

“IT ALL JUST FITS TOGETHER...”:
THE INTERSECTION OF LANGUAGE, LITERACY, AND PLACE
FOR ADOLESCENTS NEGOTIATING THEIR IDENTITIES

by

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Abstract

This study analyzes the power of literacy and language in adolescent negotiation of identity, particularly in a classroom setting. The theoretical notion of discourse communities provides the framework for this qualitative, narrative case study of one high school junior and her literacy and language experiences from the perspective of her own video diaries. The study applies Critical Discourse Analysis and sociocultural theory to literacy in order to better understand the identity choices students make as they navigate different spaces in their lives. In addition, this study offers several implications for the education profession in regard to the English language arts curricula and new teaching standards. Four emergent themes resulted from analyzing the case study's video diaries and interviews: 1) Anna uses social languages to enact different identities; 2) Anna's agency is affected by her assigned identities; 3) language acts as a means of moving between contexts; and 4) language is more than just words. This project sought to understand how Anna's literacy and language practices are embedded in her sociocultural experiences, and how these experiences and practices shape identity and reconfigure moments of agency and power in the process of negotiating identities across discourse communities. The results of the study indicate that classroom spaces do not always adjust their context to meet the needs of the student, and for Anna, making identity choices to move between contexts did not always mediate success. In essence, language influences opportunities to learn, and our social and cultural position in society, to some extent, determines our success.

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Acknowledgements

“In the end, though, maybe we must all give up trying to pay back the people in this world who sustain our lives. In the end, maybe it's wiser to surrender before the miraculous scope of human generosity and to just keep saying thank you, forever and sincerely, for as long as we have voices.”

—Elizabeth Gilbert

In the end, nothing is ever done, it's just due. I would like to acknowledge those who have helped and encouraged me along the way, to “stay on the bus,” to work until it was finally due, even if it is never really done—you know who you are.

Dedication

“If something inside of you is real, we will probably find it interesting and it will probably be universal. So you must risk placing real emotion at the center of your work. Write straight into the emotional center of things. Write toward vulnerability. Risk being unliked. Tell the truth as you understand it. If you’re a writer, you have a moral obligation to do this. And it is a revolutionary act.”

- Anne Lammott

I dedicate this work to my students, who remind me every day that using one’s voice is an act of truth, and the truth in itself is a revolution. May they always find the courage to be revolutionary.

Preface

“We affirm the students’ right to their own patterns and varieties of language – the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language.”

– Passed by the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Fall 1974

In a controversial move, the Conference on College Composition and Communication passed the above resolution for American schools and colleges to address the language biases present in regards to the unique varieties and stylistic uses of English students were bringing with them to the classroom. It was the committee’s belief that most English teachers were trained in the appreciation and analysis of literature and not on the understanding of linguistic varieties and language. Human beings use language in a variety of ways, but because traditional English classrooms have always upheld the language valued by the mainstream, many of our students’ voices are left out of the classroom. The committee upheld its belief that teachers must eradicate their own biases about our students’ cultural language preferences in order to demonstrate respect for all forms of rhetoric, and so they affirmed that students do in fact have a right to their own language.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

It is 6:45 on a brisk Monday morning in the spring of 2012. After completing my 30-minute trek to City from the neighboring town in which I live, I ease my car in slot number seven of the parking lot at City High School. Once again, I have arrived at school well before the sun, armed with a travel mug of coffee and last night's grading. Half asleep, I stroll through the double doors just outside of my academy office, mind reeling with today's to-do list, already mulling over my lesson plans. As is typical, I am greeted with the familiar face of Anna, bright-eyed and smiling, sitting casually in a plastic chair outside the empty office. She is here before anyone else. Anna is wearing a blue City High sweatshirt and gray sweatpants, the same outfit I see almost every day, and when I greet her back, she replies with a casual nod of her head and a "What up Miss C?" Like many of her peers, Anna is "plugged in" to her iPod, gently tapping her feet, waiting for the school day to begin. School does not begin for another hour, yet, here she is, already waiting for that first bell, and here she'll be every day for the rest of the year. Anna's presence in that blue plastic chair is the one part of my day that I can count on to remain the same all year long.

During the fourth block of the day, Anna enters my classroom. We are in the midst of reading *The Great Gatsby*, a classic, albeit difficult novel. Anna has been in my classroom all year long, an unusual occurrence, as many of our students switch teachers at the semester break. In observing Anna from a teacher's perspective, I noticed that she is not a strong reader. While she can certainly read the words on the page just fine, the nuances of the English language are often lost on her; according to her score on last year's state reading assessment, she struggles to comprehend basic literature. However, Anna is smart. When she participates in class discussion and when she writes, she often surprises me with her intellect and her ability to find a way to connect the most minute detail to her own life. Though she does not write particularly well, in "standard" terms, Anna still composes incredible ideas. Anna's situation is not unlike the situation for many of my other students. I often find that my poorest readers and writers, according to standardized test scores, are some of the brightest, most creative students I have in class. It is this contradiction that became the basis for my wonderings: what are we not doing for

these students? Why is a student like Anna, bright and motivated, unable to perform to the standards of the classroom? Or, is it the classroom that is unable to meet the needs of Anna?

As educators, it is our responsibility to encourage and empower students to develop skills that help them negotiate the world in which they live—to understand the texts they encounter and the implications those texts have in the ways they think and act. Traditionally, students had access to these texts in the classroom via textbook or novel, limiting their literacy experiences to what curricula dictated. However, as global communities emerge with the rapidly changing scope of technology in the 21st century world, students are given tangible access to a wider range of literacy materials, changing the ways in which they establish, negotiate, and alter their identities.

The ways in which students alter their identities to fit the needs of the roles they play, especially as they engage in literacy practices, has large implications for the traditional English classroom. Adolescents now must grapple with the intersection of home, school, and virtual spaces as they work to understand themselves and how they represent the people they are. How these adolescents employ language varieties as a function of these identities requires them to make some sophisticated choices. Thus, this study seeks to explore the connection between identity and language in youth spaces, and furthermore, to understand the ways in which youth use language as a means of negotiating their changing identity in the formative years of high school. This study serves as a follow-up to a case study conducted in the fall of 2010 in which a two-student focus group and three classrooms of high school juniors, 127 students total, participated in observational research dedicated to understanding the connections between language and identity. The results of this case study were used as a starting point for the research in this study.

Purpose of the Study

The term “multiliteracies” is used to describe the changing communication styles and shifts in use of the English language across cultures as technology works to create an essentially smaller world (Gee, 2011). Text is no longer the only way to establish communication between groups of people. Now, text is being combined with sound and images to create multimedia literacy experiences requiring a whole new set of skills to understand and navigate. Youth interactions within this new century space are changing not only the language landscape of the

classroom as new Englishes emerge, but also the ways in which students experience literacy on a daily basis. The evolution of online technologies and increased access to multimodal texts posits students in a position of power to create and recreate their identities in multiple ways. When students interact in multiple online communities, they are often making conscious rhetorical choices about how to present who they are in these different contexts, and they are doing so multiple times in one day, gaining literacy experiences unlike those of previous generations. While the creation of online personas is not necessarily a new concept, many students use this different identity to read and write for an audience other than teacher or close friend, making the process altogether unique. Additionally, these online communities afford students the opportunity to disseminate their texts to an audience that has the potential to write back, and depending on what text they've created, the audience may be different each time.

Research suggests that youth create identity through their unique use of language, and often times this language helps them to establish a social location in a world of shifting populations. The exploration of identity in the formative years of high school is an important tool to foster positive self-perception and autonomy once students leave for the real world. Gustavo Perez Firmat captures the very essence of the dilemma involved in language and identity: "The fact that I am writing to you in English already falsifies what I wanted to tell you. My subject: how to explain to you that I do not belong to English, though I belong nowhere else." Firmat's words remind us that in an age of pluralism, it is problematic to ignore the powerful link between language and identity in adolescent learning spaces.

As a current English teacher in the field, this study's purpose is to use a student's perspective to engage in a discussion on the powerful assumptions teachers bring to the classroom in regards to our students' languages, and to specifically examine how this affects adolescents' opportunities to learn.

Description of the Study

This study focused on detailed observations and interviews of Anna, a high school junior in a traditional English classroom. The traditional English classroom represents an ideal mix of students from varying demographic backgrounds and academic abilities, not necessarily limited to just students learning English as a second language or students from bilingual backgrounds, as this study sought to understand variations in the use of English. In order to analyze my

observational findings, I first conducted research on identity formation theories in order to understand the various ways in which theorists believe youth form identity. Additionally, I researched documents and case studies pertaining to language development and use in the classroom, specifically among high school students. The study took the shape of a qualitative, narrative case study involving the perceptions and interpretations of one student, Anna, on the function of language, literacy, and place in relation to her own identity negotiation. The study incorporated a whole-classroom survey to narrow the research field from three junior English classes to just Anna, who then used a video-diary format to provide insight into her identity and unique language, literacy, and place experiences, including various literate practices like texting, writing, social networking, emailing, speaking, reading, and dressing. The video diary provided a framework to guide the story I told as I interpreted the data.

Overview of the Issues

The changing scope of the language landscape for students in the 21st century classroom highlights the important questions that teachers, especially teachers of English, need to ask about our curricula and what it really means to our students. David Kirkland (2010) puts it best when he explains that:

English as taught in city schools does not always reflect the Englishes that city students travel with. Their urban English landscape is enriched by a procession of many voices that march in various directions [...] In them are spoken souls of the crowded, colored earth, the distinguishable dialects and silences that creep loudly but defiantly down the city block and into the linguistic mainstream. (p. 293)

Students come to our classrooms richly embedded with languages that are much different than what we teach. These “Englishes,” as Kirkland calls them, are important aspects of the conversation surrounding English education in our time, and to ignore the languages students possess when they enter our classroom is to partially ignore them.

Linguistic pluralism is an essential aspect to any good English education program. This is not to say the old ways of teaching English—all inclusive of standard grammar and composition techniques as well as standard interpretations of literature—are unimportant or unnecessary for students to learn. In fact, with language as a tool of power and politics, it is essential to understand Standard English in order to have upward social mobility. Yet, providing an

appreciation for the other Englishes – the Englishes that have become hybrids of the original – is an additionally relevant aspect to neo-English education (Kirkland, 2010, p. 295).

The many voices of youth culture are changing the ways educators should view language. As language standardization destabilizes and English begins to swell and shift, “urban youth [are] bending vowels and verbs, shattering stale syntaxes and sounds, and embodying the vernacular Englishes that constitute new-century spaces – online social communities, multiethnic communities, and global communities” (Kirkland, 2010, p.295). At the same time, these youth are grappling with the socio-political implications of language, especially when mainstream codes require that individuals speak and write in a certain way. “The appropriation of any code is about the politics of language, the competition among codes” (Kirkland, 2010, p. 294) and this reflects the socio-political tensions that students experience in their own worlds. As Kirkland (2010) points out, when languages shift and hybridize to form new Englishes, they become an alternative way for youth to deal with these issues and “make sense of their world” (p. 295).

It is not hard to see, then, how language, as a social, political, and cultural tool, could be linked to individual identity. As Lisa Delpit (2002) points out, “Just as our skin provides us with a means to negotiate our interactions with the world – both in how we perceive our surroundings and in how those around us perceive us – our language plays an equally pivotal role in determining who we are: it is *The Skin That We Speak*” (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002, xvii). Delpit’s research focuses specifically on the interplay involved in race and language, and whether or not language acts as a means of marginalization, particularly in the African American community. She draws interesting conclusions about the association between language and identity, language and cultural conflict, and language and political hierarchy in our world. Furthermore, her research suggests non-Standard forms of English, especially African American dialects, are viewed as inferior or deficient when compared to Standard English. In Delpit’s collection of essays *The Skin That We Speak*, Michael Stubbs comments that “we hear language through a powerful filter of stereotypes and social values” (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002, p. 66) and that these stereotypes and perceptions can have dangerous implications. The assumption that speakers of Standard English are “more ambitious, more intelligent, more self-confident and more reliable” (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002, p. 67) represents a social stereotype, implying that the social constraints on language are far more powerful than the linguistic constraints.

Language is completely social. At its core, language is about communicating every transaction we need to interact with others in our society (trade/commerce, love, friendship, pain, plans, intentions, etc.). It is a tool that individuals use to take action within social contexts, whether it is written or spoken. Language serves as a way to understand each other, the texts we read, the communities in which we live, and the things we value. Language is powerful and political. The use of language to accomplish the goals of a particular culture has the ability to empower or oppress groups of people. Language, finally, is a function of identity. Since language is culturally situated, individuals use language as a means of constructing an identity that fits the roles they play within that social context.

In order to understand the relationship between language and identity, it is first important to understand identity and its construction. Social constructivist theories of learning suggest that learning takes place within a social context where individuals construct their own knowledge based on prior experience, and also on the relationship between new knowledge and their own perception of reality. Therefore, learning is individual. No one person gathers information and makes sense of it in the same ways as another because background and prior knowledge distort what we understand about the things we encounter. In other words, individuals come heavily saturated with experiences that shape our learning. Social constructivism allows for the possibility that as an individual's reality changes, so too will his or her understanding of that reality. Knowledge shifts with every new encounter, and the new knowledge we gain is constructed from what we already know.

Like learning, identity is usually relative to the social context in which individuals find themselves. "Learning, from a social and cultural perspective, involves people in participation, interaction, relationships, and contexts, all of which have implications for how people make sense of themselves and others, identify, and are identified" (Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 2). Identity, therefore, is constructed in much the same way as social constructivists believe knowledge is constructed. Like knowledge, identity is fluid. Individuals have multiple identities that vary depending on the social context in which they find themselves. As Moje and Luke (2009) assert, "people see and represent themselves differently dependent on the interactions they are having" (p. 5) suggesting that people may enact several different identities over the course of a day or a lifetime. Identity theorists like Vygotsky and Erikson suggest, though, that the bulk of identity formation is in the years in which individuals encounter the most conflict within themselves –

adolescence – and that the end-goal is to move from this stage of conflict into a stage of autonomy.

The interplay between language and identity (i.e. race, gender, language, social status, etc.) presents a unique set of challenges for educators. Moje and Luke (2009) suggest that current “pedagogical practice privileges culture over identity,” (p. 10) and because texts require readers to “assume certain knowledge, to believe certain assumptions, and to have particular relationships to power to read meaningfully” (p. 13), language marginalization becomes a possibility. Youth who have no connection to the culture’s text are being asked to accept and understand an identity they do not possess. When English education in the classroom focuses specifically on “high dialects” or standard forms of language, without recognizing or even allowing the use of other languages students possess, fluidity is lost and the speakers of those languages become marginalized (Kirkland, 2010, p. 293). As educators, it becomes extremely important to recognize that marginalizing a student’s language sets that student apart from his or her peers. In Kirkland’s (2010) study of urban youth and their languages, he interviewed a young girl who poignantly captures the confusion in identifying her particular language with this statement: “In order to explain who I am, I have to use what people call Ebonics, but Ebonics alone don’t explain me. I have to use English, too, but English don’t explain me either. I am the poem that sits somewhere between the two” (p. 301). The interconnectedness of language and identity presents a unique obstacle that adolescents must navigate in understanding themselves and forming an identity. This requires that teachers accept a place for new versions of English, just as we accept a place for new students with varied backgrounds, and “acknowledge that new rhetorics and literacies are evolving” (Paris, 2010, p. 288), all-the-while understanding that for some students, no one language will ever be enough to fully explain who they are.

Significance of the Study

Literacy is a function of culture in that it provides a means for negotiating within social and political contexts. Literacy and language represent culture in that they are rooted in identity. The relationship between language and identity in a classroom setting becomes important when one recognizes that words represent more than just communication – they represent a world view. As Donaldo Macedo (2006) explains:

Beyond the linguistic code issue, educators must understand the ways in which different dialects encode different world views. [...] Language should never be understood as a mere tool of communication. Language is packed with ideology, and for this reason it has to be given prominence in any radical pedagogy that proposes to provide space for students' emancipation. (p. 120)

Additionally, Freire explains that “language variations – female language, ethnic language, dialects – are intimately interconnected with, coincide with, and express identity” (Macedo, 2006, p. 123). As the demographics of our classrooms continue to shift with the changing demographics of our country, it is imperative that we examine our teaching to be sure we are reaching every student. “In 2009, White students at grade 12 scored 27 points higher in reading than Black students and 22 points higher than Hispanic students” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010), suggesting there are still issues in providing equitable outcomes for all students in our classroom. It is critical that we, as educators, examine the socio-political implications of language in the classroom, and work to understand the interconnectedness of language and identity in order to provide all students with equitable access to knowledge, ultimately making meaningful the cultural experiences of every student from every background.

The Research Question

The following question was established from my personal wonderings regarding Anna's classroom experiences and it was used to guide the research for this project:

1. How do youth use language as a means of negotiating their identities?

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms have been defined in order to provide a clear understanding of how they are used in this study:

Youth: a student in my English class between ages 16 and 18 attending school in a public rural, urban, military high school.

Language: a complex system of communication that provides readable text including patterns of speaking, writing, thinking, dressing, and behaving.

Negotiate: to make conscious choices when enacting identities across discourse communities and within certain contexts.

Discourse community: a system defined by certain texts and practices that are constrained by the demands of the place in which those texts and practices exist (Gee, 2011).

Identity: state of being enacted or performed by an individual dependent on his or her context (discourse community).

Limitations of the Study

This study has certain limitations that must be addressed in order to understand its contributions to current research and scholarship. These limitations are:

- This study focuses on one high school junior from one English classroom, therefore, provides only a snapshot of experiences among high school youth.
- This study assumes that, based on research, a connection already exists between language and identity.
- When examining identities as they emerge through interviews, it is important to note that what emerges is a co-construction of both the interviewee and the interviewer.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Introduction

“I am composing on the typewriter late at night, thinking of today. How well we all spoke. A language is a map of our failures. [...] This is the oppressor’s language, yet I need it to speak to you” (Rich, 1966).

The English language has long been regarded by many scholars as the “oppressor’s language” given its roots in traditional Western culture as the language of white, powerful men. Standard English, then, becomes representative of the dominant culture and class in the United States simultaneously negating the cultural minority. Above Adrienne Rich (1966) identifies English as the “language of the oppressor” in that it is the language of the dominant culture used to stifle the voices of minority cultures in our country. As many scholars such as James Gee and Donaldo Macedo assert, language is packed with ideology and to understand language, we must understand the world it represents.

Historically, the English language is the language of conquest or domination. It is rooted in an American history that posits land gain over human needs, perpetuating a culture of inherent racism that remains pervasive in our everyday culture. Language becomes part of this tool of racism in that language is representative of a culture. When society promulgates white, Western heritage as the dominant culture and class, and when the English language is used to represent that dominant culture and class, English becomes the very tool of oppression to racial and ethnic minority groups that Rich speaks of in her poem. She asserts that we, as a people, touch each other with language, making language central and paramount to our discoveries of ourselves. Therefore, a clear understanding of the class, culture, and power associated with different types of language, as well as how those languages represent the identity of a people, is necessary to close the chasm between Western culture and its beliefs about language differences, especially in our public schools.

The Politics of Language

Donaldo Macedo (2006), in his book *Literacies of Power: What Americans Are Not Allowed to Know*, claims that schools and media are the two most powerful mediums through

which lies are projected in our common culture. From a literacy standpoint, Macedo asserts that because American schools seek to perpetuate a “Pedagogy of Big Lies” (2006, p. 9), Americans are taught through discourses that blind them from truth and knowledge. He argues that our common culture “sustains an ideology that systematically negates, rather than makes meaningful, the culture experiences of members of the subordinate cultural groups” (Macedo, 2006, p. 48) and that this creates a common culture that is flawed because it is largely dependent on the experiences of the dominant class and culture.

Thus, literacy, specifically cultural literacy, becomes the lens through which Macedo (2006) views our collective disparity as a Western culture, highlighting our predominate inability to view the word (language) and the world (context) in a way that allows for the experiences of “subordinate” groups to permeate the common culture. “Cultural literacy cannot be viewed as simply the acquisition of Western heritage values aimed at safeguarding our so-called common culture” (Macedo, 2006, pp. 47-48), but instead must be used as a medium through which all groups of people create meaning of their lived experiences in a way that makes those experiences culturally and historically significant. Macedo (2006) argues that literacies of power exist within the context of the English language when language becomes a tool of propaganda to forward the agenda of those in power:

Given our tendency as humans to construct ‘satisfying and often self-deceptive stories, stories that often advantage themselves and their groups,’ the development of a critical comprehension between the meaning of words and a more coherent understanding of the meaning of the world is a prerequisite to achieving clarity of reality. (Macedo, 2006, p. 27).

In other words, it is necessary to understand the cultural world representative of different groups of people in order to comprehend their word-level reality of that world. Without the ability to understand the word and the world, humans risk staying culturally illiterate.

Within the context of public schools, and in particular, within groups of adolescents, language as a tool of power becomes an important topic of exploration in understanding how youth use language to negotiate identity. English remains the dominant language of American public schools, and, according to Macedo (2006), this means that the dominant culture is what is taught, automatically making less meaningful the experiences of youth who are not part of that culture. If language is representative of culture, and a student’s language is not used or allowed

in the general school setting, the student's cultural experiences are ignored, and his or her understanding of the world is limited because the word-level reality of the classroom does not match his world reality.

Language is given power by those who use it. Thus, if teachers in public school classrooms continue to ignore the language differences of their students, they inevitably rescind the power their students have to make meaning of themselves and their world. As Rich (1986) writes,

When those who have the power to name or to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you...when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing. (p. 199)

Positioning students as outsiders by focusing attention on a curriculum that uses language to describe a world they are not part of leaves them at a disadvantage, and it stifles their ability to make sense of themselves and the world in which they live. Recognizing language and cultural experiences as differences rather than deficits or deficiencies is an important step in eliminating language and cultural bias in the classroom, allowing for students to adopt a more complete understanding of their own identity and its place in their world.

Still, a language of power exists in our mainstream culture, and in order for citizens to have upward mobility, an understanding of standard English is necessary. This is exemplified in traditional public school classrooms that use standard English as the standard means of discourse, often teaching mainstream linguistic codes mirrored in middle-class social, political, and cultural values. Elizabeth Burr Moje and Allan Luke (2009) suggest that use of strictly mainstream codes reveals that "children whose language and literacy practices [do] not match school language and literacy practices [are] devalued and marginalized from school learning" (p. 9), confirming the importance of adopting mainstream language in order to have success in public schools, and further, anchoring that student's success in public life.

Gaining access to the discourse of American public schools requires students to participate in a "power-imbued process" (Lewis, Enciso & Moje, 2009, p. 17), implying that much of learning is mired in power relations. Cynthia Lewis, Patricia Enciso, and Elizabeth Burr Moje (2009) argue that power is produced and enacted through all kinds of interactions, including these different discourse communities. Additionally, they theorize that learning is

about “accumulating, assimilating, and accommodating information, ideas and concepts” (p. 18) and even more than that, it becomes about “the acquisition or appropriation of ideas [...] and resistance to or reconceptualization of skills and knowledge” (p. 18). Thus, exercising power in learning becomes a tool students employ to enact an identity and develop agency. Student opportunities for agency are limited in American public schools when non-standard “social languages” are commonly seen as a sign of unintelligence.

Language, Class, and Perceived Intelligence

However, the use of non-standard English does not prevent learning and does not imply a lack of intelligence, especially when we remember that students often appropriate language to fit their social context. “Individuals use speech as a way to communicate and understand what it means to be a particular type of person within a specific context” (Hall, Johnson, Juzwik, Wortham & Mosley, 2009, p. 235) and then construct identities that “position themselves in ways they believe will meet their social and academic goals” (Hall et. al., 2009, p. 235). Learning itself is an act of shifting identities, assuming the roles the discourse community demands (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2009, p. 19). Even more than that, learning “is not only participation in discourse communities, but is also the process by which people become members of discourse communities, resist membership in such communities, are marginalized from discourse communities (or marginalize others), reshape discourse communities, or make new ones” (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2009, p. 20). These memberships or identity enactments (or resistance) shape the learning opportunities students have, and ultimately, what they learn.

Identities emerge through engagement with text and with each other, through various modes of communication; thus it becomes imperative that texts within the English classroom “join youth texts with the dominant school texts to show the value of each for communicating meaning to and exercising power with audiences” (Paris, 2010, p. 288). Many literacy theorists argue that identity, power, and agency are linked to literacy and language learning, thus it becomes imperative that the identities students enact be recognized and accepted as valuable, even if they do not match those constructed in the learning space of schools.

Still, linguistic stereotypes help to perpetuate a sense of inability based on one’s use of language. “Language always seems to play a central role in [the] class-related denial of educational opportunity” (Delpit & Dowdy, 2009, p. 133) because language is often the most

clear representation of class. Traditionally, marginalized groups of people are not offered quality education because of diminished expectations for achievement when compared to groups in power, and “teachers have regarded Standard English as correct while nonstandard features are deemed as errors that warrant correction” (Hill, 2009, p. 121). Stereotypical or marginalized perceptions of students’ abilities based on language differences intersect with student identity when social perceptions work to create dissonance for youth, making it difficult for them to “reconcile positive images of themselves with the external representations” (Shields, 1999, p. 120). Their lives become fragmented, as they must learn to grapple with the disparity between the perception of ability assigned to them by outsiders and their own perception of what they can and cannot do.

Countless studies exist that corroborate a growing sense among teachers of youth inability based on their non-standard use of language. For many teachers, a common assumption rests on the idea that “language differences correlate to minimal skills and abilities” (Hill, 2009, p. 120), often a result of being prepared to only teach in “white, middle-class settings” (Hill, 2009, p. 120). In reality, most everyone speaks a variation of standard English and often times this is how the best of us express our voice.

Code-switching is a term that refers to the use of more than one language or variety of language in conversation. Employing code-switching in a classroom setting allows for students to use their home language while learning to appropriate the correct setting for reading and writing, “developing an understanding of, and respect for, diversity in language use, patterns and dialects” (Hill, 2009, p. 122). When teachers use code-switching as a means of scaffolding language instruction, students are encouraged to develop an appropriate appreciation for their home language and culture, while also recognizing when standard English becomes necessary because of context.

For many students, preserving identity comes from using home language in a school setting. Because the language that many students bring to school has been “historically constructed by the dominant culture [and] perceived by many teachers and peers as deficient” (Hill, 2009, p. 126), students often develop a false sense of inability based mainly on identity perceptions assigned to them by the dominant culture and class. Though students recognize that “standard writing conventions [are] skills they need” (Hill, 2009, p. 126), they are often reluctant to adopt standard English if it means compromising their identity for the culture of power. The

reluctance to code-switch for standard purposes may reflect feelings of threat involved in negotiating the social and political implications that come with losing a little bit of oneself in language. For a student to adopt standard English, a variation of the English he or she speaks at home, the student risks giving up part of his or her voice in order to gain power.

Language, Literacy, and Identity

As students begin to engage in literacy practices more and more outside of the school setting, the language of home becomes more prevalent in students' expression of themselves, making it all the more important to bridge the sociological gap between youth literacy practices in the school and in the community. In working from the perspective of identity as a social construct, "place" becomes an important factor in examining the literacy experiences of youth and the ways in which they employ language differently depending on the context. Youth learning takes place beyond the formalized setting of the classroom, thus many researchers suggest that "because identities are bounded by location – where people live, write, and play – [...] teachers and researchers should consider how writing is guided by spatial practices: locations/acts of writing, community mapping, politics, differences, and identities" (Kinloch, 2009, p. 320). Literacy becomes a social practice where "knowledge and identity are central factors in understanding the multiple meanings, purposes and locations of literacy" (Kinloch, 2009, p. 321), hinging on the intersection of the school setting and language with the community/home setting and language.

When language (ways of knowing, doing, believing, acting, reading, and writing) shifts to meet the demands of a situation, individuals are enacting what are called discourse communities (Gee, 2011). As people develop discourse communities embedded in the cultural models available to them, they also develop and enact different identities. "Identities, following such a perspective, are at least in part culturally situated, mediated, and constructed [...]. Identities are built within the social interactions one has within a particular Discourse community" (McCarthy & Moje, 2002, p. 231). In this sense, identity becomes hybridized as individuals construct it from multiple experiences and relationships that are enacted in particular places (McCarthy & Moje, 2002, p. 231). Furthermore, McCarthy & Moje (2002) theorize that all learning, especially literacy learning, "can be conceived of as moments in identity construction and representation" (2002, p. 232) during which individuals are constantly

negotiating and renegotiating the multifaceted aspects of their own identities in relation to the group. Individuals' languages are tied to their experiences and those experiences are particular to their cultural and social world.

Moreover, language is a social practice, much like identity, and it is often altered multiple times in one day or one situation to meet the social demands of the speaker. If both language and identity are constructs that often emerge from social practices, both become fluid. For example, as McCarthy and Moje (2002) explain, "people can be both motivated and lazy, both aggressive and shy, depending on the spaces they are in and the relationships they enact within those spaces" (p. 230), emphasizing identity as a dynamic aspect of personhood. Often the task demands and the situation inspire individuals to behave, speak, write, read, and dress in certain ways. In addition, our identities are constructed in relation to others' perceptions of us as individuals. "Identity can be hybrid, it can be complex, and it can be fluid and shifting as a person moves from space to space and relationship to relationship" (McCarthy & Moje, 2002, p. 231), suggesting that identity, encompassing this notion of hybridity, is "situated in relationships, and that power plays a role in how identities get enacted and how people get positioned on the basis of those identities" (McCarthy & Moje, 2002, p. 231). This allows us to see identity as something that is lived and not necessarily fixed, contributing to the notion that identities change to meet the social demands individuals experience.

Examining the representations of individual identity in relation to space is an important aspect of understanding the connections between language, literacy, and identity. Youth exercise literacy practices differently in different spaces, particularly urban youth, often contributing to the growing bias among school personnel that "[these] marginalized youth's literacy (and other communicative) practices are foreign, resistant, villainous, even when the practices may simply be different rather than negative" (McCarthy & Moje, 2002, p. 235). This sense of "different" as being "negative" adds to the sense among teachers and administrators that youth's out-of-school literacy practices are somehow threatening, causing teachers and schools to use literacy practices of their own that emphasize control and that "are enacted implicitly and explicitly in language and literacy teaching" (McCarthy & Moje, 2002, p. 235). Language and literacy become automatic markers of culture, class, and ability to many school personnel, leaving youth without a sense of belonging in the school environment, especially when "only mainstream genres and texts are typically valued" (McCarthy & Moje, 2002, p. 236) in the classroom. This

privileges mainstream culture, much like Donaldo Macedo (2002) asserts in his work, potentially stifling “any learning that theoretically should occur as a result of self-expression” (McCarthy & Moje, 2002, p. 236) and it also teaches students to “subvert their identities to those of the dominant culture” (McCarthy & Moje, 2002, p. 236).

Given that youth are participating in a growing number of literacy-based activities outside of school, the nexus among youth identities and engagement in literacy tasks, and the spaces in which they enact these identities, becomes significant. Technology posits youth in the position to engage in multiple spaces of learning not just in a school setting (Kinloch, 2009, p. 320), increasing not only the amount of time youth participate in literacy activities, but also increasing the opportunities they have to enact different identities to fit the needs of those literacy activities. The interconnectedness of literacy and place contributes to the educational scholarship that highlights identity as a social practice as well. “The ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, and being” (Kinloch, 2009, p. 321), making it increasingly important to examine the literate lives of youth outside of the school setting.

Sociocultural Theory and Literacy

Sociocultural theory, when applied to literacy learning, allows for the many mediating factors involved in such learning practices to unite under one theory that joins aspects of anthropology, psychology, sociology, cultural studies, literacy studies, and linguistics (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2009, p. 2). Essentially, sociocultural theory allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which student learning is affected by all aspects of one’s personhood, taking into heavy consideration the influence of culture. Further, sociocultural theory works to stifle the idea that literacy is a one-dimensional task and “that achievement gaps can be addressed without attention to histories of power relations or group and individual struggles for identity” (Lewis et.al., 2009, p. 3). Literacy becomes an act rather than a task that involves relationships with texts and individuals, works in and across discourse communities, and is hindered by power structures deeply imbedded in American cultural values. These discourse communities (Gee, 2011) represent social and cultural aspects of a group, and some of these communities are easier to join than others. Some communities of practice require certain

aspects of one's personhood to be given up, altered, stifled, or changed in order to be accepted (Lewis et. al., 2009, p. 128).

Sociocultural theories of literacy learning take into account the acts of joining discourse communities, implying that the act of learning is in the transformations required to become part of certain communities of practice, often involving a reconceptualization of one's skills and knowledge in addition to the "accumulation, accommodation, and assimilation" of new ideas and concepts related to new communities of practice (Lewis et. al., 2009, p. 18). This, in itself, is where learners develop identity and assume agency. Therefore, learning can be "conceptualized as shifts in identity; that is, one learns to take on new identities along with new forms of knowledge and participation" (Lewis et. al., 2009, p. 19) in the process of becoming part of different discourse communities.

According to sociocultural theory, learning involves the direct intersection of literacy, identity, and place by examining the impact of relationships in the learning process. "Learning thus involves both awareness of differences and distinctions, and, ultimately, [is] an act of subject formation, that is, identification with particular communities" (Lewis et. al., 2009, p. 19). Individuals acquire, appropriate, enact, and resist different identities, skills, and knowledge across different discourse communities, and in particular, these different identities have a large impact on how one will be perceived by others within that discourse community (Lewis et. al., 2009, p. 20).

Finally, sociocultural theory requires that researchers spend time "understanding cultural practices of different groups, ... and recognize that power is produced in people's everyday lives and instantiated in institutions, systems, and socioeconomic structures that shape, and, at times control people's everyday lives" (Lewis et. al., 2009, p. 21). Recognizing the role of power in literacy practices and learning is equally important in understanding the ways in which individuals are allowed to successfully transition from one discourse community to another. The central aspect of understanding literacy from a sociocultural standpoint involves close attention to not necessarily what happens within specific contexts, but instead how people negotiate their movement across communities and contexts – what they bring with them and what they leave behind - to meet their own learning needs.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

The largest aspect of this case study is rooted in practitioner inquiry (or teacher research). As Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle (2009) theorize, “inquiry as stance is a grounded theory of action that positions the role of practitioners and practitioner knowledge as central to the goal of transforming teaching, learning, leading, and schooling” (p. 119) and, thus, I used action research to interpret a growing problem in education—unequal access to curriculum because of a persistent language bias—and to determine my role as teacher in eliminating this bias that prevents educational equity for my students.

Accountability and equity issues in education present unique opportunities for teacher inquiry. There is a shifting rhetoric in public schools and on policy-maker agendas to include topics such as accountability, high-stakes testing, outcomes, and achievement, usually in reference to teacher performance and school evaluations. Embedding these ideas into our educational philosophy has allowed teacher practitioners to create more broad definitions of equity and explore what it means to promote student achievement regardless of high-stakes test scores. The most important aspect of teacher inquiry, then, is that it allows for real systemic change to be possible by encouraging teachers to examine the larger role of education in a democratic society where action research, having its roots in knowledge, really does have power.

Social change is a central aspect of practitioner research. As teacher researchers, our end-goal is to be agents of change within the educational system. Using classroom research to improve our own praxis is paramount to providing more equitable outcomes for students in all our classrooms. Several challenges exist to prevent teacher research from being both successful and reputable, but perseverance is necessary. Educational policy and reform agendas tend to posit teacher research as too limited since it typically involves only the researcher’s classroom. However, teacher research does more than just allow for teachers to ask questions of themselves; it gives educators the freedom to explore our own roles in creating change that has the possibility to be largely systemic. Teacher research allows teachers to look at education from a larger perspective - the most important benefit of the entire process.

At the very heart of teacher research is a desire to enhance the educational experience for our students while they’re inside our classrooms; more than that, though, teacher research is an

opportunity for educators to discover even more about themselves. “Practitioner research” includes anyone who is involved in the education process. The work of practitioner researchers is a lifelong process of looking at education from a knowledgeable, questioning standpoint in order to create change in student equity across the board.

Since practitioner research involves the researcher’s own classroom, my students serve as the subject of this study. More specifically, the study began with detailed observations and field notes from each of my three English classrooms, rooted in the observations I discovered during my initial case study.

The Initial Study

The initial study was part of a research project in the Teachers as Researchers course at Kansas State University. As part of this course, I was required to select a problem or an area of interest in my own classroom and use action research to understand the problem to improve my praxis as a teacher. The initial study served as the basis for the proposed study. The initial study began with a comprehensive classroom lesson designed to engage students in a discussion about language and identity. I wanted to understand how students perceive themselves in relationship to the social roles they play in each aspect of their lives. To begin, students created Social Location Maps that provide a structured, visual depiction of what they perceive to be the most important parts of their identities at this “location” in their social lives. Students were encouraged to examine not only as many aspects of themselves as possible, but also the various ways in which each social role or social identifier connects with the others. The result was a multifaceted collection of student interpretations of their own identities, resulting in several emerging themes. Within each of these social roles, students determined their language and the various ways in which they communicate ideas that are altered to fit the needs of their specific role.

I share the view with many researchers that language is a social practice often reflecting and constructing the social world of those who participate in it; thus, my students’ observations of the importance of their social roles in establishing a unique language confirms this assumption. Language and literacy are embedded in social practice, so it makes sense that students identify language as a particularly important feature of each of their social roles. The idea of each social location in which humans interact having a particular language and function

for that language becomes the basis for the concept of discourse communities. Students participate in unique discourse communities multiple times throughout one day, altering their language to fit the needs of the particular group to which they belong.

The Research Project

For this subsequent study, I applied aspects of sociocultural theory to literacy to examine the ways in which discourse communities emerged as an aspect of identity negotiation for Anna. According to Lewis, Enciso, and Moje (2009), “sociocultural theory [allows] us to explore the intersection of social, cultural, historical, mental, physical, and more recently, political aspects of people’s sense-making, interaction, and learning around text” (p. 2). Sociocultural theory implies that relationships and interactions are central to meaning-making and learning. In terms of literacy activities, individuals “have been constructed through social and linguistic codes and practices that shape their relationship to texts and how such texts might be defined” (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2009, p. 6). Learning involves enacting different identities along with new forms of knowledge, thus, often requiring shifts in identity. The concept of discourse communities emerges as a result of sociocultural theories of literacy. Again, discourse communities “are groupings of people – not only face-to-face or actual in-the-moment groupings, but also ideational groupings across time and space – that share ways of knowing, thinking, believing, acting, and communicating” (Lewis et.al., 2009, p. 16); learners must grapple with understanding the particular qualities of a certain discourse community in order to gain access to that community. Thus, learning is mired in power relations produced and enacted in discourse communities, time, space, and relationships as learners compete for access to different discourse communities, resources, and identities (Lewis et.al., 2009, p. 17).

To explain my students’ literacy practices within different discourse communities throughout a typical school day, I applied Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Critical Discourse Analysis examines how “social and power relations, identities, and knowledge are constructed through written and spoken texts in social settings such as schools, families, and communities” (Lewis et.al., 2009, p. 22). Critical Discourse Analysis allows the researcher to illustrate how power and discourse emerge through day-to-day activities and how these structures create powerful social orders (Lewis et.al., 2009). A careful understanding of the cultural practices of

participants in this study was necessary to apply both sociocultural theory and CDA to determine how identity is negotiated within and between discourse communities.

This study was framed as a qualitative, narrative case study involving candid interactions with students in my English classroom, and in the end, focused on one particular high school junior, Anna.

The Research Question

The following research question was used to guide the research and data analysis for this study:

How do youth use language as a means of negotiating their identities? More specifically, how do youth enact discourse communities in the process of negotiating their identities?

I gathered information from interviews, artifacts, and a video diary to answer this question.

Research Procedures

After gaining approval from the Institutional Review Board in April of 2012, I distributed a five-question survey to students in each of my three English classes in order to address the primary research question for this study. Questions were preselected from interview questions used in the initial case study and focused on identity, choice, and language. Additionally, survey questions probed students for demographic information, participation in activities (both in and out of school), and availability throughout the course of the study. Since the goal was to find a student who was “interesting” enough to fulfill the needs of the study, it was necessary to determine which of my students had opportunities to use language in a variety of ways. I used the answers to these surveys to narrow the research field to one high school junior who served as the focus for this case study. Her name is Anna. Anna’s initial interview served as a follow-up to the student’s survey responses and was video-taped for use in data analysis (see Appendix A for interview questions). Anna volunteered samples of in-class writing assignments, both formal and informal, to serve as additional data representing her unique use of language for a particular discourse community. Anna was asked to provide a video diary of her typical interactions at school in one day (see Appendix B). The video diary provided visual, verbal, and social evidence of this student, her actions, the ways in which she changed or enacted different identities

throughout the course of a day, and the various discourse communities to which she belongs. The final interview, conducted near the end of the study, served as a follow-up to the initial interview as well as Anna's video diaries. Anna was encouraged to tell her own "story" to contribute to the narrative framework of this study. Anna's story, coupled with my observations and field notes, provided a body of data to answer the primary research question regarding student negotiation of identity through unique uses of language. The results of this study are presented as a narrative case study.

Trustworthiness

This study sought to gain a deeper understanding of my students' language and literacy practices in my classroom and the effect those practices have on their negotiation of identity. As such, rather than establishing validity or reliability, the study seemed instead to demand trustworthiness. "With narrative inquiry, validity rests on concrete examples (or "exemplars") of actual practices presented in enough detail that the relevant community can judge trustworthiness and usefulness" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 43); thus, this study utilizes thick descriptions and narrative as data. To establish trustworthiness, I will state and clarify any biases I have regarding the classroom literacy practices of my students as well as acknowledge the limitations of the study.

The data for this study is qualitative, thus its largest limitation is that the understandings gained from the videos, interviews, and artifacts are mostly co-constructed. That is, in order to formulate an opinion on what the data mean, I had to interpret Anna's videos using what I already know, ultimately making my conclusions partly based on my own assumptions and partly based on what Anna told me.

The study involved detailed observations and thick descriptions of Anna, allowing me to closely examine her own interpretations of self-identity and use of language. Examining data in a narrative, qualitative inquiry project invited me to understand more deeply rather than to establish convincing evidence. The study focused not only on what I gather from what she shared, but also on what the student perceived about herself.

Selection of Site & Participant

In this study, I want to understand the language practices of adolescents in the process of negotiating and establishing an identity. The site I chose for this study is my own school, a rural-

urban high school located near a military post. As an English teacher in this building, I have daily access to adolescents to complete this study, making City High School a logical choice.

City High School

City High School is a rural urban 6A high school comprised of grades nine through twelve. At the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year, City High School's enrollment was 1,738 students. City High School utilizes a career academy structure in which students are divided into separate small "schools" within the larger high school based on their career interests. According to the enrollment numbers at the beginning of the 2011 school year, approximately 53% of students were male and 47% were female. Of the 1,738 students enrolled, about 50% are economically disadvantaged. Ethnic demographics include 46% Caucasian, 24% African American, 16% Hispanic, and 15% "Other."

Majority of the interaction for this study took place in my own classroom—a small, windowless room in a corner on the second floor of the building. My classroom consists of 32 desks, one small green couch, an L-shaped teacher desk, one mobile computer lab, a Smart Board, and several chalkboard-lined walls. Despite the lack of natural light, my classroom is bright, enhanced as much as possible by eye-catching wall decorations and brightly colored bulletin boards. The atmosphere of the classroom remains light as well, as I work hard to establish and foster an environment of freedom and comfort for my students. I attribute the willingness of my students to participate in this study to this resulting ambience of safety.

The Participant

Initial 5-question demographic surveys were distributed to all students in each of my three junior English classes and their responses were analyzed to determine which student would serve as the primary participant for this study. These classroom-wide surveys contained questions designed to survey students on their various in-school and out-of-school activities as well as their availability over the course of the study. The goal of these surveys was to help me identify a student with a variety of opportunities to utilize language in different ways, contributing to the basis of the research question. Given the nature of the question, it was necessary for me to use my own classroom observations in conjunction with the surveys to identify an ideal candidate for this project.

For the purpose of this project, the participant's identity will remain confidential. As such, she will be referred to by a pseudonym, Anna, throughout the remainder of this study. Anna is a 17-year old African American female living and working in the City High School community. Anna was selected as the primary participant for this project because she is a student with whom I have a very good relationship. Additionally, Anna is a member of a variety of communities that demand a shift in her use of language; she is from a non-traditional family; she is a minority; she is vocal in class, and she was willing to participate. Anna's willingness to actively participate, even over her summer break, coupled with her uniqueness as an individual, made her the ideal selection for this project.

The Researcher's Role

Throughout the data collection period, I acted as the primary English teacher for all participants in this study. The student who was the focus of the study was in my English class both semesters, a significant point since many students change English teachers at the start of second semester. This allowed me to establish and continue to build relationships with students as the year progressed.

As an English teacher, my primary concern is my students' literacy practices both in and out of the classroom. This study allowed me to examine one student's literacy and language practices as they relate to her construction of identity during adolescence. Furthermore, this study allowed me to interpret the student's own perception of her use of discourse communities to establish and negotiate identity throughout her day.

Data Collection

The intent of the study is to understand the unique discourse communities youth enact as a means of negotiating their identities. As such, the data collected was qualitative in nature. After selecting the participant for this study, I conducted an initial one-on-one interview in May 2012 during which I gathered more comprehensive personal demographic information as well as information about the student's perspective and perceptions regarding literacy, language, and identity (see Appendix A for a list of interview questions). This interview was audio taped, videotaped, and described in field notes, in addition to being transcribed. Following this interview, Anna completed no fewer than three separate video diary entries to provide a visual depiction of her language and literacy interactions in different environments throughout her

typical day (see Appendix B for video diary requirements). During the process of creating video diary entries, I continued to keep an open dialogue with Anna regarding her literacy and language practices (in and out of school), including collecting samples of classroom work to use as artifacts for this study. In addition to recording field notes, I used this time to transcribe the initial interview. A follow-up interview took place at the culmination of the study.

Interviews

Two separate interviews took place throughout the course of the study. The initial interview occurred at the beginning of the study, in May 2012. The final interview occurred at the conclusion of the study, in September 2012. Interview questions were designed to engage Anna in a candid discussion of identity; essentially, this interview was an opportunity for her to tell me a story. In addition, questions were designed to assess Anna's perceptions and perspective about literacy and language, and, in particular, experiences in past and present English classes. Finally, this interview opened up a conversation for Anna to use as a starting point her video diary entries. The final interview questions (see Appendix D) were designed after viewing the video diary entries and served as a follow-up to the initial interview. The goal of the final interview was to engage Anna in a discussion of the process involved in reflecting on her use of discourse communities in the process of altering, enacting, shifting, changing – all aspects of negotiating – her identity throughout the course of a typical day.

Artifacts

For the purpose of this study, artifacts were collected to serve as additional data. Included in these artifacts are samples of Anna's in-class writing work and her video diary entries. By collecting both in-class writing samples and the video diaries, I gained unique insights into Anna's literacy and language practices in a variety of environments. Additionally, the demands of the writing assignments collected as artifacts for this study varied in nature from formal essays to less formal journals to informal, spontaneous acts of writing produced by the student. From this, I was able to understand how Anna negotiates movement between discourse communities and the ways in which this movement requires a shift or change in identity.

Data Analysis

The theoretical notion of discourse communities provided the interpretive frame for these data. In addition to the concept of discourse communities, I applied Critical Discourse Analysis and sociocultural theory to literacy to understand the various ways in which literacy and language are embedded in social practices, linking those practices to identity.

Critical Discourse Analysis & Sociocultural Theory

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is both a theory and a method that “examines how social and power relations, identities, and knowledge are constructed through written and spoken texts in social settings such as schools, families, and communities” (Lewis et. al., 2009, p. 20). Furthermore, CDA examines “genres (ways of acting), discourses (ways of representing), and styles (ways of being) as they work in relation to one another to produce orders of discourse that instantiate powerful social orders” (Lewis et. al., 2009, p. 23). Sociocultural theory examines how language and literacy are embedded in social practices. Using Critical Discourse Analysis and sociocultural theory in this study allowed me to examine the different discourses used by the student participant and to understand how those discourses help to shape identity, construct knowledge, and work through power and social relations. A sociocultural perspective allowed me to examine the specific role of the student’s circumstances (cultural, social, political, etc.) in shaping identity and providing room for agency. In this study, I describe and interpret the relationship between the student’s literacy and language practices in relation to her social experiences to understand the use of discourse communities as an aspect of negotiating identity.

Lewis and Moje (2009) provide a set of guiding questions to be used in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). I asked these questions as I applied CDA and sociocultural theory to the data presented in this study:

- What discourses surface in the discussions during the interviews and on the video diaries?
- What are some of the social features of the student’s life in and out of school?
- What social identities are enacted in this exchange (through language use, linguistic constructions, discourses, etc.)?

- What relations of power are enacted and/or produced in this exchange? How are these power relations locally produced? How are these power relations tied to and reproductive of larger systems of power?
- What aspects of action, talk, and silences could be considered agentic? How? Why?
- What is being learned via these practices?
- How do identities get constructed, shifted, contested, and/or changed? (p. 25)

I used these questions as my guide as I analyzed the data and determined the emerging themes from a sociocultural perspective (see Appendix C).

Summary

My final goal was to examine the evidence from the one-student case study to gain an understanding of the various ways in which this student's literacy practices influence the choices she makes (negotiation) in the formation, construction, alteration, etc. of her identity in multiple places and at multiple times. With hope, my contribution to the body of research on the close relationship between literacy, language, and place as an aspect of identity negotiation will provide more equitable outcomes for students, particularly those from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Chapter 4 - Interpretation & Findings

Introduction

On the day of our first interview in April 2012, Anna sauntered in to my classroom, casually sporting her same blue sweatshirt and grey sweatpants, wearing that same goofy smile. She pulled up a chair at my desk just as I was finishing a detailed email, and, half-distracted, I greeted her under my breath. She sat quietly, hands folded under her chin, fingers resting slightly over her lips. She waited patiently for me to finish my thoughts, before she chuckled lightly and a little smile appeared from behind those folded hands.

“You ready yet?” she said, as if I was keeping her from something important.

“Sorry, Anna. Yes, I’m ready,” I said, reaching for my camera to record our conversation. Anna laughs a little harder now, and says with a smile, “I jus’ givin’ you a hard time, Miss C. You know dat.”

With ease, our first conversation began, and with it, the rest of this project. Once I hit the red “record” button, Anna came to life for me. She leaned back casually in her chair as she spouted story after story of her own life. Mostly wrought with pain and disappointment, Anna rebuilt the tapestry of her past in a way that solidified all I had already known about her—Anna is strong, and committed, and caring, and painfully behind in her academics, but also willing to work harder than most students I know. Our conversation moved from stories of long-lost childhood memories on the streets of California, to tales of abuse and neglect, to glimpses of a fortuitous future outside the walls of City.

When the final bell rang a few weeks later to end Anna’s junior year of high school, and her time in my English classroom, we were just getting started. After exchanging cell phone numbers and email addresses, Anna and I vowed to stay in contact over the next several weeks to keep working on this project. Admittedly, once school let out, I was a bit nervous about keeping track of Anna and keeping the project going. But, Anna kept her promise. She texted and emailed her progress, and together we set up a private YouTube channel to upload videos and keep in contact with each other. She created video after video of her interactions with peers, with her family, and with her coworkers. Anna even took it upon herself to act as the interviewer in

some cases, and instead of just filming her interactions, chose to ask questions of the people she filmed.

When school finally began again after a long summer break, Anna was eager to hear from me to get an update on my progress. “Yo, Miss C, you done yet?” she usually bellowed from the doorway of my classroom. “Almost,” I would reply, with a touch of dissatisfaction in my voice. And, in true form, Anna responded by saying, “Ok, girl, I keep recordin’ then” as she walked back out of the room. That’s my Anna.

Critical Discourse Analysis & Sociocultural Theory

As a classroom teacher and the primary researcher for this project, I am considered an insider to the data, mainly because I understand the dynamics of a school system, the particulars of an English classroom, and what it takes to build a positive relationship with a student like Anna. As an insider, I am dealing with the familiar culture of the classroom and of the familiar relationship structure with Anna, and thus, I naturally take certain aspects of understanding for granted. Taking certain aspects of these cultural interactions for granted means I may miss parts of what Anna is saying by overlooking aspects of context rooted in her cultural values. As a white, middle class, educated woman, I am simultaneously an outsider when it comes to Anna’s personal culture. As such, certain aspects of her speech, behavior, dress, writing, and thinking are somewhat “strange” to me. James Gee (2011) explains the concept of strangeness in discourse analysis as necessary for true analysis to take place. He states, “we discourse analysts have to learn to make what we take for granted new and strange” (2011, p. 19) in order to fill in the context of things the speaker has left unsaid.

I will present four themes that emerged as a result of finding the “strangeness” in Anna’s discourse and I will use Critical Discourse Analysis and sociocultural theory to analyze these themes. At its simplest, Critical Discourse Analysis looks at how members of social communities construct their world in relation to social, political, and cultural influences. By applying this layer of analysis to Anna’s spoken discourses, I was better able to understand her own perceptions of who she is in relationship to her circumstances. I adopted Gee’s (2011) notion that language is more than just written or spoken words but it is also an ideology. As such, in examining Anna’s video diaries and her interviews, I viewed her many discourses as interactions in her world. In addition, this analysis includes an examination of how Anna’s literacy and

language practices are embedded in sociocultural experiences relevant to the world in which she lives. My goal was to understand how these practices and experiences shape identity and reconfigure moments of agency and power in the process of negotiating identities across discourse communities.

The four emergent themes are: (1) Anna uses social languages to enact different identities; (2) Anna's agency is affected by her assigned identities; (3) language acts as a means of moving between contexts; and (4) language is more than just words. I examined each of these themes from a discourse analysis perspective, understanding that discourse implies "language at use in the world, not just to say things, but to do things" (Gee, 2011, p. ix). Tied closely to the notion of language at use is the connection language makes to social, cultural, and political structures within particular contexts. These guiding questions from Chapter 3 served as a starting point for Critical Discourse Analysis in the remainder of this chapter (see Appendix C):

- What discourses surface in the discussions during the interviews and on the video diaries?
- What are some of the social features of the student's life in and out of school?
- What social identities are enacted in this exchange (through language use, linguistic constructions, discourses, etc.)?
- What relations of power are enacted and/or produced in this exchange? How are these power relations locally produced? How are these power relations tied to and reproductive of larger systems of power?
- What aspects of action, talk, and silences could be considered agentic? How? Why?
- What is being learned via these practices?
- How do identities get constructed, shifted, contested, and/or changed? (Lewis & Moje, 2009, p. 25)

Emerging Themes

Anna uses social languages to enact different identities

Gee (2011) describes social languages as "styles or varieties of a language (or mixture of languages) that enact and are associated with a particular social identity" (p. 156), rooted in

“what we learn and what we speak” (p. 156). Social languages are a necessary aspect of adopting a particular identity, at a particular time, in a particular context in order to be an active participant in the interactions within that context. At any given time, each of us is enacting different aspects of our identity in order to fulfill the requirements of a particular interaction. When a speaker begins to speak, in order to fully understand what is being said and what is not being said, the listener must first understand which aspect of the speaker’s identity is doing the speaking. For Anna, these social roles (or identities) include: daughter, sister, student, teenager, employee, African American female, self-proclaimed loner, and mother, among many others that I am certain have yet to emerge. For each of these social roles, Anna engages in language use that is particular to the task she is completing, the message she is sending, the story she is telling, or the relationship in which she is participating. The complication in analyzing each individual aspect of Anna’s identity is that, like for many of us, there is not always a clear distinction between each of the roles she plays; often she is enacting multiple aspects of her identity at once. For a teenager like Anna, in the critical years of finding out whom she really is, the blending of social roles, and the negotiation between those roles, in particular the language enacted to fulfill tasks within certain contexts, becomes a complication in the identity development process. For the purpose of this theme, I looked closely at Anna’s roles within her family and at school.

Daughter/Sibling

“Family talk” is a locally produced discourse in that it is rooted in the cultural values of a particular group of people and it can vary dependent on who those people are, where they are, and what they are doing. “People talk and act not just as individuals, but as members of various sorts of social and cultural groups. We do not invent our language, we inherit it from others” (Gee, 2011, p. 176). However, when we participate in different social and cultural groups, including with our own families, we do not just use language to interact. We must employ certain ways of doing, thinking, dressing, valuing, and using certain tools in certain environments, all part of enacting an identity (Gee, 2011, p. 177). According to Gee, we all “learn a culturally distinctive way of being an ‘everyday person’ as a member of our family and community” (2011, p. 179) and this becomes our primary discourse. Primary discourses can change over time as they hybridize with other discourses. As a sister and a daughter, Anna is a member of a family unit, but in two different ways. Her ways of doing, thinking, dressing, interacting, valuing, and using certain tools as a sister are much different than as a daughter, yet both roles function as part of

the same primary discourse community (the family). Very often, these primary discourses are much different than other discourses individuals meet because they are so heavily rooted in our own cultural values. “In our pluralistic world there is much adjustment and negotiation as people seek to meet in the terrain of the life world, given that life worlds are culturally distinctive” (Gee, 2011, p. 179), affecting how individuals align themselves with other groups over time. It becomes necessary, then, for individuals to make conscious choices about their language and how it affects their identity as they move in and between discourses communities.

Anna is a 17 year old high school junior, born in Hollywood, California and raised in the City community. She is one of six kids from what most would consider a “broken” home. Her parents have been separated since she was young, and her siblings range in age from 21 to less than one year. When Anna was about three-years old, her father moved the family to City. Anna’s memory of this time is limited, but the information she has been provided by family members indicates that the move was to satisfy an extra-marital relationship her father was having with another woman. Not long after the family moved to City, her father left them. Anna’s relationship with her biological father is limited, though not for lack of proximity. Although Anna and her father both reside in the City community, she has not spoken to him in over a year. Anna describes her relationship with her father as volatile:

A: I really hate him now ‘cuz he treated me like if I was nothing. (Interview 1)

Though as a daughter and a sibling Anna has many important familial relationships, her relationship (or lack thereof) with her father is of particular interest for this research. When Anna speaks of her father, she assumes the role of family caretaker, referring to him as “childish” and explaining her role in his life as solely to take care of his young children:

A: My dad is childish. And if he feel threatened, he’ll just run to his gun, but most likely he won’t [use it]...I mean, I seen him once when I was 15, he was at a club, and I had the kids, he knocked somebody out. (Interview 1)

Here, Anna explains her dad’s behavior much in the way you would expect a parent to explain the behavior of an unruly child. She speaks of “the kids” in reference to her father’s other children. In this exchange, she accepts the role of caregiver for the children while at the same time she is watching her own “caregiver” engage in violent activity. Anna’s roles are muddled by her father’s presence.

Anna's role within her family seems to shift as the stories she tells change. For example, in explaining her past with her father, she asserts herself as the more mature, more capable person in the relationship. As she speaks, her body language changes drastically from earlier conversations. Anna stiffens slightly in her chair at the first mention of her father; she looks down, away from the camera. Though she is explaining how she feels better than him, her body language suggests that she is still struggling to find power in that relationship. Anna brightens only slightly when the conversation moves toward her sisters and her mother, suggesting those familial roles provide comfort whereas her role as a daughter in relation to her dad complicates her understanding of herself.

When Anna tells a story that implies a situation of sexual abuse, Anna reverts to a very childlike state, relinquishing the power she assumed in the previous story to the powerlessness she must have felt in that particular situation. She shifts in her chair, her hands nestled tightly underneath her body; her head droops slightly, and she quiets. After a long pause, and a deep breath, Anna provides a self-assessment of her own past. She states,

A: I grew up too fast. I didn't really care for friends. I didn't care for parties. Just worked. Paid the bills. Went to school. (Interview 1)

This statement, again, puts Anna in a very adult-like role. Anna alternates between a childlike powerlessness to a self-perceived martyr in her role as caretaker, back to a "normal" teenage girl throughout the interview. These identity shifts occur between roles that are already determined for her based on her familial structure or her primary discourse community. Dependent on her social role, the student exhibits different levels of agency and enacts different levels of power.

Student

"School talk" is a globally produced discourse in that it is representative of the larger system of public school classrooms throughout our culture. Donaldo Macedo (2006) argues that the public school system, rooted in middle class codes and values, becomes a public extension of government. Much of Macedo's argument is rooted in an acceptance of government as a purveyor of control, manipulation, and deceit. Public schools become a byproduct of this because they are civic institutions influenced by an ideology hinging on competition, free enterprise, management, testing, and choice. "Part of the reason that most educators have remained complacent before social inequities lies in the fact that we have been subjected to a pedagogy of 'big lies' that not only distorts and falsifies realities, but also gives us 'the illusion of individual

freedom, ownership of our own thoughts and decisions”” (Macedo, 2006, p. 137) and this illusion continues to play out in the common culture of schools. Institutions like public schools disseminate the literacy of power by reproducing cultural norms associated with the dominant class. “Central to this cultural reproductive mechanism is the overcelebration of myths that inculcate us with the beliefs about the supremacy of Western heritage at the same time as the dominant ideology creates other instruments that degrade and devalue other cultural narratives along the lines of race, ethnicity, language and gender” (Macedo, 2006, p. 37). In this respect, public schools become tools of social control and reproduction, often seeking to mold duty bound citizens who, like Macedo asserts, blindly follow the lead of those in power.

Anna’s practices in the classroom and the feelings she expresses about the interactions within this particular discourse community suggest that Macedo’s assumptions about public schools are correct. In most classrooms, Anna claims she is made to feel “stupid” because of certain teachers, mainly because her methods of communication do not meet the needs of the commonly accepted discourse of public schools. Classroom discourses are a community to which you either belong or you don’t belong, often as a result of the ability or inability to reproduce language (ways of knowing, doing, thinking, speaking) in mainstream ways. Anna feels like an outsider in most classroom settings:

A: That’s why I don’t like school because they tell you how you ‘posed to speak, how you ‘posed to act, and I don’t feel like you should do that. (Interview 1)

Anna’s perception of school as a space in which she cannot be herself highlights the complications that arise when young students attempt to move between different discourse communities. Further, Anna feels stifled by the environment schools foster:

A: At home I can speak however I want to, I mean I can cuss if I wanted, or talk, stutter, or just talk wit an accent or whatever but at school you gotta, you gotta be proper here. You can’t be your real self. You can’t act yourself, you gotta put on a guard. (Interview 1)

This suggests that Anna is required to leave behind aspects of her own identity in order to function in a school setting, and even in doing so, Anna is not always successful at actively engaging in the classroom discourse.

Opportunities to participate in learning are embedded in power structures heavily rooted in the public school system. Often in learning situations, power is related to outsiders gaining

access to and successfully participating in various discourse communities, while for insiders, power is related to maintaining control. As Lewis & Moje (2009) suggest, “in a globalized, increasingly diverse world, people move across discourse communities, seeking to gain entrance, while existing members may be seeking to retain control over the community or to retain the community’s power and access to resources” (p. 17). Thus, “learning is shaped by and mired in power relations” (Lewis & Moje, 2009, p. 17). The influence of power structures in opportunities to learn, then, effects how one conceptualizes identity. For Anna, the classroom is a space in which she often takes on the role of outsider, continually seeking ways to move across discourse communities to successfully participate in classroom interactions. By positioning herself as “outsider,” or by having that position asserted for her, Anna relegates power to the authority figure in her life. In the classroom, this is the teacher. Anna’s perception of herself as a student becomes closely related to what her teachers perceive of her ability. According to Anna, certain teachers empower her while others invalidate her. In the following exchange, Anna and I discussed her feelings about English class, particularly my class this past year:

I: Did you learn something about yourself, have you learned things about yourself throughout the course of taking English classes?

A: I like to read complicated books now. That has drama.

I: Why do you think you all of a sudden like to read books that are more complicated?

A: Because I got through *The Great Gatsby*.

I: Ok, so before...

A: Before I couldn’t.

I: Why do you think you couldn’t?

A: I didn’t think my knowledge could know that much.

I: Well, what changed this year?

A: The thought of saying “you can.” (Interview 1)

This discussion reveals a number of things about Anna’s self-perception in a classroom setting, but particularly her perception of herself as a reader. Anna’s statement that “before I couldn’t” suggests that her feelings about her ability as a reader were somewhat diminished in previous classroom settings, but being told “you can” in my classroom prompted her to enact the identity of a successful reader and perform that task. This brings up another important wondering about classroom interactions: is Anna truly a poor reader, or is she a student who has always been told

she is a poor reader, and has thus adopted that identity? Anna's correlation between her success as a student and the identity projected on her by teachers is enlightening, though not altogether surprising. When asked if she felt her language affected her everyday performance in school, this was her response:

(Nods head to indicate 'yes') cuz y'all be usin' them big words. And I'm not, like, familiar with 'em, these extra long words and big terms y'all be usin'. Like when you guys be sayin' ... I don't know what the word was but it got me cuz it was really big. I had to sit there and spell it like it sounds, that's how I do words. I hafta spell it like it sounds. But language wise, I do not be understandin' what y'all be sayin'. I don't know those language. (Interview 1)

Right away it is obvious from this statement that Anna's language does not match the mainstream language of the classroom. Anna uses stylistic markers of African American Vernacular English by dropping the ends of certain words, shortening them to make them functional for her. Even her description of the situation demands that the reader "fill in" information to make sense of what she is saying. Anna's difficulty in understanding exchanges in the classroom because she "don't know those language" represents a common disconnect between the middle class codes and values that dominate a classroom and the varieties of students who populate them. Anna's role as a student (what is demanded of her by her teachers and her peers) becomes complicated by her use of language within this role, especially when her language does not mirror what is spoken in the classroom. Anna is establishing what Gee (2011) refers to as a "situated meaning" in which her worldview is being expressed with the words she chooses to use, and in essence, her values about school are made known. Anna is situating the meaning of the words she hears in the classroom to match what she understands about her own world, and because she is unfamiliar with these "big words," Anna is unable to make successful assumptions about the language in the classroom. Teachers are responsible for constructing the learning spaces for our students. Anna's learning spaces do not always invite her unique voice to be part of the classroom discourse, often resulting in a student who chooses to sleep instead of participate, one who chooses not to work hard to understand when she is perfectly capable of doing so, and one who decides school is not important.

Anna's agency is affected by her assigned identities

When we think about the spaces teachers create for their students, I am reminded again of the Adrienne Rich (1986) quote from an earlier chapter:

When those who have the power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you...when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing. (p. 199)

The perceptions we have of our students and the perceptions we create of the classroom and of school are powerful beyond measure. As an English teacher, the texts I use and the worlds I present in my classroom either work to include or to exclude students, either allowing or preventing learning opportunities. "A text, whether written on paper, or on the soul, or on the world, is a loaded weapon. The person, the educator, who hands over the gun, hands over the bullets (the perspective), and must own up to the consequences" (Gee, 2012, p. 61).

Anna's perception of school is that it is a space in which she can seek solace from the chaos of her home life. Though she has a good relationship with her mother, Anna is at home by herself most of the time. Her mother is an employee at the local meat plant, along with two of her sisters. Anna often arrives at school well before her peers. The following exchange explains the purpose of school from Anna's perspective:

I: What time do you get to school in the morning? 'Cuz you're always here before I am, even when I'm here extra early.

A: Well, I get up at 5:45 and I don't get here until, what, almost 6:30?

I: 6:30? Is there a reason you come that early?

A: If I stay home, at some point, I'm not gonna come to school. So, I leave.

I: Why is it important to you to come to school?

A: Learn. Education. Get out City.

I: You want to get out of City?

A: (nods head) Do somethin' wit myself.

I: What are some of the goals you have for yourself?

A: Get out of City!

I: Why "get out of City"?

A: My dad. 'Cuz he told me I wasn't gonna be anything. And that I never will. So, pretty much I'm going to make him eat those words. (Interview 1)

This particular portion of the interview is interesting for several reasons. First, Anna values school for (arguably) its intended purpose: education. She recognizes that education is what will help her “get out City” and she plans to use that as ammunition against her father. Second, Anna’s statement that her father told her she “wasn’t gonna be anything” suggests he has assigned her this identity, but Anna refuses to accept it. In several stories she tells in the interview, Anna reveals that she is often unable or unwilling to speak out against her father, suggesting that his presence limits her agency as an individual. Her candidness in the interview in revealing these aspects of her identity could be seen as an act of agency, though, as could her determination to prove her father wrong.

This exchange highlights the circulation of power that exists within and across discourses, especially within relationships that are part of those discourses, and it exemplifies the effect power has on learning and agency. When asked how her father would describe her, Anna replied:

A: As an asshole. He doesn't even talk to me. He see me in the streets but he doesn't even look at me. He just bends his head down and goes away.” (Interview 1)

As a member of her primary discourse, Anna’s father’s perception of her is powerful: “Our primary discourse gives us our initial and often enduring sense of self” (Gee, 2012, p. 153), and while primary discourses, and the people one recognizes as part of them, can change and hybridize over time, the effects of Anna’s father on her self-image cannot be ignored. It is important to note that throughout the interview, and throughout the time I’ve known Anna, she maintains a casual smile on her face, even as she tells stories of pain and heartache. But at this moment, with the admittance of her father’s neglect and basic meanness, Anna’s face shows a flicker of sadness. Her lips remain slightly turned up in a smile, but her eyes soften. Even in her interview, Anna is enacting an identity for me. She uses her words and her behavior to impress upon me an image of a strong young woman, unaffected by her past, likely in an effort to “please” me. Yet, after a closer look, Anna becomes a whole new person to me.

Still, Anna’s perception of herself is not always negative. In reviewing the exchange presented earlier in this chapter, Anna had positive identity experiences in my classroom this past year when she was able to identify herself as someone capable of reading difficult texts. The

interesting relationship Anna has with her father coupled with the experiences Anna had in my classroom reinforce the idea that agency is often affected by the identities we are assigned by others. Often, Anna's perception of herself is directly related to what she has been told she is by others. In the process of negotiating her identity, Anna has to decide whose perceptions are going to have the stronger influence over who she is and who she becomes. Still, these choices are not always Anna's, as they are not always the choice for our other students.

Language acts as a means of moving between contexts

In Anna's video diaries, she details the many facets of her life. She provides unique glimpses into her social and cultural worlds, including with family, with friends, and with coworkers. She discusses her feelings about family and culture, what it means to be an African American teenager in a public school setting, the importance of her friends, and all the life experiences she brings with her as part of her identity. Anna's diary entries are especially interesting because she takes on the role of interviewer. Rather than always filming herself in interaction with others, Anna flips the camera on her peers and asks them to engage in a conversation about language and identity:

A: I liked being in charge for once. At school I never get to be da one askin' da questions. (Interview 2)

The simple act of making this project her own represents a shift in discourse community for Anna. So, it becomes less important in this theme to examine what happens to Anna in each individual context, but rather how she moves across these different settings—what she takes with her and what she leaves behind.

In one interview Anna conducts with two friends on their way home from summer school, Anna asks them to discuss whether or not they “talk proper” and in what settings they use this proper language. Anna's friend Allie replies,

Allie: When I get comfortable with people, then I start talking the way I normally talk, but before, I talk proper. (Video Diary 1)

Allie's comments here suggest that for her, movement to a new context requires an element of comfort. This mirrors previous conversations with Anna in which she has implied that a lack of comfort exists in many classroom settings where she is made to feel unintelligent. In the following exchange, Anna highlights these feelings:

A: Some teachers make me feel stupid.

I: What do they do that makes you feel stupid?

A: Like, they go over like baby steps. They wanna sit there and treat us like kids when we can do it and they like go over the rules when we know the rules step by step by step and they still wanna go over it even though it's written down already. I don't really like that so I go to sleep. (Interview 1)

Here, Anna suggests an interesting component of “teacher talk;” that is, from Anna’s perspective, teachers use language that is at times condescending. Her issue with being taught the rules over and over again brings up another interesting aspect of public schools in which students are forced to adopt middle class ways of being (arguably another aspect of language). When Anna moves from the home context or the friend context to her school context, she takes issue with what she’s being asked to do in this new context, and she responds by going to sleep. Is this a successful negotiation, then? On the one hand, Anna’s refusal to participate in a context in which she does not feel welcome or comfortable might be seen as an act of agency—a way of preserving part of her identity. On the other hand, her refusal to participate could also be seen as a result of her inability to succeed in this new context. Either way, Anna’s movement between contexts is often plagued by difficulty.

Language is more than just words

In discussions I’ve had with Anna and her peers in my English class, language always comes up. Students very often ask intriguing questions about why authors choose the words and phrases they do to convey certain ideas. Usually, this conversation extends to a discussion about the purpose of language, to which my students always reply, “to communicate.” Anna, in particular, reasons that language is showing someone who you are, thus concluding that language is more than just words.

The notion of discourse communities has served as the theoretical framework for this research, and so the concept of discourse communities is not new. Still, I revisit this concept here to make important final conclusions about Anna and students like her. As Gee (2011) tells us:

Discourses are ways of enacting and recognizing different sorts of socially situated and significant identities through the use of language integrated with characteristic ways of

acting, interacting, believing, valuing, and using various sorts of objects (including our bodies), tools, and technologies in concert with other people. (p. 151)

Until this point, Anna's conversations have been the most significant part of the research. Yet, careful attention must be paid to her ways of believing, valuing, and doing throughout the research to fully understand the languages she speaks.

According to Gee (2011), "because language is used for different functions and not just to convey information, which is but one of its functions, it is always useful to ask of any communication: What is the speaker trying to DO and not just what is the speaker trying to SAY?" (p. 42). Throughout Anna's interviews and other video diary entries, I logged her dress, behavioral subtleties, and facial expressions, and used what Gee refers to as the "The Doing and Not Just Saying Tool" (2011, p. 45) to determine what Anna desires to accomplish from the things she says and does (see Appendix C). What I learned about Anna from charting these other aspects of language is that she is constantly adapting and changing her identity to fit the needs of our conversations. As the chart indicates, depending on the story she is telling, her body language shifts, but her facial expressions do not always change to match. What I still do not know is how much of these choices are conscious efforts to establish an identity she thinks she needs to employ for the sake of our interview, and how much of these choices are unconscious, even to Anna.

Most important is Anna's use of narrative throughout her interviews as we examine her literacy practices in terms of agency and power. According to a study conducted by James Gee (2000), working class teens used narrative on far more occasions to orient themselves than did teens from the upper middle class. Gee theorizes that this is a result of the kinds of literacy practices available to students based on their class location:

Another indicator that our working class teens fashion themselves as immersed in a social, affective, dialogic world of interaction, while our upper middle class teens fashion themselves as immersed in a world of information, knowledge, argumentation, and achievements built out of these, is how members of each group orient themselves toward narrative. The working class teens use the narrative form far more than the upper middle class teens. (p. 417)

Anna's use of narrative suggests a common literacy and thinking practice of African Americans and other minority groups who were historically not allowed to learn to read or write and

instead used storytelling to preserve heritage and identity. Gee's assertion that narrative is an important marker of the literacy and language practices of the working class suggests that Anna's literacy practices are consistent with other teens in her same social class, and this use of dialogic, affective literacy (to advance thoughts of dreams and desire rather than achievement) mimics the social hierarchies prevalent in our society.

In videos Anna recorded at her workplace, Dick Edwards Ford in City, Anna asked her coworkers some questions about their beliefs about language and how it helps them to function in the workplace. Anna asked one of the other receptionists about how she uses language at work, whether it's "proper" or "not proper." The subject responded the following way:

S: When I'm at work, I try to use proper English. But, what I've learned is you have to play with it a little to get what you need out of the person you're talking to. When people don't use proper English, it makes me think they aren't very educated. Like people who use the f-word for everything. It's like, okay, you obviously don't know what word you're supposed to be saying. (Video Diary 3)

This response is interesting for two reasons. First, the subject's comment about using language to get what you need suggests that language is about relationships. Once one has established a relationship with another person, whether in a professional or personal setting, one can use language to "get what we need" from the other person. Communication, thus, hinges on more than just words, but also on the relationships expressed in those words and exchanges. Second, the subject's comment about level of education being associated with the degree to which someone speaks properly reinforces the idea that standard English has been indoctrinated to be a representation of intelligence, despite the fact that many intelligent people speak many varieties of English. As Gee (2011), Moje (2009), and countless other researchers have suggested, language is more than words and is instead packed with an ideology that influences the assumptions we make about people, the things that are important to them, and their ability to be successful in our society.

Summary of the Findings

This research project began after what was an enlightening, challenging, professional experience in a graduate level class. The project gained its life from Anna, my dedicated student and this project's case study, in the spring of 2012. It is now six months later. At 6:45 on a brisk

Monday morning in the fall of 2012, after completing my 30-minute drive to City, I ease my car into slot number seven of the parking lot at City High School, just as I've done for the past three years. Armed per the usual with my travel mug of coffee and my bag full of graded papers, a little groggy from the early morning, yet ready for the day's challenges, I head into the building to meet the familiar face of Anna sitting casually in the blue chair just outside of the office door. She flashes me a smile, nods her head, and greets me with the comfortable "What up?" I've grown accustomed to hearing each morning. I try not to think about how soon I will have to adjust to an Anna-less morning.

Anna will graduate from high school this year with a below average GPA and an above average drive to make something of herself. She will have spent the better part of her high school years underperforming in her classes, not for lack of effort, as most of her teachers will attest, but likely for lack of opportunity. Statistics will tell you that someone like Anna is much more likely to end up working in the same meat plant as her mother and sisters instead of attending culinary school in California. Anna's grades will likely tell you the same thing. As a young African American woman from a single-parent household where poverty and alcoholism plague the day-to-day lifestyle, nothing about Anna's home-life mimics that of the cultural elite. Furthermore, as a young African American female living in City, a community wrought with crime and poverty, Anna is likely to end up like many of her already graduated peers: working at a fast-food establishment, lamenting the choice to stay instead of leave. As such, Anna already starts a few hands down.

Language is much more than just words on a page. It is an identity, rooted deeply in social, cultural, and political circumstances stemming from both our own choices and those choices made for us. Anna's social and cultural position in society determines, to some extent, her success in school in both non-literacy and literacy-based activities. Because language is a necessary tool to move between contexts and successfully perform tasks, Anna has not always had luck at literacy-based school activities, and much of her perception of herself as a student has been a direct result of what identities have been assigned to her by others.

I sought to better understand how students use language as a means of negotiating their identities across contexts (within and between discourse communities) and whether or not these negotiations allow for successful interactions. For Anna, negotiating her identity—making choices about which aspects of her "self" she will employ and which aspects she will leave

behind—did not always mediate success, particularly in a classroom setting. This result is likely because the discourse communities to which she was seeking access did not “meet her in the middle;” that is, the classroom does not always adjust its context to meet the varying context of the students, limiting opportunities for learning and ultimately making it more difficult for a student like Anna to find a little bit of home at school.

As James Baldwin claims in his essay “If Black English Isn’t a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?” as it appears in Lisa Delpit’s book *The Real Ebonics Debate*, “What joins all languages, and all men, is the necessity to confront life, in order, not inconceivably, to outwit death: The price for this is the acceptance, and achievement, of one’s temporal identity” (Perry & Delpit, 1998, p. 67). Language, then, is a tool of survival, uniting one’s individual identity to the larger, communal identity, functioning forever as a means of understanding its speaker, and again, swelling and shifting as the situation demands. To truly invite students to understand who they are, and to allow them to make use of the cultural differences they possess, including language, it is necessary to teach them with both the language we know best and the language they use best.

Chapter 5 - Implications for the Profession

Introduction

Public education is simply the largest civic institution in the United States, but it is an institution that fails to serve all of its students equally. “U.S. schools have historically failed with non-elite populations and have thereby replicated the social hierarchy” (Gee, 2012, p. 32), ensuring that those from the lower classes continue to perform the lower-end jobs in our society while limiting their ability to make important political and economic demands on those in power (Gee, 2012, p. 32). Our society is built upon knowledge and information sharing, yet many American children are given better access to education than others and—in a country where education is the gateway to opportunity—this inequity is an injustice. Though many in the education sphere believe the institution’s largest problem is its inability to provide adequate literacy education to everyone, it seems that the “crisis” associated with literacy education is rooted more heavily in a social justice problem perpetuated by an endless cycle in which the poorest kids in the poorest schools continue to get the poorest education. Thus, we cannot discuss the “literacy crisis” without also discussing the cultural inequities that sometimes deskill minority students, poor students, and those from the non-elite parts of society inculcating a culture of inequality in our public schools (Gee, 2011, p. 37).

When it comes to reading, it is important to remember that reading itself is not just a task, it is an identity. Thus, it is important to apply a sociocultural approach to literacy in which teachers examine the social, cultural, and political implications of the texts they teach. In order for students to read certain texts in certain types of ways and in certain contexts, they must be socialized into that particular practice. “Literacy practices are almost always fully integrated with and interwoven into the very texture of wider practices that involve talk, interaction, values, and beliefs” (Gee, 2012, p. 41), suggesting, again, that literacy is more than just a cognitive ability but is essentially an identity. In the following sections, I will examine the implications of this study for educators and for the future of research in this particular field.

Implications for Educators

The changing demands of the 21st century classroom mean new challenges for educators. As our students' literacy practices change to meet these new demands, it is critical that educators take time to listen to and understand our students' perceptions of themselves and of the classroom in order to provide equitable outcomes for every child.

The Politics of Location

I begin each new school year with a unit that explores individual and collective identity and its relationship to language. I do this partly to get to know my students a little better, but mostly to unearth and understand a little better the literacy experiences my students have had prior to entering my classroom. The unit begins with a discussion of “social roles” or social identities—all the jobs/responsibilities/people who make us who we are. Students are asked to create Social Location Maps (Appendix E) that chart the connections between the roles they play and the experiences they have had. When they are done, students have a visual representation of their identity as they understand it, not only allowing me a glimpse into the people they think they are, but also a very comprehensive list of background knowledge and experience to aid in their literacy development in my classroom.

These social roles become important in understanding my students' literacy practices because very often “doing literacy is not merely about mastering a code, but largely about developing command of literacy practices that are recognized as ‘legitimate;’ that is, situationally defined, arbitrarily sanctioned forms of reading or writing with (real or implied) legitimate audiences” (Bartlett, 2007, p. 54). Where students are “doing” literacy is just as important as the skills they are using to complete the task. Over and over again, researchers like Gee (2011, 2012), Moje (2009), and Bartlett echo one another in the connection between literacy and location and the success of the interaction taking place.

Anna's testimony throughout her videos suggests that traditional classrooms do not foster a location in which all voices are heard, very often resulting in failed attempts at learning. The classroom space is mired by the politics of the mainstream elite, often positioning non-elite students as outsiders, creating classroom spaces that are hostile. “Children will often not identify with—they will even disidentify with—teachers and schools that they perceive as hostile, alien, or oppressive to their home-based identities” (Gee, 2012, p. 36), suggesting that there is work to

be done from the teacher's end to burgeon a more post positivist approach to classroom development and teaching styles—one that celebrates the interconnectedness of all aspects of our students' identities and the cultures they represent.

If you look closely at the Social Location Map (Appendix E) Anna created in my classroom, you will see a complex tapestry of meaningful experiences, relationships, and responsibilities that ultimately converge to form one individual. As is true with us all, each aspect of this map has important implications at different times and in different places, and the location on the map in which my students find themselves at any given point in time can vary as their personal landscapes grow. For many, school or the classroom is only a very small portion of this map. And, while school is meant to act as our socialization into the public sphere, the curriculum it uses often ignores the larger portions of our students' maps, perpetuating among students a sense of the unimportance of their personal culture, including at-home language and literacy practices. Location is everything. Schools must establish a location, a space, a place in which students can celebrate all aspects of who they are, including the languages they use to represent themselves.

Beyond creating a classroom space that invites the celebration of cultural differences, it is necessary to include texts in our curricula that do the same. My classroom observations of my students, including Anna, suggest that many of our students struggle to see themselves in the texts they read. This is an important conclusion because, in a time of high stakes testing where schools, teachers, and students are being held accountable through standardized scores, it is necessary to recognize that most of these tests utilize stories and situations that are not culturally relevant to a large portion of our student population. Simply put, school works really well for some groups of our students, and it works really poorly for others. To negotiate a middle ground is necessary if student achievement is to remain at the forefront of our educational goals.

The Intersection of Home and School Voices

Educational spaces reproduce the dominant ideology, thus teaching dominant values and codes to our students. Included in this dominant ideology is the assumption that standard English is somehow more correct or more acceptable than other forms, dialects, vernaculars, etc. For many of our students, standard English has no roots in their world view. In order for students to understand texts and talk in a classroom that are rooted in standard English, they must first

understand the world that standard English represents. Likewise, when students use other forms of language (vernacular, dialectal varieties), teachers must remember that often that language is a reflection of the student's world. When there is a disconnection between the student's world and the words we require them to use to represent that world, the student fails to really be heard.

In short, there is a need to recognize the primacy of voices that are often marginalized or silenced in a regular classroom setting; "it is evident that we must change conventional ways of thinking about language, creating spaces where diverse voices can speak in words other than English or in broken, vernacular speech" (hooks, 1994, pp. 173-174). This means that we must accept that at times, some aspects of what our students say and write will not reach all members of the audience.

In addition to the diversity of languages represented in our classrooms, it is important to assess our internal biases associated with these different languages. For many students, a negative perception of language is accompanied by an association with particular cultural and social groups and classes. "Language always seems to play a central role in [the] class-related denial of educational opportunity" (Delpit & Dowdy, 2009, p. 133) because language is often the most clear representation of class. Traditionally, marginalized groups of people are not offered quality education because of diminished expectations for achievement when compared with groups in power.

Schools and homes are transformed by the movement of children between those spaces. School "comes home in the languages and discourses that they pick up from interactions with their peers and their teachers. School shapes the rhythm of daily life, the schedules we keep, the circles we move in, the connections we make" (Orellana in Lewis, 2007, p. 128). Home influences school because it is those little bodies that populate our classrooms. Teachers often use their assumptions about a student's home life to shape practice and develop contexts for their students. Home and school are two worlds that cannot always be seen as separate. For students, the movement between home and school may be more complicated than it is for teachers, as they have to learn which aspects of their identities they should enact and which aspects they should leave behind. Much of this negotiation is shaped by the context teachers create in their classrooms, and these contexts often shape the level of participation for students moving into them. As Orleanna suggests:

Even when we do not name our different identities, or overtly invoke them, they shape our ways of thinking, doing, and being in each context, and in doing so they reconstitute the contexts themselves. [...] Individuals are inseparable from their contexts, [...] contexts and people are mutually constituted, and when people move between discourse communities, they bring their contexts with them, fundamentally altering the nature of the new spaces into which they move. (Lewis, 2007, p. 126)

Thus, our classrooms are spaces shaped by the lives of the students who sit in our chairs. The contexts they bring with them—from home, from culture, from friends—shape the classroom context in new ways, making “school talk” and “home talk” equally important to our students’ understandings of their own identities.

Common Core State Standards & Standardizing Language

New legislation in the education sphere is nothing surprising. It seems with each passing term, newly elected government officials bring in the latest in education policy to reshape the face of public education. Nearly thirty years ago, President Reagan, along with members of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, ushered in a legislative document that would forever change the face of education reform in the United States. The inability of American students to outperform our world competitors, coupled with a growing climate of globalization and reliance on foreign relations, led the Commission to draft *A Nation at Risk* in an effort to combat the perceived risk of global failure. The document itself reads like a speech on terrorism, and at its heart, indicts America for letting our schools slip into perpetual decline.

Again, in 2001, the Bush administration passed a similar act requiring states to set research-based standards, assessed annually through standardized tests, in an effort to improve student achievement. At the core of the *No Child Left Behind* Act were a number of methods to measure student achievement and to hold states more accountable for student performance. Like most education reform, NCLB was at the center of controversy largely because of teachers’ beliefs that a law of its kind was far too unreasonable to ever actually work. Many education professionals believed the act was aimed at undermining public schools, not at helping disadvantaged students, and that it put educators in a precarious position where teachers felt like job security was tied to a test score.

Finally, in 2010, the state-led Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS) set out to establish common standards that prepare students for college and the workforce. These standards, much like those before them, focus heavily on English language arts and mathematics. The difference this time, however, is the standards themselves proclaim that all children in public schools must graduate from high school “ready” for college and the workforce, presumably based on the increasingly rigorous nature of the standards themselves.

On the surface, these reform measures present a seemingly valid argument. In the early 80s, there were obvious issues plaguing American schools. Students were failing to achieve at the level necessary to remain globally competitive, and many schools were wracked with poorly qualified teachers. *A Nation at Risk* was a powerful call to arms for the United States; it indicted Americans for accepting the status quo in education and challenged them to demand higher expectations and higher standards for students.

However, almost thirty years later, American schools are still plagued by the same issues. Students are still falling behind and teachers are still losing credibility as being capable of performing their job. The report’s intent was to establish a more rigorous approach to secondary education in particular by increasing the graduation requirements and putting a greater responsibility for learning onto the student. Yet, much of education reform prior to the 80s focused on elementary schools, and while this overhaul of secondary school curricula was a noble quest, it failed to require any real change within school buildings.

The central problem surrounding reform like *A Nation at Risk*, *No Child Left Behind*, and the newly adopted Common Core State Standards is that none of these acts are actually reform in the first place. The atomistic, positivist approach to education that reform measures like these support is at the root of reform movements that have continued to fail American schools for decades. Just as Donaldo Macedo (2006) argues, “the reform is being carried out by those players who are and always have been part of the problem they are trying to solve” (p. 140), leaving this piece of reform as ineffective as the next will be if the cycle continues.

Furthermore, reform movements like these hinge on the assumption that students in American public schools have continued to decline in the classroom, when little evidence exists to actually support this assumption. What have changed for American public schools in these last decades are the groups of people who populate the classrooms. Many of these reform measures do not take into account the changing demographics of American schools, negating the necessity

of the status quo. In particular, the newest measure of performance (CCSS) includes an entire section of standards dedicated to the standardization of students’ language. While the standards themselves do not explicitly state that students cannot use their own language, the assumption associated with the purpose of these standards is that students will not be successful in life without adopting standard English.

The following table illustrates the specificity of these language-based standards as represented in the CCSS:

Figure 1 – Common Core State Standards Initiative

Language Progressive Skills, by Grade

The following skills, marked with an asterisk (*) in Language standards 1-3, are particularly likely to require continued attention in higher grades as they are applied to increasingly sophisticated writing and speaking.

Standard	Grade(s)							
	3	4	5	6	7	8	9-10	11-12
L.3.1f. Ensure subject-verb and pronoun-antecedent agreement.								
L.3.3a. Choose words and phrases for effect.								
L.4.1f. Produce complete sentences, recognizing and correcting inappropriate fragments and run-ons.								
L.4.1g. Correctly use frequently confused words (e.g., to/too/two; there/their).								
L.4.3a. Choose words and phrases to convey ideas precisely.*								
L.4.3b. Choose punctuation for effect.								
L.5.1d. Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in verb tense.								
L.5.2a. Use punctuation to separate items in a series.*								
L.6.1c. Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in pronoun number and person.								
L.6.1d. Recognize and correct vague pronouns (i.e., ones with unclear or ambiguous antecedents).								
L.6.1e. Recognize variations from standard English in their own and others’ writing and speaking, and identify and use strategies to improve expression in conventional language.								
L.6.2a. Use punctuation (commas, parentheses, dashes) to set off nonrestrictive/parenthetical elements.								
L.6.3a. Vary sentence patterns for meaning, reader/listener interest, and style.*								
L.6.3b. Maintain consistency in style and tone.								
L.7.1c. Place phrases and clauses within a sentence, recognizing and correcting misplaced and dangling modifiers.								
L.7.3a. Choose language that expresses ideas precisely and concisely, recognizing and eliminating wordiness and redundancy.								

This table demonstrates the rigidity of the CCSS in regulating student language. Specifically, these standards pay close attention to grammar and mechanics in both speaking and writing. Furthermore, these standards suggest that all students must adopt a form of language that academia deems “sophisticated.” For example, language standard 6.3e says that students should “recognize variations from standard English in their own and others’ writing and speaking, and identify strategies to improve expression in conventional language.” This is problematic for several reasons, but mostly because it suggests that variations of the English language, presumably to include vernacular and dialectal styles, must be “improved” in order to be sophisticated. Several other standards listed in the table converge to form a series of

requirements that risk silencing the cultural voices of our students. When we begin to standardize the language students are allowed to use in the classroom to represent themselves and the language students are required to use to show their academic ability, we risk establishing an education made for social control rather than for social progress.

In reading the particulars of the Common Core Standards, I cannot help but wonder what standards like this will do for students like Anna. The underlying assumption in education reform these days seems to be that raising the bar will encourage students to rise to meet higher expectations, all while ignoring the obvious implications these kinds of standards have for African American students and other students of color who are traditionally outperformed by their White counterparts. Even the basic reading tasks required by these new standards set expectations that encourage students to learn only from the text itself, without forming personal connections to its themes; “these guidelines urge the use of difficult texts, but preclude the use of strategies that can help students situate texts in their own lives. All the instruction in the world won’t help a reader who has already decided that a text is distant and irrelevant” (Wilson & Newkirk, 2012, p. 18).

While I wholeheartedly believe in holding students to high expectations, the CCSS is another example of longstanding racist national politics and policies inculcating American public schools. The CCSS in general, and the language portion in particular, represent another attempt at establishing a school system that’s sole purpose is to maintain the status quo. According to Janice Hale (1994), author of *Unbank the Fire*:

White children are rewarded at school and on standardized tests for the words they know for objects and concepts. Their culture emphasizes verbal fluency and vocabulary breadth. The African American culture emphasizes a different aspect of language—it is not what you say, but how you say it, that is important. That is, the African American heritage emphasizes charismatic and stylistic uses of language. (p. 8)

Further, Hale asserts that much of African American culture emphasizes cultural expression rather than literary expression, suggesting that current education standards continue to privilege the cultural preferences of those in the majority.

In terms of learning, the CCSS, and the reform movements that have come before, continue to force students into a method of learning and thinking that is perpetuated by the dominant class and culture. Countless other cultures whose histories dictate they were not

allowed to learn to read or write used stories to relay messages to one another. Even in Anna's accounts in her interviews, non-linear storytelling, likely rooted in an African American cultural preference, dominate her methods of thinking, because, again, it is not what you say but how you say it. Standardizing language risks robbing our culturally and linguistically diverse students of the opportunity to use language in thinking and learning in ways that might preserve their heritage.

Adolescent Literacy

In addition to the changing demands on language in the classroom as dictated by new education standards, adolescents are experiencing even greater demands as technology works to reestablish what it means to be literate in the 21st century. Students are authoring texts in a variety of discourse communities which now include cyberspace, and traditional forms of text are no longer the most widely accessed literary materials for our young students.

New Literacies

The New Literacy Studies movement adopts the idea that literacy is not one general skill but instead is a set of skills embedded in our social practices and used to negotiate identities based on social situations (Gee, 2000, p. 413). Included in the New Literacies are the social practices associated with interactions in digital space. Reading and writing are no longer isolated tasks relegated to book work, but instead are social practices part of an ever-changing, technology-based society. These New Literacies are important as we move into a world where our global capital hinges on knowledge-based productivity rather than on the innovative products themselves. In other words, as technology continues to change at a rapid pace, the cognitive demand on our students shifts to support a world where their individual value is based on how well they can adapt their knowledge to changing markets rather than how well they can memorize past practices and theories. Gee (2000) theorizes that New Literacies give way to a new kind of capitalism in which the upper echelon of society are encouraged and privileged to engage in literacy practices that support this kind of value-added knowledge, while those in the middle to lower classes continue to experience forms of literacy that are general, preparing them for a future in a middle class that may not exist one day (p. 419).

While this research project supports that Anna, and students like her, practice literacy in social situations almost continuously, her interactions are not always successful. Additionally,

Anna's interviews and video diaries are largely narrative, often burgeoned with stories of dreams and desires and lacking stories situated around achievement. Gee (2000) would likely argue that this is a result of Anna's social class. In his study, Gee asserts that the changing times, including this new kind of capitalism in concert with New Literacies and changing demands for our students creates an interesting bifurcation in our public schools:

It is ironic, perhaps, that while current sociocritical efforts at school reform value an interactional, dialogic stance, we find this stance primarily in our working class teens who face a future without a stable working class. On the other hand, while current cutting-edge "thinking pedagogies" value conceptually explicit social languages connected to academic discourses, we find such social languages used by our upper middle class teens to distance themselves from the social, cultural, and political inequalities of our new times and to hold a firm belief in their own essential merit and worth, despite a ready acknowledgement of their very privileged circumstances. (p. 419)

Here, Gee suggests that class differences are still apparent, even in the new emerging literacies, and these differences are perpetuated by the kinds of literacy interactions taking place in different social situations for our students. Thus, the politics of location in conjunction with changing literacy demands requires a shift in public school thinking in regards to the kinds of learning opportunities we are affording our students. As Gee suggests, on one hand, our schools are holding true to "back to basics" movements that teach our students the kinds of skills deemed low-level by 21st century demands. On the other hand, reform efforts like the CCSS enact a skill set that is supposed to mimic new 21st century demands but that also naturally aligns itself with the language and thinking of the elite classes in our society.

Implications for Future Research

In this study, I offered a description of the lived experiences of one student, Anna, in regard to her literacy practices and how those literacy and language practices influence the choices she makes about her identity. By giving Anna's voice a place of prominence in this study, I allowed her words to tell a large portion of this story. In order to offer rich, detailed descriptions of Anna and her story, and to achieve depth, I limited this study to just one participant. As with most qualitative studies, the findings of this research cannot be generalized. Still, the glimpse Anna provides into her world and the perceptions she has of school, language,

literacy, and identity are valuable, offering insight into the large implications current in-school literacy practices have for minority adolescents.

With the ever-changing scope of technology and its implications in language and literacy learning in our classroom, it is imperative that research spend time understanding how these changes affect our youth and how they learn. Further research could extend Anna's descriptions from this study to include the perceptions of teachers and parents on language and literacy practices of youth. By including parents and other teachers in the discussion, researchers could gain insight into ways students like Anna can be better supported in the changing 21st century classroom. Further, this study could be replicated with additional high school students to provide a broader, deeper understanding of the central themes.

This study focused largely on how in-school and out-of-school literacy practices converge to have an effect inside the classroom. This research project could be extended to include how this transfer occurs outside of the classroom and what affect it has over time on a student's success in life. Such studies could shed additional light on how adolescents use language to form connections and make choices about how they represent themselves outside of the classroom and what implications these choices have on their success in non-school environments.

Collecting more descriptions from adolescents, their parents, and the teachers who teach them about their practices in and out of the classroom would offer further understanding about the ways in which identity and language choices have implications for successful interactions in society. As mentioned in previous chapters, Critical Discourse Analysis calls researchers to examine structures of power and their influence on the political, social, and cultural communities to which people belong. By asking questions about power and agency in relation to language and identity, researchers have the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding about the current structure of the educational community and its effect on our students.

Summary

The data gathered in this study through the initial interview, the video diaries, and the concluding interview provided a detailed description of Anna's life and her experiences with language, literacy, and place, and the ways in which "it all just fits together" (Interview 2). The study yielded four emerging themes: (1) Anna uses social languages to enact different identities;

(2) Anna's agency is affected by her assigned identities; (3) language acts as a means of moving between contexts; and (4) language is more than just words. By placing Anna's identity and her words at the center of this study, her own perceptions about her language and literacy practices with regard to her experiences at school remained the focal point of the research.

In order to provide equitable outcomes for all students, to establish an education that pushes the established boundaries, to provide students with all the possibilities we hope for ourselves, we must practice an education of freedom. "The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom" (hooks, 1994, p. 207). Educators must not pretend that we do not have the power to "change the direction of our students' lives" (hooks, 1994, p. 207) and this means we must place students—their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions—at the center of our praxis, and then we must listen.

Just as our history as a country is fluid, so is the language we use to represent it. Language helps to establish the richness and interconnectedness of all life in our world. Thus, it becomes increasingly important to create a space in the classroom where students are able to celebrate the communities and generations their languages represent. English education should no longer strive to simply uphold the traditional notion of what it means to be a standard communicator, but it should rejoice in the new Englishes of our time – the sounds and voices of our youth – languages that "live, struggle and evolve" (Kirkland, 2010, p. 303) just as our students do.

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Appendix A - Initial Interview Questions

Below is a copy of the interview questions to be used as part of the initial interview of the selected participant for this study:

Purpose: To gather background information to be used as part of the narrative explication of the data at the conclusion of the study.

1. Tell me about yourself (age, birth place, hobbies, etc.)
2. Describe your background (home life, school life, etc.)
3. Do you like school? Why or why not?
 - a. What parts of school are your favorites?
 - b. What parts of school are most difficult for you?
 - i. What makes these activities difficult?
4. How would you describe yourself?
 - a. How would others describe you?
5. Describe your friends.
6. Tell me about your job.
7. What are some of the goals you have for yourself?
8. Can you describe your language for me?
 - a. For example, do you speak differently at school versus at home versus at work?
 - i. If yes, why?
 - b. How do you think language has affected your performance in everyday tasks?
9. Much of this project centers on interactions in the English classroom. What can you tell me about your feelings about English class?
 - a. What were your past experiences in English class like?
 - b. Do you find English necessary?
 - c. Have your feelings about English changed over the course of high school?
 - i. If yes, what has influenced these changed feelings?
10. Is there anything else you'd like to add about yourself for this initial interview?

Appendix B - Video Diary Requirements

Below is a sample of the video diary requirements that will be given to the student in order to complete the project for this study:

For this project, the student will...

- Provide no fewer than three video diary entries that record any or all of the following interactions:
 - English Classroom (peer-to-peer)
 - English Classroom (student-to-teacher)
 - Work environment
 - Peer environment
 - Home environment
- Speak candidly and openly without fear of punishment for what is or is not said in the video diary entries.
- Record entries on three separate occasions between April and September of 2012.
- Participate in two video-taped interviews – one to take place at the beginning of the research project (April 2012) and the other to take place at the culmination of the research project (Fall 2012).
- NOTE: videos can include you (the student participant) simply narrating as other images are filmed, OR they can take the shape of “video confessionals” where you sit in front of the camera and tell a story. Creativity is encouraged!

The goal of this project:

- To provide me (the researcher) with video evidence of your (the participant/student) interactions in everyday situations.
- To provide me (the researcher) with an honest snapshot of one typical day in your life.
- To provide me (the researcher) with your story.

Things to think about:

- The video diaries need not be scripted in any fashion – say what you want, when you want, however you want. These videos are all about you!
- Provide personal information as you feel comfortable – tell me a story (your story) about who you are, what you’re all about, your hopes, your dreams, your experiences, your expectations, etc. There is no right or wrong way to do this!
- The project seeks to learn about you as a person (all the different parts of what makes you unique) and to then understand how your literacy and language experiences are shaped differently by the different situations in which you find yourself.

Appendix C - Critical Discourse Analysis Checklists

Event: Initial Interview

<p>What discourses surface in the discussions during the interview?</p>	<p>Locally produced discourses: family talk, friend talk. Globally produced discourses: school talk, work talk.</p> <p>Gives examples of culture: gangs, African American-specific discourses,</p>
<p>What are some of the social features of the student's life in and out of school?</p>	<p>Sister, caretaker, receptionist, student, friend. Works at Dick Edwards Ford. A loner at times. Doesn't have many friends, but chooses this.</p>
<p>What relations of power are enacted and/or produced in this exchange?</p>	<p>Familial relations yield power – determined to prove her father wrong. Behaves timidly throughout the discussion. Authority assumes the position of power in relationship to perceived intelligence. Teachers invoke a sense of intelligence based on their interactions within the discourse of the classroom – this student often feels like the classroom discourse is “uninviting” and therefore is made to feel stupid when compared to students who fit seamlessly into the discourse of the classroom.</p>
<p>How are these power relations locally produced? How are these power relations tied to and reproductive of larger systems of power?</p>	<p>In school, feels “stupid” because of certain teachers. Feels empowered by others. Can't be herself at school. Feels stifled, trapped. Classroom discourses are another community to which you either belong or don't belong. This student often feels like an outsider when compared to students who are part of the classroom discourse community.</p>
<p>What aspects of action, talk, and silences could be considered agenic? How? Why?</p>	<p>Code-switching as an act of power – changing writing or speaking practices in a classroom setting to fit the demands of the discourse. Candid discussion in the interview about family problems could be seen as an act of agency; within the stories she tells, her refusal to speak out to her father is not agency, but her belief that leaving JC will “prove him wrong” could be seen as an act of agency. Being given this opportunity to speak about herself is agency.</p>
<p>What is being learned via these practices?</p>	<p>Code-switching is necessary but makes the</p>

	student feel like she can't be herself.
How do identities get constructed, shifted, contested, and/or changed?	Shift in roles: childlike, adult caretaker, student. Alternates between a childlike powerlessness to a self-perceived martyr in her role as caretaker, back to a "normal" teenage girl. Dependent on her social role, the student exhibits different levels of agency and enacts different levels of power. Identity shifts between roles that are already determined for her based on her familial structure. Identity becomes a construct when she enters her role as a student and develops based on the perceptions of others about who she is – student alternates her identity in the interview to fit each story she tells about each role she plays.

Emerging Themes

1. The importance of family
2. Family as a function of identity (self-perception vs. outside perception)
3. Blending of social roles as a complication of identity development
 - a. Specifically, blending social roles with relationships as a catalyst for skewed perceptions
4. African American storytelling techniques as a function of language and identity
5. Language and the perception of intelligence
 - a. Largely dependent on the teacher or authority figure (power yields a different perception)
6. Code-switching (work, school) and its effect on identity development
7. Language as a barrier to learning
8. Language as limiting to identity

Event: Video Diary Entries (videos 1-3)

<p>What discourses surface in the discussions during the videos?</p>	<p>Locally produced discourses: “Friend talk”, “family talk” Globally produced discourses: “work talk”, “school talk” Identify that methods of “talk” change with situation as well as with level of comfort in a particular situation.</p>
<p>What are some of the social features of the student’s life in and out of school?</p>	<p>Narrative; student uses narrative, just like her family members, to answer questions. Family/culture central aspect of family gatherings, but not wholly important to each member of her family; other members in the videos discuss jobs, discourses at jobs, etc.</p>
<p>What relations of power are enacted and/or produced in this exchange?</p>	<p>Anna relegates power to herself in the videos by becoming the interviewer; Anna’s friends discuss “other people” making assumptions about their language and that they “sound ghetto.” One friend suggests that other people think she “talks Black” but she doesn’t think she does (this friend is Hispanic)</p>
<p>How are these power relations locally produced? How are these power relations tied to and reproductive of larger systems of power?</p>	<p>Anna’s white friend finds it easier to feel comfortable in a classroom setting than Anna’s Hispanic friend; mimics social/political hierarchies that exist in schools and in life.</p>
<p>What aspects of action, talk, and silences could be considered agenic? How? Why?</p>	<p>All participants are willing to speak. Anna’s coworkers seem to give very canned responses to questions about language and intelligence. A result of age? Of indoctrination? Some participants seem to give answer they seem to think the video demands. Not agency.</p>
<p>What is being learned via these practices?</p>	<p>Anna learns more about her friends. Many identify the necessity of code-switching to be successful (refer to this as using “proper” language at work or school or with customers, but using slang at home and with friends); this suggests a deeply ingrained need to reproduce the dominant culture to feel accepted, successful; not just for Anna but also for her older coworkers and friends.</p>
<p>How do identities get constructed, shifted, contested, and/or changed?</p>	<p>Anna’s identity shifts as she becomes the interviewer; she assumes a more powerful role in the project by asking the questions; suggests her level of comfort with the people with whom she is interacting; for most, based on what they include in the videos, their identities</p>

	are constructed largely by their interactions with other people (both in how they view themselves in relation to a new environment and how the members of that environment view them)
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Emerging Themes:

- 1. Identity is constructed by outsiders as much (if not more) as by oneself (social roles and identity)
- 2. “Proper” English has been indoctrinated into society as the acceptable way to reproduce knowledge and be deemed “successful” (language and perception of intelligence)
- 3. Anna finds power in her actions more than in her words (language as dress, behavior, actions, etc.)

Event: Final Interview

What discourses surface in the discussions during the interview?	School talk, home talk, friend talk
What are some of the social features of the student's life in and out of school?	
What social identities are enacted in this exchange (through language use, linguistic constructions, discourses, etc.)?	Discussions of Anna's use of interview in her video diaries; Anna like being the "one in charge" for once; seems to enjoy the opportunity to ask important questions of others
What relations of power are enacted and/or produced in this exchange? How are these power relations locally produced? How are these power relations tied to and reproductive of larger systems of power?	Anna's desire to be the interviewer suggests an act of power; by choosing to be the questioner, especially of older coworkers, Anna is taking on the power of the researcher (presumably because that's what she sees in me); our discussion indicate this is a new role for her – not used to being in charge, especially at school; like asking questions.
What aspects of action, talk, and silences could be considered agentic? How? Why?	Her role as interviewee is agentic; her agency is expressed in her desire to flip the camera on others; OR, she is using the camera to hide (which would be the opposite of agency)
What is being learned via these practices?	Anna is complex; her desire to be in charge suggests to me that she is seeking opportunities to express agency and action; her body language remains complex, too. In her videos, depending on the stories she is telling, her body language changes; yet, at times, her facial expressions don't match her body language (or the story she is telling) which may mean she is enacting an identity.
How do identities get constructed, shifted, contested, and/or changed?	Anna's identities shift depending on the stories she is telling; she seems to enact an on-camera identity for me as to meet what she perceives as my own demands; when she is filming others, she mimics my own language as she asks questions.

Emerging Themes:

1. Identities get enacted based on outsider perceptions (assigned identities)
2. Identities get enacted, constructed based on experiences (social roles, languages)
3. Power structures are reinforced through exchanges

Appendix D - Final Interview Questions

Purpose: To reflect on the video interview process and provide any necessary follow up to discoveries made during the filming process.

Look at the attached chart regarding the new language standards -- basically, they say that by your 11th grade year, you should speak and write using standard English only.

1. What do you think about schools being required to teach you and only allow you to use standard English?
 - a. How does that make you feel?
 - b. What do you think that might do to your "sense of self"?
2. Tell me about how you dress. Describe your "style" and why you choose this.
3. Tell me a story about your life/your family's life/your traditions and culture.
4. What difficulties did you run into with the video diary process?
 - a. Was it hard to be honest of the videos?
 - b. Do you feel like the videos you created are accurate representations of you?
 - c. Did you enjoy the process?
5. I noticed that you liked being the interviewer. Explain this to me.
 - a. What did you enjoy about being the one asking questions?
6. Any final thoughts you'd like to add on the process?

Appendix E - Artifacts

Anna's Social Location Map



Appendix F - IRB Approval Letter



University Research Compliance Office

TO: Todd Goodson
Curr. & Instr.
359 Bluemont

Proposal Number: 6213

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair 
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: April 24, 2012

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "It All Just Fits Together..." : The Intersection of Language, Literacy, and Place for Adolescents Negotiating Their Identities.."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for one year from the date of this correspondence, pending "continuing review."**

APPROVAL DATE: May 1, 2012

EXPIRATION DATE: May 1, 2013

Several months prior to the expiration date listed, the IRB will solicit information from you for federally mandated "**continuing review**" of the research. Based on the review, the IRB may approve the activity for another year. **If continuing IRB approval is not granted, or the IRB fails to perform the continuing review before the expiration date noted above, the project will expire and the activity involving human subjects must be terminated on that date. Consequently, it is critical that you are responsive to the IRB request for information for continuing review if you want your project to continue.**

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

- There is no more than minimal risk to the subjects.
- There is greater than minimal risk to the subjects.

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review at least annually, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.

Appendix G - Participant Consent Forms

INFORMED CONSENT TEMPLATE

PROJECT TITLE: "It all just fits together...": The Intersection of Language, Literacy, and Place for Adolescents Negotiating their Identities

APPROVAL DATE OF PROJECT: _____ EXPIRATION DATE OF PROJECT: _____

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Dr. F. Todd Goodson

CONTACT AND PHONE FOR ANY PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: fgoodson@ksu.edu, 785-532-5898

IRB CHAIR CONTACT/PHONE INFORMATION: Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

SPONSOR OF PROJECT: _____

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: This is a research project for completion of a Master's of Science degree at Kansas State University. The project seeks to understand how language and identity are connected for adolescents. Specifically, the study seeks to explore how youth change their language as they move from situation to situation, ultimately providing implications for the English teaching profession.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED: You will participate in two video-taped interviews as well as a video diary project. The requirements for the video diary project are explained in detail in the attached document. You will provide no fewer than three video diary entries over the course of the project. These video diaries will be used as evidence for the study. All interviews will be transcribed and information provided will be used as evidence in the study. All information provided by you will remain anonymous throughout the study. Every effort to maintain your confidentiality will be made. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You will not be compensated for your participation.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT:

N/A

LENGTH OF STUDY: April 2012 to Fall 2012

RISKS ANTICIPATED: None.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: The researcher stands to benefit from the research conducted in this study by gaining a better understanding of her own teaching practices and the ways those can be improved to provide more equitable outcomes for students.

**EXTENT OF
CONFIDENTIALITY:**

All participation will remain confidential. Any video or audio tapes will be stored on independent hard drives to be locked in a file cabinet. This data will remain with the researcher indefinitely. You will maintain anonymity by selecting a pseudonym to be used in the project.

**IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF
INJURY OCCURS:**

N/A

PARENTAL APPROVAL FOR MINORS: Yes

TERMS OF PARTICIPATION: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant)

Participant Name:

Alanna Oliver

Guardian's Signature
(not 18 years of age):

[Signature]

Date:

4-23-12

Witness to Signature: (project staff)

Morgan Campbell

Date:

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: All participation will remain confidential. Any video or audio tapes will be stored on independent hard drives to be locked in a file cabinet. This data will remain with the researcher indefinitely. The subject will maintain anonymity by selecting a pseudonym to be used in the project.

IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS: N/A

PARENTAL APPROVAL FOR MINORS: Yes

TERMS OF PARTICIPATION: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant

Participant Name: Amber Moretti

Guardian's Signature (not 18 years of age): Pamela M Moretti

Date: 8-20-2012

Witness to Signature: (project staff) Morgan Campbell

Date: 8/20/12