proficient or move up levels on STAR testing? So, how do I bring what we've been doing so that they can read the poems that the STAR test wants them to? (meeting fieldnote, 4/30/10).

Teachers were well aware of what needed to change in order to go beyond just teaching basic skills, but oftentimes discussed ways in which reform should happen without the added pressures of testing and pacing. After a Project ACTION Network Day speaker on school reform, group teachers discussed their reactions:

Sarah: I thought the morning network day presentation was great, and we're in the midst of all this program improvement planning, and it was like, oh my God, it was like she just peered into our district, knowing what we are going through, and I just felt like crying for so many of our schools and situations, how hard the government is making things for teachers and students.

Laura: Yeah, a school undergoes reform, but what about reforming the tests?

³⁰ EL: English Learner. This term is generally interchangeable with ELL (English Language Learner). EL students comprise 24% of students in California schools (CA Dept of Education, "Facts About English Learners, Spring 2009).

Sarah: Yes, it's like, reform needs to happen, but um, all the things that happen to try and just be compliant or to follow timelines or whatever, its just--

Abigail: *It's hard to be doing genuine reform under the pressure cooker of what we have currently.*

Laura: And at the same time, we can't excuse, we can't go back to the status quo either, because bad teaching is bad teaching, you know, equity, the achievement gap is still the achievement gap (meeting fieldnote, 4/17/10, emphasis added).

Sarah's comment that she felt like crying for their schools and situations, and Abigail's comparison of current conditions to a "pressure cooker" demonstrate the intense pressures experienced by these educators. Furthermore, there was a feeling that strong pushes for higher test scores happened without adequate support structures for teachers. Yolanda's school recently gained API³¹ points so it was no longer being run by the state, but the district went into PI³² due to not meeting targets for ELL students. Therefore, she shared, "there are these huge policies that are being put in our classrooms, so we are under a lot of pressure, but we don't really have clear goals for our ELL population. They are pushing for achievement and test scores but they are not really giving us enough training, or even curriculum, and it's really not meeting our students' needs" (final presentation, 5/8/10).

As the next section will demonstrate, time also played a huge factor in balancing how participants responded to these pressures. During one of our inquiry group meetings, the group had read a section from Valenzuela's Subtractive Schooling, and members were discussing the notion of "authentic caring" in schools³³. Abigail remarked that teachers in the Valenzuela study didn't "have any testing pressure, so they were saying it's a little easier for them to develop a more engaging curriculum, so its' like, I get stuck in this kind of, '*oh you are going too fast*', '*well, I know I'm going too fast, but if I don't go this fast, then we don't get through the curriculum, so its this kind of, constant struggle*" (meeting fieldnote, 4/17/10, emphasis added).

Time and Pacing

³¹ API: Academic Performance Index, an academic performance measurement system for California schools. The index is based on standardized tests results and graduation rates.

³² PI: Program Improvement. Schools that receive federal funding are monitored to see that they make Adequate Yearly Progress; they must increase the percentage of students that reach proficiency on standardized measures of achievement. Schools that don't meet Adequate Yearly Progress for two consecutive years face mandates and requirements called Program Improvement (PI). In the first year of Program Improvement, schools must offer parents the option to enroll their children in other schools. In the second year, schools must offer supplemental tutoring services at district expense. Further measures include replacement of principal or staff and, ultimately, state takeover of the school.

³³ Valenzuela maintains that a primary predictor for student engagement and success is a profound level of care from teachers, which would mirror that of a family member.

Yolanda: Next year our schedule is going to be really tight. We're going to have block schedules, the whole district is going that way, because we are P.I. year two. Last year, when we were taken over by the state, they came and they told us, you can't teach social studies, you can't teach science, you only have time for ELA and math. We looked at the schedule minutes, and have three hours of literacy and 75 minutes of math, and including our prep and lunch and recess you only have 27 minutes for social studies and science...And my principal says, how do they expect us to teach that? And I was like, you tell us.

Abigail: I think I'm also, just from trying to fit it all into the school day and feeling so rushed, I would like to do something after school, to have a chance to do more media integration and all that kind of stuff, I just don't have the time and flexibility during the school day. I've got so little time, so my freedom to do those kinds of things is after school now. So I will be trying to get more of that in. There is no leeway in our district with anything that is not state-approved curriculum.

Elizabeth: Yeah, we are little lemmings in our district (meeting fieldnote, 4/30/10).

As illustrated by the above quotations, these educators were given little time to teach much else beyond the two subjects (math and language arts) that were measured by standardized tests. They were also given strictly paced scripted curricula wherein they had to stay on track with timing whether or not their students had acquired a strong grasp and clear understanding. These demands impacted teachers' attempts at equitable teaching practices, student outcomes, and their efficacy in steps to close achievement gaps within their classrooms. For teachers who may have entered the profession with the goal of effecting change for young people, this seemed to be extraordinarily frustrating and appeared to affect their work in profound ways. Yolanda's final paper described how her students were rushed from one story to another in their literature anthology: "They are not given enough time to think, evaluate, and reflect on what they read. We are mandated to just teach, and they don't have enough time to practice and discuss, and there is a lot of time pressure, so I'm just going going going, whether they are with me or not, I just have to go."

Pacing and time pressures forced teachers of all grades to move on even if students were not understanding the material. Research has demonstrated that "following scripted, sequenced, highly structured textbooks that break the curricular steps down into minute pieces can be a disaster for English learners" (Collier & Thomas, 2010). The conversation below from an inquiry group meeting illustrates how issues of time and pacing transcended grade level and school district, and profoundly affected teaching and learning:

Sarah mentioned how the English classes feel harder to the students because of the pacing, versus her Reading-Digital Arts elective course. Anne echoed

this, saying "it probably makes it too hard, the pacing rushes it through and they can't get it. We have the same thing in elementary school."

Yolanda: You just can't fall behind, because your grade level partner is on this story, and I have to be on that story, so even if they don't understand, they told us to move on, follow the pacing calendar, even though they don't comprehend, they don't understand, they say follow the calendar.

Sarah: It just makes me want to cry. I think we're gonna look back at this time and go, "oh my god! How could they make us do this?"

Yolanda: And then they get really stressed and frustrated, it's just, like, really negative.

Felicia: It must have been really nice for your students, for that change of pace in this class, and kind of, to be able to dwell on something for a month.

Sarah: And you know what I realized too, it's a huge relief for me, to be unfettered from that pressure, and I'm much happier as a teacher, to be, 'oh we didn't finish, we'll go another day', how great is that?

Yolanda: And then we're always trying to cram everything, and we forget that, like, people need time to think and reflect and process.

Laura: Who doesn't think though, that's the funny thing. Who doesn't think that we don't need time to process? The people who wrote the pacing guide.

Abigail: And they're doing it because, we need to do X on the test, and it goes back and back, and it's like, someone decided—someone who doesn't teach—decided, they can do it! They can cram a whole year's book into May! (meeting fieldnote, 4/14/10).

As the above conversation demonstrates, one of the only strategies teachers enacted to deal with the consequences of not having enough time was to use their own after-school time to try and include extra lessons and creative pedagogies. While teachers needed this after-school time to grade and prepare, they were at times forced to make this sacrifice in order to meet the needs of their students. Elizabeth shared, "I have realized the need to provide educational equality for all my students in the context of Room 13. If this means that I spend extra time after school so that some ELL students can work on improving their reading comprehension skills so that they are on par with those who come from print-rich households, then perhaps that is what needs to be done" (final paper).

Another strategy educators employed in dealing with time and pacing pressures was to sacrifice some of the things they would otherwise like to teach. Felicia described her struggle: "I want something set that I can plan ahead, but the

problem is that I only have so much time during my ELA³⁴ block, and I barely get everything done in a given day, so what do I do? Do I just purposely cut out things that I should be doing in a given day, and just completely do my own thing?" (meeting fieldnote, 2/10/10). As a result, teachers were unable to integrate creative approaches to material, or to teach for equity and social justice as deeply as they would like.

For example, Yolanda went with her principal and another teacher to a conference on ELL/low-income student achievement. She described it as "inspirational, but we already have these things in place at our school, but it's not in depth. We always feel like we are rushed, no focus, just at the surface level" (meeting fieldnote, 4/30/10). She felt that even though her school was very diverse, the pressures of time and pacing impacted how instructional minutes were being spent and made it extremely difficult to enact multicultural education beyond a superficial level:

In terms of instructional minutes, we can't waste [puts "waste" in air quotes] instructional minutes on talking about Hispanic heritage with them, or talking about Ramadan. We have people from the state come with scores, like they come and watch you, and they want to make sure your agenda, like you are doing two hours of reading, basically they came and told us you don't have time to do anything else except to teach reading, writing, and math. So last year I didn't teach any science. It's like, they need to know how to read and write, and math, so it's very test-driven. They don't want us to waste instructional minutes. I mean, we try to do it, we have multicultural nights, that happens in the evening once a year, and all the families come and they bring food and dress up in their cultures, but it's very superficial. It's barely touching it, *I mean, I talk about Hispanic heritage month, but that was like five minutes, I just talked about it, and showed them the map, but like, it's not like something that I can create a unit and spend time teaching it* (interview, 9/25/09, emphasis added).

Similar struggles occurred at the higher grades; Sarah's middle school contended with the same kinds of time and pacing issues that made it nearly impossible to provide social justice-focused curricula and practices. She cogently stated, "we have had all these trainings at my school on culturally responsive texts and practices, but other people are feeling like these strategies take longer, since they're not incorporated in our current materials, which we are being pressured to cover in a certain time so that the kids can get tested on those materials" (interview, 2/19/10). It seemed that culturally competent pedagogy was at odds with the present day-to-day requirements of standardized testing policies. As explained below, these policies were ultimately enforced through the watchful eyes of structured policing and surveillance.

³⁴ English Language Arts

Surveillance and Policing

The mandates teachers faced were continually reinforced through ongoing surveillance and policing of state standards and policies. As Felicia described in her final presentation:

I never finish all the curriculum in a year. We're doing STAR testing right now, and I still have a whole unit to complete, which means I didn't go over the reading skills and the grammar that I'm supposed to be teaching for STAR testing. So, also because my school was monitored by the state the last two years, and our test scores were supposed to be very important to us, and *on any given day people would walk through my room and score me, or my walls or my kids*. It felt extremely difficult (emphasis added).

There are few professional positions wherein authorities walk through one's workplace to monitor and score the individual, particularly on a random surprise schedule. In fact, one could argue that the constant policing of teachers resembled the surveillance put forth in Foucault's use of the notion of "panopticism" to characterize social institutions (1977). The panopticon, a building design allowing for an observer to watch many individuals at once, is popular for prisons, hospitals, and schools. More recently, the panopticon (or the theory of panopticism) has become a metaphoric concept used by scholars to describe a state of discipline, policing, and surveillance. This theoretical lens can easily be extended to present-day constraints facing educators.

Panopticism can be seen in Yolanda's final paper, as she described her feeling of constantly being watched: "we are under a lot of pressure; literally, these people would come, like wearing suits, and a clipboard, and it's a digital scoring system, and they come and check you off, give you points." She elaborated in an interview, explaining that she was unable to teach anything other than reading, writing, and math, because they "have people from the state come with scores, *they come and watch you*, and they want to make sure your agenda, like you are doing two hours of reading, basically they came and told us you don't have time to do anything else" (9/25/09, emphasis added).

This sense of being policed extended throughout districts and transcends grade levels (though it is most common at the elementary grades). For example, during one Project ACTION stretch break, Sarah and Felicia were casually chatting about how unusual it was for Sarah to have the freedom to do literature circles with her students. Felicia said, "there used to be a lot more freedom in what we do, but recently because we were being monitored by the state they really cracked down on things, and we tend to have a group of teachers at my school where it's very much, like, take out your practice book on this page, and, they don't really do much beyond worksheets...now, it's been kinda lifted, but for a while it was like, minute-by-minute, whatever is on your agenda is what you should be doing, and it was like, *people would walk through our rooms*, it was just horrible" (meeting fieldnote, 1/27/10, emphasis added). Therefore, this surveillance actually resulted in more

worksheets for students and fewer possibilities for creative pedagogical strategies due to a distinct lack of teacher agency.

In another inquiry group meeting, Elizabeth mentioned that she felt capable of teaching her ELD students without “everyone coming in and monitoring” her all the time (meeting fieldnote, 10/29/10). Yolanda echoed this sense of frustration in her final paper:

We have to follow our district pacing guide. You can't fall behind, so when we were taken over by the state, they would come and also go to my grade level partner's classroom, and they would want to see that we are on the same page, same lesson, and same activity, and I was like, 'how? that's not even possible, because our styles are so different, and how can they expect that?' To me, that's not even good teaching, and they were pushing for that whole one-size-fits-all kind of teaching.

Due to this continual scrutiny, teachers were forced to be secretive about any curricular or pedagogical strategies that they felt would best serve their students. Sometimes, this could happen in the short post-testing window of time each spring, as Sarah explained: “After testing is over, there's like a month where the teachers go woo-hoo, we can push aside the other stuff and do our own creative projects!” (final presentation). Many times, however, teachers resorted to giving up their much needed after-school planning time in order to create and facilitate programs that meet the needs of their students. Yolanda explained, “Next year I don't think I can have literature circles, because we are regrouping, and *they are really going to police us*. So I am thinking of doing something like this after-school, like a book club, because the students and I really did enjoy reading these books and having discussions” (final paper, emphasis added). Thus, teachers were once again forced to navigate a complex system of constraints, mandates, surveillance, and policing in order to carve out time and space to best meet the needs of their students.

Needs of Students Versus Top-Down Demands

“The normalizing tendencies of high-stakes accountability policy represent profound constraint, the crisis of the educated self” (Gunzenhauser, 2008, p. 2234).

Teachers in this study expressed a profound pull toward prioritizing how to best meet the needs of their students, even in the face of extensive demands from present constraints. The individual needs of students were validated and considered, with educators working to place emphasis on caring, engagement, empowerment, and social justice in their teaching practice. However, as Yolanda shared, “Today teachers are mandated to follow their district curricular pacing guide and scripted instructional program even when it does not meet the needs of our students. Teachers know that this one-size fits all approach is not effective in classrooms, especially for our ELL population. *We struggle between completing our mandated duties and meeting our student needs*” (final paper, emphasis added).

Coupled with a culture of surveillance and testing, teachers were consistently torn between working for their students and working to keep their jobs.

A common sentiment among the educators in this study was the feeling that they were unable to teach students based on the particular needs and circumstances of each student. Felicia struggled because her district-mandated scripted anthology doesn't "have much regard for who they are as students or where they're coming from, and their life experiences" (final paper and presentation, 5/7/10). She shared,

It does go against what I am trying to do as a teacher, it's not for the benefit of the children, it's not the most conducive to their learning...I'm not able to give to my students or do for my students what I want to do. In my district they are just looked at as, these kids, it's like the decisions that the district is making is not based on what we can do to benefit the children and what can we do so that they are actually learning, but it's more like what can we do so that in the fastest way possible we can raise test scores so we can be in the newspapers with increased API scores? That's really what the focus is on.

Furthermore, trying to navigate between the needs of their students and the current demands of their profession caused the teachers to feel as though they were not being truly effective in either realm. Laura shared that she "goes back and forth" because she would "rather be teaching fun engaging stuff. So I find that tension and the way I try to negotiate it sometimes is not a good thing. I try to find a balance between the two, but I don't think I am that successful" (interview, 2/17/10). Due to this intense push/pull phenomenon, teachers were also left feeling that they cannot give enough authentic caring to their students. Following another discussion of Valenzuela's Subtractive Schooling, Yolanda shared that she gets "caught up on the mandates, and sometimes the whole day goes by and you realize there are some students you haven't interacted with, like after lunch I'm like, 'oh, he was here all along?'" Sarah responded, "you have to work to express caring, but because of the part about the standards and the pacing and the pressure, I really think it's harder to care in the way that we're describing" (meeting fieldnote, 4/17/10). Therefore, though extensive research has demonstrated the need for students to feel a sense of caring and a strong personal relationship with their teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999; Weinstein, 2002), these educators felt that at times they were unable to provide that kind of engagement even though they very much wanted to do so.

In a similar vein, Sarah shared that she believed "students should feel that they've learned, and that they've developed their skills and their knowledge. Now that we are in Program Improvement, we're talking all about covering the material. But there's a difference, I mean, there's covering and then there's teaching. I think a lot of times since No Child Left Behind, we've been covering, and not teaching as much" (interview, 2/19/10). Thus, teachers were forced to "cover" material, rather than truly "teach" based on the specific actual needs of the students who entered their classroom each year.

For example, Felicia felt that due to present constraints, teachers may not be motivated or able to teach according to the specifics of what their students may

need to learn. She shared a story about how a co-worker of hers was “really into the standards, and what's on the standards, like they have to just achieve those things. And I was like, 'so-and-so doesn't know how to use scissors' and she said, 'well, is that on the California state standards?' and was like, 'if not, then I don't really care, I don't need to teach that” (interview, 2/8/10). This teacher was forced to disregard a lesson as simple as how to use scissors, due to intense external pressures.

Because of this tension, teachers found that student achievement was impacted. Sarah discussed how her students “definitely had some issues with the ELA classes. Some of the comments [in her interviews with students] were about having teachers slow down, give more directions, stop grading so hard, they feel like they can't get an A, do more fun things. I think that's really reflective of the pacing guide and scripting and really heavy standards-dense instruction at our school” (final presentation, 5/7/10). Both students and teachers emerged from this test-heavy and strictly-paced environment with a sense of frustration and confusion. This environment also deeply affected these teachers' capacity to improve their teaching practice in order to work for equity.

Accountability and Equity

Educators in this study wanted to enact a social justice pedagogy, but their efforts were often stymied by the degree that test scores and accountability mandates affected their ability to implement these changes to their practice (meeting fieldnote, 10/28/09). For example, Laura shared, “I read an article about using poems to help students talk back to stereotypes, about bringing equity-related texts into the classroom, and I thought, 'you know, that's probably a good way to get my students, my ELL students, involved, like doing poetry. *And then I thought, 'but you know what? Is that going to improve my test scores?'*” (meeting fieldnote, 10/28/09, emphasis added). Unfortunately, Laura's attempts to utilize texts that explicitly generate conversations about stereotypes and race were tempered by her worry that doing so may not increase students' scores on standardized tests.

Similarly, Yolanda found that pacing and testing mandates inhibited her abilities to “talk about diversity”, since she found that “basically reading and writing is very test-driven. We need to bring up our scores, but I want to bring more of that multicultural diversity to my classroom. I want to do so much more, but there's no time, and I get stressed out, and I think I get grumpy with the kids. And it's hard for them too, to transition for 20 minutes at a time” (interview, 9/25/09). Sarah similarly expressed that she wanted to get to know her students and their interests, and teach about social justice issues that are not on the curriculum, but “there isn't room for that” (interview, 2/19/10). Teachers in this study were consistently torn in this way - regardless of grade level, school district, or years of teaching experience. For example, during one inquiry group meeting, Yolanda expressed her excitement at recalling that teaching for equity “can be, its not just, race but also gender, and youth culture, so I always get recharged.” In response, Laura stated, “Well, excuse my language, but the equity work is cool and fun and all that, but I just wish it would fucking show up on a test score.” Yolanda sighed and remarked, “oh, that's my goal too, I'm hoping.” Laura responded, “yeah, maybe the tests need to

change, you know, because, this is important, and you can see the responses from the kids, but it doesn't show up on a damn test score" (meeting fieldnote, 3/10/10). Laura's use of profanity illustrates her deep level of frustration with the limiting situation in which she found herself, in spite being a master teacher with extensive teaching experience.

Another exchange from a particular Project ACTION inquiry group meeting further demonstrates the position in which the teachers found themselves as they tried to navigate the path between equity and accountability. This meeting, and the ensuing dialogue, deserves detailed description and analysis. One Friday afternoon at the end of April, the group came together for one of the final meetings of the school year (4/30/10). Even though it was a relaxed potluck at Laura's home, STAR testing was imminent in their schools, and the teachers were on edge.

That day the group was scheduled to do a consultation on Laura's data. She was specifically seeking feedback on how to best demonstrate student proficiency on tests. She gave out some of the English Learner textbooks for teachers to look over, as well as the non-EL textbook which all the students would be using the following year in their mainstream English classes. She also gave out copies of the state reading standards for poetry, and some sample STAR test questions. The group also read written student responses, and Laura played audio from one of her project group meetings when students were discussing poems. Her consultation question for group discussion was: "How can I make these tests and standards interesting for my students?" Below is a transcript of the discussion that followed:

Laura: We're just reading things that are kind of outside the normal curriculum, and some are controversial, and they are not Prentice Hall, they're not Houghton Mifflin...in light of the social justice curriculum, it's focused on reading, its supposed to be rigorous, its on social justice and culturally relevant materials, and I'm working with a group of long-term EL's, how am I going to show success? How are they going to become more proficient or move up levels on STAR testing?

Abigail: I was just laughing at how in the textbook, Theme 1 is Independence and Identity, and the poetry that they choose is Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson, and I'm like, that's nothing to do with her current students' identity and independence!

Abigail had astutely observed that in order for Laura to use the district-mandated textbook, she would be forced to subject her students to the traditional canon rather than their own cultures. However, the STAR tests utilized canonical literature, so Laura was in a bind. Laura then gave out some student work and her supplemental poetry materials for the group to look over- including a book of Latino teens' poetry, sharing that "the kids just loved this book, because they could pick it up and see bunches of stories about them." Sarah then shared that she has the same questions as Laura, around how to show success on the STAR tests, and stated:

It just kills me what Abigail pointed out, that you open to the Identity page and you see Walt Whitman and its like, they deserve to come alive in conversations like that, about stuff that ignites their interest. All of us do. And then I wonder, they get to the test, and they see Walt Whitman after they've been reading, you know, about Cesar Chavez, or Latino poetry, and I hope, I don't know, will they have the staying power to get through the other stuff that doesn't speak to them?

Elizabeth: Yeah, it makes me think how we can equitably address this issue with such vast academic differences. These kids, well, this kid [indicating one of Laura's handouts] is writing not as well as my first graders, and its terrifying to see this kid that now needs to take this test to prove he's academically proficient and then be sent out to the real world, and how does our education system address that? Without watering down the curriculum, I don't know, I mean, what is equitable education when kids come from such vast differences? That's what I wonder.

Felicia: Something that I wonder, is just looking at this book, in what ways can teachers bring in, like culturally relevant poems and essays and short stories, I wonder how teachers can start using materials like this to teach those same literary elements and the same kind of vocabulary, and I'm sure that at a certain point students might feel successful being able to look at poetry and not only can they relate to it because of the content, but also be able to identify certain elements, and how you could translate that to the Walt Whitman and the Emily Dickinson.

Felicia had perceptively pointed out the conundrum these experienced educators were finding themselves in; there were no simple strategies for utilizing culturally relevant texts while ensuring students achieve on standardized tests. This was one of the key challenges the group consistently faced in teaching for social justice. The conversation continued, as teachers shared strategies on attempting to navigate this challenge:

Abigail: I think if you start here, that's where we begin. Like, what's that movie that got turned into a movie, [someone mumbles "Freedom Writers?"] yeah, she did the same thing and, these teachers who talk about having great success, they often start with where the kids come from, and its almost like a muscle you are building up, they learn how to do all these things they need to do on those accessible, interesting poems, and then often there is one that mirrors it, except it might be about an Irish immigrant in the 1800's, and its almost like, a teacher would need to find those parallels, and say, 'ok, we've done this one, now lets see if we can see what's similar about these two poems, there is the same message, they may look different and had a different experience, but they also may have faced prejudice, or kind of, the themes that you are looking at, I think you can find it in that classic literature, it just takes a lot of work.

At this point in the conversation, I mentioned the notion of bridging from students' cultures to canonical literature, specifically describing the "bridge" metaphor and concepts argued by Mahiri (2000) and Morrell & Duncan-Andrade (2004) around utilizing popular youth culture to assist students in understanding complex concepts.

Yolanda: I think it is equity, yes, we have to do both. I mean, yes we have to use multicultural, relevant materials, but they are being tested, and our tests are not culturally relevant, but that's how they are measured, that's the gateway to higher education. They need to know how to read academic language. They need to know how to write academic language. So we are responsible for doing both. I mean, it's a lot work, but we can't just give them, I think we have to make that connection, help them to make that bridge.

The teachers were repeatedly remarking on the great amount of work needed to effectively bridge this gap between academic language and multicultural materials. Abigail and Charlotte then continued discussing how teachers can potentially bring about these connections for students:

Abigail: I think some of the Prentice-Hall things could relate, with a bridge, I mean, there's a lot of stuff you can connect to, you know, the poems seem to talk about things that could be more universal problems, its just written in a style that's not very engaging or accessible, and the kids wouldn't make an automatic connection, but it seems to me that with some of the poetry the connection can be made. Its possible, it just definitely needs a bridge beforehand.

Charlotte: One of the things I was thinking is that, it seems like we are talking about all this academic language, and so, really talking about it with them as a tool to let them into places they might be shut out of...So let's learn this academic language but learning it early, and using it with something like *Vatos* and Cesar Chavez, so that they are learning it with something that they are really engaged with and interested in and that way they really gain that power before they have to move on and tackle something where they are 'what the hell is this, this is dumb and boring', which is inevitably going to happen, but just be really explicit with it.

At the end of the dialogue, Laura shared that she really appreciated the images of code-switching the group provided during the discussion, including: bridge; muscle; translation; parallel; open and shutting the door; teaching how to play the game; stating:

You know, they all know about slamming doors in middle school, so I really appreciate those things. And I hear, there is some benefit to doing things the traditional way, like rote memorization, and 'ok I guess you have to read Walt

Whitman', but its about finessing it, and bridging it, paralleling it, opening and shutting the door, so I really appreciate those kinds of simple concepts that I can hang on to.

As this inquiry group meeting illustrates, these educators faced extraordinarily difficulties assisting their diverse groups of students to demonstrate proficiency on standardized tests. This dialogue also shows how the Project ACTION meetings provided a useful space for the teachers to discuss potential strategies for dealing with these constraints³⁵.

Teacher Resistance

"Many teachers will say you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink. I've said that before too. But I think after this year, I think to myself, well, 'what's in the water? Why don't they want to drink?' because now that I've seen how different students are in two different classes, *it just makes me wonder when and how might we resist policies that we say are good for our students, like the really packed standards-driven pacing guides*" (Sarah final presentation, 5/7/10, emphasis added).

The act of questioning why the proverbial horse doesn't want to drink the water is analogous to the ways in which these teachers attempted to enact acts of micro-resistance to policies and constraints. Resisting, transforming, and navigating these standards, tests, and mandates required creativity on the part of the teachers. This took various forms, including advocating for student needs, transforming how a particular standard is taught, teaching an occasional surreptitious lesson without the knowledge of school administration, or even just changing the semantics of how they referred to their curricula and pedagogical strategies in the presence of administrators and district staff. The teachers in this study utilized various strategies through a range of acts of resistance and agency.

The most common forms of creative resistance were not using district-mandated textbooks, or extensive supplementation with other teacher-chosen materials. At times, as Laura stated, it was due to the textbook not meeting student needs: "So I do I bring in stuff that isn't prescriptive, but helps guide them to some self-discipline, or self-interest, or self-commitment around reading? That's what I'm looking for. Which isn't in the High Point curriculum" (meeting fieldnote, 12/14/09). Other times this kind of agency emerged because teachers felt restrained; for instance, Felicia shared in her final paper that she often had asked herself, "'Why do I have to use this?' or 'what can I add?'" She felt she "had to take decisive action to deliberately make time to include additional literature in my reading instruction... I know that I need to constantly seek out more ways to incorporate literature that is personally and culturally meaningful for my students." Felicia remarked that this was a form of giving herself "freedom" to "find out what

³⁵ Chapter Six will explore how Project ACTION meeting spaces helped teachers share methods for navigating current conditions.

would happen if I purposefully incorporated that kind of literature into my reading instruction, apart from my regular ELA curriculum. This would be a concrete way in which I could personally and professionally embrace and struggle with the issue of equity in my classroom through the context of teaching reading to struggling readers” (meeting fieldnote, 12/14/09). Thus, in the service of meeting student needs, teachers supplemented the traditional textbook in creative ways that allowed for more flexibility.

Another form teacher resistance took was in rethinking how to specifically meet state standards. During one classroom observation, Laura mentioned that she wasn't using the schools' district-mandated textbooks, and instead utilizes other materials to meet the standards and align with the units. For example, she shared that for a unit in the textbook about friendship, she incorporated poems and other materials that explored the concept of friendship, rather than solely teaching with the textbook. She shared that as a master teacher she was certain this fulfilled the state standards (observation fieldnote, 3/23/10). Another example she discussed was her use of a particular culturally-relevant book: “It's fabulous, because it's written by students of downtown L.A., and it's real bilingual, and so whatever topic I'm teaching from High Point, to engage my really disengaged kids, I photocopy something that relates to that, and I give it to them first, and then it makes the High Point [district-mandated] stuff easier” (observation fieldnote, 4/13/10). Felicia shared that she had considered similar questions since her first year of teaching, remarking: “Through the years the questions have evolved, starting with ‘Why do I need to use this English-Language Arts curriculum?’ to ‘What can I add to my ELA instruction to make it more interesting?’” (final paper).

At times this resistance took a furtive nature. Teachers needed to be stealthy in order to successfully enact surreptitious strategies that may have best met student needs. Laura shared, “I've even stopped using the High Point curriculum the last couple weeks in my other classes too. I'm not using these [points at shelf of textbooks] cute little books. I'm gonna get in trouble!” She also mentioned trying to get the administration to support having a social justice-based after school class again in the future, stating, “I may disguise it... *until they can monitor me every single second, I'm just going to do this stuff*” (observation fieldnote, 3/9/10, emphasis added). At times, transforming the particular language or addressing semantics made the most sense for teachers. For example, in one Project ACTION meeting, Felicia mentioned that she was trying to supplement her curriculum “with *what I call additional resources*, so that reading and literature can be a lot more meaningful for my students” (meeting fieldnote, 2/10/10, emphasis added). Hence, a certain level of concealment felt necessary if the teachers were to have agency to make curricular choices.

Several of the Project ACTION teachers tried to influence their colleagues at their respective schools to resist as well. However, they were challenged by the constraints that also made it difficult for them to have agency:

Sarah: It seems like on our staff...it just never seems to really get to the point where you are discussing the specific kids in the groups and what their particular needs are.

Laura: It is frustrating, but I guess the question is how do you build enough of a group to effect change?

Felicia: Yeah, they don't do anything in the school to build that kind of relationship or community amongst the teachers (meeting fieldnote, 2/20/10).

Hence, even when the teachers strived to motivate their fellow faculty to enact strategies of resistance, school mechanisms prevented this from easily happening. Laura's final paper communicated her desire to impact her fellow educators:

The spillover needs to flow beyond my project and classroom into other classes the following school year... My school is implementing strategic companion classes next year for those students performing at a below basic or far below basic level. The populations of these classes will contain a high number of LTELL (long term English language learners) students... Given my teaching and coaching positions, I need to advocate for a social justice curriculum. It remains to be seen though, if teachers are allowed to deviate from the prescribed texts. I look forward to communicating with my colleagues about my project; to collaborating with them; and to convincing the school to do what is vital to students' learning.

Though much of the time teachers didn't think of their acts of resistance in political terms, occasionally teachers referred to their practice in overtly critical theoretical language. Early in the year, Elizabeth shared background information about herself with the inquiry group, stating that in college "my eyes were opened to social injustices and I wanted to go into a field that addressed those issues, only to find it's so overwhelming, trying to keep one foot in the system and one foot out of the system in trying to make some change...aside from all the red tape that I see around me" (meeting fieldnote, 9/30/09). Much like many other young teachers, Elizabeth viewed her teaching as an act of social change, and worked to carve out transformative pedagogical spaces.

Similarly, during the end-of-year focus group, dialogue took place that explicitly named this work as rebellious:

Sarah: I feel like everybody is talking about doing practices that they know are best for their students, but that are sort of outside of the framework of what they are being asked to do, so, I feel a commitment to rebellion [laughter], or fomenting rebellion, against the educational practices that are being pushed on us right now.

Laura: I agree, there's something political about this too, very much.

Occasionally, once teachers had a little more experience and power in the school, they were given a bit of freedom. For example, Sarah had been asked by her school administration to design and execute a Reading/Digital Arts course, which she shared was "designed to tap into an interest area for students, an area where some students have confidence, whereas they might not feel that same confidence in

other areas and other subjects. So its an intervention that's meant to feel like an elective, and I view it as additive rather than subtractive so that they feel like they are learning something new or getting something out of it, and not just getting the same thing, drills and skills kind of activities” (final presentation, 5/7/10). The fact that she was allowed this creativity and agency in devising a new and innovative class demonstrated the extent to which she had earned the trust of her school administration over the years she had been teaching (and slowly pushing for change). Laura had similarly reached a point in her teaching career where she was given some freedom to design new curricula. She shared that for the following year she wanted to potentially teach "a social justice curriculum, and then the other teachers can teach all the core crap" (meeting fieldnote, 2/20/10). In fact, Laura’s after-school project was a clear example of a school administration that allowed and supported a long-time teacher in her work to resist larger policies for the sake of increased student achievement. As illustrated in the following chapter, this type of teaching is in fact what social justice pedagogy may look like in practice.

Chapter Five: Engagement, Care, and Rigor: Social Justice Teaching in an Era of Accountability

"They get to the test, and they see Walt Whitman after they've been reading, you know, about Cesar Chavez, or Vatos, and I hope, I don't know, will they have the staying power to get through the other stuff that doesn't speak to them?" (Sarah, 4/30/10).

"I'm looking to create bridges so I can get them to understand these are bridges from your life to something that you may think is boring and academic" (Laura, 12/14/09).

This chapter examines what social justice oriented teaching looks like in practice, specifically as related to curricula, time, and student-teacher relationships. I will argue that within the confines and challenges of present constraints, teachers in this study worked to enact equitable teaching strategies through shifts in student engagement, academic rigor, and culturally relevant curricula. However, oftentimes these strategies only happened outside of the formal school day or under the radar of administrative policies, and with the shadow of standardized testing always looming.

Curriculum & Cultural Identification Versus Engagement

A distinct phenomenon that emerged from the study data was how often teachers chose to focus on social justice teaching through one of two means: either culturally relevant curriculum or simple engagement. Laura's cogent question from a meeting illustrated this phenomenon: "do I just present *engaging curriculum which isn't necessarily social justice curriculum?* That's kind of the problem, *interest versus social justice*" (12/19/09, emphasis added). For example, while some teachers may have used "fun" books about robots or animals to try to engage students in order to increase achievement, others worked to emphasize socially transformative and culturally engaging texts in order to increase engagement and raise achievement. At times, teachers were able to effectively combine both these pedagogical strategies; however, doing so proved more difficult.

Felicia shared how she attempted to combine both of these aspects in her choices of curriculum: "How can I use curriculum to not only connect to students' lives, but allow it to be a starting point for their own understanding of who they are, where they come from, how others see them, etc?" (journal entry, 10/29/10). Effectively accomplishing all of these things while also helping students achieve on standardized tests was a fundamental challenge faced by the educators. The teachers demonstrated a sincere commitment to draw upon the culture of their students' families when planning their lessons and curricula. Yolanda shared how she first began to understand the fundamental importance of incorporating both engagement and culturally relevant curricula:

I noticed student disengagement and disinterest during instructional reading and ELD times. When students were asked to take out their anthology or practice workbooks, they often responded with discontent. At first, I

reprimanded them for not showing a positive attitude towards learning. However, as I began to observe my students, assess their performance, examine the adopted core reading curriculum, and reflect on my teaching and instructional strategies, I realized I wanted to explore how students would respond if they were given a whole novel to read that was "more" culturally relevant and personal to their lives. I wanted to use books that students could make strong connections to ethnicity, language, socio-economic status, and family relationships (final paper, 5/7/10).

Yolanda hoped that engagement and a culturally relevant curriculum could potentially go hand-in-hand. Abigail, however, discussed the complexity in trying to successfully combine both:

They got really into fables, and even though that wasn't really necessarily culturally relevant text, I think there was something about that, there was a clear message about right and wrong that was appealing to them, so it was interesting to look at what was, what would be considered more engagement or developmentally appropriate text. I may have to sacrifice ethnically related literature just because it was hard to find. That was the most disturbing thing, there was nothing I could find that was good for a nine year old that talked about their experiences. There's some stuff that talks about being migrant workers, but none of my kids are from that background, you know, they were born here, and just because they're Mexican doesn't mean they're gonna have, you know, so there were a lot of different challenges in looking at the equity piece and how I can incorporate that in my teaching (final presentation, 5/7/10, emphasis added).

Similarly, during an inquiry group meeting, Sarah remarked, "I brought in culturally relevant stuff into my classroom by having kids interpret quotes by Cesar Chavez, Martin Luther King, and Obama, and I just bombed [laughing], just so bombed, it really wasn't much of a lesson, it was just way too hard, it was like, ok it might represent their cultures, but it was like, unattainable." Laura responded, "Culturally relevant doesn't always mean ethnicity, because I picked this culturally relevant song, it was from South America, but it was like, my age song. The kids were like, ewwww!" Yolanda chimed in, "youth culture!" and Laura echoed her, "yes, youth culture, that's equity too" (meeting fieldnote, 3/10/10). This exchange demonstrates that even when teachers brought in what might be considered "culturally relevant" materials, engagement with the lesson didn't automatically occur if the students were unable to immediately relate. Sarah further confirmed this phenomenon during an interview: "I have thought about social justice or culturally relevant, like, what's appropriate and fitting at different ages. And even the stuff that I did on immigration that I thought would really speak to my students about their families, didn't happen as much as I thought! So I don't know how relevant that was, even though it was meant to be" (2/19/10). Thus, while extensive scholarship has established the vital importance of culturally-relevant curricula (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995), it is significant to note that there was not

necessarily student interest just because a text represented a student's family background or heritage. Later in this chapter I will explore how particular pedagogies made an impact in terms of the level of interest in culturally-relevant materials, but it is nonetheless important to note this fundamental phenomenon.

Another consideration the teachers in this study grappled with was that with increased engagement came potentially higher standardized test scores. While numerous studies have explored the contested nature of standardized tests as true measures of student achievement due to cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic biases, (Kohn, 2004; Popham, 2004; Ravitch, 2010), ongoing testing was nevertheless an everyday reality for the students and teachers in this study. A fieldnote from one inquiry group meeting illustrates how Felicia utilized a "fun" book, which was not necessarily culturally relevant, in order to engage students and to bring about increased achievement on tests (which, as will be examined later in this study, was considered by several of the educators to be itself a form of equity):

Felicia noted that her students are more interested in fun and in what captures their attention, rather than what she had hoped for which was more about the storylines. Currently her students are reading a book called *Dogzilla* [a spoof of the movie *Godzilla*, with dog and mice characters]. She shared that they always love it, and they enjoyed the unit because it is really interesting, and that due to the teacher-produced curriculum rather than the Houghton Mifflin curriculum, about half of her kids scored at 80% or higher on their tests, which is really good compared to how they normally do. As she stated, "*There was that motivation, and that kind of interest, just because they love the story and they love the author, and so that gave me some idea of how to move forward in terms of like, how I should select my books*" (1/12/10, emphasis added).

Hence, Felicia's use of a relatively trivial book about dogs and mice actually gained her students' attention more effectively than when other Project ACTION teachers attempted to utilize what would be considered culturally-relevant materials. However, examples also exist of ways in which the teachers were able to both draw upon culturally-relevant materials and simultaneously lead engaging lessons. Throughout this study the instances when this happened most successfully were when a second language component was directly involved, as the following section will explore.

Culturally-Relevant AND Engaging: The Language Component

A distinct trend emerged from the study data: As documented above, it was oftentimes challenging for the teachers to successfully increase student engagement with the use of what may be described as "culturally relevant" materials. However, when the materials included a Spanish language component, the teachers with classes of mostly Latino students consistently noted the students' heightened

engagement³⁶. Though this may not be a tremendously surprising finding, it is important to consider that these, in fact, were the few moments throughout all my classroom observations, interviews, and fieldnotes when “culturally-relevant” materials actually directly led to increased student engagement (as reported by the teachers). For example, Yolanda’s final paper described how she asked a student about his favorite part of a book, and he answered, “It has Spanish. That’s my language. The story is like it could happen in real life.” She elaborated:

When they see Spanish words, like Gary’s Soto’s books, they were like ‘ooh I know this word!’ because I just gave them their books, and they were so excited, they were like, ‘I know what this word is!’ (meeting fieldnote, 2/10/10).

Similarly, Laura’s after-school remedial reading program was most successful when she incorporated Spanish language curricula. One observation fieldnote reads, “They started off with a poem about a Chicana not being able to speak Spanish called *Mi Problema*. The students got very into it, saying things like, ‘It’s cool because its Mexicans. My friend is just like that.’ Laura asked if they wanted to read the Spanish or the English first, and they said Spanish” (2/9/10). On another day, a similar phenomenon occurred:

Laura introduced the reading for the day. She said, “we have been working on Social Justice, Identity, Language, and Reading, and now this is the reading part.” Students groaned, but then she pulled out a book called *Vatos*, by Jose Galvez. It completely got their attention and engagement; students were staring and began sitting up in their seats...Laura asked students to read parts of it out loud. A student asked, “Can I say it in Spanish?” “Yes, you can say it in Spanish,” she answered. A student read the dedication in Spanish, and other students read portions as well. One student exclaimed, “That’s not supposed to be a book!” and Laura responded, “It is a book!” (observation fieldnote, 1/19/10).

Students who had previously appeared bored by reading seemed visibly more engaged upon experiencing the Spanish language component. Thus, one reliable strategy these teachers utilized in order to incorporate culturally relevant materials for increased engagement was to focus on including texts containing a language spoken by their students’ families. As illustrated in the next section, another strategy teachers in this study employed in order to reliably heighten student engagement was to draw upon texts that spoke to their students’ socioeconomic status.

³⁶ As documented in Chapter Three, several teachers in this study taught classes that were predominately Latino (the students held mixed immigration statuses and represented various levels of familial generations in the United States). Thus, though this claim could potentially apply to any students who are familiar with a household second language, further research would be required. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I argue that this claim solely applies to students of this particular background in this context.

The Socioeconomic Component of Materials for Student Engagement

It's a real challenge to think about how to get them engaged, otherwise of course they won't want to do this...*its really hard to find culturally relevant stuff that they would be interested in...so I started to look at things where they could identify socioeconomically*, and there's a lot there that talks about coming from poverty, so in order to get more engaging texts I had to look at the socioeconomic status too (Abigail final presentation, 5/6/10, emphasis added).

Abigail's statement illustrates how she had more success in finding materials that excited and interested her students when she focused on socioeconomic identification, rather than solely her students' racial or cultural backgrounds. This seemed partially due to the difficulties (particularly at the elementary grades) the teachers encountered in actually finding culturally relevant curricular materials. The following inquiry group conversation illuminates these challenges, the choices teachers made as a result, and the resulting student interest:

Abigail: I'm really having a hard time figuring out what book to pick. Because all the Gary Soto ones look like they might be the right level, but they are all short story ones. I don't want them to read short stories, I want them to actually have an experience of reading a full book.

Yolanda: Yeah, that was the problem, Gary Soto is too advanced for my fourth graders.

Abigail: So I found one by Kathryn Patterson, it's called the Flip-Flop Girl, it's about this girl, and her mother dies, and they move to a new town and the kids at school are kind of making fun of her, and she doesn't have friends, and then she meets this girl Lupe who is kind of all on her own, but she helps this girl who is a loner...So I thought that might be a possibility.

Yolanda: But you know, it was shocking, how there is such a lack of multicultural==

Abigail: ==Oh my, gosh, nothing!

Yolanda: Gary Soto, Sandra Cisneros, that's it.

Abigail: Yeah, so finding a fourth grade literature circle book, that focuses on Latino students, it's hard! It's just not out there, as far as I can find. I've been looking on Amazon, looking on lit circle book suggestions, like==

Yolanda: You could do, if you're not focusing on, like, ethnicity==

Abigail: Yeah, that's why I thought I would just maybe do the, um, economic thing. Because, you know, 90% of my kids are low income. I mean, that's an issue for them. It's just, connection to them, it doesn't necessarily have to be about their ethnicity to make them feel connected to the curriculum.

Yolanda: There's a book, Good Thursday, that talks about getting their assistance paychecks on Fridays, so they have to wait until that day to go grocery shopping, that was really good and the students got so into it (meeting fieldnote, 12/15/09).

This dialogue, and particularly Abigail's statement, "it doesn't necessarily have to be about their ethnicity to make them feel connected to the curriculum" points to the difficulty these teachers faced in finding exciting culturally-relevant materials and the resulting strategy they employed in order to increase student engagement. As demonstrated in the background chapter of this study, the student population at these teachers' schools is primarily low-income; thus, the teachers ended up focusing on helping students identify with the texts based on socioeconomic background rather than solely ethnicity or cultural background. However, for these social-justice focused educators who fundamentally wanted and hoped to use culturally relevant materials, this was a frustrating bind in which to find themselves. As Abigail explicated upon being asked about her plans for a student focal group for her Project ACTION inquiry question:

A.M.: "Did you end up deciding on a focal group?"

Abigail: "Well I was going to be doing ELL, which is basically all my students, but I took it out because I'm not sure that I'm gonna use, necessarily the Latino background as my focus for cultural, that's what I'm having trouble deciding, do I use Latino or do I use more of a kind of socioeconomic, which also kind of resonates with my population, which would not be specific to ELL's. So I'm kind of having a hard time figuring that out, figuring out where to focus" (meeting fieldnote, 12/9/09).

The teachers faced difficulties in determining how to best produce student interest, whether through culturally relevant materials, language, or socioeconomic status. One solution these educators attempted to enact was to have students assist in choosing classroom materials, as the following section illustrates.

Student Involvement in Curriculum Choices

When teachers involved students in picking materials, there were two typical outcomes. At times, students chose texts that were explicitly culturally relevant; however, much of the time students chose curricula that spoke to other interests and was simply engaging. For example, when asked how and why Sarah chose to teach an article on immigration, she said it was based on student interest and that the class "brainstormed topics, and I thought it would resonate, and it does" (observation fieldnote, 12/17/09). In this case, her students responded well to a "culturally relevant" text that they had a hand in choosing. However, as the following fieldnote excerpt demonstrates, Abigail described how her students chose books for their literature circles:

'Although these books aren't all Latino/Hispanic, in fact a lot of them aren't, my thought is that there is something that speaks to them...it doesn't have to be Hispanic or Latino, but whatever it is that speaks to them will engage them.' A few of her students chose books around issues of socioeconomic status, but mostly it was based on general interest (e.g. with the book *My*

Side of The Mountain, "the boys who picked it are mostly into science and nature") (meeting fieldnote, 12/15/09).

In this case, their choices were tied to excitement and interest rather than explicitly multicultural curricula. Thus, the question of how the teachers could effectively involve their students in choosing "culturally relevant" materials emerged.

Further in this chapter, I will explore the notion that in terms of issues of student achievement and engagement, how one teaches is as important (if not more important) than what one teaches. However, an even greater challenge the teachers faced- one which is deeply rooted in present day education struggles- was in attempting to incorporate culturally relevant materials in order to teach for success on standardized tests.

The Intersection of Academic Rigor, Test Preparation, Educational Equity, and Culturally Relevant Classroom Materials

Part I: Rigor as Social Justice

Educators in this study often expressed the belief that teaching for test success is in fact a form of social justice. Furthermore, many of them stated that their goal was to find ways to effectively utilize explicitly culturally relevant curricula in order to increase student achievement. Delpit's (1995) key concept of teaching the "codes of power" helps to frame how Project ACTION teachers worked to assist students in navigating standardized tests in order to excel, while at the same time teaching the students to think critically. For example, Abigail thoughtfully stated, "my students should be able to do well on the standardized tests and that's a goal for me because those are gatekeepers. One of the reasons I got into teaching is that I feel those are a gatekeeper for students who want to achieve and go on to college" (final presentation, 5/7/10). Laura's final paper illustrates her similar commitment:

I admit to a negative disposition towards the "one size fits all" predominantly White reading selections; towards the multitude of standards covered; and towards the constant, pervasive multiple choice benchmark and standardized assessments administered, to show proficiency or not. I know I need to incorporate into my big picture of teaching the two seemingly opposing approaches. *The reality is that these students have to work on their academic reading and writing skills and they need to show proficiency to achieve more success in society* (emphasis added).

Thus, though these teachers critically understood that their students were encountering "gatekeeping" and potentially culturally-biased standardized tests, they nonetheless felt that their role as educators was to help their students to learn the codes of power, in order to- as Laura phrased it- "show proficiency to achieve more success in society." In fact, they oftentimes expressed the belief that successfully doing so is in fact a form of social justice teaching.

Similarly, teachers expressed their conviction that improving basic academic skills for students is actually teaching for equity. While this type of educational thinking (Delpit, 1995, 2012) is not a particularly new concept, it is one of the strategies that was employed by these teachers working within present-day constraints. The teachers at times saw academic rigor as a main component of social justice for their students. As Sarah stated in an interview, “I’m piloting this class called Reading/Digital Arts for struggling readers, and *to me this whole class is about equity*. It’s about promoting skills for kids that visibly aren’t doing as well” (9/26/09). Similarly, as Abigail described:

If I look at equity in terms of how the students feel about themselves, how the students achieve on standardized tests, the hope is that if there is equity in the classroom, then that allows them to have more opportunities in life... I know there is a lot of controversy about standardized test scores not being the only measure, but *the truth is you have standardized test scores all throughout your life, and to be equitable to your students, they need to be able to take those and do them well. To me that's a question of equity* (interview, 9/28/09, emphasis added).

Again, while Abigail expressed a critical view of testing, it was also grounded in the lived realities that her students will be facing. Moreover, the educators demonstrated Delpit’s concepts around explicitly teaching students to utilize academic language in the classroom while still valuing their home language or dialect. Abigail shared her desire to do so: “When we talk about writing, I say ‘it needs to be in academic English, and academic English is just what you have in school. You might speak differently at home, but here this is what you need to do’” (interview, 9/28/09). Laura’s final paper includes a similar example: “I wanted to continue emphasizing learning academic English, along with acknowledging and distinguishing students’ expertise in social English.”

In several instances, teachers described how they wanted to give their students a fundamental grounding in culturally-relevant language and texts, and to also help them make connections between that language and the language they would be encountering on tests. Yolanda commented in a Project ACTION meeting, “we have to do both. I mean, yes we have to use multicultural, relevant materials, but they are being tested, and our tests are not culturally relevant, but that’s how they are measured, that’s the gateway to higher education. They need to know how to read academic language. They need to know how to write academic language. So we are responsible for doing both. I mean, it’s a lot of work, but I think we have to make that connection” (meeting fieldnote, 4/30/10). Charlotte responded, “so let’s learn this academic language but learning it early, and using it with something like *Vatos* and Cesar Chavez, so that they are learning it with something that they are really engaged with and interested in and that way *they really gain that power before they have to move on* and tackle something where they are ‘what the hell is this, this is dumb and boring’, which is inevitably going to happen, but just be really explicit with it” (meeting fieldnote, 4/30/10, emphasis added). This interchange demonstrates how the teachers viewed their role as helping students gain a solid

grounding in both academic and culturally-relevant “home” languages in order to be successful.

Consequently the question emerges: what does the intersection of academic rigor, test success, cultural relevance, and social justice teaching look like in practice? The data in this study contain many instances of teaching for rigor and student achievement, and thus- in the eyes of several of these teachers- teaching for equity and justice. There were also several examples of successfully teaching for rigor and test success while simultaneously utilizing culturally relevant materials, though that was noticeably more challenging. The following section examines several cases when this particular intersection of academic rigor, test success, cultural relevance, and social justice teaching emerged.

The Intersection of Academic Rigor, Test Preparation, Educational Equity, and Culturally Relevant Classroom Materials

Part II: The Intersection in Practice

As discussed in Chapter Three, Laura and Sarah were chosen as focal teachers in this study because 1) they were both extraordinarily concerned with striving for social justice in their classrooms, having extensively thought, worked, and trained in order to improve equity in their teaching, and 2) they were both experienced educators and were respected by their administration, students, and colleagues. Therefore, this section will primarily focus on their teaching practices in particular.

Laura’s pedagogical strategies may be considered ways in which an equity-focused teacher can implement in order to increase rigor and academic achievement while still utilizing culturally-relevant materials. However, many of these instances took place during an after-school reading intervention class, which- as will be discussed later in this chapter- was a typical vehicle for working outside the confines of present accountability measures. While Sarah’s social-justice focused teaching actually took place during the school day, it happened during an elective designed to improve reading and writing achievement. As described in the previous chapter and in the following section, one of the fundamental challenges for these educators was fitting social-justice based pedagogies into the regular school day, specifically during core classes requiring standardized testing. Nevertheless, it is important to describe several of these pedagogical practices- even if they took after school or during electives- as this is in fact what teaching for equity can potentially look like in the current era³⁷.

³⁷ These two educators taught humanities courses; hence, this section will focus on the teaching of reading and writing as related to standardized testing, culturally relevant pedagogy, and rigor. While there is unfortunately a dearth of research on social justice teaching in math and science, it would be outside the scope of this study to focus on math/science content areas, and is not represented in the available data. As I will discuss in my conclusion, this would be an important area for future study. However, this section nonetheless contributes to literature on the present-day intersection of what teaching for social justice and rigor can fundamentally look like in practice, even across content areas.

Laura's after-school reading intervention program focused on incorporating culturally-relevant texts to improve basic reading skills. In repeated instances, she was able to successfully work with her students on increasing their reading interest and ability even while utilizing materials with which they were highly identified. A fieldnote excerpt from one particular classroom observation (2/23/10) illustrates how Laura was able to facilitate her students becoming more excited by Sustained Silent Reading (SSR):

Laura's students read silently from a stack of poetry books she let them choose from. Titles included: *Si Se Puede*; *Tupac and Slam*; *Black Poetry*; *Teenage Boys*; *Growing Up Latino*; *Bilingual Poetry*. The students were very engaged, with one student choosing to read the Spanish poems. At the end Laura told the class, "you did it! 10 minutes of reading!" The students excitedly shared the following:

"This is better than the regular SSR. Can we do SSR with you?"

"We should read this during SSR."

"I like this poem because it's beautiful."

"I like it because it's about Mexicans."

Because this class was a reading intervention, 10 minutes was an impressive length of time for silent reading. Laura was able to interest her students in reading to such a significant degree that that they were actually asking if they could repeat this type of SSR during the regular school day. Similarly, Laura also utilized the language component of culturally relevant texts in order to increase academic rigor. As she discussed in her final paper:

When using culturally relevant literature, students were motivated and more comfortable with the more social English type readings. One student said in response to a poem, "it's so cool because it is Spanglish and I love speaking Spanglish." Simultaneously, academic vocabulary, such as "stanza," was introduced and also more comfortably used to discuss the poem.

Hence, a previously challenging academic concept such as "stanza" became more accessible for Laura's students in this type of context. She elaborated in her paper:

For reading rigor, I would seek out as many culturally relevant readings as possible, anticipating that *motivating materials would lead to the academic learning of literary terms, decoding and comprehension strategies, and purposeful reading work and more*. The goal of all work would be to have students get more engaged, empowered, motivated, and achieving academically and obtaining 'real' schooling (emphasis added).

Laura's main goal, therefore, was to successfully incorporate culturally appropriate texts in order to produce both interest and academic rigor. An exchange that took place during one specific lesson illustrated the ways in which Laura was able to draw upon current social justice-oriented current events while

simultaneously challenging her students to improve their reading skills. It was March 2010, and a number of racist incidents had recently taken place on several University of California campuses, including a noose left on college grounds and a White fraternity holding a racially insensitive “Compton Cookout” party. Laura instructed one of her students to read a newspaper article aloud to the rest of the class about these particular events. Afterward, she engaged her students in the following dialogue:

Laura: So, ok, what’s this about? They say, ‘oh let’s have a Black History Month party! Were they being cool about it? Or were they using stereotypes?’”

Female student: Were they, like, mocking them?

Male student: What?

Laura: Explain that to him.

Female student: Mocking.

Male student: What is mocking?

Laura: Teasing, making fun of, ridiculing, putting them down.

Male student: Oh, I hate that! Like, I see a White person dressed with a sombrero, and I’m like, oh dang!

Laura: Is it mocking, or do they think it’s kind of fun to dress that way?

Male student: That’s mocking.

Female student: Wait, when was this party thingy?

Laura: It was February. 2010.

Male student: Wait, that’s this year! [Gasps loudly] But, didn’t they, like, change lives now and everyone’s free?

Laura: Yes, but is there still racism?

Female student: Yes.

Male student: I’m gonna be the new Martin Luther King Junior. But the Mexican version...wait I have a question, so it was a student who did the nose thingy?

Laura: A noose. It’s called a noose. Yes, it was a student.

Male student: Did he do it on purpose? Did he go to jail? Did he get suspended?

Laura: He was suspended.

Male student: So they just took it to school, or what? The people that did it were all White?

Laura: One story that I read said that a Black guy helped create this party...I don’t know the whole story though, but I am thinking that most of the people in the fraternity were White.

Female student: We should mug White people.

Laura: Well, that reaction, remember when you read about that racist teacher? [referring to a story they had read a couple of weeks prior]. You wanted to egg her house, all those kinds of things?

[Laura then explains at length how students on the UC campus turned their anger into a protest, including a definition and examples of what a protest is.]

Laura: So I can see if we can find online some of the articles on the protests, ok?

[She then went on to praise the students for reading a whole newspaper article, and says that next time they can read more and they can also write about all of this themselves, and they can read each other's writings.]

Laura: So which of those things are you thinking we can do next time?

This discussion reveals the multitude of educative objectives Laura was able to integrate into the lesson. She taught vocabulary, had students to read aloud from a newspaper, praised them for reading an entire article, discussed the concepts of stereotypes and racism, inspired them to think critically, engaged them in current events, challenged them to channel their anger about injustice into activism, and planned with them to read more articles in the future, write about the articles, and even read each other's written work. Perhaps she was able to effectively accomplish all these goals because she was a seasoned educator, but nonetheless this can potentially serve as a salient pedagogical model. Furthermore, on a regular basis, Laura also strived to undertake explicit standardized test preparation while utilizing culturally relevant texts. As she stated in her final paper:

With prior suggestions from my Project ACTION group colleagues, students and I looked at sample released STAR test questions. The questions used poems and one question compared a piece of prose to a poem. Students discussed the "bridge" of knowledge or possible connections of the poems and to attempt to tackle the test questions. This was not presented as a one time, one-step cure-all but was meant to developmentally help students.

Laura was referring to a lesson during which she had utilized released CST questions for discussion with her students. The students were prepping for the upcoming tests while simultaneously being coached by her to notice the culturally relevant items on the released sample test. The below fieldnote excerpt demonstrates how Laura additionally worked to encourage her students (who had, according to Laura, experienced marginalization and academic disidentification) to feel that they could in fact be successful on standardized tests:

Next week is the STAR tests. A student was complaining "ugh, I hate that test." Laura responded, "I want you to think, 'I can do this.'" She then gave out several sample CST tests and went over one of them, stating, "This is what the tests looks like- is this prose or poetry?...So, here's a poem. Not so bad! Then turn the page, there are questions about it. Sometimes it is good to read the questions first." One student said, "Sometimes when I see this work I just skip it." Laura responded, "Well, let's get serious about it!" (fieldnote, 5/4/10).

Laura was able to challenge her students to believe in themselves while also pushing them to achieve proficiency on the upcoming tests. Similarly, Sarah designed several lessons for her reading/digital literacy class that successfully

integrated this intersection between achieving rigor, cultural relevance, and student interest. She developed a project that she hoped would speak to her specific classroom of students, many of whom were from families who immigrated to the United States. During one of her Project ACTION consultations, Sarah explained how students who were working on writing a news magazine for her class had to “read three articles that had to do with stories of how immigration affects families and young people, and the first two were on mixed status families, who have some family members documented and some are not, so there were some deportation stories around that, and how difficult that situation is...it took a long time, *there was a lot of writing and reading built in, and there was a whole month of production time*” (meeting fieldnote, 4/14/10, emphasis added). In fact, Sarah’s students- during interviews she later conducted with them around their thoughts on the project- repeatedly expressed that even though they found themselves reading and writing a great deal for her class, they very much enjoyed it and found it “fun.” Her worksheet prompt for the immigration status project illustrates the link between academic rigor and a lesson that was potentially relevant to her mixed-immigration status students:

Be sure to include support sentences telling how each family member came to the US and what their immigration status is. Don’t forget to use signal words as transitions. This is a point-by-point comparison. Use notes about birthplace, status, where lived. Also include a topic sentence about whether their immigration status has made their life in the US similar or different (observation artifact, 12/19/09).

These directions reveal how she attempted to challenge her students to complete high-quality, rigorous academic work within a culturally relevant and engaging framework. Furthermore, at one point Sarah shared that the news magazine project met school community service requirements, as the class was planning to “use it to get the word out about the Dream Act” (observation, 3/5/10). Hence, this academically rigorous and culturally relevant student project aimed to ultimately effect broader social change. This type of outcome is one toward which all of the teachers in this study strived.

At the elementary grades, teachers also attempted to navigate this intersection of academic rigor and social justice. During one inquiry meeting (4/30/10), group members were discussing how to best teach for rigor and success while incorporating culturally relevant materials. Abigail stated,

I think some of the Prentice-Hall things could relate, with a bridge. I mean, there’s a lot of stuff you can connect to, and the poems seem to talk about things that could be more universal problems, its just written in a style that’s not very engaging or accessible, and the kids wouldn’t make an automatic connection, but it seems to me that the connection can be made. Its possible, it just definitely needs a bridge beforehand (meeting fieldnote, 4/30/10).

Abigail wanted to be able to “make connections” between traditional curricula and student engagement. Another example of this intersection occurring at the elementary grades is illustrated in a handout Felicia shared during her final presentation (5/7/10), which contained a list of supplemental literature she employed, as well as how it was utilized in instruction:

Table 3: Supplemental Literature Employed by Felicia

Title	Brief Description	Instructional Prompts
Boundless Grace	Set in Gambia, an American girl discovers family there	Journal entry theme: “Family is what you make it”
Hairs/Pellitos	Author Sandra Cisneros, about differences in types of hair	“Use adjectives to describe your family members and their hair.”
Ugly Vegetables	A Chinese girl learns to appreciate differences and share things that make people special	“What is “normal”? “What are some things that are normal in our family and/or culture that is different from people around us?”
Friends From the Other Side	Author Gloria Anzaldua, about Mexican-American immigration	Had whole-class discussion on immigration issues, words like “wetback”, “gringo”

Felicia’s prompts and choices in texts reveal how she worked to challenge her 3rd grade students to achieve while engaging them with culturally relevant literature. Similarly, Yolanda shared how she worked to help her 4th and 5th grade students excel by utilizing texts that spoke to their experiences:

It was difficult to find culturally relevant literature for elementary school students. After researching, I chose Gary Soto's Taking Sides and Eleanor Coerr's Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes. I was hoping to increase student engagement and interest in reading while practicing higher-level reading comprehension strategies with my students...By exposing and giving access to culturally relevant texts, students had more opportunities to make personal connections. I firmly believe this strong text-to-self connection became a source of motivation for some students. The four focal students became highly engaged in discussions, completed all partner and independent assignments and took leadership roles during creative group projects (final paper, 5/7/10).

Yolanda’s statement about working to increase engagement and interest while “practicing higher-level reading comprehension strategies” illustrates the complicated intersection of academic rigor and culturally relevant pedagogy with which she grappled. Teachers in this study continually sought to effectively navigate this intersection, though challenges to their success were ever-present.

The Intersection of Academic Rigor, Test Preparation, Educational Equity, and Culturally Relevant Classroom Materials

Part III: The Intersection and its Primary Challenge in Present-Day Teaching: Fitting Into the School Day (Or Not)

The above section revealed occasions when teachers were able to effectively combine academic rigor and cultural relevance. However, successfully navigating this intersection during the regular school day- particularly in core classes- proved consistently challenging for teachers in this study. As described in the previous chapter, testing, pacing, and accountability measures made it difficult for teachers to enact agency during the regular school day, rather than solely after school or during elective classes (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Ravitch, 2010). This section will elaborate on this phenomenon by providing specific instances of teachers attempting to carve out the time, space, and agency needed to navigate this challenging intersection.

At the middle school level, teachers Sarah and Laura both expressed that they felt the most pedagogical leeway during their elective and after-school classes. Laura even went so far as to remark that the following year she was hoping to teach “a social justice curriculum, and then the other teachers can teach all the core crap” (meeting fieldnote, 1/27/10). Sarah described her class as “sort of a little extra English, masquerading as an elective...the technology aspect of the class is what makes it unique and engages normally reluctant students in the process of reading and writing” (meeting fieldnote, 12/15/09). Sarah’s statement reveals the views she held about being more able to engage “reluctant students” in this “unique” elective versus in a traditional class.

At the elementary level, this challenge was even more pervasive. The elementary school teachers consistently discussed difficulties they faced in working toward their equity-oriented goals within the confines of pacing and time issues during the regular school day. During one inquiry group meeting (4/17/10), Elizabeth described at length how much more engaged her students were after-school. Sensing her frustration, Laura remarked, “Perhaps it is the non-prescribed, non-paced one-size-fits-all curriculum.” Elizabeth’s final paper further revealed her exasperation with time and pacing issues:

I have realized the need to provide educational equality for all my students in the context of Room 13. If this means that I spend extra time after school so that some ELL students can work on improving their reading comprehension skills...then perhaps that is what needs to be done.

Elizabeth felt compelled to spend additional time after school in order to effectively work for equitable outcomes in her classroom. Yolanda expressed the same issue, sharing that she was worried she wouldn’t be able to conduct literature circles the following school year, so she had therefore decided to conduct a book club after school. She was particularly concerned about being able to serve her Spanish-speaking students effectively during the school day, stating:

They loved Gary Soto's *Taking Sides*. I asked them, what did you like best about reading this book, and they are like, 'it has Spanish in it, and that's my language', and there isn't a lot of good literature at the elementary level but there are some that I can use, but I know next year our schedule is going to be really tight...we are going to have block schedules for 4,5,6, the whole district is going that way, because we are P.I. [program improvement] year two, so the whole district is making drastic measures. So next year I don't think I can have literature circles, because we are regrouping, and they are really going to police us. So I am thinking of doing something like this after school, like a book club, because I really did enjoy reading and doing discussions with my students (meeting fieldnote, 4/30/10).

Yolanda was forced to choose between holding a book club during after-school hours or give up sharing full books with her students. Similarly, Abigail remarked during an interview that this was in fact a broader issue for herself and her colleagues. She stated, "We have a committee around cultural competence, but they weren't sure what to do last year, and I think it just got lost in all the other stuff we do" (interview, 9/28/09). Hence, even these well-intentioned educators were unable to spend time working on cultural competence due to "all the other stuff" they were required to carry out.

Relationships, Caring, and Trust

To varying degrees, teachers in this study were able to navigate the complex intersection of academic rigor, test preparation, educational equity, and culturally relevant classroom materials. As illustrated in the sections above, while they were successful at times, they also encountered consistent challenges. One of the primary approaches these educators enacted to make up for the restraints they encountered during the regular school day was to pay particular attention to developing strong relationships, caring, and trust with their students. Because "authentic caring" (Valenzuela, 1999) can take place during the school day, after school, in electives, in core classes, or even during standardized test preparations, teachers were able to infuse this particular form of social justice into all aspects of their instruction. Research has demonstrated that the positive relationships developed between teacher and student can make as much- if not more- of an impact in terms of student achievement, outcomes, and equity than the curriculum or the assignments (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999). This section will illustrate how teachers in this study consistently incorporated caring relationships into their day-to-day practices as an antidote to the significant pressures with which they contended.

Sarah

During an inquiry group meeting, Sarah described how caring for her students was a strategy she utilized in response to experiencing the lack of agency that pervaded other aspects of her teaching. She explained,

Sometimes people say that school should feel like family, and I've read that in several other places...it's just about the connections and the kids feeling welcome, and that culture, and it just strikes me that we are never talking about that at all in my school, and here we are in Program Improvement, and it's all like, *more math, more English, more tutorials, basically more of the same...and that's what came out of this for me, it's like, paying attention to kids, welcoming them, nurturing them* (meeting fieldnote, 12/15/09, emphasis added).

Sarah believed that “welcoming” and “nurturing” her students could potentially counteract the “more math, more English” directives associated with her school having been facing Program Improvement. She also felt that caring itself could be a form of equity, stating in an interview, “I think they [students] like to be in an environment where it's safe and organized and structured, *and they're gonna get heard*, and nobody's going to hurt each other, and I think that all is about promoting equity too” (9/14/09, emphasis added). Sarah did an excellent job of truly “hearing” her students; fieldnotes from one particular observation described how she listened closely to her students’ suggestions about a lesson, and even when she was confused by one of the students’ statements, she listened to the student for a second time and said “oh! Yes, that is a great suggestion!” (3/5/10). Sarah’s caring relationships with her students were well-developed and constantly reinforced. She was keenly aware of student needs and worked to make sure students felt comfortable in her classes. For example, on a day she had to give a set of strict instructions, she prefaced by saying, “I don't want to sound like a big old meanie, but...[gives stern instructions]” (observation, 3/5/10). Another field note describes how throughout one class session (12/18/09), Sarah consistently validated students' comments and feelings in a variety of instances. For example, at one point she went over to a boy who was continually putting his head down on his desk during the lesson, and rather than chastising him, she asked in a caring tone, “Are you ok?” and when he answered, “Yes, I’m just tired” she leaned over, and pushed him to elaborate by asking, “Why?” They then continued a longer conversation with hushed voices. At another time during the class, when the students were getting somewhat rowdy, she said, “I don't like to do this, but we will need to have some people stay in at lunch if they are not focused.” Her preface about not “liking to do this” softened her statement in such a way that even while re-directing the class behavior, she was still able to demonstrate care (Valenzuela, 1999). During the same class session, many of the boys were blurting out answers without raising their hands. Sarah made a clear effort to then call on the quieter girls. While this seems like a natural instinct for any strong teacher, it was yet another piece of the caring relationship development demonstrated by Sarah. Furthermore, several times during the class Sarah was able to validate her students’ statements while also pushing for equity and social justice in her classroom. At one point, while referring to a newspaper article about an immigrant family, Sarah said, “Let's call this a profile on the family.” A student responded, “No, that sounds like the police.” Sarah went along with this student’s preference, stating, “Ok, let’s definitely not use the word ‘profile’ if it sounds like

police." In this way, Sarah was able to support her student's negative experiences with police in the context of a classroom lesson. Similarly, at another point that day, Sarah was discussing the same newspaper article with her students, which utilized the word "illegal" when referring to the immigrant family. Sarah, cognizant of the immigration status of several of her students, said, "I hate to call people illegal." A student responded, "Let's call them undocumented?" and Sarah agreed, "Yes, let's do that." All of the above subtle, small acts of caring occurred during just one of her class sessions. During each of the classes I observed, Sarah was similarly encouraging. For example, another field note describes a class session involving a debate:

Throughout the day, students did their "fist pumps" and Sarah would smile, once saying, "that's fine." Early in the debate, Sarah said, "it seems like everyone is getting a little quiet, this is probably due to nervousness" as she encouraged them. At the end Sarah stated, "I am really proud of all of you" and everyone did a desk clap in pride (observation, 2/5/10).

Hence, Sarah successfully helped her students to feel comfortable, validated, supported, and encouraged in her classroom, even if they were feeling nervous about an assignment. Furthermore, she developed exceptional levels of trust with her students. At the beginning of the school year, Sarah expressed how she set up her classroom in such a way that she demonstrated to her students her high expectations and a great deal of confidence in their abilities to make good choices:

I talk at the beginning [of the year] about all the ways they can promote learning or obstruct learning. I tell them, 'you guys are in middle school, so I'm not gonna put up all these rules, but you see them and you know them, and so if you aren't promoting learning I am just gonna come up to and say 'you aren't promoting learning and I need you to.' And its funny, because this class was really squirrely when they first came in at the beginning of the year, and I thought I was going to have my hands full, but they've really come around. They still can be rambunctious and talkative, but they get it. If I say 'you're not promoting learning right now', they fix it (interview, 9/14/09).

This description encapsulates the profound belief she held in her students, wherein even when it seemed they were going to be "squirrely," she held fast to her conviction that they would be able to "fix it" when they were not behaving in ways that would lead to learning. For instance, during another class, I observed Sarah giving a lesson on note-taking. She shared, "this lesson used to be more teacher-led but now I am trying to have them [students] be more independent." At one point, as the class was supposed to be working on their notes, a group of students in the back of the class were playing around and not paying attention. Sarah went over to them and said, "This doesn't promote learning. Should I be worried about you guys?" (observation fieldnote, 12/17/09). By asking this question, Sarah put the responsibility on the students to make better choices, rather than simply chastising them. On another class day, a student got up from his seat during a lesson,

presumably to walk around and not pay attention. Sarah said to him, "It isn't time to get up yet Tony, but I need the lights on, so you can turn them on." In this way, even though Tony was not doing what he was supposed to be doing, she validated and re-directed his actions toward something useful (observation fieldnote, 3/19/10).

Perhaps one of the most compelling instances of Sarah's trust in her students lies in how she treated her students in relation to the school's expensive computer and video equipment. For several weeks, her students utilized the technology equipment on a regular basis for the news magazine assignment. According to Sarah's final paper,

The students were remarkably good with the equipment, wrapping cords and putting everything neatly away in the proper boxes, even while in a rush to get to lunch. When one of the ELA [English Language Arts] teachers borrowed a camera and tripod, I told her she could just have one of the RDA [Reading Digital Arts] students bring it back to me, but she was reluctant to entrust them with it. However, she later told me that when the RDA students saw the equipment in her room, they exclaimed, "You got those from Ms. K., didn't you, you better return them because we are using them tomorrow!" She was surprised at the extent of their investment and admitted that she could have trusted them to bring the equipment back.

Sarah clearly demonstrated more faith in her students than her colleague, who had assumed the equipment would not be properly returned if given to a student. This high level of student trust was a part of Sarah's work for equity and achievement in her classroom- even in the midst of enormous outside pressures and constraints.

Laura

Much like Sarah, in order to work towards social justice, Laura cultivated deeply trusting and caring relationships with her students, so as to have a strong impact on their learning and achievement. Laura explicitly mentioned several times that she believed "equity is having a good relationship with students" (meeting fieldnote, 3/10/10) and that as a teacher, "I should listen to their lives so that I can strengthen relationships with them" (final presentation). During her research project, Laura specifically developed supportive and caring relationships with her after-school group, and, as she described in her final paper,

These four boys and two girls I now view as underserved. Their special strengths and needs were not acknowledged, valued, developed, or met. Beyond the records and my perspective on them as leaders, these students all described themselves as "cool" and "intelligent." I agreed with this initially and even more so after working with them on this inquiry project.

Laura elaborated in an interview:

It comes down to relationships with the kids. It's like, who cares what you believe in, the question is do you have good relationships with the kids so that they can at least understand why it's important to get educated? (2/17/10).

Laura worked hard on the rapport she had with her students, and as elucidated above, she did so in order to counter how “their special strength and needs were not acknowledged, valued, developed, or met” in order for them to understand “why it is important to get educated.” Laura’s pedagogy demonstrates how she translated these ideals into practice. Similar to Sarah, Laura did not discourage her students- even when they were doing something that other educators may have found troubling. For example, one day her class was reading a poster out loud, with each student taking turns to read different sections. For his turn, one student who seemed to want to read as little as possible chose to simply read the author's name. Laura encouraged him, not telling him that was the wrong thing to do and thereby shutting him down, but rather she continued to pull him out of his discomfort and reluctance. (observation fieldnote, 2/2/10). On another occasion, Laura asked her students if they preferred to read a particular story in Spanish or English; they chose Spanish. Students took turns reading the story out loud, and at one point Laura read a section out loud in Spanish as well. She read very slowly and stated to the class that she was “not good at Spanish.” By attempting to read the Spanish, and volunteering information about her lack of Spanish skills, she shared her vulnerability and connected with her (mostly English Language Learner) students around their mutual discomfort with a foreign language (observation, 3/23/10).

Another assignment Laura gave her students- and the resulting conversation- exemplifies her level of care and validation. It was the first session of Laura’s new after-school program. Students were filling out an introductory worksheet she had developed. Prompts included:

- How I See Myself
- How Others See Me
- How Friends See Me
- How My Family Sees Me
- How The Outside World Sees Me
- How Teachers and School See Me

While Laura explained the last prompt, one student mumbled, “[They see me as] stupid, like a clown. They see me as [pause] the one who [pause] never mind.” Laura responded, “It's not a never mind, write it down.” Much like how Sarah had pushed her student to go beyond simply saying he was “fine, just tired,” Laura similarly pushed a student to elaborate further about what was bothering him and what societal barriers with which he struggled. Furthermore, this activity was so engaging to the students that, even though at the beginning of the day they had stated that they didn’t want to stay after school, once they began the worksheets they became so interested that they shouted out exclamations such as, “I can stay

until 4:30!" and "I'll call my mom to pick me up later!" (observation fieldnote, 1/19/10).

Felicia

At the elementary school level, Felicia also demonstrated a commitment to working for equity and social justice through the development of caring, trusting relationships with her students. Felicia explicitly shared her vision for this type of classroom environment, saying, "If I think about the past couple years, the way I interact with my students, and expectations I have for how they interact with each other, that could be considered social justice. Even just the way that my classroom community is, and what I build from the beginning and then throughout the year" (interview, 9/25/09). Felicia saw positive student-teacher relationships as a form of social justice. During another interview, Felicia expanded on how much she prioritized her interactions with students, sharing:

When they do well, I feel like it has a lot to do with not just what text I am using, but also my personal interactions with them. Like, 'oh Jose, you did so well on this test, you spent so much time writing the story, and wow you did really well!' So, just giving those recognitions and praise, and affirming they are doing well, I am seeing how even that goes a long way. They started improving because of me making a really big deal about them doing well...I think what they all need is a little recognition or a little push, because we're all human and we all want that...I try very hard to focus on each individual student, and how each of them come into my class with their own history, their own background, and how that's going to affect their interactions with me, and others, and how they learn or process things differently from each other...I know I have a lot of pressure, like they are in third grade and they need to meet these standards, they need to do this, but I also try to keep this in mind as I teach, like, 'oh this child is like this' or 'this child has this going on at home' (2/8/10, emphasis added).

Felicia's belief that "giving those recognitions and praise, and affirming they are doing well" would help increase her students' achievement is supported by extensive research on the vital importance of teacher expectations (Good & Brophy, 1984; Rose, 1989; Weinstein, 2002). Moreover, Felicia's comment "I have a lot of pressure, they are in third grade and they need to meet these standards...I also try to keep this in mind as I teach" further illustrates the ways in which she attempted to use caring and praise as a response to challenging accountability measures.

Tensions Between Test Preparation and a Pedagogy of Care

Project ACTION teachers aimed to develop strong caring relationships with students as a pedagogical strategy to work for social justice and equitable outcomes in the midst of significant outside pressures. Ironically, oftentimes the very accountability measures to which they were responding became an impediment to

authentic caring. To explore this we can look to two particular inquiry group meetings. During one meeting, Laura shared that she was reading an article about reconnecting students to learning through the ethics of caring, and she remarked that she is “always surprised by the teachers who say that this school as family stuff is just B.S. because ultimately we are just responsible for raising that test score.” Laura was clearly frustrated with her colleagues, whom she believed prioritized test scores over student care. Yolanda then agreed with her, although even within her goal of caring for her students, it was clear she still felt the burden of raising test scores. She stated:

I think, our school, we really want give them a sense of belonging, so they will feel proud, and we do a lot of outreach to make kids feel like, I'm proud to be part of the school...and I think our principal does a lot of positive reinforcement, so I think that helps...We need to have them realize school is a fun place where you can learn, *and then I think if they are motivated the test scores will go up* (meeting fieldnote, 12/15/09, emphasis added).

While Yolanda wanted students to feel a sense of belonging and pride, she also acknowledged that the end goal was also for test scores to rise. Likewise, a longer exchange from another meeting exemplifies the ways in which efforts to develop caring student relationships in order to counteract outside pressures were actually stymied by those same pressures:

Felicia: I almost feel like whether you teach pre-school all the way to 12th grade, having that caring aspect is just a part of our job. Whether you just communicate verbally or through your facial expression or your body language, or a note, just commenting on their new haircut, little things like that, to show that you care.

Yolanda: But I think we get caught up on teaching, and all the mandates, like sometimes the whole day goes by and you realize you haven't interacted with them, like after lunch I'm like, 'oh, he was here all along?'

Sarah: Now imagine that if you only had them for 50 minutes. The thing is, it does radically change after elementary. It really is, you have to work to express caring, and I think its so interesting, the part about the standards and the pacing and the pressure, because I really think its harder to care, in the way that we're describing, when you have more pressure on you to achieve and have your students achieve...and you feel like their failure makes you feel like a failure, and its this reverberating negativity that happens and I don't know about elementary, but I feel like its more, I don't know, prevailing in middle and high school, because you don't have that extra time with the kids anyway.

Laura: And its like, even if you just say good morning, can we just do that for them? That's kind of like the contrast between caring and uncaring, on a daily basis. So, for me, I have made a point to say good morning to every student in my classroom, just something a simple as that.

Yolanda: "Yeah, they just want to be acknowledged, like, they're there. They want us to notice them, I think. Especially as they get older, I think they need that.

Elizabeth: And yet I struggle with the reality, they all come in my classroom in the morning, and they all want to tell me about their weekend, and I can't hear them all, and I need to get started with the day, time's ticking! [laughing and imitating a clock sound] So, in terms of time, I struggle with that a lot.

Charlotte: This doesn't change in high school. One of my senior boys wanted to share what he did over spring break, and I had to say, 'ok, but you have to make it quick!' (inquiry meeting, 4/17/10).

This dialogue is illustrative of the balance this group of 1st through 12th grade teachers attempted to navigate, wanting to develop caring and trusting relationships while simultaneously being pressured by (as Sarah noted) "the standards and the pacing" which makes it "harder to care." Yolanda and Elizabeth described how due to "all the mandates" and the "time ticking," entire days can go by where teachers "can't hear" students and realize they "haven't interacted" with them. It seems an extraordinarily challenging scenario; it took sufficient time for the teachers to develop strong caring relationships with their students, and to therefore attempt to effect change by working against the current constraints. However, because of those same constraints, the teachers didn't consistently have the time needed to develop the caring relationships.

While these types of trials were a constant reality in for the teachers, this chapter has nonetheless attempted to present promising instances of educators negotiating the complex intersection of equity, social justice, test preparation, rigor, and caring in this unique era in schooling. The following chapter will examine a model for how teachers can come together to purposefully share these kinds of strategies and reflectively navigate constraints through a structured professional learning community.

Chapter Six: Pushing Forward: Teacher Inquiry for Equity

"I have been reminded that teaching is what is meaningful to me." -Felicia

As noted in the previous chapters, teachers in this study faced tremendous pressures related to present-day accountability constraints. In fact, undertaking their Project ACTION inquiry projects at times became a challenge due to the demands of pacing, time, scripted curricula, and testing. Conversely, however, the inquiry projects also helped teachers to navigate the mandates. Furthermore, the biweekly inquiry group meetings served as a valuable space between teaching constraints and what could actually be done in the classroom even in the midst of such demands. During meetings, through the structured conversations and research protocols, teachers were able to express frustrations, convey strategies for dealing with shared difficulties, deeply discuss equity issues, become more reflective, and in turn found new ways of working for student achievement and improved outcomes.

Teacher Inquiry and Accountability Constraints

Occasionally teachers found that their inquiry projects were complicated by demands relating to time, pacing, and testing directives. For example, Sarah designed her project in order to bring about increased student engagement and achievement. However, she regularly expressed concerns about how to translate student growth resulting from her project into outcomes that would be valued by standard assessment measurements. As she shared,

How do I demonstrate and measure achievement with this project? The idea is that doing these thematic units and having students really practice reading and writing a lot through the digital recordings and stuff, the hope is that they will improve in their reading and writing and that it will be demonstrated on the test. But do those things go together? I don't know. I don't really believe that the writing portion of the state test actually measures writing the way that we do it (interview, 2/19/10).

She went on to elaborate about how the district would consider her project, during an inquiry group consultation:

How can I measure the effect on student reading and writing? The administration's end goal is improved test scores but what if the reading assessments available to me do not measure what has been taught? On the other hand, *if what I am teaching does not translate into higher scores on standardized measurements, is it valuable to the district and students?* (protocol handout, 12/15/09, emphasis added).

Sarah grappled with conducting an inquiry project on digital literacy that would bring about increased engagement through more reading and writing, but would not necessarily automatically and immediately result in higher test scores. Ultimately,

while she continued with her project, she was concerned and ever mindful of these challenges.

Laura and Yolanda also expressed reservations about how to successfully balance the needs of their inquiry project with current teaching demands. Laura described her desire for more time in order to successfully improve her practice through the inquiry project, stating, "I wish I had more time for this project, I just don't want to do it in my regular day because it just gets too crazy, and I truly admire all the elementary school teachers who try to work this into their regular day. So I am grateful that I have my own little niches of time, but I wish I had more time to work with this group of students. I have to figure out how to get more time with these kids" (interview 2/17/10). Yolanda similarly remarked that as much as she wanted to work toward explicit classroom discussions about culture throughout her project, she was limited by pacing and time constraints. She shared, "I talk about Hispanic heritage month, but that was like five minutes, I just talked about it, and showed them the map, but it's not like something that I can create a unit and spend real time teaching" (interview 9/25/09). While all the teachers' inquiry projects ultimately resulted in a variety of positive outcomes, these kinds of difficulties were nonetheless a common thread throughout the Project ACTION group.

Inquiry to Navigate Present Conditions

Although the inquiry projects were at times challenging due to external constraints, the projects ultimately in fact assisted teachers to navigate these hurdles. In fact, results from an end-of-year survey about the teachers' participation in Project ACTION revealed that six out of seven of the teachers "strongly agreed" with the statement "Project ACTION inspired me to remain in teaching because my participation made me feel more efficacious."³⁸

Creativity

One of the ways the projects helped teachers negotiate current conditions was in assisting them to explore methods of being more pedagogically creative in spite of limitations. Felicia described how her inquiry project gave her the opportunity to do so:

Even though I believe in equity and social justice, when it comes down to my classroom, when I'm feeling the pressure to do certain things, to keep giving my assessments and those kinds of things, that's what fills up my days. I know it's very easy to just resort to just, 'ok, here's my Houghton-Mifflin, and here's the next story, ok lets just do this, ok turn to the next grammar page.' And so I'm really glad to be part of this group because this project is the way I want to teach, I want to be mindful of what kind of literature I'm using, or what kind of discussion questions I'm using, or what kind of writing prompts

³⁸ The seventh teacher did not complete the full survey in its entirety and hence did not respond to that particular item.

I'm giving my kids, or in what ways I want them to start thinking and reflecting. Now I don't have an excuse to say, 'oh, I'm so busy and I'm gonna just let it slide' (interview, 2/10/10, emphasis added).

Because of the structured inquiry project and associated expectations, Felicia was able to force herself to move beyond the pressures she felt to “do certain things, to keep giving my assessments and those kinds of things” in order to teach in ways that were more aligned with her philosophy of education.

Abigail's inquiry project similarly helped her to explore creative ways of serving her students. As she expressed in her final paper, “Through Project ACTION, I was able to find ways to integrate this ‘extra’ work with our required textbook in a way that used higher-order comprehension skills to help scaffold the learning of my English Language Learner students.” Although Abigail had to utilize a particular textbook as per district guidelines, through her inquiry project she discovered effective strategies for supplementing with other literature in order to support her high need students.

Laura also found her inquiry project useful in assisting her to creatively explore new approaches to balancing teaching objectives and external demands, particularly evidenced over time as the school year went on. Toward the beginning of the project, Laura remarked that she was looking for resources that would help guide her students to “some discipline, or interest, or commitment around reading, which isn't in the High Point [district-mandated] curriculum.” She elaborated, “How do I as a teacher get them to say, 'this is of use to me', even though I don't know as much about their lives as they do?” (interview, 12/14/09). Two months further into the project, Laura found that it was indeed helping her in meeting some of her goals:

It [the inquiry project] gives me a focus for what I feel passionate about in teaching. Whereas when I'm teaching and dealing with school stuff all the time, I have to figure out whose agenda it is, and whether that agenda is ok, or if I should blindly follow it. So Project ACTION lets me follow a passion of mine without having to worry about anyone else's agenda, and then I can figure out if what I'm doing fits into the bigger picture agenda. So I really appreciate the focus that I'm allowed to have in this (interview, 2/17/10).

Being able to hone in on a micro-project within her teaching assisted Laura to “follow a passion” without “worrying about anyone else's agenda” (while still finding aspects in which her passion still fits into “the bigger picture agenda”) and was hence allowing for a sense of renewed agency in her teaching. Two months further into the project, Laura remarked how her teaching had fundamentally changed, even beyond the class in which she did her inquiry project. As she expressed:

One example of how the project helped me is this book here; it's written by students of downtown L.A., and it's bilingual, and so whatever topic I'm teaching from High Point, to engage my really disengaged kids, I photocopy something that relates to that, and I give it to them first, and then it makes

the High Point stuff easier... So, this one's about a student who comes across as a *cholo*, so I handed it to Jose, and then he gets engaged and gets a slightly different homework assignment...so his homework assignment is to go home, write a paragraph, and he's going to download some images and it to us. So, you know, he's sitting there thinking and he's usually totally disengaged in other ways. So then, he may or may not do the High Point book, but he's doing some thinking. *So that's what's transformed about my teaching, I can hand out supplemental stuff, because until they can monitor me every single second, I'm just going to do this stuff* (interview, 4/13/10, emphasis added).

Laura found that as a result of her inquiry project she was forced to examine new methods of engaging students who were the least interested in reading, and she emerged having found creative new strategies for doing so while staying within the boundaries of what she was mandated to utilize for the teaching of reading.

Elizabeth correspondingly explored new ways of focusing on her students who had the highest need. Through the inquiry project, she found successful approaches for meeting this goal, even as she dealt with limitations. As she expressed in her final paper:

It has been particularly interesting to focus on my ELL students and help address their academic needs. I feel that that the Film Club [inquiry project] was a means by which I was able to scaffold their learning instead of watering it down. The hands-on projects and various use of instructional methods strived to push my ELL students to reach academic grade level standards...The strides we make towards equity as well as the steps taken back are always fueled by political agendas. In spite of this, I have realized the need to provide educational equality for all my students. If this means that I spend extra time after school so that some ELL students can work on improving their reading comprehension skills so that they are on par with those who come from print-rich households, than perhaps that is what needs to be done. The progress that I have seen in my focal students reminds me of the "shine-a-light" strategy where we push certain students toward proficiency by focusing on them a little bit more than usual. To me, this is equity as we try to level the playing field and provide all students the right to achieve excellence in school.

Thus, while Elizabeth encountered particular boundaries to what shifts she could realistically make in her teaching practice due to external "agendas,"³⁹ she

³⁹ It is noteworthy that both Elizabeth and Laura separately, and at different times, referred to outside "agendas" that were placed upon them as educators. We had not discussed this concept of external agendas during our inquiry group meetings; however, these two teachers from different schools, cities, and grade levels simultaneously experienced a similar phenomenon, to the degree that they described it in identical language.

nonetheless was able to uncover avenues for focusing on her highest need students after undertaking her inquiry project.

Motivation and Empowerment

Another way in which the inquiry projects assisted this group of educators to navigate present teaching conditions was in increasing their motivation, which in turn made them think differently about teaching. Felicia described in her final paper how she felt after encountering her students' reactions to the supplementary literature that she was using for the first time in her teaching career:

My students consistently ended our reading and discussion time with enthusiastic applause. At first, I did not think much about it and did not question it. When I found there to be a pattern, I asked them about their clapping. To that they simply said, "We like the book." Never in my six years of teaching has reading from the state mandated, district adopted ELA anthology ever garnered that kind of response. Yet when I read them books that they could personally relate to, books that presented meaningful content, or touched their emotions in a certain way, they responded with such positivity. I have been reminded that teaching what is meaningful to me, and being mindful of what is meaningful to my students and implementing it is what should occur daily in my classroom. Though this is a simple reality, it is often overlooked, forgotten, and glossed over.

Felicia's students had such a positive response to her choice in texts from her inquiry project that she was reminded of how she could indeed reach her students in a profound way, beyond the mandated district curricula. Felicia thus found herself remembering why she wants to teach, and came away with a newfound motivation. In fact, upon conclusion of the project, she shared "It is making me think about what ways am I going to continue what I tried to start this year. I feel like its opening up different thoughts and ideas, so its interesting how as the school year ends, in contrast my mind is spinning to think about the future, like what to expect and what I want" (meeting fieldnote, 4/30/10). Her reinvigorated motivation for teaching was extending into the future and was inspiring her to think of how to prolong what she was able to accomplish through her project. Similarly, through Project ACTION, Elizabeth experienced ongoing motivation about why she became an educator, sharing, "It makes me think a lot about what schools can be...it brings me back to the point of why I stepped into teaching and what I wanted from a school" (meeting fieldnote, 4/17/10).

Another way in which the inquiry projects resulted in successfully navigating constraints was in helping teachers becoming more empowered to push for change, from the individual student level up to the school and district level. Sarah experienced this shift after completing her inquiry project, noting in her final paper that she felt the project assisted her to focus more deeply on herself, her students, and to examine her class and school reform efforts in ways that, as she stated, were "much more mindful than I would have been able to otherwise in the daily hustle of

lesson planning...as a result, I have given this class and my students more attention and thought. I have spent more time considering students and advocating on their behalf. I have even coached and encouraged students to a greater extent than I might have.” This statement reveals the extent to which Sarah found herself pushed to focus on her students as a result of the project, and how she ended up advocating for them and honing in on efforts for change.

Laura also experienced a sense of empowerment to push for transformation as a result of her inquiry project, particularly toward her colleagues. As she shared in her final paper, “Given my teaching and coaching positions, I need to advocate for a social justice curriculum. It remains to be seen though, if teachers are allowed to deviate from the prescribed texts. I look forward to communicating with my colleagues about my project; to collaborating with them; and to the convincing the school to do what is vital to ELL students' learning.” While Laura already held a very equity-focused teaching philosophy prior to her inquiry project, she ultimately emerged with a strong commitment to work for change by sharing her project experiences with her fellow faculty and working with them to utilize her newly-tested strategies for effectively serving ELL students.

Felicia likewise found herself, upon completion of the inquiry project, with a similar sense of urgency to share what she discovered from the project in order to effect change at the school level. She remarked in an inquiry group meeting at the end of the school year that she intended to have a conversation with her principal about some of the things she noticed about the school and district. She explained, “I feel like she's very driven to try to push our school to succeed in certain ways, to try to achieve 800 [API score] and things like that, but there hasn't been a lot of talk about who are these students we are serving, and what are some of their needs, not 'oh, how much do we need to raise their math score', but really looking at their language or whatever it may be. That is what I would like to do as a result of this project” (fieldnote, 4/30/10). Hence, whether through the experience of completing the inquiry project, or the pedagogical knowledge gleaned from it, or from the subtle shifts in teaching philosophy and motivation, it seems that this group of educators found themselves experiencing increases in their commitment to navigate restraints in order to push for change at the student, classroom, faculty, school, and district level.

Inquiry Group Meetings as A Space Between Constraints and Agency

Comparable to how the individual inquiry projects helped the teachers negotiate current constraints, the biweekly inquiry group meetings also assisted teachers in navigating these same challenges. As they engaged with each other on a regular basis as a cross-school, cross-grade, reflective professional learning community, teachers were able to share, discuss, explore, and refine strategies for expanding their agency as educators and were collaboratively able to build upon the limited spaces that exist in the cracks between mandates and day-to-day lived teaching experiences. In doing so, they were challenged to examine difficult questions around equity, social justice, present-day limitations, and their own teaching philosophies.

Comparisons with Schools

During an interview in the middle of the school year, Felicia expressed how the inquiry group discussions felt very different than the dialogues she had with her colleagues at the school where she taught. She said, “I really like the conversations we have in our group, because *we don't have conversations like that in the faculty lounge, or in staff meetings, it's just not like that.* And there are things that come up at school that can be very maddening, and I like the space that we have together in our group, because I don't get that at my school. I mean, *I would like to be part of a school where all my co-workers are like that, where we can have those conversations, but it's not like that*” (interview, 2/8/10, emphasis added). Felicia's comments illustrate the abundant merits in the level of useful dialogue she found in this group of educators from various schools and grades, to the degree that it far exceeded interactions she had with fellow teachers from her own school. In her final paper, she expanded on the specifics of why this was the case:

I'm thankful for the opportunity that being part of an inquiry group with like-minded colleagues in the realm of education has stretched me and challenged me...Rather than thinking in just the abstract and theories of what sounds good, being a member of this intellectual community has pushed me to examine my own philosophy and practices as an educator. I had to confront the uncomfortable, and struggled to understand how my research would change or deepen my own philosophy and mold and shape my practice.

For Felicia, “confronting the uncomfortable” and being a member of an intellectual group of teacher-researchers ultimately pushed her to rethink her philosophies about education and her teaching practices.

This lack of other spaces for intellectually and uncomfortably having “these conversations” was ubiquitous among the teachers. For example, at the beginning of the year Elizabeth shared her hopes for the inquiry group, wherein she demonstrated a similar phenomenon of feeling unsatisfied with how current support structures at her school lacked sufficient strategies for serving her students, particularly in the era of top-down curricula. She stated, “I think we are yearning for a discussion group and some dialogue. I want to explore and see what else I can do beyond what the district gives us. What else can we do to supplement and further reach our students?” (interview, 9/28/09). The teachers repeatedly expressed their desire for having a similar space at their own schools. As Sarah described toward the end of the school year, “I definitely like the idea of inquiry as an integral part of school reform. And you know, it just made me think of our group and how to implement something like this at my school, to continue this practice” (meeting fieldnote, 4/17/10). In the same vein, Yolanda described how she wanted to explore how to best meet her students' needs with supplemental curriculum, but was concerned she could not even mention this desire outside of the inquiry group:

How do I give my students what they need when I am mandated to do things that are put upon me by my school, my district, the state, so where do I find my balance? So, I was sharing this [literature circle plans] with my group, I mean, I can't even talk about this in my school district, because they'll say, 'were you using curriculum that was aligned with the standards?' (final presentation).

Yolanda worried she could not bring up a question with her school that would even slightly deviate from the state standards, even if in this instance she thought it could meet the needs of her students. Similarly, during one meeting, Sarah shared that "teaching is hard, and we don't get to just talk about it that much, and just brainstorm, problem-solve, and get feedback" and Laura echoed her, remarking, "we don't have this kind of time to ever do this, and it makes me feel professional and valued and thoughtful and all that stuff we don't get...it all really helps my thinking" (meeting fieldnote, 2/10/10). Sarah expanded on her experiences at another meeting, stating:

I appreciate that this is like a safe haven to talk about some of the questions we discuss, you know, like *does* culturally responsive literature improve students reading and writing? You know, some of the hard questions, like, *are* the tests biased? We don't always get to bring these things up in our day-to-day (fieldnote, 4/30/10).

Beyond helping them to rethink their teaching philosophies and practices, the teachers found that discussing certain difficult questions around contested notions of current education struggles within a "safe haven" assisted them to "help their thinking" and "problem-solve." The inquiry group dialogues provided a unique space that was not like any other that the teachers had available to them at their schools or districts, a space that helped them in various ways on multiple levels.

Navigating Constraints

Specifically, one of the key needs the group filled for the teachers was in supporting each other in finding ways to navigate current constraints. This sharing and exploring of strategies included dealing with curriculum issues, time constraints, and testing. For example, during one meeting (2/10/10) Felicia had expressed her frustration with the mandated Houghton-Mifflin (HM) textbook, and how she wanted to instead use supplementary materials that would, in her mind, potentially better serve her students. The inquiry group teachers made several suggestions for how she could link her materials with the HM textbook by introducing themes that overlap in both. Elizabeth then remarked that it didn't even necessarily need to fit within the HM framework, as it didn't have to occur within the ELA time. Abigail also elaborated about several more strategies for how to best navigate using HM while also pulling in other materials. Essentially, these teachers were working together as sounding boards, guides, peers, experts, and learners,

finding ways to support their fellow group member and collectively develop alternative approaches to present teaching challenges.

This same type of group support assisted Abigail in exploring new strategies for dealing with time constraints. She was finding that using her regular mandated reading program did not allow her sufficient time to complete the more extensive comprehension strategies she wanted to undertake. She then brought this dilemma to the group, wherein members shared ideas for how to navigate this dilemma. As she described, "After discussing my difficulties with my Project ACTION group, I was given the advice to change to a whole class approach using poetry. I then tried to find poetry that would reflect my student's experiences as youth, with poverty, and ethnicity" (final paper). Hence, inquiry group teachers again served as peer experts, helping guide their fellow educator to new ways of tackling a specific pedagogical quandary rooted in present mandates.

Much in the same ways as the group worked with each other to develop ways to navigate curriculum directives and time constraints, they also regularly collectively explored strategies for dealing with accountability-based standardized testing. For example, Sarah was grappling with this particular challenge in the context of her inquiry project. As a meeting fieldnote recounts:

Sarah was concerned because she doesn't feel test scores will measure this class effectively, even though that is what the school administrators want to know about. She said, "I need help with how to measure the effect on student reading and writing because my administrators will say, 'well did their test scores go up?' That's what they are saying to us all the time. And yes I want their test scores to go up, but I'm not really sure if the kinds of tests we give will measure what happens in this class." We discussed her plans, and everyone volunteered many insights and lots of feedback on various means (e.g. rubric design, specific goals for reading comprehension and writing, etc.) for Sarah to measure their reading and writing progress beyond just test scores and grades. Afterward, Sarah shared that she was so glad to have this group consultation, as it was extremely helpful and she wishes she could have one every week. She said, "it feels like such a rich experience. It just feels like a privilege to have colleagues discuss your work and the problems you are having. It is an incredible process" (meeting fieldnote, 12/15/09).

The group provided Sarah with not only several tools to navigate the standardized testing dilemma with which she was struggling, but also a unique space in which to get vital feedback on her teaching practice.

One such meeting (4/30/10), which has also been described to some extent previously in this study due to the extensive noteworthy dialogue, occurred toward the end of the school year just before STAR testing. Laura was seeking support from the other teachers about how she could make connections between her students' lives and the upcoming standardized tests as well as the mandated textbooks, in order to help her low-performing English Learner students increase their achievement. As she asked, "How can I bring it back to a textbook? How can I make these tests and standards interesting for my students?" During this inquiry group

consultation on her teaching practice, the group discussed her questions, while Laura listened and took notes. As the group dialogue unfolded, teachers shared their input on how Laura could work through her challenges:

Felicia: Something that I wonder in looking at this book is in what ways can teachers bring in culturally relevant poems and essays and short stories. I wonder how teachers can start using materials like this to teach those same literary elements and the same kind of vocabulary, and I'm sure that at a certain point students might feel successful being able to look at poetry and not only can they relate to it because of the content, but also be able to identify certain elements, and how you could translate that to the Walt Whitman and the Emily Dickinson.

Anne: I think that's where we begin. Like...these teachers who talk about having great success, they often start with where the kids come from, and it's almost like a muscle you are building up, they learn how to do all these things they need to do on those accessible, interesting poems, and then often there is one that mirrors it, except it might be about an Irish immigrant in the 1800's, and a teacher would need to find those parallels, and say, 'ok, we've done this one, now let's see if we can see what's similar about these two poems, there is the same message, they may look different and had a different experience, but they also may have faced prejudice, or kind of, the themes that you are looking at, I think you can find it in that classic literature, it just takes a lot of work...I think some of the Prentice-Hall things could relate...there's a lot of stuff you can connect to, you know, the poems seem to talk about things that could be more universal problems, it's just written in a style that's not very engaging or accessible, and the kids wouldn't make an automatic connection, but it seems to me that with some of the poetry the connection can possibly be made.

Charlotte: It seems like we are talking about all this academic language, and so really talking about it with them as a tool to let them into places they might be shut out of...So let's learn this academic language but learning it early, and using it with something like Vatos and Cesar Chavez, so that they are learning it with something that they are really engaged with and interested in and that way they really gain that power before they have to move on and tackle something where they are 'what the hell is this, this is dumb and boring', which is inevitably going to happen, but just be really explicit with it.

Once again, members of this group of educators collectively developed ideas about how to best serve students while adhering to necessary external factors. After the insights shared by the teachers during this discussion, Laura remarked that she very much appreciated new ways of thinking about how to negotiate the tests. She elaborated, "There is some benefit to doing things the traditional way, like rote memorization, and 'ok I guess you have to read Walt Whitman', but it's about

finessing it, and bridging it, paralleling it...I really appreciate those kinds of simple concepts that I can hang on to." Abigail echoed her thoughts, saying, "Usually I don't think about this until right before the school year, but I'm sort of already like, 'oh next year!' so this is starting the process to think about the things I can do based on what I heard about here and want to try more of in my classroom." Laura responded, "Yes, having a chance to step back and focus on my own teaching is really good for me."

These types of dialogues filled a void the teachers had in their usual practice at their schools. Particularly in the era of extensive mandates, tension, and struggles for control, the educators needed this type of space in order to collaboratively strategize and receive individualized feedback on how to do their most effective teaching while staying within accountability boundaries.

Meetings as a Space to Teach and Learn About Equity

In addition to the preceding findings on conversations that explored equity in the context of navigating mandates and constraints, oftentimes equity issues were explicitly discussed at the forefront of inquiry group dialogues. At times these interchanges were transformative for the teachers, providing them a new lens with which to consider how to teach for equity and social justice. In fact, results from an end-of-year survey about the teachers' participation in Project ACTION revealed that six out of seven⁴⁰ of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements: (1) "My participation in Project ACTION has inspired me to advance equity through my teaching." (2) "Through Project ACTION I *regularly* engaged in *explicit* conversation about issues of educational equity (e.g. race, class, language, and gender)." (3) "Our group conversations allowed me to grapple regularly with issues of social justice and equity." These dialogues took many forms; occasionally there was minor tension, but much of the time the safe space that had been created allowed for teachers to share perspectives and authentically learn from each other. While all the teachers were committed to equity and social justice, there was in fact a slight range of levels of understanding about these issues. Thus, while the majority of the "teaching" fell to Sarah and Laura (the two members with the most knowledge and comfort around equity issues)⁴¹, group discussions generally produced new thinking for all members about race and educational inequity.

Bringing Equity to the Forefront in the Midst of Larger Pressures

One of the outcomes of consistently and explicitly discussing educational equity with a group of colleagues for an entire school year was that the teachers were reminded of this commitment as a priority, even in the midst of dealing with

⁴⁰ The seventh teacher did not complete the full survey in its entirety and hence did not respond to these particular items.

⁴¹ Sarah and Laura seemed to have the most "expertise" in this area; however, as Sarah is White and Laura is Chinese-American, this situation did not reproduce the all too common problematic dynamic wherein African-American and Latino people of color are forced to "educate" individuals from other backgrounds about race (Peter-Davis & Shultz, 2005).

larger concerns and pressures. As Abigail remarked, “The group sparked my thinking about what I want to do differently, you know, we were an equity group so it brought that back to the forefront, which is really the reason why I got into teaching but it kind of fades, you know, the pressures of everything and the daily grind, so it was really great to have that come back up and be something I was actively thinking about again” (focus group, 5/8/10). This sentiment was consistently echoed by several of the teachers, who had found that while they were theoretically committed to social justice in their teaching, in their lived experience it proved difficult to push it to the top of their priority list given the multitude of conflicting demands placed upon them. Being reminded of this commitment on an ongoing basis, and exploring strategies for how to push equity to the forefront, proved a valuable component of the inquiry group experience.

Collaborative Development of New Ways to Teach for Equity

Group members consistently challenged and pushed each other to explore divergent ideas about social justice, multicultural education, and educational equity. This took place through various means: structured individual teaching consultations using protocols; informal dialogues before, during, and after the meetings; meeting discussions using formal prompts; and nonverbal exercises. While the formal teaching consultations have been previously described in the background chapter of this study, it is worth noting that the objective of utilizing nonverbal exercises was in place in order to elicit dialogue from group members who may have felt less comfortable expressing themselves verbally. For example, one meeting activity involved the teachers walking between large sheets of butcher paper with questions at the top such as “Why does the achievement gap exist?” and “What is multicultural education?” so that they could write their responses below, in a written dialogue with one another. At other times, teachers were asked to propose questions about their own teaching practice for the group to reflect upon. As a result, group members were able to explore a variety of avenues for exchanging ideas about race, schooling, and inequity, and how to best teach for transformative outcomes. In doing so, they also collaboratively developed new strategies for teaching with these goals in mind. As described by Elizabeth,

I enjoyed talking about equity issues and how race, culture, and language play a role in our classrooms. The realities of teaching diverse groups of students and addressing issues of equity have been challenging and inspiring this past year (final paper).

Throughout the year, teachers worked toward deepening their understanding of these issues in order to improve their teaching practice. Oftentimes, the modeling of a particular teaching strategy by one of the teachers sparked new ways of navigating a particular classroom challenge for another teacher. For instance, during one meeting Laura described her utilization of hip-hop (specifically the rap artist Tupac) in teaching, which led to Abigail re-evaluating one of her teaching strategies, and Laura ultimately sharing several more suggestions:

Laura: What gave me a lot of buy-in with these kids was Tupac! So I started with Tupac, and there was no argument, even though I selected it, so there was no, like, 'why do we have to read this?'

Abigail: You found a clean [non-explicit language] one?

Laura: Yeah, actually I did.

Abigail: I think I might change my strategy entirely, because, what I want them to do, my work on equity is around literacy, and actually my lower performing kids, who are often ELL's, need to be able to access the text, and really what it is is that they have to be able to do the things that I teach them.

Laura: Have you also thought of having them draw or illustrate their comprehension, since for EL students sometimes that then transfers to the writing? Also, as far as what I've learned about culturally relevant teaching, a lot of it is communal, so when I see the word 'independent', the way I see it is that there needs to be some communal stuff going on too (meeting fieldnote, 2/10/10).

This interaction demonstrates the extent to which Abigail was influenced by the work Laura was exploring in her inquiry project. Both teachers worked with English Learner students, and through this dialogue Abigail gained solid ideas and inspiration from Laura's practice. Laura also directly shared insights with Abigail on culturally relevant pedagogy and best practices for English Learner students.

Deepening Understandings

Throughout the year it became apparent that while Yolanda had a similar commitment to social justice teaching and multicultural education as the other group members, she seemed to have a lesser degree of comfort, knowledge, and experience with it as the other group members. As a result, she was consistently given ongoing guidance by the other teachers. While Yolanda sometimes asked for these insights, at times she didn't always realize that her understandings of the issues could deepen and it was in these moments that the honest and safe group dynamics allowed for the other teachers to provide constructive dialogue and suggestions about her practice. For instance, during one meeting Sarah asked Yolanda if she had explicitly told her students the purpose in their reading multicultural literature, and Yolanda responded that she had introduced the literature circles and the novels, but "I haven't, that's a good point." This was a vastly different orientation than Laura, who discussed multicultural issues and social justice with her students on a regular basis. During another meeting, Yolanda asked for advice from the group about how to discuss the concept of stereotypes with her students, because she felt she had been unsuccessful thus far. A fieldnote describes how the other teachers provided insights and guidance to help Yolanda toward her goals:

The group gave Yolanda feedback that perhaps the conversations aren't overtly discussing stereotypes, but it could be an underlying theme to the

discussions. Felicia and Sarah suggested giving out guiding questions or sentence starters for students to answer. Sarah and Laura also suggested having concept words up on the board around equity issues/stereotypes/ethnicity. Laura then explained how to model these interactions with ELL students. Laura also suggested paired reading, "so that they are less focused on the worksheets and more engaged in hearing and asking questions that may lead to those concepts you are trying to get at." Felicia pointed out that what Yolanda is trying to do will in fact take a long time, because they are so used "it's going to take time to develop things on their own, this thinking and relating it to the text" (meeting fieldnote, 1/27/10).

Group members provided Yolanda with focused feedback that was specific to her pedagogical quandary around multicultural education. The ideas the teachers shared with her provided assistance in deepening her theoretical and practical understandings of how to teach for equity.

During another meeting, Yolanda was struggling with a situation that had recently taken place in her classroom. Hoping to tie a text back to issues of social justice, she had assigned a book wherein the protagonist was homeless. Ultimately during one of the class discussions, she realized several of her students had also dealt with homelessness. She felt uncomfortable with knowing what reaction to give in front of the students. As described in another meeting fieldnote,

Yolanda stated, "I just realized that I a couple of students lost their apartments and were evicted and at a shelter but it didn't cross my mind when we were talking about it, so I think the equity part of it got lost. It's kind of a balance act that we need to do, like, you want to address equity, but at the same time I don't want to impose my beliefs on my students. So I didn't make any judgments. I kind of shared my personal story, because I think a lot of what they share is from their parents." The group advised Yolanda that her personal stories may still influence the students. Sarah said, "It seems like there is no judgment in that but you have power because you are the teacher." Laura mentioned how she believes equity is having a good relationship with students, and shared how to talk to students about homelessness. She suggested that students can journal, with a prompt being 'what kind of connection do you have to this next theme?' Laura also said, "If you have a good relationship with your students, which to me is equity, if they say they don't want to talk about it, you respect it, or at least investigate and find out more later that the student is homeless. You could also insert some silence, so the ELL students could use that time to formulate what they are going to say." Abigail remarked, "I also wonder about sentence frames and vocabulary, and I wonder about a theme of justice, and fairness, with homelessness, and using vocabulary as a frame for the discussion" (3/10/10).

This dialogue provided Yolanda with a variety of suggestions for how to handle any similar situations in the future, and assisted her to think about how to best transform a difficult issue into a teachable moment. Yolanda later stated in her final paper,

As a result of my project, I began to reflect more about my teaching practices. Am I doing everything I can to meet my student needs? Am I being equitable with my instruction, time and learning materials? Am I using my ELD time effectively? Am I doing enough to close the achievement gap in my classroom?

Yolanda's growth and reflection illustrates how the group served not only as professional development, but as a true professional learning community, in which it was safe to provide critique and honest constructive feedback.

Everyone Can Learn More

It was not just those group members with less experience on issues of equity who gained insights into their teaching practices through participation in Project ACTION. Sometimes even the individuals with the most knowledge and comfort around social justice teaching were pushed to examine how they could do more. For instance, although Sarah and Laura were well-versed in the theory and practice of social justice teaching, they recognized that they still had plenty they could learn about and improve upon. Thus, they continually gave each other feedback on how to bring social justice to the forefront of particular lesson plans. For example, during one meeting Sarah gave Laura a useful suggestion, stating, "By making them [students] the experts on a new topic, like child labor or mixed immigration status families, they can apply their sense of justice to a whole new realm" (fieldnote, 1/11/10).

At times they even pushed themselves to improve their own understanding of social justice and their equity-focused teaching practice, such as when Laura handed out questions for her teaching consultation, asking the group members to help her consider:

- 1) What would "rigorous" curriculum look like? How would it be planned/implemented/measured/assessed?
- 2) What would "empowerment" look like? How would it be documented?
- 3) What ideas, activities, websites, videos, or books/readings would you have for teaching social justice?
- 4) What ideas, activities, websites, videos, or books/readings would you have for teaching the differences and appreciations of academic and social English?
- 5) How would I surface/bring forth students' experiences and expertise into the self-awareness and/or social justice realms? What guiding questions can I ask?
- 6) How or should this social justice reading curriculum be translated into

action(s)? Or are there any good field trips or projects to culminate or associate with this curriculum for students?

7) What (might I collect from students to show meta-cognitive reflections and/or learning of reading or social justice from students?

Laura was able to gain a variety of responses from the group members as to how to tackle the challenges with which she grappled. Hence, through group participation and the inquiry project, individuals of all levels of understanding pushed each other and themselves to stretch further in their theoretical and practical knowledge and comfort in social justice teaching.

Deepening Teacher Reflection and Pushing Forward

"We need to improve our practices. Project ACTION treated us as professional and lifelong learners" (Final survey, 5/8/10).

As a result of their participation in Project ACTION, teachers were able to consistently deepen their level of reflection about their practice. In fact, 100% of inquiry group end-of-year survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "My participation in Project ACTION has convinced me of the importance of adopting an inquiry stance toward my teaching." The inquiry process and group provided a crucial reflective space to step back and consider what was working and what could be improved in one's teaching. As Sarah explained, "Teaching is hard, and we don't get to just talk about it that much, and just, like, brainstorm, problem-solve, and just get feedback...I've been more in my head since my teaching consultation, and it highlighted areas I need to improve, so that has been very helpful" (meeting fieldnote 1/27/10).

In fact, several times during the year, teachers engaged in dialogue about the ongoing reflection they were respectively experiencing. During one group meeting, Felicia shared that she felt teacher inquiry is "all about what can I do to improve my practice so that it reaches students, not so much the way I'm trained to work in terms of like, 'what is this kid not doing and how can I get him to do it, how can I move her from this to this,' but I think its like that whole self-reflection, that process of like, 'ok, what do I need to do, and based on what I do and the choices I make, then it has this impact on the students I teach.'" Yolanda responded with further insights, remarking, "Its like, when we are teaching, we're just caught up in teaching, and you don't have time to reflect or think, so I think for me Project ACTION is like, I get to come and just think about my practice, how I can improve myself as a professional" (meeting fieldnote, 2/20/10). Being given the time and space to actually reflect about their teaching resulted in these educators considering how they could best serve their students, which led directly to changes in classroom practice.

For example, in several instances Sarah highlighted how her teaching practice had shifted as a result of her participation in Project ACTION. Initially, she had found that undertaking the project and participating in the inquiry group assisted her to "shine a light on my teaching. So, I'm observing myself, and in the

role of a teacher researcher, I'm just looking at everything as data, and paying a lot more attention to what I do, and my students, and capturing comments they make as feedback for me. So, I felt a bigger connection to them, because I was studying them and they were helping me study myself" (focus group, 5/7/10). This process of "shining a light" led to specific changes in her teaching. In an email correspondence, she shared, "There are several things that I thought about doing on behalf of my students in my reading class last year that I never got around to, but as a result of the attention inquiry has brought to bear on my class and my practice, I actually have implemented this year" (2/21/10). Furthermore, the inquiry also led Sarah to planning new pedagogical strategies for the future, as illustrated in her final paper:

As a result of this inquiry, some insights and resolutions I hope to work on for next year are:

- More practice with shorter units of text and writing
- More consistent work with vocabulary and opportunities for academic discussion
- Clear, recurring and building reading and writing learning goals (better constructed scaffolding)
- More regular ongoing formative assessments and feedback related to these goals
- My assumptions about what constitutes 'student centered text' were not always right-on, so continue to seek text that is high interest.

Due to her participation in Project ACTION, Sarah experienced time for reflection, an increased focus on her teaching, and an impetus to make solid classroom changes in order to improve her practice and student outcomes.

Push to Motivate and Support

The inquiry group and projects also provided needed motivation and support to the participants, to the extent that they felt they were pushed to move beyond any boundaries in their teaching with which they may have grappled. Felicia described the motivation she experienced, stating,

Just being engaged in the program makes me think about my teaching in a different way, because I have this regular venue to talk about it, this expectation that I'm observing myself and my practice, my students, gathering evidence, so I think it changes everything...it definitely helps me ask a lot of questions about my teaching. It puts me on notice, because I am sort of evaluating myself, and it makes me, you know, if there is a day when I am tired and just want to wing it, it makes me think about that twice. It's just so powerful knowing that you are going to talk about your work and turn that lens on yourself (interview, 2/19/10).

This motivation and support oftentimes took the role of a push to make changes. In fact, the word “push” was consistently used by group members to describe their experiences, so much so that it is useful to visually illustrate the degree this phenomenon occurred:

Table 4: Use of the Word “Push”

Data	Speaker	Source
“I wanted something that would be meaningful to me and that would push me forward . And there were times when it was uncomfortable but I really felt I got what I expected, and I could leave my classroom and go to the meeting feeling burdened but then afterward I would always leave feeling a lot better and like, ‘oh, there’s people out there who are really invested in their teaching’ which is not what I always see.”	Felicia	End-of-Year Focus group, 5/8/10
“Project ACTION has provided a space for me to engage in an intellectual level with other like minded teachers. It has been an arena where I could push myself professionally through reflection and discussion.”	Elizabeth	Final Paper
“The group kinda pushes me, like spurs me on to think , ok, I’m going to do this this week, or I have this book in mind and I’m want to share this with my kids and see what kind of discussion I can have. Or, whatever I see or hear from them [other group members] are things that I want to do, or continue to do, or start doing in my own class as well, in my own way with my grade level or my particular student. So it’s always a way for me to be motivated, and, ‘oh, how can I do that?’ or ‘I want to bring that into my classroom.’”	Felicia	Interview, 2/8/10
“I just needed this project to push myself forward . It’s so easy to be in my classroom and think, ‘oh, I’m doing a great job’ but to challenge myself and push myself professionally I needed the group that would intellectually help me do that, engage in that kind of conversation that doesn’t happen at my school.”	Abigail	End-of-Year Focus group, 5/8/10
“It was personally intellectually challenging and pushed me out of my comfort zone . It stretched me to think, reflect, act upon, make decisions, etc.”	Anonymous	End-of-Year Survey
“Members in my group were motivated & took their teacher research experience seriously. We grew to bond, help & support one another and spur each other on. It pushed me to more critically approach my teaching practice .”-	Anonymous	End-of-Year Survey

The above data demonstrate how much the projects and group served to “push” the teachers in ways that made a deep impact on them and their practice. These pushes

assisted them to move beyond their comfort zones, professionalize their teaching, and take a distinctly critical eye toward their own classroom practice.

Cross-grade/Cross-school/Cross-experience Mentorships

Because the group consisted of individuals who taught grades 1 through 12, participants were provided a unique set of feedback. Teachers oftentimes expressed the positive aspects of being a part of a cross-grade inquiry group, particularly made up of teachers of different subjects, from different schools, and different levels of teaching expertise. For example, as a first-year teacher, Charlotte found she gained a great deal from the group. Halfway through the year, after one of her teaching consultations, she remarked how helpful she found them to be, stating, "Even when I wasn't talking I found myself thinking about what you guys were saying, not even about my project but just ideas about teaching, and that's different for me because I'm first year and I feel like I have a lot more that I can take in from all of you" (meeting fieldnote, 1/27/10). At the end of the year, after sharing some of her student handouts and student work with the group, she reiterated her appreciation, remarking, "I feel much better by having had all of your wonderful experienced eyes on it, and getting those little bits of encouragement" (meeting fieldnote, 4/14/10).

Furthermore, the support Charlotte and others gained from this professional learning community transcended the intellectual and philosophical, extending to the emotional. A fieldnote from one such meeting illustrates the degree to which group members were able to lean on one another for emotional support through the trials and tribulations of the teaching profession:

Charlotte was very upset, having had a very difficult week teaching. She ended up in tears as she shared her first-year teaching challenges and how unprepared she feels. She said, 'I don't want to be one of those teachers who cries.' The other members consoled her and encouraged her, telling her that it will get easier and that they also cried many times their first years. Yolanda shared that she used to have happy hours with margaritas every Friday during her first year. This made everyone, including Charlotte, have a good laugh. Laura also shared a helpful story from her first year teaching, as did Sarah, and everyone else told her that it will get better, it really will. I was moved by the extensive support and tremendous caring that the group members gave to Charlotte (meeting fieldnote, 11/12/09).

It was not just the new teachers who benefitted from the group being made up of educators from a range of grade levels and schools. Even Laura, with her 25 years of teaching experience, remarked at the end of the year, "I really appreciate that this is a cross-school and cross-grade group. Obviously there are benefits of being within one's school, but I'm really appreciating hearing the range of K-12 and different schools. That is really refreshing for me" (meeting fieldnote, 4/30/10). While this particular dynamic may be unique, even amongst inquiry groups, it can

potentially serve as a powerful model for a range of options for collaborative inquiry between teachers, schools, and districts.

Student Achievement

Because of the extent to which teachers had a more critical eye toward their classroom teaching practice due to the inquiry projects and inquiry group, they ultimately found that they were better able to serve their students and bring about increased student achievement. This is supported by the fact that 100% of inquiry group end-of-year survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "Conversations within my inquiry group helped me to improve my curriculum & instruction." The inquiry process assisted teachers to investigate and reflect on how they could be more successful in improving outcomes for their students.

Exploration of Teaching Strategies to Improve Outcomes for Students

Sometimes this investigative process took the form of subtle shifts in which particular pedagogical strategies to explore. For example, Sarah explained how her project came to fruition and led her to examine student motivation:

I felt a bit sheepish focusing on motivation at first when achievement is the essential question of the day. Motivation seemed self-evident in so many ways, after all students obviously get excited about computers. But when I thought about it for a little while, I realized I wasn't even sure how to define or observe motivation. Then, after first quarter grades came in and twelve of my students earned F's or D's in their ELA class while all were earning C's, B's and A's in my class the need to explore the connection between motivation and achievement seemed justified and necessary (final paper).

Even just the process of making small shifts in how the teachers approached their curricula practice brought about new classroom outcomes, as illustrated in this fieldnote excerpt:

Felicia shared that she is reading *Dogzilla* with her students and she noticed that they always love it, and they enjoyed the unit because it is really interesting, and that due to the teacher-produced curriculum rather than the HM curriculum, about half of her kids scored at 80% or higher on their end of unit tests, which is really good compared to how they normally do. This gave her insight into how "there was that motivation, and that interest, because they love the story and they love the author, and so that gave me some idea of how to move forward in terms of how I should select my books. And I also spent some time just looking up things online, like, what is multicultural, and I also ordered several books on Amazon, books by like Sandra Cisneros, and Gary Soto (1/10/10).

Felicia's inquiry project pushed her to rethink her curricular choices, which she felt resulted in improved engagement and academic achievement. Similarly, Abigail shared that she was able to explore new ways to include texts that would benefit her students, saying, "Through Project ACTION, I feel that I was able to find ways to integrate this "extra" reading with our required textbook in a way that used higher-order comprehension skills to help scaffold the learning of my English Language Learner students" (final paper).

Observing to Understand Student Needs

The act of deepening observations of students was an integral part of the inquiry process, and it led to teachers gaining a stronger and more nuanced sense of how to better meet student needs. Felicia explained how this phenomenon occurred in her teaching:

It [inquiry project] really helped me see my students differently. I mean, particularly the three students I was following all year, I could easily have concluded they were still struggling, but really observing them really drew me to them, and I was able to see more than I would have normally, like every little thing about them (focus group, 5/8/10).

Unfortunately, while this level of close student observation may not always be feasible due to the larger external constraints outlined in this study, it nonetheless served as a salient goal toward which these teachers, who wanted to better understand and serve their students, could strive. Abigail summarized how much this level of observing her students assisted her to make shifts in her understanding, and she suggested a way in which all teachers could attempt to replicate this process:

When normally you might just think, 'oh yeah, they [students] are having trouble', but looking at them more in-depth, and taking those observational notes was really helpful for me with my focal students, and just thinking about it going forward, you know, you can't really do it for all your students, but for those students where you aren't quite sure, it might be something that would be helpful to do mini research and observation projects on those individual kids (focus group, 5/8/10).

Deepening Rigor

Another method explored in order to improve student outcomes included Laura's push toward increasing her classroom rigor. Her inquiry project had a specific goal of assisting her to become more rigorous in order to best serve her students and improve achievement. She remarked, "I think I am really good at motivating students, and I'm good with relationships with students, but I want to be more rigorous with them, so I wanted to do something that would force me to be more rigorous. So the project not only helped me reflect on my practice, but also be

more rigorous in my teaching” (focus group, 5/8/10). As shown in the following section, she felt she succeeded in this goal.

Increased Student Outcomes

Teachers consistently reported positive improvements in student outcomes as a result of implementing their inquiry projects. Felicia described what she noticed in her classroom upon completion of the school year, stating, “I do not have assessments, rubrics, and test scores to show for some measure of my students' growth as readers. But one of the most valuable pieces of information I've collected through my observations of students is the increase in their participation. The greatest growth in my students was through their participation during class discussions during and after the various read alouds” (final paper). Increasing levels of student participation like Felicia was able to do is a crucial first step needed to work toward improved academic outcomes (Webb, 1982).

Elizabeth also noticed improvements, even in her 1st grade students, as a result of the strategies she implemented from her inquiry. She summarized these shifts in her final paper:

It is hard to solely credit the Film Club for the growth in reading comprehension in my focal students as there are also a lot of different factors that could have played a role...However, I cannot deny that the projects, discussions, and dialogue that we shared in film club behooved the students as I saw it spill over into the regular classroom in small ways:

- One student was inspired to go to the library and check out the movie version of the book I had read in class. He wrote about this moment and about the movie in such detail, he had almost written a summary about the book! He has been going to the library often.
- Students are making a lot of text-to-movie connections. There have been several occasions when students have referred to certain scenes and characters as a means of comparison.
- Students participating in the film club are seemingly appreciating film for its content. When I first introduced the film club, students asked questions like, "Is it a cartoon?" or "Is it funny?" or "Is it long or short?". By the third film viewing, students were asking questions regarding content and making predictions about the movie simply based on the DVD cover. They had discussions amongst themselves and could not wait to see if their predictions would be correct.
- The vocabulary lessons during the pre-viewing portion of Film Club are definitely sticking in their minds. Students are using the "million-dollar" words in their writing and in their everyday language. Moreover, the vocabulary lessons that I have in class through our language-arts program has become much more engaging for the students.
- I feel that the Film Club has taught some students how to build patience for appreciating the written word. Instead of mindlessly watching the film,

students have been encouraged to slow down (as I pause the movie), engage in some reflective thinking with a partner, and take time to notice details from the movie as I rewind certain scenes. I have noticed that analyzing text has become a lot easier as students are a lot more patient and engaged when we stop at certain points to hold discussions. I also think that the ELL students are beginning to visualize the text that they read (with the help of some pictures). I feel that some of them are making the leap from printed symbols to actions, events, and ideas that are visible in their mind.

Even at such a young age, Felicia’s students were positively affected by her choices in pedagogical shifts. Moreover, in a higher grade level, Sarah similarly found increased engagement in her middle school students as a result of her inquiry project, in ways that were exceptionally transformative. As she described,

Students' enjoyment of the technology led them to engage in the reading and writing process in a sustained way...the technology was not only fun, but had a particular positive pedagogical impact and this led to very productive peer collaborations and a positive classroom climate...Throughout the project, students completed difficult reading and writing assignments so they could have scripts to use in the technology phase. This was remarkable, in and of itself because in ELA the same students continued to not complete essays and book reports. Even more remarkably, when they received their drafts back with teacher comments, some students worked hard to improve them before they recorded. Other students ignored the teacher comments and tried to record right away, only to discover on their own or with their partner that something in the script was missing or unreadable and that the problem made the script unrecordable. They would then set about doing the revision often without me telling them to. This collaborative editing process was remarkable to me (final paper).

Sarah discovered that as a result of the processes she put into place in her Reading and Digital Arts class, her students were completing work in ways she had never previously observed. The growth she witnessed was, in her words, “remarkable.”

Focal Students

Oftentimes the teachers focused in on individual students to illustrate growth and achievement. As described in the background chapter of this study, these “focal students” represented individuals who had previously been struggling and on whom the teachers strived to place their attention throughout the inquiry process. Table 5 documents the tremendous focal student growth consistently noticed by the teachers.

Table 5: Increased Achievement of Focal Students

Data	Teacher	Source
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<p>There was definitely more reading commitment. From the initial poems to student choices, a news article, and short stories students were engaged. They read and discussed for up to 40 minutes a session. In particular, poetry served to be a good starting point and helped these students become leaders in reforming their sustained silent reading period. They recorded onto a PowerPoint presentation the rationale for changing one reading period into a poetry reading time and they recommended the books they liked...One other significant example to note involves Cabel, an admitted struggling reading hater. He has shown reading commitment in two ways. A day after reading a short story on a topic of his choosing, he talked with me about not understanding what he reads in history. He felt that the vocabulary frontloading strategy used with the short story "helped <him> understand better." Given that, he approached his history reading with more effort to the effect that his history teacher made note of it to me later, not knowing of the earlier experience. He also is working with me on his third grade level decoding skills in reading some powerful social justice stories, starting with his choice of Stanley Tookie Williams' book, Life in Prison. With Cabel, the lowest level reader and actual leader of the group committed, the other LTELL students have also demonstrated stronger engagement and effort in reading.</p>	<p>Laura</p>	<p>Final Paper</p>
<p>Elizabeth made the most growth, and advanced to the basic level from below basic. Mark was a proficient reader before, but is now an advanced reader in 4th grade. Jenny also increased her Lexile from basic to proficient. Cam continues to be on the basic level, but increased his Lexile level by 71 points. The three students also had a perfect score on their most recent selection test from the HM.</p>	<p>Yolanda</p>	<p>Final Paper</p>
<p>I noticed that with these three students started off the year shy and not raising their hands, and I have seen that their participation level has increased a lot, and that's not something that is on a report card, its not something that is going to show on a STAR test, but for me as a teacher, I found that participation is one way that I can measure their growth in ELA as a reader, as a thinker, how they reflect, and things like that...Though the changes were slow, there has been steady and incremental growth throughout this school year. All three have progressed in their reading level, now all reading just at grade level...Their participation increased to the point where they are now answering questions, asking questions, and responding to the comments and insights of others on an average of three times per story. This in itself is one of the greatest achievements for me to witness as a teacher. There is confidence in each of these three students when they listen, read along, read aloud in class, and when they engage in class discussions that has grown in the past trimester... The literature that was presented to my students helped increase their reading comprehension, enhanced class</p>	<p>Felicia</p>	<p>Final Presentation and Paper</p>

discussion, allowed for writing opportunities, and had an emotional pull that is evidenced by their enthusiastic, thoughtful, or heartfelt responses.		
I found that the students had the most in depth and thoughtful responses in the response to literature unit. Additionally, all three showed growth and were able to identify the author's message and viewpoint. The three focal students showed an understanding of needing to find evidence in the text to support a main idea, and were able to pick small details out of a larger text. Given what I saw in the writing, I feel that incorporating more of a "literature response" within the reading program might help students to develop more sophisticated ways of looking at the stories. Once taught, this work could easily be added to many of the stories in the anthology we are required to use. Giving them the concrete tools and graphic organizers for the stories would also be beneficial. Making more of a connection between reading and writing helped my students build capacity with literacy and gives them a chance to apply skills in two contexts.	Abigail	Final Paper
In class, Gary currently demonstrates increased motivation and confidence as a reader and writer. Since participating in the film club, Gary's DRA score has increased from a Level 1 to a Level 10, placing him almost on grade level for the current trimester. His rate of comprehension is now proficient...Denise is making moderate progress in her reading comprehension skills. As an ELL student, Denise benefits from all sorts of visual aids, so I noticed that extracting information from film was a lot easier for her. In class, Denise is attentive and engaged. Since participating in the Film Club, her DRA score has increased from a Level 3 to a Level 12, placing her on grade level.	Elizabeth	Final Paper

While the above table demonstrates the range of growth witnessed by the teachers, Felicia's comment that "this is one of the greatest achievements for me to witness as a teacher" summarizes the extent to which these pedagogical shifts and the resulting outcomes may have had an impact not only on the students, but on the teachers as well.

Inquiry in the Formal School Context

Project ACTION projects and group dialogues provided participants invaluable pedagogical strategies to improve their teaching for equity, as well as a powerful format for gaining specific insights on their own beliefs and teaching struggles. As previously documented, throughout the year inquiry group members consistently expressed their desire and effort to bring these types of projects and discussions back to their schools in order to provide similar experiences for their colleagues. One participant summed it up in the end-of-year survey, stating, "Project ACTION was structured well in all above aspects. I have used the equity readings back at my school, and I will try to infuse Professional Learning Communities and

protocols.” Unfortunately, as much as the teachers may have wanted to insert the texts, activities, projects, and discussion formats into their own school professional development, it may have proven difficult without a formalized process from the school administration or district offices. As Felicia cogently noted,

They don't do anything in the school to build that kind of relationship or community amongst the teachers, like how we shared our own racial autobiography, and it seems like, you don't even know where like, your grade level partner, where she or he is really coming from, and there's no effort put into trying to really continue to educate the teachers. It shouldn't just be like, oh you are cleared and you have your credential, and go teach your class, but I feel like there needs to be the kind of training or different things that we do here in the group, maybe it need to be more geared towards that...its like, when you have people thinking all these different things, we aren't working together to impact students in the way we say we want to, you know? I feel like there is no time or effort put into trying to treat teachers in an intellectual way, or have us read or engage difficult conversations or things like that (meeting fieldnote, 2/10/10).

Hence, the following chapter will include a discussion of implications for implementing teacher inquiry processes within professional development and intellectual learning communities.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

“Being mindful of what is meaningful to my students, and implementing it, is what should occur daily in my classroom. Though this is a simple reality, it is often overlooked, forgotten, and glossed over” –Felicia, final paper.

This research has attempted to illustrate the ways in which present mandates affected the daily practice of a group of K-12 educators, and the strategies they utilized to collectively navigate these constraints in order to develop their teaching for social justice. While these themes have been explored a fair amount in educational research (e.g., Ayers, et al, 2008; Christensen, 2012; Curry, et al., 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Gunzenhauser, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Picower, 2007, 2012; RAND, 2007; Wiedeman, 2010), in this historical moment it is vital to document the day-to-day struggles faced by educators, in order to shed light on what teaching for equity looks like in the present era of significant accountability measures. This framework is different from much of the literature on teaching for social justice in that it integrates the lived day-to-day realities of the current education profession, while simultaneously outlining the ways in which the inquiry process can serve to provide a space for reflection, agency, and increased teacher self-efficacy.

Chapter four detailed specific accountability struggles, including obstacles related to time and pacing as well as surveillance and policing. The chapter demonstrated significant tensions between current policy demands and what teachers actually feel able to do within their daily classroom challenges. For example, teachers were given little time to teach anything beyond the two subjects that were measured by standardized tests. Teachers were also given strictly paced scripted curricula without regard for whether or not their students had acquired a strong grasp of the material. As Kohl (2009) asserts,

Scripted curriculum turns teachers into mechanical delivery systems. Most teachers try to revolt against them, but they have to face what are called ‘the Open Court police’...Though those monitors obviously can’t check all the classes at all the times they induce a state of anxiety since they can enter any classroom at any time without even knocking. *This aspect of the panopticon contributes to the erosion of self-respect and pride in one’s work by treating teachers as objects with no independent educational knowledge and judgment of their own...*teachers and students are under constant scrutiny, allowed no choice over what is learned or taught, evaluated continuously (para. 7, emphasis added).

The chapter found that in order to deal with these demands and attempt to enact equitable teaching practices, educators in this study oftentimes spent their own after-school time giving extra lessons and enacting creative pedagogies. However, though some dedicated teachers may be able to do this, this strategy can be problematic for those educators who are unable to carve out the time needed to provide after-school support for their students.

This chapter also showed that the teachers were affected by the degree that test scores impacted their ability to implement changes to their practice. To illustrate the phenomenon of profound shifts in educational priorities, one can look to scholar Diane Ravitch, who famously reversed her stance on high-stakes accountability and standardized testing, stating, “we forget that schools are responsible for shaping character, developing sound minds in healthy bodies, and forming citizens for our democracy, not just for teaching basic skills” (2010, p. 167). Rather than encouraging teachers to shape character and form citizens, as Ravitch advocates, the mandates that teachers faced were continually reinforced through ongoing surveillance and policing. Teachers in all grade levels faced this continual scrutiny, which had the effect of forcing them to be secretive about curricular or pedagogical strategies that they believed would better serve their students.

Chapter four then moved on to investigate current manifestations of teacher resistance and agency as related to equity and student needs. Resisting and navigating tests and mandates required creativity, and took various forms, such as advocating for student needs, transforming how a particular standard was taught, teaching surreptitious lessons, or even simply changing semantics in the presence of administrators. The most common forms of creative resistance were not using district-mandated textbooks and supplementation of those texts with other materials.

Moreover, these teachers’ ideological positions could themselves be conceptualized as a form of resistance, as illustrated by Gunzenhauser (2008), who asserts, “Foucaultian resistance is not limited to what may immediately come to mind: questioning authority, protesting, or refusing to participate. Nor is this resistance necessarily resistance to standards, testing, or accountability itself. Resistance is instead a more radically personal, relational stance toward oneself and others” (p. 2231). This illustrates the notion that resistance and teacher agency can, in fact, bring about some transformative shifts- no matter how minor. Collins (1990) conceptualizes this idea as “rather than seeing social change or lack of it as preordained and outside the realm of human action, the notion of a dialectical relationship suggests that change results from human agency” (p. 274). Hence, the teachers saw the cracks between accountability and agency, and enacted resistance in small and large ways in their classrooms throughout the study.

Chapter five outlined the multiple forms that teaching for social justice took, specifically as related to curricula, time, and student-teacher relationships, with a range of philosophies and practices present in the study. The chapter argued that within the confines of present constraints, teachers in the study enacted equitable teaching strategies through shifts in student engagement, academic rigor, and culturally relevant curricula. However, these strategies oftentimes were only feasible outside of the formal school day.

A distinct phenomenon highlighted in the chapter was the extent to which teachers focused on social justice teaching through either emphasizing culturally relevant curriculum or solely aiming for student engagement. For example, while some teachers used “fun” books in order to engage students and increase achievement, others worked to emphasize socially transformative and culturally relevant texts. Also, educators in the study often held the philosophy that teaching

for test achievement is in itself a form of social justice. Furthermore, many of them stated that their goal was to successfully draw upon culturally relevant curricula in order to increase student achievement.

To varying degrees of efficacy, teachers in this study navigated the intersection of rigor, test prep, equity, and culturally relevant materials. One of the primary approaches these educators enacted was to develop strong relationships, caring, and trust with their students. Teachers were able to infuse this particular form of social justice throughout various aspects of their instruction. The chapter ultimately attempted to present promising cases of educators negotiating the complicated intersection of equity, social justice, test preparation, rigor, and caring in this distinct era in schooling.

Chapter six examined the ways in which the teachers worked together to share strategies and reflectively navigate constraints through a structured professional learning community. The chapter demonstrated how, while the educators' inquiry projects at times became a challenge due to external demands, the projects actually also helped teachers to navigate these mandates. Furthermore, the inquiry group meetings served as a beneficial space between constraints and what could be undertaken in the midst of these particular struggles. Through structured dialogue and research protocols, during the meetings teachers could express their difficulties, share strategies for dealing with challenges, discuss equity issues, become more reflective, and find new ways of working for student achievement and improved outcomes.

The chapter examined how the inquiry projects helped the educators negotiate current conditions, through the ways in which the projects assisted teachers to explore methods of being more pedagogically creative in spite of limitations, as well as to increase their motivation for teaching, and to become more empowered to push for change. Similarly, the inquiry group meetings also assisted teachers in navigating these challenges. As the educators regularly engaged with each other, they collectively explored strategies for expanding their agency. Specifically, this sharing of strategies included dealing with curriculum issues, time constraints, and testing mandates.

These discussions were unlike any experiences the teachers had at their respective schools, where these educators found that they needed this type of space, and particularly valued the individualized feedback about the means through which they could undertake their most effective teaching while staying within accountability limitations. Additionally, equity issues were explicitly discussed throughout the meetings, and these exchanges were oftentimes transformative in the sense of providing the teachers a new framework with which to understand educational equity. Furthermore, the group members expressed the great extent to which the meetings reminded them of their commitment to social justice in their teaching, even as they navigated larger external pressures.

This chapter also demonstrated how, as a result of their participation in Project ACTION, teachers deepened their reflection about their practice. The inquiry process and the group meetings offered needed space and time to consider the efficacy of their teaching, and what aspects could be further improved. Moreover, because the group consisted of cross-grade and cross-school educators,

participants often described the beneficial elements of receiving such diverse feedback, which included intellectual and philosophical exploration as well as emotional grounding. Lastly, the chapter found that because the teachers developed a more transformative lens toward their practice, they ultimately discovered that they were better able to bring about increased student engagement, motivation, and achievement.

Significance

This study complements the body of research literature on educational equity and teacher inquiry, and it informs current policy considerations related to accountability mandates and teacher practice. While substantial scholarship has investigated the outcomes of educator attempts to enact social justice-based pedagogies (Ayers, et al., 2008; Banks, 1999; Delpit, 2012; hooks, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1994; McLaren, 1988; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2004, 2008; Nieto, 2000; Sleeter, 1996), and much research has documented impacts of the teacher inquiry process (Caro-Bruce & Klehr, 2007; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2001, 2009; Devlin, 2003; Henson, 2001; Levin & Rock, 2003; Picower, 2007), this study is unique in that it combines the two arenas while also incorporating daily demands and constraints present in the current teaching profession.

Additionally, this investigation contributes to scholarship on the conditions around which educators may develop their understandings and practices as related to equity issues, and it posits that teachers can in fact effect change and resistance in their classrooms. Moreover, this study interrupts the ubiquitous conception of teachers as beneficiaries of academy-generated knowledge and instead views them as creators of practice-based knowledge. Because this study is grounded in the lived realities of educator experiences, it adds to emic understandings of current teacher challenges. Lastly, this project also informs research on the inquiry process as a potential in-school professional development tool, elucidating insider perspectives on the benefits of participation in an inquiry group and undertaking an inquiry project.

The research also illustrates the ways in which the inquiry process can serve as a vital means of support for teachers to develop their understanding and practice of multicultural pedagogy and educational equity, particularly in a context of external restraints. Thus, in an era of extensive policy flux and focus on issues of student achievement, assessment, and school reform, this research is significant to practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and teacher educators, as it illuminates the ways in which struggles around accountability and equity produce a complicated intersection for educators to navigate in their teaching practice, and it examines the inquiry process as a tool to assist them in doing so.

Study Limitations and Areas for Future Research

Based on the research findings, certain areas of this dissertation deserve further investigation. One key element that was beyond the scope of this research would be to replicate the study with a more diverse group of teachers. Further

examination of the inquiry process with educators from culturally varied backgrounds would prove useful in expanding this study beyond this current limit, as it which would add to understandings of how the inquiry process impacts broader demographics of educators and how impactful replication might be for these teachers.

Another important consideration is that the secondary teachers in this research study all taught humanities content areas, but the study is limited in that there were no mathematics or science teachers participating in the research. Therefore, extending this study to focus on mathematics and science teaching would be helpful in pushing past present limitations- particularly given the dearth of scholarship on social-justice based mathematics and science pedagogy. While it is possible that findings may be similar, it is important to determine whether mathematics or science teachers face different constraints in their attempts to enact equity and social justice in their teaching practice, as well as the ways in which the inquiry process does or does not assist them in these endeavors.

Lastly, because the educators in this dissertation all chose to participate in the inquiry group because they prioritized equity issues in their work, it would be valuable to investigate the extent to which the inquiry process transforms the practices of educators who do not place the same degree of importance on teaching for social justice and equity. This would require a pre-survey in order to determine teacher stance, and the inquiry group and process would need to be designed in such a way as to move participants along the spectrum of social-justice teaching and inquiry for equity. A study of this type could also address the voluntary nature of this research; because participants in this dissertation all chose to be involved in Project ACTION, this limits the extent to which study findings can be broadly applied. Further research on the efficacy of mandated inquiry groups and projects would illuminate to what degree the inquiry process impacts teachers who may not otherwise choose to participate.

Implications

While it is beyond the scope of this research to make specific policy recommendations on state and federal accountability structures, it is nevertheless important to note that the conditions with which the educators in this study contended created teaching environments that were less conducive to student and teacher success. As cogently asserted by Rothstein, et al. (2008):

In the service of creating a democratic and just society, schools must prioritize the notion that adolescents should enter young adulthood with many cognitive skills and non-cognitive qualities – not only strong academic knowledge and skills, but also the ability to reason and think critically, an appreciation of the arts and literature, preparation for skilled work, social skills and a strong work ethic, good citizenship, and habits leading to good physical and emotional health. State accountability systems should ensure that schools and supporting institutions promote all these traits in a

balanced fashion, because *accountability for only some outcomes will create incentives to ignore others* (p. 5, emphasis added).

In other words, it is vital that accountability directives be rooted in broader considerations around desired societal outcomes, and must fundamentally take into account potential long-term implications for students and educators.

This research study also found significant potential benefits in the implementation of teacher inquiry processes within school-based educator professional development and intellectual learning communities. It would perhaps be difficult to find many other professional development opportunities that can so easily result in this level of teacher reflection, collaboration, and transformation amongst participants. Project ACTION can therefore theoretically serve as a replicable model for inquiry processes aimed at improving outcomes for students and teachers, as illustrated in chapter six. This recommendation is supported by the extent to which the participating teachers consistently expressed their desire to bring the inquiry process back to their schools in order to provide similar experiences for their colleagues. For instance, Felicia's assertion that at her school, she and her colleagues "don't have conversations like that in the faculty lounge" illustrates a lack of experiences similar to Project ACTION;⁴² yet if this same type of structured equity-focused inquiry group were formed with colleagues at her school, while it remains to be seen if it would provide her the exact same outcomes, most certainly it would at the least provide a forum for having "conversations like that" beyond the standard professional development and staff meeting dialogues.

In order to successfully insert teacher inquiry processes into professional development, it is vital for school and district administrators to carve out and allow space and time for teachers to effectively undertake such activities, as well as encourage participation (e.g. incentives such as units which eventually count toward a step on the salary scale). Without buy-in and support from administration, inquiry groups and projects in a school context could be unfeasible. However, with the right type of supports, teacher inquiry within schools can inform understandings of social justice, assist teachers to transform their practice, and ultimately result in more equitable classroom outcomes and improved student achievement.

⁴² Further supporting data from all study participants can be found in chapter six.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Sample Meeting Agenda

AGENDA - MEETING 1 Cross-School Equity Group September 30, 2009

AIMS:

- *To launch our inquiry group and build our community*
- *To develop meaningful questions that help us improve our practice & student learning*
- *To further develop our understandings of key issues affecting our practice*
- *To provide feedback for one another regarding teacher inquiry projects*

<i>Minutes</i>	<i>Start Time</i>	ACTIVITY
5	4:30	Arrival – Contact sheet & name tents & binders
5	4:35	I. Welcome
20	4:40	II. Building connections
15	5:00	III. Introduction to the project
20	5:15	IV. Setting Norms
35	5:35	V. Launching our dialogue/gallery walk
5	6:10	VI. Discuss HW, distribute books
10	6:15	VII. Set yearlong schedule/next location-discuss mtg timing
5	6:25	VIII. Closing Reflection
6:30		Adjourn: Turn in contact sheet, name tents, consent form, commitment agreement

For next time:

- *Read sheet: “What’s Particular about Inquiry for Equity?”*
- *Read one article in Au book; you’ll have a few minutes next time to share out. Keep in mind: How is this piece relevant to your classroom/school?*

Appendix B: Typical Meeting Structure

Provisional Meeting Structure:

Note: Groups are encouraged to develop their own agendas and procedures. One template for how to proceed follows. Please modify to suit context.

Time:	Activity:	Purpose:
5-30	Teacher Talk: <i>A time to check in & share “brags and drags” or burning issues. Not a time to respond to each other, but rather to listen deeply to one another.</i>	To build interpersonal connections and sense of trust/safety among members.
5-15	Inquiry Whip: <i>Members briefly share where they are in their inquiry process, indicating expected next steps. Members, who presented last time, provide follow-up reports on actions they’ve taken in the interim.</i>	To sustain all members’ focus on their area of inquiry and promote a sense of accountability to self and group.
30-90	Individual Teacher Presentations: <i>An opportunity to delve deeply into the question/inquiry of one or two members. Conversations frequently structured by protocols and based on artifacts of classroom practice (lesson plans, student work, or other data).</i>	To deepen inquiry and have data scrutinized by others with different perspectives.
10-20	Reflective Journals: <i>Silent reflection to process the group’s discussion, as well as other insights related to inquiry and teaching practice.</i>	To document inquiry and anchor emergent understandings.
5-10	**Final Process Whip: <i>Each member shares what s/he thinks about how the meeting proceeded. What was effective? Engaging? Difficult? Suggestions for improvements / modification discussed. Etc.</i>	To develop a metacognitive awareness of the group’s learning and promote continuous improvement.
5-10	Develop Agenda <i>for next meeting.</i>	To ensure smooth management & clarify roles and expectations.

**This is a tempting step to skip, but is essential to developing a truly reflective community!

- Each member in the inquiry group gets to present/facilitate various inquiry group sessions throughout the school year. (This will be a the time when you can work with others on your question.) See attached schedules.
- When you present/facilitate you will come with a specific process in mind that will engage the group in supporting your inquiry, as well as with tangible materials that will help the group reflect on your question.
- At the end of the school year, each teacher will use their journal to reflect on and present an exhibition of their inquiry progress and findings.

Appendix C: Sample Protocol Guide

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Time 30	Time 40	Activity	Purposes/Notes
1	1	Facilitator introduces protocol and goes over format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Important to keep time.</i>
5	7	<p>Presenter shares his/her inquiry-in-progress. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research question/focus - Context: class, kids, curriculum... - Overview of his/her inquiry process - Question, struggle - what he/she wants group to think about when looking at data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Presenter needs to give enough context so that listeners can have an informed discussion – but does not need to give lengthy background.</i>
4	5	Group reads data /materials (if necessary – otherwise presenter can use this for more presentation or discussion time)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A chance for listeners to engage actual materials from the teachers' work.</i>
5	7	Questions from listeners; presenter responds. Start with clarifying questions (factual) and move to probing questions (for benefit of presenter).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A chance for listeners to get clarification and to get deeper into the presenter's thinking and dilemma.</i>
10	15	<p>Discussion by the group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - feedback (“I liked,” “It struck me”...) - reflective questions (“I wonder...”) - possible directions (“What if...”) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Facilitator reminds group of what the presenter wants feedback on.</i> • <i>Presenter is quiet; group speaks to each other, not to the presenter.</i>
3	3	Presenter reflections. The presenter talks about what she heard, learned, is thinking now – whatever feels most useful.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The presenter does <u>not</u> need to respond to issues or questions raised.</i>
2	2	Process reflections (presenter first) Facilitator closes protocol.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Important to check on process.</i>

*(The times above can be modified to suit the needs of the presenter.
The presenter negotiates this with the facilitator beforehand.)*

Appendix D: Final Paper Guidelines

Summary Reflection Paper Guidelines

- ❖ Three page minimum
- ❖ Issues/Topics to address:
 - Background of area of interest – Motive for inquiry and inquiry context
 - Inquiry Question – stated crisply
 - Precedents/Other relevant literature (optional)

- Description of your inquiry process – data collected, interventions / changes in practice, data analysis, consultations with your ACTION community, etc.
- Conclusions/Findings/Next Steps
- Reflections, especially on how participating in the ACTION community influenced your inquiry and sense of teaching as a profession.
- ❖ Audience = other ACTION teachers, funders, and other practitioners interested in teacher inquiry. We intend to compile summaries in a book.
- ❖ 12 point font, times preferred. ___ will send template file in April
- ❖ Submit two hard copies & send an electronic copy to ___.

Options for Final Sharing Day Presentation:

- ❖ **Round Table Discussion.** Roundtables allow maximum interaction with the presenters. Individual presenters are assigned to a meeting room or table where interested persons gather for discussion with the presenter about his or her inquiry. Generally the presenter provides a brief summary of their inquiry and shares concrete artifacts related to the inquiry (ie. a before and after homework policy sheet, student work samples, graphical displays of survey results, etc.). The presenter poses questions to participants to spark dialogue. (30 minutes)
- ❖ **Interactive Poster Talk.** Poster sessions combine graphic display of materials with the opportunity for individualized discussion on the presenter's inquiry. Presenters display their work in a meeting room, provide a brief synopsis of their inquiry and orient attendees to the poster. Next, the audience members ask questions of poster presenters and engage in interactive discussion. This option has the advantage of creating a product that can be displayed in a faculty room at your school. (30 minutes)
- ❖ **Formal Talk.** Presenters share their work in a more traditional manner using power point or overhead projector to explain their inquiry. This option is especially appropriate for anyone who intends to present at conferences. (20 minutes - 15 for talk and 5 for Q & A)

Appendix E: Sample Final Paper

Increasing Participation Through Making Reading Meaningful

Inquiry Question/Background:

What happens with regard to student participation when I supplement my current English-Language Arts curriculum with additional literature that are more culturally and personally meaningful to my students?

I have been asking myself some variation of this question for the past six years, since my first year of teaching. Through the years the questions have evolved, starting with “Why do I need to use this English-Language Arts curriculum?” to “What can I add to my ELA instruction to make it more interesting?” to this particular question this year.

I teach third grade in a small city encompassed within the tri-city area in ____

County. The school population of 404 students is comprised of about 50% Latino, about 15% Asian, 13% Filipino and/or Pacific Islander, and about 7% African-American) and 65% of our students receive free and/or reduced school lunch. About 47% are English Language Learners. Many changes have occurred in the enrollment and make-up of my class since the first day of school. A total of 31 students have been enrolled in my class at various times (not all at once), of which my current enrollment stands at 23 students – 11 boys and 12 girls. This particular year, my room has felt like a revolving door with students picking up and leaving without any prior notice and new students arriving without any warning.

The year I began teaching in my school was the same year that the district approved and purchased new English-Language Arts curriculum for grades K – 6, which is one of the major state adopted curricula. This was my first introduction to teacher’s manuals, anthologies, sound-spelling cards, selection tests, practice books, and the like. I was instructed to use only these materials to teach reading to my students; students who come to me with varying reading levels in the beginning of the year (some reading at a kindergarten level with barely their letter sounds down, while some come reading at fourth grade level – the spectrum is wide) and whose first language is not English. One of the first difficulties I faced as a teacher was the challenge of reading the selections (stories) in the anthology with my students. While I am able to read it aloud to and alongside them, close to half my students were not able to read the text on their own. I also faced the challenge of students showing physical and verbal disinterest in any reading related to their anthology and practice book. I was disheartened that my students’ perception of reading amounted to reading from the district-mandated, state-adopted anthology. To them, “reading” literally meant taking out their anthology. This is when I made a deliberate change in my teaching early on to incorporate realia, related literature, and extension activities for each of the stories we read.

This year, I decided to embark on finding out what would happen if I purposefully incorporated more culturally and personally meaningful literature into my reading instruction, apart from my regular ELA curriculum. This would be a concrete way in which I could personally and professionally embrace and struggle with the issue of equity in my classroom through the context of teaching reading to struggling readers.

Equity is more than merely celebrating the diversity that exists within a classroom or school. According to the National Coalition of Equity in Education, it requires articulating individual and school goals and making changes in practice. Tangibly, within the walls of a classroom full of children with varied abilities, learning styles, cultural and linguistically backgrounds, as well as their own preferences, equity plays out in numerous ways. Equity, to me, means that each child that steps foot into my classroom has access to his/her learning regardless of their gender, ethnicity, language, socio-economic status, and/or learning difficulties. Equity does not necessarily mean that everyone gets the same exact thing at the same exact time. But it does mean that each student receives what s/he needs at the appropriate time. Equity also ensures that my students’ are heard and they feel accounted for in my classroom.

Equity in my classroom in the area of reading instruction is addressed in two

ways. One is through introducing supplemental literature that is more culturally and personally relevant to my students. Another is through my attempt to engage all my students in discussion through the diverse range of topics and issues raised in the literature.

Participation is a means of achievement in the classroom and gives a teacher insight into the understanding a student has. However, it is not an aspect of one's learning that is readily considered or documented as achievement. Though participation is not an aspect of teaching or learning that is readily documented and it can easily go unnoticed, participation is one unit of measure that I base my English Language Arts evaluation on.

Inquiry Process:

Student selection

I had no difficulty in selecting my focal students for this inquiry. At the time when I began my inquiry process, all three students I chose were relatively quiet in nature and participated minimally in class discussions. These three students were also students who were reading below grade level. I also chose three that represent some of the ethnic and cultural diversity in my class.

- Jacob is an African-American boy who is well-liked by his peers and known for his athleticism which is popularly displayed during recess and P.E. class. He plays on a football league for the city, and hopes to play football in high school and college. He often appears to not be listening; as he sits in awkward positions on the rug, does not face the front of the classroom or the speaker, and fidgets with whatever he has in his hand. But he surprises me most times when he responds when he is called on, because he knows exactly what was said and what's going on. He has a habit of raising his hand frequently during lessons or discussions to ask a question, which is mostly off-topic. Although Jacob's handwriting is mostly illegible, when I could figure out his enigmatic written work, it has a strong voice and great insight.
- Jazmin is a Mexican and Salvadorian girl who is a fluent Spanish speaker and has taken it upon herself to be responsible and helpful towards many classmates around her, especially certain individuals who present a language need. She is highly self-motivated and will take home past assignments, do it several times as practice at home until she fully understands. Her parents are highly involved in her learning, regardless of their lack of English proficiency. In class, she often has a worried and intense look on her face as she struggles and strives to understand. In the beginning, it appeared that she feared being called on. However, when she does comprehend a concept, you can tell by the big smile on her face. Jazmin used to read word by word, in a very choppy manner and it was difficult for her to gather meaning from what she had read herself due to her fluency.
- Mila is fair-skinned, tall, and has straight dirty blond hair. At first glance, she appears to be white, but she strongly identifies herself with her Spanish roots as her mom is part Mexican. She likes to share about the various traditions and food that her family enjoys. Mila struggles with the absence of her father and often writes and talks about the last time she spent some time with him, which was a few years ago. She surrounds herself with high-achieving friends, of whom she performs much lower than and is often a source of some insecurity, but also motivation for her. She started off the year very timid in her participation and unwilling to read aloud in front of me, or the class. Mila did not read with grade level accuracy and fluency and her comprehension was not clear due to her shyness.

Pre-Survey

Before I began introducing additional literature in my reading instruction, I conducted a survey that required students circling choices and writing in reasons to

explain their answer choices. Questions ranged in students stating whether they are a reader, how they see themselves as a reader, what genres they like to read. Students also selected stories from the anthology that they considered their favorite and why, and which stories they least liked and why. I gave this survey to get a general understanding of my students' opinions and feelings toward the stories (books) we have read in our anthology so far.

Literature selection

I carefully selected literature that touched upon wide-range of themes that were representative of my students' cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds, and would be personally relevant to them. Many of the authors were women of color. The types of topics and/or issues presented in the literature were: family, divorce, hair, single parent homes, loss of people and/or belongings, differences in various ethnicities and within the same ethnicity, immigration, cultural practices and identity, memories, traditions, bullying, adoption, and countries.

Book title	Author
Boundless Grace	Mary Hoffman
Hairs * Pelitos	Sandra Cisneros
A Chair For My Mother	Vera B. Williams
The Ugly Vegetables	Grace Lin
Friends from the Other Side Amigos Del Otro Lado	Gloria Anzaldua
Journey Home	Lawrence McKay, Jr.
In My Momma's Kitchen	Jerdine Nolen

Whole-class discussions

Each piece of literature was presented through a whole class read-aloud. Throughout and following each story, I asked a variety of comprehension questions (ranging in explicit, implicit, and analysis) to assess student understanding of the text. I also asked many personal questions that guided students to relate the book to their own lives. Students were also able to keep the discussion going by responding to one another's comments, questions, and experiences. Depending on the book and the topic, students were also asked to summarize and respond to the literature through journal writing.

Participation chart

I kept a piece of paper, which later turned into a more organized chart that helped me keep track of Jacob, Jazmin, and Mila's participation during class discussions. The chart had four types of participation represented (a sample template is inserted below):

I = a tally mark indicating participation

Title of Book	Raised hand on his/her own	Called on by teacher	Asked question	Response to a classmate
Jacob				
Jazmin				
Mila				

Interviews

I conducted one-on-one interviews that helped me understand my students' view of themselves as readers and what a "good reader" is to them. Here are some responses that reveal their perceptions of a "good reader" and how they evaluate themselves based on that perception:

Jacob:

What types of books have you enjoyed reading in class? What do you like about those books?

The Magic Tree House books – about how kids go on adventures

Don't Laugh at Me – to teach me and people not to be a bully

Tiki and Randy Barber book – I play football and I am good at it like them

Can you describe to me your idea of a good reader? A person that doesn't pause when they are reading and a person who reads the books like they are talking, without pausing or talking.

Are you a good reader? [Silence].....Yes.

How are you a good reader? I try my best at reading books.

Jazmin:

What types of books have you enjoyed reading in class? Why do you like those books?

Historical fiction, Fiction, Garden of Abdul Gasazi, Child Times – real life....it's interesting because it talks about real life. Their chores and how her brother got bit by a snake. I like stories that tell about real life. It makes me stuck in it.

I like holiday books because you get to know more about the holiday that is coming up....like Easter, Christmas, St. Patrick's Day. It shows you about tradition. You get to understand it a little more.

Can you describe to me your idea of a good reader? A good reader is who knows how to read all the words. Who could like read faster. Who could read in a few seconds.

Are you a good reader? I think so. (Shrugs)

How are you a good reader? I read knowing some of the words in the story. I kind of read a little faster.

Mila:

What types of books have you enjoyed reading in class? Why do you like those books?

Um.....hmmm....fiction. I like fiction because it's about a bunch of different things.

Can you describe to me your idea of a good reader? Um...they really understand the words and the book.

Are you a good reader? Um....yes.

How are you a good reader? I try to understand what I am reading.

I also interviewed them to gain more understanding of their ideas and feelings towards participation in general.

Jacob:

How do you feel about your participation in class? Ok.

How do you feel about answering questions in class? Good

When do you raise your hand in class? If I hear something I think I can answer.

How do you feel when Ms. Kim calls on you? I like it because when I'm not paying attention you remind me to by calling on me.

How do you feel about asking questions in class? Good.

How do you feel about class discussion time? Alright.

Jazmin:

How do you feel about your participation in class? Good.

How do you feel about answering questions in class? Good.

When do you raise your hand in class? When I think about it and know the answers.

How do you feel when Ms. Kim calls on you? A little bit nervous and scared because I might not know the answer.

How do you feel about asking questions in class? Shy. Good.

How do you feel about class discussion time? Kind of....sometimes I like to add more to the answer or details that others share.

Mila:

How do you feel about your participation in class? Good. I feel good.

How do you feel about answering questions in class? Um, I feel fine.

What makes you raise your hand in class?

Hmm...(thinks for a bit....long pause) When you ask a question and I know the answer. When I have another question to ask or when I'm interested in something.

How do you feel when Ms. Kim calls on you? I feel a little nervous.

How do you feel about asking questions in class? I feel pretty good.

How do you feel about discussion time? I feel good too.

Post-Survey

Though my inquiry is not necessarily complete, I gave another survey to my students based on the additional literature we read and discussed as a class to find which books they enjoyed and did not enjoy, and which ones they felt they could relate to and how and/or why. While the first survey was based on stories from the anthology, this survey was focused on the literature we read in addition to the ELA curriculum. Students were asked which books were their favorite and least favorite and why. I also asked students to list the titles of the books they could relate to most and why or how it is that they relate to the characters, events, or topics in the stories.

Findings:

Jacob, Jazmin, and Mila all started off the school year as shy, unassuming children who struggled with reading (all scored below grade level on their first reading assessment) and who participated minimally in text-based class discussions. These three rarely raised their hand to answer a question, to ask a question, or to make personal comments or comment on others' insights. I commented on all three of their report cards at the end of Trimester 1 that they could grow in the area of participating in class. I also commented during parent-teacher conferences to both the student and their parents that I encourage greater participation – "I would like to see you speak more in class – to ask questions, to make comments, to share your thoughts, and to answer questions."

Though the changes were slow, there has been steady and incremental growth throughout this school year. All three have progressed in their reading level, now all reading just at grade level. When asked, all three said they "feel good" about their own participation in class. With the addition of new literature read aloud to them, their participation increased to the point where they are now answering questions, asking questions, and responding to the comments and insights of others on an average of three times per story. This in itself is one of the greatest achievements for me to witness as a teacher. Jacob, Jazmin, and Mila all show interest through their body language, facial expression, and the tone of their voice. There is confidence in each of these three students when they listen, read along, read aloud in class, and when they engage in class discussions that has grown in the past trimester.

Jacob's favorite books were The Ugly Vegetables because "it talks about food," Friends From the Other Side (Amigos Del Otro Lado) because "it teaches us about racism," and Journey Home because "it talks about the lives of people."

Jazmin described that she really liked Journey Home because "I can get into the story." She shared that she relates the most to Friends From the Other Side (Amigos Del Otro Lado) in that her father is from Mexico and she worries "they might get him."

Mila noted that one of her favorite books was Friends From the Other Side (Amigos Del Otro Lado) because "it teaches me to not be a bully" and she can personally relate to this story because "I wanted to be friends with someone, but couldn't."

The depth and variety of their responses show how different books had significance or ACTION on them.

The literature that was presented to my students helped increase their reading comprehension, enhanced class discussion, allowed for writing opportunities, and had an emotional pull that is evidenced by their enthusiastic, thoughtful, or heartfelt responses.

I have noticed growth in the individual participation level of my three focal students when they had:

- the opportunity to read and discuss books that interest them on a purely personal enjoyment level – i.e fiction pieces with humorous characters, creative settings, and exciting plot
- the opportunity to read and discuss books about real people – i.e heroes in history who have made a significant ACTION in their community and the world
- the opportunity to read, discuss, and write based on books about people or places that they can culturally identify with
- the opportunity to read, discuss, and write based on books about people who face situations, problems, and issues that they can personally relate to

Conclusion/Implications

It is inevitable with most things in life that if one can personally relate to something, then one would be more compelled to speak on behalf of it. I know this is the case for me. I don't often talk and speak out just to say something. I choose to do so because I could relate and I have my personal experience to add to it. I have found that this is the case for my own students as well.

I do not have assessments, rubrics, and test scores to show for some measure of my students' growth as readers. But one of the most valuable pieces of information I've collected through my observations of my students is the increase in their participation. The greatest growth in my students was through their participation during class discussions during and after the various read alouds.

As a teacher, I do not have the option to not consider equity in my teaching and in my interactions with the students. Awareness of equity issues and how it plays out in the context of my primary classroom is essential. Not only in presenting and discussing topics and issues that pertain to equity in the context of my

classroom, school, community, and even the world, I have the responsibility to create a classroom environment where my students have the opportunity and access in voicing their stories, their opinions, and thoughts.

In this era of standards and testing, and with the pressures I often felt from higher powers above me, I had to take decisive action to deliberately make time to include additional literature in my reading instruction. In the future, I know that I need to constantly seek out more ways to incorporate literature that is personally and culturally meaningful for my students. I want to develop my own units on topics, allowing for students to participate not only verbally or in writing, but through active participation as a member of a group, participate through projects that involve kinesthetic learning, and have the choice to respond using a variety of modes, not just raising their hand.

Student participation is highly dependent on the opportunities that the teacher provides. I understand that I have an inordinate amount of influence in how much a student participates by the opportunities that I create and provide and I want my students to experience the joy of learning through the myriad ways one can participate.

Reflections:

My students consistently ended our reading and discussion time with enthusiastic applause. At first, I did not think much about it and did not question it. When I found there to be a pattern, I asked them about their clapping. To that they simply said, "We like the book." Never in my six years of teaching has reading from the state mandated, district adopted ELA anthology ever garnered that kind of response. Yet when I read them books that they could personally relate to, books that presented meaningful content, or touched their emotions in a certain way, they responded with such positivity. I have been reminded that teaching what is meaningful to me, and being mindful of what is meaningful to my students and implementing it, is what should occur daily in my classroom. Though this is a simple reality, it is often overlooked, forgotten, and glossed over.

I'm thankful for the opportunity that being part of an inquiry group with a group of like-minded colleagues in the realm of education has stretched me and challenged me beyond the comforts and safety that is easy to find just within the walls of my own classroom. Rather than thinking in just the abstract and the theories of what sounds good and how things should be, being a member of this kind of intellectual community has pushed me to examine my own philosophy and practices as an educator. I had to confront the uncomfortable, and struggled to understand how my research would change or deepen my own philosophy and mold and shape my practice.

Appendix F: Initial and Mid-Year Teacher Interview Protocols

Beginning of Year Interview Protocol:

I would like to audio record our conversation so that I can focus on you in the moment and later revisit our conversations. I will start off with some general questions about you, then how the group can be most useful for you, and then maybe you can share some of your thoughts about the equity focus of the group.

1. How many years have you been a teacher? How did you get into teaching?
2. Do you have any prior experiences with teacher inquiry/teacher research?
3. What are some of the things you hoping to get out of being part of the group? What drew you to it?
4. I know it is sort of early in the process, but at this point, what sorts of inquiry project directions are most exciting or interesting to you?
5. How might this inquiry group be most useful to you?
6. In what ways would you say social justice is reflected in your teaching? Your school?
7. How do you define educational equity?
8. How do you see the relationship between equity in your classroom teaching and working towards equity in larger society, or do you see these things as two different struggles?
9. Do you have any questions about the inquiry group?

Mid-Year Interview Protocol:

I am going to start off with some questions about your and your teaching, and will then move into questions about the inquiry group and your inquiry project.

- 1) How would you describe your teaching?
- 2) How would you describe your teaching philosophy?
- 3) What does it mean for a student to achieve? For a teacher to achieve?
- 4) Tell me about your relationships with students. Feel free to include examples.
- 5) In what ways, if at all, do you think the inquiry project process is affecting your teaching practice? Can you give some concrete examples?

- 6) In what ways, if at all, do you think the group dialogues on equity issues are affecting your understanding of the issues? In what ways, if at all, do these conversations affect your teaching practice? Can you give some concrete examples?
- 7) How would you say these dialogues compare to those you had in your teaching credential program?
- 8) In what ways, if at all, do you find testing, assessment, and accountability measures affecting your ability to teach for equity and social justice? Can you give some concrete examples?
- 9) What do you think about our inquiry group dynamic?
- 10) Are there any things you would change about the group or your project?
- 11) Any other thoughts about the group? Your inquiry project?

Appendix G: End-of-Year Survey

Project ACTION Final Evaluation Survey 2010

We are committed to developing an effective and meaningful program, so we need your ***honest and detailed*** feedback. Your comments will remain anonymous and will be compiled by staff unfamiliar with your handwriting. Written comments in complete sentences are especially appreciated. Thank you for your help!

DIRECTIONS: Please check the appropriate box for each of the following item.

Strongly Agree:
SA

Agree:
A

Disagree:
D

Strongly Disagree:
SD

Not Applicable:
NA

	SA	A	D	SD	NA
I. Final Network Day (May 8th)					
1. The Final Network Day (FND) was generally well organized.					
2. I benefited from attending the final FND.					
3. The food provided was great!					
4. My facilitator reminded me of this final event during meetings this spring.					
5. The email mail notices gave me adequate advance notice and information regarding the final ND.					
6. I enjoyed myself at the final ND.					
7. I enjoyed hearing about other teachers' inquiry during the					

	SA	A	D	SD	NA
formal talks.					
8. Preparing my presentation for the FND helped me crystallize my thinking about my inquiry and was worthwhile.					
9. The focus group at the end of the day helped me bring closure to this experience.					
10. Session A B C D was engaging and thought provoking. <i>(Circle the session letter you attended)</i>					
11. Session E F G H was engaging and thought provoking. <i>(Circle the session letter you attended)</i>					
12. Session I J K L was engaging and thought provoking. <i>(Circle the session letter you attended)</i>					
13. Because of the four network days I feel part of a regional network of inquiring teachers.					
Comments About Today:					
II. Program Structures:					
14. Through Project ACTION I <i>regularly</i> engaged in <i>explicit</i> conversation about issues of educational equity (e.g. race, class, language, and gender).					
15. The biweekly meetings were sufficient to keep me focused on my inquiry.					
16. The ACTION binder was a useful resource.					
17. The use of protocols to structure conversations helped advance my inquiry learning.					
18. I think inquiry is beneficial to beginning teachers.					
19. I think inquiry is beneficial to experienced teachers.					
20. My participation in Project ACTION has convinced me of the importance of adopting an inquiry stance toward my teaching.					
21. My participation in Project ACTION has convinced me of the importance of creating supportive networks of colleagues, who collaborate and learn together.					
22. My participation in Project ACTION has inspired me to advance equity through my teaching.					
23. My participation in Project ACTION has inspired me to take or pursue leadership roles within my school.					
24. My participation in Project ACTION has inspired me to continue teaching in low-income, urban schools.					
Comments About ACTION Program Structures:					
III. My ACTION Group:					

	SA	A	D	SD	NA
25. I discussed my inquiry with group members outside of regular meetings.					
26. I felt emotionally supported by my ACTION group.					
27. My group pushed my inquiry and helped me refine my inquiry					
28. Group members took their commitment to ACTION seriously (as evidenced in attendance, participation, preparation, etc)					
29. Our group consistently anchored its discussions in data and evidence.					
30. Conversations within my inquiry group helped me to improve my curriculum & instruction.					
31. The conversations in my inquiry group gave me an opportunity to discuss and better understand how my school functions as an organization.					
32. My inquiry group used its time efficiently.					
33. We often reminded ourselves of our norms.					
34. We always honored the group's norms.					
35. Group meetings always involved productive conversations.					
36. Our group has taken on shared responsibility and ownership for running and managing meetings.					
Comments About My ACTION Group:					
IV. My ACTION Inquiry & Experience:					
37. I shared my inquiry with other educators outside Project ACTION.					
38. In between biweekly ACTION meetings, I routinely thought about and reflected on my inquiry.					
39. My inquiry project helped me to improve my curriculum & instruction.					
40. The 40+ hours I invested in Project ACTION were a worthwhile use of my time.					
41. My inquiry work focused my attention on student learning.					
42. My inquiry work focused my attention on students' lives and experiences.					
43. Our group conversations allowed me to grapple regularly with issues of social justice and equity.					
44. I feel that Project ACTION was an invaluable professional development experience.					

	SA	A	D	SD	NA
45. Given the opportunity, I would choose to remain affiliated with Project ACTION next year.					
46. Beyond my involvement with ACTION, I will definitely continue to engage in inquiry as a teacher.					
47. Beyond ACTION, I intend to continue participating in a professional community so that I can continually improve my practice.					
48. Project ACTION has contributed to my desire to remain in the classroom.					
If you disagreed or strongly disagreed with #48, skip to #54.					
49. Specifically, Project ACTION inspired me to remain in teaching because my participation stimulated me intellectually.					
50. Specifically, Project ACTION inspired me to remain in teaching because my participation made me feel more efficacious.					
51. Specifically, Project ACTION inspired me to remain in teaching because of the increased sense of collegiality I experienced with colleagues at my school.					
52. Specifically, Project ACTION inspired me to remain in teaching because of the increased sense of collegiality I experienced with colleagues from across the Bay Area.					
53. Specifically, Project ACTION inspired me to remain in teaching because (write in):					
Comments About My Project ACTION Inquiry Experience:					
V. FACILITATOR: Name of Facilitator: _____					
54. Our facilitator helped us manage time well.					
55. Our facilitator was well organized and prepared for meetings.					
56. Our facilitator facilitated discussions effectively.					
57. Our facilitator shared important expertise/knowledge with us.					
58. Our facilitator provided clear channels for communication through email and/or phone calls.					
59. Our facilitator kept us focused on making progress with our inquiry.					
60. Our facilitator was available and constructive when I prepared for my protocols/consultations.					
61. Our facilitator encouraged us to take on responsibility and ownership for the group.					
62. Our facilitator provided feedback that deepened my inquiry.					

	SA	A	D	SD	NA
63. Our facilitator reminded us of our norms regularly.					
Comments about My Facilitator (Strengths & Areas for Growth):					

Thank you so much for taking the time to fill out this survey!

Appendix H: End-of-Year Focus Group Protocol

Exit Focus Group Interview Protocol – Project ACTION -- 2010

DIRECTIONS to FOCUS GROUP LEADERS:

The time for the focus group interview is short (40 minutes – 1:20-2:00), so please be mindful of time. Try to spend an equal amount of time on each question – roughly 6 minutes per question. In larger groups 6+, this time constraint may feel even more acute. Please do your best to cover all questions. You can preface the interview by stating that their answers will help us understand the effectiveness of Project ACTION and chart the program’s course as we head into year seven. When the tape starts it would be great to have people state their names so that the transcriber can easily identify speakers’ voices.

Exit Focus Group Interview Questions:

1. What were your expectations for Project ACTION at the outset of the year? To what extent were these fulfilled?
2. What are you taking away from your year in Project ACTION?
 - a. Follow Up Probe: Any changes in beliefs, knowledge, or teaching practice?
 - b. Follow Up Probe: Any understandings of how to navigate schools?
 - c. Follow Up Probe: Any new understandings of equity / social justice in relation to your work?
3. What activities in biweekly meetings were most beneficial to you? Why & in what way/how?
 - a. Follow Up Probes: Protocols, text readings, journals, check-ins, etc.
4. How did the conversations in your ACTION group compare to the conversations that occur in your other professional circles (Dept. mtgs, faculty mtgs, committee mtgs., staff rooms, credential programs, etc.)?
 - a. Follow Up Probe: Was the content of the talk different or similar? The process?
 - b. Follow Up Probe: What kind of feedback did you receive from your group? Validation? Critique? Challenge?
5. What would you like to see changed or improved in Project ACTION?
6. Given the difficulties of teaching today, was Project ACTION a burden or a help? How so?

7. Has your participation in ACTION influenced your commitment to teacher as a career? If so, how so?
8. Is there anything else about Project ACTION that you want to say?