The Role of Dialogic Teaching in Fostering Critical Literacy in an Urban High School English Classroom

Charity Gordon

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The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student’s Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

______________________________  ________________________________
Michelle Zoss, Ph.D.                      Janice Fournillier, Ph.D.
Committee Chair                          Committee Member

______________________________  ________________________________
Nadia Behizadeh, Ph.D.                   Amy Seely Flint, Ph.D.
Committee Member                        Committee Member

______________________________
Date

______________________________
Gertrude Tinker Sachs, Ph.D.
Chairperson, Department of Middle and Secondary Education

______________________________
Paul A. Alberto, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Education and Human Development
AUTHOR’S STATEMENT

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CHARITY T. GORDON
NOTICE TO BORROWERS

All dissertations deposited in the Georgia State University library must be used in accordance with the stipulations prescribed by the author in the preceding statement. The author of this dissertation is:

Charity T. Gordon
Department of Middle and Secondary Education
College of Education and Human Development
Georgia State University
Atlanta, GA 30303

The director of this dissertation is:

Dr. Michelle Zoss
Department of Middle and Secondary Education
College of Education and Human Development
Georgia State University
Atlanta, GA 30303
CURRICULUM VITAE

Charity T. Gordon

ADDRESS: 
Department of Middle and Secondary Education  
College of Education and Human Development  
Georgia State University  
Atlanta, GA 30303

EDUCATION

Ph.D. 2017 Teaching and Learning  
Concentration: Language and Literacy  
Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA

Ed.S. 2011 Secondary Education  
Concentration: English Education  
University of West Georgia, Carrollton, GA

M.S. 2006 Secondary Education  
Concentration: English Education  
Texas A & M Corpus Christi, Corpus Christi, TX

B.A. 2002 English  
Auburn University Montgomery, Montgomery, AL

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Fall 2017 University Supervisor  
EDCI 4660/7660: Practicum I  
Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA

Fall 2016 Part-Time Instructor  
ECE 3340: Diagnosis and Application of Literacy Instruction  
Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, GA

Spring 2016 Teaching Internship with Dr. Michelle Zoss  
EDLA 7750: Theory and Pedagogy of English Instruction  
Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA

2006 – 2014 High School English Teacher  
Osborne High School, Marietta, GA

2005 – 2006 Middle School English/Language Arts Teacher  
A. C. Blount Middle School, Aransas Pass, TX
2004 – 2005  Elementary School Teacher
Cathedral of the Palms School, Corpus Christi, TX

2003 – 2004  High School English Teacher
Lighthouse Christian Academy, Montgomery, AL

PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS


Zoss, M., Jones, R., Gordon, C. T., Jolly, T., & Sowerbrower, K. (2016, Nov.). Bring your methods courses to the stage! Advocating for the arts in an era of high stakes testing. Roundtable presentation at National Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention, Atlanta, GA.


PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

2013  Alpha Upsilon Alpha Honor Society
2013  American Educational Research Association
2013  Conference on English Education
2013  Georgia Council for Teachers of English
2013  International Reading Association
2013  National Council for Teachers of English
2016  Middle and Secondary Education Doctoral Student Council
THE ROLE OF DIALOGIC TEACHING IN FOSTERING CRITICAL LITERACY IN AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASSROOM

by

CHARITY T. GORDON

Under the Direction of Dr. Michelle Zoss

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the role of dialogic teaching in fostering critical literacy in an urban high school English classroom. The study was framed by sociocultural, dialogism, and critical literacy theories, in which the researcher paid particular attention to the contexts that shaped dialogue before, during, and after critical discussions of literature. The researcher used a Participatory Action Research (PAR) orientation, an ethnographic methodology, and discourse analysis methods to explore a dialogic approach to critical literacy and teacher perspectives on the approach. The findings from this study demonstrate that while a dialogic approach supported critical literacy, certain aspects of critical literacy were difficult to enact. The teacher cultivated a dialogic environment and afforded students with opportunities to have meaningful dialogue toward critical literacy ends, but she also
experienced ideological conflicts that often complicated the path toward critical literacy.

Implications of the study show the promise of dialogic teaching in valuing culturally-and-linguistically diverse students’ contribution during the meaning-making process. This study underscores the importance of understanding the teacher’s role in shaping the direction of critical dialogue and advocates for educational policies that position teachers as transformative intellectuals in the classroom.

INDEX WORDS: Dialogism, Dialogic teaching, Critical literacy, Urban education, Secondary English, Participatory action research, Ethnography, Discourse analysis, Sociocultural theories of learning
THE ROLE OF DIALOGIC TEACHING IN FOSTERING CRITICAL LITERACY IN AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASSROOM

by

CHARITY T. GORDON

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Teaching and Learning in The Department of Middle and Secondary Education in The College of Education and Human Development

Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA
2017
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAVE</td>
<td>African American Vernacular English</td>
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<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td>Advanced Placement</td>
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<td>AR</td>
<td>Action Research</td>
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<td>CDA</td>
<td>Critical Discourse Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLD</td>
<td>Culturally and Linguistically Diverse</td>
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<td>CGT</td>
<td>Constructivist Grounded Theory</td>
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<td>EC</td>
<td>Ethnography of Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>English Language Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>English Language Learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL</td>
<td>English as a Second or Other Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAE</td>
<td>Mainstream American English</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAR</td>
<td>Participatory Action Research</td>
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<td>NAEP</td>
<td>The National Assessment of Educational Progress</td>
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<td>NCES</td>
<td>National Center for Education Statistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAE</td>
<td>Standard American English</td>
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<td>SHS</td>
<td>Southeast High School</td>
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<td>TOT</td>
<td>Turn-of-Talk</td>
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<td>ZPD</td>
<td>Zone of Proximal Development</td>
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1 INTRODUCTION

For several years, I taught English at an urban high school with a culturally and linguistically diverse student population. Some of the most challenging yet rewarding moments of my life took place there. As I walked onto campus my first day, I embarked on a seven-year journey that began with a stomach full of butterflies, a mind full of questions, and a heart full of passion for teaching English. When my journey ended, I walked away full of hope for the future, certainty about the research I wanted to do, and a passion not just for teaching subject material but teaching students and constructing knowledge with them. Before my teaching experience at this school, I was limited to particular perspectives of the world and thus limited to particular understandings of what it meant to be an educator. Although I had studied what it meant to be a teacher in my teacher education program, the meanings that I constructed from class texts and class discussions were still based on my limited worldview. In the beginning, I strived to have what I believed was the “perfect” classroom. Over the years, I had to find a balance between creating a rigid learning environment while following a strict curriculum and cultivating a dialogic environment in which the learning process centered in students’ interests and built upon their existing knowledge. The latter required a lot more flexibility on my part. During my experience as a high school English teacher, my classroom ultimately became a place where multiple perspectives came together as we interpreted “the word” and “the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Through dialogue, members of the class encountered diverse perspectives that caused us to reflect on our experiences, challenged us to consider alternate viewpoints, and provided us with opportunities to see the world and others in a different light. I have learned many lessons throughout my journey as an educator. Sometimes the lessons have been simple, and other times they have been difficult, and nearly impossible, to understand. However, the
The most important lesson that I have learned is that my task as a teacher is not to walk the path for students, simply imparting knowledge into their minds. Sometimes my role was to guide them through terrains that I have experience with and know well. At times, I walked beside them as we explored territory unfamiliar to us all. Other times, I followed their lead through lands that they may have had more familiarity with. Ultimately, my most important responsibility was to help students understand their journey as they experienced the world. By helping students find purpose in their journey, I have found purpose in my own.

Since leaving the classroom, I have begun a new chapter of conducting research in and about the classroom, and I have developed new understandings about schooling, teaching, and learning. I have also developed understandings about the ideologies and systems that shape what happens in the classroom. In my research on classroom dialogue and critical literacy, researchers have emphasized the importance of classroom talk that centers around students’ voices (Alexander, 2006; Applebee, 1996; Barnes, 2010; Cazden, 2001; Nystrand, Gamoran, Kachur, & Pendergast, 2007, Wells, 1999). I have gained insights about the dialogue that took place in my own classroom and why it was vital to fostering meaningful learning experiences for my students. However, I was surprised to discover that even though the existing research on classroom discourse over the past 40 years illustrates the potential of engaging student in meaningful dialogue, classrooms in the U.S. are still largely monologic, in which the teacher talks the majority of the time (Alexander, 2006; Cazden, 2001; Howe & Abedin, 2013; Nystrand et al., 1997), and teachers still see their primary responsibility as transmitting information to the their students, especially in classrooms with students of color (Delpit, 1995/2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009).
In this dissertation study, I explored dialogue in the high school English classroom. I was particularly interested in an urban school that serves culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. I view cultural and linguistic diversity as a valuable resource in classroom dialogue because class members can share multiple perspectives on subject material. Dialogic teaching, in which the teacher shares interpretive authority with students (Alexander, 2006; Shor & Freire, 1987), potentially creates a learning environment in which students from all walks of life can build upon their cultural experiences and linguistic repertoires as they explore curricular material. In addition, critical literacy is a classroom practice that also values multiple perspectives as the teacher and students evaluate texts. Critical literacy also equips teachers and students to enact positive change in the world (hooks, 1994; Freire, 1970/2000; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Morrell, 2008). The aim of this qualitative study is to investigate a dialogic approach to critical literacy in an urban high school English classroom in an effort to understand how multiple worldviews may contribute to the knowledge construction process and cultivate a more equitable learning environment for diverse student groups.

Lived Experiences of the Researcher

My experiences with dialogic teaching and critical literacy have influenced my thinking about teaching, learning, and research and have contributed to my developing ideologies. *The American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* (2005) defined an ideology as “a system of beliefs or theories.” Street (1995) also described an ideology in terms of its relationship to the social and cultural context. He posited that the process of knowing is a direct result of a person’s sociocultural environment and not something that happens autonomously. The evolution of my ideology may also be described using the Bakhtinian notion of “ideological becoming” (Bakhtin, 1981; Freeman & Ball, 2004). This “becoming” has been an ongoing process, taking shape and
being reshaped as I interact with others and the world around me. My personal ideologies play an integral role in this research study and I use them in conjunction with existing theories in the current literature to explain concepts throughout this dissertation study.

As a middle-class, African American female growing up in a mid-sized city in the South, my identity, like many others in my community, was very complex. The African-American community in my hometown had forged and maintained a cultural identity, represented by its own beliefs, values, and linguistic practices. This cultural identity was also developed amidst the history of racial tensions in the South. My maternal great grandmother, who died when I was ten years old, was the daughter of two former enslaved people. Both my grandmothers and grandfathers grew up in the Jim Crow era, in which Blacks and Whites were legally segregated. My mother was a child during the Civil Rights Movement and vividly remembers the Freedom Riders traveling through her town on their way to fight the social injustices that plagued our community. My grandfather would tell her, “Stay away from those Freedom Riders.” He gave her this advice because he feared for her life. He had witnessed too many times what could happen to people who did not “stay in their place.” Even though I had not lived during these troublesome times, I was not far removed from them, and the unresolved tensions of the region’s past resided in the heart of my community and manifested itself in the thoughts and actions of many of its inhabitants, including me. Bakhtin (1981) defined “double-voiced” utterances as a tendency for people to “assimilate others’ discourse” into their own as they contribute to their ideological becoming (p. 342). I have often found myself re-voicing the utterances of my ancestors and practicing similar survival tactics as both a teacher and as a researcher. Thus, my ancestral past has shaped my ideology and has been an important part of how I have viewed the world and navigated through it.
As a student, the various schooling contexts and classroom activities in which I participated also played a role in my ideological becoming. Even though legal segregation in the South had ended long before I enrolled in school, my hometown still had “Black schools” and “White schools.” The newly integrated public schools of the 1960s and 1970s slowly over time lost most of the White population. By the time I became a student, these public schools had almost 99% Black populations, extremely low test scores, low graduation rates, and high incidence rates of violence and crime. If parents could avoid sending their children to one of these schools, they did. Other options for a formal education included attending private schools, which consisted of mostly wealthy, White students, or one of the publicly funded magnet schools, which comprised a more diverse, but hand-selected, population with equal percentages of White and Black students and a growing number of Asian American students, all from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. When I learned I would be zoned for one of the most notorious public schools in my city, I remember begging my mother, “Please don’t make me go to school there!” By being accepted into a magnet high school, I was able to escape the fate that I felt awaited me and many of the students at the regular public schools. The outcomes of these different schools in my hometown represented the politics involving educating students from diverse cultural backgrounds and the deficit language surrounding students of color. It was also clear to me even then that a quality education was not always viewed as a right, but a privilege. In this view, if students were not meeting curricular standards, it was assumed that the problem was with students or their families or their communities. Early in my career as a teacher, these views served as a part of my ideology, as well.

I applied for several jobs until I landed an interview at the urban school where I would spend the majority of my high school teaching career. At the end of the interview, the department
chair gave a compelling speech about why I should teach there. He stated, “You can teach at any school in this area, but if you want to make a difference…you should teach here.” He added, “In many cases, you will be all these students have.” This speech struck a chord with me. I left the interview with those words etched in my mind. As a fairly new teacher with three years of experience in two private schools and one rural school, I wanted to work with the students who I believed needed me the most. I also thought about the “Black schools” in my hometown and the narratives about those students, and I wanted to change the narratives for my future students, so I accepted the position. My intentions were to change students’ lives, but I realized I had to change my thinking. It would take years for me to recognize that the narratives that I wanted to change about my students actually informed my own ideologies. These narratives are what Bakhtin (1981) refers to as the “authoritative discourse,” which represents the dominant discourse of mainstream culture that often goes unnoticed or un-questioned.

On the other hand, there is what Bakhtin (1981) calls “internally persuasive discourse.” It encompasses what people ultimately decide is persuasive for them and not just what the authoritative discourse has put forth as truth. This internally persuasive discourse was evident with my students as they questioned and challenged dominant views of schooling. That first semester a student, Don (all names are pseudonyms) told me, “The only reason they make us come to school is to keep us off the streets.” Instead of asking Don to elaborate on what he meant, I continued re-voicing the views held by the dominant culture – an education is a sure way to success! Of course, as an educator, I still believe that an education is important. Today, though, I realize that this student was simply using his lived experiences to articulate a different view. He was most likely feeling like schools did not value him nor did they expect much from him or people like him. I don’t think he had these same low expectations for himself as he
consistently earned good grades in all his classes and later graduated from high school. He was using an internally persuasive discourse to challenge the authoritative discourse that influenced dominant views of thinking about schooling. It took me a while to understand the reality that graduating from high school was usually the end of formal education for many of my students and this was also usually the end goal their teachers and administrators had in mind for them. Fairclough (2015) argued that the ideologies that are perpetuated through dominant discourses have long-lasting social effects. As I reflected on my own experiences as a teacher working with CLD students, I began to understand the social effects that certain beliefs and teaching practices might have had on my own students.

By the end of the first grading period, almost all the students in my class had failing grades. I was called into one of the assistant principal’s office for a conference about my students’ grades. When she asked me why so many students in my class were failing, I explained to her that the students in my class simply were not doing their homework. I was shocked when she advised that I stop giving them homework. I asked her, “How else am I going to prepare them for college?” She responded, “Let’s face it. Most of the students here are not going to college.” This conversation was a turning point for me for two reasons. First, this conversation led me to reflect on my teaching practices. It was the first time I felt I had “failed” as a teacher. I was forced to ask myself questions like, “Why are so many students not completing the work in my class?” and “Why did they seem bored?” Even though I had good intentions for my students, the reality is that they were not learning much, if anything, in my class. At this point, I still thought the problem was with the students. They just would not do the work, so I thought I needed to motivate them in some way. Second, I began to see how the dominant discourse about my students was coming into play. “Why did some people think these students could not do
college preparatory work?” This was a defining moment because I encountered conflicting ideologies. I believed students could do the work, but just needed motivation while the dominant discourse, influenced by a deficit view of CLD students, contended that my students could not do the work. As I encountered these conflicting ideologies I had to work to resolve them, which meant shifting my own ideologies.

After three years at this school, I was assigned an 11th grade American Literature class. It was this class that marked a major milestone in my teaching career. For their beginning-of-the-year introductions, I instructed students to use a multi-media format to present autobiographical narratives that included five important events from their lives. One student, Rayshawn, began his autobiography, and then he displayed a picture of one of my former students, Dale, who was amongst the group of 10th graders I taught during my first year at this school. He was a great student in my class, always friendly, always polite. He was a basketball player for the school, and he was well-loved and respected by his coaches, his teachers, and his classmates. I excitedly commented, “Oh, there’s Dale! I remember him!” Rayshawn continued his presentation and recounted the last conversation he had with Dale before he was killed.

My visceral response to Rayshawn’s narrative was instant shock and then tears. The entire class looked at me, and many were surprised by my reaction. For the next few moments, the students shared with me how Dale, who had recently graduated, had been shot and killed in his front yard during the summer break by a rival gang member. Students were eager to share every detail with me and opened up to me beyond the typical disclosure one would expect from students during the second week of school. They also revealed to me how they had asked the school’s administration if they could have a school-wide assembly to observe Dale’s death, but they had been denied because Dale’s death had been gang-related. In that moment, I bonded with
students by demonstrating a genuine concern for them as human beings. My teaching took on a
different purpose other than just presenting students with academic content and having them
recite it back to me. I began to understand how important it was for me to validate students’ lived
experiences and their voices during classroom instruction.

As I built relationships with my students, I came to understand them beyond their
academic records, and this allowed me to reach students on a different level. We were able to
discuss issues that were important to them as individuals, and I used these topics to create
meaningful literacy activities that were no longer just important to me but were finally
significant to students. One particular class, when I announced that students would be writing
persuasive essays, there was a collective moan. I began explaining the assignment, and then in an
effort to increase their interest in the assignment, I extemporaneously began throwing out topics
that I knew would evoke emotional responses from them; however, I did not expect the level of
enthusiasm that followed. Excited with the level of excitement in the room, I decided to change
the format of our brainstorming session to a debate. I gave students guidelines for the debate, and
they took off. Not one student was sleeping during class that day. As students filed out of class, I
could still hear them talking about the debate. One student even came up to me smiling from ear-
to-ear and said, “That was fun! We should do that more often.” Although no one wrote a word on
paper, students demonstrated their natural abilities to argue a claim and support it with evidence,
which was the academic standard I was addressing in the planned curriculum. What I learned
from this event was that students will open up when they can relate to the subject matter and
when there is an environment in which they can be themselves without fear of ridicule and
negative judgment. The next day, students were much more willing to write their essays. The
dialogue from the previous class gave them confidence in their ability to construct knowledge
and served as a catalyst into other types of literacy tasks with which they had previously been reluctant to attempt.

After the debates, I was extremely proud that my students produced such compelling persuasive essays. They were proud of themselves, too. They even asked, “Can we present our essays to the class?” to which I excitedly agreed. Even though it was not in the lesson plan for the day, I was sensitive to the fact that students wanted their voices to be heard, and I wanted to hear them. I was seizing on a moment that held potential for student learning (Intrator, 2003) and using that moment in what Zoss and White (2011) characterized as “an expressive moment” in teaching. As I listened to students’ speeches, I found some of them riveting, some strictly analytic, and some downright hilarious. These students that many people did not expect much from were proving that they could not only meet curricular standards but also exceed them and also enjoy doing it. It finally started to feel like real learning was taking place.

What happened with my American Literature class inspired me to want to create that type of learning experience with students year after year. I realized that I had cultivated a dialogic space, or a platform through which students’ voices could not only be heard but also valued in the meaning-making process. The dialogic space in my classroom honored students’ discourses and welcomed the exchange of worldviews. Through critical literacy practices students felt empowered to push back on the deficit views of the Dominant discourse represented in academic texts and in real-life situations. I was able to foster meaningful, authentic learning experiences that followed students beyond the four walls of my classroom.

My experiences as a teacher at this urban school completely transformed my ideology. As a new teacher, I failed to include students in the knowledge construction process. I lectured them, they listened, I assessed them, and they learned very little. However, the learning possibilities for
my students opened up when I included them in classroom dialogue. I had conversations with them, they participated, I assessed them, and they demonstrated more in-depth understandings of academic content. They also enjoyed the learning process much more, as did I. I also cared deeply about what happened to my students inside and outside my class. Not only did students have an authentic purpose for learning, but I also had an authentic purpose for teaching them.

**The Problem**

After fostering critical literacy using a dialogic approach in my own classroom and then conducting research on dialogic teaching toward critical literacy, I realized its potential to advance the learning of all students and to transform their realities. The burning question I still had was “Why hasn’t curriculum and instruction in U.S. public schools moved in this direction?” The standardization of schooling in the U.S. has contributed to all sorts of disparities across racial and socioeconomic lines, and it is crucial that educators re-evaluate the goals and methods of schooling. How can teachers meet the learning needs of *all* students in U.S. public schools? How can teachers advocate for equity and social justice? Fairclough (2015) contended that social orders that exist in society can be established in a *naturalized* manner, in which members of society consider all possible options and decide on the structures and systems that are best for all people. Social order can also be determined in a *synthetic* manner, in which members of society create structures and systems based on particular ideologies that may or may not benefit everyone. In many cases, members of society with the most powerful social tools, such as money and political influence, construct social order. Fairclough wrote that members of dominant social groups often establish a dominant discourse as the “standard.” All other discourses are then marginalized. My own cultural identity, represented by my ancestors’ beliefs, values, and linguistic practices became a part of a marginalized, non-dominant discourse. As a student and
then as a teacher, as long as I aligned my beliefs, values, and linguistic practices with the
dominant cultural group, things moved along as they always had. Meanwhile, the achievement
gaps of CLD consistently remained the same. I managed to escape the fate that awaited many
students of color in the notorious public schools of my hometown, but thousands of other
students did not. As a teacher, I also noticed a consistent trend in learning outcomes for CLD
students at the school at which I taught. After reflecting on these experiences, I realized that the
problem was not that students could not reach learning standards, nor was it that they simply
would not do the work, as I once thought. The problem was with the way that they were being
taught and the goals that teaching was directed toward.

**Significance of the Study**

The world is comprised of individuals with diverse views, experiences, and cultural
practices. The U.S., especially, is widely known for its cultural diversity and is filled with people
who speak various dialects and languages, practice many different religions, and hold disparate
political views. The U.S. is also founded on the democratic principles that, despite our
differences, “all men are created equal” and have certain freedoms that should always be
protected. The classroom plays a significant role in cultivating these democratic principles.
Cazden (2001) pointed out, “Classrooms are amongst the most crowded of human environments”
(p. 2). It is one of the few places in the U.S. where a multitude of diverse voices combine to
accomplish a shared goal. This is especially true in the urban high school English classroom. The
urban high school English classroom could potentially serve as a site where the democratic
process is fully recognized. First, English is a subject that is very broad in nature because “an
English teacher can find language in anything” (Applebee, 2002). Second, the urban classroom
typically enrolls students from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, who represent
various cultural identities and employ various cultural practices. Finally, high school is the final stage of compulsory schooling where students share common educational objectives.

Students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds bring multiple perspectives into the high school English classroom that could potentially create a rich environment for learning. Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) described this repertoire of knowledge and skills as students’ *funds of knowledge*. These funds of knowledge that CLD students bring into the high school English classroom could be used as a “resource for teaching and learning” (Ball, Skerrett, & Martinez, 2011, p. 22). Unfortunately, the problem is that schools do not always view students’ cultural and linguistic diversity as resources but as deficits that need to be fixed (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lee, 2007). This view has often resulted in the marginalization of CLD students and all that they have to offer. Furthermore, this way of thinking has also painted a negative depiction of CLD students as “at-risk” of failure or “struggling” to meet academic standards. As a result, schools that serve CLD students typically focus on meeting the minimum curricular standards, relying on test-driven instruction that requires students to recite given academic knowledge rather than providing them with opportunities to practice higher-order thinking and construct knowledge themselves (Comber, 2012; Fecho, Combs, & McAuley, 2012). CLD students are essentially not trusted to participate in the knowledge construction process for fear they will not meet set curricular standards.

Deficit views of CLD students and concomitant, marginalizing, instructional practices are not beneficial to students, their teachers, or their school districts. For example, schools serving CLD students are still being labeled “underperforming” year after year, despite districts increasing teacher accountability measures to help CLD students meet prescribed curricular standards and pass high-stakes assessments (Mead, 2012). In addition, teachers become
overwhelmed and burnt-out by accountability measures to engage all students in the learning process, meet curricular standards, and help students pass high-stakes exams, all while trying to establish their own teacher identities in the classroom (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Further, CLD students do not always find instruction to be relevant or meaningful to their own personal lives and often feel disconnected, marginalized, and even devalued by certain traditional classroom practices (Willis, 2002). In order to maximize the learning of all students, schools can move away from monologic instructional practices that marginalize and limit the learning opportunities for CLD learners and include more dialogic practices that include all students in the meaning-making process. Schools can also seek to pave a pathway for students to be able to fully participate in a democratic society through critical literacy practices.

**Culturally Diverse Schools**

It has become increasingly more important for U.S. classrooms to employ dialogic approaches to critical literacy. Over the past few decades, U.S. public schools have experienced a drastic increase in cultural diversity and this diversity is expected to only increase in the years to come (Valdez & Callahan, 2011). According to *The Condition of Education 2016*, in the fall of 2013, U.S. public schools were comprised of 50% White, 25% Hispanic, 16% Black, 5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% Native American/Alaskan Native, and 3% Multi-racial students (Kena et al., 2016). From 2003 to 2013, the percentage of Hispanic students enrolled in public schools in the U.S. increased from 19% to 25% and is projected to increase to 29% by the year 2025 (Kena et al., 2016). Also, the percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander students increased from 4% to 5% from the year 2003 to the year 2013 and is predicted to increase to 6% by 2025 (Kena et al., 2016). Figure 1 illustrates the shift in percentages of students from each cultural group over time.
Among the skills that culturally diverse students bring into the classroom are their linguistic abilities. The linguistic repertoires of CLD students range from the ability to speak several varieties of English to the ability to speak multiple languages other than English. Because many CLD students both comprehend and speak multiple dialects and/or languages, they develop unique cognitive and social skills that allow them to mediate a variety of activities inside and outside of the classroom. For instance, CLD students’ experiences with multiple dialects and languages provide them with a “range of meaning-making strategies” for understanding a variety of texts (Valdez & Callahan, 2011, p. 7). Language also plays an important role in shaping students’ individual, cultural, and academic identities. Therefore, when teachers utilize students’ language abilities developed outside of the classroom, they not only deepen students’ understanding of academic material, but they also positively contribute to the development of their identities (Cooks & Ball, 2009; Lee, 2007; Valdez & Callahan, 2011).

**African American Vernacular English (AAVE) speakers.** Many students speak various dialects of English. In particular, many students of African American descent, regardless of the 

<table>
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<td>Two or more races</td>
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*Figure 1. Cultural Diversity in U.S. Public Schools*
of their locale, commonly employ a distinct dialect, known as African-American Vernacular English (AAVE), which varies greatly from the dialect used in mainstream American English (MAE), the English variety generally spoken by the majority of Americans. Smitherman (1977) describes this language variety as follows:

Black dialect is an Africanized form of English reflecting Black America’s linguistic-cultural African heritage and the conditions of servitude, oppression and life in America. Black language is Euro-American speech with an Afro-American meaning, nuance, tone, and gesture (p. 2).

Based on Smitherman’s definition, AAVE entails more than just words, but it represents the histories, ideas, feelings, and practices that many African Americans share. It is also important to note that this variety of English is not tantamount to mispronunciations or slang, but it follows specific grammar and pronunciation rules that convey “complex logic and reasoning” (Cooks & Ball, 2009, p. 141). However, AAVE has not been recognized as a legitimate English variety as easily as some others because of the broader societal views held about its speakers (Cooks & Ball, 2009). Nevertheless, the research on using AAVE as a resource for students suggests that educators can cultivate a supportive learning environment that values AAVE speakers’ linguistic repertoires and their funds of knowledge, design curricula that build on their cultural knowledge and skills, and assess these students based on their ideas and less on specific conventions used in Standard American English (SAE), a term used to refer to the English variety traditionally used in academic settings (Cooks & Ball, 2009). Ball and colleagues (2011) noted that encouraging the use of AAVE during instruction contributes to a supportive learning environment in which its speakers feel comfortable expressing their ideas during instruction. They also point out that explicit instruction of language ideologies can be beneficial in fostering students’ understandings
of the role that language plays in schooling. Additionally, using texts that employ AAVE also provides teachers with useful tools to scaffold students’ understandings of unfamiliar subject material.

**English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) and English Language Learners (ELLs).** In addition, the number of students who speak languages other than English is steadily increasing in U.S. schools. For the 2013-2014 school year, approximately 4.5 million public school students (9.3%) were enrolled in an English Language Learner (ELL) program (Kena et al., 2016), which is only one, small indicator of the students who may speak a language other than English in U.S. public schools. Of all the languages reported, the most common home languages spoken by ELL students were (in decreasing order): Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Vietnamese, Hmong, Haitian, Somali, Russian, and Korean. (Kena et al., 2016). The languages that students speak and the linguistic repertoires for each language spoken are also quite diverse (Ball et al., 2011). As a result, there are vast resources that a CLD individual might be able to draw from. Also, a student’s primary language serves as a resource for understanding and producing texts in other languages and language varieties, such as SAE (Ball et al., 2011). For instance, students who speak multiple languages may have experience translating or code-switching, which is when speakers switch from one language or dialect to another to fit the current context, and thus they often develop the ability to adapt their voice for various audiences. In effect, this skill can be applied to understanding voice and author’s purpose within a text. However, many teachers are not adequately prepared to use the funds of knowledge that CLD students bring into the classroom and more research needs to be conducted in this area (Ball et al., 2011).
Students in Urban Schools

This study focuses on urban schools because they have the highest concentration of linguistically diverse students from various socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, making these schools rich spaces in which dialogic instruction could potentially thrive. As defined by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), urbanized, or urban, areas consist of large cities, and their surrounding areas, with a population of 50,000 or more. Urban schools enroll more Black and Latino students than schools in other locales (Kena et al., 2016). As a result, these schools are often known for being socially, culturally, and linguistically complex. Critical literacy is also important in urban schools because of how deficit language has positioned many of these student populations. The majority of students whose first language is not English, students living in poverty, and students of color attend urban schools (Kena et al., 2016). These students disproportionately have the worst educational experiences in comparison to students in other locales (Milner & Lomotey, 2014). Milner and Lomotey cite “inadequate teaching practices,” “un challenging curricular opportunities,” “poor administrative decisions,” among others as factors inside of schools that contribute to students’ negative educational experiences (pp. xv – xvi). The authors also posit that there has not been enough research on successful educational strategies in urban schools to understand how to improve the learning conditions in these schools across the board.

Rethinking the Purposes of Schooling

In many public schools across the U.S., academic achievement is often defined by students’ scores on standardized assessments. However, these assessments could never capture all students’ funds of knowledge. For instance, a student may have a vocabulary of 20,000 words in several varieties of English, but an assessment may only measure this student’s knowledge of
20, content-specific words, and those 20 words may or may not be a part of this particular students’ linguistic repertoire. Also, students’ ability to think critically and analytically and solve problems cannot be fully measured by standardized assessments because of the traditional, multiple-choice format that serves as a more efficient way to assess larger groups of students on their understandings of specific academic content taught in schools rather than an individual student’s knowledge. Behizadeh (2011) asserted that these types of assessments tell “a single story” of a student and argued for assessments that illustrate a broader view of student abilities.

Nonetheless, classroom instruction should provide students with adequate opportunities to engage with subject matter in authentic and meaningful ways, and, in turn, students may be more likely to meet, or even exceed, curricular standards. Dialogic instruction can potentially prepare students for more than just passing standardized assessments or completing high school, but, combined with critical literacy, it can also prepare them for participation in a democratic society, for higher education, and for any career field that students choose to enter.

**Reconsidering Instructional Practices**

One driving force behind curriculum and instruction is educational policy, which seeks to hold teachers accountable for the learning progress of all students through standardized curricula and assessments. Teachers not only have the responsibility to help each student meet these prescribed curricular standards and to pass exams, but they must also try to find ways to keep students interested in classroom instruction. In addition, diverse learners in urban schools and their ways of knowing, doing, and being in the world are often overshadowed by test-driven instruction, rather than instruction that challenges them to think analytically and critically about subject matter. However, the goal of an education should be to provide all students with meaningful opportunities to interact with others dialogically as they evaluate existing knowledge
and construct new meanings (Alexander, 2006; Shor & Freire, 1987). Students’ diverse ways of thinking only strengthens the learning process and should be included in classroom dialogue to advance the learning of all. Further, classroom dialogue should also be purposeful and meaningful for learners. Critical literacy, or teaching students to be critical consumers of given knowledge and active agents in their communities, prepares students for more than simply passing a test or completing high school, rather it prepares them for a greater purpose, creating a more meaningful existence beyond the four walls of the school building, and ultimately making the world a better place for all to live in.

**Culturally-relevant pedagogy.** Learning is most meaningful for students when it is culturally-relevant and aligns with students’ personal goals and desires. Outside of the classroom students develop knowledge and skills that have developed as they encounter real-life situations in their homes and communities. These *funds of knowledge* represent student identities and ideologies (Moll et al., 1992). In their study, Moll et al. investigated the practices of Latino/a students in their homes, in the classroom, and in an after-school program, and designed culturally-relevant projects that enhanced the learning of these students. The data gathered about students’ home lives, or their funds of knowledge, was used to co-construct knowledge with students in an after-school program. In the end, students found learning interesting and relevant to their personal lives and thus flourished both inside and outside of the classroom.

To ignore students’ funds of knowledge or to discredit them not only devalues students as human beings, but it also deprives them of the opportunity to bridge the distance between home and school life. Understanding who students are and who they want to be are critical things to consider when designing instruction. In my personal experiences as a teacher, I have often heard students ask, “Why do we have to learn this?” or “When are we ever going to use this?” For me,
culturally-relevant teaching has involved listening to my students and finding ways to answer these questions about their learning. The unfortunate result of not listening to students and what is important to them is what Larson and Irvine (1999) label as “reciprocal distancing.” This is the distance that is created between the teacher and the student as a result of the teacher ignoring the cultural and historical contexts of students and their learning, which leads to disparate educational objectives. Instead of teachers using students’ histories as resources for learning, they see students’ lives outside of class as irrelevant to the learning process.

Understanding student’s lives outside of the classroom gives teachers the ability to align curricular material in a way that makes learning relevant to students’ current and future lives. Gay (2002) explained that Culturally-Relevant Teaching requires a knowledge base of different ethnic groups and their histories, the ability to critique and re-design curricula, build community, communicate across cultures, and deliver lessons that meet the needs of diverse students. According to Morrell (2011), some examples of Culturally-Relevant Teaching practices include: 1) youth popular culture, which uses pop culture as an entry point; 2) sociocultural language pedagogy, which uses language as a resource, and 3) youth participatory research, in which students investigate real-world issues. These practices can potentially make the content, delivery, and instructional goals in the English curriculum relevant to students’ lives.

**Democratic pedagogy.** Giroux and McLaren (1986) argued that teachers should be “transformative intellectuals” rather than “routine workers.” That is, teachers should not just be transmitters of academic knowledge who do not exercise their own decision-making in the classroom, but they should be able to make curricular decisions that allow the meaning construction process to take place in the classroom. The authors explain, “Teachers who assume the role of transformative intellectuals treat students as critical agents, question how knowledge
is produced and distributed, utilize dialogue, and make knowledge meaningful, critical, and ultimately emancipatory” (p. 215). My very first year of teaching, I taught English at a private high school, and I employed what Giroux and McLaren described as a “labor market perspective” on education. I thought the goal of an education was simply to prepare students for lucrative careers. That was the only motivational tool I had at the time to convince students to engage with literacy tasks. However, my perspective began to shift when I encountered a student who told me that he had no desire to be rich. He just wanted an adequate house and the ability “to play the guitar.” At the time I did not know how to respond to this statement, but his words stuck with me over the years. They forced me to reconsider the purpose of schooling. How could I make school relevant to the lives of students who did not want a high-paying job?

One commonality amongst all people in society is that they all live in the world, and they want their experiences in the world to be positive. Democratic teaching involves practices in which students are able “to engage in critical analysis and to make choices regarding what interests and knowledge claims are most desirable and morally appropriate for living in a just and democratic state” (Giroux & McLaren, 1986, p. 225). Gutiérrez and Larson (1994) added that “In democratic classrooms, the curriculum and the context for learning are more evenly co-constructed by both teacher and student” (p. 28). Essentially, democratic teaching not only makes learning relevant for all, but also allows teachers and students to utilize intellectual freedom in constructing knowledge and building a better society. However, independent thinking is not enough to transform society (Shor & Freire, 1987).

**Critical pedagogy.** Critical pedagogy helps students develop the ability to think critically and independently and actively participate in a democratic society. Gutiérrez and Larson (1994) describe the critical classroom as a “site for the interrogation of texts, the encouragement of
critique, and a place where students and teachers actively co-construct meaning” (p. 24). The critical classroom provides a space for teachers and students to “question hegemonic values, beliefs, and practices dominant in most curricula” (p. 24). For example, when I was a graduate student, one of my English professors assigned the text *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, a coming-of-age story about a young European American boy who runs away from home and befriends an African American man who is trying to escape slavery. I was one of two African American students in the class, and I remember being extremely uncomfortable with how the European American professor and students were discussing issues of race. My problem was not that we were discussing race, but that there were certain knowledge claims in the text about race that went unquestioned during the discussion. The assumptions about my own race compelled me to speak up in the class and challenge ideas presented in the text. Gutiérrez and Larson illustrate the positioning of individuals in schools by describing the borders that separate those who are members of dominant cultural groups and those who are part of non-dominant cultural groups. The authors advocate for the explicit instruction of these “borders” so that students are more informed about how they are positioned in society and how they can cross borders. Ultimately, literature instruction should involve more than just reading and writing about texts, but teachers and students should also be actively involved in the evaluation and construction of the textual meanings.

**Purpose of the Study**

Dialogic teaching entails purposeful classroom dialogue in which the teacher and students share interpretive authority while reading and discussing texts while critical literacy involves the evaluation of existing knowledge, construction of knowledge, and social action. Although many researchers have pointed out the benefits of dialogic instruction, this type of
instruction is still rarely used in U.S. classrooms (Alexander, 2006). In addition, classroom
dialogue has been heavily researched over the past several decades, but there is little research on
dialogic instruction with CLD students in urban schools, in particular in the urban high school
English classroom (Howe & Abedin, 2013). Further, I personally believe one of the goals of
instruction when teaching historically marginalized groups, such as CLD students in urban
schools, should be to use critical literacy to evaluate existing forms of knowledge, to provide
them a space to construct new knowledge, and to give them a greater purpose for learning
through social action. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand a dialogic
approach to critical literacy in an urban high school English classroom.

Research Questions

I began this study with a set of questions that guided my thinking throughout the research
process. I wanted to know how this approach worked, what it looked like in an urban setting, and
how students and teachers perceived this type of instructional practice. The research questions
for this study were:

1) How did a teacher use dialogic teaching to foster critical literacy?

2) To what extent were the goals of critical literacy achieved?

3) How did the teacher’s perspectives shape instruction?

Epistemology

The epistemology, or beliefs about knowledge, that frame this research study is social
constructionism. A social constructionist epistemology influenced my understandings about the
knowledge construction process observed in the classroom, and it also influenced the research
knowledge that I constructed about classroom activity. Some argue that knowledge exists
outside of human influence, and that reality is something to be discovered through scientific
inquiry. However, social constructionists contend that, while reality can be understood through scientific inquiry, all knowledge, including scientific knowledge, is both culturally and historically specific (Burr, 1995; Cook-Gumperz, 2006; Mercer, 1995; Weinberg, 2014). Things can exist without people constructing them, but knowledge of those things is constructed when people ascribe meanings to them within specific cultural and historical contexts. Further, knowledge is not static but constantly changes over time, differs across cultures, and varies depending on its practical application in different situations. One of the key assumptions of social constructionism is that knowledge is not based on objective, unbiased observations of the world. Instead, every individual views the world from a particular perspective, and these perspectives are inevitably present during knowledge construction and representation (Burr, 1995).

In addition, language is the foundation for all knowledge construction. Human beings use language as a tool for thinking, for acquiring and constructing knowledge, and for shaping their identities and the world around them (Vygotsky, 1962/2012). As a result, throughout this study, I use language to understand the knowledge construction process in the classroom and knowledge constructed about the classroom.

**Theoretical Perspectives**

Systems of beliefs, or theories, influence people’s perspectives of the world and their actions within it. These theories serve as guiding principles throughout the entire research process, motivating researchers to choose a particular topic of study and affecting the way they see and interpret data (Ezzy, 2002). Within this research study, sociocultural theories of learning, dialogism, and critical literacy guide my views on language, literacy, teaching, and learning and also play major roles during data collection, analysis, and the interpretation of results. See Figure
According to sociocultural theories of learning, language, literacy, teaching, and learning do not take place in isolation but must be considered within the specific cultural contexts in which they occur (Cook-Gumperz, 2006; Smagorinsky, 2001; Vygotsky, 1962/2012). Dialogism demonstrates the relationship between past utterances to present utterances and how the present word anticipates and shapes future utterances (Bakhtin, 1981). Additionally, critical literacy is the theory that ties this study together. According to critical literacy, teachers, students, and researchers are not simply repositories for school-sanctioned knowledge, but they are also active agents who evaluate existing knowledge, construct new knowledge, and find areas that require social action (Freire, 1970/2000; Freire & Macedo, 1987; hooks, 1994).
Figure 2. Theoretical Framework
The following theoretical principles frame this study:

1) Language and literacy practices are shaped by the sociocultural contexts in which they are developed and used over time (Cook-Gumperz, 2006; Smagorinsky, 2001; Street, 1995; Vygotsky, 1962/2012).

2) Discourses entail the shared language and literacy practices of specific cultural groups (Fairclough, 2015; Gee, 2012; Halliday, 1993).

3) Knowledge is socially constructed and is best understood within the cultural and historical context in which it was derived (Burr, 1995; Cook-Gumperz, 2006, Mercer, 1995; Weinberg, 2014).

4) Dialogue involves the exchange of contrasting worldviews as a way to construct and re-construct knowledge (Alexander, 2006; Bakhtin, 1981; Burbules, 1993; Shor & Freire, 1987; Wells, 2001).

5) Academic knowledge is shaped by cultural and political views, and one of the goals of schooling should be to evaluate this knowledge and construct new knowledge that positively impacts society (Freire, 1970/2000; Freire & Macedo, 1987; hooks, 1994).

**Sociocultural Theories of Learning**

Sociocultural theories of learning posit that understanding the sociocultural context, which encompasses people, the material world, and an individual’s interaction with these things, is important to understanding the learning process (Vygotsky, 1962/2012). According to sociocultural theory, learning first takes place within the social realm and second on the individual level (Vygotsky, 1962/2012). In other words, first people interact with their sociocultural environment, and then they internalize these experiences. Further, individuals are also able to reach higher levels of thinking with the assistance of someone with more experience.
Vygotsky called the space in which people complete tasks with assistance, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) termed the process of assisting others within this space scaffolding. Moreover, the people that an individual interacts with in the sociocultural environment also shape culture, which is an essential part of the sociocultural environment that inevitably impacts the way people think, speak, and behave.

**Culture.** Culture entails all the knowledge, linguistic repertoires, social practices, values, and beliefs of its members and is the foundation on which all meaning is built. All people are “products of culture” (Smagorinsky, 2001, p. 139). Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) maintained that culture is not static but an ongoing process. It is constantly being shaped by the sociocultural environment and evolving over time. That is, culture shapes and is shaped by the people within it. Furthermore, the understandings that people construct together and the tools they use to construct them are also products of culture. Smagorinsky (2001) defined tools as a “means by which one acts on one’s environment” (p. 139). Language is the primary tool that people use to perform these actions.

**Language.** While interacting with the sociocultural environment, human beings develop mental concepts that provide the foundation for language development. Language serves as a way for people to share mental concepts in material form. This form could be expressed using spoken or written words, or any other semiotic expressions, such as visual art or physical gestures. Another way of characterizing the representation of mental concepts is as “signs” (Vygotsky, 1962/2012). Signs are socially constructed symbols that are mutually agreed upon by cultural groups (Smagorinsky, 2001). That is, signs have no meaning unless people ascribe meaning to them. The “configuration of signs,” also known as “texts,” serve as foundational
tools for language systems (Smagorinsky, 2001). Vygotsky (1962/2012) wrote, “the central moment in concept formation, and its generative cause, is a specific use of words as functional ‘tools’” (p. 115). In other words, language provides human beings tools to structure their thoughts, convey these thoughts to others, and ultimately influence the thoughts and language of others. Mercer (1995) also contended that “Language is a means for transforming experience into cultural knowledge and understanding” (p. 4). Language embodies a person’s cultural identity and the knowledge that has emerged as a result of cultural practices.

Discourses. As people communicate with each other, they develop shared language systems, or discourses. As a product of the sociocultural environment, a person’s voice represents the historical experiences of a particular cultural group and the voices of all those who came before (Bakhtin, 1981). Discourse is a cultural practice shared by a group of people (Fairclough, 2015; Gee, 2012; Mercer, 1995). People with shared discourses generally agree on the meanings that they construct together in regard to their cultural past and lived experiences. Mercer defined discourse as “language as it is used to carry out the social and intellectual life of a community” (p. 79). Gee also made the distinction between little “d” discourse, which simply involves language use, and big “D” Discourse, which is used to enact a particular cultural identity. People can also be socialized into more than one Discourse. In many cases, a person’s identity is tied to several different social and cultural groups. In addition, Fairclough also argued that discourse comprise social structures, and these structures reflect the various power relationships within society.

Dialogue. Dialogue happens when people use language to communicate and, in the process, also exchange different discourses. Because discourses reflect cultural values, beliefs, and practices, dialogue involves multiple worldviews coming in contact with one another.
Bakhtin (1981) underscored the “importance of struggling with another’s discourse” during the meaning-making process (p. 348). Conflicting ideas and perspectives on the same topic cause people to seek clarity, and the process of seeking clarity in the midst of controversy is what best characterizes dialogue. Dialogue involves a process in which people examine the world and interrogate ideas and, through dialogue, construct shared understandings of the world. Burbules (1993) explained, “Dialogue is an activity directed toward discovery and new understanding, which stands to improve the knowledge, insight, or sensitivity of its participants” (p. 8). The shared understandings that emerge as a result of dialogue are often represented in “texts.” Finally, this system of shared texts can also be referred to as literacy.

**Literacy.** As a result of their lived experiences and social interactions, individuals use “signs” to represent their developing mental concepts to others (Vygotsky, 1962/2012). Cultural groups then use sign systems, or “texts,” to convey shared meanings of signs (Smagorinsky, 2001). Smagorinsky (2001) defined a text as “any configuration of signs that provides a potential for meaning” (p. 137). Texts could be “books, films, music, art, clothing, spoken language, architectural designs, landscapes, and other human products imbued with a potential for meaning” (Burroughs & Smagorinsky, 2009, p. 171). Through discourse, cultural groups ascribe meanings to texts. Because there are many different cultural groups thus various discourses, texts can have different meanings for different people. The meanings that cultural groups give to these texts constitute shared knowledge, or ideologies. As individuals from separate cultural groups exchange shared ideologies, they engage in dialogue.

**Literacy** encompasses the ways that people present shared knowledge. It provides people with the opportunity to put shared knowledge to use (Cook-Gumperz, 2006). Scribner and Cole (1981) defined literacy as “a set of socially organized practices which make use of a symbol
system and a technology for producing and disseminating it” (p. 236). Sharing knowledge can be done in many ways, including written, spoken, and artistic forms. While literacy is the production and dissemination of shared texts, Burroughs and Smagorinsky (2009) elucidated that its plural form, literacies, represent the social practices of specific cultural groups for specific purposes (Street, 1995).

**Dialogism**

Dialogism encompasses multiple voices and multiple forms of knowledge (Bakhtin, 1981). It also views multiple perspectives of reality as crucial to the meaning-making process. Enciso and Ryan (2011) explained, “Dialogism points to the many voices and histories of relationships formed through language that are always at play during any social interaction” (p. 133). In the classroom, the words that are spoken by both the teacher and students reflect histories of a particular cultural group and the voices of all those who came before them (Bakhtin, 1981). Freeman and Ball (2004) asserted that the world comprises diverse people who “often struggle to understand one another” (p. 4). Each person or group’s understanding of the world is a result of their relative experiences in the world, resulting in varying and, often times, conflicting worldviews. Including these voices during instruction creates a rich context for meaning-making. Bakhtin (1981) emphasized the importance of dialogic engagement during the knowledge construction process. He explained that the meaning of an utterance can only be understood against the background of other concrete utterances on the same theme, a background made up of contradictory opinions, points of view and value judgments – that is, precisely that background that, as we see, complicates the path of any word toward its object (p. 281)
Put differently, people cannot truly know the world around them until they encounter a worldview different from their own. Encountering varying perspectives on the same topic forces people to have to justify or change their position on that topic, which is an essential step in the knowledge construction process. Bakhtin labeled the condition in which utterances are spoken as *heteroglossia*. Within heteroglossia, there are two forces always at work - the *centripetal* and *centrifugal* forces of language. Centripetal forces work “toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization” (p. 271). These centralizing forces entail the dominant Discourses that influence the way the majority thinks, speaks, and acts. It also reflects the dominant culture’s views on knowledge. On the other hand, centrifugal forces comprise the decentralizing “languages of social groups” (p. 272). That is, the centrifugal forces of language portray the views and practices of non-dominant cultural groups. Further, heteroglossia does not just refer to the present condition, but also the past conditions of voices throughout history come to bear during dialogic engagement. In essence, the “double-voiced” utterances of speakers embody the ideologies of past speakers as they encounter present speakers and influence future utterances. In order to understand dialogic exchanges, it is essential to understand the ideologies that influence utterances and the lasting effects of dialogic encounters.

One inevitable result of dialogic discussion is a person’s *ideological becoming* (Bakhtin, 1981). The process of ideological becoming involves how people develop their views on the world (Bakhtin, 1981; Freeman & Ball, 2004). Bakhtin explained, “The tendency to assimilate others’ discourse takes on an even deeper and more basic significance in an individual’s ideological becoming” (p. 342). The multiplicity of voices present in the dialogic environment inevitably produce tension and conflict, which are both necessary for an individual’s personal
growth because they encourage individuals to think deeply about issues and shift ideas to make room for more.

Bakhtin (1981) also put forth that the two types of discourses that are constantly in conflict with each other during the process of an ideological becoming are 1) *authoritative discourse* and 2) *internally persuasive discourse*. He defines the authoritative discourse as follows:

The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us quite independently of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it (p. 342)

In other words, authoritative discourse represents the language of power in a society. It is a dominant, hegemonic force that has engrained itself in the minds of all individuals within a society to the point that it almost always goes unquestioned. It is represented in the discourse of parents, schools, religious leaders, and political figures in society. As an example, at every level in my educational journey, the authoritative discourse has been an integral part of the discourse. For instance, sometimes when I asked my high school students to cite evidence for their opinions, they would simply say they believed something because their parents told them it was true, or the Bible supported their case, or the law indicated that it was right. These examples highlight how authoritative discourse serves as the dominant, unchallenged Discourses in society. Freeman and Ball (2004) also added that “The nature of our struggles with an authoritative discourse depends on our relationship with it” (p. 7). In her autoethnography, Fournillier (2011) revealed how the dominant Discourse of the academy in her ethnographic study on Trinidad Carnival inevitably produced tension for her as someone who is a member of both the Academy and the Trinidad Carnival community. She wrote:
Sometimes I did what I felt I should not do and troubled it to release myself from the
guilt of doing it. But I was not prepared for the eventual understandings of the social,
cultural, and political contexts of doing this work. They served me in good stead so that I
can now write from the “wonderful view” of my fourth floor office that looks on to the
big city. (p. 558)

I understand Fournilier’s conflict as a person of color and a member of a non-dominant
discourse. It is often a challenge writing about other people of color and members of non-
dominant discourses while using the Dominant discourse to describe their experiences. During
dialogic engagement, if people accept the authoritative discourse there is no need to struggle to
understand its meaning. However, when the authoritative discourse is challenged by another
discourse, this is the moment when the struggle for understanding occurs.

Internally persuasive discourse represents the voices of all other discourses, or the
discourses of everyday people (Freeman & Ball, 2004). These discourses may exist in
conjunction or in contrast to the authoritative discourse. Bakhtin (1981) explained that internally
persuasive discourse

is affirmed through assimilation, tightly woven with “one’s own word.” In the everyday
rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-
someone else’s. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a
word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of our words from
within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition. (p. 345)

Whereas authoritative discourse is front and center within society, internally persuasive
discourses lay within each individual. As individuals come into contact with the world and
others, they inevitably face problems that they must use their creativity and intellect to solve,
they tend to have questions that they must seek the answers to, and they meet people that impress upon them a different view of the world and cause them to shift their thinking. All of these examples represent internally persuasive discourses. The tension and production among the authoritative and internally persuasive discourses are necessary components in people’s ideological becoming and also in the dialogic process of knowledge construction in the classroom.

**Critical Literacy**

Critical literacy as described by Freire and Macedo (1987) is a “creative act that involves critical comprehension of reality” (p. 157). Because knowledge is socially constructed and understood best when considered in relationship to its cultural and historical context (Burr, 1995; Cook-Gumperz, 2006; Mercer, 1995; Weinberg, 2011), students can critically explore the relationship between knowledge and the sociocultural and sociohistorical contexts in which it has been constructed. When students understand academic knowledge within these contexts, it opens up “the possibility of a new knowledge” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 157).

Critical literacy is inherently a dialogic process because it centers on the use of dialogue to construct and reconstruct knowledge with others. Freire (1970/2000) contended that “For the dialogical, problem-posing teacher-student, the program content of education is neither a gift nor an imposition...but rather the organized systematic ‘re-presentation’ to individuals of the things about which they want to know more” (p. 93). In other words, the teacher is also a student, and presents academic knowledge not as the end goal of instruction, but for the purpose of igniting students’ curiosity as the teacher works with students to re-learn given knowledge.

Moreover, critical literacy is also democratic in nature. Guitérrez and Larson (1994) contend that “schooling perpetuates the needs of an unequal society through its reproduction of
acritical students” (p. 23). For example, perspectives of knowledge that marginalize the contributions of certain groups of people may be taught in schools, and when students do not question the absence of this group, the marginalization continues. However, Luke (2012) maintains that “Equitable access to how texts work…is an essential step in social justice” (p. 8). That is, students who challenge ideas in curricula that may not represent their own worldviews enact critical literacy practices that could possibly lead to more equitable representations in the future. According to Luke, critical literacy “is focused on the use of literacy for social justice in marginalized and disenfranchised communities” (p. 5). These communities have historically been silenced in the classroom; however, critical literacy offers opportunities and space for historically marginalized groups to actively participate in knowledge construction and reconstruction in the classroom, which is an important step towards equity in education.

Sociocultural theory demonstrates how social interaction and life experiences shape the thoughts, words, and actions of individuals within a specific culture, and also how different cultural groups develop shared discourses. On the other hand, critical literacy illustrates how people from various cultures and discourses can construct and re-construct knowledge through meaningful dialogue. Both theoretical perspectives are informed by a social constructionist epistemology that views knowledge as culturally and historically situated. I use the principles of sociocultural theory, critical literacy, and social constructionism throughout this study in an effort to understand how the diverse perspectives in an urban high English classroom are used to evaluate and construct knowledge.

**Overview of the Study**

In this study, I explored dialogic teaching and critical literacy by using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) orientation, in which I worked alongside an English teacher in an urban
high school setting. I collected and analyzed data from the classroom using ethnographic methods, and I analyzed the transcript data using discourse analysis. I next turn to a review of the literature to situate this study within ongoing empirical work on literature instruction, classroom discourse, dialogism, and critical literacy.
2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Language can be found in virtually everything (Applebee, 2002). It is also the means people use to convey ideas and learn from others (Alexander, 2006). Instruction in the high school English classroom offers limitless possibilities for knowledge construction because it is centered around language. The process through which people share language is *discourse*. Classroom discourse ostensibly plays an important role in teaching and learning in the English classroom. The research on classroom discourse is vast, spanning over several decades and investigating topics from the structure of classroom talk to its impact on the learning of various student groups (Howe & Abedin, 2013). In my classroom experiences teaching high school English, I have found classroom dialogue, in which various discourses are exchanged, to be one of the most engaging and effective ways to propel the learning of all my students forward. However, even though many educators and researchers have emphasized the importance of classroom discourse in teaching and learning over the past forty years, there are still areas that need to be explored further (Howe & Abedin, 2013). For example, in my review of the literature, I discovered that there were fewer studies on dialogic approaches in the English classroom as compared to other instructional approaches.

In addition, in light of the inequities that exist in U.S. society, it is crucial that teachers include the voices of all students in the learning process and employ classroom practices that equip students with the knowledge and skills to participate in a democratic society and effect positive change. I came to this conclusion after several years of teaching at an urban school with a CLD population and encountering the various perspectives of the teachers and students there. Many of the teachers and administrators at the school believed that the students were limited in their academic abilities, and they “watered down” material so that students could meet the
minimum curricular standards. “Our kids don’t do homework.” “These kids can’t do that type of work.” “My kids are so low.” “They would be out of control if we tried that.” These statements reflect the sentiments of faculty at the school in which I taught. On the other hand, the students thought quite differently about themselves, and I knew that they were more than capable of taking control of their learning and exceeding curricular standards. However, they were rarely presented with opportunities to evaluate academic knowledge and construct new knowledge as a result of the deficit thinking many of their teachers had about them. There is a growing body of research on critical literacy and its importance in classroom instruction; however, there are limited research studies that examine a dialogic approach to critical literacy (Aukerman, 2012). In my review of the literature, I discuss the current research on dialogic teaching and critical literacy and how my study will make a significant contribution to understanding the role of dialogic teaching in fostering critical literacy for CLD students.

The empirical research studies for this review were located using the ERIC and Academic Search Complete databases, literature reviews, and handbook chapters. First, I conducted database searches using the key terms: “classroom discourse,” “classroom dialogue,” “dialogic teaching,” “dialogic pedagogy,” “dialogic teaching and critical literacy,” and “dialogic pedagogy and critical literacy.” I only considered research studies in peer-reviewed academic journals in this search. I also excluded articles that were not empirical in nature, not related to classroom contexts, and not applicable to critical discussions of literary texts in the high school English classroom. Second, I found literature reviews on classroom dialogue and critical literacy and used the reference sections in these articles to locate more empirical research related to my topic. Lastly, I read chapters in The Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts and The Handbook of Adolescent Literacy Research and found empirical research studies in
the reference sections of these chapters. After scanning the research studies in the literature reviews and handbook chapters, I selected studies that also related to dialogic teaching and critical literacy in the high school English classroom. Although there may be additional empirical studies on classroom discourse, dialogic teaching, and critical literacy in the high school English classroom that are not included in this literature review, I present here a variety of studies that serve as a good representation of the research conducted on these topics.

In my review of the literature, I discuss the curriculum that has been taught in English classrooms and make a case for literature instruction that is culturally-relevant, democratic in nature, and evaluative of existing forms of knowledge. Next, I address how curricular material is taught using classroom discourse and how classroom discourse in the high school English classroom has been examined in the existing research. Then I examine the current literature on dialogic teaching and attempt to illustrate that this type of instruction is highly beneficial for all learners. Finally, I argue for a dialogic pedagogy that fosters critical literacy, providing a conceptual framework for a dialogic approach to critical literacy in the classroom. Figure 3 represents how this literature review is organized. Even though the major concepts in this review are presented in a linear fashion, it is important to note that the concepts of literature instruction, classroom discourse, dialogic teaching, and critical literacy are actually interrelated and recursive.
Figure 3. Organization of the Literature Review

For centuries, formal education has served as a way for individuals in societies to share and construct knowledge together. The Sumerians and Ancient Egyptians were the first groups to operate schools for this purpose (Webb, Metha, & Jordan, 2003). Additionally, the Greeks are credited with being one of the first groups to formally deliberate on the purpose of a universal education and the methods for teaching students. Socrates, for example, “believed that the purpose of an education was not to perfect the art of rhetoric but to develop in the individual his inherent knowledge and to perfect the ability to reason” (Webb et al., 2003, p. 127). On one hand, the classroom serves as a place where human beings may potentially encounter multiple worldviews and broaden their own understandings of the external world. The classroom experience provides students with the opportunity to utilize critical thinking skills to solve
problems and draw conclusions, resulting in academic knowledge. Students can then use this academic knowledge to change their realities, influence the thinking of others, and transform the world around them. On the other hand, classrooms can also serve as a site where certain practices and worldviews are privileged over others, and people are essentially socialized into thinking, speaking, and behaving in particular ways sanctioned by whomever is power at the time. In this section of the literature review, I intend to describe the knowledge students have been taught in high school English classrooms in the U.S. and what the research says about how students should be taught in order to maximize their learning potential.

**Historical Development of Literature Curriculum and Instruction**

According to the epistemology of social constructionism, all knowledge, including academic knowledge, is socially constructed (Burr, 1995). *Literature*, which is a representation of academic knowledge, entails a body of shared texts, constructed within specific historical and cultural contexts, that reflects the cultural values and beliefs of individuals (Smagorinsky, 2001). In the high school English classroom, these texts typically come in written, oral, or artistic forms and, like all other shared texts, are “imbued with a potential for meaning” (Burroughs & Smagorinsky, 2009, p. 171). Smagorinsky (2001) described literature as “texts codified to imply rather than explicate a meaning” (p. 140). Based on this definition, literature can be characterized as shared texts that can be interpreted in many different ways. Literature instruction in the high school English classroom usually involves reading, analyzing, discussing, and writing about shared texts in an effort to interpret their meanings.

Like all forms of knowledge, the knowledge represented by school curricula is culturally and historically situated. Gutiérrez and Larson (1994) posited that neither schools nor the instructional practices employed in classrooms are “neutral.” Every educational decision that is
made in schools represents a system of ideas, beliefs, and values. The decisions about what counts as knowledge in school, how this knowledge is taught, and who gets to participate in the knowledge construction process is important to understanding literature instruction in the classroom. The U.S. has a complex cultural history that has played a crucial role in these decisions. In the backdrop of American society have always been the issues of social class and race. The history of social class and race provides a context for understanding the structure of schooling in the U.S.

Before the late 1800s, schools were comprised of a more homogenous culture, consisting of students who were wealthy and of European descent (Worthy, Hungerford-Kresser, & Hampton, 2009). During this time, poor, working class people often did not have the ability to attend school and enslaved people of African descent were denied access to a formal education. Early reading instruction consisted of students reciting religious catechisms and the alphabet (Applebee, 1974). In addition, by 1810 English grammar was formally studied in most U.S. public schools from elementary through college, and rhetoric was studied in most high schools and colleges. The U.S. was comprised of individuals who spoke various languages and dialects, and schooling was often used as way to standardize the practices amongst its citizens. For instance, Noah Webster created the American Heritage Dictionary in 1828 as a way to “regularize” the way Americans spelled and pronounced words in English (Applebee, 1974).

The student population began to change in the late 1800s to early 1900s due to an influx of European immigrants and White, working class students who had been recently impacted by child labor laws (Worthy et al., 2009). Even though schools saw an increase in size and variation in students’ socioeconomic statuses in the late 1800s to early 1900s, students were still expected to assimilate into the dominant, upper-class, European-American culture. In response to the
increasing diversity in U.S. schools, prominent members of the dominant cultural group began to create curricular standards that would determine what all European-American students should be learning in schools. First, in 1892, the Committee of Ten proposed a standardized curriculum, offering courses that would prepare these students for college. Later, in 1918, the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education put forth the *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*, which made provisions for helping students who might find college preparatory material difficult. These curricular standards would lay the groundwork for the Standards Movement in the years to come.

During this time is also when the first English curriculum emerged (Applebee, 1996). The study of literature during the late 1800s stressed “the cultural knowledge of the great Western tradition” (p. 23). In 1872 Harvard University developed its first English Department and created a list of book titles that students must know as a college entrance requirement. Other colleges soon followed in their footsteps, and for the next 10 years, in order to be admitted into college in the U.S., students would have to be familiar with these 15 texts that were “largely white, male, and Eurocentric” (p. 28). Applebee also found that most English curricula across the United States still exhibit this “knowledge-out-of-context,” and the same classic texts identified in the late 1800s to 1900s are also still predominantly taught in English classrooms.

In addition, schools also began using IQ tests to determine students’ learning capacities, and since the 1920s, standardized tests have been a fundamental part of all U.S. public schools (Worthy et al., 2009). Worthy et al. maintained that these tests were initially designed for upper-class, European-American students and that students from other ethnic and socioeconomic groups have almost always performed poorly on such tests.
During the 1950s and 1960s American schools experienced an unprecedented growth in cultural diversity, increased attention to global education and competition, and more involvement from the federal government. First, in the early 1950s, the Civil Rights Movement was taking place in the South as African Americans fought for equal access to a quality education, and in 1954 the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling legally ended school segregation between African American and European American students. Second, in 1957 when the Soviet Union launched *Sputnik*, the first space satellite, the concern for America to compete globally led to an even more rigorous curriculum focused on the mastery of specific subject matter. Finally, in subsequent years, the federal government passed laws that addressed the needs of historically marginalized groups. These laws were designed to ensure that students of color, students with disabilities, and students from low-income families were provided necessary educational assistance to meet curricular learning standards. However, these laws presupposed an objective view on academic knowledge, teaching, and learning.

A turning point occurred in U.S. schooling in 1983 after the publication of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative in Education*. This report sought to improve “academic achievement and accountability” in American schools (Marshall, 2009; Shanahan, 2011). *A Nation at Risk* launched what has been called “the Standards Movement” (Marshall, 2009; Shanahan, 2011). By 1998, 47 states had adopted national standards. At the turn of the century, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002, which outlined what students should be able to do as a result of reading, math, and science instruction, was initiated. Then in 2009, the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) put forth common national standards. Despite the claims for standards and efforts to increase the academic achievement of all students, there is little to no empirical evidence that the Standards Movement has been successful in positively changing
learning outcomes for students. In fact, the Standards Movement narrowed learning outcomes, diminished the effectiveness of teachers, and marginalized diverse learners (Marshall, 2009).

Understanding the context from which curricular standards and assessments has emerged is important because it provides possible reasons for the disparity in learning outcomes for diverse cultural and socioeconomic groups in U.S. schools. Freire and Macedo (1987) wrote, “The dominant curriculum is designed primarily to reproduce the inequality of social classes while it mostly benefits an elite minority” (p. 125). Many educators and researchers agree that the context of schooling in the U.S. entails the dominant culture’s attempt to preserve social control (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gutiérrez & Larson, 1994; Webb et al., 2003). This desire has materialized in the hegemonic practices in American schools and dominant culture’s resistance to any progressive movements that center on students’ active construction of meaning.

The potential for student-centered learning has always co-existed alongside the desire for social control and control over student learning. The Progressive Movement founded by Dewey in the 1920s that centered in students’ practical application of knowledge within a particular context was deemed by many educational leaders of the time as “anti-intellectual” (Webb et al., 2003) because it did not focus on the established knowledge of the dominant culture, but it focused instead on the process of knowledge construction. It is also important to point out that the Progressive Education Association conducted a study that involved 3,000 students from progressive schools and non-progressive schools and showed that students in progressive schools fared better both academically and socially (Webb et al., 2003). However, Gutiérrez and Larson (1994) emphasized that in order for schools “to meet the needs of a diverse society, then we need to redefine the function of schools and what it means for schools to ‘work’” (p. 23). They also put forth that in order to transform schools into institutions that better serve all students,
educators need to understand the relationship “between the participants and the larger societal context” (p. 24). By overlooking the context in which learning takes place, educators may potentially contribute to the inequities that exist in the broader context of society. On the other hand, taking students’ cultural identities and practices into consideration is an important step in understanding the relationship between social context and student learning. Culturally-relevant pedagogy has the potential to de-marginalize diverse student groups and actively involve them in learning processes.

**Classroom Discourse**

Classroom discourse plays an important role in teaching and learning (Applebee, 1996; Cazden, 2001; Mercer, 1995). It serves as a tool for teachers and students to both represent and construct various forms of knowledge. Applebee (1996) emphasized the critical role of classroom discourse by suggesting that curricular decisions should be organized around the type of conversations educators want to take place in the classroom.

Furthermore, because shared language is also a cultural tool, it provides teachers and students with a means to convey their cultural identities and practices (Gee, 2012; Smagorinsky, 2001). Through discourse, teachers and students express who they are, what they value, and how they perceive the world around them. Cazden (2001) pointed out that “one of the functions of the public school is to give students opportunities to develop their abilities to communicate with a broader world” (p. 17). Classroom discourse represents “a broader world” in that it encompasses the voices of different people with different cultural backgrounds, experiences, and worldviews. When these various discourses come together in one space, it provides teachers and students with the chance to create new learning experiences and understand perspectives other than their own. Discourse is not only strengthened by cultural diversity but also complicated by the cultural
differences that come into play (Cazden, 2001). Many researchers have attempted to understand
the complexity of classroom discourse.

**Empirical Studies on Classroom Discourse**

Over the last several years there has been a great deal of research on classroom discourse
(Howe & Abedin, 2013). In my review of the literature on classroom discourse, I narrowed my
focus to studies in the secondary English classroom. The research studies that I found on
classroom discourse in the secondary English classroom generally fell into the following
categories: 1) characteristics of classroom discourse; 2) context of and influences on classroom
discourse; 3) effects on student learning; and 4) perspectives of classroom participants. I discuss
the literature on classroom discourse in the secondary English classroom, building a case for its
significant role in teaching and learning.

**Characteristics of classroom discourse.** A large body of work in secondary English
classrooms describe the structure and characteristics of classroom discourse (Culican, 2007;
Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, & Long, 2003; Razfar, 2011; Samuelson, 2009; Skidmore &
Murkami, 2010; Smith & Connolly, 2005; Soter, Wilkinson, Murphy, Rudge, Reninger, &
Edwards, 2008; Vetter, 2010; Williamson, 2013; Wiltse, 2006; Zuengler, 2011). These studies
discussed the qualities in both teacher and student talk and also how teacher talk influences
student participation in classroom discussion. In addition, a few of these studies described the
characteristics of classroom talk in CLD urban high school English classrooms in the U.S.
(Razfar, 2011; Zuengler, 2011) and Canada (Wiltse, 2006).

While making a case for class discussion in the classroom, it is essential for researchers
to establish what characterizes quality classroom talk. In Nystrand et al.’s (2003) quantitative
study, the researchers examined the structure of classroom discourse and how classroom talk
evolved over time. They collected data from 16 junior high and high school classrooms in 112 English/language arts classrooms and 106 social studies classrooms. A trained observer visited each class four times during the school year and collected data on class discussions using audio recordings and the Classroom Language Assessment System, CLASS 2.0 (Nystrand, 1988 as cited in Nystrand et al., 2003). The observers listed and coded all the questions (excluding procedural questions) used during class discussion, totaling 35,887 questions across 872 observations. They then analyzed the proceeding discussion and categorized them as recitation, discussion, or dialogic spells. Recitation was “characterized by IRE patterns and teacher test questions,” while discussion was “characterized by the open-ended conversational exchanges of ideas largely absent of questions,” and a dialogic spell was “characterized by engaged student questions and an absence of teacher test questions” (p. 150). The authors found that across the board, dialogic spells occurred less frequently than other discourse patterns, with only 66 out of 1,151 instructional episodes comprising dialogic spells. They also found that dialogic spells occurred more frequently in smaller classes, in social studies versus English classes, and with students with higher socioeconomic statuses. They were also least likely to occur in “lower-track classes” (p. 180). By using quantitative methods, the researchers were able to investigate classroom discourse in a large number of classrooms on a macro level, effectively illustrating the pervasiveness of monologic teaching practices in classrooms. Its limitations include not being able to explore the relationship between teacher questioning and student talk in individual classrooms and the factors that influence the discourse on a micro level.

**Contexts and influences on classroom discourse.** A number of studies also investigated the context of classroom discourse and the factors that influence both student and teacher talk (Duff, 2002; Godley, 2006; Gutiérrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995; Samuelson, 2009; Wiltse, 2006).
In a qualitative study conducted in a ninth grade English class at a CLD urban school in Canada, Wiltse (2006) illustrated how the social context influenced teaching and learning. The researcher observed classroom discussions twice a week over the course of a year, focusing on the social context of teaching and learning taking place in a CLD classroom in which a large number of students spoke English as their second language. The majority of the students were of Cambodian descent (45%) and 30% of students were Vietnamese and Chinese. Wiltse described the remaining students as “First Nation.” The researcher was interested in understanding how the social contexts limited or facilitated classroom talk in the secondary English classroom.

Wiltse (2006) collected data in the form of field notes, audio recordings, and student assignments. The author detailed the cultural practices that played out in this classroom, detailing the teacher’s struggle to engage in authentic class discussions with students who had different cultural practices from her own. Although the teacher expressed an interest in authentic classroom dialogue and the researcher found the teacher’s instructional stance as non-authoritarian in that she “had a good sense of humor and positive relationships with her students,” (p. 207), the researcher found the teacher’s stance and her instruction to be contradictory to one another. Wiltse observed that “there was very little structured classroom dialogue and almost no teacher-whole class discussions” (p. 206). The teacher at one point during the study stopped posing questions to the class altogether. The researcher concluded that the teacher perceived the Asian American students to have more of a quiet nature and was reluctant to engage them in dialogue because she was unsure if she was “showing proper respect” to students’ cultural practices (p. 212). The author drew the conclusion that true dialogue in the classroom occurs when teachers learn to bridge students’ home cultures with school culture.
**Classroom discourse and student learning.** Further, Alexander (2006) argued that classroom discourse alone does not lead to student learning, and the research on classroom discourse should demonstrate what specific qualities of classroom talk enhance the learning of students. The research on classroom discourse in the secondary English classroom reveals how various types of classroom discourse affect student learning (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003; Carpenter Ford, 2013; Cubero & Ignacio, 2011; Duff, 2002; Lee, 2006; Razfar, 2011; Soter et al., 2008; Vetter, 2010; Williamson, 2013; Wiltse, 2006).

Many studies on classroom discourse have focused on how teachers can increase student talk (Howe & Abedin, 2013); however, an increase in student talk does not necessarily equate to an increase in comprehension and higher-order thinking. The quantitative research study conducted by Soter et al. (2008) depicted how quality class discussions can be linked with students’ higher-level thinking and reasoning. First, they selected nine discussion approaches that they located within “recognized research and scholarship” that based discussion around a classroom text. The nine approaches chosen were: 1) *Grand Conversations*, 2) *Book Clubs*, 3) *Literature Circles*, 4) *Instructional Conversations*, 5) *Questioning the Author*, 6) *Junior Great Books*, 7) *Collaborative Reasoning*, 8) *Philosophy for Children*, and 9) *Paideia Seminar*. Next, the authors used the existing literature to determine the typical characteristics of quality class discussions. Lastly, they evaluated the nine discussion approaches to see if they matched the following criteria for quality discussions: 1) used authentic questions; 2) involved student uptake; 3) reflected higher-level thinking amongst students (i.e., analysis, generalization, and hypothesizing); and 4) posed questions that invited shared knowledge, affective, and intertextual responses. In addition, Soter et al. denoted that each of the nine approaches in their study could also be characterized by “their stance toward a text.” These stances include: an *expressive stance*
(Jakobson, 1987), which centers in a reader’s personal or emotional response; an *effe rent stance* (Rosenblatt, 1978) that revolves around the acquisition of textual information; the *critical analytic stance* (Chinn & Anderson, 1998; Wade, Thompson, & Watkins, 1994), which entails making analyzing and critiquing the underlying assumptions within a text.

The researchers hypothesized that the outcomes of class discussion may vary depending on who controls the dialogue. Soter et al. (2008) then located four transcripts of video data for each of the nine approaches, totaling 36 class discussions. They created a deductive coding scheme based on the existing literature and applied it to the discussions. They used the number of turns during class discussion and the length of each turn-of-talk in an attempt to understand the stance found in each of the nine approaches.

What Soter et al. (2008) found is that the results of their study were mostly consistent with previous literature on classroom discourse. The student-controlled discussions, such as *Book Club, Literature Circles*, and *Grand Conversations*, were expressive in nature and the length of talk and student turns were significantly higher than that of the teacher’s. The teacher-controlled discussions of *Instructional Conversations, Junior Great Books*, and *Questioning the Author* were efferent in their orientation toward texts. One difference in this study, however, is that in *Junior Great Books*, the students and teachers contributed almost equally to the discussion. Finally, in *Collaborative Reasoning, Philosophy for Children*, and *Paideia Seminars*, the teachers had fewer turns, but they typically spoke longer than students. Soter et al. found that this is most likely the result of teachers scaffolding the higher-order thinking required for critical-analytic discussions of literature. *Philosophy for Children* had the most student responses and the longest student responses while *Book Club* discussions had the shortest and fewest responses. Students in *Collaborative Reasoning*, *Book Club*, and *Literature Circles*, all used
exploratory talk for the longest periods of time while students in *Philosophy for Children*, *Paideia Seminar*, and *Book Club* had more incidences of exploratory talk.

Further, all of the approaches mostly used authentic questions, except *Instructional Conversations* and *Questioning the Author*, which mostly used what the authors labeled “test questions.” Additionally, all approaches reflected higher-level thinking. Students also used more reasoning words in *Philosophy for Children* and *Grand Conversations* than in any other approach. Approaches that had a critical-analytic and expressive stance showed the most potential for helping students develop higher-level thinking and reasoning by providing them with a space to construct knowledge (Soter et al., 2008).

Because discourses vary across cultural contexts, research has also been conducted on how specific discourses used by cultural groups can be leveraged to facilitate learning in classrooms. Lee’s (2006) qualitative study serves as a great example of a teacher who successfully utilized students’ home language as a resource to advance the learning of African American students in the secondary English classroom. Lee argued that African American students, who are often viewed as reluctant learners who fail to engage in classroom discussion do so because of the devaluation of their home language. Students’ home languages represent a part of their identity. One of the concomitant results of teachers not valuing students’ diverse linguistic practices is that these students have “limited opportunities to learn” (p. 306). Her study is significant in that few research studies demonstrate how to incorporate AAVE as an academic resource. In her study, she used a Cultural Modeling Framework in which students’ applied their problem-solving and analytical skills that they commonly used in their everyday practices outside of school to academic topics. In other words, students applied their learning to the typical dominant Discourse of school. Lee, who was the teacher/researcher in this study, used “cultural
data sets,” which included videos or songs, with which students were familiar. After the students engaged in analytical processes to dissect these cultural data sets, the teacher then led them in applying these same higher order reasoning skills to canonical texts. In her study, Lee (2006) made a strong case that AAVE should not be viewed as a deficit, but a resource in the English classroom. AAVE-speaking students felt valued by this instructional practice not only because the teacher relinquished interpretive authority to students as they analyzed the cultural data sets with which they had more familiarity than the teacher, but also because the teacher used cultural experiences that meant something to students.

**Perspectives of classroom participants.** The perspectives of both teachers and students have also been the focus of research on classroom discourse in the secondary English classroom (Alvermann, Young, Weaver, Hinchman, Moore, Phelps, et al., 1996; Connolly & Smith, 2002; Glazier, 2005; Smith & Connolly, 2005). In their multi-case study, Alvermann et al. (1996) used a mixed-methods approach to investigate students’ perspectives on classroom talk in five middle and high school classrooms that taught English, history, and social studies. The researchers observed classes weekly while taking field notes, and they also videotaped three class discussions in each classroom at the beginning, middle, and end of the study. Next, they showed students the video recordings of class discussions and interviewed them in focal groups to better understand their perceptions of these discussions. They also collected student and teacher questionnaires, student work, and discussion guides as data for the study. Alverman et al. organized their findings based on the following three assertions:

1) Students are aware of the conditions they believe to be conducive to discussion (p. 53)
2) Students say the tasks teachers present and the topics or subject matter they assign for reading influence participation in discussion (p. 57)

3) Students see discussion as helpful in understanding what they read (p. 60)

First, the students interviewed for this study felt that one of the best conditions of classroom discussions were small groups because it was often difficult for all students to have an extended speaking turn in whole-group discussions. Students also noted that another important condition to classroom discussion was how well they knew and liked their classmates. Finally, many of the students expressed that it was important for class participants to stay on topic in order to have productive discussions.

Second, a number of students interviewed in Alvermann et al.’s (1996) study described the types of learning tasks and topics that made them more likely to participate in class discussions. They emphasized that teachers should make learning tasks interesting, challenging, and clear to students. They also demonstrated a preference for tasks that allowed them to exercise logic and reasoning abilities. Further, students in this study also maintained that discussion topics should be interesting and debatable. They also felt that the teacher’s responsibility was to spark students’ interest in discussion topics.

Lastly, based on the insights provided by the students in this study, class discussions have the potential to enhance students’ comprehension of texts by allowing students to express their opinion on a topic, listen to others’ perspectives on an issue, and clear up misunderstandings of unfamiliar vocabulary.

**Monologic Teaching**

Classroom discourse is best characterized by which participants are presenting and constructing knowledge in the classroom. Monologic instruction is characterized by Gutiérrez
and Larson (1994) as a practice in which the teacher asks a question or poses a problem to the class and then calls on students until someone provides the correct response, which the teacher has already established beforehand. Historically, the means of learning in traditional, monologic English classrooms included the memorization of biographical and historical facts (Applebee, 1996). Also, during this type of instruction, the teacher controls the topic of discussion and the turn-taking sequence, discourages sidebars, keeps student responses short, and retains the interpretive authority of information (Gutiérrez & Larson, 1994; Reznitskaya, 2012). Freire (1970/2000) characterized this instructional model as “the banking concept.” Within this view of schooling “the teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of students. His task is to ‘fill’ the students with the contents of his narration” (p. 71). Within this model, students are not provided with opportunities to construct knowledge because all the work has been done for them before they walk through the classroom doors. The main task of students then is to receive the curriculum presented by the teacher, process it, and then “recite” it back to the teacher. This type of instruction positions teachers and school officials as the authority on knowledge construction.

Cazden (2001) described monologic instruction as “traditional” instruction, in which the teacher employs the IRF discourse pattern, which involves teacher Initiation, student Response, and teacher Feedback. Cazden asserted that this style of instruction is the “default” way of teaching students. After presenting students with academic knowledge, the teacher initiates discussion by prompting students to recite this knowledge back. The students then usually bid for the opportunity to respond to the teacher. After a student responds, the teacher offers feedback, typically by telling the student if the response is correct or incorrect. Feedback may also be
Evaluative, in which the teacher provides a descriptive comment about the student’s response. This IRF discourse pattern allows the teacher to control what knowledge is represented in the classroom, typically talking “about two-thirds of the time” (p. 51).

In *Culture and Pedagogy*, Alexander (2000) examined the instructional practices of primary classrooms in England, France, India, Russia, and the United States of America. Even though the study was on culture in the classroom, the author found the patterns of classroom discourse to be the most significant aspects of the research. The author found that classroom talk was used differently and towards different ends in the classrooms across the various countries. For example, in British and U.S. classrooms the teachers typically called on as many students as possible during a class period, limiting students’ responses and teacher feedback to short, inauthentic replies. Conversely, classrooms in Russia employed a different approach to discourse in which the teacher engaged in extended dialogue with one or two students and followed one line of questioning, allowing students to reach higher levels of thinking and teachers to exercise their pedagogical expertise. Barnes (2010) speculated that the pervasiveness of traditional instruction in the U.S. and Great Britain stems from large class sizes and curricular mandates that create pressure for teachers to disseminate as much information to as many students as possible, leaving no time for in-depth class discussion. Shor and Freire (1987) also argued that “The right to have a small discussion begins as a class privilege” (p. 12). They point out that extremely large class sizes with less experienced instructors negate the capability of in-depth discussion in many publicly-funded institutions. However, with oversized classes, instructors must “feed” information to as many students as possible using recitation-style instruction.

Monologic instruction is a necessary component in classroom instruction because it serves as a means to present information to students. However, the problem occurs when it is the
only means of instruction (Shor & Freire, 1987). The inevitable result of solely using traditional instruction is that students are “socialized to particular forms of discourse and interaction as well as socialized through the discourse of the classroom” (Gutiérrez & Larson, 1994, p. 26). In other words, the structure of classroom discourse sends a message to students about what content they should be talking about and how they should be talking about it. The centripetal forces that comprise the Dominant discourse inevitably stifle the creativity of teachers and students and limit opportunities for them to use critical and independent thought. The centrifugal forces that make up the non-dominant discourses of diverse learner groups, however, are given a platform in the dialogic classroom.

**Dialogic Teaching**

While traditional instruction has its value, it should not be the only type of instruction taking place in the classroom if teachers wish to expand students’ worldviews and deepen their understandings of the world and others around them (Alexander, 2006; Cazden, 2001). There are many different kinds of teacher talk during classroom instruction that Alexander (2006) outlined: 1) *rote* – drilling of facts; 2) *recitation* – questioning previously encountered information; 3) *instruction/exposition* – explaining facts, principles, and procedures; 4) *discussion* – exchanging ideas; and 5) *dialogue* – achieving common understanding through questioning (p. 30). While the first four approaches are traditional practices that lay the groundwork for learning, the last two, discussion and dialogue, offer the most potential for increasing student learning. They also require the most skill and expertise on the part of the teacher (Alexander, 2006). However, Alexander pointed out that discussion and dialogue are much more rare in classrooms than traditional instruction. Gutiérrez and Larson (1994) asserted that instead of positively impacting student identities and transforming society, traditional classroom practices, silence student
contributions and separate the curriculum from its cultural and historical context, and only perpetuate the inequities that persist in society. They argue that “most instructional contexts provide little to no opportunity for the kind of scaffolding and apprenticeship that learning as a socially mediated activity requires” (p. 25). It is vital for classroom teachers to incorporate other, non-traditional instructional practices to give all students a more active role in the learning process (Alexander, 2006; Applebee, 2002; Cazden, 2001). Monologic instruction establishes the teacher “as an authority who transfers fixed knowledge to students” (Shor and Freire, 1987, p. 15); however, in a dialogic classroom, the knowledge construction and reconstruction process is shared amongst all members of the class. Additionally, knowledge is never fixed because new questions about the nature of reality are always arising (Shor and Freire, 1987).

Shor and Freire (1987) described the dialogic classroom as one in which the teacher presents knowledge to students and, through dialogue with students, the class examines, critiques, and reconstructs knowledge, which leads to individual transformation in the teacher and students, with the hope that this transformation will effect positive change within society. They define dialogue as “a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it” (p. 13). In other words, dialogue allows people to construct and reconstruct knowledge as the world around them changes. The dialogic classroom involves the teacher placing an “an object to be known on the table between the…subjects of knowing,” and the teacher and students through “mutual inquiry” build knowledge together (p. 14). The role of the teacher is to present the topic, or object of discussion, having had previous contact with it, and, through the dialogic process, “re-learns” the topic with students. In this way the learning process is much more motivating and exciting for all involved. Furthermore, Alexander (2006) asserted that “dialogic teaching reflects a view that knowledge and understanding come from testing
evidence, analyzing ideas, and explaining values, rather than unquestioningly accepting somebody else’s certainties” (p. 32). The dialogic classroom also gives students a more active role in the learning process, and because of students’ increased involvement teachers become more familiar with their students and can design instruction that is relevant to their interests and learning needs (Alexander, 2006).

**Conceptual Framework for Dialogic Teaching**

In the classroom, there are many cultural identities and practices evident, including school practices. Classroom learning involves “learning to a specific cultural purpose” and the teacher must mediate the learning process so that students from various backgrounds can achieve the purpose of schooling (Alexander, 2006). Alexander posited that during dialogic instruction, the teacher is not a “hands-off ‘facilitator’ or transmitter” but a guide who provides students with instructional support as they work to construct meaning. The author also explained that teachers should not do the work of thinking for students, but should provide students with the opportunities to think things through for themselves and engage in dialogue with others in order to reach higher-level thinking.

**Classroom environment.** The classroom context is an important aspect of dialogic teaching. Alexander (2006) maintained that in a dialogic classroom, the layout, instructional pacing, topics, assignments, assessments, and teacher’s instructional stance, all help facilitate dialogic teaching and learning. For instance, the layout in the classroom should fit the learning activity and the needs of students. Also, students should be situated in a way that allows them to see, hear, and respond to each other during dialogic discussions. In addition, Alexander argues that lessons in the dialogic classroom should be focused on “depth” not “breadth” of knowledge. Alexander also emphasized that rather than placing higher value on written representations of
knowledge, the dialogic teacher stresses the equal importance of oral representations of knowledge, such as classroom dialogue and oral assessments, to written tasks and assessments. Finally, the teacher’s instructional stance is vital to making a dialogic classroom work (Boyd & Markarian, 2011). Shor and Freire (1987) explicated that the dialogic teacher: 1) uses conversational tones, 2) listens intently, 3) defers to other students’ opinions, 4) starts next class with answers to questions, 5) stresses the importance of student statements, and 6) uses humor.

**Characteristics of dialogic teaching.** According to Alexander (2006) dialogic teaching is: 1) collective, 2) reciprocal, 3) supportive, 4) cumulative, and 5) purposeful (p. 28). First, dialogic teaching is collective because it requires the participation of both the teacher and students. Everyone in the classroom is actively involved in the meaning-making process. It is also reciprocal because students and teachers must listen to each other, consider different perspectives, and also respond to one another as they build knowledge. Next, the dialogic environment is a supportive one in which students feel free to express their views without being ridiculed or punished for “wrong answers.” Students and teachers support each other as they work to construct shared knowledge. Additionally, dialogic teaching and learning is cumulative as teachers and students stick with a “coherent line of thinking and enquiry” and “build on their own and each others’ ideas.” Lastly, dialogic teaching is purposeful, and classroom talk moves in a particular direction towards a common learning goal. Table 1 illustrates Alexander’s (2006) five components of dialogic teaching.
Table 1

*Alexander’s (2006) Components of Dialogic Teaching*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collective</th>
<th>Teachers and children address learning tasks together, whether as a group or as a class, rather than in isolation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocal</td>
<td>Teachers and children listen to each other, share ideas and consider alternative viewpoints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>Children articulate their ideas freely, without fear of embarrassment over “wrong” answers; and they help each other to reach common understandings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative</td>
<td>Teachers and children build on their own and each other’s ideas and chain them into coherent lines of thinking and enquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposeful</td>
<td>Teachers plan and facilitate dialogic teaching with particular educational goals in view</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Student involvement.** Shor and Friere (1987) also put forth that pressuring students to speak when they have nothing to say creates a “false democracy” (p. 16). For instance, to involve more students in dialogue without creating a false democracy, teachers can use a “situated pedagogy,” which builds from monologic instruction, in which the teacher mostly lectures, and becomes increasingly more dialogic, in which academic knowledge is presented and students are taught to evaluate, challenge, and reconstruct knowledge. The authors maintain that students have become so used to oppressive ideologies of schools that they have grown to fear their own freedom. Situated pedagogy slowly releases the authority back to students, scaffolding the learning process in a way that makes them feel comfortable. Shor and Freire also contended that, contrary to popular beliefs about giving students intellectual freedom, when students have more freedom, they actually become more self-disciplined. In other words, students learn to control themselves because they want to learn, want to be heard, and they naturally understand that, in order for the dialogic process to work, they have to control themselves.
**Topics of discussion.** Shor and Freire (1987) also posited that “dialogic inquiry is situated in the culture, language, politics, and themes of the students” (p. 18). That is, topics of discussion center around students’ interests and, as students engage in dialogue, they use their lived experiences, personal knowledge, and cultural and linguistic repertories and skills to explore these topics. Shor and Freire wrote, “The liberating teacher has to study this routine scenario in the classroom, see how the socialized limits express themselves concretely, and then decide which themes are the best entry points for critical transformation” (p. 28). This type of dialogic inquiry also involves creating controversy around topics with which students are somewhat familiar or situating unfamiliar topics within social and historical contexts with which students are familiar. The goal of using relevant topics in dialogic inquiry is to transcend given knowledge not just to motivate students to reach a desired end. Shor and Freire (1987) argued that through dialogic instruction, “We gain a distance from the given by abstracting it from its familiar surroundings and studying it in unfamiliar critical ways, until our perceptions of it and society are challenged” (p. 18). Although topics in the dialogic classroom may be familiar to teachers and students, through dialogue, class participants evaluate familiar topics in nuanced ways. They look at the object of study from various perspectives, broadening their own perspective of the object.

**Empirical Studies on Dialogic Teaching**

Many researchers have emphasized the important role of dialogic teaching across the curriculum. The research studies on dialogic teaching can be classified as follows: 1) the teacher’s role in dialogic teaching; 2) characteristics of the various types of dialogic approaches; 3) its impact on student learning; and 4) the tensions and possibilities of dialogic instruction. In
my review of the literature on dialogic teaching, I will use the above categories to argue for its inclusion specifically in high school English classrooms.

**The teacher’s role in dialogic teaching.** One of the areas of focus in the research on dialogic teaching is how teachers develop dialogic instruction (Aukerman, Belfatti, & Santori, 2008; Caughlan, Juzwik, Borsheim-Black, Kelly, & Fine, 2013; Christoph & Nystrand, 2001). In their study, Christoph and Nystrand explored what instructional decisions lead to more dialogic engagement and authentic discussions in the classroom and the challenges teachers may encounter when planning dialogically-organized instruction. They describe dialogically-organized instruction as providing “a public space for student responses, accommodating and promoting the refraction of voices representing differing values, beliefs, and perspectives” (p. 252). Christoph and Nystrand used this description of a dialogic instruction to help characterize the types of discussions that the participating teacher facilitated during the study.

Christoph & Nystrand’s (2001) study took place in an urban ninth grade English classroom. The researchers used methods from ethnography and conversational analysis and collected data over an 18-week period. All class sessions were audio and video recorded and the researchers took field notes during observations. In addition, they conducted interviews with the teacher and self-selected students. The researchers observed the class 51 times. Christoph and Nystrand observed that the teacher typically employed monologic instructional practices and that students were usually expected to recite answers in their verbal and written responses. Out of the 14 class discussions that took place over this 18-week study, the teacher mostly employed a recitation-style of questioning in her class. Four types of questions predominated: 1) “recitation prompts,” 2) “reminder questions,” 3) implied answer questions,” and 4) “guided prediction questions” (Christoph & Nystrand, 2001). There were, however, a number of instances in which
the teacher used discussion questions, in which she took on a more conversational tone, and indicated that she would accept multiple correct answers. She also allowed students more time to deliberate, thus scaffolding student responses by modeling the thinking process for them, and building on their prior knowledge.

The researchers did find that there were occasional “bursts of active dialogism” in the class. Out of the 51 observations, there were 14 discussions involving half the students that totaled 55 minutes and 25 seconds. The longest discussion was 14 minutes and the shortest was 49 seconds. There were two significant instances in which rich, meaningful classroom discussion unfolded. Both discussions were student-led but emerged as a result of student interest in a topic embedded within the lesson. Both discussions were also spontaneous in that the teacher asked a question and was surprised by the enthusiasm with which students responded. Christoph and Nystrand (2001) observed that “these interruptions and off-topic comments actually made learning possible because they bridged the lives of students to the coursework in ways that were meaningful to the students” (p. 276). They also add that dialogic instruction was only possible when the teacher was willing to take risks by giving up some of the control in the classroom and embracing the unpredictability inherent in dialogic learning. Christoph and Nystrand noted that some of the hindrances to dialogically-organized instruction involve not only the fear of taking risks, but also state mandates and students’ unfamiliarity with dialogic classroom interaction.

The findings of this study attribute the kinds of discussions that took place in this class to the teacher’s ability to foster a positive classroom environment and her ability to develop positive, personal relationships with her students. The teacher in this study also showed students that she valued them as individuals and she respected their ideas. As a result of the teacher’s rapport with her class, students felt that contributing to class discussions were “less threatening”
than in their other classes. These findings suggest that dialogic teaching requires the teacher to have the mindset that all students’ voices are an important part of the meaning-making process. Additionally, this study shows that students will participate during the instructional process when they feel that their opinions are valued and respected.

**Characteristics of dialogic approaches.** Several types of instruction are considered to have dialogic qualities, and these approaches have also been described in the research on dialogic teaching (Billings & Fitzgerald, 2002; Boyd & Markarian, 2011; Chisholm & Quillen, 2016; Hennessy, Mercer, & Warwick, 2011; Reznitskaya & Glina, 2013). In an effort to understand how a dialogic approach differs from traditional instruction, Reznitskaya and Glina conducted a research study comparing the dialogic approach, *Philosophy of Children*, to a traditional approach to instruction. They used a mixed-methods design to gather and analyze data for the study, which was conducted in two public schools, and included two fifth-grade classrooms of mostly European American students. The study had a quasi-experimental design in which students were randomly assigned to the two “treatment conditions” – Regular Instruction and *Philosophy of Children*. Interviews were used to gather data about students’ perceptions of each approach. The authors then used content analysis to code the interview data, separating it into “meaningful units” that conveyed specific themes. Based on students’ responses, Reznitskaya and Glina found that dialogic instruction was more enjoyable for most students. However, there were also students who “felt excluded” and others who were uncomfortable with controversy and “disagreement” (p. 61). These findings support the existing research on how dialogic engagement may give students a more active role in their learning, but they also demonstrate the need for teachers to find more ways to navigate conflict and feelings of isolation that arise during class discussion.
A great deal of the research attributes the effectiveness of classroom discussion to the structure of the discussion. However, Boyd and Markarian (2011) maintained that there is no single method of questioning that works all the time for engaging students in rich dialogue. They argue that the teacher’s instructional stance is most important when involving students in authentic dialogue and that “form follows function” (p. 517). For instance, a teacher with a dialogic stance may ask a closed-ended question and students may provide elaborate, evaluative responses. On the other hand, a teacher with a monologic stance may ask an open-ended question and students may reply with short, recitation-style responses. In addition, the teaching practice is more like an art rather than a scientific formula. The teacher must take advantage of moment-by-moment opportunities and use personal knowledge of students to facilitate learning. The authors describe one teacher’s experience and how he took on a dialogic stance with a class of third-grade students as they discussed their personal reading logs. They observed the class for a year, and at the end of the year collected data in the form of interviews, field notes, and audio and video recordings, for their analysis. The unit of analysis for this particular study entailed 7 minutes of talk at the end of the year, in which students “illustrate accumulative achievement” after being exposed to the teacher’s “dialogic stance” for an entire year (p. 522). Each conversational turn of talk was coded for “speaker and communicative function” rather than form (p. 522). Even though there were several examples of the teacher using closed-questioning, the students still engaged in meaningful dialogue with both the teacher and each other, often taking an authoritative role in the discussion, a role traditionally held by the teacher. The researchers attribute the success of student dialogue to the teacher’s dialogic stance. This study demonstrates that during dialogic instruction, teachers must rely on personal knowledge of students, as well as their pedagogical expertise (Alexander, 2006) to facilitate successful
classroom dialogue, in which the students take on an active role the knowledge construction process.

**Dialogic teaching and student learning.** Additionally, many research studies demonstrate the positive impact that dialogic instruction has had on student learning (Barekat & Mohammadi, 2014; Hajhosseiny, 2012; Kuhn & Crowell, 2011; Reznitskaya, Glina, Carolan, Michaud, Rogers, & Sequeira, 2012). For instance, Kuhn and Crowell (2011) investigated classroom talk in a middle school with predominantly Hispanic and African American students in a longitudinal study over the course of three years, and they illustrated how dialogic teaching facilitated students’ argumentation skills. Using an experimental design, the researchers randomly selected two experimental classes and a third comparison class. The authors used an argumentative writing assessment at the beginning of the study and the end of each year to measure students’ ability to argue. Each year, teachers assigned a specific topic that had been piloted to make sure there would be almost equal numbers of students who would agree or disagree. Experimental classes met twice a week for “philosophy class” in which they were taught to debate the assigned topics using various instructional methods, including “electronic dialogues.” The comparison group also met twice a week for philosophy class, participated in debate, and wrote essays every two weeks. At the end of the study, the researchers analyzed both the dialogues and essays in all three groups. They found that the experimental essays not only become longer over time but also offered more evidence over time. In particular, Kuhn and Crowell found that the experimental groups “generated more dual-perspective arguments than the internal comparison group did” (p. 549). Finally, during discussion the students in the experimental groups also posed more questions than the comparison group. The research on dialogic instruction supports the idea that providing students with the opportunities to talk...
through their ideas with others not only increases their participation in the classroom, but also strengthens their abilities to think critically and analytically about subject matter.

**Tensions and possibilities in the dialogic classroom.** The tensions and possibilities of dialogic teaching and learning have also been explored in the existing research (Fecho, Collier, Friese, & Wilson, 2010; Teo, 2012). For example, Fecho et al.’s (2010) study used narrative inquiry to explore three graduate students’ experiences in a class entitled, “Culture, Literacy, and the Classroom.” After the course had concluded, three students were purposively selected to participate in the study. They were then asked to reflect on their writing from the course and produce narratives based on their experiences in the class. To analyze the data, the three participants, Collier, Friese, and Wilson, each read their narratives aloud as the other two participants and the instructor, Fecho, took notes using a narrative inquiry protocol that guided their questions about what the speaker was saying. All four collaboratively analyzed the notes and developed themes from the data. Fecho et al. discussed the tensions within each student and in the class and related these tensions to their own learning experiences in the graduate course and their experiences as teachers. For example, in her narrative Beth recalls a dialogic encounter in the graduate course in which other students’ opinions about tracked classes made her so uncomfortable she left the class angry and in tears. She reflects on the experience, describing classroom dialogue as “far more complex than I could have imagined, nearly dangerous at times.” (p. 435). She almost withdrew from dialogue in future classes, but decided against it. The tension Beth felt during this class forced her to think about her own views and also informed how she would approach dialogue in her own classroom. The authors suggested working “within” tensions rather than “against” them to create richer dialogic possibilities in the classroom. Rather than maintaining one perspective on an issue, students in the dialogic
classroom encounter multiple worldviews that may create tension and discomfort for them, but may lead them to question why the tension and discomfort exists, which, in turn, force them to develop more profound understandings of the world, others, and themselves.

Based on the existing research, dialogic teaching is not only a meaningful instructional practice but also a necessary one. The research places dialogue at the center of authentic learning. Critical literacy researchers also utilize dialogue to create authentic learning experiences.

**Critical Literacy**

Literacy practices in schools involve the critical reading of texts, but Luke (2012) contends that critical reading is different from critical literacy in that critical reading requires students to analyze the underlying assumptions and consider the background of the text, but fails to recognize that texts are shaped by cultural and political views. Critical literacy, on the other hand, centers around political awareness, and places the interpretive authority of a text in the hands of the students, which invariably allows them to use their own lived experiences and funds of knowledge to analyze the underlying themes and cultural, political and historical contexts of a piece of literature.

Luke (2012) wrote, “critical literacy entails an understanding of how texts and discourses can be manipulated to represent and, indeed, alter the world” (p. 9). Some approaches to critical literacy consist of: 1) going beyond canonical literature to include multicultural and popular texts; 2) critiquing the hegemonic discourse present in texts; and 3) recognizing the historical and cultural experiences of marginalized groups (Luke, 2012).

Teaching students literary theories is one way that English teachers have approached critical literacy. When teachers use literary theories, they acknowledge that there are multiples
belief systems that authors have when they write and the readers use to interpret their writing.

Beach and Swiss (2011) summarized the development and evolution of literary theory instruction. The authors categorize the theories as: 1) text based, 2) reader-based, 3) socio-cultural, and 4) New Media. Teaching students critical lenses is an example of “situated pedagogy” as described by Shor and Freire (1987). From there, teachers can then start to incorporate more nuanced ways to help students interrogate texts.

Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) reviewed the literature in which critical literacy has been defined and provided a conceptual framework for teachers who wish to incorporate critical literacy in their classrooms. Table 2 outlines Lewison et al.’s (2002) four dimensions of critical literacy. It describes the ways in which teachers can enact critical literacy practices in their classrooms by 1) disrupting the commonplace, 2) interrogating multiple perspectives, 3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and 4) taking action and promoting social justice.
### Table 2

*Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys’s (2002) Dimensions of Critical Literacy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Disrupting the commonplace</strong></th>
<th><strong>Interrogating multiple perspectives</strong></th>
<th><strong>Focusing on sociopolitical issues</strong></th>
<th><strong>Taking action and promoting social justice</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problematizes all subjects of study.</td>
<td>Reflects on multiple and contradictory perspectives</td>
<td>Goes beyond the personal and attempts to understand the sociopolitical systems to which we belong</td>
<td>Engages in praxis – reflection and action on the world in order to transform it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understands existing knowledge as a historical product</td>
<td>Asks of texts: “Whose voices are heard and whose are missing?”</td>
<td>Challenges the unquestioned legitimacy of unequal power relationships</td>
<td>Uses language to exercise power and question injustice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks how texts position the reader as well as others</td>
<td>Focuses on the voices of silenced or marginalized individuals</td>
<td>Uses literacy to engage in the politics of daily life</td>
<td>Analyzes how language maintains domination and how social action can change existing discourses and/or how they are perceived</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes popular culture and media as a regular part of the curriculum</td>
<td>Examines competing narratives and writes counternarratives to dominant discourses</td>
<td>Redefines literacy as a form of cultural citizenship and politics</td>
<td>Challenging and redefining cultural borders in order to understand others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzes how language shapes identity, constructs cultural discourses, and supports or disrupts the status quo</td>
<td>Makes difference visible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develops the language of critique and hope</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Empirical Studies on Critical Literacy

There is a growing body of research on critical literacy practices. The research studies on critical literacy fit into the following categories: 1) characteristics of critical literacy approaches; 2) professional development of teachers’ critical literacy practices; 3) role of critical literacy in student learning; 4) contexts of critical literacy practices; 5) instructional tools used to teach critical literacy; and 6) tensions and possibilities. In my review of the literature on critical literacy, I use these categories to explain why critical literacy should be a part of the secondary English curriculum. I also address aspects of the literature that need to be explored further.

Characteristics of critical literacy approaches. Several studies described what a critical literacy approach looks like in the classroom (Lasisi, 2015; Locke & Cleary, 2011; Lopez, 2011). After examining several multicultural English classrooms in New Zealand, Locke and Cleary (2011) drew conclusions about what constitutes effective critical literacy approaches. This qualitative study was a part of an action research study in which university-based researchers partnered with several teacher-researchers who used critical literacy approaches in their Year 13 English classrooms in a project called “Teaching Literature in the Multicultural Classroom.” The teacher-researchers in this study engaged Year 13 students in critical literacy practices over two years. The teacher-researchers created reflective profiles at the beginning of the study as baseline data. In addition, the researchers conducted interviews and observations, and also collected questionnaires, student work samples, pre- and post-test data, and assessment task products. Teachers also wrote reflections at the conclusion of the study.

The findings of the study suggest that close reading as a critical literacy practice involves several dimensions, which allows for more exploration of topics. Locke and Cleary (2011) also found that students’ cultural backgrounds played an important role in how they interpreted texts,
and the open-endedness of critical literacy practices allowed students to explore issues that were relevant to them, which increased their interest and active participation during new learning tasks. Additionally, the researchers also suggested that students should be exposed to a range of texts on the same topic in order for them to grasp critical literacy concepts. Finally, this study demonstrates that critical literacy is a powerful practice for students in that it positions texts as “both contestable and resistible” (p. 136). The research that characterizes critical literacy demonstrates that a dialogic approach to critical literacy in which students explore topics that are relevant their own lives increases student participation and learning during classroom instruction.

**Professional development of critical literacy practices.** Riley (2015) and Wolfe (2011) also researched how teachers design and implement critical literacy practices in the classroom. Riley conducted research in a collaborative research project with an Adolescent Literacy Education Study Group to examine the ways that a group of education professionals imagined and designed critical literacy practices. The group consisted of 5 teachers who met twice a month over the course of a year. During the first half of the study, they met to discuss texts related to critical literacy. During the second half of the study, they each designed an inquiry of teaching practices on critical literacy.

The data collected for the study consisted of meeting transcripts, interviews, artifacts, field notes, and research journal entries. The researchers analyzed the data using an ethnographic approach and “ongoing and recursive analysis” (Riley, 2015, p. 420). They also regularly met with participants to support interpretations of the data. The findings of this study outline how teachers envision critical literacy in their classroom and the instructional practices that they think will foster critical literacy. In their group discussion, these teachers also indicated that their positioning in the classroom and in the school also played important roles when trying to
implement critical literacy practices in the classroom. For example, one of the teachers in the study already had a reputation as a leader in the school, so she was able to take more “risks” in her classroom because of this positioning. According to Riley, teachers who wish to implement critical literacy practices in the classroom must do so in intentional and meaningful ways. They must first evaluate their own critical literacy practices because their own ways of thinking about the world play an integral role when implementing critical literacy practices in the classroom. Educators who advocate for critical literacy in their schools must also understand how different teachers are positioned to be able to take certain risks in the classroom and then cultivate an environment in which teachers feel comfortable taking such risks. Finally, inherent in critical literacy is the struggle for meaning through dialogue with others. Therefore, critical literacy instruction must be a collaborative effort that encompasses the diverse perspectives of educators.

**Critical literacy and student learning.** The student’s role in critical literacy practices is also discussed in the literature (Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012; Lesley, 2008). According to Lesley (2008) when teachers provide students with opportunities to engage with personally-relevant texts centered around social justice, students take on a more active role in critical discussions of literature. In a study of a critical literacy approach used in a voluntary literacy groups with students who were labeled “at-risk” of dropping out of school for various reasons, Lesley collected observational analytic notes, audio recordings of weekly sessions, interviews, and student writing samples to understand students’ social identities and the role of these identities in constructing meaning as students read various texts with themes of social critique and justice. When students encountered the poetry of Tupac Shakur, a popular rapper, they became more active in discussion and used non-dominant forms of discourse to “resist” Dominant discourse through critical literacy practices. Students demonstrated their abilities to think critically and
analytically when presented with culturally relevant texts, given an authentic purpose for learning, and provided an opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue.

**Contexts and influences of critical literacy practices.** Context inevitably plays a key role in critical literacy practices. Johnson (2011) delineated the classroom context in which critical literacy practices emerge and, the instructional decisions that may stifle such practices as they come into play. Simmons (2016) explained how systemic functional linguistics can serve as a tool to help students enact critical literacy practices in the classroom.

Further, Dorman (2012) discussed the tensions and possibilities in classrooms that seek to foster critical literacy. In the study, the author traces the journey of three teachers who graduated from an Urban Teacher Education Program and accepted positions in urban schools and the approaches they adopted to teach students to become critically aware. The study wanted to explore how prepared these teachers were to address the needs of diverse students in helping them become critically literate. The researcher in the study used qualitative case study methodology to collect data from the three teachers over a six-month period. They coded field notes, interviews, and video transcripts from observations and developed themes. Finally, Dorman (2012) used “descriptive case stories” from each teacher to present the results. After each vignette, the author provided an analysis of the data and occasionally connected the data to existing literature. The researcher also gave a detailed description of the themes that emerged from the data and connected them to the existing literature. In her discussion of the findings, Dorman’s study supports much of the previous literature on addressing the needs of diverse learners in that teaching is more of an art than a science. She states, “There is not just one ‘right way’ to go about having these discussions” (p. 23). Each teacher has to find what works best for his/her own class. She also noted that having critical discussions inevitably requires teachers to
come out of their “comfort zones.” Ultimately, the author concluded that the most important factor in each teacher successfully appropriating critical awareness in their teaching practice was “teacher identity” and “personal biography.” The teachers who had experiences or personal knowledge with social injustice were able to navigate critical discussions more easily than those who had not. The study demonstrates how teacher preparation programs could possibly provide teachers with the personal knowledge to address issues of diversity and social justice in urban schools.

The research on critical literacy in the secondary English classroom represent the possibilities of engaging all students, especially CLD students, in authentic and meaningful dialogue about texts. The research on critical literacy demonstrates that a dialogic approach to critical literacy makes learning relevant to students’ lives, encourages student participation, increases learning opportunities, and prepares students to be productive citizens in a democratic society who understand how to advocate for social justice.

**Empirical studies on dialogic approaches to critical literacy**

Dialogic teaching and critical literacy are both valuable practices that can advance the learning of all students. In her work, Aukerman (2012) advocated for a more dialogic approach to critical literacy. The author categorized popular approaches for teaching critical literacy as 1) *outcome*, in which the teacher orients critical literacy practices toward a particular perspective or social action predetermined by the teacher; 2) *procedure*, in which the teacher focuses on equipping students with “analytic tools for critiquing texts” (p. 44); and, 3) *personal response*, in which the students read texts that the teacher feels will evoke particular responses and asks students to react to the texts. The first two instructional approaches to critical literacy typically situate the teacher as the authority while the last approach situates students as authorities but
does not always result in critical readings of texts. Aukerman argued for “critical literacy for
dialogic engagement,” which involves decentering the text and the teacher as the sole
interpretive authority and creating an “intentional space for the unfolding of social heteroglossia”
(p. 46). In her study, Aukerman described a spontaneous interaction between students during a
classroom discussion in which students demonstrated the potential to use their own interpretive
authority to critically read and analyze texts. Aukerman characterized this dialogic engagement
toward critical literacy as “powerful because it potentially evokes conversations in which
students have a profoundly personal stake” (p. 47). While the class discussion in the study
demonstrated the potential for a dialogic approach to critical literacy, the author suggested that
further research needs to be done on this topic. By sharing interpretive authority with students,
teachers can potentially create classroom environments in which students have vested interests in
classroom topics and, through dialogue with the teacher and other students, learn to critically
analyze texts, resulting in a depth of understanding of themselves, others, and the world around
them.

Few researchers have examined classroom dialogue and its relationship to critical literacy
practices (Brown, 2011; Desai & Marsh, 2005). Brown used Freire’s cultural circles with five
African American female students outside of school to explore social issues presented in various
texts that the students selected. Freire’s cultural circle model involves a small group of people
who engage in critical discussions that lead to social action. Brown designed cultural circles
around culturally-relevant texts described as “urban fiction” that the students chose themselves.
The participants read each book independently, and then wrote summaries, analyses, and
questions for each book before meeting with the cultural circle. The findings from this study
raised “more questions than answers” (p. 8). The researcher felt that although students felt
empowered as intellectuals of color and inspired to become social activists, they remained largely “uncritical” of the mainstream idea of success that Freire’s cultural circles aimed to disrupt. Brown writes, “In these cultural circles, students were able to identify and critique oppression, but did not use this knowledge to turn against the ‘superstructure’” (p. 9). For example, the researcher noticed that students recognized that there were “superstructures” within society that oppressed certain groups, like women, people of color, and the working class, but they still made statements about how they believed they would rise above this oppression and achieve “success” by going to college and getting high-paying jobs. They critiqued the system but did not express the need for social action. The findings of this study bring up important questions to consider about a dialogic approach to critical literacy. A dialogic approach to critical literacy does not present clear-cut, step-by-step strategies for teachers to implement nor does it delineate specific end results for instruction.

**Contributions of the Present Study**

The literature review presented here represents terrain that has been covered by other researchers exploring dialogic teaching and critical literacy. While many feet have walked this terrain and many eyes have seen the affordances and constraints of dialogic teaching and critical literacy both together and separately, there is still more ground to be covered, there are still more perspectives to be explored, and there are still many questions to be answered. In my review of the literature, I found few studies that explored dialogic teaching and critical literacy together. Although many studies demonstrate that conversation is an important aspect of critical literacy, Aukerman (2012) contended that these conversations are not always dialogic in nature.

In this study, I demonstrate how teachers can facilitate a dialogic approach to critical literacy by applying the principles of dialogic teaching and exercising their knowledge of
students and pedagogical expertise during class discussions (Alexander, 2006; Shor & Freire, 1987). I also show that the objective of combining dialogic teaching and critical literacy is not to help students reach a predetermined outcome but to help students become more socially conscious and critically aware while reading texts and discussing real-life issues. As a result, a dialogic approach to critical literacy is ostensibly “messier” than traditional approaches (Aukerman, 2012). However, in my experiences with class dialogue in which students have more interpretive authority, I have found students exceeded my expectations because the discussion was guided by students’ personal interest and curiosity. Finally, researchers who have investigated dialogic teaching and critical literacy practices in the classroom have shown that the advantages of dialogic teaching and critical literacy practices, used separately and together, outweigh the risks. Although monologic instruction is a necessary component in all teaching, when teachers present academic knowledge to students without subsequently providing opportunities for students to critically explore topics of interest embedded in the curriculum and evaluate issues that are important to them, the learning experience is less meaningful for students. Most importantly, CLD students with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and worldviews can have equal access to academic content through a dialogic approach to critical literacy. In this study, I will contribute to the existing literature on dialogic teaching and critical literacy by combining the principles of both concepts during instruction to facilitate the learning of CLD students. In the following chapter, I describe the methodology used to investigate an urban high school English classroom.
3 METHODOLOGY

Before I began this dissertation, I had a conversation with a teacher, Jahaun Cason (pseudonym) about the best ways to teach students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds at a school that had been labeled “underperforming” for several years. Even though her students were intelligent and talented in many different ways, their funds of knowledge were placed in the margins of classrooms that centered around standardized assessments mandated by the school district. Classroom instruction, designed to help them reach curricular standards aligned with these high-stakes assessments, often failed to hold students’ interest to develop their critical and independent thinking. Ms. Cason and I spoke about how many of her students seemed to come alive when they engaged in class debates. I asked Ms. Cason if she would be interested in using a dialogic approach to critical literacy in her classroom, and she excitedly agreed. I then designed a qualitative study to investigate dialogic teaching and critical literacy in Ms. Cason’s classroom. This chapter describes the methodology used for this research study. It outlines the research design, guiding principles, and methods used to investigate a dialogic approach to critical literacy. Bloome, Chapman, and Freebody (2011) asserted that research methodologies should reflect the complexity of ELA classrooms, the multiplicity of voices present, and the fact that individuals can change over time and across contexts. I chose ethnography as my methodology because I wanted to understand the culture of the teacher’s classroom and the diverse perspectives of class members as they engaged in critical dialogue over an extended period of time.

I used a Participatory Action Research (PAR) orientation throughout this study because I wanted to work alongside the teacher to understand the issues she and her students encountered in the classroom and how a dialogic approach to critical literacy might address these issues. I
was eager to examine the potential of critical dialogue in an urban high school English classroom because as space with the diverse perspectives of CLD students is one in which dialogic instruction could potentially thrive. Social constructionism guided my thinking throughout this study, and by using a PAR orientation to research, I was able to socially construct knowledge with the teacher about her classroom practices.

Sociocultural and critical literacy theories also guided this study as I investigated classroom dialogue and the context in which this dialogue took place. I used ethnography as my methodology to explore the culture of Ms. Cason’s classroom. Ethnography is a methodology used to systematically investigate “the social and cultural life of communities, institutions, and other settings” (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010, p. 1). I lived the experience with the teacher and her students and saw firsthand how the dialogic process unfolded. I also had the opportunity to spend extended time with participants, and my interviews with them gave me certain insights about classroom activity. Using an ethnographic perspective, I described the classroom environment, the members of the class, their relationships with one another, and the role that their experiences and perspectives might have had during class dialogue. To address the research questions guiding this study, I collected and analyzed the following ethnographic data: 1) lesson plans; 2) observational field notes; 3) audio recordings of classroom discussions; 4) student assignments; and 5) audio recordings of interviews.

Because I was concerned with classroom discourse, I used methods from discourse analysis. Gee (2014) explained, “when we speak or write, we simultaneously say something, do something, and are something” (p. 20). Through discourse analysis methods, I was able to better understand how language in the classroom was enacted in these various ways. Discourse analysis allowed me to systematically study the way the teacher and students used language to construct
knowledge in the classroom, and how they used language to describe their classroom experiences.

**Research Design**

This dissertation study began in Spring 2016. The first PAR cycle took place during the Spring of 2016, the second PAR cycle took place during the Fall of 2016, and the third PAR cycle took place in the Spring of 2017. Using a PAR orientation, the participating teacher and I planned lessons that employed a dialogic approach to critical literacy. I transcribed, coded, and analyzed the data using ethnographic and discourse analysis methods. At the end of the first two semesters, the teacher and I revisited the study and planned for the third and final semester. I report findings from the all three PAR cycles for this dissertation study to illustrate the teacher’s instructional approach over time. However, I focus the majority of my attention on the final semester. Table 3 illustrates how I designed the research study to explore answers to my research questions.

Table 3

**Research Design**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Orientation</th>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Why Data Source Was Chosen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participatory Action Research (PAR)</td>
<td>How did a teacher use dialogic teaching to foster critical literacy?</td>
<td>• Lesson Plans</td>
<td>Lesson plans illustrated the resources the teacher used to foster critical dialogue in her classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To what extent were the goals of critical literacy achieved?</td>
<td>• Observations • Transcripts of class discussions • Student assignments</td>
<td>Observations allowed me to see how the teacher and students engaged in critical dialogue while transcripts of class discussions and student assignments demonstrated the extent to which critical literacy was represented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How did the teacher’s perspectives shape instruction?</td>
<td>• Teacher interviews</td>
<td>Teacher interviews revealed how the teacher defined a dialogic approach to critical literacy and possible influences on the teacher’s beliefs and actions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Reason and Bradbury (2008) described action research (AR) as “an orientation to inquiry” rather than a methodology (p. 1). In AR people work collaboratively in an attempt to solve problems in their community, organization, or institution. The AR process occurs in repeated cycles: The first cycle, the action cycle, is when the researchers enact a practice and then collect data. The second cycle, the reflection cycle, occurs when the researchers interpret the data and plan the next steps. The cycles are then repeated, as necessary. As a result of this ongoing process, researchers are better able to understand the problems they encounter and thus provide “practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people” (p. 4). The ultimate goal of AR is what Reason and Bradbury describe as the “flourishing” of individuals and their communities. In other words, individuals work towards creating social conditions in their community that benefit all of its members. AR can potentially take qualitative research beyond explaining the experiences of participants who encounter real-world problems and collaboratively devise real solutions that are informed by research with participants and not just about participants. In this study, information gathered during the first two PAR cycles during Spring 2016 and Fall 2016 informed the PAR cycle of Spring 2017.

The hierarchical relationship in traditional research typically positions the researcher as the knowledge authority and participants as subjects to be studied. In PAR, an extension of AR, this hierarchical relationship between researcher and participant(s) is broken down, and the researcher adopts the role of a “facilitator” who lives the research experience alongside participants. Glassman and Erdem (2014) explained that the objective of PAR is “to participate in the realities and experiences of the community and collaborate, learn, and move toward social change in order to improve the human condition” (p. 214). Researchers using a PAR orientation
believe the knowledge of participants is a critical component in understanding the research situation, the interpretation of research data, and exploring solutions to problems that affect the participants and their communities.

For this study, I used Transformative PAR because my goal was not just to explore the issues with teaching and learning, but to provide solutions for teaching CLD students in a way that honors their funds of knowledge and makes them feel empowered. Transformative PAR is a genre of PAR, inspired by Paolo Freire, whose work influenced several anti-colonialist research projects across the globe (Glassman & Erdem, 2014; Hall, 1992). Some of Freire’s key ideas that influenced PAR were that 1) students should play a part in the direction of their education; 2) the voices of the research participants should be prominent throughout the entire research process; and 3) the researcher and the participants are equal partners in PAR. In addition, Freire posed that PAR should be a “cyclical process of discovery and realization” (Glassman & Erdem, 2014, p. 209). In Transformative PAR, the researcher and participants collaboratively conduct research, analyze data, and apply solutions to problems in repeated cycles, all in an effort to enact social change. In other words, they examine why problems exist and what they can do to solve them. According to Glassman and Erdem (2014), three concepts co-occur within this genre of PAR:

1. *Participation/Vivencia*, in which the researcher “lives” the experience;

2. *Action/Praxis*, in which the researcher and participants act upon the conditions they are experiencing in order to change them; and

3. *Research/Conscientization*, in which knowledge about the problems and possible solutions are constructed. (pp. 212-214)

In this PAR-oriented study, I aimed to create opportunities for CLD students to practice critical literacy by participating in classroom dialogue about social issues. The participating
school had been classified as underperforming for several years and their graduation rates and test scores had been consistently low. The participating teacher in this study agreed to provide more opportunities for her students to have critical dialogues in an effort to increase their interest, propel their learning forward, and provide them with the knowledge and skills to effect change in their communities. I observed the teacher’s classroom over the course of three school semesters to explore how the teacher and students experienced a dialogic approach to critical literacy. Finally, I consulted with the teacher at the end of each PAR cycle to discuss the classroom experience and how we could modify the dialogic teaching and critical literacy to meet the needs of students in future classes.

Sociocultural theories of teaching and learning guided each PAR cycle in this study, and social interaction played a pivotal role during classroom instruction and also in constructing knowledge about the classroom. The process of teaching critical literacy requires the teacher to build upon students’ prior knowledge, to show them different ways of seeing the world, and to impel them to take action. This process takes place in the zone of proximal development, which involves interaction between the teacher, the more knowledgeable person, and her students (Vygotsky, 1978). The teacher was also using a dialogic approach, so the traditional, hierarchical relationship between the teacher and students was dismantled as the teacher shared interpretive authority with her students. Although the teacher was more knowledgeable of subject matter, she was open to looking at material from different perspectives, or re-learning it, with her students (Alexander, 2006; Shor & Freire, 1987). Throughout this study, I focused on the classroom teacher and the process through which she became more critically literate through dialogue with me, the researcher, and students over the course of the three PAR cycles. I was interested in
understanding how this dialogic approach to critical literacy might be used to interrogate dominant Discourses in the classroom.

Throughout this study, dialogue was at the center of classroom instruction. It was also central to the entire PAR cycle as the teacher and I: designed and implemented interventions, collected and analyzed data, and reported research findings. Guided by a social constructionist epistemology, I aimed to collaboratively construct knowledge with the teacher throughout this study. I also used student narratives to support our interpretations of research data. Essentially, the teacher’s and students’ perspectives are reflected in the research, not just my views, resulting in a PAR-oriented study that is deeply rooted in the reality of the research participants.

Figure 4 illustrates how I used PAR, ethnography, and discourse analysis methods to collect and analyze data for this study. It also shows how I situated the methods within sociocultural theories of learning and critical literacy frameworks.
Figure 4. PAR Cycle

Ethnography

The cultural context of the study was particularly important because it involved an issue in a community represented by a single classroom. As mentioned earlier, the participating school, located in an urbanized area and enrolling mostly Latino/a and Black students, had been underperforming for several years. This created a school climate in which teachers and students were concerned about high-stakes test scores and often focused instruction on helping students pass mandatory exams. However, Ms. Cason sought to employ instructional practices that were not simply test-driven and to forge a space in which students could engage in meaningful dialogue about issues that were relevant to them. This space was not only influenced by the
historical and political context of the school, but also the sociocultural, historical, and political backgrounds of each member of the class. As a result, I used an ethnographic approach to collect and analyze research data about the culture of the classroom. Spradley (1979) defined ethnography as “the search for the parts of a culture and their relationships as conceptualized by informants” (p. 93). As a result, the ethnographer has the unique task of understanding participants’ perceptions of their culture. LeCompte and Preissle (2010) explained, “ethnographic researchers learn through systematic observation in the ‘field’ by interviewing and carefully recording what they see, hear, and observe people doing while also learning the meanings that people attribute to what they do and the things they make” (p. 2). In ethnography, the conclusions that the researcher draws about a particular cultural group and their practices cannot be based solely on what the researcher perceives. The ethnographer also has to know who the participants are and how they perceive themselves and the world around them. That is, the ethnographer has to depend on participants’ interpretations of cultural experiences and their understanding of these experiences.

Ethnographers posit that “human behavior and the ways in which people construct and make meaning of their worlds and their lives are highly variable and locally specific” (LeCompte & Preissle, 2010, p. 2). In other words, the meanings that people construct are based on specific sociocultural and historical contexts, and these meanings may also change over time. The ethnographer pays careful attention to the context in which meanings are constructed. During this study, I used ethnographic methods to understand the sociocultural and historical contexts that have shaped the meanings that the teacher and students had about the external world and also how they constructed meanings within the context of the dialogic classroom.
**Discourse Analysis**

Discourse analysis methods were useful while I examined transcripts of class discussions and interviews. Discourse analysts examine language in an effort to answer specific questions about how language is structured, acquired, used, or relates to a person’s identity (Johnstone, 2008). The earliest forms of discourse analysis studied language in a decontextualized manner, focusing on “isolated, abstract, invented sentences” (van Dijk, 2007, p. 1). In modern discourse analysis, researchers began to look outward and analyzed the contexts that influenced language development and use, in addition to the variations of language. Because sociocultural and critical literacy theories guided this study, I used modern discourse analysis methods to understand classroom discourse and the contexts that shaped it.

In contrast to the early forms of discourse studies, modern discourse analysis looks at discourse in context rather than as isolated utterances. One influential text was Hymes’s (1964) collection of writings on language, which laid the groundwork for *the ethnography of communication*, in which the social, cultural, and historical contexts of language were taken into consideration during the analysis of discourse (van Dijk, 1985). Discourse analysis also became a popular approach across disciplines. Eventually, discourse analysts began to focus their attention on classrooms and other institutions, following the research conducted on classroom discourse by Sinclair and Coulthard in 1975 (van Dijk, 2007). Discourse represents the values, beliefs, and worldviews of various cultures. Discourse analysis has been a useful method for understanding the cultural values, beliefs, and worldviews that shape and are shaped by discourse in different contexts. For this study, I used *ethnography of communication* (EC), also known as *ethnography of speaking*, as a specific discourse analysis method for framing
classroom discussion. I also used *critical discourse analysis* to investigate the extent to which critical literacy was used in the design and implementation of classroom instruction.

**Ethnography of communication.** The goal for EC “is to learn what members of a culture know about how to ‘make sense’ out of experience and how they communicate those interpretations” (Schiffrin, 1994, p. 141). I wanted to know how a teacher and her students made sense of subject material as they engaged in critical dialogue. According to Schiffrin, an ethnographer studying discourse looks for patterns, classifies these patterns into groups, and then tries to understand the relationships between the various components of communication. Hymes (1974) placed these components of communication into eight groups, which comprise what he entitled the SPEAKING model. The components of the SPEAKING model are sometimes interrelated and sometimes have individual meanings. Table 4 outlines the eight units of the SPEAKING model.

Table 4

*Hymes’s (1974) SPEAKING Model*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S</th>
<th>setting, scene</th>
<th>physical circumstances; subjective definition of an occasion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>participants</td>
<td>speaker/sender/addressor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>hearer/receiver/audience/addressee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>ends</td>
<td>purposes and goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>act sequence</td>
<td>message form and content (turn-taking)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>key</td>
<td>tone, manner (feelings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>instrumentalities</td>
<td>channel (verbal, nonverbal, physical)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>forms of speech drawn from community repertoire (slang)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>norms of interaction and interpretation</td>
<td>specific properties attached to speaking (behavior)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>genre</td>
<td>interpretation of norms within cultural belief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>textual categories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The SPEAKING model served as an “aid to being systematic” (Cameron, 2001, p. 57) while I explored classroom discourse. It provided me with a heuristic, or “an exploratory device” (p. 57), to describe the classroom context, teacher and students, learning experiences, classroom dialogue, and how these things related to one another. Cameron maintained that the EC is not a “recipe” that follows a specific order nor does the researcher have to “force” the data to fit into each category (p. 57). The writer explained that if research data does not fit into a category, the model can be used to help the researcher think about why they do not fit. In the classroom, EC can be used as a tool to describe classroom discourse and also explore the context and why certain speech events take place. Cameron also noted that researchers using EC in the classroom may analyze how classroom talk is used to represent social identity, mitigate cultural differences, and demonstrate learning.

Duff (2002) suggested that by using EC, the researcher can examine discourse at both a macro and micro level. On the macro level, the researcher could explore the cultural practices that play out in the classroom, and on the micro level the researcher is able to examine the details of classroom interaction. In this way, EC delineates how the social context causes tension or affords teachers and students with authentic learning opportunities. By using EC to analyze classroom discourse throughout this study, I was able to describe what was happening in classroom dialogue, interpret how context influenced the ideas presented during dialogic encounters, and explain how classroom dialogue may have contributed to participants’ future thoughts and actions.

**Critical discourse analysis.** I also used *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) to explain the discourse in and about the classroom. Fairclough (2015) wrote “language is centrally involved in power, and struggles for power” (p. 51). When using a dialogic approach to learning, the teacher
shared interpretive authority with her students as they studied subject matter together. As they
engaged in dialogue, the discourse types that the teacher and students drew upon reflected
particular ideologies. I used CDA to examine these ideologies and to explain the power struggles
represented in contrasting ideologies.

According to Fairclough (2015), the social order within society can be established in a
naturalized manner, in which members of society consider all possible options and create
structures and systems that benefit everyone. The social order can also be determined in a
synthetic manner, in which members of society construct structures and systems in society based
on particular ideologies that may or may not benefit all. In many cases, members of dominant
social groups, who have the most powerful social tools such as money and political influence,
construct the social order and the orders of discourse within society. Using CDA, I examined the
contrasting ideologies represented in classroom discourse and used these moments of conflict
and tension to explain how the discourse reflected the power struggles within the classroom and
the broader context of society.

CDA has its roots in critical applied linguistics, and there are many different approaches
to the method. According to Fairclough and Wodak (1997), CDA is guided by several
foundational principles. First, CDA is a systematic methodological tool for studying power
relationships and social problems within society. It does this by locating and describing the
discourse that constructs particular ideologies in society and within cultures. Next, the critical
discourse analyst examines discourses and how they shape and are shaped by sociocultural,
political, and economic contexts, paying particular attention to inequities that may be
demonstrated by discourses. Finally, the primary goal of CDA is to gain a better understanding
of the relationship between language and power in society.
Rogers (2004) maintained that researchers using CDA are “critical” in different ways. Some critical discourse analysts specifically examine power relations, others study the relationship between the form and function of language in an effort to describe how some discourse patterns are privileged over others, and still others explore social problems with the intent to provide solutions. Additionally, Rogers pointed out that the analysis of discourse can be conducted in a number of ways. The author explained that “CDA is both a theory and a method” used to help researchers “describe, interpret, and explain” the relationship between language and society (p. 2). In this study, I used Fairclough’s (2015) three-tiered model of CDA that describes, interprets, and explains discourse on the situational, institutional, and societal levels. Figure 5 illustrates Fairclough’s CDA framework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Analysis</th>
<th>Focus of Analysis</th>
<th>Domain of Analysis</th>
<th>Constraints</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Situation</td>
<td>Contents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation</td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Society</td>
<td>Subjects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5. Fairclough’s (2015) CDA Framework

Fairclough (2015) categorized the social conditions in which discourse takes place as: 1) the social situation, 2) the social institution, and 3) society as a whole (pp. 57-58). The social situation comprises the immediate, local context in which discourse takes place. For example,
the social situation was discourse in the teacher’s classroom. The social institution represents the broader context in which the discourse is situated. For this study, the social institution was the school and the school district located in a metropolitan area in the Southeast region of the United States. Finally, society as a whole represents the even broader context that influences the social institution. The context of society was reflected in the social orders and subject positions that class members reinforced through their talk. For each of these dimensions of discourse, there is also a corresponding stage of analysis. On the situational level, I described the text, which for this study included transcripts of class discussions and interviews. On the institutional level, I interpreted the interaction between members of the class. On the societal level, I explained how the classroom talk both was shaped by and also shaped the broader context of society. Lastly, at each stage of analysis, I examined the affordances and constraints on content, relations, and subject positions in society. The content entailed the knowledge the teacher and students constructed or evaluated during class discussions. The relations involved the interaction between the teacher and students. The subject positions represented how participants saw themselves and others within the context of society.

Description. Fairclough’s (2015) model for CDA begins with a description of a specific text, located at the situational level. Texts may include documents, interviews, group discussions, visual art, video, or gestures. In this study, I used CDA to describe teacher interviews, class discussions, and student assignments. At this stage in the analysis, the researcher using Fairclough’s CDA framework describes the “formal properties of the text” (p. 58). The formal properties include vocabulary, grammatical features, and textual structures.
**Vocabulary.** For vocabulary, I used Fairclough’s (2015) model to describe words that could be ideologically contested, words that frequently co-occurred, rewordings, and overwordings.

**Grammar.** For grammatical features, I used Fairclough’s framework to describe how the sentence structure focused on subjects, actions, events, or attributions. I looked at whether sentences were active or passive and if agency and processes were clear or hidden. I also looked at whether sentences were positive or negative and if speakers made ideological assumptions about their listeners. I described whether speakers used words like “may,” “might,” “should,” “can,” or “can’t” that illustrated the speakers’ authority in relation to the “truth.” I also described how speakers used linking verbs to present their ideas as facts. I described how pronouns were used to speak for others, establish solidarity, or decrease impersonality. I described how conjunctions were used to illustrate the relationship between two ideas. Finally, I described how grammar provided affordances and placed constraints on content, relations, and subject positions.

**Textual structures.** For textual structures, I used Fairclough’s (2015) CDA framework to describe the turn-taking systems speakers used during class dialogue, how speakers controlled topics, and speakers’ purposes for summarizing others’ responses. I also looked at larger-scale textual structures typical for specific discourse types.

**Interpretation.** Next, Fairclough’s (2015) model continues with an interpretation of the social interactions that take place on the institutional level and their relationship to the local domain. At this level, the researcher focuses on how texts are (re)produced and interpreted within institutions such as government agencies, news outlets, businesses, and schools and how these institutions “enable and constrain the local domain” (Fairclough, 2015, p. 7). I used this CDA model to interpret how the school and classroom contexts influenced classroom talk, how
speakers utilized various discourse types during discussions, and how discourse types may have changed over time.

First, when examining the role of context during classroom discussions, I interpreted how the social order influenced the institutional setting of the school and then how the institution influenced the situational setting of the classroom. I interpreted what was taking place in the classroom, who was involved and in what capacities, and finally the role that language played in achieving specific purposes. Second, I also interpreted the discourse types that speakers drew upon during class discussions. Interpreting discourse types required that I recognize how participants demonstrate knowledge of different discourses. Lastly, I examined how speakers responded to interpretations of context and discourse types differently and how their responses may have evolved over time.

**Explanation.** Finally, during the last stage of Fairclough’s (2015) CDA, the researcher examines the discourses on the societal level and explains their relationship to the local and institutional domains. At this stage in the analysis, I used the framework to interpret the social determinants, ideologies, and social effects of classroom discourse. When interpreting social determinants, I examined how power relations in the classroom, in the school, and within society influenced classroom discourse. Next, I interpreted how speakers’ discourse reflected particular ideologies. Finally, I examined the social effects of the power struggles within classroom discourse, and if the result of these struggles sustained or disrupted existing power relations.

**Research Setting and Participants**

This research study took place in a mid-sized city in the Southeast region of the U.S. The school district is one of the largest in the region, enrolling over 100,000 students during the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years. During the 2015-2016 school year, there were 39%
White, 32% Black, 20% Hispanic, 5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 4% Multiracial, and <1% American Indian/Alaskan Native students. During the 2016-2017 school year, demographic data was similar to the previous year with a 1% increase in its Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander populations. There were 38% White, 31% Black, 21% Hispanic, 6% Asian/Pacific Islander, 4% Multiracial, and <1% American Indian/Alaskan Native. As defined by NCES (Kena et al., 2016), the district is in an urbanized area based on its size and proximity to a large city. I use pseudonyms for the people and places included in this study to protect the identity of participants in this study.

School

The high school in which the study took place, Southeast High School, was a rather large urban, Title I school with approximately 2,000 students in grades 9 through 12 enrolled during the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years. The school consisted of mostly Hispanic (59%) and Black (32%) students during both 2015-2016 school years.

The school had also been labeled as an underperforming school and was being monitored by school district officials throughout the duration of this study. In the middle of the Spring semester of 2017, only 30% of seniors were eligible to walk in the graduation ceremony. The principal even held a special assembly for seniors in which he explained the importance of working hard in their classes so that they could graduate. The school’s administration also placed a heavy emphasis on improving test scores and increasing the graduation rate. There were at least three school days during PAR cycle 3 that the entire school’s focus was on improving students’ performance in the classes they were failing or preparing them for an upcoming high-stakes exam. Ms. Cason reported that many of her students skipped school on those days. In addition, when Ms. Cason offered opportunities for students to come in before or after school to work on
improving their grades, she lamented that only one or two of her Latino/a students who were already passing showed up each time.

At the end of the 2015-2016, there was also talk of the school increasing the number of technical courses to prepare students for jobs immediately after high school; however, community leaders protested this decision and rather than include more technical classes, the district decided to house a magnet program. At the time of the study, the main school building housed the majority of students and was the oldest building in the district. The school was comprised of several new and old buildings that are spread out across the school’s large campus.

By the end of the third PAR cycle, school officials had bought the neighboring land and had begun construction for the school’s new magnet department.

In the front of the main building, there was parking for administrators, office staff, and visitors, and a police vehicle was usually parked on the curb. The school receptionist was always warm and friendly towards visitors, as was the principal of the school. Walking down the hallway of the main building, a visitor could see brightly colored lockers, pictures of the “star” faculty members, teachers, and students of years past, students’ artwork and classroom projects, along with flyers of upcoming and past school events.

SHS was on a block schedule, so students attended four classes each semester for 90-minutes at a time, except for half-credit courses that lasted 45 minutes. In between classes, racially diverse students filled the hallways and the outdoor “breezeway,” a covered walkway to the other buildings, with their linguistically diverse chatter and playful banter, speaking in Spanish, MAE, AAVE, and other regional dialects. Occasionally, after their lunch period, I saw large groups of students walking off campus. Many teachers typically stood outside their doors ready to welcome students for the next class.
Many of the students in the school spoke multiple languages and dialects. Out of the students in Ms. Cason’s classes, for example, over half of them spoke at least two languages, including Spanish, French, Vietnamese, Khmer, and Mam, to name a few. However, the participating teacher insisted that students use SAE in their work and sometimes during discussions. She believed it was important to equip them with the linguistic tools to access social goods in the broader context of U.S. society.

It also seemed the behavioral norms of the Latino/a students were aligned more closely with the behavioral expectations of the school faculty. For instance, the teacher often commented on how well-behaved and hard-working her Latino/a students were in comparison to her Black students, who seemed “apathetic” about their education and were often more social than their Latino/a classmates during instruction. In one of our formal interviews, Ms. Cason stated, “I have majority Latinos, but they’re quiet. That’s because the African American boys that I have are very… assertive.” The school’s climate played a role in understanding the academic and behavioral expectations of students and how these expectations ultimately shaped classroom instruction.

**Teacher**

The teacher participating in this study, Jahaun Cason, was purposefully selected based on her willingness to use a dialogic approach to critical literacy. She was a 59-year-old Black female, who had a Master’s degree and, at the time of the study, had 19 years of teaching experience. She had several responsibilities at SHS besides teaching students, which included attending data team meetings, professional development trainings, Title I meetings, serving as a teacher leader, and being the chair for an advisement committee for graduation. During the Spring of 2017, she was also given an extended day assignment, which meant she taught an
additional class during her planning period in exchange for overtime pay. New teachers often frequented her room, and she shared tips to help them throughout the year. She also volunteered for special school improvement committees.

Ms. Cason had specific behavioral expectations of everyone who entered her room. For example, if students arrived to her class late, she required them to say, “Excuse me, may I come in?” before she would permit them to enter the room. She also corrected teachers who entered her room during instruction and required them to ask permission to enter. During the last PAR cycle, she placed a sign on her door explaining to all how they should enter her classroom. The sign read:

ATTENTION ALL WHO ENTER THIS HOUSE:

“We are in training” Please knock before entering our house. Say, “Excuse me, may I enter?” You will then enter after you are given permission! WHEN YOU KNOW BETTER, YOU DO BETTER! NOW, YOU KNOW BETTER!

She also had different behavioral expectations for the girls and the boys in her classroom. For instance, once when a female student asked another female student to throw an object across the room she reprimanded them, “No, no, no, no. Ladies don’t throw things.”

Ms. Cason had been teaching at SHS for over 10 years at the time of the study and had established a good reputation with many of the students. During my time in her classroom, it was apparent that her students respected her. I observed that some of her students even referred to her as “Mama Cason” and visited her room in between classes. She kept food in her room for students who were hungry and once brought one of her female students clothes and shoes because other students were making fun of the holes in her clothes. She had zero tolerance for
bullying of any kind and worked to create a classroom environment in which everyone felt safe and comfortable to speak.

It was important to Ms. Cason to set specific behavioral and learning expectations for her students. She often emphasized that students had to work to earn grades in her class and that they must complete things in a timely fashion. If students turned in work late, she gave them partial credit. She taught grammar regularly in her class and expected students to apply the rules of SAE in all of their class assignments. In addition, even though the school had a high truancy rate in which 28% of students were reported as absent 15 or more days for the 2015-2016 school year, Ms. Cason expected all of her students to come to her class regularly. She once told her seniors if they skipped her class on the designated “Senior Skip Day,” she would administer a quiz and give all absent students a grade of zero. Any students present were exempt from taking the quiz. This tactic seemed to work because the majority of them came to class that day. On days when attendance was low, she told students that even if there was one student in class, she was going to teach.

Because I had known Ms. Cason for several years, I was familiar with her teaching philosophy and practices. Ms. Cason allowed her Advanced Placement (AP) students to hold the conversational floor quite often. During my first semester with her, she said to her AP Language students, “I am relinquishing my position as teacher” to indicate to students that they controlled the discussion from that point forward. During the Spring of 2016, I observed her AP Language engage in class debates. That same school year, Ms. Cason taught one section of Multicultural Literature. In an interview, Ms. Cason revealed that she did not typically engage her Multicultural Literature students in debates because, when she had tried with them in the past, they did not seem interested, but she told me that was open to the idea in the future. During
subsequent semesters, I observed two of Ms. Cason’s Multicultural Literature classes, in which she increasingly used more dialogue and critical literacy practices.

Based on our many conversations, I knew that Ms. Cason and I shared some of the same beliefs about teaching and learning. Ms. Cason believed that knowledge is socially constructed and that students need opportunities to exchange in dialogue during class to construct knowledge and evaluate existing academic knowledge and the contexts in which this knowledge derived.

**Classroom**

Ms. Cason’s classroom had 34 one-piece desks, and the arrangement of the desks often changed depending on the instructional task. For the Spring of 2017, usually three rows of desks on each side of the room faced the middle of the room. The walls were decorated with colorful posters displaying district standards, vocabulary, and student work. There were bulletin boards that Ms. Cason decorated with light blue butcher paper and then created window panes using black tape and made clouds using white paper. The back of the room had two teacher’s desks, one for Ms. Cason, and one for her co-teacher who was with her for the first half of the day. The teachers’ space was decorated with plants, pictures of family and friends, and a lamp. In the Fall of 2016, during her planning period, a “floating” teacher without a permanent classroom used Ms. Cason’s room for instruction. Ms. Cason had a large closet space in the back of her room that she had repurposed as a working space, and at times she used this closet during her planning. Figure 6 illustrates Ms. Cason’s classroom layout for the Spring of 2017.
Students

I observed three of Ms. Cason’s classes over the course of three semesters. Each semester the students I observed had unique personalities and differed in their interaction with each other and the teacher. Even though I observed all the students in Ms. Cason’s three classes, not all students participated in the study. I next describe the general characteristics of the students in each of Ms. Cason’s classes and discuss how she interacted with each group over time. I only analyzed transcript data between Ms. Cason and the students who volunteered to be a part of the study (See Appendix A for Student Profiles).

Spring 2016. During the first PAR Cycle in the Spring of 2016, I observed Ms. Cason’s second block AP Language class. The students in this course consisted of juniors and seniors who were encouraged either by a teacher or school counselor to take an AP English course as
one of their four required English credits. Many of the students in this class had taken multiple honors and/or AP courses since their freshman year. There were 20 students in the class – six males and 14 females. Out the 20 students, there were 11 Hispanic/Latino/a, seven Black, two Asian American students, and one White student in this class.

The learning activities in this class were often self-directed. The curricular framework for the AP language class was established by The College Board organization, but Ms. Cason had freedom to choose texts that she felt would inspire discussion and writing. Students read, wrote, and held discussions even when the teacher stepped into the hallway for a few minutes. The discussions were self-directed even when the teacher was present. Ms. Cason said that she preferred to allow students to have discussion without her input. During class discussions, students presented diverse views, analyzing issues from both personal and broad perspectives. At the end of the course, students took an AP language exam, which is created and scored by representatives from The College Board. However, there was no pressure for them to pass. If students did not pass the AP exam, their grade would not be affected.

Ms. Cason rarely had to address behavior issues with her AP students. However, she did regularly discuss grades with this class. Students asked about the status of their grades in the class often. “Trust me. You’re good. I haven’t touched the grades,” she would reassure them. Ms. Cason also informed me that many of her students in her classes did not do homework. When Ms. Cason would ask how many students had read for homework, usually very few students raised their hands. She then gave them time in class to read. This was a common theme throughout each semester.

Fall 2016. During the second PAR Cycle in the Fall of 2016, I observed Ms. Cason’s fourth block Multicultural literature class. The students in this course were all seniors fulfilling
their final required English credit for high school. There were 22 students in the class – nine males and 13 females. Out of these 22 students, there were ten Hispanic/Latino/a students, ten Black students, one Asian student, and one Native American student.

The activities in this class were more teacher-directed. The curriculum for the multicultural literature class had specific standards that Ms. Cason had to address, but other than that, she was free to choose the texts and the learning activities that would help students meet the learning standards. Ms. Cason was the only multicultural literature teacher at the school, and there was no standardized assessment associated with the course, which also provided her with a certain level of autonomy when designing lessons. She could design lessons that matched her students’ interests and experiences and built on their funds of knowledge.

Ms. Cason addressed behavior more often with her multicultural literature students. The students in this class were a lot more social than her AP class. For example, during grammar instruction, students held side conversations, not related to instruction, while the teacher was talking. When Ms. Cason called on one particular female student to answer a grammar question, she stated, “Oh, I wasn’t paying attention.” Ms. Cason responded, “Oh, I feel a pop quiz coming on!” Some days she also gave candy as incentives for students to respond to the grammar assignment.

The students during the second PAR cycle were the most talkative overall and had the most robust discussions out of all three cycles. In addition, although students periodically asked about their grades, many students contributed to class discussions when no grade was being assigned. They seemed genuinely interested in the discussion topics.

**Spring 2017.** During the third PAR Cycle in the Spring of 2017, I observed Ms. Cason’s fourth block Multicultural literature class of seniors fulfilling their final required English credit
in their last semester of high school. There were 16 students in the class – nine females and seven males. Among them were seven Hispanic/Latino/a students, eight Black students, and one multi-racial student. Almost half of the students in this class were in the ESOL program at some point in their high school career. Several students spoke Spanish as their first language, one student spoke Mam as his first language, and one student spoke French as his first language. Because many students were not born in the U.S., they offered international perspectives on critical issues in U.S. society. I spent more time with this group of students than previous semesters, and I learned a lot about their lives outside of school through our many conversations.

Similar to the previous multicultural literature class, Ms. Cason was free to design lessons around themes that were important to students. There were several robust discussions throughout the semester. There were topics that students just did not seem interested in and other topics that they seemed eager to discuss. The students in this class seemed open-minded and usually supportive of each other; however, a small group of students in the class did the majority of the talking. Ms. Cason revealed in one our informal conversations that many of the ESOL students became reluctant to speak after one of her students laughed at an ESOL student’s accent. Even though she addressed the issue, many ESOL students only spoke when they were called upon by the teacher.

The class was also smaller in size in comparison to previous semesters and had more students absent on a regular basis. A few students also asked to leave class and did not return on multiple occasions. Ms. Cason often used grades as an incentive to keep these students in class and to participate.
**Researcher Positionality**

As a classroom teacher for 10 years, my research interests have always centered around student learning. My teaching experiences with CLD students in an urban school first sparked my interest in dialogic instruction. As a graduate student, I began to understand how politics and policies positioned me, as a teacher, and also my students, and I became interested in critical literacy. As an African-American female growing up in the South, I identified with a lot of my students who had similar cultural histories to my own. In the classroom, my students and I often connected over topics and issues that affected our communities. Because of my experiences inside and outside the classroom and my relationship to students, teachers, administrators, and faculty in the school, I had certain assumptions about the context, subject matter, and participants in this research study. One of my assumptions was that dialogue between a teacher and students in urban high school English classrooms rarely takes place. Based on my experiences, I thought a dialogic approach to critical literacy would be difficult to implement at this school because of curricular and testing mandates that typically take precedence over class discussions. I also believed that most CLD students and the teachers who serve them had diverse backgrounds and perspectives, and they would benefit from classroom dialogue. I believed that critical literacy is an important end goal in schooling and that dialogic teaching is one of the best means to this end. However, I attempted to bracket my assumptions so that I could explore the research data knowing that I had a responsibility to find out how Ms. Cason and her students made meanings about dialogic teaching and critical literacy.

**Gaining Entrée**

Entering into a research relationship with people who I already know is what Glesne and Peshkin (1992) call “backyard research.” They caution against this type of research because of
the ethical dilemmas it might create. While I understand that familiarity with the research setting and participants is not always ideal, in this case, I believe my emic perspective was more beneficial than not. My experience with the school setting provided me with an understanding of the historical and sociocultural context of teaching and learning there. I knew that the CLD population at this school could possibly benefit from a dialogic approach to critical literacy. I also wanted to work with this population because very few studies have investigated dialogic teaching with CLD students (Howe & Abedin, 2013). I also desired to work alongside a teacher to effect change in this particular school that had been labeled underperforming for many years. In order to conduct a PAR study, I needed someone who was willing to try a dialogic approach to critical literacy, and I knew Ms. Cason was up for the challenge.

Additionally, Purcell-Gates (2011) maintained that having an insider’s view is critical to understanding participants’ experiences in ethnographic research. This view is obtained by building rapport with participants. Having a relationship with the teacher before the study began allowed me to obtain an insider’s perspective more quickly; building relationships with her and the students over multiple cycles of PAR assisted me in maintaining trust and gaining further insights into their perspectives.

**Co-constructing PAR Cycles**

Before collecting data, I met with Ms. Cason, the participating teacher, outside of instructional time to discuss dialogic instruction, critical literacy, and the objectives of the study. We discussed the concepts of dialogic teaching and critical literacy and how these two practices could work together in the English classroom. In subsequent meetings, I shared lessons I created with Ms. Cason that used a dialogic approach to critical literacy, and she provided input on how she wanted to move forward. After each lesson, we met during lesson planning hours to discuss
what went well and what we could improve next time. At the end of the first cycle, we evaluated the lessons and improved them for the next cycle. This pattern was repeated for each cycle.

**Informed Consent**

After planning the PAR cycles with the participating teacher, I attended each participating class to inform students about the research study and invite them to be a part of it. During the study, all students participated in activities that were already a part of the planned curriculum; however, I only collected data from the students over 18 years old who had consented to participate in the study, or from the students under 18 years old who had assented and whose parents had also consented to their participation. Before recruiting participants or collecting data, I submitted an IRB application to Georgia State University and the school district for permission to collect and analyze data from the teacher and students, to audio record students and teachers during class dialogue, and to audio record participants during interviews (see Appendix B for informed consent, assent, and permission forms).

**Role as Participant Observer**

Throughout this study I was a participant observer (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011), participating in classroom activities as a knowledgeable peer and second teacher. Ms. Cason, the participating teacher, delivered units of study to the entire class while I actively participated over the course of each instructional unit and collected data in the form of audio recordings and observational field notes (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). *Active participation* takes place “when the ethnographer engages in almost everything that other people are doing as a means of trying to learn the cultural rules for behavior” (pp. 23-24). During my observations, I periodically explained concepts, started discussion topics, posed problems, asked questions, and answered questions; however, I was not involved with classroom management or student discipline. My
goal was to live the experience with participants and capture what I saw and heard in the classroom to try to understand the experience.

**Data Collection**

The data sources that I gathered for this study included: 1) lesson plans; 2) observational field notes and audio recordings of class discussions; 3) student assignments; and, 4) teacher and student interviews. By collecting multiple data sources, I strengthened the trustworthiness and credibility of the research (Creswell, 2004; Ellingson, 2008; Richardson, 2000) and also addressed each research question for the study.

**Lesson Plans**

Lesson plan data allowed the teacher and me to structure a dialogic approach to critical literacy and understand how the two concepts could work together. While audio recordings of lesson plans were not formally analyzed, they helped me understand the teacher’s thoughts on dialogic teaching and critical literacy. Lesson plans involved students reading a variety of multicultural texts, discussing topics related to these readings, and completing assignments that demonstrated critical understandings of these topics (see Appendix C for Sample Unit Plan).

Ms. Cason and I co-constructed lessons for each PAR cycle. As mentioned earlier, Ms. Cason taught multicultural literature the last two PAR cycles, which afforded her the ability to freely choose texts and design relevant, learning activities. The first PAR Cycle, Spring 2016, Ms. Cason designed the lessons for her AP language course, and I provided input on how she could introduce elements of dialogic teaching and critical literacy. We met after the semester to discuss how to modify instruction for the second PAR cycle. The second PAR cycle, Fall 2016, I presented Ms. Cason with lesson plan ideas, informed by the first cycle, for her Multicultural literature class, and she provided input on the changes she wanted to make. We met after the
second semester to discuss changes for the third and final PAR cycle. During the third PAR cycle in Spring 2017, I presented revised lesson plan ideas, informed by previous cycles, for Ms. Cason’s Multicultural literature class, and then we discussed the changes she wanted to make, once again. Several of our lesson planning sessions were audio recorded. The lesson plans for the Spring of 2017 are the lesson plans I used for this dissertation study.

The first week of the third PAR cycle, we planned for students to present mini autobiographies. The purpose of this activity was to understand students’ personal backgrounds and histories so that we could plan lessons that were culturally relevant and meaningful for students. Also, by sharing my own autobiography, I wanted students to feel a connection with me as a member of the classroom and not just as a researcher. Ms. Cason did not present an autobiography.

During weeks 2 and 3, instruction focused on explaining the 10 critical lenses outlined by Appleman (2015): 1) reader response; 2) new criticism; 3) psychological, 4) biographical, 5) gender, 6) social class, 7) new historicism, 8) post-colonial, 9) deconstruction, and 10) archetypal. Each day, Ms. Cason planned to teach one of the critical lenses, modeled for the students how to apply the lens, and then guided students in applying the lens using culturally-relevant texts. After introducing the lenses, Ms. Cason and I scaffolded the learning process from being structured by critical lenses to being less structured, encouraging students to employ critical literacy practices as they saw fit.

After reviewing the lenses, Ms. Cason and I planned to collaborate with students to establish guidelines for our classroom discussions. We went over the principles of dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2006) and the components of critical literacy (Lewison et al., 2002) and posed the following questions: 1) How can we make sure the dialogue is collective? 2) How can
we make sure the dialogue is reciprocal? 3) How can we make sure the dialogue is supportive? 4) How can we make sure the dialogue is cumulative? 5) How can we make sure the dialogue is purposeful? and 6) Is there anything else we should consider?

During weeks 4 and 5, we planned for students to read and analyze teacher-selected texts with the critical lenses taught in previous weeks. Students divided into groups of two or three, and each group had the responsibility of applying one lens to the text. Next, students discussed the text using the fishbowl discussion strategy. One member from each group sat in an inner circle in the middle of the room. The rest of the class sat in an outer circle around them. While the group in the middle discussed the text using the various lenses, the outer circle took notes. After the discussion, the students in the inner and outer circles switched places. During each discussion, we encouraged students to critically evaluate topics and probed them to think deeply about issues and consider alternate viewpoints. Ms. Cason and I planned to apply the principles of dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2006; Shor & Freire, 1987), following one line of coherent thinking until each issue had been considered from as many perspectives as possible and thoroughly critiqued. We also encouraged students to employ the critical literacy principles described by Lewison et al. (2002): 1) disrupting the commonplace, 2) interrogating multiple perspectives, 3) unpacking sociopolitical issues, and 4) taking action and promoting social justice. The goal during weeks four and five was to provide students with guided practice in critical dialogue.

During weeks 6 through 8, we planned for students to read the anchor text for the unit theme, “Windows into the Soul.” Ms. Cason and I chose the play, *Real Women Have Curves* by Josefina Lopez (1996) as the anchor text for this unit. We chose this play because it was written by a Mexican American female author, featured a Mexican American female protagonist, and
many of Ms. Cason’s past students of Mexican heritage enjoyed reading the play. It also critiques social issues in which her students expressed interest, such as gender, race, and social class. As students read *Real Women Have Curves*, they would take notes, applying the critical lenses and critical literacy perspectives they deemed most appropriate. After they read the play, they discussed the text as a whole class while Ms. Cason and I probed them again to think deeply about issues and consider alternate viewpoints. Lastly, students chose a theme from the play and wrote their own one-act plays.

During weeks 9 through 12, we planned for students to read the memoir, *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) for a unit themed, “Windows into Society.” We chose this book because it was written by an African American male author, critiqued social issues in which students had expressed interest, and many of Ms. Cason’s past students of African American heritage could relate to the text. As students read the memoir, they again took notes and applied the critical lenses and critical literacy perspectives they deemed appropriate. After they read *Between the World and Me*, students discussed the book as a whole class with Ms. Cason and I probing for alternate viewpoints. Finally, students chose a theme from the memoir and created their own documentaries. Overall, the lesson plans that Ms. Cason and I created for this study helped us imagine how a dialogic approach to critical literacy might look in the English classroom.

**Observations**

While lesson plans illustrate how a dialogic approach to critical literacy *could* work in the classroom, observations of how the lessons unfolded demonstrate how a dialogic approach *actually* worked. I observed Ms. Cason’s class at least once a week for the first and second PAR cycles. During the third PAR cycle, I observed the participating class five days a week for the
first month and then twice a week for the remainder of the semester. By observing Ms. Cason’s class, I was able to explore the extent to which the principles of dialogic teaching and critical literacy were present during instruction. In the Spring of 2016 I observed six 90-minute classes for a total of nine hours. In the Fall of 2016 I observed nine 90-minute classes for a total of 13.5 hours. In the Spring of 2017 I observed 30 classes for a total of 45 hours. Altogether I spent 67.5 hours in Ms. Cason’s classroom. During my observations, I actively participated, audio recorded, and/or took field notes. Field notes helped me to describe and analyze the context of the study, in addition to the words and actions of participants. After I conducted observations, I listened to the audio recordings to add to my field notes where I may have missed something during class. I also wrote reflective notes, after my observations, about what I was thinking and feeling about the research in an effort to make my subjectivities known (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Out of all the observations, I transcribed and formally analyzed four audio recordings of class discussions from all three PAR cycles. I analyzed one discussion from Spring 2016, one from Fall 2016, and two from Spring 2017. After coding and analyzing the discussions, I recognized there were salient moments across all three semesters that contributed to my understanding of how Ms. Cason was evolving as a teacher using a dialogic approach to critical literacy.

**Student Assignments**

Student assignments were “physical evidence of literacy instruction, learning, or practice” (Purcell-Gates, 2011, p. 147). They included, but were not limited to, writings about discussion topics and assignments related to critical literacy. Because one of the components of critical literacy according to Lewison and colleagues (2002) is “taking action and promoting social justice,” students periodically reflected on class discussions and selected social justice
topics and themes that resonated with them and wrote about them. After reading *Real Women Have Curves* (Lopez, 1996), students chose a topic from the play that interested them and then wrote and performed their own one-act plays in small groups. This project was modeled after a collaborative project at Georgia State University with Dr. Michelle Zoss.

After reading *Between the World and Me* (Coates, 2015), each student chose a social justice issue that resonated with him/her and devised an argument that proposed what should be done about it. They later turned these arguments into documentaries. These assignments demonstrated the extent to which dialogic teaching and critical literacy were taken up by students.

**Interviews**

Ethnographic interviews “allow the researcher to elicit insider information from informants and to explore topics in greater detail” (Purcell-Gates, 2011, p. 146). One of the key objectives of ethnographic interviewing “is to explore the meanings that people ascribe to actions and events in their cultural worlds, expressed in their own language” (Roulston, 2010, p. 19). I conducted semi-structured teacher interviews before and after dialogic critical literacy instruction each semester. I formally interviewed the participating teacher, Ms. Cason, at the beginning of the study and at the end of each semester, and I held numerous informal conversations about her teaching practices, how they came to be, and how they were manifesting in her teaching practice. During my formal interviews and informal conversations with Ms. Cason, she explained her beliefs about dialogic teaching and critical literacy, how she enacted these principles in her teaching in the past, and how she planned to enact these principles in future instruction.

I also conducted semi-structured student interviews to support findings about how a dialogic approach to critical literacy worked in the high school English classroom. At the end of
each PAR cycle, I interviewed student participants who volunteered to talk about their experiences in Ms. Cason’s class. A total of eight students volunteered for interviews during the first PAR cycle, eight students volunteered during the second PAR cycle, and five students volunteered during the third PAR cycle. I asked students to describe their experiences with class dialogue and critical literacy in Ms. Cason’s class, share their opinions about the instructional approach, and give advice on how teachers could best meet students’ learning needs in the future. Through the interviews, I hoped to understand how the teacher and students experienced and perceived a dialogic approach to critical literacy (see Appendix D for Interview Protocols).

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis began from the moment I collected the data and continued long after observations and interviews concluded. I used both deductive coding and inductive coding to analyze the data. According to Smagorinsky (2001), “coding manifests what theory would say about data and makes the researcher’s theoretical perspective on the data corpus explicit, without excluding other ways of looking at it” (p. 399). In other words, there are several ways of looking at research data, but labeling data with codes helps demonstrate how the researcher is using theory to think about the data in specific ways. One of the theoretical assumptions guiding my analysis is that there are sociocultural factors that influence the way a person thinks, speaks, and acts. Furthermore, social interaction is central to the learning process. As a result, I used dialogism to guide my thinking about how teachers and students interact and what influences and results from these interactions. Another theoretical perspective that framed this study was critical literacy, which posits that teaching, learning, and classroom texts are not neutral but situated within particular social, historical, and political contexts. As a result, I coded each turn-of-talk during class discussions with a description of what was happening, the relationship between
participants’ words related to sociocultural theories of teaching and learning, and how
participants’ words related to the principles of dialogic teaching and critical literacy. I
corroborated my analysis of what was happening during class discussions with field notes,
interviews, lesson plans, student assignments, and reflective notes.

Coding Data

I organized all data in a way that made it easy for me to access and analyze logically and
efficiently. I typed all lesson plans, field notes, and reflective notes. I scanned and uploaded
samples of student work. I immediately uploaded all audio recordings of class discussions and
interviews after recording them. I then transcribed audio recordings of class discussions and
interviews (See Appendix E for Transcript Conventions). I also labeled all audio and documents
with descriptive titles and placed them in folders on a password-protected computer Finally, I
imported documents to the analysis software program Atlas.ti for coding. Table 5 describes the
steps I followed in the coding process.

Table 5

Steps in the Coding Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1: Open Coding</th>
<th>I examined the data, selected segments of data, and then created codes that described what was happening in these segments.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Axial Coding</td>
<td>I looked for similarities amongst the codes using “constant comparison” and grouped codes into categories. I used Hymes’s (1974) SPEAKING grid to create categories for transcripts of class discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3: Selective coding</td>
<td>I chose specific excerpts from class discussions that illustrated the tensions and possibilities of dialogic teaching toward critical literacy ends. I then used CDA to explain these moments of tension and possibility.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Open coding. Before coding the data, I read through everything at least once to get an idea of what took place during the study. Next, I read through the data again, and I used Atlas.ti to open code class discussions and interview transcripts. Open coding involves taking a “chunk” of text and labeling it with a word or phrase to describe what is taking place in the data (Creswell, 2014). A chunk of text might represent a segment of data that illustrates either a complete thought expressed by one speaker or a segment of data that encompasses an idea that is expressed and then built upon by one or more speakers. A chunk of text could also simply be the utterance of each speaker, whether it is a fully expressed idea or not. In this case each chunk of text that I selected and coded entailed each turn-of-talk during an interview or class discussion. The turn-of-talk began when the speaker expressed an idea, and it ended either when the speaker completed the idea or another speaker expressed an idea, initiating a new turn-of-talk.

I also drew on the Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) method during this phase (Charmaz, 2014). Researchers using CGT attempt to value the participants’ words as theories as they analyze the data. During the initial coding stage, researchers stick to the data as closely as possible, providing a general sense of what is happening in the data. Charmaz suggested using gerund phrases, describing actions and not participants, in order to maintain “an insider’s view” (p. 121). Action codes included phrases like: Introducing a new topic, Sharing a personal experience, Summarizing the text, Agreeing with someone else, Disagreeing with someone else, Asking a rhetorical question, Asking an open-ended question, or Asking a closed-ended question. By using these phrases I described the participants’ actions during interviews or classroom talk, but refrained from interpreting these actions at this point in the analysis. For example, if a speaker said, “I feel the same way” I labeled this as Agreeing with someone else. If a participant asked a question and then answered it or continued talking without waiting for a response, I
coded this as *Ask a rhetorical question*. According to Charmaz, action coding prevents the analyst from forcing theories onto the data or prematurely analyzing the data without first getting a general sense of what is happening first. The goal during initial open coding was to stick closely to the participants’ own words. These codes helped me understand how the teacher was using a dialogic approach to critical literacy, what might have influenced her pedagogical decisions, and how members of the class experienced critical dialogue.

**Axial coding.** Next, I applied axial coding, which requires looking for similarities and, through “constant comparison” (Ezzy, 2002), grouping codes into categories. For teacher interviews, I categorized segments of our talk into three categories: 1) Ms. Cason’s perspectives on society, 2) Ms. Cason’s perspectives on schooling, and 3) Ms. Cason’s perspectives on teaching and learning. I then created codes for each of these categories that described the teacher’s views in each of these areas. For instance, when she said that she wanted to facilitate class discussions for all of her students but that she had concerns about one of her classes getting out of control, I coded this segment of talk as *Perspectives on teaching and learning: Discipline*. Lastly, I wrote comments interpreting the potential meanings of her words and then met with her to make sure these interpretations were fair.

For class discussions, I categorized classroom talk according the principles of dialogic teaching and critical literacy. For instance, I grouped all open codes in which the teacher, student, or I *provided the historical context* or *provided the cultural context* and placed them in the category *Disrupting the commonplace* (Lewison et al, 2002). During the axial coding phase, I used EC as a discourse analysis method to further examine transcripts of class discussions, specifically applying Hymes’s (1974) SPEAKING model to categorize existing codes.
Setting. I used the setting code to describe the context for classroom activity. Codes for setting described aspects of the classroom environment that related to instruction. For example, I described whether the members of class were involved in a small group or a whole group discussion. Describing the classroom environment was important to understanding the role that the setting played in facilitating classroom dialogue.

Participants. During classroom discussions, I coded each turn-of-talk with the name of the participant. The students who did not participate in the study were not identified by name. Although I did not formally analyze unidentified students’ comments, totaling the number of turns for students and the teacher allowed me to compare student participation with teacher talk. Cazden (2001) put forth that during monologic instruction in which the teacher typically uses the Initiation-Response-Feedback pattern, the teacher talks approximately two-thirds of the time. By identifying the frequency and length of the teacher’s turns-of-talk across three semesters, I could see if the teacher was becoming more dialogic in her approach over time. Additionally, labeling the speakers during class discussion also allowed me to see the roles of participants and their relationships to one another during instruction.

Ends. The purpose of the class discussions in this study was to foster critical literacy; therefore, codes in the ends category described the dimensions of critical literacy (Lewison, et al., 20002) that were present during each discussion. There were four subcategories of codes, each representing one of the dimensions of critical literacy as outlined by Lewison and colleagues: 1) disrupting the commonplace, 2) focusing on sociopolitical issues, 3) interrogating multiple perspectives, and 4) taking action and promoting social justice. These codes helped me locate specific moments during discussions in which critical literacy was present and the extent to which they were present. For instance, I could see how frequently critical literacy dimensions
appeared in the data. I also looked for the questions or comments that preceded moments in which one of the dimensions successfully played out or did not seem to be taken up by the teacher or students. Finally, I examined the outcome of these critical moments.

**Act Sequence.** The *act sequence* category included codes for how a topic was initiated, how participants responded to each others’ questions and comments, built upon each others’ ideas, provided feedback on each others’ responses, and ended the discussion of a topic. This category also allowed me to indicate whether participants’ turn-of-talk was a full turn, meaning that their ideas were completely expressed and then taken up by other members of the class, or an interjection, in which participants’ ideas were either partially expressed or not taken up by members of the class. Participants often initiated a topic by asking an open or closed-ended question or by soliciting comments from class members. They typically responded by sharing a personal opinion or experience, referring to the text, discussing the historical context, or making a real-world connection. The teacher and students also built upon each other’s ideas by asking follow-up questions or presenting alternate viewpoints. Sometimes a long silence indicated that a topic had been exhausted, other times the speaker summarized the discussion. However, the topic usually ended when a new topic was introduced. Identifying the act sequence allowed me to see the ways participants responded to specific types of questions or prompts and afforded me the opportunity to examine the extent and qualities of their responses. In particular, the act sequence illustrated whether the discussion was dialogic in the turn-taking patterns, form, and function of the teacher and students’ utterances. I could also see what types of questions and prompts preceded moments of extended critical dialogue.

**Key.** The *key* of participants’ comments were divided into four subcategories: *efferent, critical/analytic, aesthetic,* and *dialogic* (Chinn et al., 2001). These categories provided me with
an idea of how participants felt about subject matter. For instance, an *aesthetic stance* demonstrated that participants viewed the subject as personally interesting because they related the subject to personal experiences or feelings. Further, an *eff erent stance* illustrated that participants saw the subject matter as fixed because they sought to acquire existing knowledge as opposed to exploring alternate representations of knowledge or constructing new knowledge. Typically, when participants had an efferent stance, they were not exercising interpretive authority. On the other hand, when participants held a *critical/analytic stance*, they exercised interpretive authority by considering alternate viewpoints and multiple interpretations of subject material. This code complemented the *ends* category because if participants were applying one of the dimensions of critical literacy, they also had a critical/analytic stance. Finally, participants who had a *dialogic stance* invited diverse perspectives and collaborated with others to reach common understandings. The dialogic stance mostly described the teacher’s behavior, but it also described students who took on the role of interpretive authority during discussion. I used Alexander’s (2006) characteristics of a dialogic stance, in which the participant: 1) defers to students’ opinions, 2) listens intently, 3) starts class with answers to questions, 4) stresses the importance of student statements, 5) uses conversational tones, and 6) uses humor. When coding a dialogic stance, it was necessary to define *listening intently, conversational tones, and humor*. Listening intently is an internal act. As a result, it was not possible for me to code all instances in which participants listened intently to each other. However, I coded external evidence of listening when the speaker directly quoted or summarized the words of another speaker or asked follow-up questions. Additionally, I coded conversational tones based on what the teacher was saying. If the teacher shared a personal story, for example, this was evidence of conversational tones. Finally, there is no consensus on the definition of humor; however, Warren and McGraw
(2015) define humor as “a psychological response characterized by the positive emotion of amusement, the appraisal that something is funny, and the tendency to laugh” (p. 407). In effect, I coded humor based on the speaker’s and/or listener’s external display of amusement, including laughing or saying that something was humorous.

**Instrumentalities.** I used the category of *instrumentalities* to indicate the means participants used to reach critical literacy ends. In particular, I identified if they used the principles of dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2006) during class discussions. Alexander put forth that dialogic teaching is 1) collective, 2) cumulative, 3) purposeful, 4) reciprocal, and 5) supportive. The codes in the *act sequence* category helped inform the *instrumentalities* category. For instance, if a participant solicited comments from the class, this demonstrated that classroom talk was *collective*. If a participant built on a class member’s utterance by asking a follow-up question, for example, this illustrated that the discussion was *cumulative*. If a participant asked a question or made a comment that moved the discussion towards one of the dimensions of critical literacy, this action was labeled as *purposeful*. If a participant simply responded to a question or comment without building on a previous idea, this was coded as *reciprocal*. Finally, if a participant agreed with someone else’s comment or provided positive feedback on someone’s response, this showed that members of the class were being *supportive*.

I also identified other instrumentalities that participants used to relay a message to listeners, including *code-switching* from one dialect or language to another. For example, students occasionally said that they didn’t know how to say something in English, and then they said it in Spanish because many of the other participants, including myself, understood Spanish. Other times, some of the students said something using AAVE during class discussions. The instrumentalities category not only represented the means participants used to get their message
across to their listeners but also demonstrated how dialogic teaching practices were employed to reach specific critical literacy ends.

**Norms.** The norms category illustrated the behavioral, learning, and speaking expectations that were present during my observations. Sometimes these norms were explicitly stated and other times patterns in participants’ speech or behavior indicated that they understood classroom norms. For instance, the teacher might say that she expected each student to speak during class discussion and that she was giving a participation grade, which illustrated a learning expectation. An example of a speaking norm occurred when multiple students talked at once, and the teacher or a student who had been given the conversational floor said, “I’ll wait” to indicate that s/he expected the members of the class to be quiet while s/he was talking. An example of a behavioral norm was when the teacher required students to say, “Excuse me, may I come in?” if they walked in the classroom during the middle of a discussion or presentation. I confirmed my interpretation of norms through teacher and student interviews. During interviews, I mentioned specific incidents that took place during my observations and asked the teacher and students how they knew what was expected of them. Examining the norms of the classroom helped me better understand the classroom culture and how this culture influenced aspects of class discussions.

**Genre.** The genre category described whether the type of talk that was taking place in the classroom was a part of non-dominant discourses or dominant Discourses (Gee, 1996). According to Gee, all individuals are socialized into various discourses. When individuals master dominant Discourses, they increase their potential to gain access to “social goods” such as money, social status, or social power (Fairclough, 2015). On the other hand, non-dominant discourses grant individuals access to social networks but not necessarily the social goods within wider society. Bakhtin (1981) described dominant Discourses as authoritative discourses, or the
discourses in society that often go unquestioned or unchallenged. He described non-dominant discourses as internally persuasive discourses, in which individuals question and challenge authoritative discourses until they reach conclusions that are personally convincing to them. The stance of participants sometimes helped me determine whether their talk represented dominant Discourses, non-dominant discourses, or both. For instance, when participants had an efferent stance, they were trying to acquire knowledge, which often indicated that the speaker was not questioning or challenging existing knowledge. When they had a critical/analytic stance, they were usually challenging given knowledge or presenting alternate viewpoints. However, there were still times when participants were critical/analytic and also supporting views reflected in dominant Discourses. As a result, when participants were being critical/analytic, I had to determine what they were critiquing – individuals or society. I labeled critiques of individuals as Dominant discourses and critiques of society as non-dominant discourses. I modeled my coding method after the system developed by Zoss, Smagorinsky, and O’Donnell-Allen (2007), creating codes based on my theoretical framework, and providing an explanation, example, and code frequency. See Appendix F for a list of axial codes and examples used for class discussions.

Axial codes helped me to understand the context of classroom discourse, the discourse types that participants drew from, the qualities of classroom talk, the relationships established through interactions, and also the immediate effects of classroom discourse. I specifically looked for how the teacher employed the principles of dialogic teaching and the extent to which these principles were present. I also paid particular attention to the segments of classroom talk in which the dimensions of critical literacy were present and the extent to which they played out.

Selective coding. Finally, during the selective coding phase, I chose specific transcript excerpts from class discussions that illustrated moments in which dialogic teaching and critical
literacy were present and in which the teacher provided significant input. During this phase, I used CDA to explain why I thought the discussion did or did not move toward critical literacy ends. I used Fairclough’s (2015) three-tiered model of CDA that describes, interprets, and explains discourse on the situational, institutional, and societal levels.

The **situational** level included the texts being discussed and the formal properties of the classroom talk. I made comments on codes in the *act sequence* and *norms* category. I described the vocabulary, grammar, and textual structures of classroom discourse. I also demonstrated how these textual properties provided affordances or placed constraints on content, relations, and subject positions. I then connected the comments about what was taking place on the situational level to the institutional level.

The **institutional** level included the context of classroom talk. I made comments about the institutional context that influenced what took place in the classroom and the discourse types that the teacher and students employed during class discussions. At the institutional level, I wrote comments on the codes in the *setting*, *participant*, *key*, and *instrumentalities* categories. I discussed how the teacher had district curricular standards to which she had to adhere, which influenced her interactions with students. She also had her own beliefs, values, and teaching philosophy that shaped the classroom environment and activities. As a result, the texts she chose, the emphasis she placed on certain topics or norms, in addition to her relationship with students, all contributed to the potential for critical dialogue in her classroom. Lastly, I was able to show how the local, institutional, and societal levels worked together.

The **societal** level involved the power relations that shaped classroom discourse, the ideologies represented in classroom talk, and the ways in which participants reified, critiqued, or disrupted dominant Discourses. As I explored the societal level, I added comments to the codes
in the *ends* and *genre* categories. I explained why I thought participants’ discourses worked towards or against the dimensions of critical literacy. For instance, when students described an individual’s social status as a personal choice rather than something that is influenced by systems within society, I interpreted their words as reifying the dominant Discourses on social class. Rather than “focusing on sociopolitical issues” (Lewison et al., 2002), they were focusing on the individual, working against this dimension of critical literacy. By explaining what was taking place on the local, institutional, and societal levels, I could then begin to make meaningful connections between each level and examine how the utterances during class discussions were possibly influenced by educational institutions and systems within society. Ezzy (2002) wrote, “Coding finishes when the researcher is satisfied that the theory is saturated” (p. 93). I coded the data until I had explored all aspects of dialogic teaching and critical literacy. See Appendix G for a Sample Coded Transcript.

**Explaining Data**

After using Atlas.ti to code the data, I finally began my explanation of data. Ethnographic analysis is both “grounded in theories of culture” and “builds theories of culture” to explain the experiences and worldviews of specific groups of people (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010; Purcell-Gates, 2011). I was interested in understanding how a dialogic approach to critical literacy unfolded or did not unfold during instruction. Before interpreting data, I looked for patterns and themes amongst the codes I had created. To find patterns, I determined how often specific codes and groups of codes occurred in the data. I then developed themes as I saw similar explanations for why these codes or groups of codes re-occurred.

First, I determined how frequent each tenet of dialogic teaching occurred in the data and then how frequent each of the dimensions of critical literacy showed up. Next, I selected excerpts
in which the principles of dialogic teaching and critical literacy occurred most frequently and excerpts in which they seldom appeared in the data. Next, I took a closer look at what was taking place in these excerpts. Atlas.ti was a helpful tool in making connections between codes. I used the software to build networks that illustrated the relationships between analytic codes. Finally, through CDA I began to lay the groundwork for relating data to existing theories and also building theories about why dialogic teaching and/or critical literacy did or did not take place. I then used field notes, interviews, and existing research on dialogic teaching and critical literacy to support my explanations of why these moments were successful or unsuccessful. I discussed my interpretations of these moments with the participating teacher, Ms. Cason, and took her input into consideration.

**Data Reduction**

While the frequency of codes gave me an idea of how often components of dialogic teaching and critical literacy played out in the data, further analysis was necessary to understand the full extent to which they played out and why. I observed Ms. Cason’s classroom across three semesters and collected copious amounts of data throughout this dissertation study. When presenting my findings, I wanted to focus on the most critical moments in this study that would potentially help me understand how Ms. Cason was evolving as a dialogic and critical literacy educator. I chose four class discussions across three semesters that represented how Ms. Cason was developing as a dialogic and critical literacy educator. I then chose excerpts from these four discussions that illustrated the principles of dialogic teaching and the dimensions of critical literacy and in which the teacher contributed to the discussion in a meaningful way.

Each excerpt represented a segment of data that began when a topic was initiated and ended when the topic was exhausted or another topic was introduced. I then labeled each excerpt
to identify the discussion topic. For instance, when Ms. Cason asked, “Is it only with the African Americans?” this represented a single discussion topic. Within each excerpt, I included all responses after the initiation of the topic and then ended the excerpt when the topic changed. Another example is when Meech commented, “I think we finna have a purge…,” this marked the beginning of a new discussion topic. I included all responses related to this topic and ended the excerpt when Ms. Cason switched to a different topic. For each discussion, I divided all topics within the discussion this way, creating several excerpts.

Lastly, using Atlas.ti, I created a table that outlined the frequency of codes within each excerpt. For instance, under the excerpt labeled: “Is it only with the African Americans,” I charted how many times the teacher spoke, how many times students spoke, the principles of dialogic teaching, and the dimensions of critical literacy. I excluded excerpts in which the teacher did not contribute or her contributions were limited to one-word interjections. I also excluded excerpts in which members of the class did not take up topics. Lastly, I excluded repetitive discussions in which the teacher and students talked about the same topic in the same way during the same discussion. In the end, I analyzed 17 excerpts across all four discussions. Appendix H illustrates the excerpts used in this study and the codes that co-occurred under each discussion topic.
To construct meaning from the data, I looked for patterns across all 16 excerpts. I asked, “What did these conversations accomplish?” The first pattern that I looked for was if conversations moved toward critical literacy or away from critical literacy. I grouped all the excerpts that moved toward critical literacy together, and then I looked at the excerpts in which classroom talk did not move towards critical literacy ends together. Within the conversations that did not move toward critical literacy ends, I created two more groups: discussions that moved toward the commonplace and discussions that moved toward personal response. I decided to organize the findings in terms of what each conversation accomplished. Figure 7 depicts the continuum along which findings fell. I chose three excerpts from each group, a total of nine excerpts, to discuss in my findings. I used Fairclough’s (2015) framework for CDA to interpret what I believe was happening in these excerpts and explained why the conversations moved towards critical literacy ends at times and other times seemed to work against the goals of critical literacy.

Figure 7. Critical Literacy Continuum
Trustworthiness and Credibility

Trustworthiness

Data can be “trusted” when it is “conducted in a rigorous, systematic, and ethical manner” (Merriam, 2009, p. 24). Throughout this study, I describe the steps that I used to make clear to those who were not present during the study what I did and how I did it (See Appendices G & H for Data Crosswalk and Timeline for the Study). I also used crystallization to increase the trustworthiness of the study (Ellingson, 2008; Richardson, 2000). Richardson (2000) posited that triangulation, in which the researcher uses at least three data sources, methods, and or informants to strengthen the trustworthiness of a research study limits the research to specific ways of knowing and representing data. Instead, crystallization best captures the multidimensionality of research by representing multiple forms of knowledge and representations of data. Richardson stated, “Crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic” (p. 934). Ellingson (2008) expounded on this concept by articulating a research framework for crystallization, explaining:

Crystallization combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researchers’ vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings, and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them (p. 4).

In other words, crystallization offers several, different ways of collecting, analyzing, and representing data. The researcher understands that knowledge is socially constructed and that knowledge constructed during the research process is filtered through the researcher’s particular
views of the world. Ellingson also wrote that qualitative research studies that utilize crystallization typically have one or more of the following characteristics:

1) Offer thick descriptions and complex interpretations
2) Reflect multiple, often contrasting, ways of knowing
3) Use more than one genre of writing
4) Reject positivist claims that knowledge is “singular” and “discoverable” (p. 10)

Throughout this study, I spent over 67 hours in the teacher’s classroom and audio recorded several class periods, which afforded me the opportunity to write thick descriptions of the day-to-day occurrences that took place. Not only did I interview the teacher and have informal conversations with her, but I also interviewed the students and talked with them on at least a weekly basis. Their explanations of what took place in the classroom helped me interpret what I understood to be taking place. As a result, the research also reflects multiple viewpoints. I also felt it was important to include our histories and actual words throughout the study, not just one particular genre of writing. Essentially, I embraced the notion that there is no single way to represent knowledge, and the various ways of knowing are reflected through data collection, analysis, interpretation, and the representation of findings. The result was a multidimensional, crystallized, study with endless possibilities. I used multiple methods, data sources, analytic tools, informants, and representations of findings to crystallize this study. (See Figure 8 for how I used crystallization for this research study.)
Credibility

According to Purcell-Gates (2011) credibility in an ethnographic study “refers to the degree to which one’s data and interpretation correspond to ‘the way it is’ within the phenomenon being investigated” (p. 140). In other words, information gathered and the interpretation of this data is as close to reality as possible. In qualitative research, “interpretations of reality are accessed directly through observations and interviews” (Merriam, 2000, p. 214). To increase the credibility of my interpretations in this study, I used a PAR orientation, involving the participating teacher during all phases of the study. I used informant checking, also known as member checking, which is when the researcher “shares his or her evolving interpretations of the data with the study participants to gain their perspective” (Purcell-Gates, 2011, p. 148). The participating teacher was involved in this process at specific times during the study to ensure that my interpretations were as close to reality as possible.
Ethical Considerations

This dissertation study involved humans as subjects and participants. I observed their words and actions, audio recorded them, held conversations with them, and used their writings for the purpose of understanding the process of a particular instructional approach. I took care that at each step in this research process, I did not cause harm to anyone participating in this study. First, while planning for this study, I collaborated with the participating teacher. While collecting data, all identities of the participants and their records remained confidential to the extent allowed by the law. I use pseudonyms to make sure their identities remain private. All information was stored and remain stored in a locked filing cabinet and on password-protected computers.

Because I was the primary data collection instrument, there were biases and assumptions that may have influenced the way I perceived and interpreted data. Transcribing people’s words is never a neutral act. While analyzing transcript data, I used a thorough coding process, starting with a description of what was happening in the data to avoid prematurely forcing my preconceived ideas and assumptions onto participants’ words. Also, by using a PAR approach, ethical concerns of whether or not I was bringing good or harm to the research participants were less obscure because the teacher was involved in every step of the process. Also, I made my assumptions known throughout the research study by keeping a reflective journal.

Finally, I made sure all participants and their families who read and signed consent/assent forms understood that their participation in the study was strictly voluntary and that they could choose to withdraw from the study at any time. In the following chapter, I discuss the findings of this study.
4 FINDINGS

One of the primary goals of this study was to understand how an English teacher used dialogic teaching to enact critical literacy at an urban high school with CLD students. For this study, Ms. Cason and I designed lessons using a dialogic approach to critical literacy, I observed classroom dialogue in action, and I interviewed participants about their experiences, all in an effort to understand as much as I could about dialogic teaching and critical literacy in Ms. Cason’s classroom. After reading through the data, coding it, and then analyzing it, I learned more about how dialogic teaching was used to foster critical literacy. I also gained an understanding about the ways Ms. Cason’s worldviews shaped the direction of classroom talk.

In my findings, I discuss Ms. Cason’s views on society, schooling, teaching, and learning. Next, I describe the extent that the tenets of both dialogic teaching and critical literacy were represented in class discussions. Then, I present several excerpts from class discussions across all three semesters. These excerpts were purposefully selected to illustrate what the discussions in Ms. Cason’s classroom ultimately accomplished. I describe where topics from each discussion fell along the critical literacy continuum. Some discussions moved toward critical literacy ends while others moved towards the commonplace or personal response. Lastly, I discuss student assignments and where students’ work fell along the critical literacy continuum. I use Fairclough’s (2015) framework for CDA to describe what was happening during teacher interviews and class discussions. I present my findings about the teacher’s perspectives first because I want to describe how her ideologies shaped classroom conversations.

The Teacher’s Perspectives

According to sociocultural theories of learning, all learning starts out as a social process, in which individuals interact with others to construct meaning (Vygotsky, 1962/2012). The
classroom represents a social space in which the teacher interacts with students to create shared understandings. The sociocultural context played a significant role in understanding dialogic teaching toward critical literacy ends in a high school English classroom. In this research study, I wanted to understand the role of the teacher’s worldviews on her instructional practices. I visited her classroom several times over the course of three school semesters, and I constructed knowledge about her perspectives and her teaching practices through my observations, field notes, and interviews. I gained insight about her views on schooling, teaching, and learning outcomes, all of which showed up throughout classroom instruction.

**Ms. Cason’s Views on Society**

Ms. Cason’s views on society were important for me to understand because they played a role in how she fostered both dialogic teaching and critical literacy in her classroom. In my first interview with Ms. Cason, she shared her views on education. She talked about the relationship between social class and education. She described how she grew up poor in a housing project in the South, but her mother stressed the importance of education, and she eventually escaped poverty after getting a college degree. She also told me a story about how she attended an all-White school in the South. She remembered being ashamed of her grammar because her classmates once laughed at her dialect when she spoke aloud in class. She recalled crying and her teacher sternly telling her, “Don’t you dare cry!” Ms. Cason was grateful to this teacher because she inspired her to master SAE, which helped her throughout her professional career as a radio announcer and then as a teacher. Through our conversations, I came to understand that Ms. Cason often associated “success” with reaching a higher social class. She believed that the vehicle that led to success was education but that “education could mean several things,” including learning a skill or trade. In Excerpt 3, Ms. Cason expressed her views on society.
Excerpt 1: “You have to have your haves and your have-nots”

Cason: [...] Because, again, you have to have your haves and your have-nots. Everyone cannot succeed in education. I mean as far as in academics. Education could mean several things. You need your trade people, you need your skilled workers, you need your, um, medical students, you need your blue collar. You need all of those, right? So education doesn’t mean academically you’re going to college. It could be a trade, and I think here in our society, I think we have refocused our attention on college-bound kids. If you’re college-bound kids, then you’re going to make it. If you’re not, and, you know, that’s the problem because if you’re not college bound, they tend to demean you or you’re not that important. […]

In Excerpt 1, Ms. Cason pointed out that schools place a heavy emphasis on college preparation but argued that not all students should go to college. Ms. Cason believed that a hierarchical structure in society was necessary and that skilled workers were just as essential to society as college-educated professionals. When I later opined that people without college education should be paid more, she stated, “That will never happen.” She also added, “There has to be some kind of hierarchy. Always.” Even though Ms. Cason believed that people within society should have the ability to escape poverty through education, she also held the view that a hierarchical social structure helped maintain order within society. I revisited this topic at the end of our study and asked Ms. Cason if she still felt the same way about social hierarchy. Ms. Cason told me that her views had not changed and repeated that “you have to have your haves and your have-nots” in order to avoid “chaos.” When I asked Ms. Cason where she would place her students within this social hierarchy, she seemed torn. She expressed that she wanted her
students to reach their greatest potential, but that did not always mean they would have to go to college. Her perspectives on society influenced the extent critical literacy played out in her classroom. Because she viewed the social order in this way, Ms. Cason could not fully invest in one of the goals of critical literacy, which is to help students understand ways they can transform society.

**Ms. Cason’s Views on Schooling**

Additionally, Ms. Cason’s views on schooling shaped the extent of classroom dialogue toward critical literacy. She believed that there were structures and systems within society that cannot be changed, and she often saw these systems at work in the classroom. For instance, during our first interview, she talked about how high-stakes assessments shaped the social order within schools. She pointed out that schools often emphasize certain types of knowledge over others and that standardized assessments inevitably lead to achievement gaps. Ms. Cason also supported a dialogic approach to education, but expressed her doubts that schools would ever move in this direction.

**Excerpt 2: “The achievement gap will always be the same”**

1 Gordon: Do you think that dialogic learning impacts student achievement regardless of socioeconomic status or race or culture?
2
3 Cason: Yes. This is a good question too, but the other thing is it depends on how we assess our kids, because if you're assessing kids on a holistic view, you're not gonna give a grade per se. It would be great if they did, but that doesn't happen. They're going to assess you based on the test. Test, I would say.
4 People make the test, right? Versus what you really know. The achievement gap will always be the same. I think we'll encourage people to at least have
the dialogue. I think it's great. If they would assess people on how well you
think, given that you’ve been given the chance to express yourselves from
kindergarten on up. It's okay to express yourselves, and that's what they want
to do starting kindergarten going up. Kindergarten. Elementary school.

Giving them that voice. Unfortunately, I don't think it'll happen.

Ms. Cason taught at a school that placed an emphasis on high-stakes assessments. Her views on schooling influenced her participation in this study because a dialogic approach to critical literacy sometimes did not align with the school’s goal to help students pass high-stakes exams. She valued classroom dialogue but felt that it would be difficult to center her classroom around something that was not valued school-wide. She could not envision one dialogic teacher in one classroom as something that could make a long-term, meaningful impact on her students. Ms. Cason contended that it would have to be introduced to students from kindergarten, but remained doubtful that this would ever happen.

Ms. Cason expressed in our interview that students in more affluent areas had access to academic resources and subsequently performed well on standardized assessments. On the other hand, she shared that students in less affluent areas had limited access to academic resources and, on average, did not perform well on high-stakes exams. Although the top students at SHS typically did not come from wealthy families and did not pass standardized exams at the same rates as students in wealthier schools, Ms. Cason believed that students like her AP language students were grouped based on how their test scores compared to their schoolmates. Ms. Cason pointed out that SHS had approximately 300 students enrolled in AP courses, but only about 10 students passed the AP exams at the end of the semester.
Ms. Cason’s Views on Teaching and Learning

Finally, Ms. Cason’s views on society and schooling influenced her perspectives on how students should be taught. During the study, Ms. Cason taught three different subjects, including ninth grade literature for students repeating the course, AP language, and multicultural literature. She also co-taught some of her multicultural literature classes with a Special Education teacher or a pre-service student teacher from a local university. Between the three subjects that Ms. Cason taught, she noted the difference between the students’ learning behaviors and connected her students’ behavior in her class with their past experiences with school. She explained that her AP language students enjoyed reading and were self-motivated while her other classes did not seem as motivated to engage in reading and other learning activities. As a result, Ms. Cason adopted different instructional stances for each class. She had a tendency to use more monologic teaching practices with her ninth grade literature and multicultural literature students but more dialogic teaching practices with her AP students. During our first interview, Ms. Cason revealed her views on teaching students from diverse backgrounds.

Excerpt 3: “You have to have control”

1  Cason:  If you give them a voice, you may be losing control. I think that's what
2       happened in the classroom. I think some teachers cannot handle no control.
3  Think about it. Even if the answer is “no” according to the book, but if you
4       can prove it and you're thinking beyond that book, you're losing control of
5       your classroom, but they're gaining a voice.
6  Gordon:  And a better understanding, maybe.
7  Cason:  Absolutely. Absolutely. But a lot of teachers- I'm telling you, it's not just
Gordon: Is it a good thing?

Cason: I think it's a good thing, but again you have to have control.

Ms. Cason’s views on teaching and learning played out in the classroom, sometimes in contradictory ways. Ms. Cason agreed that students should be able to express their opinions in the classroom but that the teacher should maintain intellectual and behavioral control. While she encouraged dialogue and independent, critical thinking in her classroom, Ms. Cason was still firmly in control of the direction of classroom instruction and limited discussion with students who did not seem responsible enough to handle extended dialogue. Ms. Cason agreed that all students should have an active role in their learning. For instance, her AP students engaged in class dialogue on a regular basis. They were used to exercising intellectual freedom, so it was easy for her to have conversations with them. However, because of schools’ deficit views on certain student groups, ability tracking, and students’ past experiences in the classroom, she believed it would be difficult to facilitate discussions with her ninth-grade repeaters and multicultural literature students. She believed that certain social orders within the educational system, like tracking, were beyond her control. Ms. Cason’s teaching practices sometimes reinforced these social orders in her classroom. For example, students who had early exposure to extended dialogue were given more opportunities to have extended conversations while students who had not been exposed to extended dialogue were not given opportunities for extended talk.

Ms. Cason’s believed that classrooms should be student-led versus teacher-led, so that all students could be involved during instruction. She often provided students with frameworks for reading, writing, and discussing and then placed students in small groups to complete these learning activities. She also used a variety of texts, including canonical and contemporary literature and pulled themes from the texts that students could relate to. She believed that
students should be able to find literature interesting and relevant to their own personal lives and designed activities in which she made connections to her student’s cultural backgrounds. Ms. Cason reflected that her students once asked her if they could talk more during class, so she decided to use the themes from class texts for students to debate. She used scenes from movies to demonstrate the art of debate and supported students after they presented their sides, by giving titles such as “greatest debater” and “esquire.” She specifically gave one of her AP students the latter title because he told her he wanted to become a lawyer one day, and Ms. Cason used it to motivate him.

**Principles of Dialogic Teaching**

Over time, Ms. Cason increasingly became more dialogic with her classes, guiding their conversations toward critical literacy ends. She employed a dialogic stance by 1) using conversational tones, 2) listening intently, 3) deferring to other students’ opinions, 4) starting class with the answers to questions, 5) stressing the importance of student statements, and 6) using humor (Shor & Freire, 1987). She also used the principles of dialogic teaching by being 1) collective, 2) reciprocal, 3) supportive, 4) cumulative, and 5) purposeful (Alexander, 2006). Her teaching reflected each of the principles for dialogic teaching but to different extents across the three semesters.

**Dialogic Stance**

Out of the four class discussions used for this study, 203 utterances illustrated the teacher’s *dialogic stance*. The most evident example of Ms. Cason’s dialogic stance was that she deferred to students’ opinions. Ms. Cason started each class discussion by inviting students to share their opinions about class texts. She encouraged them to apply critical lenses (Appleman, 2015) as they discussed the texts as a class.
Ms. Cason also demonstrated a dialogic stance in other ways, but the other characteristics like listening intently, using humor, and using conversational tones were less apparent. I labeled fewer utterances as “listens intently” because it was more difficult to ascertain each time the teacher was listening, other than when she repeated or restated someone else’s words. When she did use humor, she typically laughed at her own jokes, which was an indication to me that she was intentionally being funny. For example, she laughed after she initiated a discussion by saying, “May the odds forever be in your favor.” Although students did not join her in laughter, her use of humor over time contributed to the positive rapport she had with her students. There were also times she used humor to soften a comment about behavior. For instance, when she wanted students to be quiet, she jokingly said, “I’m hearing angels” and “There it goes again.” One student laughed and another student responded, “You need to get that checked out” before the class finally fell silent. Fairclough (2015) put forth that phrasing requests in this way helps those in positions of power to mask their authority. As a dialogic teacher, Ms. Cason maintained a balance being an authority on discipline and a learning partner with students through humor and lightheartedness. Finally, Ms. Cason used conversational tones by sharing personal stories or making connections to popular culture. I coded these instances less frequently perhaps because Ms. Cason felt that students who responded to such comments with their own personal stories and references to pop culture veered “off topic.” She would say, “We’re off topic, now.” She would also interrupt students and change the tone to a more serious one in an effort to keep students going in a particular direction during discussions.

**Collective**

Ms. Cason employed the principles of dialogic teaching by being *collective*. The teacher addressed learning tasks with her students by inviting them to discuss class texts. I coded a total
of 164 utterances as collective. I coded the teacher’s instructions for the discussion, her invitations for students to speak, and participants’ open-ended questions to initiate discussion topics, all as collective. The first discussion in the Spring of 2016, Ms. Cason’s contributions involved mostly procedural and behavioral instructions. She also interjected short responses providing feedback on students’ questions or comments, and she only asked one open-ended question. She stated in a formal interview that the reason she refrained from speaking during this particular discussion was because she wanted students to do most of the talking. She explained, “they lead the conversations and, I’m just merely an observer.” She essentially adopted the role of “hands-off facilitator” (Alexander, 2006).

For example, Ms. Cason, her AP Language students, and I collectively discussed Ta-Nehisi Coates’s (2015) text, *Between the World and Me* during PAR cycle 1. This memoir addressed Coates’s 15-year-old son and chronicled the lessons he’s learned as a Black male growing up in the U.S., providing commentary on topics such as race, social class, religion, education, and the criminal justice system. One of the pivotal moments in the book was when his college friend, Prince Jones, was killed by a police officer because he mistook Jones for someone else. The students began the first discussion after Ms. Cason said, “I am going to relinquish my position as teacher. Whoever starts, it’s on you.” Some of the students admitted to only reading parts of the book. For instance, one student, Terez, an African American female in her junior year, started off her comment by saying, “Um, I didn't really read the book, but the parts that I did read…” Also, later in the discussion, another student mentioned that Coates’s wife was killed by a police officer rather than his friend. However, one student, Kierra, an African American female in her senior year, was one of the students who read a great deal of the book and also
talked the most during the discussion. Excerpt 4 represents Ms. Cason’s contribution to the first discussion and the exchange between Ms. Cason and Kierra about Coates’s book.

Excerpt 4: “Is it only with the African Americans?”

1  Gordon: So you’re basically saying you can still do everything right and still you’re not safe.
2  Kierra: You’re not↑
3  Cason: Is it only with the African Americans?
4  Student: No.
5  Kierra: It's with minorities of America. I feel like society is made, and the structure, it's for Caucasian people, and that's not to sort of offend anyone, but that's just how it is. People lie to you, like make it—pass it off and make it seem like it’s not real or it’s not that big of a deal, but it’s a major problem within our society for a country who says we're free and we're not oppressing people. Our whole system is based off that. | | |

In Excerpt 1 Kierra had initiated the topic of discussion of the criminal justice system in the U.S., particularly as it pertains to African Americans. Kierra discussed the portion of the book in which Coates described how his friend Prince Jones was killed by a police officer. She started her comment, “I want to talk about Prince Jones.” Although the text offered specific topics for students to discuss, Kierra’s initiation of this particular discussion demonstrates her interest in the topic. I summarized the latter part of her response, in which she argued that African American men can do everything “right,” but they’re still not safe from police brutality. The student responded by reiterating the idea that African American men were not safe from police brutality with a rising intonation at the end of her reiteration, emphasizing, “You’re not↑.”
She used the ideologically contested word “right” to discuss how Prince Jones lived his life before he was killed. She drew on dominant Discourses to describe how Prince Jones lived his life in a way that aligned with the dominant bloc. Ms. Cason then asked a closed-ended question to prompt Kierra to consider a different perspective other than the African American experience with law enforcement. Although Ms. Cason asked a closed-ended question, Kierra provided an extended response in lines 6 through 11, and she shared her views on how American society is structured “for” Caucasian people and against minorities. Kierra’s extended responses corroborated the point made by Boyd and Markarian (2011) that a closed-ended question can lead to a student’s extended response if the teacher has a dialogic stance. Ms. Cason’s question probed Kierra to think about the broader context of society.

The teacher took a brief, active role in the discussion, and then she reverted back to the role of “hands-off facilitator” after Kierra responded to her question. The student took on the role of an interpretive authority during this exchange. At the end of this excerpt, there was an long pause, and neither Ms. Cason nor any of Kierra’s class members responded to her statement. Instead, another student initiated a different topic. This was the only instance during the first discussion in which Ms. Cason actively participated by asking a question. However, learning tasks were addressed in an increasingly collective manner across the four discussions formally analyzed for this study. As the teacher became more involved in class discussions, the students also participated more.

**Reciprocal**

The participating teacher also exhibited dialogic teaching by being reciprocal. Ms. Cason and her students took turns listening to one another, sharing ideas, and considering alternative viewpoints. I labeled utterances as *reciprocal* when the teacher and students took turns speaking
but did not build on the same ideas (instances in which students built on each other’s ideas were labeled with a different code). For example, in Excerpt 4, the teacher, students, and I took turns speaking and listening to one another, but no one really built onto Kierra’s ideas. Altogether, I coded 435 utterances as “reciprocal.”

Further, several factors contributed to the reciprocal nature of discussions throughout this study. During PAR cycle 1 and PAR cycle 2, the discussions were shorter in length, so fewer students took turns speaking simply because there was not enough time. Students also took turns speaking without building on each other’s ideas when they were mainly concerned with receiving a grade. For instance, a student who only spoke once asked Ms. Cason, “You got me down, right?” towards the end of the first class discussion. Ms. Cason kept track of students’ comments as they spoke and gave points for what she considered to be meaningful contributions. The third discussion in the third PAR cycle was the longest, yet the fewest students took turns speaking and listening to each other. For this particular class, many students were absent because prom was the next day, the students present in class were typically quiet, and the teacher had to deal with an administrative issue, so she was in and out of the discussion. The fourth discussion, which was also during the third PAR cycle, had the most utterances that I identified as reciprocal because the discussion was considerably longer than the first two, more students were present, students seemed interested and eager to talk about certain topics that they could relate to their own personal experiences, and the teacher was there the entire time to help facilitate the discussion and call on different students. In the end, all discussions were reciprocal although some were more reciprocal than others.
**Supportive**

The third dialogic principle of dialogic teaching is that the teacher is *supportive*, making students feel comfortable to freely express their ideas without the fear of having a “wrong” answer, and encouraging students to reach common understandings (Alexander, 2006). Determining if the teacher was supportive was not an easy task because she was not always outwardly trying to make students feel comfortable, but I determined that she was being supportive when she provided students with positive feedback, gave an affirmative response in support of what students were saying, or when she agreed or empathized with students’ opinions. I coded 53 utterances that fit these criteria as *supportive*. I acknowledge that if students spoke of their own volition, this could also be an indication that they felt supported, but I was not always able to confirm if students felt comfortable to speak as a direct result of the teacher.

In addition, even though Ms. Cason made several efforts to make students feel comfortable to speak, some of the ESOL students who struggled with their English did not speak for the majority of the discussions during PAR cycle 3. According to Ms. Cason, other students in the class laughed at their English-speaking skills and their accents during a previous class, which made some of the ESOL students hesitant to speak. There were two exceptions, Demba, an African/French male, and Messi, a Guatemalan male, both in their senior year, who made significant contributions to class discussions. Ms. Cason intentionally called on the quiet, ESOL students to give them opportunities to express their ideas, but they did not always reply.

**Cumulative**

The fourth principle of dialogic teaching is that the teacher should be cumulative. In order for the discussion to be cumulative, the teacher and students must build on one idea and follow one line of coherent thinking for a prolonged period of time. I coded a total of 668
utterances as “cumulative.” The majority of all utterances were cumulative, but the last two discussions during the third PAR cycle were the most cumulative. I believe this was due in part to the teacher’s increased participation over time. Students also tended to build on each other’s ideas when their curiosity was piqued, and the teacher built on students’ statements in an effort to help them think through their ideas and/or move them toward critical literacy.

**Purposeful**

Finally, the last principle of dialogic teaching is that the teacher is purposeful and plans dialogue with a specific goal in mind. In the case of this research study, the goal was critical literacy, and I coded 332 utterances as *purposeful* each time the teacher moved the discussion toward critical literacy ends. In Excerpt 4, the teacher asked a question to encourage Kierra to interrogate an alternate perspective, which is a dimension of critical literacy (Lewison et al., 2002).

There were other times Ms. Cason asked questions to redirect students away from what she considered to be idle talk. Excerpt 5 represents a moment during the second discussion of PAR cycle 2 when she redirected a student’s comment. This discussion took place shortly after the 2016 U.S. presidential election, in which Donald Trump was elected president. Ms. Cason, her students, and I were discussing Coates’s (2015) text; however, similar to the students in the first PAR cycle, many of the students in this class had not read the text. Ms. Cason asked how many students had read the book, one student responded, “Didn’t we just get the book yesterday?” and then one student, Meech, an African American male in his senior year, responded that he had read. Ms. Cason did not acknowledge his proclamation. She then showed the video clip of Tim Wise (2008) discussing White privilege. Before Excerpt 2 begins, Omar, a Latino senior, made the comment that Wise’s discussion of White privilege was important today.
because Americans now have someone in power who “supports White supremacy, basically,”
referring to President-elect Donald Trump.

Excerpt 5: “Naw, this ain’t germane!”

Meech: I think we finna have a purge. On *The Purge*, the quote was "Make America
Great Again," like Trump quote is. And it's a movie where high class
people can kill low class people | for fun.

Cason: That’s happening right now, though.

Meech: All the rules dead, shook off. All- everything for 24 hours, kill whatever
you got.

Cason: That's a movie?

Meech: Yeah.

Winthorpe: It’s a movie. It’s sick. {Winthorpe is a co-teacher visiting the class}

Students: [crosstalk]

Meech: As clear as day, it says, “Make America Great Again,” right on the front of
the=

Cason: Is this germane?

Meech: Is this what?

Students: Our vocabulary word!

Meech: Naw, this ain’t germane! We talkin’ ‘bout Trump! Trump said the same
thing!

Students: ((laughter))

Cason: Okay. Okay, okay, now.
In Excerpt 5, the topic of discussion is politics and social class. This topic is made available by the video clip that the teacher shows. Meech took control of the conversation, shifting the focus to a movie called *The Purge*. In lines 1 through 3, he made a connection to the presidential election by first declaring that he felt that what happened in the movie was eventually going to happen in real life. He then made parallels between a quote from the movie, “Make America Great Again,” and Donald Trump’s campaign slogan using the same words. Meech drew on a discourse type familiar to him as he described the plot of the movie where upper class people kill lower class people for entertainment. Ms. Cason initially tried to control the direction of the conversation by building on his idea, but also moving the discussion to real-world issues and away from a fictional movie. The teacher was supportive, validating the student’s contribution to the discussion, and he freely continued his commentary.

As Meech continued to describe the plot of *The Purge*, however, Ms. Cason asked Meech in line 7 if he was describing a movie, her question reflecting a tone of surprise rather than a tone of inquiry. The co-teacher answered for him, saying that it was a “sick” movie. Next, when Meech continued his description of the movie and, again, connected the slogan to Donald Trump’s presidential campaign slogan, Ms. Cason interrupted him in line 13 and asked him if what he was saying was “germane.” I coded his utterance as *purposeful* because Ms. Cason was trying to take control of the conversation in an effort to redirect the conversation towards a different purpose. She was also controlling relations because she employed a more authoritative role. Her question was not designed to further the student’s contribution but to shift the focus of the discussion to something else. Meech’s response to her question showed that he did not know what “germane” meant. Several students chimed in and reminded Meech that “germane” was one of their vocabulary words, but still no one explained what the word meant. Meech increased his
volume and emphatically stated in line 16, “Naw, this ain’t germane!” and then described how his contribution was relevant by again making the connection between Donald Trump’s slogan and a quote from the movie, *The Purge*. His contradictory and ironic statement further demonstrated that he did not know what the word meant. Students laughed at the misunderstanding, and Ms. Cason ended the TOT saying, “Okay, okay, okay. Now” and immediately changed the topic.

The exchange in Excerpt 2 also illustrates the different backgrounds of the teacher and student, each drawing from different discourse types, which led to misunderstandings. When the Ms. Cason asked, “Is this germane?” Meech could not interpret her question because he did not understand the word “germane.” He asked, “Is this what?” Moreover, Ms. Cason acted as a “gatekeeper” (Fairclough, 2015), using a word that was a part of a Dominant discourse to control Meech’s access into the class discussion. Because she never explained the word’s meaning, Meech was not granted further access and his contributions are cut short. Ms. Cason also missed an opportunity to show Meech how his contributions were actually germane to a critical literacy discussion.

**Dimensions of Critical Literacy**

To understand how Ms. Cason was developing as a critical literacy teacher, I coded utterances that represented each dimension of critical literacy. I labeled utterances in which participants: 1) disrupted the commonplace, 2) interrogated multiple perspectives, 3) focused on sociopolitical issues, or 4) took social action and promoted social justice (Lewison et al., 2002). I looked at the frequency of codes in each of these critical dimensions and found that Ms. Cason exemplified all four dimensions of critical literacy in her classes; however, *interrogating multiple perspectives* appeared most frequently while *taking action and promoting social justice*
appeared least frequently. After looking at the frequency of codes in each dimension, I then analyzed the context in which they were taking place to describe the extent that critical literacy was present and why classroom talk moved towards or away from critical literacy.

**Disrupting the Commonplace**

The teacher and students disrupted the commonplace if they discussed the cultural, historical, and political context of an issue, made references to popular culture and media, and/or demonstrated how language supported or challenged the status quo (Lewison et al., 2002). I coded the critical literacy dimension of disrupting the commonplace 188 times across all four discussions. Before reading *Between the World and Me* (Coates, 2015) and *Real Women Have Curves* (Lopez, 1995), Ms. Cason showed students documentaries explaining the historical context of each text. By showing documentaries, Ms. Cason was disrupting the commonplace because she was including non-traditional texts as part of her curriculum and also situating knowledge within a particular historical context (Lewison et al., 2002). The language of all texts, including the documentaries, also disrupted the status quo, showing students parts of history that many of them had never been taught before in school. For instance, during PAR cycle 3 the teacher showed students in her fourth block Multicultural literature class portions from the documentary, *Chicano!* (Ruiz, 1996), which chronicled the Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. that took place during the 1960s and 1970s. None of the students in her fourth block class had ever heard of this movement inside or outside of school.

Not only did the teacher provide context for certain topics discussed during class, students’ personal experiences also provided context for certain issues. For instance, in Excerpt 4, Kierra challenges the status quo as she discussed how the criminal justice system positions
minorities. When I asked her about this moment in an interview, Kierra explained to me that she researched social issues topics independently outside of school.

Additionally, Excerpt 5 shows Meech, a student during PAR cycle 2, disrupting the commonplace by making a connection between popular culture and real-life events by comparing the language in the movie, *The Purge*, to the presidential election. However, his commentary of the language in both the movie and the presidential election remained on a personal level as he only noted the similarities between the words themselves and not their meanings or the ways they might have supported or challenged the *status quo*. Meech also summarized the plot of the movie without describing the plot’s relevance to the class discussion. The teacher could have used this opportunity to scaffold his understanding of the movie’s plot to understand and interrogate the presidential election and then to understand the historical context of the *Between the World and Me*. However, the conversation ended when the teacher used vocabulary that Meech was unfamiliar with. Her response also demonstrated that she did not consider his connection to popular culture as a serious contribution to the discussion.

**Interrogating Multiple Perspectives**

I coded “interrogating multiple perspectives” a total of 390 times. I considered the teacher and students to be interrogating multiple perspective when they considered different perspectives on a single issue and focused on the voices that are often marginalized. This dimension of critical literacy appeared most frequently in the data possibly because of the emphasis Ms. Cason placed on the critical lenses each semester, stressing the importance of considering things from a variety of perspectives. For example, in Excerpt 1 Ms. Cason encourages Kierra to consider a different perspective when she asked, “Is it only with the African
Also, when they found topics relevant to their own lives, they often took turns sharing their personal perspectives on particular issues.

**Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues**

In addition, focusing on sociopolitical issues occurred 216 times throughout all the discussions. The teacher and students focused on sociopolitical issues whenever they discussed how individuals are situated within the broader context of society and also noticed if there were inequalities within society. This aspect of critical literacy did play out in the classroom, but usually when a more knowledgeable person, usually the teacher or I, challenged class members to take a step back and focus on societal issues. For example, in Excerpt 4, Kierra described an instance in which one African American male was killed by police in Coates’s book, and when the teacher probed her to consider other perspectives, she discussed the context of society.

Generally, the conversations remained on a personal level unless directed outward. Students typically commented on their personal experiences or the experiences of people they knew during the discussions. However, the documentaries used in conjunction with class texts helped students see the bigger picture because they occasionally quoted information from documentaries during class discussions to support their view on societal issues.

**Taking Action and Promoting Social Justice**

Lastly, the dimension of critical literacy that appeared least frequently in the data, exactly 30 times, was “Taking Action and Promoting Social Justice.” Even though students discussed injustice and social action, the topic of transforming the world seemed like a lofty goal for both the teacher and students. Many times, the teacher and students discussed the problems without considering possible solutions. Also, the teacher asked questions about how students could change their individual actions.
However, one important accomplishment from this study is that students worked in small groups to write and perform their own plays about social issues that were important to them. They also created documentaries about issues that were personally relevant. In these assignments, students exercised critical literacy by interrogating multiple perspectives on social issues while focusing on solutions to problems that historically marginalized groups faced. The students wrote these assignments with a broader audience in mind and planned to present them in an effort to promote social justice outside of the four walls of the classroom.

**Dialogic Teaching toward the Commonplace**

The commonplace represents the current state of society, or the *status quo*. The dominant/authoritative Discourse shapes the commonplace and vice versa. Knowledge often takes on an authoritative role when objects of study can withstand the questioning and challenging of people within society (Morson, 2008). For instance, we know that two and two always equals four because it has survived such questioning. Sometimes, knowledge reflected by the dominant/authoritative Discourse is maintained because it goes unquestioned and unchallenged (Bakhtin, 1981). Fairclough (2015) attributed authoritative Discourse to the dominant class in society. He argued that members of the dominant class maintain power either by coercion or consent. Convincing people to consent to certain ideologies is the most common way for the dominant class to maintain social power. For example, certain laws have lasted throughout American history because people consented to them, regardless of whether these laws were for the good of all people. During this dissertation study, there were times when classroom talk supported the commonplace, as members of the class advocated for things to stay the same.
within society or presented knowledge as indisputable fact. The topics in this category included U.S. government, racial profiling, and the education system.

**U.S. Government**

One instance took place during PAR cycle 4 in the third discussion collected and analyzed for this study. Ms. Cason assigned, as a class reading, the play *Real Women Have Curves* by Josefina Lopez (1996). The play chronicled the daily lives of a group of Latinas as they worked in a sewing factory owned by Estella, the only character who is undocumented. Everyone in the play had become naturalized as a U.S. citizen except Estella because she was charged with a felony for catching lobster out of season, and having a felony made her ineligible for legal citizenship. During a class discussion about if the law was fair in Estella’s case, and if the law was fair in regard to other undocumented immigrants, Messi, an ESOL student from Guatemala, shared that he was once like Estella, and he did not believe that the laws in the U.S. protect undocumented people.

Messi was a high school senior who, a few years prior to this conversation, had walked for over a month from Guatemala to the Southeast United States, and when he arrived, he did not speak English and knew very little about the country. Of his immigration experience, Messi stated, “It was almost to be reborn.” He lived and worked with his older brother in construction while attending high school. Messi also shared that as an undocumented person, people would sometimes hire him and his brother to do construction work but refuse to pay them in the end. Sadly, he felt there was nothing he and his brother could do about it because of their undocumented status. Eventually Messi learned to speak English fluently and saved up almost $10,000 for a permanent resident card, or “green card.” At the time of the study, he was only $600 short of this goal and weeks away from graduating from high school. Messi spoke often
about becoming an immigration lawyer so that he could help people who were like he once was. He was usually very vocal during most class discussions, especially on the topic of immigration. After discussing with the class the experiences of Estella and other undocumented people in the U.S., Messi avowed in Excerpt 6 that he was going to change things.

Excerpt 6: “But I’m gonna change it”

1 Cason: Okay, now. So, agai::n, that's interesting that they would treat- people treat |
2 human beings as if they are nothing, because they do not abide by certain
3 standards, or look a certain way.
4 Messi: But, I'm gonna change it.
5 Gordon: How? How are you going to change it? Tell me. I'm excited to hear.
6 Cason: Yeah, I want to hear it myself. How?
7 Messi: Uh, first, I'm gonna be a lawyer. And the::n because to become the President
8 of the United States you have to be born in this country or to have- to live in
9 this country for [Cason: Born.] 14- Even if you're not born, you have to live
10 14 years in this country.
11 Gordon: Oh↑
12 Cason: No.
13 Gordon: I didn’t know that.
14 Cason: No.
15 Messi: It is.
16 Cason: Arnold Schwarzenegger. He was not born here. He wanted to run for
17 president.
18 Messi: No, I learned it on, on- It was in:: U.S. History.
18 Cason: Whose history?
19 Messi: Huh?
20 Cason: Whose history?
21 Messi: U-S History.
22 Cason: In here?
23 Messi: No, in Ms. Bolten's class.
24 Cason: Okay, I can't speak then. Because Arnold Schwarzenegger. Remember him?
25 [Demba: yeah?] He wanted to run for president? He couldn't. He wasn't born here.
26 Messi: No, but that's, THAT'S what I learned=
27 Cason: =So they changed it, you think?
28 Messi: Uh, I don't know, but that's what I learned. And even to become, to become
29 president you have to be 35 years old.
30 Cason: That's true.
31 Messi: So, I still remember | everything you guys teach.
32 Cason: (((laughing))) Oh, I believe you! I know you have a good mind. I believe you,
33 my mind's not that great! Okay. So, if you become president? | You
34 mentioned lawyer.

Excerpt 6 represents an instance in which the teacher and a student have contrasting understandings about subject positions within society, which resulted in extended dialogue. On the situational level, Ms. Cason was reluctant to ascribe agency to those who would mistreat undocumented immigrants. She used the pronoun “they” twice in lines 1 and 2 but did not use an antecedent to specify who “they” were. She used the word “interesting” to describe the treatment
of undocumented people but refrained from criticism unlike Lopez (1996) had done in the play and Messi had done throughout class discussions. She also used the nouns “people” and “human beings” in the place of immigrants to possibly show solidarity with people who immigrated to the U.S., a social group that she was not a member of. Ms. Cason intimated that the reason some people mistreat undocumented immigrants is because of their looks or because they “do not abide by certain standards;” however, she did not specify which “look” or “standards” she was referring to. Ms. Cason’s vagueness as she addressed the topic of immigration shows her hesitation to overtly address power struggles within society. Messi, on the other hand, acknowledged that he felt there was a problem with immigration laws. He was also optimistic about changing these laws and confidently stated, “I’m gonna change it,” in line 4. Through this statement, Messi demonstrated agency to change things in society.

On the institutional level, when I asked Messi to elaborate, I was enforcing explicitness, something that Fairclough (2015) asserted that people with power often have the ability to do. However, I added “I’m excited to hear” to reflect a more conversational tone and to make known that my intentions for asking Messi to elaborate was for my own personal interest. Ms. Cason also showed personal interest in line 6, “I want to hear it myself;” and then asked the question, “How?” By showing personal interest and using conversational tones, Ms. Cason and I employed dialogic stances that invited extended dialogue (Shor & Freire, 1987), and Messi did not disappoint. Messi explained in lines 7 through 9 that he was going to become a lawyer and then president of the United States, but he was interrupted by Ms. Cason who interjected the single-word, “Born” after Messi explained that to become president, he would have to have lived in the U.S. for 14 years. The interaction between the teacher and student was reciprocal (Alexander, 2006) as they took turns sharing conflicting information about the requirements for U.S.
president, and they both expressed interpretive authority. Fairclough (2015) explained that using linking verbs to express ideas often demonstrate authority, and Messi felt comfortable enough to defend his ideas and to challenge the teacher, emphatically stating, “It is” when she pointed out that Messi was wrong about the requirements. This moment represented a conflict in knowledge about the legal requirements to become president. Messi interpreted the law to mean regardless of a person’s country of origin, one could become president of the United States after living here for 14 years. Ms. Cason interpreted the law to mean that any U.S. president has to have been born in the U.S. and lived on U.S. soil for at least 14 years. Ms. Cason seemed to have more knowledge about the topic of the U.S. presidency, and one of her responsibilities as a teacher is to ensure that students have accurate information about the topics they discuss in class. When Messi added that the U.S. president had to be 35-years-old. Ms. Cason pointed out, “that’s true” as if to say what he said previously was not. The object of study, in this case, was hazy for Messi, and Ms. Cason’s role as teacher was to help him see the object more clearly so that they could examine it more thoroughly. However, Messi was sure that what he was seeing was all there was. Had they reached a mutual understanding of the requirements for becoming president, Ms. Cason and Messi could have moved beyond this topic and focused more on the point that Messi was trying to make about changing the conditions for undocumented immigrants in the U.S.

On the societal level, Both Ms. Cason and Messi drew on the dominant/authoritative Discourse of constitutional law, and they both demonstrated interpretive authority of this particular law. They also both drew on other discourse types to support their views. Ms. Cason used her knowledge of past elections, and Messi brought in knowledge constructed in his U.S. history course taught by a different teacher. By arguing with Messi’s summary of what he
learned in U.S. history class and repeatedly stressing her interpretation, Ms. Cason also intimated in her question that some versions of history are more truthful than others.

Undocumented people in the U.S. often struggle to assert their power and in some cases, defend their humanity, and feel silenced by the policies that position them in the margins of society. However, Messi placed himself on common ground with documented U.S. citizens and expected equitable access to positions of power. His initial remark, “I’m gonna change it,” demonstrated that he believed there was a problem with the way immigration laws positioned people like Estella and himself. A part of his solution was to occupy a position of power, so that he could change things for immigrant people. Messi did not say anything about not having been born in the U.S. in this exchange, so Ms. Cason was drawing on her personal knowledge of Messi as a person who had immigrated to the United States. Ms. Cason also drew from the dominant Discourse of the law and positioned Messi in a different position than he saw himself. She tried to inform Messi that access to this particular position of power was not possible for him. She did not inform him about the positions of power that he could occupy. An administrator pulled Ms. Cason into the hallway immediately after this exchange. When she returned, the teacher started a new topic. Messi never had a chance to discuss how he planned to disrupt the commonplace, which in this case was immigration laws in the U.S.

**Racial Profiling**

Another example of a dialogic teaching toward the commonplace took place during the fourth discussion in PAR cycle 3. Before the discussion represented in Excerpt 7, the students in Ms. Cason’s class were talking about the documentary *13th* (DuVernay, 2016), which outlined the history and the effects of the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. This amendment freed enslaved African people except if they committed a crime. In the documentary, filmmaker Ava
DuVernay related the passing of the 13th Amendment to the mass incarceration of African American people throughout U.S. history. Whitney, an African American female in her senior year, commented that police still target certain racial groups, citing the documentary as evidence. I agreed with her. Whitney was a very talkative student who contributed generously to each discussion. She was never afraid to express her opinion even if she was the only person in the class who held that particular viewpoint. Members of the class, including Ms. Cason, often had to limit her responses because she would sometimes dominate the discussion and other students would not get an opportunity to speak. She also shared with the class that she was boxer, and her ability to stand her ground and defend herself was often reflected during class discussion. After a short pause, Jim responded to Whitney’s comment with a different opinion about racial profiling. Jim was an African American male in his senior year. At the beginning of the year, he had shared with the class how he was going to “be someone” despite what all his teachers in the past had thought of him. He sometimes spoke of himself in the third person as if he were narrating his life story, “Everybody doubt Jim, but they gon’ see.” He also revealed that he had been involved in gang activity at one point in his life, but after his brother was shot and killed, he decided to change his lifestyle. Excerpt 7 begins when Jim placed the responsibility on the individuals targeted by police, claiming that Black boys make themselves targets.

Excerpt 7: “I ain’t even gon’ lie, I even made myself a target”

1 Jim: I mean, I don’t know. Some, some kids- some Black boys get targeted, they
2 make themselves a target.
3 Cason: How so?
4 Jim: I ain’t even gon’ lie, I even made myself a target, too.
5 Cason: How so?
Jim: That’s when I was like, [I was in the trail.]

Jurrell: [By being in gangs,] and having beef with a lot of people.

Jim: Not even, not even being in a gang, like I used to do, like, little dumb stuff. Like, we used to walk to the store at SaveMart. You know SaveMart already hot. We be like ten people with our hoodies on. That's a target.

Rose: Ye::s.

Jim: We all got hoodies on.

Cason: So, so, why would you- why would you:: [Whitney: consider that as a target] purposely=

Jim: No, no, I was just dumb. Like, we was just all dumb. Me and my [inaudible], we was all dumb. We would do dumb stuff like just=

Whitney: But=

Cason: But you already know the results of that. I mean, you’re, you're just perpetuating that stereotype. In other words, you're saying, "Yeah, we’re thugs. [Yeah’’]

Jim: ……. [Not stereotype,] because it was a White dude with us, too.

Gordon: But at the same time, what's wrong with wearing a hoodie?

Cason: Yes. Yes.

Students: [Crosstalk].

Whitney: Yeah, that's what I was going to say. There’s nothing, there’s nothing- It really doesn’t=

Students: [Crosstalk].
29  Cason:   Okay. Hold on, hold on, guys. Hold on.

30  Whitney:  It really doesn't matter the way you look. The way you look doesn't have to

31          do about being a target. It's just the way other people's [mindsets]

32  Messi:       [What society sees]

33  Whitney:  Yeah, what society sees.

34  Messi    Mmmh. (affirmative)

35  Whitney:  Just because you walk into a store, 10 or 30 deep, with hoodies on, doesn't

36          make you a target. [It's nothing wrong about wearing]

37  Jim:       [What do you mean] it don't make you a target.

38  Whitney:  No, it doesn't. Like, in people's minds it makes you a target- Their thinking

39          and=

40  Jim:       You a target

41  Rose:     ((sucks teeth)) Shoo::t.

42  Jim:     If you come out the store with- It’s 10, it’s 10 boys come out the store with a

43          hoodie on. I'm thinking [you gon’ rob me or you gon’] try to steal from my

44          store

45  Whitney:  [That is not considered as a]

46  Gordon:   So what if y'all were wearing suits and ties?

47  Jim:       Huh?

48  Gordon:   What if all of y'all were wearing suits and ties, 30 of you?

49  Jim:      That's different. You, you can't compare a hoodie and a tie.

50  Whitney:  See? that's=

51  Gordon:   Why not?
Jim: That's totally different. You got a hoodie on your head.

Gordon: What's the difference between a hoodie and a tie?

Jim: Because a tie go in there- you go in there, they respect it, you go like a=

Mariah: They're gon’ think you came from somewhere.

Jim: Right, and you go in there like a good boy. Now, a hoodie↑

Rose: Yeah, society, it really makes a difference, somewhat. It’s all in how you dress.

Mariah: Right, how you present yourself.

Jim: Yeah, how you dress=

Gordon: Well, thank you for saying that, because back to the book. What about Prince

Jones?

In Excerpt 7, the teacher, students, and I examined the existing system collectively and several members of the class shared their perspectives. On the situational level, Jim started out his response to Whitney by saying, “I don’t know.” This phrase was used as a marker to indicate that a rebuttal was coming as in “I don’t know about that.” He specifically said that it was “Black boys” that “get targeted” in his rebuttal. He was specific in identifying the “patients,” the individuals receiving the action, but he refrained from identifying the agent in this sentence. Who was doing the targeting? Fairclough (2015) argued that hiding agency through the grammatical structure of a sentence is often tantamount to hiding power relations. In this case, Jim was hiding the agency of police who use racial profiling. In his sentence in line 2, “They make themselves targets,” Jim placed Black boys in the subject position and described the process of them making themselves into something. The process of racial profiling was hidden in this sentence. Jim continued, “I ain’t even gon’ lie,” to signify that he was going to be completely honest with the
class. He then ascribed agency to himself and claimed that he made himself a target of racial profiling. In line 3, Ms. Cason built on Jim’s statement by asking him, “How so?” twice. Jim continued with the phrase, “That’s when,” presupposing that Ms. Cason and the rest of the class knew what time period he was referring to, perhaps because he had shared his personal history with them and assumed they knew when he made himself a target. He also mentioned a place, “the trail,” that many of the students were familiar with. It was short for the name of an apartment complex near the school. Jurrell drew the conclusion that Jim was referring to his past gang activity and said so. However, Jim insisted that it was not gang-related, and he added that he did “dumb stuff.” He then defined “dumb” activities as wearing hoodies and walking to the local store, that was “already hot,” with a group of friends. I assumed “hot” meant that the store used some sort of surveillance. Rose, an African American female in her senior year, agreed with Jim’s example with her elongated “Ye:::s.” Jim also used overwording, repeating the word “dumb” four times from lines 9 through 17. He then characterized dumb behavior by associating it with the phrases, “with our hoodies on” in line 11 and “we all got hoodies on” in line 13. Fairclough (2015) explained that grouping words together in this way creates a classification scheme in which a person’s ideology is reflected. Jim illustrated his belief that by wearing hoodies Black boys make themselves targets for racial profiling.

In lines 14 and 15, Ms. Cason and Whitney overlap in their responses. Whitney questioned Jim’s thinking while Ms. Cason questioned Jim’s actions. In the grammatical structure of Ms. Cason’s response, she placed Jim in the subject position saying, “You’re just perpetuating that stereotype.” She also added, that Jim and his friends were sending the message that they were “thugs.” She said that they were “perpetuating” a stereotype but did not identify the source of the ideology. She also used an ideologically contested word (Fairclough, 2015)
when she said “thugs.” Ms. Cason presupposed that class members knew which definition of the word she was using by offering no further explanation of it. Jim disagreed with the idea that he was reinforcing the stereotype of being thugs because he had a White person with him when he and his friends walked to the store. In his statement, he associated the word “thug” to non-Whites. As the conversation continued, I decided to interject, which slightly changed the dynamic of class dialogue.

On the institutional level, Ms. Cason created a dialogic environment in which students could volunteer to speak at any time. Jim controlled the topic by initiating the discussion and making the claim that Black boys make themselves the targets of law enforcement. Jim and his classmates used informal phrases like, “I ain’t even gon’ lie” and “Having beef,” “SaveMart already hot,” and “10 or 30 deep,” which speaks to the comfort that students had with expressing their ideas in Ms. Cason’s class. There was also lot of crosstalk, perhaps because of students’ high interest in the discussion topic. When I introduced an alternative perspective to Jim’s comments, the class seemed eager to share their views on the subject. The class members and I presented contrasting ideologies, and students were eager to interrogate multiple perspectives on the issue of racial profiling. At this point, students competed for the conversational floor, and Ms. Cason repeatedly said, “Hold on” to gain control. This reminded me of the interview that I had with Ms. Cason in which she explained, “You have to have control.” Overlapping talk interrupted the flow of ideas. It was difficult for Ms. Cason to maintain control of the conversation and direct students’ comments in a purposeful way because of this overlapping talk. Although students had previously spent a portion of one class period creating guidelines for dialogue, they did not draw on these guidelines to facilitate classroom talk at all times. Once Ms. Cason got the class to quiet down, Whitney finally contributed her rebuttal to Jim’s statement.
This exchange represented a dialogic encounter in which conflicting ideas about racial profiling was centered, and members of the class had to either defend their positions or change their views (Bahktin, 1981).

Further, the teacher’s role decreased after the researcher’s contribution to the discussion. She was silent from lines 30 through 61. The question that I asked students about hoodies conflicted with the comment Ms. Cason made earlier about hoodies, and she grew silent shortly after. I interpreted her response of, “Yes. Yes.” after my question, “what’s wrong with wearing a hoodie?” as solidarity and support. In an interview, when I asked Ms. Cason about her statement about thugs, she expressed that she believed it was her responsibility to teach students how to protect themselves from the dangers that might await them in the outside world. She agreed that racial profiling is not fair, but that it is reality for many of her students. The conversation continued to unfold, after Ms. Cason became silent, and I took on a leadership role as students discussed the topic further, enforcing explicitness by asking questions that attempted to get them to think about their ideological assumptions.

On the societal level, Jim initiated a social justice topic when he described a large group of Black boys with hoodies on walking to the store as potential “targets” of racial profiling. A few members of the class agreed with him. They never described criminal activity as the source of being targeted but clothing. Historically, clothing has been associated with certain social class groups and races, and although the history of clothing as the source of racial profiling had been discussed in previous classes, this idea was not interrogated during the discussion.

The commonplace in this instance represents the practice of racially profiling. The conversation continued to move in the direction toward the commonplace as students found no fault with the way things were in society but found fault in the clothing they wore, the company
they kept, and the places they visited in large groups. Whitney and Messi interrogated alternative perspectives at one point in the discussion and, for a moment, classroom talk moved away from the commonplace and toward critical literacy. However, Jim vehemently disagreed with their views.

When I asked him about the difference between suits and ties, Jim responded that there was no difference, and authoritatively stated, “You can’t compare and hoodie and a tie.” The meanings of these clothing items were fixed, in his opinion. However, I enforced explicitness, asking “Why not?” and repeating the question again in line 53, “What’s the difference between a hoodie and a tie?” Jim insisted that a hoodie was different from a tie because people respect ties and also because “good” boys wear ties. Mariah and Rose agreed with his comments. Mariah added, “They gon’ think you came from somewhere.” In her statement Mariah made an ideological assumption and expected listeners fill in the gap (Fairclough, 2015) as to what “somewhere” signified. The fact is that everyone comes from somewhere. However, Mariah drew from the ideology that some people come from “somewhere” important and others come from “nowhere” of significance. Rose commented that “It’s all in how you dress,” referring to how society sees individuals. I ended the act sequence by making a connection to the book and Prince Jones, Coates’s friend who committed no crime but was targeted and killed by a police officer because he looked like someone else and not because of his clothes.

Classroom talk remained on a personal level until Whitney and Messi briefly provided an alternative point of view and related the topic to the broader context of society. They spoke of how society views certain groups, in this case, African American males wearing hoodies, but still did not investigate the origin of these views or discuss ways in which they could change them. Throughout the discussion, students supported the view that people should work within the
systems in society even though these systems may not benefit all people, and try not to make themselves targets of law enforcement by dressing like “good” and respectable people. Thus, several class members viewed the current systems in society that negatively stereotype African American males wearing hoodies, the commonplace, as unchangeable.

This particular conversation was noteworthy because students in Ms. Cason’s class, especially the African American students, had strong feelings about the topic of racial profiling in the African American community. At the time of the study, it had only been a few years since George Zimmerman shot and killed an unarmed, African American teenager, Trayvon Martin, who was walking home from the convenience store wearing a hoodie because he looked “suspicious.” It had been even fewer years since the world watched on television as a judge declared that Zimmerman had committed no crime. Many people lost their faith in the U.S. justice system that day, and because Martin was not the first nor the last unarmed Black person killed as a result of racial profiling, it is understandably difficult for people of color to believe that the system will ever change. For members of this class, they focused on what they could change – themselves.

**Education System in the U.S.**

Lastly, Excerpt 8 illustrates how class discussion moved toward the commonplace. This discussion took place in PAR cycle 3 during the fourth discussion used in this study. In this excerpt, Ms. Cason initiated the topic of discussion by reading a quote about education from Coates’s (2015) book. At one point in his book, the author critiqued the educational system. Coates described his preference for the library because he could pursue his own interests unlike in the classroom. Rose, an African American female in her senior year was the first to respond. Rose was usually very vocal during class discussions. She was also transparent and often shared
stories about personal life and her family. She was also supportive toward other members of the class. For instance, when two ESOL students shared their immigration experiences with the class, Rose flashed a huge smile and said, “I love all people. It doesn’t matter where you’re from.” In Excerpt 8, Rose engaged Ms. Cason in extended dialogue.

Excerpt 8: “He didn’t like learning”

1 Cason: He- let’s see, ((reading)) “the pursuit of knowing was freedom to me:: that
2 right to [inaudible] and follow them through-” Okay. “I was made for the
3 library, not for the classroom. The classroom is a jail for other people's
4 interests. | The library was open, unending.” Unfortunately, a lot of us don't
5 even visit the library=
6 Rose: No, because it’s a far walk.
7 Jim: I do!
8 Cason: What?
9 Rose: It's a really far walk.
10 Cason: Okay. Okay. ((laughs))
11 Jim: I just go there, leave=
12 Cason: But you do have your phones, right?
13 Rose: Yeah, I read on my phone, I just don't read books because [it's so far.]
14 Cason: [So, EDUCATION]
15 is education designed to help=
16 Messi: Yes.
17 Cason: =all people?
18 Jim: No.
Rose: No. Certain people. But my dad said he hated school.

Cason: What do you mean?

Rose: He fought everyday. But that's because he was in a=

Mariah: [inaudible]

Rose: Yeah. And he had to fight, but he said he hated school. But he was good with math. He could do a math problem [without being taught it.]

Cason: [So, Hold on.] Why did he hate school? Was it because of teaching? Or=

Rose: He didn't like, he didn’t like learning↑

Jim: I didn’t like school at a point.

Cason: If you’re not learning, why not=

Rose: He feels- He just said, "It wasn't his interest." He said building things and math was the only thing that he was good at, and now he’s in construction.

Cason: That's education↑

Rose: No, like, he said he had to learn to by hisself. Like, in New Orleans, he said the school would be like eight miles away, and if he missed the school bus↑ he would just go build random stuff and just do it by hisself, so he just=

Cason: But, I'm saying to you, our system is wrong. We know people who hate school.

Building.

Rose: Hate it with a passion.

Cason: We have monies that's allocated to programs to help our people, Brown brothers, no matter what. And my point is we have more dropouts, boys, this year. Our retention rate is very low.
Jim: 30 percent.

Rose: This year, 30.

Demba: I don't think it's [inaudible].

Cason: What's happening?

Jim: Too many Black kids=

Rose: PARENTS! It's in the homes, it's the parents. They=

Cason: ((laughing)) What? Wait a minute!


Cason: What do you mean too many Black people?

Jim: Too many=

Cason: This school is 62 percent Hispanics.

Rose: I was about to say, ain’t no- you look everywhere else=

David: For real?

Cason: Yes!

Rose: =you see it's Hispanic | Hispanic.

Cason: So you say=

Jim: Hispanics technically Black, though. They got Black in them.

Sarah: ((laughs))

Jim: Agreed?

Sarah: No.

In Excerpt 8, after reading parts of the book, Ms. Cason shared her opinion about how infrequently many of “us” visit the library. On the situational level, Ms. Cason could have chosen to build upon ideologically contested words and phrases (Fariclough, 2015) such as
“knowing,” “freedom,” or “classroom is a jail.” However, she focused her attention on a word that is typically uncontested, “library.” Her use of the pronoun “us” demonstrated that she was collectively addressing the learning task with her students. It also illustrated inclusivity and solidarity (Fairclough, 2015) but for the purpose of making a critique about behavior appear less judgmental. She used it as if to say, “we all do this.” She emphasized the word “visit” to support the ideology that everyone should at least visit the library.

When Rose shared that she did not go to the library because it was “too far,” her response seemed to catch Ms. Cason off-guard. This exchange demonstrated a contrast in Ms. Cason’s and Rose’s ideologies. Ms. Cason’s response was laughter, perhaps because she did not initially take Rose’s contribution seriously or maybe because she did not expect her to disagree with her. When Rose did not reciprocate the laughter, Ms. Cason decided to build on Rose’s statement by asking if she used her phone. Rose assented that she did use her phone and then reiterated her comment about why she chose not to visit the library, keeping the conversation on a personal level.

In lines 14 and 16, Ms. Cason asked a closed-ended question about if education was designed to help all people, with emphasis on the word “all.” She used passive voice, hiding the agency of those who design educational policies and systems. Further, by emphasizing the word “all,” she seemed to be looking for a particular response. After Rose responded, “No,” and made a personal connection to her dad’s experience with school in line 18, Ms. Cason built on her extended response by asking an open-ended follow-up question encouraging her to elaborate. In her response, Rose presented a perspective that was similar to Coates’s perspective in the quote Ms. Cason read at the beginning of the discussion. She said that her father pursued his own interests outside of school, yet she did not make her connection to the text explicit. Just based on
the situational level, Ms. Cason and Rose each demonstrated particular ideologies about formal schooling. Rose held the view that education was an individual responsibility. She argued that formal schooling does not help everyone, and used her father’s individual experience as an example. She stated that her father “just didn’t like learning” in a matter-of-fact manner and rising intonation at the end of her utterance. On the other hand, Ms. Cason held the view that education was a collective responsibility. She asked, “Was it teaching?” Ms. Cason tried to shift Rose’s thinking from her father’s personal experience to the broader context in which her father was situated, but her line of questions and statements did not move Rose’s thinking in this direction.

I labeled this excerpt as moving towards the commonplace because, in lines 39 through 41, Ms. Cason shifted the conversation about Rose’s father to the retention rate of minorities and referenced the retention rate at SHS. When the teacher asked “What’s happening?” Rose attributed the low retention rate to parents while Jim answered, “Too many Black kids!” Both students believed the school’s retention rate was attributed to the individuals within the system. Finally, Ms. Cason, surprised by Jim’s response, built on his response by asking a follow-up question, but when Jim tried to elaborate, she interrupted him and cited that the school was actually 62 % Hispanic. Jim ended the topic discussion when he shifted the conversation to race, concluding that “Hispanics technically Black, though” but not changing his initial response as to the cause of why some people of color, like Rose’s father, don’t find school personally interesting or relevant. Based on the vocabulary, grammatical features, and textual structure of this excerpt, several ideologies intersected. The ones that the teacher took up were ones that were opposite to her own. For example, Rose’s comment about the library and later Jim’s comment
about Black people. However, the conversation did not move toward critical literacy because the teacher’s responses and line of questioning do not move it in that direction.

On the institutional level, Ms. Cason adopted a dialogic stance with her students, and it was clear she had created a space in which students felt free to express their opinions. However, she exercised her authority as teacher to build on certain comments while interrupting or ignoring others. For instance, in line 14 Ms. Cason interrupted Rose, increased her volume to regain control of the topic, and shifted the conversation from how far the library is for Rose to education, in general. Although Ms. Cason successfully shifted the conversation toward her goal of the broader topic of education, she missed an opportunity to discuss the issue of Rose’s access to the public library. In one of our formal interviews Ms. Cason discussed that many of her students did not have access to the same academic resources as students in more affluent areas, so it was ironic that she did not take up Rose’s comment on this very topic. This moment represented an opportunity for Ms. Cason to discuss the ways that young people follow their interests and seek knowledge outside of school and why some schools fail to connect to students’ interests. However, she seemed fixated on making a comparison between the physical library, where Coates pursued his interests, and school, where the interests of “others” are often taught. Another instance in which Ms. Cason controlled the turn-of-talk and the topic occurred in lines 28 and 29. Jim identified with Rose’s father by saying that he didn’t like school in the past, but Ms. Cason did not acknowledge his comment. In an interview, Ms. Cason revealed that her less mature students would say things that were “off the wall.” Jim had a reputation at SHS for causing disruptions in his other classes. Ms. Cason may not have given him the floor as often as other students because she was nervous about what he would say. Ironically, she did not
acknowledge any of Jim’s non-controversial comments about his experiences with learning, but finally took notice when he blurted out, “Too many Black people!”

Further, Ms. Cason asked questions and made comments about education, but her line of questioning did not lead to critical literacy ends. Instead, it encouraged students to summarize the problem. For instance, she pointed out that many people did not visit the library, pointing to individual student actions; she asked, “Was it because of teaching?” directing attention toward teachers’ actions; and she also pointed out the retention rate of students, focusing on dominant views on student achievement. She did not direct attention outward toward the broader context of the education system and society. She asked, “What’s happening?” but never had the opportunity to build on this question to explore “What can be done?” The members of the class were possibly limited by their own personal experiences and knowledge of the education system as a whole. As a teacher, Ms. Cason also could have been thinking about her institutional obligation to encourage students to value education and to limit their interrogation of schooling.

On the societal level, the teacher and her students were focusing on the topic of education, made available by the class text. The education system at the time of this discussion represented the commonplace. It was an institution that children are mandated to attend by law, an authoritative word (Bakhtin, 1981). It was also a place that presents students with academic curricula, knowledge that also represents dominant Discourse because students must recite academic knowledge on high-stakes exams to advance through school. When Ms. Cason began the dialogue with a quote in which Coates (2015) questioned the education system, education then became the object of study for the class to question and challenge and discuss the possibilities for improvement. How can schools better serve the interests of its students? However, the conversation never answered this question. As members of the class evaluated the
topic of education, they seemed to view it as an immovable, unchangeable system. Rose shared her father’s experience with education, and Jim shared that he felt similarly about school at one time; however, the reasons they provided point to individuals and their responsibilities. Rose commented that her father “didn’t like learning” even though he loved math. She later blamed parents for the low retention rates while Jim blamed Black people, and later included Hispanics. Even though the teacher and students located the commonplace, education as it stood at the time of the discussion, remained unchallenged, and the conversation did not result in changes or action in this particular instance.

**Dialogic Teaching toward Personal Response**

At times classroom talk focused primarily on the personal experiences of individual class members. While the commonplace represented systems within society and critical literacy involved the practice of evaluating these systems within society, personal responses reflected an individual’s experiences within society. Personal response is an important component of dialogic teaching because drawing from personal experience helps individuals understand subject matter (Dewey, 1938). Additionally, interrogating multiple perspectives is also vital to achieving critical literacy ends (Lewison et al., 2002). However, personal responses best serve as a means to an end and not an end in itself (Aukerman, 2012). Throughout this study, the teacher often initiated topics that the students showed great interest in, but the comments throughout some discussions were mostly descriptions of personal experiences. Discussion that remained on a personal level were on the topics of police brutality, immigration laws, and the U.S. prison system.

**Police Brutality**

Excerpt 9 is from the fourth discussion that occurred during PAR cycle 3 in which classroom talk remained on a personal level.
Excerpt 9: “They don’t control our body, but they control our image”

1  Cason: So, the body, the dangers of society as a male, a young Black or Brown child. What do you feel Mr. Coates is trying to convey to his son? What do you think? What was the purpose of the letter, the body?

2  Rose: To show you how to respect yourself. [Cason: Mm-hmm] And, um how to live in the world that- Well, the country that we live in [and know how to stay] aware

3  Cason: [Okay now, what-] Mm-hmm. I beg your pardon. So, respect his body. What do you mean respect his body? What is respect?

4  Rose: Don't let other people live your life for you, basically. Like be your own self, don't follow the crowd and stay away from things that would harm you as a person. ‘Cause he said that in one of them, he said- wait, hold on, let me find it. ((flips through book)). It’s gon’ take a minute. | Oh, he said, "Never hand over our body willingly." So he was basically saying if your friends are, like, a bad influence on you, basically handing over your body to them so do whatever they want to it. But, if you're, like- if you’re leading your own path then you're good. You're not handing over your body, you're controlling your own self, but if you let other people do it, then they're controlling you.

5  Cason: That sounds great However, I want to add to that. When you say, "Controlled your own body." Just recently more boys were asked to put their hands up because they fit the description. They lost their bodies. And they were told to “Get on the ground!” because apparently the police had a report that these kids fit the description, that they were dangerous. Okay.
A::nd they could have been killed, obviously, but they weren't. Okay, so it's the control of your body. Did they have control of their bodies then?

Students: No.

Cason: Then what do you mean when you say= Rose: Well, like besides that, you can have control over your body but not in certain- When it comes to stuff like that it's other people controlling it out of fear, basically. Like, with the police they're controlling you because you fear that you might end up not making it, if that makes sense?

Whitney: I think it [has-] Rose: [I don't] have nobody else to build off of, so::

Whitney: I think it has something to do with like what she said, how they try to control your body based off of fear. I didn't think like- some people act in certain ways that they won't be judged a certain way like how Black people are judged as ghetto and dangerous and stuff. Some people try to act differently, but they still will fit the description of society. So, I think to be honest, society, they don't control our body but they control our image.

Cason: They- they don't control your body but your image.

Whitney: Yes.

Cason: So if it’s the body- Okay, I'm trying to make a connection because, again, just recently there was even the news, again, whe::re I think this morning, a::nd I'm not sure how old he was, but he was shot and killed. | It was on the news this morning. And he may have been 13?

Rose: Dang.
Cason: And=

Jim: He got killed?

Cason: Yes↑ he was killed↑ He was killed=

Students: [crosstalk]

Jim: Oh, he was Black, wasn’t he?

Cason: Yes, and they were driving something, and I think he was on the passenger side and it killed- And it shot him in the face or something, he got-

Rose: Who? The person that was=

Cason: This was this morning. Okay. However. This morning. So, control of your body.

Gordon: Who shot him?

Jim: Officer.

Cason: It was a policeman, an officer.

Student: What?

Gordon: Why?

Student: [inaudible] shot.

Cason: Let me pull it up. Let me pull it up. Because it was on Tom Joyner this morning.

In Excerpt 10 Ms. Cason initiated the discussion by posing a question to the entire class about one of the major themes in the book – the Black body in U.S society and the dangers that often befall it. Rose responded that the purpose of the letter was to show “you,” the reader, to “respect yourself.” At first, Ms. Cason added her own words to Rose’s response by asking, “What do you mean respect his body?” She then asked Rose to define “respect.” Rose provided
an extended response in lines 9 through 17, and she talked about people not allowing peer pressure and bad influences to control their behavior. She supported her response with a quote from the book, “Never hand over your body willingly.”

Ms. Cason built on Rose’s response first with positive feedback, “That sounds great.” This positive comment softened her subsequent critique. She stated, “However, I want to add to that.” She then described a recent occurrence in which “more boys were asked to put their hands up because they fit the description.” She added that “they lost their bodies” and then later said that they were not killed. She mentioned that the police “had a report.” Writers often construct sentences in a way that centers or de-centers specific things or ideas. Fairclough (2015) maintained that passive sentences can serve as a way for speakers or writers to hide agency and thus mask power relations. When Ms. Cason uses passive voice throughout her retelling of the incident, it is unclear who almost took the boys’ bodies. She conceals the power of the police in the situation. Ms. Cason then asked Rose a closed-ended, follow-up question about if the boys in her account had control of their bodies. Without even having all the information about the incident, Rose replied with a single-word answer, “No.” Next, Whitney weighed in on the discussion. She started off by supporting Rose’s comment and agreeing with her statement about people controlling “your” body because of fear, and then she added the example that some people in society stereotype Black people as “ghetto” and “dangerous,” and she intimated that this stereotype follows people even when they try to “act differently.” Whitney reflected a particular ideology by grouping the words “ghetto” and “dangerous” together in regard to Black people and also presupposed that listeners understood what she meant by using these ideologically contested words. She ended by saying that society does not control “our body,” but they do control “our image,” or, in other words, the perception of Black people. Ms. Cason did
not build on this particular idea but instead just repeated the last phrase of Whitney’s statement to which Whitney responded with the single-word response, “Yes.”

Ms. Cason then shifted the conversation by providing another real-world connection to Coates’s text, retelling a news story that she had heard that morning of a 13-year-old boy who “was shot and killed.” Again, she gave very few details about the circumstances surrounding the boy’s death or the people involved and used passive voice when describing the shooting, leaving the members of the class to wonder who did it and why. This time, their interest was piqued, and they asked for more details. First, Rose provided a one-word, aesthetic response, “Dang.” Then when Ms. Cason tried to continue the story, Jim wanted to confirm, “He got killed?” and when Ms. Cason confirmed that he was killed, he followed up with, “Oh, he was Black wasn’t he?” Jim automatically made this assumption about race, perhaps from personal observation or experience. Ms. Cason answered, “Yes” but did not pause. She continued with more details from the news story, this time using active voice, but still not attributing the killing to a person. This time, she used nominalization (Fairclough, 2015) recalling that “it shot him in the face.” When Rose started to ask “who?” Ms. Cason interrupted her, perhaps to keep the conversation focused on the topic of “the body.” She used the subordinating conjunction “However,” repeated that she heard the story that morning, and finally stated, So, control of your body.” The conjunction demonstrated a hierarchical relationship between the words before and the words that followed it. By placing the phrase, “So control of your body” after the conjunction, Ms. Cason placed more emphasis on the topic of the body. The teacher seemed reluctant to share the details of the story and wanted to move the discussion away from the personal level and towards a discussion about Black people, in general, being in control of their bodies, repeating the phrase, “the body” to redirect the attention of the class. However, Ms. Cason did not make a clear connection
between the shootings and the “dangers of the body,” as she described. Her avoidance of active voice and personal pronouns reflected a hesitation to place blame on the individuals involved in the news stories. The stories about the shootings could have provided an opportunity for the teacher to center these instances as “objects” of study, especially since students showed interest in talking about them.

Not picking up on the fact that she was trying to move the conversation forward, I asked Ms. Cason who shot the 13-year-old boy. Before she responded, Jim answered, “Officer” and then Ms. Cason confirmed that it was a police officer. I then asked, “Why?” Finally, Ms. Cason went to her computer to pull up the news story to present all the details of the story. She never found the story because a student immediately initiated a new topic.

On the institutional level, Ms. Cason and students collectively addressed the topic of the criminal justice system and police brutality. She asked a question about “the body,” and took on the role of dialogic teacher as she built on Rose’s response and used a narrative to help her see a different perspective. She had control of both the topic and the turn at the beginning of the discussion. When Whitney disagreed that “they don’t control our bodies, but they control our image,” Ms. Cason did not build on this idea. She simply repeated the student’s statement and continued to refer to the body. This action suggests that the teacher was focused on a particular end goal for the discussion. It could also serve as indication that she wanted to build up to the broader context instead of jumping right into how society pictures minorities. However, she was also reluctant to address agency in the news stories, which suggests that she wanted to discuss them in a particular way.

On a societal level, Ms. Cason used real-world issues in society to illustrate police brutality; however, she used passive voice to describe these instances. Fairclough (2015) wrote
that when a person avoids attributing responsibility to a particular person or dominant group, this may represent “the power to disguise power” (p. 80). Ms. Cason wanted to discuss the Black body, but did not feel comfortable overtly critiquing those who held the power to take the Black body and even sometimes exercised this power with impunity. For instance, when Whitney addressed this power head-on and mentioned the societal context in which minorities are positioned, Ms. Cason refocused her attention to the body of minorities. As a result of the teacher’s hesitation to challenge power structures, the discussion remained on a personal level.

**Immigration Laws**

Furthermore, many of the class discussions about immigration remained on a personal level. In Excerpt 10, the teacher and students discussed the experience of being undocumented in the U.S. This discussion took place during PAR cycle 3. In the play, *Real Women Have Curves*, the Latina women who have become legal U.S. citizens and the one Latina who is still undocumented, all live in constant fear of *La Migra*, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement, also known as ICE. Before this excerpt begins, the class discussed how the character Estella felt hopeless because she was issued a felony for fishing for lobster out of season and was denied citizenship as a result of this felony. Before Excerpt 10 begins, I asked students what Estella could have done to improve her situation and suggested that maybe she could have told her story so that more people could empathize with her and join her cause. Excerpt 10 begins with Messi’s response.

Excerpt 10: “Immigrants like us, we don’t want to tell our story”

1  Messi: That's why immigrants like us, like me, we don’t want to tell our story
2  because we’re scared that- Because if you tell your story today, tomorrow
3  [inaudible] Even if they don't have a:: what is that called- when the judge
give them permission to go to the door? [Gordon: Uh huh (affirmative)]

They're just gonna say, “We are police,” and then “Open the door.” If you
open the door, they have the right to enter your house.

Cason: And I was told, because I asked- wasn't Mr. Barrera here yesterday? Maybe
it was third block. Yes, you have to have a warrant. And I was told Ms.
Rosa? She said if there's a knock on the door, do not open the door. You
have to have a warrant, and if they slip it under the door, that's different, but
never open the door. Never.

Messi: Uh huh (affirmative). Even if they have a warrant, but if that person is not
living in that house you can’t open the door. Because they say they are just
going to take this person, but there's another person that doesn't have papers,
they're going to take them, too.

Cason: Yes. Yes. And they're using the word police. "Police!" And when it’s ICE.

Gordon: So the only thing you can do is hide? You can't like=

Cason: Yes.

Messi: Right now, yes.

Cason: Yes. Right now, yes. It's tough.

On the situational level, Messi used the pronouns “us” and “we” to speak on behalf of all
undocumented immigrants. Throughout the class discussions, the ESOL students were usually
quiet. Some never spoke, even when Ms. Cason called on them. Messi, on the other hand, spoke
up often, especially when the topic of immigration came up. It was clearly a topic that he felt
passionate about. He explained that undocumented immigrants don’t want to tell their stories,
and he used the conjunction “because” to set up his most important idea afterward, “We’re
scared.” He also began the next two clauses with “today” and “tomorrow” to describe how present utterances anticipate future actions (Bakhtin, 1981). The present utterance of an undocumented person remembers the history of being undocumented in the U.S., acknowledges the laws the currently exist, and anticipates negative consequences for speaking out. As Messi was describing the problem, he was also limited in his vocabulary. He could not remember the word “warrant,” so he used the words within his linguistic repertoire to explain what he meant. Messi and Ms. Cason then took turns giving advice to a silent but attentive class. Ms. Cason, in lines 7 through 10 supported her undocumented students by sharing information that could potentially help relieve some of their fears. In line 9, Ms. Cason emphatically instructed students “do not open the door” while Messi stated, “you can’t open the door” in line 13. Ms. Cason’s advice implied that undocumented people have a choice in the matter while Messi’s advice implied that they do not have a choice. Messi then discussed the reasons why an undocumented person should never open the door for ICE, and Ms. Cason described the language that ICE often uses. When I asked if the only solution was to hide. Ms. Cason answered “Yes,” but Messi replied, “Right now, yes.” Messi’s reply suggested the possibility for change. Ms. Cason further demonstrated her support by expressing her sympathy, saying “It’s tough.”

On the institutional level, the class discussion was dialogic in nature, and the teacher, student, and researcher discussed the immigrant experience using the class text as a reference. Messi expressed his fear of sharing his story to others but demonstrated several times throughout this study that he felt comfortable enough to share it with Ms. Cason and the rest of the class. His openness illustrated how Ms. Cason created a safe space for students to express their opinions. The traditional hierarchy between the teacher and student was broken down as they took turns sharing tips on how undocumented people could avoid deportation.
On the societal level, the object of study was immigration laws. The teacher and students discussed the impact that these laws have had on undocumented immigrants. The conversation was geared toward personal responses because participants discuss personal experiences rather than trying to understand the laws and policies in society that position immigrant people. Messi described the subject positions of undocumented immigrants and ICE in lines 5 through 6 when he said, “If you open the door, they have the right to enter your house.” In this case, ICE is in a position of power because they have “the right” to enter an individual’s home even if that individual does not welcome them in. In this case, the warrant represents the authoritative word, and it supersedes the individual’s word. Ms. Cason also reinforced this positioning when she stated in line 10, “if they slip it under the door, that’s different.” They must open the door. In the end, although Messi hints that there may be change in the future, the future is not discussed.

U.S. Prison System

Finally, there were also instances in which the students controlled the topic and the turns while sharing their personal experiences. Excerpt 11 from PAR cycle 3 features a discussion about the mass incarceration of Blacks. Before reading Between the World and Me, students watched the documentary 13th that summarizes the history of mass incarceration of Blacks. Jim initiated a discussion about his family’s experience with the prison system.

Excerpt 11: “Prison fun!”

1 Rose: And then in prison, they make you do things | in there.
2 Jim: Prison fun!
3 Mariah: What?
4 Cason: [Hold on, hold on, hold on.]
5 Rose: [You been to prison?]
Cason: No, no, no, no. [Hold on]

Jim: [No, my uncle in] prison. He said it's just like home and-

Rose: It depends on certain prisons, though like=

Jim: No, I’m talkin ‘bout like he in prison-prison, like he on lock down=

Rose: Which prison he in?

Jim: The Chicago prison, Cook county

Whitney: Okay.

Mariah: Oh, my.

Jim: He went to jail, but he got sent to prison.

Whitney: Douglasville prison not so good I know ((laughs)) [crosstalk]-

Cason: Wait, hold on. Stop. *Wait a minute Mr. Postman*

Mariah: ((singing)) *Wa::it, Mr. Postma::n*

Cason: ((singing)*Hey, hey* Because of this, I'm, I'm appalled.

Whitney: Okay, [inaudible].

Cason: When you say, "Prison is fun."

Jim: But how he said, like=

Cason: That is=

Jim: You know, [he still got a phone]

Cason: [it's an oxymoron.]

Jim: He still could get on like, all that, social media, he can get on all that.

Whitney: Could he eat good?

Student: Excuse me, may I enter?

Cason: Yes, you may.
Mariah: Okay [inaudible].

Rose: ((laughs)) He stood outside before he entered.

Mariah: That's not funny↑

Rose: No, because he didn’t [inaudible].

Students: [Crosstalk].

Cason: Okay now. [Rose: Ms. Winthorpe got lost] No, she's in [inaudible]. Let's, let’s finish this first, okay. So. it i::s an oxymoron. An oxymoron, you know, kinda like the opposite of something.

Jim: They're like the same thing as YDC like, you know, like little kids go like- you know, [like 16-year olds go to jail]

Cason: ….. [That’s not prison.]

Jim: It's not a prison but, you know, how people say like it's just like a boot camp. It's like a boot camp, it’s like stuff you do at home but it’s gon’ start at a certain time.

Rose: My cousin says otherwise. [Because he’s in prison, now.]

Cason: [So:: Hold on one sec, one sec.] Go ahead. Go ahead {to Messi}

Messi: You have to live that life first, you said, "It's fun." Because some people it might be fun for them, but for you it couldn't- it could be not fun. Because you have to live it first and then you can say, "It's fun."

Rose: My cousin did two and half- He doing a sentence now=

Messi: Because my cousin went to jail, too,

[and he said being there] is like being in hell. It’s not fun.
Whitney: [I did it for a month, and it’s not fun.]

Jim: Yeah↑ That’s a- We different. My uncle, we different.

Rose: [My cousin got 70 days til he got out]

Jim: [I’m not going back to jail no more.] It’s not fun to me. It was boring. He been there for a long time, he traumatized. He all he know is jail, so he gon’ think it's fun in there.

Rose: Yeah, but people who don't live that lifestyle, [Mariah: yeah↑] like who not used to that. People who got their life together, got married, had kids, they got-

Jim: He didn't get all that, he been like this since he was twelve.

Rose: My cousin said he hates it in jail- or prison.

At the beginning of the discussion Rose suggested that people in prison were forced to “do things” against their will. Jim contested, “Prison fun!” His controversial statement increased student participation. Ms. Cason tried to get students to pause in line 4, but did not get control of the floor until line 18. In lines 5 through 15 Rose, Mariah, and Whitney contributed to the discussion. Rose asked Jim for more details, Mariah expressed her surprise, and Whitney shared her own experience with being in prison. Jim elaborated that his cousin was in “prison-prison.” I interpreted this to mean a high-security prison. Ms. Cason also expressed shock at Jim’s statement that prison was fun. “I’m appalled,” she stated, and added that “it’s an oxymoron.” Jim continued to describe why he believed prison was not so bad, citing that his cousin had a phone, internet access, and social media accounts. Whitney asked about the food, but the discussion was interrupted by a guest. The discussion continued in line 34 as Ms. Cason repeated her opposition to Jim’s statement. When Jim compared prison to a Juvenile detention center, the teacher pointed
out that the two were not the same. Jim then compared prison to boot camp. Rose brought up that her cousin was also in prison and had a different view, but she was interrupted by Ms. Cason who told her to “hold on” and then asked Messi to repeat what he had said. Messi told Jim that he could not draw that conclusion unless he lived the experience himself and disagreed that prison was fun. He also cited his cousin went to jail and described it as “hell.” Rose interjected that her cousin spent two and a half years in prison, and Whitney stated that she spent a month in prison. Whitney also did not see prison as fun. Jim finally admitted that he, too, went to jail and thought it was boring, stating, “I’m not going back to jail no more. It’s not fun to me.” Jim distinguished himself from his cousin calling him “traumatized” because jail was the only life he had known.

Finally, Rose suggested that people who “don’t live that lifestyle,” referring to people who “got their life together, married, had kids,” could not get used to prison, and Mariah agreed with her. Jim explained that his cousin never had the opportunity because had “been like this” since the age of twelve.

On the institutional level, the teacher took on the role of facilitator as students took control of the discussion. Students overlapped in their talk, and the teacher repeatedly told them to “hold on” so that she could gain control of the floor. When she gained control of the floor, she made evaluative comments, saying that she as “appalled” and that Jim’s statement was “an oxymoron.” She also selected Messi to speak at one point. She was demonstrating her need to be inclusive of all her students. These instances demonstrate her role as the authority in the classroom, but she also shared that authority with students by allowing them to control the discussion for a prolonged period of time. The result was a discussion centered on students’ personal experiences.
On the societal level, the criminal justice system represented the commonplace and went unchallenged and unquestioned. Several students, with similar cultural backgrounds, shared their experiences with being in jail or having family members in jail or prison; however, they failed to make a connection between their experiences and the mass incarceration of minority cultural groups on a national level. They described being in prison as a “lifestyle” opposite of those who have their “life together.”

**Dialogic Teaching toward Critical Literacy**

Finally, the teacher and students did successfully reach critical literacy ends. Members of the class discussed the historical, political, and cultural contexts of social issues, presented multiple perspectives on the same topic, and talked about ways in which they could enact social change. The teacher also moved class discussion toward critical literacy goals by sharing stories from her personal life. The topics that moved toward critical literacy included employment opportunities for Black people, law enforcement and communities of color, and public reactions to police shootings.

**Employment Opportunities for Black People**

In Excerpt 12 the class discussed the actions that people can take to reverse negative stereotypes. The topic was initiated by Demba, an African/French ESOL student in his senior year in high school. Demba had been in the United States for two years at the time of the study. He was born and raised in France by parents of African descent. He spoke French as his first language. Demba usually spoke in class when the discussion topic interested him. For instance, when Ms. Cason used old, Disney cartoons that depicted Africans as cannibals before she introduced post-colonialism, Demba spoke up and said, “This is making me mad.” He then initiated a discussion about his cultural heritage. There were other times that he laughed about
the cultural misunderstandings he often had when he first immigrated to the U.S. During the
following discussion, many students were absent and Demba took on a leadership role in a
discussion about stereotypes.

Excerpt 12: “Like, Black people→ It’s hard to get hired in certain places”

1 Cason: Is there any reason why we can't leave our, our current status?
2 Demba: Yeah, because of the jobs that we have.
3 Cason: Hm?
4 Demba: Because of the jobs that we have. Like, Black people→ It’s hard to get, like,
5 hired in certain places.
6 Cason: You mean all black people?
7 Demba: Yeah, all black people.
8 Cason: I'm→ black. So that's not my job. In fact, you know what? Whatever job I
9 wanted to get, and I'm not joking. I'm not even being cocky or anything. If I
10 wanted to be, for example, a newscaster, which I did for a period of time. I
11 went into the::, the office, the radio station, in Dalton, Georgia, had no
12 experience of radio voice at all, and I made myself do it. I'm→ black. I→ got
13 the job. | | | ANY JOB, when I was younger, I'm not kidding, because I had
14 that much confidence in myself. I did not want to | fit that mold, saying
15 black people can't do stuff. | So you mean all black people?
16 Demba: Well, not all black people. Some black people, they just think that sports is
17 the only way out.
18 Cason: Why's that?
Gordon: That’s the only way out?

Cason: Sports. Sports. [Gordon: Oh.] Good question. Why is that?

Demba: On TV shows and everything. They make it like sports are the only way out.

Cason: It is the media, right? [Demba: Uh huh (affirmative)] Well, if it's the media, then what can we do to change the media from impressing you on, on certain stereotypes?

Demba: Which=

Sarah: Try to change it.

Cason: What now? Say again?

Sarah: I said try to change it.

Cason: How?

Sarah: How?

Cason: How?

Sarah: By showing that you’re more than that. Like you’re more smarter than that.

Demba: Yeah. Like, Black people, they should try to be like doctors and lawyers more and more of that, so we can like, um- And then like the BET, you know, like, um, Black Entertainment Television? [Cason: Uh huh (affirmative)] They should put movies out with Black people being lawyers and stuff like that.

Cason: Have you watched BET lately?

Demba: I mean, yeah.

Cason: When?
Demba: Oh shoot, I don’t watch BET.

Students: ((laughter))

Cason: Because they changed it.

Demba: For real?

Cason: And- Yes. And yes, you're absolutely right.

Demba: But it used to be like Boys in the Hood and=

Cason: It was a lot of the:: video | dancing, and the rappers, and the hardcore stuff

People complained. And that's why you see a number o::f, of Black shows, now. You know. A::nd several, even Oprah Winfrey, she has her own |

station, or network, and, her shows right now, Greenleaf, if you watch it, it’s
gaired toward, uh, professionals. It's still the same drama, sort of like

Dallas. | So changing the media.

Gordon: Well, I want to add to that. Like, you guys are saying the way we change

their views of people of color is by getting jobs like doctors and lawyers, but

then doesn't that say, too, that you're only valuable if you have money? |

Like, I'm only valuable if I'm a doctor or lawyer? Doesn't that say- like why

can't we value people when they're starting from the bottom? Or why can't

we value people that are just working regular jobs or working class? Why do

we have to become a doctor before people can see us?

Cason: Good question.

Gordon: Don't we matter right now?

Demba: People they don't value poor people, like, at all.

Gordon: But should we?
Demba: Huh? Yes, we should care about—Because we're all humans, you know? So, like, we all go through the same things in life. So imagine if, I should put myself in your place. For example, if you live in the hood and you poor↑, I should try to put myself in those places and see how it is, you know.

Gordon: So that's the way you can change people's views?

Demba: Yeah. And they should make TV shows like that. Like you taking my spot for like a month, and I take your spot for a month, and we see how it's gon’ work out. | | |

On the situational level, Ms. Cason opened the floor up to discuss how we could shift the negative perceptions of certain minority groups. Demba responded that he believed Black people have a difficult time getting certain jobs. Ms. Cason asked if he meant “all Black people,” and Demba confirmed “Yeah, all Black people.” Ms. Cason emphasized “all” to encourage Demba to rethink his response. However, when he insisted, she replied in lines 8 through 16 with a personal story of how she got any job that she ever wanted because she had confidence that she could do anything and did not want to limit herself to a stereotype. She asked the question again, “So you mean all Black people?” Demba changed his statement to “some Black people” at this point. He added that some of them believe that “sports is the only way out.” Ms. Cason asked Demba an open-ended question to elaborate, and he explained that television sends this message. Ms. Cason agreed that the media does send this message and asked the class how “we” could change the media from perpetuating stereotypes. Sarah responded that we should simply “Try to change it.” When the teacher asked her “how so,” Sarah repeated the question, and then decided that the solution was for minorities to show people they’re “smarter than that,” meaning they could do more than play sports. Demba added that TV stations geared toward Black people
should show movies featuring Black lawyers and doctors. Ms. Cason mentioned that there were already shows like that, possibly to encourage him to think of a different solution.

Finally, I shifted the discussion by questioning why people of color would have to become doctors and lawyers to be viewed differently. Demba changed the focus from how different races are viewed to how poor people are treated. I asked the closed-ended question about whether we should value poor people? Demba responded with an extended response explaining that we should value all humans. I then asked him how we could change people’s views. He replied that people should walk in the shoes of others who are different from them and then make TV shows about the experience.

On the institutional level, Ms. Cason created a dialogic encounter when she presented Demba with perspectives that conflicted with the one he had presented, including her own experiences with employment. He was forced to either defend his position or change it. When Ms. Cason asked him the same question the second time, he was able to consider her question with her experiences in mind, and he ultimately changed his position. The teacher also asked open-ended questions, expanding the dialogic possibilities for the class discussion. These questions led Demba outward as he evaluated why some Black people may have had particular employment aspirations. She disagreed with Demba about the difficulty of employment perhaps because she felt an institutional responsibility as his teacher to instill hope in him about his future career choices. Further, even though the discussion was dialogic, this particular dialogic encounter employed a traditional IRF structure. The teacher initiated the discussion by asking an open-ended question, the student responded by sharing his opinion, and the teacher disagreed with his opinion, so she asked the same question twice to encourage him to think about his response. In the end, Ms. Cason agreed with Demba’s statement about the media, which
represented positive feedback on his response. The dialogic encounter continued for as long as Ms. Cason found points to disagree, and it ended when the teacher and student reached consensus on an issue.

Ms. Cason also asked questions that encouraged students to think of ways they could take social action and change how the media perpetuated stereotypes. When Sarah stated that people should try to change these stereotypes, Ms. Cason asked “how so?” When Sarah repeated her question, this indicated that she either did not understand the question or she was not sure how to answer it. However, rather than rephrase the question, Ms. Cason just repeated “How so?” Sarah’s response was slightly more specific, but could have been fleshed out a bit more if teacher had the opportunity to ask more follow-up questions. However, Demba took control of the turn by elaborating on Sarah’s answer. This exchange represented dialogic engagement because students were sharing the floor with the teacher and building on each other’s ideas. In the end, I took control of the turn, asking another open-ended questioned to encourage the teacher and students to think even broader. Demba was able to direct his attention toward social class and how poor people are treated in society. When I asked a closed-end question about if we should value poor people, Demba responded with an extended response, which speaks to the dialogic environment that the teacher and I had created up until this point.

On the societal level, the teacher, students, and I center the discussion on social class and race. The teacher presented conflicting ideologies, which caused students to rethink their own views of race and social class. However, even though the conversation about social class and race led students to think differently, the teacher’s discussion about the employment status for many Blacks, was limited to her own experiences with employment as a Black woman. She suggested that individuals have the power to change stereotypes. Sarah reiterated this point.
Demba pointed out that the media perpetuated stereotypes and should change the images of Blacks to doctors and lawyers. Their discussion reflected the minority perspective, or the non-dominant discourse, on social class and race. The media represented the authoritative/dominant Discourse on social class and race. However, throughout the discussion, dominant, capitalist views on social class remained intact until I brought it to their attention. When I introduced yet another perspective, Demba, continued to shift his thinking about social class and race.

**Law Enforcement and Communities of Color**

Excerpt 13 illustrates a conversation that also accomplished critical literacy goals but without the teacher questioning students. This discussion took place during PAR cycle 3. It begins right after Ms. Cason shared a news story about a 13-year-old Black boy who was shot and killed by a police officer.

Excerpt 13: “See, that’s why every time I see police, I run!”

1 Jim: See that’s why every time I see police, I just run.

2 Gordon: No:: don’t do that.

3 Jim: I can [crosstalk]

4 Cason: No, don't run.

5 Messi: Because if you run, it's easy [crosstalk].

6 Cason: They won't- Hold on, hold on, say that again, now {to Messi}

7 Messi: Uh, if you run they're gonna think that you are suspicious=

8 Jim: They gotta catch me. If they don’t catch me, then they don’t=

9 Cason: So, hold on. Hold that thought. Why is it – we’re off topic, now – why is it

10 that if a Black/Brown brother | sees a police officer, [Jim: I run ‘cause-]

11 automatically you think, "Run."
Jim: I just run ‘cause=

Cason: WHY is it instinctive?

Rose: Because on the news and how you- Like over the past couple years, you see that they're taking us out.

Demba: They don't care if- [crosstalk].

Mariah: Oh. Um. [Crosstalk] because it’s not us who’s dangerous. It’s them.

Cason: Say that again, now.

Mariah: It's not us who's dangerous, it's them.

Cason: How so?

Jim: They White.

Mariah: They not doing their job, [really, they]

Demba: [They using] the law to=

Mariah: They really not [doing]

Cason: [HOLD ON] Hold on. Now=

Mariah: They are there to protect the city, but they just=

Messi: They are supposed to protect [crosstalk]-

Rose: They're doing it constitutionally [crosstalk]=

Mariah: Doing it against their own will, really. Taking it in they own hands and not like=

Jim: The White man, they be the ones, they [inaudible]

Gordon: But what about [the Black police officers?]?

Whitney: [To be honest, I think it's just based off of]=

Jim: Huh? {to Gordon}
Cason: Hold on. Hold on. Hold on=

Whitney: I think it's just based off of our history of slavery, like every time you see a White person, run. Just like slavery. Every time they see a White person they try their best to run away from their situation for freedom, just like we run for freedom. Still when the police come by our door or come passing us, like, we automatically think, "Run."

Jim: Yeah ‘cause=

Whitney: I think it's something to do about like we're still not free, basically. We're still trapped.

Jim: That don’t got nothing to do with slavery ((laughs))

Whitney: It kinda does ['cause]

Jim: [No it don't.]

Whitney: Because that's what it's based off of.

On the situational level, Jim initiated a new topic when he made the controversial statement, “That’s why every time I see police, I just run.” Both Ms. Cason and I advised him not to do that while the rest of the class buzzed with chatter. Ms. Cason told the students to “hold on” and controlled the TOT by inviting Messi to speak. Messi commented that running would make Jim look suspicious. Jim implied that he was willing to take a risk of looking suspicious because the police might not catch him. Ms. Cason interrupted Jim and gained control of the floor, stating that the class was “off topic” and asked a purposeful open-ended question aimed at getting students to interrogate a particular perspective. She asked them to consider why Black and Brown people instinctively think “run” when they see police. She interrupted Jim again when he tried to elaborate and repeated the question. Rose gained control of the floor and
referenced the news and the stories showing that “they’re taking us out.” Demba and Mariah both competed to gain the conversational floor, and Ms. Cason gained control and called on Mariah to speak. Mariah opined that the police are the ones who are dangerous. When Ms. Cason asked her to elaborate Jim cited race as the reason, “They White” he said matter-of-factly, perhaps speaking from his own personal experiences. Mariah said she didn’t feel police were protecting citizens. Mariah, Demba, Messi, Rose, Jim, Whitney, and I all competed to gain the floor in lines 23 through 32 as Ms. Cason tried to control the TOTs in lines 26 and 36, by saying “hold on” several times. When Jim mention race again and says, “The White man” in reference to police officers, I asked, “What about Black police officers,” to provide an alternative perspective. However, my question was interrupted by Whitney, who gained control of the floor in lines 37 through 40. She provided the historical context of slavery and compared minorities running from police to slaves running toward freedom. Jim laughed at her response and said that it had “nothing to do with slavery.” They briefly went back and forth disagreeing with the relevance of Veroncia’s historical connection to slavery.

On the institutional level, Jim’s controversial statement sparked a dialogic encounter filled with many opinions. Members of the class competed for the floor and it was difficult for the teacher to gain control. There were several statements in the discussion that demonstrated potential for meaningful dialogue. In this case, it would have been helpful for the teacher table some of the contributions until a later time and focus on one or two for the moment and really explore them. When the teacher gained the floor the first time, she asked “Why is it instinctive?” but did not allow Jim to continue, possibly because she really wanted to him to think about the question a little longer and produce a more thoughtful response. Later, Ms. Cason assumed the role of a facilitator by quieting the class down, gaining control of the floor, and calling on Messi
to speak. As in previous excerpts, she demonstrated the institutional tradition of focusing on the quantity of students rather than the quality of their responses. Although students seemed interested and eager to participate, this moment is evidence that the teacher’s control is necessary, especially when many voices contribute to dialogue. Listening is just as important as speaking during critical dialogue because it interlocutors can build on one line of coherent thinking until it has been considered thoroughly.

On the societal level, the teacher quieted the class long enough for Whitney to gain the floor in line 37, and she focused the discussion outward to society. The object of study was law enforcement and Whitney presented a historical view on the issue by showing how it related to slavery. However, she made generalizations about race and the criminal justice system, connecting all White people with the institution of slavery. She also changed pronouns a few times, suggesting that “you” run from police, “they” run from slavery toward freedom, and “we” run for from police toward freedom. Despite her oversimplification of the issue, Whitney disrupted the commonplace by discussing the sociohistorical context of law enforcement.

**Public Reactions to Police Shootings**

In Excerpt 14, the discussion moved toward the critical literacy ends after a discussion centered around a popular TV show. Students made a connection between Coates’s (2015) book and the TV show. The topic was not only about police brutality but also the public reactions to the shootings of Black youth.

Excerpt 14: “Because people don’t care when Black kids get shot”

1. Whitney: People will do anything for money nowadays because that's what society and everybody thinks of, is money. Money controls people, so basically if you
2. got money, you basically control a lot of people.
Rose: ((Gasps)) That new TV show, *Shots Fired*.

Whitney: Yes.

Rose: It was different because on the show instead of a White cop killing a Black guy, it was a [Black guy]

Whitney: [Black guy.]

Rose: who killed a White kid.

Whitney: Oh, yeah. I saw the first=

Rose: But then two weeks before then they was like, "Why didn't nobody speak on the other shooting when the Black kid was shot by a White cop?" And then the=

Jim: [inaudible] Black cops.

Rose: The lieutenant told the mama whose son got shot, "You better not look further into your son's investigation." But when the White boy got shot, it was broadcasted all throughout the whole state. [Whitney: Yes.] Then so=

Jim: All cops the same.

Rose: The people, he's trying to figure out why is the- He said, why is the system of the police, um, thing, trying to figure out why they’re hiding the dudes that- And then they got- the lieutenant sent out a hit man to kill the witnesses of the cop killing the boy, innocently just walking in the street.

Cason: Now, how can we relate this to the book? I mean, how's that related to the book?

Rose: Because people, they don't care. Well, a lot of people don't care when Black kids are shot unless we make like we're, we’re- We speak, we open up like
open our mouths and say something. Like, if we don't say nothing then nobody would know about it.

Whitney: Like-

Rose: Then a Black cop kills a White person and it’s most likely gon’ be broadcasted throughout the whole-

Mariah: That cop ain't gone have no job.

Rose: -county and ended up, "Oh, you know, whatever?" Then the Black cop will probably get convicted, like, quick like this.

Whitney: And then the White cop gets put off of the ((snaps)) um::

Rose: It's just like a slap on the wrist, like he said.

Whitney: There you go. That’s like Trayvon Martin.

On the situational level, Whitney began by describing “people,” in general, who will do anything for money. Somehow she made a connection to a TV show called, *Shots Fired*. I assume the connection was people with money and people with power. Rose seemed to see the two as one-in-the-same. Whitney showed support of her connection by simply stating, “Yes.” When Rose described the show, she stated, “It was different” as if the show veered from an unwritten standard. As Rose explained the storyline of the TV show, she described how a Black cop killed a White kid instead of the presupposed norm of a White cop killing a Black kid.

Whitney and Rose both said “Black guy” in unison. When Whitney interjected in line 7, Rose interrupted her and excitedly continued describing the plot with rising intonation at the end of the words “then” and “Black” and “White.” Jim interjected a partly inaudible comment about Black cops, and even though I could not understand what he said, I interpreted that he had a negative tone as he said it. Rose continued her description of the plot while Whitney and Jim interjected
comments as she spoke. Jim made a comment about all cops being the same, again with a negative tone. In line 16, Ms. Cason asked a question to redirect the conversation, “Now, how can we relate this to the book?” Without hesitation and in a matter-of-fact manner, Rose stated, “Because people don’t care.” She then rephrased her statement to “A lot of people don’t care when Black kids are shot.” She also added that if “we” don’t speak up about it. I understood “we” to include Black people or those who care about Black people. Whitney, Rose, and Mariah continued with a discussion of what typically happens when people of color are killed by cops.

On the institutional level, the conversation was initiated and controlled by students. Ms. Cason took on the role of a “hands-off” facilitator” (Alexander, 2006). She only spoke once during the entire exchange. Her contribution was aimed at getting students to relate their comments to the book. Rather than focus on the book, students pursued their own interests, talking about a TV show and finally real-life incidents. They never make an explicit connection to the book. They presuppose that members of the class know that they are referring to the pivotal moment in Coates’s (2015) memoir when Prince Jones was killed by a police officer. The dialogic environment that Ms. Cason cultivated made it possible for students to pursue their own interests as they discussed the class text.

On the societal level, Whitney begins with a discussion of capitalistic values. She commented on how a person with money can control “a lot of people” within society. Rose connected this idea of money and power to power within governmental institutions, like the criminal justice system. She drew on popular culture to explain the idea of how money, power, and race are represented within the criminal justice system. By drawing on a discourse type that demonstrated critical literacy and interrogated multiple perspectives, Rose also (re)produced critical literacy discourse. Rose drew on a discourse type with a particular ideology that aligned
with her own. By supporting her with similar comments, Whitney, Jim, and Mariah all demonstrated solidarity in their ideologies. Rose indicated in lines 23 through 26 that although injustice happens to Black people, they can advocate for themselves.

**Student Assignments**

Finally, student assignments demonstrated how students were enacting critical literacy. For instance, after reading the play, *Real Women Have Curves*, students worked in small groups to write plays based on social issues from the play. Ms. Cason gave them one week to write their plays, two days to perform in front of the class and receive feedback, and two days to rehearse them. They performed the plays in front of students from three other classes and some of their parents.

First, Rose, Mariah, Whitney, Megan, and Jim wrote a play entitled “A Father’s Love.” It was the story of a mother, father, and their three teenage daughters, Megan, Blue, and Alex. They started out as a happy family, sitting around the dinner table, sharing happy memories from the past. The father then left the family, and the mother had to work extra hours to provide for herself and her daughters. The mother was stressed out from work and lashed out at her daughters. The three daughters attended a house party, and Blue was shot and taken to the hospital. The mother arrived at the hospital as soon as she heard the news. Later, when the father arrived, Alex and Megan blamed him for what happened. When Blue woke up, she saw her father, and told him to leave. He left and never returned again.

The students chose the theme of mother-daughter relationships taken from the play, *Real Women Have Curves*. They drew upon their own experiences and decided to focus on the father-daughter relationship to write their play. However, they illustrated the perspective of a mother and her daughters, and neglected to show the father’s perspective in the play. The play focused
on the characters’ personal feelings and actions but did not investigate the external factors that may have contributed to the main conflict. Members of the group also disagreed on the direction of the play at times mainly because their experiences with their parents were slightly different. This play demonstrates how the teacher gave the students a dialogic platform for them to explore a social issue, but it also speaks to students’ need for the teacher’s direction and constructive feedback to reach deeper understandings of social issues. Also, on the day of their performance, Jim was pulled out of class for a random drug test and was unable to play the role of the father. Jurrell played the role instead.

Second, Diana, Jose, James, and Jurrell wrote the second play entitled “A Day in Her Shoes.” A male character, Jose, and his male friend, Ricardo stood outside as Jose made cat calls at women. Ricardo advised Jose not to speak to women that way, but Jose dismissed him. Later, Jose woke up in the middle of the night feeling ill, went to restroom, and realized that he had turned into a woman, Josephine. When he called Ricardo, he found that he too had turned into a woman, Raquel. The next day, Josephine and Raquel went to lunch at a restaurant and the male waiter flirted with them and made Josephine feel uncomfortable. That night, they both went to a nightclub where Josephine was sexually assaulted by a man. Josephine punched the assailant and then blacked out. When Jose woke up, he realized that it was all just a dream. In the end, he decided to treat women with more respect.

For this play, the students chose the theme of gender roles from Real Women Have Curves. They decided to paint a picture of how women have been treated in society. They reversed the gender of two males in their play to illustrate how women are sometimes objectified by men. In the end, the men decided to change the way they treat women. This play moved toward critical literacy ends because it interrogated the alternative perspective of women, a
marginalized group within society. It also promoted social justice in that the main character made a conscious choice to change his views toward women. This view was being expressed on a stage with an audience who could potentially be moved to social action, as well. The characters in the play, however, laughed through their lines, and the message was somewhat lost in their presentation.

Third, Messi, Luz, David, and Chepe wrote an untitled play about a group of people who immigrated to the United States. The play was written and performed in both English and Spanish. The journey started out in an unnamed small town with 20 people. The main characters Juan and Maria paid a “coyote” 1,000 pesos to take them to the United States. When they arrived to Los Angeles, California, Juan and Maria were the only people to have survived the long, difficult journey. Fourteen years later, they lived in a house and had a son, Luis. The family watched a news story on TV that described an undocumented father being deported and separated from his family. The story made Maria sad but inspired Luis to become a lawyer one day. In the next scene, Juan was driving when a police officer pulled him over and arrested him for driving without a license. Juan called Maria and told her what happened. She cried and told Luis that his father was in jail and that she did not have money for a lawyer. The next day Luis met someone in the park that told him he knew of a good lawyer. When he arrived home, Luis and his mother called the lawyer and told him about their situation. The lawyer visited Juan in jail and told him he would be released if he paid a penalty fee. Juan cried and thanked him.

This group drew from their personal experiences and funds of knowledge to explore the topic of the immigrant experience. Many of the events in the play were based on true events, including the deaths of people who traveled with them to the United States and the arrest of undocumented family members. They initially wrote the play entirely in Spanish because that
was the language they were most comfortable telling their story. However, Ms. Cason told them that they would have to translate some of the play into English so that their audience could understand it. Their play moved toward critical literacy because it disrupted the commonplace, which was represented by immigration laws. They used internally persuasive discourse to explore the human aspect of immigration rather than the authoritative discourse which reflects the legal aspect on the issue. Their play also focused on a sociopolitical issue and interrogated the alternative perspective of the undocumented immigrant. The lawyer in the play represented social action. Ms. Cason provided them with a platform and an audience. The actors took their roles seriously and put forth a lot energy and did not waiver in their performance even when they struggled to pronounce a word in English or when other students in the audience occasionally laughed. Messi also took advantage of the platform he had been given at the end of the play. He walked to the front of the stage and gave a powerful, impromptu speech about how immigrants just wanted a better life. It ended with a standing ovation.

Lastly, Demba, Sarah, Emily, and Billy wrote a play entitled simply “Criminal System.” At the beginning of the play, two high school students, Junior and Juan, were practicing for a JROTC rifle competition on Juan’s front lawn. A neighbor named Hanna called the police and reported that two kids were outside playing with rifles. The police arrived and called for backup, reporting that the boys were threatening to shoot them. Hanna and the two boys talked while the police waited for backup. Juan explained that they were practicing for JROTC. Hanna explained that she felt uncomfortable. Junior asked her did she feel uncomfortable because he was Black and Juan was Hispanic. Hanna explained that most of the crime in their community was committed by Blacks and Hispanics. Juan replied that both his parents had jobs. Hanna retorted that they came to this country and stole their jobs. They continued this back-and-forth until the
police arrived. One police officer told the boys to put the rifles down, but they didn’t hear him. The policeman then fired seven shots and killed Junior. Juan cried hysterically and screamed at the police officer, “How dare you call yourself a hero?” as the officer handcuffed him. The policeman said that he was protecting his people from Juan and the other terrorists. When Juan said that he would get justice for Junior, the policeman laughed and told him he had no witnesses. Finally, Junior’s mother arrived at the police station crying and demanding answers for what happened to her only child. In the end, Juan and Junior’s mother went to court and Juan delivered a long monologue about Junior. He ended his monologue, saying “We are strong. We are important.”

As its title suggests, this play focused on the criminal justice system and law enforcement, especially as it related to minorities. Students disrupted the commonplace, law enforcement, challenging the behavior of police officers in relation to communities of color. They based their play on real-world experiences and used internally persuasive discourse to express their feelings about these instances. The students also focused on sociopolitical issues and interrogated multiple perspective through their dialogue as they represented two opposing opinions about race, crime, and law enforcement. They also promoted social justice when they took their case to court. However, they left the end of the play unfinished because they couldn’t agree on whether the policeman should have been convicted or not. They decided to focus their attention on the main conflict of Junior’s shooting and let the audience decide. Unfortunately, this play was not given a platform or an audience. Ms. Cason had concerns because the play involved guns. The students then stated they would not show the shooting but just talk about it. After Ms. Cason conferred with the assistant principal, he told her that no violence of any kind could be given a platform. In the end, students changed their play altogether on the day of the
performance and it did not go well. The setting was a classroom, one of them was teacher, and they talked about their grades.

The interviews, class discussions, and student assignments represented in this chapter illustrate what the teacher thought about a dialogic approach to critical literacy, how this approach played out in the classroom, and how students enacted critical literacy in their work. Moments of tension occurred several times throughout this study when the teacher, researcher, or students encountered conflicting ideologies. Through dialogue, members of the class presented diverse perspectives, and sometimes the result was a better understanding of an issue. Other times, the result was more questions. Ultimately, dialogue played a significant role in moving toward critical literacy. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I discuss how these findings contribute to existing research and the implications for future research, teaching, and policy.
5 DISCUSSION

Throughout this dissertation study, I examined one teacher’s journey toward becoming a dialogic and critical educator. Ms. Cason demonstrated many of the principles of dialogic teaching in her classroom, adopting a dialogic stance (Shor & Freire, 1987), addressing learning tasks collectively with her students, and building on their responses toward a specific purpose (Alexander, 2006). Throughout this study, she increasingly demonstrated the principles of dialogic teaching in her classes to reach critical literacy ends. The teacher and students disrupted the commonplace, interrogated multiple perspectives, focused on sociopolitical issues, and promoted social justice in their class discussions (Lewison et al., 2002).

Summary and Discussion of Findings

First, I wanted to know the extent that dialogic fostered critical literacy in Ms. Cason’s classroom. There were several moments that helped me understand how this type of instruction could be used toward critical literacy ends. Giving students time to freely express their ideas resulted in opportunities for meaningful dialogue. Also, using critical texts and popular culture to foster discussions about social issues that were personally interesting to students increased their participation during instruction across all three semesters. In addition, the teacher, students, and I became more critically literate over time as a result of critical dialogue. The teacher and the students agreed that they learned a great deal as a result of the conversations that took place in this dialogic space.

Second, I wanted to understand the role that the teacher’s perspectives had on her teaching practices. During my interviews with Ms. Cason, she talked about her perspectives on using a dialogic approach to critical literacy, how she enacted the principles of dialogic teaching in her teaching in the past, and how she planned to enact dialogic teaching and critical literacy in
the future. Over the course of three semesters, Ms. Cason’s understanding of dialogic teaching and critical literacy evolved. She shared with me how her views on laws, cultures, and values in American society transformed throughout this study. As her thinking shifted, some aspects of her instructional practice also changed.

In the end, not only did I gain an understanding about how dialogic teaching and critical literacy were represented in the data, but also what class dialogue ultimately accomplished. While analyzing the research data, I specifically looked for how the data might address my research questions, and several salient themes emerged. First, the teacher afforded her students with opportunities to engage in meaningful dialogue towards critical literacy ends, but she also placed constraints on the content, relations, and subject positions of the students in her classroom. Second, the teacher experienced ideological conflicts within herself and with her students that influenced the direction of critical dialogue. Third, dialogic teaching fostered several dimensions of critical literacy in Ms. Cason’s classroom, but social action was a difficult goal for the teacher and her students to achieve. In this chapter, I discuss my findings from Chapter 4 in relation to the existing literature. I combine my understanding of sociocultural theories, the theories of dialogism and critical literacy, and empirical research to construct understandings about Ms. Cason’s classroom practices.

**Affordances**

While traditional instruction directs classroom talk toward specific ends, dialogic teaching expands the directions that classroom discussions can take. This study highlighted how a dialogic approach to critical literacy could cultivate independent thinking in students rather than directing them toward a predetermined outcome (Aukerman, 2012). Through dialogic teaching, Ms. Cason gave students a more active role in the learning process (Alexander, 2006;
Applebee, 2002; Cazden, 2001). By combining dialogic teaching and critical literacy, Ms. Cason created an environment for her students that honored their funds of knowledge and promoted the evaluation and co-construction of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992). Ms. Cason also served as a transformative intellectual because she treated her students as critical agents while she engaged them in meaningful dialogue (Giroux & McLaren, 1986). In the end, class members constructed knowledge that was in many ways emancipatory. Ms. Cason moved away from the traditional approach to education, which organizes subject matter into “bodies of information and skills” that teachers “transmit” to their students (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970/2000). She also moved away from “traditional stylistic thought” that positions the language practices of historically marginalized groups outside of the classroom context and treats them as “the word of no one in particular” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 276). Instead, she created a dialogic space in which students’ voices were removed from the margins and literally brought center stage.

**Content**

One of the views that guided this study is that knowledge is socially constructed and is best understood within the cultural and historical context in which it originated (Burr, 1995; Cook-Gumperz, 2006; Mercer, 1995; Weinberg, 2014). With this view of knowledge, a dialogic teacher can create a learning environment in which subject matter is examined and re-examined and meanings are constructed and re-constructed. Freire and Macedo (1987) contended that knowledge is produced during social interaction. The authors also put forth that curriculum can represent “the logic of legitimation and domination, but also the possibility for transformative and empowering forms of pedagogy” (p. 20). In other words, educators can view knowledge as fixed and use it to perpetuate dominant ideologies, or they can view knowledge as socially-constructed and collaborate with students to evaluate existing knowledge and construct new
forms of knowledge. From the texts they discussed, to the critical dialogue they used to discuss them, to the assignments they produced as a result of discussions, Ms. Cason and her students treated knowledge as a socially-constructed process with vast possibilities.

**Texts.** Rather than treating class texts as fixed forms of knowledge, Ms. Cason and her students recognized class texts as socially constructed products, and studied the contexts in which they were derived. The texts that the teacher and I chose were pivotal in fostering critical dialogue. Lewison and colleagues (2002) maintained that choosing texts centered around critical issues in society is an important part of fostering critical literacy in the classroom. Ms. Cason used documentaries and social issues books, both of which successfully inspired critical dialogue in her classroom.

**Documentaries.** The teacher used documentaries to provide students with the cultural and historical contexts of class texts. Using popular culture and media was also one of the ways the teacher met the diverse needs of CLD students (Gay, 2002; Lewison et al., 2002; Morrell, 2011). Many of the Latino/a students in Ms. Cason’s class were transfixed as they watched the documentary *Chicano!* (Ruiz, 1996) because none of them had ever heard of the Mexican American Civil Rights movement. Messi was inspired by the some of the leaders of the movement and referenced what they had done when he talked about his vision for undocumented immigrants in the U.S. After the documentary, I told Messi that it took several years for the leaders of the movement to see change and that it was not always easy. He responded, “But we have to start. If we don’t start we are never gonna see change.” Several African American students found the documentary *13th* (DuVernay, 2016) insightful, and Whitney and Rose often quoted the documentary during discussions. For example, In Excerpt 13 Whitney drew from the discourse of *13th* to support her comments about why Jim wanted to run from police whenever he
saw them. She cited, “I think it’s based off of slavery…” just as the documentary had explained. Rose also quoted statistics from the documentary in a different conversation about prison.

Academic knowledge is shaped by cultural and political beliefs, and one of the goals Ms. Cason and I had was to utilize critical literacy to evaluate given knowledge and construct new knowledge that promoted social action and justice (Freire, 1970/2000; Freire & Macedo, 1987; hooks, 1994; Luke, 2012).

**Social issues books.** In the texts that the teacher and I chose, the authors used critical literacy to explore social issues from culturally diverse perspectives, and these class texts offered several topics for the teacher and students to discuss. However, students participated more when they could relate discussion topics to their own experiences. For instance, Messi pointed out similarities between the play, *Real Women Have Curves* (Lopez, 1996) and his own life. Students also drew on their knowledge of other texts to interpret class texts (Fairclough, 2015).

For example, Rose identified correlations between the TV show *Shots Fired* and the memoir *Between the World and Me* (Coates, 2015). Several participants showed particular interest in the topics of social class, immigration, and the criminal justice system. For all three topics, students made connections to texts or personal experiences.

**Classroom discourse.** By choosing curricular materials that centered around social issues that students found interesting and relevant to their experiences, and focusing, not just on the texts themselves but also the contexts in which they were derived, Ms. Cason and her students constructed rich meanings from class texts and gained deeper understandings of the external world. The affordances of discussing context is that classroom discussions flourished even when students had not fully read texts. All students could find ways to contribute to the conversation by discussing the historical, cultural, and political contexts of the books read in
class. For instance, one student in PAR cycle 1 admitted, “Um, I didn't really read the book, but the parts that I did read…” She then provided valuable insights on her experiences in the world. Freire and Macedo (1987) maintained that before individuals read the word, they read the world. Understanding the world was just as important a goal as understanding the words on the pages of the assigned books. In fact, discussing the world first potentially deepened students’ understandings of future texts. Fairclough (2015) wrote that "text interpretation is the interpretation of an interpretation" (p. 104). That is, authors first read the world and then write their interpretation of it. If readers take an author’s words at face value, they might take the author’s interpretation of the world as the only one there is. On the other hand, if readers first interpret the world themselves and then read an author’s words, they understand that author’s words to be an additional interpretation to their own, and they can ultimately decide on what is internally persuasive (Bakhtin, 1981).

Furthermore, by using dialogue as the vehicle for learning, members of the class expanded the directions that their conversations could take and the possibilities for critical literacy. Whereas test-driven instruction often guides students toward a specific destination, dialogic instruction took both the teacher and students on a journey with multiple destinations. As students discussed topics, they made connections to their own lives, popular culture, and other texts. They shared multiple perspectives of the same object of study and learned new information, changed their opinions, or validated their currently-held beliefs. They applied what they were learning in class to real-world events. They envisioned the future and discussed how it might look. Not only did they enjoy the journey toward critical literacy, they saw purpose in the journey.
**Student assignments.** Student assignments, such as the one-act-plays that students wrote, represented social issues that many students felt passionately about. Ms. Cason allowed her students to choose a topic from *Real Women Have Curves* (Lopez, 1996) to develop their plays. They chose the topics of parent-child relationships, gender roles, immigration, and the criminal justice system and police brutality. The views they presented in their plays also reflected the opinions that they expressed in class dialogue. Several students took pride in their work because they were given an opportunity to share their stories with a wider audience. For the most part, students decided on the content of the plays and how the content would be presented. For instance, one group of students performed their play partly in Spanish. Messi argued, “It should be in Spanish. Mexicans speak Spanish.” For him it did not make sense to tell the story of Mexican immigrants in English because this did not reflect the reality of the characters in their play. Ms. Cason contended that if the members of Messi’s group wanted everyone in their audience to understand their message, they should at least make half of the play in English, and they agreed to change some of it. Several researchers have contended that when working with students of color, teachers should legitimate the linguistic resources they bring into the classroom while finding ways to expand their language practices to understand and transform the broader society (Delpit, 1995/2006; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gay, 2002; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lee, 2007; Moll et al., 1992). I saw Ms. Cason’s compromise with Messi’s group as doing just that.

**Relations**

The classroom environment that Ms. Cason cultivated played a significant role in facilitating dialogue. Dewey (1938) characterized the learning environment as the conditions that “interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience which is
had” (p. 44). Ms. Cason created a learning experience in which the learning purposes aligned with the needs and interests of her students. She cultivated a learning environment that encouraged dialogue by arranging students’ desks facing each other, presenting debatable topics, and adopting a dialogic stance in which she valued students’ opinions (Alexender, 2006; Boyd & Markarian, 2011). Learning was a social process (Dewey, 1938; Vygotsky, 1962/2012) that not only took into account the teacher’s experiences, worldviews, and language practices, but also valued students’ histories, opinions, and linguistic repertoires (Delpit, 1995/2006; Gay, 2002; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lee, 2007; Moll et al., 1992) as members of the class explored relevant discussion topics. The utterances of Ms. Cason and her students thrived in an “authentic environment” in which heteroglossia was realized (Bakhtin, 1981). That is, rather than trying to force students into a unified ideology, the teacher made space for diverse worldviews, values, and practices in her classroom.

**Sharing the conversational floor.** By employing a dialogic approach, Ms. Cason valued her students’ funds of knowledge, and students seemed comfortable sharing their ideas in her classroom. For instance, in Excerpt 10, Messi stated “That's why immigrants like us, like me, we don’t want to tell our story because we’re scared…” However, he felt safe enough in Ms. Cason’s classroom to openly share his story. By sharing the conversational floor with her students, Ms. Cason was able to make students feel that their contributions were equally important. hooks (1994) contended that “Making the classroom a democratic setting where everyone feels a responsibility to contribute is a central goal of transformative pedagogy” (p. 39). All members of the class were invited to share their perspectives, and several students contributed to each class discussion. It was apparent that students considered themselves as equal partners in the learning process as they discussed subject matter.
Sharing interpretive authority. Ms. Cason often shared interpretive authority with her students, which is difficult for many teachers to do (Aukerman, 2012; Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970/2000; hooks, 1994; Shor & Freire, 1987). Sharing intellectual authority with students is an important part of dialogic teaching because students can use critical and independent thinking to decide what is internally persuasive for them rather than accepting authoritative Discourse without question (Bakhtin, 1981). The learning process may also be more meaningful for them. Alexander (2006) argued that the dialogic teacher should not do the thinking for students but should provide students with opportunities to engage with others as they think through subject matter and reach informed conclusions. The dialogic teacher acts as a guide who asks questions that help students develop their ideas. Because Ms. Cason used a dialogic approach with her students, they were able to think through different topics with their peers, listen to different perspectives, and, over time, draw informed conclusions based on what they had discussed in class.

Dewey (1938) wrote that “problems are the stimulus to thinking” (p. 79). Much of classroom dialogue took place when the teacher, students, and I presented contrasting worldviews to construct knowledge about topics (Alexander, 2006; Bakhtin, 1981; Burbules, 1993; Shor & Freire, 1987; Wells, 2001). Ms. Cason fostered dialogic encounters in which conflicting ideologies caused students to either defend their views or shift their thinking (Bakhtin, 1981). For instance, in Excerpt 6 Messi defended his views about the requirements to become president of the U.S. In Excerpt 8 Rose defended her position and maintained interpretive authority as she described her father’s experiences with schooling. After Ms. Cason interpreted Rose’s father’s experience, saying “That’s education↑” Rose responded, “No, like, he said he had to learn to by hisself.” She then continued describing specific aspects of her father’s
learning experience that Ms. Cason did not know about, like how her father was in New Orleans, how far he was from the school, and if he missed the bus, how he stayed home and taught himself. Even though it seemed that she and the teacher did not reach a mutual understanding about the problems facing our educational system, Rose was an expert on her own life (Delpit, 1995/2006) and was adamant about interpreting her family member’s experiences herself.

**Building on responses.** Throughout this study, Ms. Cason posed questions and statements that inspired dialogue. When Ms. Cason listened intently to her students and asked follow-up questions that helped them think through sociopolitical issues (Alexander, 2006; Shor & Freire, 1987). For instance, when Demba expressed in Excerpt 12 that it was hard for all Black people “to get jobs in certain places,” Ms. Cason and I asked questions that encouraged him to consider alternate views. Ms. Cason asked, “You mean all Black people?” Later, I questioned Demba’s statement that more Black people should become doctors and lawyers to reverse negative stereotypes, asking, “doesn’t that say, too, that you’re only valuable if you have money?” Our questions caused Demba to rethink his statements, and he decided that all people were valuable. He stated, “we’re all human, you know? So, like, we all go through the same things in life.” There were also times when students’ comments inspired dialogue. For example, in Excerpt 11, when Jim exclaimed, “Prison fun!” several classmates presented diverse perspectives, and Jim ultimately changed his position, saying “It’s not fun to me. It was boring.” Because Ms. Cason cultivated a dialogic environment in which students became equal partners in constructing knowledge, critical dialogue was able to take place in her classroom.

**Subject Positions**

Fairclough (2015) posited that members of society occupy subject positions, “which they are exposed to partly through learning to operate within various discourse types (p. 122).
Discourses embody the ideologies of specific cultural groups, and Fairclough argued that all ideology “positions subjects” within society (p. 124). For instance, dominant ideologies position policymakers, administrators, teachers, students, and parents in different subject positions in society. Individuals can also occupy more than one subject position. Ms. Cason and her students at times repositioned themselves in a way that contrasted with dominant ideologies.

**Teacher as transformative intellectual.** One of the affordances of using a dialogic approach was that Ms. Cason positioned herself as a transformative intellectual rather than a routine worker. The school at which Ms. Cason taught was located in an urbanized area (NCES), served CLD students of mostly Latino/a and African descent, and had been labeled as “underperforming” for several years in a row. The administration of the school faced external pressure to increase the graduation rate and students’ performance on high-stakes exams. The principal held an assembly to encourage seniors to work hard to improve their grades so that they could graduate, and the school had review days planned throughout the school year. During this time, each teacher focused on an area that students were not meeting district standards, and students rotated from room to room to receive targeted instruction and support in the areas in which they were struggling. On these days, schooling adopted an efficiency model to transmit as much information to as many students as they possibly could in a very short amount time. Teachers assumed the roles of “depositors” of knowledge (Freire, 1970/200). However, by utilizing a dialogic approach in her classroom, Ms. Cason repositioned herself as a transformative educator, an intellectual who was capable of making choices that were best for her students.

**Students as critical agents.** Ms. Cason also positioned her students as critical agents rather than just “depositaries” of knowledge (Freire, 1970/2000). District mandates forced school
administrators to think in terms of numbers and percentages of students failing, perpetuating commonly-held deficit views of CLD students (Delpit, 1995/2006; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lee, 2007). Ladson-Billings (2009) pointed out that deficit views in which students are regarded as “know-nothings” or “know-very-littles” is only “exacerbated in classrooms of minority students” (p. 60). In contrast, Ms. Cason thought of her students as individuals with complex histories, worldviews, values, and linguistic practices. By welcoming their contributions to classroom discussions, she positioned students as intellectuals who were capable of engaging in thoughtful discussions about social issues. In addition, by directing students’ attention to the historical and political contexts of class texts, Ms. Cason helped students see how dominant Discourses positioned them throughout history and in modern society, and students were then able to reimagine different subject positions for themselves in the future.

**Ideological Conflicts**

However, the findings from this study were not cut and dry. Berthoff (1987) wrote, “Nothing about society or language or culture or the human soul is simple” (p. xii). This statement holds true for the teacher in this study as she implemented a dialogic approach to critical literacy. While Ms. Cason created an environment in which she valued students’ contributions, she faced conflicting ideologies within herself and with her students that, at times, complicated the path toward critical literacy. Her dilemma was not uncommon. Lewison et al. (2002) found that “In moving toward enacting critical practices, most teachers are faced with a continuing examination and revision of long-held beliefs” (p. 390). Critical literacy entails examining the world with students in order to help them understand how they can transform it (Freire & Macedo, 1987); but first, critical educators must “examine the social and political
interests that construct their own voices” (Giroux, 1987, p. 22). During our interviews, Ms. Cason revealed her views on society, schooling, teaching, and learning. During my observations of her class, I witnessed how these perspectives shaped the direction of classroom talk and the extent that critical literacy was able to take place.

**Within the Teacher**

Ms. Cason held complex views on society. She believed that the existing social order in society was fixed. She repeated during several interviews, “You have to have your have-haves and have-nots.” She added, “That sounds awful, but it’s true.” Ms. Cason believed that this social hierarchy was necessary in order to avoid “chaos.” However, when I consulted with Ms. Cason about her views on society at the conclusion of the study, she maintained her original argument but emphasized that she did not feel that way about the structure of her classroom. She believed her students could be and do whatever they wanted in life, and she always encouraged them to pursue their dreams. Ms. Cason did not want to change the structure of society, and she was content to work within the existing system. To her, the “have-nots” were just a necessary part of the social order. Ostensibly, with this view, it was difficult for her to “disrupt the status quo” through class discussions (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Lewison et al., 2002).

The teacher showed excitement about the critical lenses and shared her personal experiences to bring to life certain cultural or historical contexts. She also legitimized students’ voices and experiences during instruction. Ms. Cason expressed in an interview that her students were “so filled with other thoughts, It’d be wrong for me to stifle that, or suppress that.” She added, “Whatever you think, you’re not wrong.” She celebrated cultural diversity, encouraged students to examine historical and political contexts, and taught them to be vigilant of oppressive systems in society. However, in her critical literacy practices, Ms. Cason did not promote the
transformation of society. For instance, she informed her undocumented students of their legal rights and told them, “Do not open the door” for ICE. She added, “if they slip it under the door, that’s different.” She also agreed with Jim when he said he made himself a target by walking to the store with a group of friends wearing hoodies. During member checking, Ms. Cason reflected on her statements and shared that certain systems were not fair for people of color, but they were the current reality, and she had an obligation to keep her students safe.

**Within Her Practice**

Throughout this study there was a palpable tension between traditional, or monologic, instruction and dialogic instruction as Ms. Cason tried to embrace the principles of dialogic teaching. During one of our informal talks, after about three weeks into the semester, Ms. Cason expressed that she was excited that her students were enjoying the readings, applying the lenses, and engaging in critical dialogue, but she had concerns that students did not have very many grades. She also stated that students really had not been “doing anything.” Shor and Freire (1987) argued that this tension between monologic and dialogic practices is a result of how some teachers view knowledge. In the traditional classroom, teachers view knowledge as fixed and deliver it to students, typically by lecturing them. This is a preferred method because it can be easily counted and graded with relative ease. In the dialogic classroom, although teachers have expert knowledge of subject matter, they do not view knowledge as fixed and engage in dialogue with students to reexamine existing knowledge. Dialogic teachers adopt an epistemology that views knowledge as a social construction, situated within a particular context, and likely to change over time (Burr, 1995). Ms. Cason was comfortable teaching vocabulary, grammar, literary devices, and even critical lenses. These represented subject material that she could easily package for students, deliver to them, and evaluate whether they received it. She was also
comfortable facilitating class discussions in which the students were the only ones contributing their ideas. She would listen to students’ comments, tally their responses, and grade them on the number of times they made meaningful contributions to the discussion.

Many teachers rely on traditional instruction because it is much easier to follow an already beaten path (Dewey, 1938). However, dialogic teaching is “messier” than traditional instruction (Aukerman, 2012) because the dialogic process cannot be scripted and is not easily measured. It is more of an art form in which teachers exercise their “creative ingenuity” to guide conversations (Shor & Freire, 1987). Dialogic teachers combine their knowledge of students and their pedagogical expertise to advance conversations towards specific intellectual goals (Alexander, 2006). Alexander also argued that in order for classrooms to truly be dialogic, then dialogue would have to be an integral part of class instruction, and not simply a skill that is occasionally taught when time permits. That is, dialogic teachers consider oral discussions just as important as written discussions and other learning activities. Adopting a dialogic approach required Ms. Cason to shift the way she viewed knowledge, the construction of knowledge, and the goals of schooling. This was not an easy task.

**Between the Teacher and Her Students**

Ms. Cason showed concern with keeping students “behavior-wise, under control.” She worried about engaging in extended dialogue with students who she considered less mature. She mentioned, “They love cursing,” and suggested that they might say something “off the wall,” but she agreed that they might benefit from class discussion “even if they laugh,” because “they listen.” During my observations, I noticed that Ms. Cason addressed behavior more often with her multicultural literature students than with her AP students. She explained that her AP students had been given more opportunities to have class discussions than her multicultural
literature students throughout their academic careers. Ms. Cason also informed me that she had tried facilitating class discussions with her multicultural literature students in the past, but they were “not interested.” Shor and Freire (1987) postulated that traditional curriculum conditions students to “[reject] their own freedom, their own critical development” (p. 21). During my observations, although some students did not participate in class dialogue, many of the multicultural literature students embraced the freedom afforded by dialogic instruction, especially when they were interested in a particular topic. Shor and Freire elucidated that “dialogic inquiry is situated in the culture, language, and politics, and themes of students” (p. 18). As Ms. Cason and I learned more about the students, we were able to present topics that centered around their lived experiences, and the classroom filled with excited, overlapping talk. Ms. Cason often viewed this overlapping talk as “noise” that she had to get under control. She said, “Hold on, hold on, hold on” to quiet the class and then reverted to a more traditional classroom format with students bidding for a turn, the teacher calling on them, and then the teacher commenting about their responses (Cazden, 2001).

Dialogic teachers see themselves as learning partners with students. Shor and Freire explained that dialogic teachers “invite the students to exercise their own powers of reconstruction” (p. 16). That is, dialogic teachers view students as powerful agents capable of reconstructing knowledge. When guiding critical dialogue on social issues, Ms. Cason struggled with repositioning herself from a facilitator to a learning partner with her students. When I asked her about her role during class discussions, she responded, “I prefer to say that I am the facilitator. It is student-led. You know, they lead the conversations and, I’m just merely an observer and, if they get off course, I will be able to bring it back to focus.” Alexander (2006)
posited in order for dialogic teachers to help students reach higher-level thinking, “direct interaction” is necessary (p. 13).

Shor and Freire (1987) also put forth that dialogic teaching is both “a political and aesthetic act” (p. 31). They contended that there is no such thing as a neutral curriculum or a neutral teacher. The authors wrote, “Education is always directive” but “The question is to know towards what and with whom it is directive” (pp. 22-23). Ms. Cason believed by not speaking during moments when students presented controversial ideas that she was being “neutral.” Her goal was to permit students to resolve ideological conflicts themselves. “I prefer that they do all the talking,” she would explain. However, ideological conflicts were never resolved in this way. Typically, students presented diverse views, and the conversations ended with little interrogation as to why they held certain worldviews, what influenced their beliefs, and the social effects of their ideologies. Freire and Macedo (1987) argued that by adopting this false idea of neutrality, teachers inevitably perpetuate dominant ideologies. Rather than impose their personal ideologies, dialogic teachers ask questions that cause students to reflect on their thinking and develop new understandings.

**Constraints**

Fairclough (2015) wrote, "whenever people speak or listen or write or read, they do so in ways which are determined socially and have social effects" (p. 56). Through social interaction individuals develop ideologies that shape their utterances (Bakhtin, 1981; Vygotsky, 1962/2012). Fairclough contended that as people speak, they draw upon and (re)produce ideologies. In turn, these ideologies shape the social environment and the utterances of others. In Ms. Cason’s classroom, as she directed classroom talk, her ideologies shaped and, at times, constrained content, relations, and subject positions (Fairclough, 2015). However, Fairclough argued, “being
constrained is a pre-condition for being enabled” (p. 69). In other words, the need for critical literacy and social action is predicated by social constraints. As the teacher and students encountered constraints, they were sometimes forced to be creative and work around them.

**Content**

Constraints on content took place on the situational level of the text (Fairclough, 2015). At times, Ms. Cason treated knowledge in the classroom as socially-constructed, and other times, she treated knowledge as fixed. When she treated knowledge as fixed, she placed constraints on the extent of classroom talk and potentially influenced students’ ideologies (Fairclough, 2015). Likewise, when students treated knowledge as fixed, they potentially constrained other class members’ knowledge and beliefs. Evidence of the teacher’s and students’ ideologies were represented in their vocabulary, their grammatical structure, and the textual structures they employed.

**Texts.** Culturally-relevant texts played a pivotal role in this study and served as models for students as the authors in the texts exercised critical literacy, discussing social issues from culturally-diverse viewpoints. The students often identified with the authors’ experiences and found the content relatable. Although the knowledge presented in these texts was not treated as fixed knowledge, these texts represented a limited view of the world. Students were often constrained to particular worldviews that were similar to their own, and consensus on topics was sometimes reached without extended dialogue. The discussions might have been more fruitful had the teacher and I explored ways in which canonical texts challenge or support the status quo. It is important to find balance between exposing students to culturally-relevant texts and texts that might present diverse views from their own.
When working with students of color, sometimes it is challenging for teachers to legitimate students’ linguistic skills and practices while adding to their linguistic repertoires by teaching them dominant Discourse practices (Delpit, 1995/2006; Ladson-Billing, 2009; Lee, 2007). While Ms. Cason employed a dialogic approach because she valued students’ ways of speaking and interpreting the world, she sometimes spent half of the class period teaching her students SAE grammar because she also believed students of color needed to speak the language of power. Delpit (1995/2006) contended that teachers of CLD students should understand “the need to help students establish their own voices, and to coach those voices to produce notes that will be heard clearly in the larger society” (p. 46). A variety of texts that present both dominant and non-dominant discourses could potentially provide students access to diverse linguistic practices and worldviews.

Ms. Cason’s ideologies. Ms. Cason’s ideologies were reflected in the ways that she took up certain topics and derailed others, and also in the emphasis that she placed on certain ideas while de-emphasizing others during discussions. For example, in Excerpt 5, Ms. Cason asked Meech, “Is this germane?” after he connected the text to a slogan from the presidential election. She did not see his comments as relevant to the discussion. Another example of this took place in Excerpt 8. Jim bid for a turn during the discussion four times, and each time Ms. Cason ignored him. It seemed to me that she was intentionally not giving him the floor. When I asked her about why she ignored Jim’s comments, she admitted that she was a little afraid he might say something “inane.” This statement reflected Ms. Cason’s ideology about the orders of discourse and the types of discourse that she valued and did not value.

The teacher’s views on the power relations between dominant social groups in society and non-dominant social groups also placed certain constraints on classroom discourse. While
she saw certain things in society as immovable, some students saw these same things as changeable. When ideological conflicts arose between Ms. Cason and her students, she sometimes changed the topic or stopped speaking altogether. Her views on immigration laws, the criminal justice system, and the educational system placed certain constraints on classroom discourse because she saw these societal structures as fixed. As a result, the discussions focused on individuals and their actions within certain systems. She might have fostered critical literacy to a greater extent if she had been more open to alternative ways of viewing social orders and structures within society.

**Structure of classroom talk.** Fairclough (2015) pointed out that the structure of a text often “ideologically sets and closes agendas” (pp. 152-153). Ms. Cason sometimes set and closed the agenda for classroom talk by using the “Three Key Questions” (Blau, 2003) to frame discussion of topics. Students were encouraged to answer: 1) What does the text say? 2) What does it mean? and 3) Why does it matter? By using this framework, Ms. Cason limited students to summarizing, interpreting, and making connections to the text. Other times, the teacher encouraged students to apply specific critical lenses (Appleman, 2009) to texts as they read. Ms. Cason taught students 10 lenses at the beginning of the semester, and asked them to analyze class texts using the critical lenses as a way help students to become more critically conscious. While critical literacy still occurred within these constraints, Aukerman (2012) argued that by giving students tools for which to be critical, “the teacher may be reified as an infallible, singular authority in matters of text analysis” because students “are told what it means to be critically aware” (p. 45). Aukerman did not deny that these tools might result in critical readings of texts but contended that “dialogic engagement” expands the possibilities for critical analysis. However, as someone who was still evolving as a dialogic teacher and still trying to understand
critical literacy herself, Ms. Cason used these tools to direct students’ attention from the text toward issues in society. Shor and Freire (1987) posited that teachers are often uncomfortable with sharing intellectual authority with their students and that students are likewise fearful of the newfound freedom that a dialogic classroom affords. As a result, the writers suggested using “situated pedagogy,” which allows teachers to slowly relinquish authority to students. When Ms. Cason and I designed lessons for this study, we meant for critical tools to work in this way; however, Ms. Cason found it difficult to completely trust that dialogic encounters would be enough to cultivate critical awareness. At the end of the study, she still struggled to completely share interpretive authority with her students.

**Time.** Ms. Cason was also obligated to meet curricular standards put in place by the school district and often felt there was not enough time for extended class discussions. For instance, in an interview, she described her ninth-grade repeater class, “We haven’t had a discussion in here like that. We’ve had maybe discussions for the bell ringer that last a short time because we’re forced for time.” One of the most important lessons that I learned from this study is that quality dialogue takes time. Discussions are more productive when speakers spend adequate time studying a specific issue, considering diverse perspectives, examining cultural and historical contexts, and asking relevant questions. Dialogic teachers also know that it is acceptable to start the next class with answers to difficult or thought-provoking questions (Alexander, 2006; Shor & Freire, 1987). Ms. Cason emphasized the number of speakers during discussion, stating, “all students must speak,” for instance. She also limited the time for dialogue because she wanted to focus on other curricular demands, saying “We need to move on.” These two things combined diminished the quality of discussions, at times, because speakers were not able to give each topic adequate attention.
**Student assignments.** Throughout this study, the topics that garnered the most interest from students were the criminal justice system and police brutality. However, when students wrote their plays, the play about police brutality never reached a broader audience because of the constraints that Ms. Cason and the school’s administration placed on the content of the play. Ms. Cason was concerned that the play portrayed violence and sought advice from an administrator. He assured her that no violence of any kind could be given a platform. In the play about police brutality, students discussed an issue in society that they felt strongly about and depicted the violence that law enforcement sometimes inflict on communities of color, communities in which students were a part. However, the teacher and administrator placed constraints on the content that students wrote. The other topics of parent-child relationships, gender roles, and immigration did reach a broader audience as they interrogated alternative perspectives. Although, there was violence in all three of these plays, these topics were given a platform perhaps because the ideologies they reflected aligned more with the teacher’s and the school’s ideologies. When I asked Ms. Cason why she chose to censor the play on police brutality, she informed me that she was thinking of the campus police officer at their school, and she did not want to taint students’ perception of him. She also revealed that her son had recently completed training to become a police officer. She stated that, “My son and my colleague…are considered good policeman. Sometimes we forget not all police are corrupt.” Ms. Cason interpreted the students’ play as an indictment on all policemen, which included her son and her friend, and she felt an obligation to protect them from such harsh criticism.

**Relations**

Constraints on relations took place during interaction. Although Ms. Cason nurtured a dialogic environment with her students, she still maintained a certain distance from them. Her
desire to keep students “under control” was juxtaposed to her desire to promote dialogic encounters. She often shifted from a dialogic stance to an authoritative stance to regain control of students’ behavior. Shor and Freire (1987) wrote:

Dialogue means a permanent tension in the relation between authority and liberty. But, in this tension, authority continues to be because it has authority vis-à-vis permitting student freedoms which emerge, which grow and mature precisely because authority and freedom learn self-discipline. (p. 16)

Put differently, the tension between maintaining and relinquishing control in a dialogic classroom will always exist. Teachers and students must learn to work within this tension.

**Authoritative but dialogic.** Dialogic teachers exercise their authority simply by structuring the dialogic environment. Dialogic teachers learn to control the environment while, at the same time, providing students opportunities to speak freely. Students also learn to work within the constraints the teacher provides as they speak, listen to one another, and build on each other’s ideas. It is important for dialogic teachers to make the purpose of class discussions clear and to establish explicit guidelines, and we missed several dialogic opportunities during this study because of overlapping talk. Cazden (2001) wrote, "Sometimes the teacher's problem is not silence but the opposite - too many students talking at the same time. Then, it becomes important to try to understand when overlapping speech is an interruption and when it expresses peer solidarity and support" (p. 86). There were instances of both throughout this study. However, when classroom talk did not illustrate solidarity but the opposite, it was apparent that classroom talk needed structure and purpose. Listening intently is just as important a part of class discussion as speaking with purpose. Guidelines for discussion encourage class participants to listen intently and respond thoughtfully to each other as they work to construct meaning.
Ms. Cason occasionally initiated topic discussions by calling on particular students to speak. By forcing students to speak, she employed a more traditional teacher role, and sometimes placed students in a position in which they felt obligated to provide the “correct” response that the teacher might have been looking for. Shor and Freire (1987) described:

For them to feel pressured to speak even when they have nothing to add creates a false democracy, a fake moment of discussion. In a way, this is an imposition of the students, by a teacher who has made dialogue into a dogma, a technique instead of into a genuine open exchange (p. 16).

Classroom dialogue cannot be forced if it is to be authentic and meaningful for students. Instead, dialogic teachers find ways to impel students to speak by centering instruction on their knowledge of students, the social problems they face, and potential solutions. Dewey (1938) explained that experiences that capture students’ interests have the ability to propel their learning forward because they will be driven by curiosity and excitement about subject matter.

Additionally, hooks (1994) put forth that the classroom should be a place of excitement and collaboration. At times, Ms. Cason’s classroom was such a place that centered in authentic experiences that piqued student interest and filled them with excitement.

**The teacher’s role during dialogue.** While monologic teaching plays an important role in the classroom, it is best viewed as a necessary means to an end rather than the end itself (Alexander, 2006; Aukerman, 2012; Cazden, 2001; Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970/2000; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Shor & Freire, 1987). The goal of dialogic teaching is to help students draw their own conclusions given all the perspectives presented during class discussions. Many times, the teacher and I did not maximize the potential for dialogue because we wanted the students to
reach a consensus that aligned with our own personal ideologies. The teacher’s perspectives on society, schooling, teaching, and learning sometimes moved the conversation toward critical literacy and other times moved it toward personal experience or the commonplace. The teacher’s voice plays a vital role during classroom dialogue (Alexander, 2006). However, it is crucial that dialogic teachers maintain discourse that is internally persuasive rather than authoritative (Bakhtin, 1981) to help students think critically and independently. Gee (2012) wrote that although all claims and beliefs are ideological, “we must ask ourselves whether our theories are based on a genuine attempt to understand the world and make it better or just on a desire for power, control, and status” (p. 20). During teacher interviews, I tried to understand Ms. Cason’s ideologies and how they were represented in classroom talk. At times, I understood her contributions as an effort to understand students’ experiences and imagine a better world for them. Other times she tried to shape the way students thought about the people and things that she cared about, like her friend and son, who were police officers.

**Subject Positions**

Participants’ ideologies reflected constraints on subject positions. Fairclough (2015) contended that "ideological struggle pre-eminently takes place in language" (p. 110). By examining the ideological properties in Ms. Cason’s words during interviews and class discussions, I gained a better understanding of how she positioned herself and others in society. During our first interview Ms. Cason revealed that she believed the hierarchical structure of social class in society was unchangeable and necessary. She also saw formal education as a means to acquiring wealth and social status in society, but believed high-stakes testing controlled who could access wealth and social status. Ms. Cason employed dominant Discourses when it came to social class. “You have to have your ‘haves’ and our ‘have-nots’,” she frequently said.
In subsequent interviews, I revisited the topic of social hierarchy in society. Each time, Ms. Cason stood firmly on the belief that the existing social hierarchy should be maintained to avoid “chaos.” When I asked Ms. Cason about where in this hierarchy would she place her students, Ms. Cason seemed torn and could not provide a straightforward answer. There was no simple answer. Ms. Cason wanted to provide her students with a quality education, and she also desired for them to live in a world in which they were free to pursue their dreams without insurmountable challenges. However, she did not believe that the social order within society would ever change or that the challenges that her students of color often faced would ever disappear. There would always be the “haves” and the “have-nots.” Her views on society sometimes limited the extent to which critical literacy played out in her classroom.

**Hidden power relations.** Fairclough (2015) argued that the favored method for dominant social groups to maintain their power is through consent. A part of this requires them to remove “surface markers of authority and power” (p. 67). By using passive voice when she discussed certain social struggles, Ms. Cason sometimes obscured power relations during classroom talk. For example, she avoided ascribing agency to police officers who inflicted violence on communities of color. For example, in Excerpt 9, Ms. Cason initiated a topic from Coates’s (2015) text that talked about the violence against the Black body. By initiating the topic, Ms. Cason demonstrated her willingness to discuss the problem with police brutality, but her use of passive voice placed constraints on the way she wanted to talk about the problem. She started, “Just recently more boys were asked to put their hands up because they fit the description,” but she did not say who asked them to put their hands up. Later, when she described a 13-year-old-boy who “was killed,” and that “it shot him in the face,” the students and I persisted, and she finally said, “It was a policeman.” As mentioned earlier, Ms. Cason shared that she did not want
to influence the way students felt about the campus police officer at SHS. She wanted students to show him respect. By hiding agency in acts of police brutality, Ms. Cason felt she could avoid painting this particular police officer in a negative light. Ms. Cason’s choice in this instance established the subject positions of police officers as people students should respect.

**Student assignments.** Ms. Cason’s views on police officers was reflected in her decision to censor the play on police brutality. She censored the play because it included violence, but all the plays had violence in them, and I pointed this out to her. She again mentioned that she had the campus police officer and her son in mind. In Ms. Cason’s view police officers, in general, should be respected. I imagine that when Juan’s character screamed at the character playing a police officer, “How dare you call yourself a hero!” during practice, his views conflicted with the views that Ms. Cason held about policemen. By censoring this particular play, Ms. Cason not only constrained the content of students’ play, she exercised her authoritative role, and reinforced the subject positions of law enforcement and citizens. Ms. Cason curtailed any critique of the established law enforcement system and implicitly positioned students in a subordinate position in society.

**Talk but No Action**

Previous research has established classroom dialogue as a key component in cultivating critical literacy in the classroom (Aukerman, 2012; Freire & Macedo, 1987; hooks, 1994; Shor & Freire, 1987). Ms. Cason successfully cultivated a dialogic environment as she and her students engaged in several meaningful discussions about social issues. However, for the most part, talk about social issues was all that took place. While all the dimensions of critical literacy were represented during discussions, the dimension of critical literacy that showed up the least was
“taking action and promoting social justice” (Lewison et al., 2002). Taking social action was clearly the most difficult aspect of critical literacy for the teacher to enact in her classroom.

Taking social action and promoting social justice was a challenge for Ms. Cason mainly because she did not believe that social transformation was feasible. The most important aspect of critical pedagogy is a view that the world is not fixed and can be positively shaped by way of transformative pedagogy (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux, 1987; hooks, 1994; Shor & Freire, 1987). For Ms. Cason, critical literacy practices entailed valuing students’ voices, validating their experiences, and viewing their cultural practices as resources for developing critical literacy. However, Giroux (1987) argued that “a celebration of plurality is not enough” and that critical educators should also be committed to “improving the quality of human life” (p. 21). This starts with teachers understanding how particular educational practices may cause diverse student groups to suffer and a desire to eliminate that suffering.

**Implications**

From the critical texts the class read to inspire dialogue to the critical texts they produced to promote social action and justice, Ms. Cason’s class illustrates what dialogic teaching and critical literacy represented for one teacher and her students and offers possibilities for what it could be for others. Students benefited from a dialogic approach to critical literacy as did the teacher. This study also underscores the importance of research in the understudied area of urban schools and advocates for more inclusive teaching practices that will potentially lead to equity across educational contexts.

**For Practice**

Ms. Cason fostered critical literacy in a high-stakes environment with CLD students who had not previously been given many opportunities to engage in extended dialogue about issues
that were important to them. Through this approach, CLD students listened intently to each other and demonstrated higher-order thinking by analyzing topics during critical discussions of literature. The findings from this study underscore the importance of the teacher’s role in fostering a dialogic environment and achieving critical literacy ends. She established a positive rapport with her students, and they were comfortable expressing their ideas, including ESOL students, like Messi, who were, at one point, reluctant to speak in class. However, Ms. Cason did not engage students in critical dialogue on a daily basis because of curricular mandates and because she did not always view dialogue as an outcome to learning and wanted to move on to more traditional assignments that were easier to measure and grade.

Because I used a PAR orientation during this research study, Ms. Cason had opportunities to develop her dialogic approach to critical literacy and to continuously improve her practice with each PAR cycle. As we looked at transcripts, she remarked, “I said that?” surprised by her reactions to students during class. There were even moments that she regretted. For instance, Ms. Cason revealed that she should have supported Messi’s dream to become president. She asked, “Who’s to say the law could not change?” Reflecting on her practice was important to her development as a dialogic and critical educator. Although she started out with certain fixed views about the world, Ms. Cason was ultimately transformed by this approach to teaching and learning. On the other hand, for each cycle, we had a different group of students, so students had fewer opportunities to develop dialogic and critical literacy practices. In the future, researchers might try a PAR study that examines how this approach could be used with the same students over an extended period of time. I believe students might also provide valuable insights on the instructional approach.
Ms. Cason created a dialogic environment in which critical literacy was represented in her classroom, which demonstrates hope for the future, but the broader context still has not changed. Ms. Cason adopted this approach with the support of a teacher-researcher. She believed that my support played an important role in shaping her views on knowledge, the knowledge construction process, and the goals of schooling. After the study concluded, she wrote me the following email message:

Thank you for helping me open my eyes to the truths of society. Through the lenses and conversations, I find myself questioning traditions, laws, cultures, and American values. I am a better person because of you. (Cason, personal communication, October 3, 2017)

Teachers who wish to use this approach in the future would benefit from different types of support, whether it is a researcher, a university, another teacher, a team of teachers, or an entire school. Schools could adopt a model in which each class has a shared goal of dialogic teaching toward critical literacy. Adopting this approach school-wide may be necessary for it to reach its fullest potential for teaching, learning, and social transformation.

**For Research and Policy**

Using ethnography, I was able to explore this approach over an extended period of time, which provided me with insights on one teacher’s classroom practice over the course of a year and a half. But what about other classrooms? On a larger scale, dialogic teaching is not widely used in U.S. public schools (Nystrand et al., 1997). Milner and Lomotey (2014) also pointed out that urban schools, which serve the majority of students who speak English as a second language, students who live in poverty, and students of color, disproportionately have the most troubling educational experiences in comparison to other contexts. They wrote that “too little effort has been made in exploring the successes that have been achieved in some urban schools
to determine the applicability and transferability of those strategies in other urban contexts” (pp. xviii – xix). First, I suggest a large-scale study that examines the pervasiveness of critical dialogue in urban schools to see how often this approach is taking place. Second, I propose that researchers start by working with a team of teachers using critical dialogue in an urban school and then expand this approach school-wide and then across several urban schools. The more researchers examine this approach in urban schools, the more empirical evidence they will have to potentially shape educational policies. Sahlberg (2010) argued that “a pre-condition for reform” requires “political consensus” (p. 16). The policies that shape curriculum, instruction, and assessments in U.S. public schools “are seldom evidence-based” and assume that a one-size-fits-all model will “work efficiently across different subject areas” (Marshall, 2009, p. 113). These policies do not bear in mind the diverse cultural and linguistic practices that many students bring into the classroom whereas dialogic teaching toward critical literacy does. Educational policymakers might also consider giving teachers more autonomy in the classrooms in which they “may exercise their professional knowledge and judgment both widely and freely in their schools” (Sahlberg, 2010, p. 7). A dialogic approach to critical literacy has the potential to establish teachers as transformative intellectuals and students as critical agents. This is especially important in contexts like urban schools where it is happening the least. Figure 9 illustrates how future research might shape educational policy.
This study highlights the importance of providing teachers in urban schools with professional development opportunities in which they explore how to incorporate students’ funds of knowledge, utilize dialogic teaching, and foster critical literacy. They also need more opportunities to reflect on their practice. With the support of researchers, more educators in urban classrooms and schools across the United States can employ more inclusive and powerful teaching practices for historically marginalized CLD students. More research on critical dialogue in more urban classrooms across the U.S. could possibly contribute to the broader conversation about equity and social justice, and shape policies that affect teachers and students in urban public schools.

Conclusion

Individuals learn and understand deeply when the learning process is dialogic, or when multiple voices and viewpoints contribute to the knowledge construction process. In other words,
learners are able to cover more terrain when it is walked using many feet and experienced through multiple pairs of eyes. On the other hand, when the learning process is monologic, a single pair of eyes and feet, or one perspective, is privileged over others, and learners are limited in how far and how deeply they can learn. Also, by privileging one worldview in the classroom, learners from different walks of life with different perspectives are marginalized and removed from the path towards equity in education. In U.S. schools the practice of standardizing curriculum, instruction, and assessment presupposes that there is a “standard,” or ideal student. While using traditional, monologic teaching practices have value in the classroom, they are best used as means to an end (Dewey, 1938). Unfortunately, many classrooms in the U.S. use monologic teaching practices as an end (Nystrand et al., 1997), especially in schools that serve CLD students (Delpit, 1995/2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Not all students’ interests are taken into account. Not all students’ needs are met. Not all students’ funds of knowledge are valued. In many cases, the content that students learn in the classroom never leave the school building. However, dialogic teaching has the potential to speak to all students and to hear all students, and critical literacy has the potential to help students use their voices beyond the four walls of the classroom to effect positive change in society.
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# Appendix A: Student Profiles

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<td>Black/White</td>
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</table>
Appendix B: Informed Consent Forms

Appendix B.1: Teacher Consent Form

Georgia State University
Department of Middle and Secondary Education

Teacher Consent Form

Title: The Role of Dialogic Instruction in Teaching Critical Literacy
Principal Investigator: Dr. Michelle Zoss
Student Principal Investigator: Charity Gordon

I. Purpose:
You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to investigate the role of dialogue in the classroom. We want to explore the way it helps students learn to think critically about texts. You are invited to participate because you have shown an interest in using dialogue to help students think critically about texts. One teacher and up to 35 students will be recruited for this study. Participation will require 3 hours of your time (outside of instructional time) over the span of 8 weeks.

II. Procedures:
Before the study, we will meet to design an instructional unit during your regularly scheduled planning time. During the study, you will facilitate classroom dialogue throughout an entire instructional unit, during regular school hours. This dialogue will be audio recorded. The unit will last about four weeks. If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed three times outside of instructional time about your experiences with teaching dialogue and critical literacy. The researcher will conduct interviews at the beginning, middle, and the end of the study. Each teacher interview will last 30 minutes to 60 minutes. All interviews will be audio recorded.

III. Risks:
In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:
Participation in this study may benefit you personally. You may develop better understandings of how students develop critical literacy. Overall, we hope to gain information about how classroom dialogue helps students think critically about texts.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:
Participation in research is voluntary. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time.

VI. Confidentiality:
We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Only the researchers, Charity Gordon and Dr. Michelle Zoss will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). We will use a
pseudonym rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored on password-protected computers and locked cabinets. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. You will not be identified personally.

VII. Contact Persons:
Contact Charity Gordon at (770) 443-5212 or cgordon21@student.gsu.edu or Dr. Michelle Zoss at (404) 413-8415 or zoss@gsu.edu or if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team. You can talk about questions, concerns, offer input, obtain information, or suggestions about the study. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Participant:
We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research, to be interviewed, and to be audio recorded, please sign below.

____________________________________________  _________________
Teacher’s Signature        Date

___________________________________________  _________________
Researcher’s Signature      Date
Appendix B.2: Parental Permission Form

Georgia State University
Department of Middle and Secondary Education
Parental Permission Form

Title: The Role of Dialogic Instruction in Teaching Critical Literacy
Principal Investigator: Dr. Michelle Zoss
Student Principal Investigator: Charity Gordon

I. Purpose
Your child is invited to participate in a research study. The main researcher for this study is Charity Gordon. She is a Ph.D. student at Georgia State University. Your child is invited to participate because your child’s teacher has agreed to be a part of the research study. We want to explore how classroom dialogue helps students develop their ideas. Only students in your child’s English class will be recruited for this study. We will recruit up to 35 students. The study will last 6 weeks. Participation in this study involves a total of 90 minutes of your child’s time. The study will occur during the 2015-2016 school year.

II. Procedures
If you give permission for your child to participate, your child may assent to being audio recorded during class discussion and during interviews. Your child will participate in 3 interviews during the study. These interviews will take place outside of class time in the teacher’s classroom. Each student interview will last 15 to 30 minutes. The interviews will occur at the beginning, middle, and end of the study. You also give permission for your child to give the researchers samples of his/her class work and/or homework. This includes written responses to prompts, essays, and projects related to the study. These documents will show us how your child’s thinking is developing.

III. Risks
In this study, your child will not face any more risks other than those faced on a normal school day.

IV. Benefits
This study may benefit your child. This study may help your child understand the topics discussed during English class. Overall, we hope to gain insight on how classroom dialogue helps teachers and students with critical literacy.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal
Participation in research is voluntary. Your child does not have to be in this study. Your child can quit at any time. Your child’s grade will not be affected if your child decides to withdraw from the study.

VI. Confidentiality
We will keep your child’s records private to the extent allowed by law. Only the researchers, Charity Gordon and Dr. Michelle Zoss will have access to the information your
child provides. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). We will use a pseudonym rather than your child’s name on study records. The information your child provides will be stored on password-protected computers and locked cabinets. Your child’s name and other facts that might point to your child will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. Your child will not be identified personally.

VII. Contact Persons
Contact:
- Charity Gordon, (770) 443-5212 or cgordon21@student.gsu.edu
- Dr. Michelle Zoss, (404) 413-8415 or zoss@gsu.edu
  If you have questions, concerns or complaints about this study.

Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity at
- 404-413-3513 or
- svogtner1@gsu.edu
  If you want to talk to someone who is not a part of this study team. You can talk about questions, concerns, offer input, obtain information, or suggestions about the study. You can call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your child’s rights in this study.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Participant
Charity Gordon will give you a copy of this permission form to keep.

If you give permission for your child to volunteer for this research study and to be audio recorded, please sign below.

____________________________________________
Child’s Name

____________________________________________
Parent’s Signature

____________________________________________
Researcher’s Signature

Date

Date
Appendix B.3: Student Assent Form

Georgia State University
Department of Middle and Secondary Education

Student Assent Form

Title: The Role of Dialogic Instruction in Teaching Critical Literacy
Principal Investigator: Dr. Michelle Zoss
Student Principal Investigator: Charity Gordon

I. Purpose
You are invited to participate in a research study. The main researcher for this study is Charity Gordon. She is a doctoral student at Georgia State University. You are invited to participate because your teacher has agreed to be a part of the research study. We want to explore how classroom dialogue helps students develop their ideas. Only students in your English class will be recruited for this study. We will recruit up to 35 students. The study will last 6 weeks. Participation in this study involves a total of 90 minutes of your time. The study will occur during the 2015-2016 school year.

II. Procedures
If you participate, you agree to being audio recorded during class discussion and during interviews. You will participate in 3 interviews during the study. These interviews will take place outside of class time in the teacher’s classroom. Each student interview will last 15 to 30 minutes. The interviews will occur at the beginning, middle, and end of the study. You also assent to give the researchers samples of your class work and/or homework. This includes written responses to prompts, essays, and projects related to the study. These documents will show us how your thinking is developing.

III. Risks
In this study, you will not face any more risks other than those faced on a normal school day.

IV. Benefits
This study may benefit you personally. This study may help you understand the topics discussed during English class. Overall, we hope to gain insight on how classroom dialogue helps teachers and students with critical literacy.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal
Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. You can quit at any time. Your grade will not be affected if you decide to withdraw from the study.

VI. Confidentiality
We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Only the researchers, Charity Gordon and Dr. Michelle Zoss will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). We will use a
pseudonym rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored on password-protected computers and locked cabinets. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. You will not be identified personally.

**VII. Contact Persons**

Contact:
- Charity Gordon, (770) 443-5212 or cgordon21@student.gsu.edu
- Dr. Michelle Zoss, (404) 413-8415 or zoss@gsu.edu
  If you have questions, concerns or complaints about this study.

Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity at
- 404-413-3513 or
- svogtner1@gsu.edu
  If you want to talk to someone who is not a part of this study team. You can talk about questions, concerns, offer input, obtain information, or suggestions about the study. You can call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

**VIII. Copy of Assent Form to Participant**

Charity Gordon will give you a copy of this assent form to keep.

If you would like to be a part of this research study and to be audio recorded, please sign below.

_______________________________________________  ___________________
Student’s Signature                          Date

_______________________________________________  ___________________
Researcher’s Signature                        Date
Appendix B.4: Student Consent Form

Georgia State University  
Department of Middle and Secondary Education  
Student Consent Form

Title: The Role of Dialogic Instruction in Teaching Critical Literacy  
Principal Investigator: Dr. Michelle Zoss  
Student Principal Investigator: Charity Gordon

I. Purpose
You are invited to participate in a research study. The main researcher for this study is Charity Gordon. She is a Ph.D. student at Georgia State University. You are invited to participate because your teacher has agreed to be a part of the research study. We want to explore how classroom dialogue helps students develop their ideas. Only students in your English class will be recruited for this study. We will recruit up to 35 students. The study will last 6 weeks. Participation in this study involves a total of 90 minutes of your time. The study will occur during the 2015-2016 school year.

II. Procedures
If you participate, you consent to being audio recorded during class discussion and during interviews. You will participate in 3 interviews during the study. These interviews will take place outside of class time in the teacher’s classroom. Each student interview will last 15 to 30 minutes. The interviews will occur at the beginning, middle, and end of the study. You also consent to give the researchers samples of your class work and/or homework. This includes written responses to prompts, essays, and projects related to the study. These documents will show us how your thinking is developing.

III. Risks
In this study, you will not face any more risks other than those faced on a normal school day.

IV. Benefits
This study may benefit you personally. This study may help you understand the topics discussed during English class. Overall, we hope to gain insight on how classroom dialogue helps teachers and students with critical literacy.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal
Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. You can quit at any time. Your grade will not be affected if you decide to withdraw from the study.

VI. Confidentiality
We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Only the researchers, Charity Gordon and Dr. Michelle Zoss will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). We will use a
pseudonym rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored on password-protected computers and locked cabinets. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. You will not be identified personally.

VII. Contact Persons
Contact:
- Charity Gordon, (770) 443-5212 or cgordon21@student.gsu.edu
- Dr. Michelle Zoss, (404) 413-8415 or zoss@gsu.edu
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VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Participant
Charity Gordon will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you would like to be a part of this research study and to be audio recorded, please sign below.

_____________________________________________  _____________________
Student’s Signature                          Date

_____________________________________________  _____________________
Researcher’s Signature                       Date
Appendix C: Sample Unit Plan

I. INTRODUCTION
A. Mini Autobiographies
B. Picture Puzzle Activity
C. Critical Lenses “Cheat Sheet”

II. CRITICAL LENSES
A. Reader Response Lens
   i. Kevin Hart
   ii. “We Real Cool”
   iii. Oprah interviews Tyler Perry
B. New Criticism
   i. Rhetorical Devices/Elements of Humor
   ii. Excerpt from “Letter from Birmingham Jail”
   iii. “Black Lives Matters”
C. Psychological
   i. Fresh Prince of Bel-Air
   ii. “What For”
D. Gender
   i. “Only Daughter”
   ii. “If I Were a Boy”
   iii. Role Play Activity
E. Biographical
   i. Sojourner Truth – Mini-Biography
   ii. “Ain’t I a Woman?”
   iii. Maya Angelou
   iv. “Caged Bird”
F. Social Class
   i. “I Am Not a Bum” - Discussion
   ii. “The Poor You Know”
   iii. Social Ladder Activity
   iv. “On Dumpster Diving”
G. New Historicism
   i. Red Summer of 1919
   ii. “If We Must Die”
   iii. “Sagging Pants and the History of ‘Dangerous Street Fashion”
H. Post-colonial
   i. Disney Cartoons
   ii. “Message to the Modern World”
   iii. “I Will Fight No More Forever”
   iv. “Sure, You Can Ask Me a Personal Question”
   v. TED Talk - “The Danger of a Single Story”
I. Deconstruction
   i. “Freeway 280”
   ii. “Desiree’s Baby”
J. Archetypal
   i. Native American origin stories/ “The Creation”

III. CRITICAL LITERACY/ DIALOGUE
A. Critical Literacy
B. Guidelines for Dialogue
   i. Multimedia Vocabulary Review
C. Dialogic Approach to Critical Literacy
   i. Thomas Jefferson – Mini Biography
   ii. Notes on the State of Virginia, Query 14
   iii. The Declaration of Independence
   iv. We Are It”
   v. TED Talk - “Looks Aren’t Everything”
   vi. “I Want to Be Miss America”
   vii. “Nina Simone’s Face”
   viii. Writing Assignment – Reflective Essay/Poem

IV. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES
A. Chicano!
B. Background of Real Women Have Curves
C. Read Real Women Have Curves
D. Critical Dialogue – Real Women Have Curves
E. Writing Assignment – One-Act Play

V. BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME
A. 13th
B. Background of Between the World and Me
C. Read Between the World and Me
D. Critical Dialogue: Between the World and Me
E. Writing Assignment – Video Essay/Documentary
Appendix D: Interview Protocols

Appendix D.1: Semi-Structured Student Interview Protocol

Opening Script: Today is [date] and the time is [time]. I will be interviewing [Student’s Name] about dialogic approaches to critical literacy. Hi [Student’s Name], thank you for agreeing to this interview. How are you? Well, one of my goals for this interview is to learn about your perspectives on using class discussion and critical literacy to evaluate texts that you are reading in class. Keep in mind that there are no wrong answers. I just want to you speak freely about your experiences and your opinions and tell me as much as you can.

Before the Instructional Unit
1. Describe your experiences with class dialogue so far.
2. What have you gained from this type of instruction?
3. How has classroom dialogue contributed to your reading of the text?
4. Is there anything else you want to tell me that I didn’t ask you about?

During the Instructional Unit
1. What are your thoughts about class dialogue this week?
2. What did you gain from this dialogue?
3. How has class dialogue contributed to your reading of the text?
4. Is there anything else you want to tell me that I didn’t ask you about?

After the Instructional Unit
1. Describe for me experiences with class dialogue overall.
2. Describe for me what participating in classroom dialogue did for you?
3. What do you think are the most important ways to analyze a text after this class?
4. If you had to tell a teacher about what makes you participate more in class dialogue, what would you say?
5. Is there anything else you want to tell me that I didn’t ask you about?
Appendix D.2: Semi-Structured Teacher Interview Protocol

Opening Script: Today is [date] and the time is [time]. I will be interviewing [Teacher’s Name] about dialogic approaches to critical literacy. Hi [Teacher’s Name], thank you for agreeing to this interview. How are you? Well, one of my goals for this interview is to learn about your perspectives on using a dialogic approach to critical literacy. Keep in mind that there are no wrong answers. I just want to you speak freely about your experiences and your opinions and tell me as much as you can.

Before the Instructional Unit
1. Describe your experiences with classroom dialogue.
2. Describe your experiences with teaching critical literacy.
3. What role has class dialogue played in teaching critical literacy in your classroom?
4. Is there anything else you want to tell me that I didn’t ask you about?

During the Instructional Unit
1. What are your thoughts about dialogic instruction this week?
2. What do you think students gained from the dialogue this week?
3. What did you gain from participating in class dialogue this week?
4. Is there anything else you want to tell me that I didn’t ask you about?

After the Instructional Unit
1. Describe for me your experiences with classroom dialogue overall?
2. Describe for participating in classroom dialogue with students did for you.
3. What do you think are the most important ways to analyze a text after using dialogic teaching?
4. How have your views may have changed since you have been using a dialogic approach to critical literacy?
5. If you had to tell other educators about how to make learning experiences more meaningful for both the teacher and the student, what would you tell them?
6. Is there anything you want to tell me that I didn’t ask you about?
Appendix E: Transcript Conventions

rising intonation at the end of an utterance

[words] overlapping speech

[words]

= no gap between utterances (latched); interruption

| short pause

|| long pause

[…] material has been omitted from the transcript or the transcript starts or ends in the middle of a conversation

words:: elongated syllable

*words* voice, pitch, or style change

((action)) action or body language

words text in italics represents words in another language or a social dialect pronunciation

WORDS text in all caps represents increased volume

words underlined text marks stress or emphasis

word - self-interruption

{words} transcriber’s comments

student unidentified student speaking

students many students speaking at once
## Appendix F: List of Axial Codes and Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Setting</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Setting: Small group</td>
<td>Students address each other in groups of 3 to 6 while the teacher monitors</td>
<td>Cason: I need to see you in groups. Not beside each other, I want your desk to physically move in groups…</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discussion</td>
<td>them</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Setting: Whole group</td>
<td>The teacher and students address each other in a whole group setting</td>
<td>Cason: Let’s talk about this…The whole class.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Participant: Cason</td>
<td>Each time the teacher made an utterance during class discussions, I coded</td>
<td>Cason: Okay, now, I am going to relinquish my position as teacher. You are now in control.</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>it with her name to keep track of how often she spoke</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Participant: Gordon</td>
<td>Each time I, the researcher, participant observer, and second teacher, made</td>
<td>Gordon: Okay. So: I'm gonna throw out questions and then you guys can just talk, I guess.</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>an utterance during class discussions, I coded it with my name to keep track</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of how often I spoke</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Participant: Winthorpe</td>
<td>The co-teacher was at times invited to speak during class discussions, and</td>
<td>Winthorpe: I had a question. Talking about classism, and system-wide racism. They're very good, I love to hear this, um, but I had a question regarding what you said [inaudible 00:24:41]. Where you said you don't want to see that kind of history happen again…</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I coded each of her utterances with her name to document how much she</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>contributed as a third teacher in the room</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Participant: [Student</td>
<td>I coded each students’ utterances with students’ names to keep track of how</td>
<td>Student: Can I answer that?</td>
<td>816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name]</td>
<td>often each student participated and how much students contributed overall.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I coded students who did not participate in the study or whose voices were</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>not recognizable in the audio as “Unidentified Student.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ends</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Ends: Critical Literacy: Disrupting the commonplace</td>
<td>The speaker evaluates knowledge within a specific cultural or historic context, asks how the text positions individuals within society, and/or emphasizes critique as well as hope.</td>
<td>Cozie: ‘Cause like media, like the media plays a big role in how black people are portrayed.</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Ends: Critical Literacy: Focusing on sociopolitical issues</td>
<td>The speaker looks at the relationship between the local and societal levels and/or challenges the status quo</td>
<td>Milenys: Um, I think it's interesting that he said, talking about this stuff, sometimes we don't have really black people, minorities, and because you don't have control over the problems like our poverty, or the situation that we're in.</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Ends: Critical Literacy: Interrogating multiple perspectives</td>
<td>The speaker analyzes multiple contradictory perspectives, recognizes whose voices are privileged, focuses on those whose voices are marginalized, and/or constructs counternarratives to dominant Discourses</td>
<td>Demba: You know in France? Like you know how when over here when a black person wins something, like an award, they'll say the first black leader wins this? [Gordon: Uh huh (affirmative)] In France, they don't do that. They just say another person.</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Ends: Critical Literacy: Promoting social justice</td>
<td>The speaker reflects and acts upon the world, questions injustice, examines how language maintains domination, and/or engages in crossing cultural borders to understand others</td>
<td>Messi: Because if we vote we are going to change a lot of things in the United States.</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Act Sequence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Act Sequence: Initiates a topic</td>
<td>The speaker introduces a new or different subject</td>
<td>Cason: Okay. Anyone else?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Act Sequence: Responds</td>
<td>The speaker responds to a topic by making a statement or asking a question</td>
<td>Cason: So do you think it was because of political purposes or did she really</td>
<td>435</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
related to the topic at hand without building upon a previously stated idea
genuinely feel that she was wrong?
Shayla: She may have genuinely felt it was wrong, but in my opinion, it was for political purposes.

- **Act Sequence: Builds**
The speaker builds upon a previously stated idea by asking a follow-up question, presenting an alternative viewpoint, or sharing a personal opinion
Omar: Uh, well, I mean, I wrote down another quote that said, "They wanted to kill us, but they didn't wanna do the work."
Cason: Okay, what does it mean do you think, and why does it matter?

- **Act Sequence: Evaluates**
The speaker makes a comment about someone else’s response or evaluates their response by describing whether their response was good or bad, correct or incorrect, or other descriptive words
Cason: Excellent, excellent. I only heard two people speak on their lenses, did you all discuss your lens?

- **Act Sequence: Ends Act Sequence**
A speaker indicates the discussion of a topic has been exhausted and either changes the topic or ends the discussion some other way
Cason: Now, let me just stop it here please, and I want your responses obviously. And, and let's see:... I need to keep your books, so books out please from yesterday.

**Key**

- **Key: Aesthetic stance**
The speaker responds to a topic by simply describing its characteristics and/or sharing personal feelings on the topic
Gordon: What did you guys think about that part of the book?
Mariah: I thought it was sad.

- **Key: Critical/analytic stance**
The speaker focuses on challenges the meaning(s) within a text or others’ interpretations of a text’s meanings and supports interpretation with evidence
Kierra: In some aspects I don't agree and then some aspects I do agree, because…I think it also has to do with gender because picture his friend being an African American woman...I feel that African American men have it harder...

- **Key: Dialogic stance: Defers to students' opinions**
The teacher or lead discussant solicits comments from a specific student or the entire class
Cason: Alan, let me hear from you, please.

- **Key: Dialogic stance: Listens intently**
The teacher or lead discussant demonstrates listening by summarizing what someone else has said, making connections with another speaker, or asking follow-up questions to a previous utterance
Derika: It's not right just to single out foreign people. And uh:... Cason: What, what do you mean, foreign people?

- **Key: Dialogic stance: Starts class with answers to questions**
The teacher or lead discussant begins the discussion by referring to a previous class discussion
Cason: What you had yesterday, we didn’t finish. We started, but didn't finish.

- **Key: Dialogic stance: Stresses the importance of student statements**
The teacher or lead discussant encourages students to state their opinions
Cason: Now, this is your time to show off and show out! Whatever you've learned, whatever you have discussed with your group. Whatever came to your mind when you were reading this.

- **Key: Dialogic stance: Uses conversational tones**
The teacher or lead discussant does not look for a “right” answer but invites conversation and makes students feel comfortable to speak openly and freely by sharing personal stories, making connections to popular culture, and finding ways to include the interests of the group in the discussion
Cason: The people treat her differently. They knew that she had the accent, but she was considered white, and she had more invitations to go places. And they find out what she does for a living. She was just like my mom, a maid. She was still treated differently even though she was a maid. She became upset because a lot of the black people of the time were...that's what they had. That's what they did. They were maids back then, in my community.

- **Key: Dialogic stance: Uses humor**
The speaker(s) laugh or indicate that something was funny through their words or actions
Cason: Okay. Let's see:... May the odds forever be in your favor (laughs)

- **Key: Efferent stance**
The speaker focuses on acquiring information but refrain from providing
Cason: Okay, wait, let's go back. What do you mean, white poor people? I mean,
### Personal Commentary

Who are they? [We gave you the history first.]

Omar: [Farmers.] The farmers, and then, uh, other people that came from another country to try to make a living.

### Instrumentalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrumentalities</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Code-switching</td>
<td>The speaker switches from SAE to AAVE or Spanish during class discussion in an effort to make convey their message.</td>
<td>Messi: ‘Cause there’s a saying in Spanish, uh, it’s just that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogic teaching: Collective</td>
<td>The teacher and students address learning tasks together.</td>
<td>Cason: I want to hear your thoughts because I’m a little curious. What did it say to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogic teaching: Cumulative</td>
<td>The teacher and students build on each other’s ideas and follow one line of coherent thinking and inquiry.</td>
<td>Demba: On TV shows and everything. They make it like sports are the only way out. Cason: Is the media, right? [Demba: Uh huh(affirmative)] Well, if it's the media, then what can we do to change the media from impressing you on, on certain stereotypes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogic teaching: Purposeful</td>
<td>The teacher and students stay focused on their learning goal (critical literacy).</td>
<td>Cason: So how does that relate to your [critical] lens?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogic teaching: Reciprocal</td>
<td>The teacher and students present alternate viewpoints and take turns listening to each other.</td>
<td>Cason: Okay, now. A few more please? Because I want to move on to the next thing. Let's see::: pass it to me, please. Everybody's going to speak, by the way. Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogic teaching: Supportive</td>
<td>Students feel free to express their ideas without the fear of embarrassment. They help each other reach common understandings.</td>
<td>Cason: Okay guys. Great job. Tomorrow, continue. I love it!</td>
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### Norms

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<th>Norms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral expectations</td>
<td>Participants either explicitly state an behavioral expectation or demonstrate that they understand rules for behavior in the classroom.</td>
<td>Cason: But I want your full attention to the young ladies and men in the middle, okay? That means all cell phones off.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning expectations</td>
<td>Participants either explicitly state a learning expectation or show that they understand learning expectations.</td>
<td>Cason: Now, if you have not read, you need to discuss right now what's going on because you're going to be on the spot, right now. I'm giving you a grade for discussion. Alright?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking expectations</td>
<td>Participants either explicitly state an expectation about speaking or show that they understand the rules of speaking during classroom discussions.</td>
<td>Cason: Okay. Okay good. Yes? Pass her the- the frog.</td>
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### Genre

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<th>Genre</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dominant Discourse</td>
<td>Discourses that could possibly lead to “social goods,” such as money, power, or status in a society; This authoritative discourse reflects given knowledge that often goes unquestioned or unchallenged.</td>
<td>Rose: Yeah, society, it really makes a difference, somewhat. It’s all in how you dress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-dominant discourse</td>
<td>Discourses that connect individuals to social networks but not necessarily social goods within the wider society; This internally persuasive discourse challenges given knowledge and draws conclusions based on what is personally convincing.</td>
<td>Messi: I did feel angry, but I couldn't do anything because if I called the police, “You have no credential” none of those things, so. So, I am the one who’s gonna lose in that situation.</td>
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</table>

Appendix G: Sample Coded Transcript

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Open Coding</th>
<th>Axial Coding</th>
<th>Selective Coding</th>
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</table>
| Cason: [...]Okay, let's get started. Let's see::: Omar! | Solicits comments | Setting: Whole Group  
Participant: Cason  
Act Sequence: Initiates  
Instrumentalities: Dialogic  
Teaching: Collective | Situation: The teacher uses "let’s" to show that the discussion is a collective effort  
Institutional: The teacher controls the turn by calling on a specific student |
| Omar: Yes? | Provides affirmative response | Participant: Omar  
Act Sequence: Responds  
Instrumentalities: Reciprocal | Situation: The student responds with a question, which forces the teacher to be explicit about what she wants from him.  
Institutional: There is a break in the interactional norm because the student does not volunteer an extended response as the teacher expected. |
| Cason: I want to hear your thoughts because I'm, I'm a little curious. || I'm a little curious. What did it say to you? | Solicits comments | Participant: Cason  
Act Sequence: Initiates  
Instrumentalities: Dialogic  
Teaching: Collective  
Key: Dialogic Stance: Defers to students’ opinions | Situation: The teacher uses overwording when she repeats "I'm a little curious." She wants the student to feel like she cares about what he has to say.  
Institutional: The teacher asks an open-ended question, giving the student an opportunity to exercise interpretive authority. |
| Omar: Uh, well, I mean, I wrote down another quote that said, "They wanted to kill us, but they didn't wanna do the work." | Uses the text as evidence | Participant: Omar  
Act Sequence: Responds  
Instrumentalities: Reciprocal  
Key: Efferent  
Norms: Learning Expectations  
Ends: Critical Literacy: Disrupting the commonplace  
Ends: Critical Literacy: Focusing on sociopolitical issues  
Ends: Critical Literacy: Interrogating multiple perspectives | Situation: The student’s use of the words “uh,” “well,” and “I mean” demonstrate hesitation. He does not express agency in his sentence but uses “they” without an antecedent  
Institutional: The student refers to the notes that the teacher instructed him to write down beforehand.  
Societal: The text choice presents sociopolitical issues, and the student draws on the discourse provided by the text. |
| Cason: Okay, what does it mean, do you think, and why does it matter? | Asks a follow-up question | Participant: Cason  
Act Sequence: Builds  
Instrumentalities: Dialogic  
Teaching: Cumulative  
Instrumentalities: Dialogic  
Teaching: Purposeful  
Instrumentalities: Collective  
Key: Dialogic Stance: Defers to students’ opinions | Institutional: The teacher asks two more open-ended questions. She enforces explicitness, demonstrating an authoritative role. She uses the say-mean-matter framework for building upon the student’s response. Several of the principles of dialogic teaching are present. |
| Omar: Um, well, “they” would be the whites, or, the rich white people basically. And um, they didn't like having all the poor, other poor people. It didn't-like it didn’t matter if they were white or black. They just didn't like poor people. | Summarizes the text | Participant: Omar  
Act Sequence: Builds  
Instrumentalities: Cumulative  
Key: Efferent  
Ends: Critical Literacy: Disrupting the commonplace | Situation: The student summarizes the text and reproduces the discourse type to which the text belongs. He chooses to define “they” (without being asked) as rich, white people. He also says “the” poor people and then immediately rephrases it to
“other” poor people. He also did not attribute a race to poor people because “it did not matter” to the rich, White people described in the text.

Insititutional: The student responds to the first question, “What does the text say?” but does not include his own opinion. Several of the dimensions of critical literacy are present, however.

Societal: She also stresses the importance of textual evidence and refers to “the history” that the student should be drawing from.

Cason: Okay, wait, let’s go back. What do you mean, white poor people? I mean, who are they? We gave you the [history first.]

Omar: [Farmers.] The farmers, and then, uh, other people that came from another country to try to make a living.

Omar: Uh, and they, the- the rich White people didn't like them. Uh, but they couldn't kill them, either, because they wanted to get rid of them, but they couldn't kill them, because then who would work for them?

Cason: Okay. Why does it matter

Cason: Mm-hmm.
though? Why does it matter?

Omar: Because that's what started slavery…basically. It didn't start slavery, but it, like, made slavery, like, really, really popular.

Cason: You mean, having other people come in and having forced labor, free labor, right? Okay. Okay good. Yes? Pass her the…the frog.
Appendix H: Co-occurrence of Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discussion</th>
<th>Excerpt</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Collective</th>
<th>Cumulative</th>
<th>Purposeful</th>
<th>Reciprocal</th>
<th>Supportive</th>
<th>Disrupting the commonplace</th>
<th>Focusing on socio-political issues</th>
<th>Interrogating multiple perspectives</th>
<th>Taking action and promoting social justice</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>&quot;Is it only with African Americans?&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>&quot;You mean forced labor, free labor, right?&quot;</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>&quot;Race isn't just the color&quot;</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>&quot;Naw, this ain't germane!&quot;</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>&quot;White supremacy, basically&quot;</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>&quot;Like, Black people, it's hard to get hired in certain places&quot;</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>&quot;But I'm gonna change it&quot;</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>&quot;Immigrants like us, we don't want to tell our story&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>&quot;People, they need a chance to be someone in life&quot;</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>&quot;I ain't even gon' lie, I even made myself a target&quot;</td>
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<td>71</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>&quot;That's why every time I see police, I just run&quot;</td>
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<tr>
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<td>&quot;They don't control our body, but they control our image&quot;</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>&quot;Prison fun!&quot;</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>&quot;He didn't like learning&quot;</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>&quot;Because people don't care when Black kids get shot&quot;</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<tr>
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<td>&quot;The KKK is in the government&quot;</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>&quot;These cops are scary!&quot;</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
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Appendix I: Data Collection Crosswalk

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ1: How did a teacher use dialogic teaching to foster critical literacy and to what extent were goals of critical literacy achieved?</th>
<th>Audio of lesson planning sessions</th>
<th>Lesson plans &amp; handouts</th>
<th>Audio/ transcripts of Initial teacher interview</th>
<th>Observation- al field notes</th>
<th>Student work samples</th>
<th>Audio/ transcripts of class discussions</th>
<th>Audio/ transcripts of follow-up teacher interviews</th>
<th>Personal Conversations</th>
<th>Audio/ transcripts of researcher reflections</th>
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<th>RQ3: How did the teacher’s perspectives shape instruction?</th>
<th>Audio of lesson planning sessions</th>
<th>Lesson plans &amp; handouts</th>
<th>Audio/ transcripts of Initial teacher interview</th>
<th>Observation- al field notes</th>
<th>Student work samples</th>
<th>Audio/ transcripts of class discussions</th>
<th>Audio/ transcripts of follow-up teacher interviews</th>
<th>Personal Conversations</th>
<th>Audio/ transcripts of researcher reflections</th>
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Appendix J: Timeline for the Research Study

### PAR Cycle 1: Spring 2016

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<tr>
<td>Follow-up discussion/interviews and member checks</td>
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- **Lesson Planning**: X indicates the task was completed during the specified week.
- **Initial Interviews**: X indicates the task was completed during the specified week.
- **Observations**: X indicates the task was completed during the specified week.
- **Follow-up discussion/interviews and member checks**: X indicates the task was completed during the specified week.
- **Locate artifacts/documents**: X indicates the task was completed during the specified week.
- **Data Management**: X indicates the task was completed during the specified week.
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