CO-CONSTRUCTRIONS OF MEANING THROUGH DIALOGUE: THE INTERSECTIONS OF HOMOSEXUALITY AND RELIGION IN A PRESERVICE TEACHER/INSTRUCTOR INQUIRY GROUP

by

JILL M. HERMANN-WILMARTH

(Under the Direction of JoBeth Allen)

ABSTRACT

Building on work with preservice teachers around issues of multiculturalism and critical inquiry pedagogy, this qualitative collaboration action research study highlights how the stated religious beliefs of the students in my class intersected with issues of homosexuality and heterosexism raised in course readings and discussions. Through participation in discussions and interviews with an inquiry group formed around the question, "How do culturally held beliefs affect the teaching of language arts to diverse students?" and made up of students in my children's literature and language arts methods classes, I describe and analyze ways that my students and I interact and use language around issues of homosexuality and religion. I also explore ways in which my students and inquiry group members create spaces where we feel comfortable in our discussions of these issues, or where silence and resistance mediate our dialogue. A key component of this study is the role of collaborative research among the undergraduate preservice student members of the inquiry group and myself as their teacher, and the dialogue that drove this collaboration.

INDEX WORDS: Collaborative Action Research, Gay and Lesbian Children's Literature, Liberatory Pedagogy, Multicultural Education, Teacher Preparation

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JILL M. HERMANN-WILMARTH

Bachelor of Arts, Religious Studies, Agnes Scott College, 1997

Masters of Education, English Education, University of Georgia, 2001

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

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JILL M. HERMANN-WILMARTH

Major Professor:	JoBeth Allen
Committee:	Michelle Commeryas Joel Taxel

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my “little essay” to my family. To Jessica who kept me grounded, laughing, and my nose to the grindstone while she provided more support and love than I thought possible. And to Arden—the idea of him pushed me into this research, and his sweet self continues to inspire me to do this kind of work.

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CHAPTER 1

PREGNANCY, POLITICS, RELIGION, AND TEACHER EDUCATION: CAN THEY ALL FIT IN ONE STUDY?

"You don't talk about gay stuff with elementary school students—it isn't appropriate."

"I'm a Christian, and I don't believe that *those* issues belong in the public school."

"It isn't an issue unless you make it one."

The list of offhand comments that I've heard or been told during my teaching of elementary language arts methods and children's literature classes at a large southeastern university could go on and on. I have watched my mostly white, mostly female, mostly Christian students grapple with their stated respect and affection for me as their Graduate Teaching Assistant and their sometimes shocked and sometimes hidden responses to me when I step out of the identity position that they've assumed for me as very much like many of them (white, southern, middle class, lover of children and literature). I am pushed by Freire's admonition that "I cannot be a teacher if I do not perceive with ever greater clarity that my practice demands of me a definition about where I stand. … I must choose between one thing and another" (Freire, 1998, p. 93), to come out and firmly stand in my position as a lesbian to my students—to merge my outside- and inside-the-classroom identities with the hopes of furthering conversation about what it means to teach from standpoint that challenges the dominant and often oppressive social structure.

As an elementary school teacher, I worked to bring the issues of race, class, and gender that I'd learned were central to culturally relevant teaching during my own teacher preparation to my young students. I quickly realized this trinity was a limiting multiculturalism. For example, I had no language to discuss the homophobia spoken by my students with elementary school students. I wanted to learn how to bring a radical multiculturalism to elementary school classrooms while still meeting the curricular requirements of the school district. I began graduate school with this question in mind, and learned that for change to happen in the elementary school, change needed to occur in teacher preparation.

Upon hearing my students make the afore mentioned comments, mixed with the frequent references to church, Jesus, Biblical study groups, and some actual Bible reading during class, I have previously closed my ears to dialogue and growth around issues of difference. Freire asked, "How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others, and never perceive my own?" (1970/1993, p. 71). At the same time, my own classroom requirements of reading about issues of race, class, gender and sexual orientation seems to have closed the ears of some of those same students to discussions of teaching for social justice. Any attempt to form a community of respect and dialogue around these issues is stymied by this inability to understand or allow for multiple truths around the same issues.

This separation and boundary that my students and I build around our firmly held spiritual and religious beliefs is, I fear, a perpetuation of status quo oppression. Without learning how to listen and talk to each other within these differences, students could continue to ignore issues of sexual orientation in their future classrooms, and I could

continue to live with and perpetuate my own stereotypes of professed conservative Christians, and their inability to address the needs of all of their future students. My own experiences as a lesbian as both a teacher and student and as a person who claims a progressive Christian identity point me to the importance of dialogue and research around the intersection of social justice—particularly homophobia—and religion. This study has become a part of my grappling with these issues.

A View From the Keyboard

Laurel Richardson (2000) has called writing "a way of 'knowing'—a method of discovery and analysis" (p.923). The writing of this inquiry has certainly been a process in learning and knowing for me. Richardson wrote that our experiences shape our writing, and the texts that I ask my students to read as they learn about writer's workshop (Fletcher, 1994; Calkins, 1993) say that we write what we know. The fabric of this text is woven with diverse threads—some personal, some political, some curious. The final product, I hope, is a layered fabric, one with non-linear patterns, but with a pattern nonetheless. Like each of my participants, the fabric is complex, changing, and sometimes hard to define. This study doesn't fit into a traditional box, but does reflect the vigor and scholarship of the academic tradition. There is literature review, there is methodology, and there is analysis. But, rather than being pre-determined, these threads of my study are shaped to complement the fabric.

As I write, I am inundated with the physical and political memories—the people, events, interpretations, and tensions of the of the study itself. I came to the year of data collection with the layers of three years of teaching children's literature and language arts methods courses to preservice elementary school teachers (these layers will be discussed

in detail in Chapter 2, but for a condensed timeline, see Appendix A). During those three years, as a citizen of the United States, these experiences were layered with the debacle of the 2000 presidential election, the September 11, 2001 attacks on American buildings and in American airplanes, and the creation of the USA Patriot Act which changed how many Americans experience democracy.

Likewise, I became pregnant with my first child during the fall semester of my two semester study. For me, pregnancy was a personal, a physical, and a political space. As an out lesbian, I felt constructed by others in a new way. Those who didn't know me assumed my heterosexuality more than ever—even in a society where single motherhood is common, pregnancy seems to signal heterosexual marriage to many. Those who did know me—even who only knew me as an acquaintance—sometimes asked intensely personal questions about my child's conception, commented on my ability to parent effectively as a lesbian, or questioned what I would do if the child was male (which he is), seeing as he would have no father.

I embarked on this study with images of my future child floating both in my head and through my conversations with colleagues, professors, students, and, of course, my partner. I wondered what it would mean for teachers to talk about the issues that might meet my child at the schoolhouse door. I wondered how the right-wing politics and Conservative Christianity of my southern state would enter into these conversations, or if the conversations could even begin. As I dove into the data, I tried to tell the story of how that talk happened, but my telling isn't linear or predictable. It followed the lines of dialogue, of issues, of learning that can happen at different times, in multiple ways, and with multiple purposes for those who choose to participate. In chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6, I

look closely at different issues that came through the data, as well as at the second layer of this study, the creation of an inquiry group with my students. This group was the vehicle through which I asked my research questions, as well as tried to teach participants about research while the students investigated a topic of interest to them. (For a more linear timeline of the study, see Appendix B.)

In the same way that my telling of the story meandered back and forth, so did my writing. Chapters 4, 3, and 2 were written (in that order) during the sixth, seventh and eighth months of my pregnancy. I wrote in my journal often during that period. An excerpt written in May, just as the study was ending and my writing was beginning (and the last trimester of pregnancy was making sitting at the keyboard increasingly difficult): "I am feeling the effects of gestating both a baby and a dissertation. I am an out lesbian teacher both committed to social justice education and to embarking on the same risky journey of self-reflection that I ask my prospective elementary teacher students to travel, and this journey is the site of my research. The mixed messages bombarding me—and seemingly my uterus—tell me that while courageous, I am crazy. While admired, I am scorned. While enthusiastically greeted, I am wholeheartedly rejected. How dare I? How dare I not? What, I wonder, does it mean to be a teacher, writer, lesbian, mother, researcher in the social and political climate that my students live in, that my politics occupy, that the laws determine, and that my committee creates?"

All other chapters (5, 6, 7, and 1) have been written since the birth of my son Arden. The philosophical wonderings of a pregnant woman have been replaced with the pragmatics of a woman with an infant child. I now write when I can, and am intentional about carving out quiet time so that my thoughts can somehow be transferred into the

computer. But, even as I stare at the screen in a childless room, my child stares back at me. Who he will be, who his teachers will be, and how he will experience school are questions that drove my research and that drive my writing.

The Key Players

This study was conceptualized as collaborative action research (a research method which will be discussed in Chapter 3). Students enrolled in my class who chose to participate picked a topic to study and also agreed to talk with me individually and as a group about my topic. While all of my students have certainly played a role in helping me to think about teacher education, particularly when it comes to the issue of multicultural education and the education of children with same-gender parents, those in my study have played the most significant role.

Of the eleven students who began the study with me (the study and the students will be described in more detail in Chapter 3), four students—Ginger, Jianna, June, and Maggie (theirs and all other names are pseudonyms)—sit on my shoulders as I write. Their participation, resistance, idea generating, writing, arguing, silence, and growth with each other and with me plays in my head as I weave the fabric of our two semesters together. They appear, along with their colleagues, throughout this tapestry. I think that for different reasons, their threads hold the fabric together, and drive its pattern, more than any other. When they reappear in chapter 3, I hope that the sketches drawn of them in this chapter become fuller drawings, and that their place in my learning becomes more clear.

Ginger and Jianna

Save Maggie, I had the opportunity to spend time with each of these four students as they taught during their field practicum. It was planned for Ginger and Jianna to have these elementary school classroom experiences at the same school because they lived near each other and carpooled to class together. They both talked freely in our university classroom of their weekend and weeknight church events, and shared a similar conservative approach to Christianity. Their similarities, however, seemed to end there. While Jianna was unafraid to speak and share her sometimes controversial ideas in class (she was particularly challenged by her classmates about her stance on the Harry Potter books), Ginger remained quiet during large group discussions. Jianna's work was meticulously written, and when careless mistakes were found in her assignments, she wrote apologetic emails to me, saying that she knew that future teachers should be careful in all of their work, as they would soon be setting examples for their students. Ginger's work, however, was rife with grammatical and spelling errors. My repeated requests that she proof-read her work, or ask a friend to review her writing before she turned it in were only occasionally met. When, at the end of two semesters together, she still had gross grammatical errors in her work, it was clear that she had not sought out ways to improve her general writing ability as I had suggested. Her responses to my suggestions were usually met with a cheerful, "Thanks, I'll try harder!" but I never saw the results.

Likewise, in their teaching field experiences, Ginger and Jianna were like night and day. Jianna's well planned and executed lessons reflected ideas about classroom management that she'd been learning about, she told me, in her elementary education classes. Paired with her creative ideas, Jianna's natural teaching ability created a

classroom where students were actively learning and teaching each other. Some of my notes from my two observations of Jianna read like this: “You do a really great job of continually assessing what is happening, and responding to the needs of the students, both intellectually and behaviorally. You’ve developed a great rapport with them—they obviously love you—and this can only help your teaching!” and “Your creation of study groups out of your students’ questions is great! You have pictures and research to answer some of the questions that you won’t have time to research. Your poster of volcanoes is a great model for the work that they will do! They can also see how seriously you take their questions. What a great way to show them that you, too, are always learning. I love how you brought your life experiences into the lesson. It would be great to also encourage them to do the same thing.” Jianna was forever critiquing her teaching. Even as I shared my notes with her, she talked about the two or three students who weren’t as actively involved in the lesson, and wanted to brainstorm with me ways to draw those kinds of students in.

Ginger, on the other hand, struggled during her field practicum. The first time that I observed her, she was working with a group of eight students. During this observation I sat behind the group with my laptop taking notes (occasionally, when I observe students who are doing more student-centered lessons, I mingle with the class, ask the students about what they are doing, or follow the lead of my student intern as she asks and answers questions with her students). Ginger only maintained the attention of two students during her lesson. Two were trying to talk with me (I ignored them and kept my eyes on Ginger or my laptop), and the others were talking with or picking at each other. This was a math lesson about time, and Ginger gave students incorrect information on

how one can calculate how much time has passed. When students gave answers, she accepted all of them, never correcting students, teaching them how to arrive at the correct answer, or asking how they arrived at the answer that they gave. I had the lesson that Ginger had written in front of me, but had a difficult time telling what her objectives were—I wrote in my notes to her, “I’m not sure what you hoped students would learn during this lesson. Did students have an idea? How did you assess what they were learning?” Ginger’s general response to constructive criticism was that she’d try harder next time. Her mentor teacher and other professors from the university had multiple conferences with her about ways to improve her preparedness and her teaching style. In conversations with her other instructors, I learned that with them, as with me, she never reflected on her teaching, or expressed disappointment in how she had performed. Nor did her teaching improve.

June

I loved watching June teach during her field practicum. She seemed unafraid of anything. As I walked in to the room, her third grade students were acting out “anarchy” during a lesson about kinds of government. (There were crayons all over the floor, and the noise level was quite high. The difference between this scene and the dictatorship and democracy scenes that they then enacted was quite stark!) She brought in current events (there was a primary election that week) to help them talk about how the issues in their social studies lessons are acted out in the life of our country. Another time, I observed her conducting a writer’s workshop where, in the mini-lesson, she asked students to compare their own writing to that in a book she had shared with them. When they went to their own desks to write, not all students participated. She said, “Jill! How can they be so

excited during the mini-lesson, but so inactive when it comes to writing?! I have got to figure this out!"

When June was frustrated in this third grade class, she did what she often did in our university class—she asked questions. She found anyone she could and asked how they had conquered whatever issue she was struggling with. In our university class, this meant that she often received grateful looks from her classmates who had the same questions, but didn't want to ask them for whatever reason. After she received a B on a class assignment, she began to email me drafts of her other work so that she could be sure that she was headed in the right direction. In her field practicum, June's constant quest to be the best teacher that she could be meant that she brainstormed often with her mentor teacher, or other teachers in the school. We spent our post-observation conferences making lists of how to expand her lessons for when she has her own classroom, and thus a little more autonomy over how to spend valuable classroom time.

Her quick smile endeared June to her colleagues in class. She identified closely with a clique of students whose clothing and discussions of expensive trips betrayed their privilege, but unlike the other members of this clique, June often mingled with other classmates. Like Ginger and Jianna, June spoke easily and frequently about her small-town church and her active role there. She was surprised that she liked reading Harry Potter for our Children's Literature class, as she had heard about the witches and wizards at church, and didn't feel like it was something that she wanted to be a part of. But, as she later told me in an interview, "I know as a Christian that I can't judge things and people that I don't know." June brought this aspect of her Christianity into her teaching and

learning, and into our inquiry group. She was always ready to ask questions, look more deeply, or learn about a person or idea, rather than take something merely at face value.

Maggie

While I never observed Maggie teaching in an elementary school classroom, she shared (and continues to share) her experiences with me frequently. Maggie's work with an after school program at an area inner-city elementary school seeped into how she talked about issues that were raised in our class, as well as how she talked about the students she met in her practicum. Students at our university have three field practicum experiences before their student teaching semester, and at least one of those experiences is in a school much like the school where Maggie spent her afternoons. The other schools are filled mostly with white middle-class students. Upon their arrival at these more suburban schools, the university students are often met with welcome gifts, and as their experiences come to a close, are given farewell parties by their students and mentor teachers. This is not a regular occurrence at the inner-city schools. The university students often use negative language when talking about those inner-city schools and their experiences there. This language contrasts starkly with the flowery words they use to describe the suburban schools. Maggie was not hesitant to ask her colleagues to clarify their meanings. She asked leading questions of her peers such as, "Don't you think it is interesting that in one group of schools, most of the students aren't white, while in the other, they are?" She often shared stories of "her kids" from the after school program, telling of the struggles that they faced at home and school because of what she perceived to be injustices due to issues of race and class.

Maggie's enthusiasm for teaching came through in her approach to class assignments. We often shared our work (I did many assignments with the students) in small groups and most students gladly participated in this sharing. But, when I asked students to share their work with the whole class, I was often met with silence. Maggie was often the first to fill that silence. She would read from her own paper, looking up frequently to explain or take questions from her classmates. Her energy often inspired others who would then bravely share their own work.

From the Students to our Context

The student and teacher selves that my participants and I brought into the classroom were, of course, far more complex than merely people interested in elementary education. Like I said at the onset of this chapter, I began this study after three years of hearing students use religion to silence or ignore conversations and texts that addressed gay and lesbian issues. In order to enter into dialogue with my students about these issues, a central purpose of my study, I needed to understand more of where my conservatively Christian students were coming from, and to have a clearer definition of the term "Christian." What does it mean when different people claim that identity? And, how has the issue of homosexuality entered into the religious discussion for Christians like me and Christians like my more conservative students?

Homosexuality and Religion: The Christian Right, Biblical Text, Political Power

I was told by Jianna that she had never been asked to think about gay and lesbian issues as they pertained to her future teaching until she came to my class. If preservice teachers were more exposed to gay and lesbian people in a positive light, would their response to addressing these issues both in their teacher education classrooms and in their

own future classrooms would be different? As the political climate in the United States has swung to the right over the past couple of years, gay and lesbian issues have been pushed front and center in court cases and on state and local ballots. In churches there seems to be little or no discussion about gay and lesbian people; rather there is an insistence by clergy that, if members of their congregations are to stay true to their Christian faith, they must vote against particular ordinances and for particular candidates. Regardless of the laws of the land, the conclusions reached by many religious leaders seem to be the basis for how the majority of Americans decide to vote. Like a student in my class wrote before our discussion of gay and lesbian children's literature, "I think that most of my reasoning is stemmed from my morals, values, and religious beliefs. I understand that most of us will be teaching in a public school that is supposed to be separate from church, however, we all know that almost nothing in this society is that way."

Even though there is a constitutional separation of church and state in this country, laws and policies concerning many marginalized groups point to the strong connections between the law of the land and the powerful lobby of the Christian Right. Suzanne Pharr (1996) described the Christian Right as a group of people who:

> see people of color, feminists, lesbians and gay men as standing in the way of their goal to *merge church and state* in order to give legislated dominance to white Christian males who are taught that they receive their authority from Biblical scriptures. (p. 61, emphasis added)

Heyward (1999) helped me distinguish members of the Christian Right from others who also label themselves as Christians. She suggested that, historically, there have been four

images of Jesus reflected in the messages coming from the Religious Right: “Jesus Christ as authoritarian Lord; Jesus Christ as moralist; Jesus Christ as adversary against his enemies; Jesus Christ as obedient son of his Father” (p. 19). These images contrast starkly with the images put forth by liberal theologian Marcus Borg (1994) of Jesus as “spirit person,” “teacher of wisdom,” “social prophet,” and “movement founder” (p. 30). These conflicting images expose a fundamental difference between the religious understandings and experiences of conservative Christians like many of my students, and more progressive Christians like me.

In the current day of mass media conglomerates and wealthy religious institutions—both with the money to support a political lobby—media messages, legal decisions, and Sunday sermons often mirror each other. As conflicts around homosexuality arise within individual denominations and churches, public religious figures are not limited to their Sunday morning congregational pulpits. Widely viewed television programs have given these leaders a broader congregation. Jerry Falwell’s post-September 11 comments on television blaming, among others, pagans, the abortionists, the feminists, and the gays and the for opening our country to the attacks on the World Trade Center point to the connection between mass media and the church. In his comments to CNN (2001), Falwell said,

> I do believe, as a theologian, based upon many Scriptures and particularly Proverbs 14:23, which says, ‘living by God’s principles promotes a nation to greatness, violating those principles brings a nation to shame,’ … [that organizations such as the ACLU] have attempted to secularize America, [and]

> have removed our nation from its relationship with Christ on which it was founded. (¶4)

By using Biblical text to reinforce his statements in a political arena, the theologian Falwell uses the Bible to both justify his political philosophies and to support those who share his ideologies. Those who view the Bible as an infallible word of God can use Falwell as a model for their own political actions.

The influence of the Christian Right does not stop with the media; in the summer of 2003, evidence of the Christian Right's power in governmental policy came from a member of the highest court in the land. In his dissenting arguments to the United States' Supreme Court's recent decision that consensual sex between two men cannot be criminalized, Justice Scalia (Lawrence et al. v. Texas, 2003) pointed to the connection between the standards of morality put forth by the Christian Right and the state when he wrote:

> Today's opinion is the product of a Court … that has largely signed on to the so-called homosexual agenda. … It is clear from this that the Court has taken sides in the culture war, departing from its role of assuring, as neutral observer, that the democratic rules of engagement are observed. Many Americans do not want persons who openly engage in homosexual conduct as partners in their business, as scoutmasters for their children, as teachers in their children's schools, or as boarders in their home. They view this as protecting themselves and their families from a lifestyle that they believe to be immoral and destructive.

By not acknowledging that he, too, is working within a particular agenda, Scalia's message was that anti-gay laws, unlike the new law created by the Court, are neutral. His

nod toward Americans who find homosexual Americans to be immoral and destructive suggested that, like members of the Christian Right, he finds homosexuality "immoral and destructive." By not naming his agenda, he technically stayed within the boundaries set up by the separation of church and state, but the language that he used clearly aligned him with the Christian Right.

Likewise, after George W. Bush gave his Presidential Inaugural Address in January of 2005, his Houston minister said a prayer, blessing the event, the president, and all leaders. He concluded his prayer saying, "Respecting persons of all faiths, I humbly submit this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ" (Caldwell, 2005). The church, particularly the Christian Church, and the state were explicitly tied at that moment.

A Point of Resistance: Linking Sexism and Homophobia

Within mainline Protestant Christianity, there are two major conflicts around homosexuality—marriage and ordination. These major conflicts within individual denominations churches began in the 1970s (Ruether, 2000) in the midst of the political furor caused by the Religious Right. Sexism and homophobia walked hand-in-hand as those with power in the movement tried to maintain that power by privileging the nuclear male-headed family. "The norm of heterosexuality in American culture today rests on the subordination of women. … Our traditional marriage pattern is still based on the assumption of male dominance" (Carey, 1995, p. 27). The Family Values ideal put forth by the Christian Right to be protected for Jesus is certainly a post-gospel construction. In Luke 14:26 it is written, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, … he cannot be my disciple."

Ruether (2000) reiterated that

> …the family model promoted by the Christian Right has its origins in the ideology of Victorian white middle-class America, not in the Bible. The Bible, comprising Hebrew Scripture and the New Testament, reflects a variety of family patterns common in its era(s), all quite different from the model of the Victorian nuclear family. (p. 225)

In fact, the Christian Right's desire for sexual control through marriage contains echoes of Foucault's (1976/1978) description of the three major codes of Victorian sexuality: "canonical law, the Christian pastoral, and civil law. They determined, each in its own way, the division between licit and illicit" (p. 37).

Marriage as defined by the Christian Right is only between a man and a woman, and is the only place where sex is licit. According to the Christian Right, "Same-gender … sex is inherently 'disordered,' not only personally sinful but also destructive of the heterosexual family as the foundation of social order" (Ruether, 2000, p. 173). It is this "male and female only" construction of marriage that allows for a maintenance of the male-headed household, and at the same time demonizes gay sex. By disallowing sex outside of marriage, and by disallowing gay and lesbian marriage, the Christian Right erases the possibility of an acceptable non-celibate gay relationship.

Suzanne Pharr (1988) highlighted the connection of sexism and homophobia when she wrote, "The central focus of the rightwing attack against women's liberation is that women's equality, women's self-determination, women's control of our own bodies and lives will damage what they see as the crucial societal institution, the nuclear family" (p. 17). Women who resist the submissive familial roles defined for them by the Christian

Right are socially marginalized. “In the 1950s working women were seen as pathological deviants from a ‘proper’ sexual destiny, and working mothers as the cause of divorce and juvenile delinquency” (Ruether, 2000, p. 132). Many have used the label “lesbian” to insult powerful women in the workplace and in the feminist movement. “We must know that the institution of heterosexuality is a die-hard custom through which male-supremacist institutions insure their own perpetuity and control” (Clarke, 1981/1983, p. 130). Because female heterosexuality is assumed (Rich, 1980), those who don’t comply with this institution can be seen as troublemakers. As Pharr wrote, “To be a lesbian is to be *perceived* as someone who has stepped out of line, who has moved out of sexual/economic dependence on a male, who is woman-identified” (1986 p. 18, emphasis in original).

Children are taught at an early age that a refusal to conform to status-quo gender roles is unacceptable. This sexism not only affects women, but gay men. “Visible gay men are the objects of extreme hatred and fear by heterosexual men because their breaking ranks with male heterosexual solidarity is seen as a damaging rent in the very fabric of sexism” (Pharr, 1986, p. 18). They are thus seen as less than—not as *real*—men. “Misogyny gets transferred to gay men … and is increased by the fear that their sexual identity and behavior will bring down the entire system of male dominance and compulsory heterosexuality” (p. 19). This reliance on sexism and heterosexism to maintain status-quo power undergirds the Family Values message delivered via radio, television, print media, sermons, and brought to our classrooms by members of the Christian Right.

Denominational Issues

Even as the Christian Right uses a political platform to further its religious message, many Protestant denominations and churches are struggling with issues surrounding homosexuality. The two major conflicts—ordination and marriage—have caused strife both at the denominational level and in individual churches. Congregations have lost members and ministers, been asked to leave denominations, and, in many cases, survived the often bitter battles over how they individually and collectively feel that God has called them to treat their gay and lesbian members.

In *Congregations in Conflict: The Battle Over Homosexuality,* Keith Hartman (1996) provides case studies of nine churches in the Research Triangle area of North Carolina as they struggled with issues of homosexuality. The debates, questions, and worries that members of these churches have are similar to those that I was a part of at two different Presbyterian churches during the early and mid-90s. They reflect the larger denominational concerns over the issues of gay marriage and ordination. Many denominations have both advocacy groups created to support their gay and lesbian members and other groups that advocate for the denial of full membership for gay and lesbian people. Some denominations (such as the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.) have asked individual congregations to study the issue over a specific period of time, and other churches (such as Pullen Baptist) have studied the issues as they have been raised by their members. Often these internal studies include intense examination of both church doctrine and the few scriptural passages in which homosexuality is mentioned (these are outlined clearly in Daniel Helminiak's [1994] *What the Bible* Really *Says About Homosexuality*), book discussions, and intentionally-created Sunday School classes

(Hartman, 1996). Complex questions about what it means to be a Christian often lay the groundwork for these studies:

> How does one know right from wrong? Is the Bible infallible? To what extent does it reflect the traditions of society? Do good Christians always follow the Church's teachings, or are they allowed to think for themselves on moral issues? And to what sources does one finally look to determine what God wants? (Hartman, 1996, p. ix)

The results of these studies are as different as the churches themselves, and the conversations around how to address and meet (or, in some cases, deny) the needs of gay and lesbian Christians continue long after official stands have been taken.

I will discuss the conflicts and actions within two Protestant denominations—the Southern Baptists and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Certainly, there is much to be said about other denominations. For the purposes of my study, however, I think it is most important to look at conflicts within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as my own religious roots reside there (and some of my resistance to organized religion is a result of my experiences with this denomination), and the actions of the Southern Baptist Convention, the denomination of many of my vocally Christian students.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

I renounced my membership in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) only six years ago when I was told, after 22 years of regular attendance, Sunday School teaching, choir singing, and Bible learning that I was not allowed to get married in the church in which I was baptized. Twice I have participated in denominational "sexuality studies"—once as a high school student in my church in Houston, Texas in the early 90s, and one as a college

student and teacher of a senior high Sunday School class in Atlanta in the mid-90s. Both churches consider themselves progressive (and for their particular contexts, this could be true), though neither, at the time of my respective memberships, named itself a "Morelight Church" (Presbyterian Morelight churches ordain gay and lesbian ministers, elders and deacons).

As a high school student in Houston, my participation in the sexuality study was limited to Sunday evening Youth Group discussions about the importance of abstinence before marriage. We never discussed same-gender sexuality. The facilitator of our group was the minister's wife. Our discussions remained rigidly separate from Sunday morning church school—homosexuality did not, it seemed to this church, need to be discussed by non-adults. My parents, however, attended Sunday School classes that were created with the express intent of discussing homosexuality. I remember their talking in the front seat on our 45-minute drive home from church about the fact that Jesus never mentioned homosexuality at all.

My experiences as a college student in Decatur, Georgia were vastly different from this "adults-only" approach to discussion. I was active in the church's Wednesday evening discussion groups concerning homosexuality where we discussed the upcoming General Assembly vote on the issue of ordination. We had both small and large group discussions, and each small group was a diverse mix of older and younger adults and high school students. Often the Wednesday night discussions would continue on Sunday morning in the senior high Sunday School class that I co-taught.

These very different ways of exploring issues of sexuality began with the 1993 call by the church's governing body, the General Assembly, for a three-year study on

human sexual behavior and ordination. This call followed the rejection of a commissioned report, "Keeping Body and Soul Together: Sexuality, Spirituality and Social Justice," whose authors, among other things, stated that "the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) would be more faithful to the message and ministry of Jesus if its commitment to inclusiveness also included gay and lesbian persons as children of God and as full members of Christ's Church" (Carey, 1995, pp. 32-33).

In 1978, the Presbyterian Church formally "welcomed gays and lesbians as members. But they prohibited the ordination of openly homosexual persons. However, they allowed all gay and lesbians who were already ordained to remain members of the clergy" (Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, 1995-2003, p. 1, ¶1). After the rejection of the sexuality report in 1991 and the subsequent denomination-wide sexuality studies during the 1990s, there were several amendments to the Book of Order put forth at the General Assembly. The often close margins of defeat reflect a deep split over the issue of gay ordination in the denomination.

The Church maintains that "chastity and fidelity" are moral requirements for ordination. Because the denomination does not recognize gay marriage, this means that only single (or dishonest) gay and lesbian people can serve the church in the capacity of minister. The church still does not recognize unions between two men or two women. Today, there continues a ban on non-celibate gay and lesbian (and non-celibate single heterosexual) ordination. Some clergy continue to ignore this ban—in May, 2003, "there [were] nearly 30 cases pending in church courts in which clergy have been charged with violating the Church's constitution by knowingly ordaining gay clergy" (Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, 1995-2003, p. 2, ¶3). There is fear that further

discussion of gay and lesbian ordination will create an even deeper chasm in the already polarized denomination.

An important point, I believe, is that while I (and, frankly, many gay and lesbian people) have left the Presbyterian Church (U. S. A.) over these issues, I am very tied to my own sense of Christianity. Since leaving, I have joined a non-denominational church that labels itself as a Feminist Christian Community. Part the draw of this congregation for me is the intentional critique of the power of the traditional church, of traditional familial structures, and of traditional ways of church/community relationships that we engage in on a regular basis.

The Southern Baptist Convention

The Baptist faith has a strong democratic and grass-roots tradition. Baptists believe in "the priesthood of the believer"—anyone can learn the will of God without the help of a minister or other religious authority by looking to the Bible and asking God to help in one's search for truth. Unlike the Presbyterians, historically Baptist congregations, rather than governing bodies, have voted on decisions that affect the life of their individual churches. This sense of autonomy is uniquely Baptist in the sea of mainline Christian churches. It allows for a great diversity within the denomination. (Hartman, 1996)

The Southern Baptist Convention was created in the split in the Baptist denomination over the issue of slavery during the Civil War. In 1995, they acknowledged that their stand on slavery was sinful. However, as a denomination, they still maintain the sinfulness of homosexuality. A pamphlet first published in 1977 by the Southern Baptist

organization the Christian Life Commission, “Critical Issues: Homosexuality,” states that:

> The many Bible passages that are commonly quoted as condemning homosexuality are valid; people can change their sexual orientation; homosexual orientation is not “caused” by hormonal imbalance or genetic factors, but by an unhealthy relationship with one’s parents; … discrimination against gays and lesbians is proper in the areas of employment, to protect the family, to protect other social institutions.

Regardless of this stance, the priesthood of believers theoretically would allow for individual churches to determine their own approach to homosexuality. However, as churches began to bless the unions and ordinations of their gay and lesbian members, the priesthood of believers and the autonomy of Southern Baptist churches took a backseat to those in charge of the Southern Baptist Convention. When, in the early 90s, two North Carolina Baptist churches, after many meetings, Bible studies, question-and-answer sessions, and deliberation decided to support their homosexual members, the Southern Baptist Convention expelled them from the membership rolls. With this action, “the convention ended the long-standing Baptist tradition of autonomous churches, and issued the denomination’s first decree of faith. From this point on, all Southern Baptist churches had to accept opposition to homosexuality as a part of their creed” (Hartman, 1996, p. 63). Both churches have maintained ties to another Baptist denomination, the American Baptist Churches in the USA.

Today, the Southern Baptist Convention maintains its stance on homosexuality. This firm stand is reflected in the language and resistance of many of my former students.

In telling their churches what they have to believe in order to remain affiliated with their wealthy and powerful organization, the Southern Baptist Convention has modeled for its members religious exclusivity—if you don't believe our way, you aren't really following Jesus. While other denominations such as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) maintain their discriminatory stances on gay marriage and ordination, the denomination-wide conversations, amendments, and support by powerful clergy of gay and lesbian issues are active and ongoing. Students who come to my class with a rigid understanding of the sinfulness of homosexuality might be less willing to engage in discussion of gay and lesbian issues than students whose denominational discussions have not resulted in a final decree, never to be revisited again (or, like the slavery issue, to be revisited 100 years down the road).

What does all of this mean for education?

One of my goals as a teacher educator is to help my students redefine multicultural education. The trinity of race, class, and gender should, in my opinion, be expanded in order to be truly inclusive and, indeed, multicultural. If teachers begin to include diverse language communities, diverse abilities, and sexual orientation and other groups that, through an expression of who they are and the communities that they belong to are marginalized by the written and implied laws of mainstream culture, into their conceptualization of what it means to teach through a multicultural lens, the lives of children could be changed in positive ways.

<u>How are our children being affected?</u>

These definitions of marriage, of gender roles, and of acceptable expressions of love have crossed from mere expressions about the needs for "family values" by

members of the Christian Right to actual legislation that takes away rights from members of the gay and lesbian community. Before these laws, the socialized expectations placed on children had devastating consequences for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth, as well as for children with same-gender parents. Those of us involved in the GLBT community have been inundated with the statistics about growing up queer in America. For example, a 2001 National School Climate Survey published by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) reported that:

- 41.9% of high school students surveyed responded that they have been harassed because of actual or perceived sexual orientation at school
- 21.1% of these students have been physically assaulted.

Other surveys (Center for Disease Control and the Massachusetts Department of Education, 1997; Safe Schools Coalition of Washington, 1995; Vermont Department of Health, 1997) found that:

- 97% of students in public schools have heard anti-gay comments from peers
- 53% of students have heard these kinds of comments made by faculty and staff
- 80% of preservice teachers have negative attitudes towards GLBT youth
- 80% of gay and lesbian youth report feeling severe social isolation

The image drawn by young adult novelist Alex Sanchez (2005) is a powerful one, “Four American teens today will take their lives because of their fear, confusion, and self-hatred around being gay. Thirty-two others will attempt it” (p. 47). When we think about those numbers in terms of children in schools that we teach in or have taught in, that looks like a classroom a week full of students who commit suicide, and a classroom a day who attempt it. This is devastating. Human Rights Watch reported in 2001 that children

growing up with same-gender parents often face the same harassment as their gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender peers. There are an estimated 6 to 10 million children living in families headed by same-gender parents, and an additional 2 million school aged students grappling with issues of their own sexuality. The school experience for these children includes threats of violence, regular name calling, regular silence about name calling from teachers, high rates of drug and alcohol abuse, and the highest rates of suicide among all school-aged children.

Those of us in the GLBT community know that life isn't all about devastating statistics. In the light of recent elections, we have forwarded emails to friends and family, protested in the streets and to our elected officials, had quiet and not so quiet conversations in the hallways of our places of employment, across the tables at our favorite coffee shops, and over the phone lines—listening, telling, hoping, sharing. All because we live full and wonderful lives that, it seems, aren't always valued by those with political power. Most recently in our struggle, particularly if we live in one of the eleven states with initiatives on the ballot, those of us in the GLBT community have voted on our own lives, the lives of our children, the lives of our colleagues, or the lives of our friends. Who we are has become a hot-button issue.

All of the statistics listed above concern middle and high school students. As Casper and Schultz (1999) wrote,

> While a movement has grown steadily around gay issues in education for teenagers … the field of early childhood remains a last stronghold against the inclusion of gay issues. Gay- and gender-based taunting can be heard from the mouths of first and second graders in schools across this country and is but a

> precursor to the queer-bashing and hate crimes that begin as early as junior high school. (p.3)

What can this mean for the children whose parents are being held up in negative ways, or whose families are invisible in their classroom texts? How can we teach teachers to reach out so that the devastating statistics become less devastating?

What is the Role of Teacher Education?

I came to this study after reading comments in course evaluations like the following: "Please stick to helping teacher (sic) learn how to teach writing instead of trying to impress your beliefs and values onto your students." As I stood in front of the class in which I conducted this study, my pregnant belly held a child that, in theory, could be a student in the future classrooms of these preservice teachers. I feel very much that my teaching about issues of diversity is integral to teaching my students how to teach writing and how to integrate children's literature across the curriculum in their future classrooms. This student missed the idea that pedagogy and content are tied. If students feel that their families are invisible in the classroom or ignored by the teacher, how open will they be to learning from and with that particular teacher?

While I do expect my students to entertain the idea that there are multiple ways of understanding family, and this expectation has very personal roots—my son, Arden, is one of those 6 to 10 million children of same-gendered parents that will be affected by the attitudes of his teachers—is it also based in the philosophy that public school teachers should be prepared to meet the needs of all of their students. Lipkin (2002) wrote that "most would agree that any teacher education program that does not prepare its students for the demands of a diverse classroom is failing them" (p. 13). I believe in multicultural

education. I believe in preparing my students to be culturally relevant teachers to their diverse students by helping my students redefine multiculturalism in more inclusive ways—to add, among other things, issues of sexuality and familial construction. In today's political climate, this is a struggle. But, if we believe in helping teachers meet the needs of all of their students, it is also our responsibility.

My students have often said to me that the needs and desires of the parents of their students would limit them from using books with gay and lesbian characters, or from addressing gay and lesbian issues in deep and meaningful ways in their classes. A few, including most participants in this study, have recognized that some of those parents might, indeed, be gay or lesbian. But recognizing that there are students of same-gender parents in our schools and meeting the needs of those families are two different things. Casper and Schultz (1999) published their three year ethnographic study of the interactions between gay and lesbian parents and the early childhood educators of their children. This study sheds light on the challenges faced by both parents and educators, as well as gives suggestions for ways to ease the parent-school relationship.

While it might be important for gay and lesbian parents to initiate conversations with school officials and teachers about their family structure, having a safe place to take this initiative was important. One lesbian mom in Casper and Shultz's (1999) study said,

> We've gone to all of them and said, "You know, our family structure is different from the other kids', and it may not be familiar to you and there's lots that we can tell you about it if you have questions. When discussions of family come up, we'd be happy to offer another perspective, and it's something that I speak on." And we get downcast eyes and they change the subject. When we first went to the schools,

> we felt very strongly that we weren't going to go to a school unless we had some assurance ahead of time. … We spoke to the principal, and he couldn't have walked up those steps ahead of me faster. (p. 89)

However, when teachers said, either in initial parent-teacher conferences or on early open house nights that they valued diversity, including a diversity of familial structures, parents felt safer about being honest about their families.

The Landscape in Teacher Education: How are we meeting this challenge?

My experiences with preservice teachers around the issue of homosexuality are not rare. Lipkin (2002) pointed out, "When it comes to readying educators to deal effectively with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered students, there is virtual silence—few public demands and little reform of undergraduate and graduate curricula" (p. 13).

In Sears' 1992 study of the attitudes and feelings around homosexuality of teachers, students, preservice teachers and guidance counselors, he found that of 258 preservice teachers surveyed, eight out of ten "harbored negative feelings toward lesbians and gay men" (p. 39), and that "prospective teachers pursuing certification in elementary education were more likely to harbor homophobic feelings and express homo-negative attitudes than those planning to teach in the secondary schools" (p. 40). He found that preservice teachers were unaware of elementary classroom (mentor) teachers' knowledge about homosexuality, and thus, the preservice teachers were unaware of how to address it in the classroom. "The absence of classroom discussion in all but a few classrooms may explain why so few respondents could assess the position of their teachers" (p. 49). My students confirmed these statistics—my classroom was often the first place that they'd

been asked to talk about how and why to include gay and lesbian issues in their classrooms. The resistance of many stemmed from their idea that elementary school children are too young to be "exposed" to gay and lesbian issues or people.

Maney and Cain (1997) found that of the 195 preservice elementary school teachers that they surveyed, 23.3 % are "very uncomfortable talking to homosexual parents regarding [their own] familiarity with gay and lesbian families" (table 4). They also found that students with "stronger religious attitudes were significantly more likely to have had a negative attitude toward mothers who are lesbians than those with weaker religious attitudes" (Results, paragraph 8). While my students said that they would treat all students and parents equally, and would welcome same-gender parents at parent-teacher conferences, their homophobic attitudes often made me wonder if this was really true. Casper and Shultz (1999) heard from the gay and lesbian parents that they interviewed that teachers often took a "don't ask, don't tell" approach. About being out as lesbian parents, one woman said, "It isn't easy. … we get the lowered eyes, and the muffled clearing of throat and the back-turn" (pp. 77-78). Parents in the study also worried that the homophobia of school administration and faculty would affect how their children were approached.

> Parents seem aware of the fact that their children's teachers may (consciously or unconsciously) be on the lookout for some unstated effects of being raised by gay or lesbian parents. … 'Yeah, I think that there's a tendency for people to look at the kids, and for every characteristic about them that they find questionable, to wonder, are they that way because of who their parents are, instead of really respecting the child's individuality?' (pp 70-71).

I wonder if my students stated beliefs of gay and lesbian people would enter into their interactions with gay and lesbian parents as Maney and Cain's (1997) statistics suggest they would? Or if their treatment of children of same-gender parents would be as opening or welcoming as it would be of children from more traditional families?

Robinson and Ferfolja (2001) pointed to some of the problems of resistance faced by teacher educators who raise issues of homophobia in their classrooms. Some forms of resistance that they have faced are "total dismissal, resistance on moral or religious grounds, perspectives that 'they are OK as long as they keep away from me'" (p. 130). Preservice teachers were often more concerned with issues of classroom management and the "'mechanics' of teaching" (p. 125), and so teacher educators found that discussions of social justice issues, particularly issues that challenge students' positions of privilege and power (p. 124) were deemed unnecessary by the students. I've had student after student tell me this same thing in course evaluations, writing comments like, "This was a Teaching of Writing Class and not one to teach us about diversity." Like me, Robinson and Ferfolja (2001) posited that "the need to address gay and lesbian issues is paramount in the light of the homophobic violence, vilification, and discrimination experienced by individuals in educational contexts in western societies, who are perceived to be gay or lesbian" (p. 122).

Bickmore (1999) outlined the importance of discussing homosexuality in the elementary school classroom. "The first reason to discuss sexuality in elementary school is that it is already present in students' lives" (p. 15). She pointed to censorship around homosexuality by both administration and teachers. Students did not have the opportunity to think about multiple ways of expressing gender and sexuality because only one way of

expression ever makes it into the classroom. Teachers were not prepared to help students think outside of a heterosexual norm. Bickmore's outline of how heterosexuality and traditional gender roles were taught through curriculum shows ways to expand that curriculum into more inclusionary discussions of sexuality. Cahill and Theilheimer (1999) also pointed to the heterosexism of early childhood classrooms. "The materials teachers select and the words they use may actively communicate a norm of heterosexuality. Whereas some teachers affirm children's experiences and help children advocate for themselves and a fair society, others do not" (p. 43). When teachers enter the classroom without having been exposed to, or taught how to address issues of homophobia, heterosexism, and homosexuality in their classrooms as preservice teachers, the likelihood that they will be teachers who help children of gay and lesbian parents, or students who identify as gay or lesbian advocate for themselves seems slim in our current social climate.

How have elementary teacher educators approached homosexuality?

As an out lesbian teacher educator who well remembers the sting of "lesbo" and "dyke" during elementary recesses in the 1980s, and more recently hearing a fellow teacher in a 2001 graduate multicultural children's literature class say about using books with gay or lesbian characters in elementary school, "well, if you put garbage in, you get garbage out," I know that the homophobia of preservice teachers is being ignored, unchallenged, or unproblematized in many teacher education programs. When such homophobia is addressed, it is often met with resistance.

When Janine Schall was a graduate student teaching children's literature courses she brought examples of children's books with gay or lesbian characters to share with her preservice students. Schall and Kauffmann (2003) found that many of Schall's students:

> were willing to read the books, [but] some wouldn't even look at them. The majority of preservice teachers rejected the idea of children's reading these books in the classroom, saying that books with gay and lesbian characters were inappropriate because the children couldn't deal with books "like that." (p. 36)

The students in Schall's class had a desire to protect elementary students' innocence, and this was a theme that ran through her discussions of prejudice, racism, and identity. There is no further exploration of how Schall approached the literature with her preservice students, but she joined a $4^{th}/5^{th}$ grade classroom teacher to see if, indeed, elementary students *could* "deal with books 'like that.'"

Schall and Kauffmann (2003) moved their study into Kauffmann's fourth/fifth grade multiage class where Kauffmann tied the reading of picture books with gay and lesbian characters to the name calling on the playground. Students had a variety of responses to the books, and were given the option of not participating in the readings or discussions. All but five participated, and participants came to the conclusion that being gay was just another kind of love. Interestingly, the students wondered "why they weren't told about the reality of gays and lesbians" (p. 41). In their discussions the students taught the teacher/researchers not to approach these issues separately from other issues, but "emphasized that gay and lesbian issues would naturally integrate into themes of family, identity, stereotyping, survival, relationships, a sense of belonging, or discrimination" (p. 43).

Another professor of children's literature, Patti Capel Swartz (2003) found "the children's literature classroom to be a place where discussion of [gay and lesbian] issues can reach prospective elementary school teachers" (p. 52). She used both children's literature and Deborah Chasnoff's (1995) film *It's Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues in Schools* as a springboard for discussion of homophobia in schools, and "to provide methods of discussing homophobia, gender, and sexuality in elementary and middle-grade classrooms" (p. 52). Swartz (2003) wrote that most students in elementary education programs care about the well-being of all children, but have yet to think about the effects of homophobia on students who might later identify as queer, or who have same-gender parents.

Like my own students, Swartz's (2003) students were mostly white and from rural towns with deeply held religious beliefs. Also like my students, Swartz's students were hesitant to integrate literature that discusses homosexuality into their curricula and doubt that elementary school students are even aware of gender and sexuality differences. Viewing Chasnoff's (1995) video helped Swartz's (2003) students to see both how this integration could help them achieve their goal of "being there" for *all* of their students and that their students may, because of media and other cultural influences, be fully aware of how GLBT people are seen as different. Swartz facilitated discussions in which her students used the film and children's literature to "[explore] the diversity of family structures" (p. 59). Students wrote about their internalized homophobia, and Swartz described one student recognizing that, in order to "reach all children, her religious beliefs or personal prejudices must be set aside" (p. 59). Swartz provided examples of the picture books she used, and reviewed extensively Chasnoff's film, but never delved into

how her initially homophobic students simply set aside their religious beliefs. The model that she provided for other teacher educators of integrating film, children's literature, and other texts in which elementary teachers describe how they address gay and lesbian issues with elementary students is incredibly valuable, but it still falls short of addressing how to work within the strong religious bias that she attributes to her students, and that I saw reflected in my own classroom.

Shawyn Williams (2002) is an African American teacher educator who felt that "it is [her] obligation to make students aware of not only the United States' growing racial diversity, but also to challenge their preconceived notions of teaching 'others'" (p. 231). In order to do this, she asked her students to present information about controversy and diversity in the field. One week, she chose to bring the controversy herself by sharing Willhoit's (1991) *Daddy's Roommate* as her end-of-class read aloud. She asked her students to write initial responses as she was reading the text, and then opened the class discussion by asking students if they would use the book in their own classrooms. After the discussion, she asked students to write follow-up responses. Williams' (2002) summary of their opposition could describe the feelings of many of my own students: "I think having teachers use this book in class may be 'overstepping' boundaries" (p. 233). Likewise, the words of one of her students could have been written by any number of my own past students.

> How did we get to this point? How is it that in a Christian nation, we have people ready to step right over parents' responsibilities and take their children's own beliefs into their own hands. If we are banned from praying, reading the Bible, or

> even referencing God, then this book and others like it need to be banned also. Homosexuality is a religious topic. (p. 235)

Some of Williams' students were worried about the closed-mindedness of the families in their schools, or the policies of the administration, and thus would not bring this kind of literature into their classrooms.

Co-Creations of Meaning Through Dialogue

My hope, through this study, is that I have found ways to add texture and complexity to the fabric of teacher education. Issues of religion are often officially left out of the classroom, even though teachers and students use their religious ideologies to help them interpret texts and to guide how they approach classroom issues. As my students have told me and other researchers have found, it is the rare teacher educator who broaches the subject of homosexuality and education. By bringing these issues together in this study, I hope that teachers and teacher educators can learn ways to facilitate discussions with each other and in their classrooms in ways that are respectful of *all* members of their learning communities.

CHAPTER 2

JUMPING IN AND LISTENING TO STUDENTS: TRYING TO SHAPE MY PRACTICE TO FIT MY THEORY

Students gather in groups of four to discuss the required reading for the day—J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. In my fourth year of teaching Children's Literature at my southeastern university, and of requiring this as the first text of the semester, I am somewhat prepared for a little bit of student resistance—self-identified conservative Christians make up a majority of my students, and many have heard about the evils of the witchcraft and wizardry of Harry Potter from the pulpit. More students now than ever have read the text or seen the movie before entering my class, but there were still those who raised their eyebrows as they perused the syllabus on the first day of class.

On this fourth day of class, I know little about the four students gathered tightly at their table so that they can hear each other over the rising din of five other literature circles. The relationships that will be created among a variety of texts, writings, conferences, conversations and around ideological, religious, and educational differences or similarities during our two semesters together are yet to be discovered. Jianna sits quietly as her peers share their enthusiastic responses to Harry Potter. They've brought the articles I've asked them to find about the controversy surrounding this fantastical character, and words like, "ridiculous," "stupid," and "unbelievable"

punctuate the air as Jianna's group becomes exasperated with the idea of a parent censoring a book that they loved so much.

"Well …" Jianna gently attempts to join the conversation. "I actually agree with …" "What?" Though she is immediately cut off, Jianna's body remains engaged in the dialogue, but she doesn't attempt to yell over her classmates to get a word in edgewise. I watch her eyes widen as the other three students in her group try to show Jianna the error in her thinking, devaluing what she obviously feels strongly about. Remembering what it feels like to have my own voice silenced around unpopular issues that are close to my heart—white privilege, gay rights, gendered teaching—in groups that look and sound like the demographic (white, middle class, educated) that I belong to, I step in. "Jianna, why don't you explain what you're trying to say? Remember, everyone's ideas are important to the discussion." As her eyes look gratefully at me, I think, "I wonder if this student, so sure in her beliefs, will participate in a study with a teacher, also sure in her beliefs, if words like gay and lesbian rights and Christianity are central to the discussion? I wonder if we'll listen to each other?"

I want to understand the world—I want to feel that understanding tangibly—in a way that is hinted at through the passion in voices of those who have long been silenced when they speak their truths. I want to touch that understanding with my life, to pass it on to my students, and for them to pass it on to their students. This is self and cultural critique, and I believe it can—eventually—change the world. Reflection and action are what Freire (1970/1993) called teachers to, and without the reflection, the action might never come. Greene (1995) wrote that "the act of critiquing requires an authentic self-reflectiveness, a thoughtfulness that informs knowing in the many contexts of everyday

life" (p. 61). I want to figure out how my own truths intertwine with others' truths, creating the complex fabric that is conversation.

I believe that understanding comes from informed dialogue. Informed dialogue requires self-understanding, self-examination, and self-reflection. For me, this understanding is best achieved through memoir, dialogue, writing, reading, and constant rethinking of experiences based on new experiences. Bruner (1986) wrote, "Society provides a tool kit of concepts and ideas and theories that permit one to get to higher ground mentally … This is, of course, the mind reflecting on itself" (p. 73). The theory in which I ground not only my teaching but my life helps me constantly renew and re/vise my classroom practice. I have had to learn how to listen to voices that often silence my own, while I simultaneously recognize that those same voices perceive me as silencing. This study has taken me on a whirlwind where Harry Potter, Paulo Freire, Christopher Columbus, my many students and I collide, interact with and challenge each other. Some of us even learned to trust each other. Greene (1995) wrote, "Neither my self nor my narrative can have … a single strand. I stand at the crossing point of too many social and cultural forces" (p. 1). Join me on this intermingling of strands as I explore the woven fabric that they have created in the classroom.

My Classroom Theories

Students walk around the room with markers, chatting as they look at their papers and occasionally—and anonymously—write words or phrases on the brown butcher paper that hangs on the walls. Scratched in my angled hand at the top of each large piece of paper are words like "Race/White Privilege" or "Sexual Orientation" or "Gender Stereotypes." These and other concepts relate to the articles that we've read for the day.

As students reconvene in their cliqued groups, my eyes scan the words they've written on the walls. Phrases such as: "I'm tired of talking about this;" "I don't feel oppressed because of my gender;" "Men SHOULD be in charge;" and "I don't believe that [homophobia] fits in the same category as racism," intermingle with "I think white people get defensive about this issue. Why?" "Don't allow torment and discrimination about [gay and lesbian] issues [in your classroom] because you're afraid to address it;" and "It is easy to fall into gender stereotypes. That doesn't mean we should."

Before I ask students to talk in their four to six person groups about why we'd read these articles in a Language Arts methods class and to explore their own responses to the texts based on their experiences in local schools, as students of privilege, or as future public school teachers, I read aloud all of the words on the butcher paper, and ask them to use those words as an initial text. "Why is it," I ask, "that you're tired of reading about issues that affect the students you talk about in your teaching journals? Why is it that I'm asking you to read about these particular issues? What don't you like about it, and why? We obviously know that I think they are important issues or I wouldn't have asked you to read about them—why might that be? How could we address the issues here in ways that don't feel so repetitive? " And, like always, I tell them that I don't expect us all to have the same opinions, and that grades are not determined by who thinks most like the teacher. The classroom begins to buzz with sometimes heated, sometimes forced, and sometimes bored conversation.

Little did I know, when I first read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970/1993) for an independent study as an undergraduate student, how many struggles, questions, teaching blunders, and student resistances this work would help me grapple

with in my search for ways to live in my classroom what I taught my students to live in their future classrooms. Intertwining with Freire's theory for me are the ideas of both bell hooks and Maxine Greene. Freire's work, developed in Brazilian communities of poverty, centers on his call for dialogic action between the oppressed and the oppressor, and hooks and Greene bring this idea into American classrooms where the privileges and oppressions of race and class mingle.

In traditional American classrooms, the "banking concept" (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 53) of education is at work, with students as receptacles for the information that the teacher is depositing, the teacher is the one in the classroom with the most power, and the students mere objects in the capitalist exchange of school. Freire wrote that "education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students" (p. 53; emphasis in original). This pedagogy is similar to what hooks (1994) termed engaged pedagogy.

Hooks (1994) wrote of engaged pedagogy that "teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students" (p. 15). As students and teachers reflect on their own privileges and oppressions in open dialogue, each learns how their subjectivities lean on, inform, change, oppress or enhance the lives of other members of the community. Likewise, Greene's (1988) questions: "Does not one have to act upon one's freedom along with others—to take the initiative, to break through some boundary? Does not one have to claim what are called 'human rights' to incarnate them in the life of community?" (p. 3) both invite and require student-teacher dialogue, shared challenging,

and shared learning. In the description of my classroom above, where students' words on the butcher paper become the text from which we begin our discussion, student resistance to challenging issues did not cut off discussion of these important topics, but neither was it silenced. It becomes a part of the classroom text to be critiqued, along with the ideas brought forth by our course readings.

If as teachers we are striving to create a community with the possibility of freedom in our classrooms, we cannot be the only classroom member working towards that freedom. This means that voices of dissent, even if that dissent could be perceived as oppressive to marginalized people, must be allowed so that it can be analyzed by students and teacher alike. In order to become an authentic community, teachers must provide spaces, share power, and anticipate resistance in order to work with students to create a classroom with a common goal. This resistance, which I have experienced both as a teacher and learner from and with the same students, can be seen as a door opening the possibilities for dialogue, rather than as a silencing of the authentically engaged educational process.

One of the most challenging parts of teaching for me has been to actively talk about my teaching agenda with my students—to not remain neutral as I'd been taught teachers are supposed to do. I've struggled to push myself to explore my own resistances, ideas, and opinions along with my students. My students know where I stand on most issues because of the spaces for equal dialogue that I work to create in my classroom. If I am asking my students to explore critically ideas and beliefs that drive them, I, too, must engage in this critical exploration. Likewise, hooks (1994) does not expect that her students reflect and act alone:

> Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. … I do not expect students to take any risks that I would not take, to share in any way that I would not share. (p. 21)

As a teacher, she expects students to engage in questions about power with her and she with them. She invites and expects critique of the classroom and larger communities in terms of voice: "Who speaks? Who listens? And why?" (p. 40). Engaged pedagogy is a continual learning process, and it is from this collaborative and dialogical learning that action stems. Education can only escape the banking method in hooks' eyes "when everyone claims knowledge as a field in which we all labor" (p. 15). In my classroom, this means that I must be willing to push my students to think in new ways, and invite them to push me.

The dichotomy identified by Freire, hooks, and Greene between teacher-as-oppressor and student-as-oppressed in traditional classrooms is blurred as issues of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and religion are introduced to the equation. Recognizing the multiple places of privilege and oppression that teacher and students bring into the class is both an initial space for dialogic conversation to begin and for the dichotomy to lose power. For, while the African American or lesbian teacher might have perceived authority over students' grades or the course content, she could be facing multiple obstacles from racist or homophobic administration, parents or students who strip that power both inside and outside of the classroom. Likewise, the whiteness of poor white students might blind teachers to the ways in which the classroom is inaccessible to them. Open dialogue among teachers and students about these inconsistencies in privilege or

oppression and how they present themselves in schools could help to equalize classroom power.

This dialogue is necessary because “the teacher’s thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students’ thinking” (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 58). In order to create a liberatory classroom, the teacher must work to establish spaces for authentic dialogue where all voices are valued. Freire (1998) wrote that teachers must “create the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge” (p. 30). There must be a recognition that each participant in the dialogue brings value, new knowledge, and expertise to the collaborative learning effort.

Part of the teacher’s purpose is the facilitation of constructive dialogue and learning. The social and historical construction of the roles of teachers and students reproduces the banking method over and over by naming the teacher as the expert, placing her at the front of the room, depositing information to the receptacle students who will regurgitate the information when a withdrawal is required on a standardized test or elsewhere. To break this pattern, the teacher must build, through dialogue, trusting relationships with students in which they find that, rather than mere objects, they, like the teacher, are the subjects of their own educational process. Freire (1998) clarified,

> It is essential therefore, from the very beginning of the process, that the following principle be clear: namely, that although the teachers or the students are not the same, the person in charge of education is being formed or re-formed as he/she teaches, and the person who is being taught forms him/herself in this process. … There is, in fact, no teaching without learning. One requires the other. …

> Whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching, and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning. (pp. 30-31)

In my classroom of late, that has meant using student words and work to help us think about how oppressive and liberatory language affect both those with privilege and those on the margins.

Freire's words have been helpful to me in reconceptualizing the possible relationships between knower and learner. It is with this reconceptualization of teacher and student, not in an oppressor-oppressed relationship, but in a both-and relationship of constantly learning and teaching that is the basis for the kind of teaching/learning environment that I strive to establish with my students in our classroom.

Classroom Practice—Guided by Theory

During my graduate studies, I have taught two undergraduate classes a year—Children's Literature in the fall, and a writing methods course in the spring. At our university, Elementary Education undergraduate students move through the program with the same cohort of students for several semesters, and each year I have looped with the same cohort through both the fall and spring semesters. Each semester is cut into three one month segments—the first "before the field" month, the second "in the field" month, and the final "post-field" month. During their time in the field, students are supposed to connect the theory and ideas that they are learning at the university with actual K-5 teaching practice. Upon returning from the field, the students' experiences often shape our classroom discussion. The structure of continuity—teaching students for two full semesters in a row—has given my students and me the opportunity for leisurely

introduction. Our knowledge of each other's expectations, work styles, and mannerisms is important as we will work closely together for an entire academic year.

This 10-month relationship also serves my own teaching agenda of looking at the Language Arts through a critically multicultural lens (McLaren, 1998). Students are asked to examine, some for the first time, issues of privilege and oppression, consider the historical experiences of marginalized people, and think about their responsibilities as future teachers around these issues using literature and writing experiences as the medium for thought. I place a decided emphasis on social justice education, which is embraced by some students, resisted by many, and outright rejected by others. Because we are together for two semesters, students can see the difference between a "diversity day" and teacher who uses a multicultural lens to inform teaching and learning.

In the Fall—Children's Literature Through a Multicultural Lens

A goal for my children's literature classes that I began identifying on the first day of fall semester with my students was that we begin to understand the ideologies from which we read literature, and in turn, from which we read our students. I explained to my students that I wanted us to begin to identify the ideologies present in the texts we read, and to understand how those ideologies have shaped our own learning and thinking, and how they would shape who we were and are as teachers. As Perry Nodelman (1996) explained, literary texts are "expressions of a culture and a significant way of embedding readers in those values and assumptions" (p. 69). And present in every text is the ideology of the author whose "perspectives [are] shaped and conditioned by their times" (Cai, 1997, p. 204). My understanding of the term ideology is taken from Nodelman

(1996) who defined it as “the body of ideas that controls how we view the world and understand our place within it” (p. 65).

“Even though there is considerable disagreement among ... theorists about the precise social and ideological function of the schools, most of them agree that educational institutions are active agents of cultural and economic reproduction” (Taxel, 1981, p. 207). The literature that teachers bring into their classrooms usually reflects the values held by the teacher, and typically held by the larger culture. “The richness of the readings in the classroom [appear] to be influenced heavily by the kinds of readings the teacher values” (Hade, 1997, p. 238). These readings, this literature, and how it is privileged in the classroom help to define the acceptable knowledge in that classroom. Taxel (1981) wrote,

> School knowledge is seen as the knowledge, culture, and tradition of specific cultural groups. Those groups or social classes which have historically been able to define *their* knowledge as *the* knowledge have been the dominant groups in society, while those unable to do so have tended to lack power and influence in society. This relation between culture and power—between knowledge and control—is readily apparent one recognizes that the well documented minimization, distortion, and outright exclusion of women, blacks, and other racial and ethnic minorities in curricular materials is both a reflection and a cause of the relative powerlessness of these groups in the larger society. Thus, an important point to recognize is that a group’s ability to confer cultural legitimacy to its knowledge is intimately related to its power in the larger political and economical arena. (p. 208; emphasis in original)

This school knowledge is a selective tradition defined as "an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification" (Williams in Taxel, 1981, p. 208). These issues of ideology and availability in children's literature "come together to make fewer books, and fewer kinds of books, available to children. The books that remain tend to be the ones that are likely to sell widely to people with mainstream tastes and values. … The scope of what [kids] get to choose from … tends to encourage conformity to the most popular ideas about what it means to be human" (Nodelman, 1996, p. 96).

In my pursuit of engaged pedagogy with my students, I have been aided by the fact that I will teach them for two semesters. In our pursuit of figuring out "what it means to be human" (Nodelman, 1996, p. 96), we seemed to feel safer with each other given our extended time together. We were able to enter controversial conversations gently—beginning first with the fantastical *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (Rowling, date), turning to more recent and realistic issues such as racially charged read alouds such as *The Friendship* (Taylor, 1987), examining our own indoctrinated learning around Christopher Columbus with articles by Yolen (1992b) and Ingberger (1992)**,** as well as books like *Morning Girl* (Dorris, 1992) and *Encounter* (Yolen, 1992a), and rounding out our semester with books with gay or lesbian themes (Woodson, 1997; Garden, 2000; Howe, 2001). Our discussions were mediated by small literature circles (Daniels, 2002) which flowed into whole class discussions around guiding questions that I listed on the board at the beginning of each class session. Students brought their responses to texts, either written reflections or responses in a more creative format to guide their

discussions. Along with the children's literature required for each session, there were often a group of readings that we called "professional readings" which students were expected to respond to in a quick one page reaction paper. The themes from these often politically charged readings occasionally weaved in and out of the discussions of the literature, or were the impetus for the guiding questions that I listed on the board.

In the spring—Culturally Relevant Teaching Through the Language Arts

Spring semester I taught "Language and Literacy in Elementary Schools." I introduced students to the concept of Writer's Workshop (Calkins, 1994, Fletcher, 1993, Harwayne, 2001, Fletcher and Portupuli, 2001), and we discussed multiple concepts of the meaning of literacy. Because the students in these classes had me as their teacher already for a semester of Children's Literature, they had encountered my requirement that they read about and discuss groups of marginalized people. Much of this language and literacy class was taught as a writing workshop where students became a part of a community of writers, engaging in regular personal and academic writing, and establishing a strong tie between what they were reading about teaching writing to children and what they were experiencing as writers.

The theories that have guided my understanding and methods of teaching writing workshop stem mostly from Calkins (1994) and Fletcher (1993). In particular, Calkins' ideas about writing parallel Greene's (1995) requirement that teachers and students look closely at themselves in order to establish classrooms where equality and democracy matter. Calkins (1994) said that "writing matters the most when it is personal … and when it is interpersonal" (p. 14) and that "writers need to be heard" (p. 15). Looking closely at practice, Greene (1988) drew a picture of what it might mean to imagine the

boundaries of classrooms as more fluid. “We might think of freedom as an opening of spaces as well as perspectives, with everything depending on the actions we undertake in the course of our quest, the *praxis* we learn to devise” (p. 5; emphasis in original). Greene’s (1995) assessment of unimaginative banking education is that it ignores students at the heart of the classroom. Teachers must enter classrooms with new eyes, focused on learning the needs of their particular community. In a classroom where there is a community of writers—established through a writer’s workshop—where students and teachers are, through writing, imagining and creating spaces where multiple ideas and experiences are shared and valued, there becomes the possibility for a *critically* engaged community where students and teachers evaluate and discuss multiple ways of experiencing the world. As Greene (1995) wrote:

> To ask for intensified realization is to see that each person’s reality must be understood to be interpreted experience—and that mode of interpretation depends on his or her situation and location in the world. It depends as well on the number of vantage points a person is able or enabled to take—the number of perspectives that will disclose multiple aspects of a contingent (not a self-existent) world. (p. 19)

In my own writing classroom, I’ve used multiple methods within the context of writer’s workshop to help my students and I see multiple contexts and multiple experiences. One is through the Cultural Memoirs assignment (Allen & Labbo, 2001) in which students explore how their different cultural identities shape how they see the world, read texts, understand each other and themselves, and, culminating with, how they will approach their students. To prepare for this assignment each spring semester, I

invited my students to participate in a “Power Walk” with me. We all stood on one side of the room, and I read statements such as, “walk if you’ve ever lived outside of Georgia” or “walk if you or your family has ever been on food stamps” or “walk if you consider yourself a reader.”. When debriefing the experience afterwards, students often described inner turmoil. As they contemplated for a few seconds the “go” or “stay” of walking, they felt the desire to explain. When I read, “walk if both of your parents have college degrees” for example, I remember a student saying, “I wanted to explain that Vietnam happened, that there were other circumstances. I wanted to explain away the shame that I felt as soon as I saw my classmates looking at me.” This is the smaller picture of education—where the individual experience is exposed, the one that “screens out the faces and gestures of individuals, of actual living persons” (Greene, 1995, p. 11). These activities and assignments in a writing context often gave voice to parts of students’ lives that had been silenced in traditional schooling, but also helped them to see where more marginalized students in their future classrooms might be silenced.

Our writing time afforded us the opportunity to explore one small, perhaps even insignificant idea about our lives, and imagine it as it might be imagined by others. I hoped that my students understood the power that this could have in their own lives, as well as in the lives of their students—that writing without constraints can help to, in Greene’s (1995) words, release the imagination: “It takes imagination to break with ordinary classifications and come in touch with actual young people in their variously lived situations. It takes imagination on the part of the young people to perceive openings through which they can move” (p. 14).

I tried to teach my students (and in turn, glean greater understanding of my own teaching, living and activist self) that if we write the everydayness of our lives as Calkins (1994) and Fletcher (1993) suggest, we can begin to see the need for change, and we can begin to understand how who we are is shaped by past norms, by how our own norms are silenced or silencing, and how writing provides us an opportunity to imagine things differently. Greene (1995) wrote that "the act of critiquing requires an authentic self-reflectiveness, a thoughtfulness that informs knowing in the many contexts of everyday life" (p. 61). In order to change our lives, to live better lives, to revise our living, we have to think about and critique the most normed aspects of ourselves. We have to put ourselves on paper, and reread our lives in order to better understand them. I don't think that we can create life communities and certainly not classroom communities if we don't dare to learn who we need to be within those communities. It is not until we tell our own stories to ourselves that we can share our stories in a "context of solidarity" (Greene, 1995, p. 62) with would be community members. "People must become aware of the ways they construct their realities as they live together" (65).

Theory and Practice—How Well Did They Mix?

The lofty goals of my syllabus and lesson planning didn't always result in the kind of engaged dialogue that I hoped it would. Semester by semester, I tweaked, pulled, revised and researched both my syllabus and myself as a teacher. Each cohort of students, unique in their interactions with me, the course, the texts and each other, profoundly influenced my teaching of the subsequent cohorts. When the time came to begin year four of teaching—and to begin the study that I will discuss in the following chapters—course

evaluations, in-class feedback, letters from students, and an initial study informed not only my stance in the class, but my expectations of students and of myself.

Beginnings: Stepping Into the Waters

My first year in graduate school, I entered my teaching role fresh from the elementary school classroom. As a 25 year old first time teacher of college students, I was unsure, inexperienced and apprehensive. I followed the syllabus and timeline set by previous instructors of the courses that I taught, and the result was a series of trial and error mistakes and successes around particular assignments. I knew that I wanted to be intentional about teaching from a critical and political standpoint, and that I wanted to enact with my students the democratic education that we talked about in our discussions of multicultural children's literature in the fall and culturally relevant teaching of language arts in the spring. However, I wanted to do this without revealing too much about myself. So, while I kept the previously used readings about race and education on the syllabus, I failed to include any texts that could point a finger at my own marginalization—there was no book with gay or lesbian characters or text dealing with how best to meet the needs of students with same-gender parents or who might eventually come out as GLBT themselves. I was fearful that if students, many who openly resisted Harry Potter (one even drawing links between the wizardry in this fantasy book with the horrific murders at Columbine High School a few years before), desired prayer in schools, and seemed hesitant to challenge the comfortable status quo, "discovered" my sexual orientation, any chance that we had of discussing challenging issues would be squashed.

By the spring semester and the Language Arts methods class, I felt that I'd developed enough of a rapport with my students to share more of myself with them. I chose to complete the Cultural Memoir assignment (Allen & Labbo, 2001) with the class, and in my memoir, included pictures of and writing about my wedding to my female partner. For my wedding-enamored female students, the pictures with flowers and cake and dresses seemed the opening to conversation. Their own memoirs were filled with glowing writing about their loving families and close knit small towns, and failed to address the social and political contexts that had shaped them as I'd hoped (see Allen & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2004 for further explanation). But, while the deeper conversations and understandings of the intersections of race, class, gender and education failed to occur within the context of this particular assignment, the comfort level that was created between my female students and me carried us into sometimes challenging articles that asked them to look closely at issues of race, class, and gender. Resistance to these topics was surely a part of class discussion, but seemed masked by our easy conversation. I felt confident that, although I'd not met my goals of rigorous critique by students of status quo educational practices, I had opened the door to future thinking. I felt like I had listened to my students, and met them where they were. Even if we'd not engaged completely in a *critically* democratic classroom, we had enacted democratic education. My one male student was not so sure.

Anthony (his and all other names are pseudonyms), a student who often challenged my patience through his consistently late arrivals to class, his half completed assignments, and his frequent failure to read the assigned texts for class, informed me in a letter at the end of our two semesters together that I'd not lived up to my claim that I

wanted to listen to the needs of all of my students (Hermann-Wilmarth, 2002). He'd skipped the day that our Cultural Memoirs were due, so he wasn't aware that I am a lesbian. His challenge to me in class to discuss the relationship that I had with my husband made him uncomfortable (particularly when I informed him that I didn't have a husband because I am, indeed, a lesbian), and his noting of my inconsistencies—expecting students to fully reveal themselves and challenge long-held ideas while I kept myself to myself—forced me to reevaluate my stance as both a teacher and a graduate student. How could I ask my students to engage fully, to take risks, to think about their cultural and political positionalities if, indeed, I was not willing to do that with them? I was ignoring hooks' (1994) modeling of engaged teaching: "I do not expect students to take any risks that I would not take, to share in any way that I would not share" (p. 21). Writing about Anthony immediately after our class ended and after I received his emailed letter about my non-democratic teaching really helped me to understand how I had not been the teacher or student that I claimed to be. I was ready to change.

Lessons Realized and Enacted

I began to realize the lessons of Anthony the summer after our two semesters together ended. Leaving my role as "instructor" felt freeing as I entered the classroom, ready to experience the thrill of new ideas and the joys of graduate studies. I felt so comfortable in that classroom that summer. I knew this room—it was where I taught. I understood the ways that groups could pull together and not be noticed by the other students in the vastness of the "U" shaped tables—how long rows of students didn't have to see each other's faces. I had privilege in that class, "Culturally Diverse Children's Literature" : I was the only doctoral student; the professor and I knew of each other;

much of the theory that was new to many of the other students was old hat to me; I taught children's literature using some of the books that Janie, our teacher, had included on her syllabus. I spoke with confidence in that classroom. My voice was often heard—probably because I used it too much, but mostly because I was really comfortable with the discourse of a graduate level class.

Because my morning class met in the same room, I was already seated when Sylvia entered that morning. Sylvia placed herself right in front, on the same row as me, directly under the teacher's nose.

The first activity assigned in our three hour class was to answer some questions on paper about who we are—claim our identities, reveal our histories, think about our biases. Fresh from my Anthony writing experience, I decided to share when the instructor asked if anyone would like to. I talked about my position as both a lesbian and an elementary school teacher—the fears of losing my job based on an identity that is natural and real to me—and how it feels to have family members deny you the rights that they have. This was a huge risk for me on the very first day of class, but, I felt, really important—particularly keeping in mind that I hoped that my next group of students would enrich my classes with their truths. Silvia shared how her Christianity guided her parenting, and how she couldn't believe that books like Harry Potter were making it into school libraries. In fact, on the first day, she also took a risk in a room full of literature loving teachers, and said, "If we have to read Harry Potter I'm skipping that day." I remember thinking, "Hmm. This might be an interesting three weeks."

Our class readings were divided by culture—we spent several days on African-American literature, for example, and Latino literature. We read challenging books like

Mildred Taylor's (1987) *The Friendship*, and our discussions were interspersed with ideas from the scholarly and theoretical articles that we'd read, as well as with personal experiences as teachers, readers, and people who are generally struggling to be the kinds of teachers who invite students marginalized by culture into comfortable places in our classrooms.

Then, it happened. It was about half way through the semester. I don't remember the texts that we were discussing, or the culture that was in the spotlight, but during a whole group discussion of classrooms, literature and voice, Silvia spoke. Because of our self-selected seating arrangement, she couldn't see my face, but our teacher could, as could about half of the 30 students in the class. "I would treat the child of gay parents just like I would treat a child whose father was in jail for drugs or whatever. With sensitivity." I think my eyes bugged out. I know that the word "nice" sarcastically slid from my lips. The friend sitting to my left broke her pencil between her shocked fingers. Our instructor challenged her on her words as she looked cautiously at me, a person who at the same time was her student, colleague, and friend. Silvia preached to the class about the evils of homosexuality for a good ten minutes as two brave students along with the professor, struggling to maintain a sense of control, tried to help her see the bigotry in her words, and how harmful this way of thinking could potentially be to her students.

I, on the other hand, sat stunned. I heard some of the things that Silvia said like, "I've counted, and four times in this class have people said that living that way is OK, and it should be fine for me to say that it isn't." "Four times?" I thought. "What does she think that *everyday* is like for me? How does she think it feels to hear law after law passed to deny me the same rights that she has, and person after person be hunted down

by someone and beat up because they are gay, or slur after slur be thrown at students, unchallenged by those teachers who are supposed to be their advocates?" When Janie asked if she could see the similarities between how Silvia had previously described the racism that she felt and that is constantly directed at her as a Latina woman and the words that she was directing at an entire group of people, Silvia replied, "There is no similarity." As I both listened and tried not to hear, I kept thinking, "Where am I going to send my future children to school? How will I know if their teachers harbor an inward (or not so inward) hatred of them because of the culture to which they will belong?" It was a horrible 15 minutes.

Finally, our teacher said that we needed to take a break. I fled the room and went to my office across the hall. Janie followed me. She asked me if I was alright, and I asked if she was kidding. I also said that I had heard students grumbling that Silvia shouldn't have been challenged the way that she was, and that the approach that the other two students and she had taken of questioning her so intently wasn't acceptable. I asked my teacher and friend if she thought that the silent students in the class were thinking, "Thank God Silvia has finally said what I was thinking!" I was not okay. I wanted to leave. I had just sat in a classroom where someone, using religion as a rationalization, had freely spoken reasons to hate me. I was not okay.

The class' conversation about this so-called issue—and my reality—continued for two days, culminating with Silvia asking me to hug her and tell her that she and I would just have to agree to disagree. I said, "No" and walked away. She didn't come the day we talked about gay and lesbian literature. Later she said, "I don't hate homosexuals, but I don't see why I would have to read this," followed by, "if you put garbage in, you get

garbage out"—she completely missed the contradiction in her words. While I think that the conversations opened new ways of thinking for many class members, Silvia's mind was so closed that she left the class with the same hatred that she entered with. I wonder if she even remembers?

I do. Janie and I talked about the difficulties of valuing the voice and experience of every student, even if a student is causing such pain to her colleagues. As a teacher with a student like Silvia, how would I respond? As Greene (1995) wrote, "It seems clear that the more continuous and authentic personal encounters can be, the less likely will it be that categorizing and distancing take place" (p. 155). In a way, it was nice to hear her hatred so that it could be countered. Silvia and my other colleagues in the class were able to see how words and attitudes can affect a student who does not remain silent. What kinds of responses, however, would have been appropriate for me—as a lesbian—had I been the teacher in that class? I know that students often silence themselves in classrooms where their ideology differs from the professor's. When this happens, growth around issues is stymied.

I continued to struggle in other graduate classes with students whose legalistic approach to religion, as Bruce Bawer (1997) wrote, caused them to accept the idea that they should "view their fellow Americans not as having been 'created equal,' as the Declaration of Independence would have it" and that there is no need to "respect those most different from themselves but to regard them as the enemy, to resist their influence, and to seek to restrict their rights" (p. 10). Religion was a painful topic for me in those classes—that summer and beyond. As that summer ended and the fall semester of 2001 began, my life as a deeply spiritual person whose very being was openly labeled by Jerry

Falwell (2001) in his post-September 11 comments as unholy and dangerous by religious leaders and followers who believe as Silvia does. This provided me with an example of how certain religious dogma can inspire the kind of hatred that ended the lives of Matthew Shepard, a young gay man who was lynched in Wyoming and Brandon Teena, a transgendered woman who was mistreated by police before she was gang raped and murdered.

This balance between silencing and silenced, student and teacher, facilitator of learning and advocate for social justice is one that I believe I will always struggle with. Would an outright racist statement go unchallenged by me as a teacher? Probably not. Why, then, should a homophobic one be ignored? These are questions I pondered. Bruner (1986) wrote, “Silence is interpretable, has a meaning” (p. 84). If I don’t challenge students on homophobia, I am encouraging it. If I am out as a lesbian to my students will they refuse to speak honestly in class, therefore allowing their silences, and their ideological truths about issues of homophobia (and racism and sexism) to go unchallenged? How will this affect my teaching? Our classroom dialogue?

Bruner (1986) wrote that “language can never be neutral, … it imposes a point of view not only about the world to which it refers but toward the use of mind in respect of this world” (p. 121). I want to help my students understand that each of us comes with a language and ideology that, no matter how accepted it is in the larger culture, is not neutral—it is loaded, and each of us must be willing to challenge that ideology, that language. I entered my second year of undergraduate teaching focused on issues of cultural diversity—and not just safer diversities, but those often left out of the conversation. The pain that I felt in class that day will never leave me. My fears for

students struggling with their own sexuality issues, or who love their gay parents, but whose society doesn't, were made very real that day. I began to teach with those fears in mind.

Year 2: Initial Risks

I began the fall semester Children's Literature class full of the inspiration from my summer writing about Anthony. I initiated a 10-minute Monday morning ritual with this cohort that entailed bringing a "cultural artifact." We discussed in small groups of five how that artifact represented a part of us and how the culture that it represents is portrayed in public school and in children's literature. This beginning of class time was intended to provide a bridge to our commonalities and diversities. My cultural artifact—my wedding invitation—represented my class privilege, my familial ties, and my lesbian identity. I was met with surprise and interest upon sharing this with my students (Hermann-Wilmarth, 2003). This ritual, I believe, aided our class' conversations around issues of diversity, as we were all aware of significant parts of each others' lives from the beginning of our time together. Also bringing us closer together were the horrifying events of September 11, 2001. Sharing a crisis, our tears, our anger, our fear made us more human to each other. These students actively engaged in discussions of race, gender and class in children's literature. Our conversations around a book with gay or lesbian characters were lively and engaged. While students did not always agree with me or feel comfortable with the idea of bringing the literature into their future classrooms, they were willing to talk about the text without shutting down merely because of the topic. This dynamic was a shift from the Year One cohort as the deeper conversations were present, alive, and engaged where before they were static if they even occurred at all.

Feeling confident from the positive response to risky literature that I received from my students in the fall and from the rapport that we'd created through our comfortable conversations both before class about the details of our lives and during class about our responses to literature, I included articles from such publications as *Rethinking Schools* towards the end of the spring semester Language and Literacy syllabus. We read them after the students had read Lucy Calkins' (1994) *The Art of Teaching Writing*, Ralph Fletcher's (1993) *What a Writer Needs*, and returned from a month-long field experience in an elementary school classroom. By the time the students returned from their classrooms, they were already in self-selected email groups of four to five students created to discuss course readings and issues or questions that arose in their field experiences. I was ready to dive with them into the articles that address issues of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.

Each "issue" only occupied one day on the syllabus, and I was very clear (or so I thought) with my students that we were reading these articles so that they would be better prepared to respond with respect and compassion to the personal writings of their future students. I tried to tell my students that knowing and learning about different people would be central to developing a trusting classroom environment where their students would share, through writing, their lives and experiences in the ways that the students in Calkins' and Fletcher's books did.

Because I received a copy of every group email sent to discuss these articles, I thought I was informed about the students' responses to the various issues. I repeatedly told my students that I would not grade them on their opinions, and that I merely expected them to engage in dialogue about these sometimes challenging topics. I would

use the responses to group students for in-class discussions, prepare guiding questions for the small groups to address, or to determine my read aloud for the next class meeting. Our class schedule began with a read-aloud (sometimes children's literature and sometimes selections from other teacher research such as bits from Karen Hankins' [2003] *Teaching through the Storm*) and response, followed by small group discussions of readings with me moving in and out of groups both listening and joining in with comments or to answer and ask questions, and ending with a whole-class discussion of the issues raised. Sometimes, students remained with their email groups to continue the discussions that began on-line, but occasionally, I created small-groups based on information I gleaned from the email responses. For example, when one white student's response to an article about race was particularly offensive—she wrote that she felt nervous about getting on airplanes with anyone with non-white skin—I recreated groups so that the Korean member of her email group would not be put in an awkward position, and so that I could put the white student in a group with other white students who might challenge her thinking.

By the end of the semester, I could feel the resistance that my students had, not only to the articles that we were reading, but to me as their teacher. I wondered if it was a case of Spring Fever, a general weariness with having to discuss such challenging issues, or a mixture of the two. When I received my anonymous course evaluations later in the summer, I realized how, despite my intentions to create spaces for students to discuss challenging but important issues, I had not made clear my purposes for including the readings that I had. The anger and frustration that my students felt with the requirement to discuss sensitive issues reads clearly from these evaluations:

> [We had to read] articles that had nothing to do with teaching writing, the whole focus of the course. The articles we read had to do with how white people are evil and all are racist, rich people suck, homosexualism (*sic*) should be taught in the classroom, and how our country was "founded" by an awful, villainous man.
>
> Had I been in a culture class focusing on gender, gay and lesbian, and racial issues, these articles would have served a purpose.
>
> I cannot see how the articles we were assigned had any relation to children's writing. I feel like it was very much the teacher's agenda to push all of this information on us.
>
> I feel the articles were not really necessary for the course, but were more along Jill's crusade for multiculturalism in the classroom.

Other students acknowledged correctly that I have a teaching agenda, but never mention the agenda that we often discussed in class of those who push for standardized writing tests, and how that agenda is often harmful to already marginalized students. I recognize now that, as one student wrote in their evaluation, no matter how much I want my students to be open and honest, my position as teacher is threatening.

> We didn't really share our true views on the issues because we copied every one to Jill. While I'm comfortable sharing my views with my email buddies, I don't feel so comfortable with Jill because I know she holds much different views from

> myself. In her support, she said that we weren't graded on our opinions and that we could say whatever we wanted. … No matter what anyone says, we write and respond for (and to) the teacher. If the teacher believes one thing, I'm much more likely to temper my response to more closely match hers.

I believe that all education courses should be taught through a multicultural lens, so those students who complained that my course is a class "that is not devoted to multicultural or social issues," so the discussions were "pointless," or that "This was a Teaching of Writing Class and not one to teach us about diversity" merely pushed me to continue asking future students to discuss race, class, gender and sexual orientation and how these issues are played out in schools and society. However, I was quite concerned that so many students did not see the connection between the articles and the teaching of language arts. While a very few students responded that I had helped them to make the connection, "Jill's major strength was in conveying importance of all the issues and topics we talked about," to most students it seemed that I was wasting their time. I wanted to figure out a way to both discuss these important issues *and* show students how they would be relevant to their future teaching lives.

Year 3: A Test Study

As I tried to negotiate these complex and sometimes controversial issues in my classroom, I was working on the proposal for this study. I entered this third year of undergraduate teaching discouraged but determined after the attacks my students had issued in their course evaluations. I wanted to continue to teach from a critical place, but was reminded by a professor and mentor, Bob Fecho, that I could only meet students where they were. Pushing students to confront issues and engage in discussions about

topics that for years had been silenced both in their personal lives and institutionally before they were ready would result in the closed ear resistance that characterized the end of Year Two. I searched for places to begin.

I taught the Children's Literature class in very much the same way that I had in the previous year with one exception: I pushed myself, on our first day together in the fall, to come out as a lesbian during a discussion of how our subjectivities affect our reading of texts. That course was characterized by energetically engaged small group literature circles around high quality children's literature. My students rolled their eyes in "OK, I'll play along with this" protest, but participated whole heartedly in discussions of sexism, racism, and representation in the books that we read for class. Our perspectives often clashed, but I believe that we had a sense of trust in each other, evidenced by our open challenging of each other on issues that did or did not belong in the classroom, ideas about teaching, and rigorous, rather than silent, classroom discussions. I repeated often that students weren't graded on their opinions, but their critique of why they held those opinions, and how those opinions informed their reading of the literature. The frustration that I often felt at their resistance was tempered by their eventual recognition that the readings and discussions were indeed valuable to their understanding of culturally relevant teaching.

This reluctant admission about issues of race and gender was not so forthcoming from as many students when it came to the issue of homosexuality. There was some vocalized grumbling to the requirement that they read one of three books with gay or lesbian characters (Garden's [2000] *Holly's Secret*, Howe's [2001] *The Misfits*, or Woodson's [1997] *The House You Pass on the Way*), and members of some discussion

groups reported the rampant homophobia running through their classmates' critiques. When asked for a quick written reflection on that particular class session, students who regularly vocalized both their religious beliefs and their annoyance with my focus on racism and sexism gave little response. "It was fine." "I don't see the necessity of reading this kind of literature." Other students reported that they'd never been asked to think about issues of homophobia and heterosexism before, and thanked me for opening the discussion.

The anonymous course evaluations suggested that the discomfort students voiced in class would carry over to their teaching—"Jill shouldn't have made us talk about homosexuality. It made everyone uncomfortable, and we wouldn't talk about it in elementary school anyway." As they had in the past, evaluations and resistance like this had encouraged me to continue conversations with my students about issues of homosexuality that might arise in their future public school classrooms. If my classroom was the first time my students had been required to discuss homosexuality, I couldn't expect them to embrace it fully. Their discomfort, however, continued to make it apparent that these conversations were important to their preservice teacher education. This discomfort certainly wasn't going to cause me to erase the relevant texts from the syllabus in order to improve my evaluations, but instead helped me to realize that the conversation about gay and lesbian issues in the classroom had to start somewhere, and I was happy to initiate it. More important than glowing comments, in my view, is some discomfort that could lead to eventual change.

When we returned to class in the spring, I came armed with a research agenda. As a feminist teacher educator, I wanted to learn how to respect the religious beliefs of my

students, as I taught my students how to respect the diversity of familial and sexual identities of their future students. Because religious identities and beliefs continually transact with our understandings of our own and others' cultural identities, understanding how to value sometimes seemingly oppositional viewpoints is important for teacher educators and preservice teachers alike. I was curious how our class readings and discussions around issues of homophobia and heterosexism would shift or create new understandings about the importance of these issues in teaching and teacher education.

I hoped to talk with my students who regularly quoted Biblical text in their writing and talking about how their constructions of teacher and religious identities intersect with each other, and then with issues of homosexuality that might come up in their future classrooms. I invited, during the second week of class, participation in my study. I was, admittedly, quite nervous as I explained the premise of my research. As I looked at the class, I wondered who would respond. The front and back tables filled every class with students who concluded every email to me with a Bible verse, and who were usually silent during whole group discussions around social justice issues. These students furiously scribbled in their notes during my plea for participants. The students at the other back table nodded at me as I explained my research topic—lively debate during class and comfortable conversations before and after characterized my relationship with this group. They were not afraid to tell me how they felt—especially if they thought I'd disagree. To my right was an impenetrable clique of students whose comfortable confidence during every class discussion, perfectly styled hair, expensive clothing and accessories, and ability to change the flow of whole group exchanges pointed to the power they had in this class. Their knowledge of how schools, classrooms and teachers

work came from years of parents with power on school boards and PTAs. Finally, at the middle table sat a group of students whose small group discussions were always quietly intense, and whose individual writing was filled with questioning of their own privileges, frustration with status quo teaching, and questions to me about how, when, and in what ways they could change long-held social ideas about teaching. This vigor within the confines of their group rarely made it into whole group discussion. Regardless of clique, most students in this class had, at some point, written or talked about the importance of church in their lives.

As I finished explaining my study, and asked that anyone interested let me know after class, one student asked how many people I needed.

"Three."

"And, will you be graded on this project?" another student asked.

When I responded in the affirmative, the students at the first two tables I described—students usually silent during discussions of social justice, whose writing reflects their religious resistance to readings about gay and lesbian issues, and the students with whom I was most interested in speaking—remained silent. But, immediately all other students said that they wanted to help me in any way that they could. They volunteered to pass around a sign up sheet so that I would be able to pick any three students I wanted. I was stunned by this positive response from most of my students, but frustrated that those students whose religious beliefs most differed from mine and from whom I felt I could learn the most did not offer their participation.

As I mulled over the "why" of silence in my classroom, I thought about the text that I create as an out lesbian teacher. Even as I have explicitly pushed myself into the

stated position of “lesbian” in my classroom, I have found that this text, created as my identity intersects with the course readings and my students’ beliefs, experiences, and multiple identities, has sometimes silenced students, sometimes resulted in strong verbal, written, or future classroom resistance from those silenced students, and sometimes enhanced dialogue, understanding, and connections with other students. Why did those same, usually silent-around-issues-of-homophobia students, look away when I asked for participants? There could be multiple reasons for this—lack of time, worry about the effect of talking with a lesbian about one’s own homophobia when that lesbian is your teacher, lack of desire to discuss an issue that they don’t believe should be discussed. I wondered if those same students would have offered to participate in a similar study, conducted by a teacher with the same commitment to social justice teaching who happened to be heterosexual or who was not explicit one way or another about her sexuality.

The response of my silently resisting students to my request for interview participants sent me into a quandary around how I claim and perform my lesbian identity in my classroom. I explicitly labeled my lesbian self as a position from which I read and think on the first day of class with this cohort of students. Reflection made me wonder if this explicit outing of my lesbian identity merely reifies the function of the closet in gay and lesbian oppression. Judith Butler (1996) wrote,

> For it is a production, usually in response to a request, to come out or write in the name of an identity which, once produced, sometimes functions as a politically efficacious phantasm. … [I]dentity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures

> or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression. (p. 371)

Likewise, Honeychurch (2000) wrote that "in order to police and enforce its own predications, the dominant culture has fabricated the closet—a unique and ugly place in which to hold and hide homosexuals—or to insist that homosexuals hold and hide themselves" (p. 177). By the act of naming my lesbian identity in my classroom, while a heterosexual teacher in my position or student in my class does not, because of our heterosexist culture, have the same need to profess her heterosexuality, am I saying that the closet is a necessary place? That, in order to "be" a lesbian teacher in my classroom, I have to come out of it? I know that, even if I don't come out to my students, I am still their lesbian teacher.

Butler (1996) asked, "What remains permanently concealed by the very linguistic act that offers up the promise of a transparent revelation of sexuality?" (p. 373). What if, by the act of coming out, I was essentializing, for my students, the category of lesbian? Was I telling them, "This is what a lesbian is, does, says, looks like"? Instead, could I have taught and talked and questioned and assigned and lead discussion in the same way, *in my lesbian body*, giving voice to my lesbian self, without uttering the words, "I am a lesbian"? By coming out, did I expect, and indeed confirm, my students' homophobia, because they have another essentialized concept of "what a lesbian is/looks like/talks like" that I don't fit into? Did that explicit act implicitly say, "I understand your heterosexism, and I'm going to play along with it by telling you that, although you assume I'm heterosexual, I'm not"? Could I live in and teach from an identity category without verbally naming it?

More Lessons From My Students

I entered the interviews with my three participants with questions that I hoped would lead to insight into my initial questions about how our readings about gay and lesbian issues in children's literature and language arts helped them to think about their future teaching. But, I found that the process of obtaining participants had sent me into a deeper quandary. Was my verbally claimed lesbian identity not only preventing me from obtaining the kinds of participants that I desired for my study, but more importantly, preventing dialogue around issues of homophobia that I think are so important? I had a friend interview me with my questions, and even my own answers revealed that I was, regardless of past insight into the importance of teaching from a non-closeted position, wondering about how my position as lesbian teacher was affecting my position as teacher working for social justice. I said:

> As I think about [teaching] a new group of students who don't know me, I wonder if those conversations around the tables of my now silent students would be as silent if I was not out? I think that there would be more discussion. I don't know. That is my quandary right now. Would there be more discussion if I was closeted? Or, if I just wasn't as out. I mean, I'm not going to lie to anybody. But if I just wasn't as out, I wonder if these conversations would be different, if my more resistant students would be more willing to talk about homophobia.

When I took my questions to my participants, the discussions that began revealed that my students could provide important insight into my quandary. Our interviews turned into conversations guided by our own understandings of the class. Although I initially set these discussions up as interviews, my students and I wandered through the

preset questions into conversational realms that I could not have previously imagined. We navigated around our different understandings of the importance of anti-homophobic teaching, to try to understand how our religious and spiritual beliefs inform that understanding. These navigations felt very conversational, and the transcripts of these conversations show how central the students' questions are to our shared understandings. At one point, a participant, Veronica, said,

> I feel like, does that offend you when we talk about things? Like I know that my grade would never be affected by what I say, and I know that I can really trust you to try to understand where I'm coming from, but like, I know that this is so personal to you. It's like, I don't know if when I say, "I don't know how I feel about homosexuality." I feel like that would offend me so much if I were in your shoes. I just wonder.

This led to an extended conversation about how we are both learning to be better teachers to students who look differently or believe differently or construct their families differently than we do. Because I was attempting to establish a sense of equal and mutual respect between myself and my students, I see this interview turned conversation as a place for growth and learning for both myself and for my students.

Does My Disclosure Help or Hurt?

Returning to the question, can I live in and teach from an identity category without verbally naming it? Like me, others have troubled this notion of outness in the classroom (Mittler & Blumenthal, 1994; Adams & Emery, 1994; Beck, 1994; Gregory, 2004; Lipkin, 2004). The answer I came to that year was, I can and I can't. In trying to learn how to better address issues of homophobia with religious students, I discovered

that the beliefs of those students might inhibit them from speaking honestly with me because I have *told* them that I am a lesbian. When this is the case, my research questions about how to engage with religious students about issues of homosexuality, as important as they may be, could be in vain.

On the other hand, the three students in my study told me how important it was for them to hear about my experiences as a lesbian, and to be able to ask me questions about what would feel respectful to me as a student in their class. When asked how my being out as a lesbian affected their learning about issues of homophobia, Lori responded,

> I think that your being out as a lesbian has made me more aware of how I feel about teaching about homophobia, homosexuality, and heterosexism in my classroom. … I think that it has made me more curious and comfortable in some ways and made me want to ask and know more about what it is like to be homosexual and how that affects your teaching and life. I think that your out-ness will help me to be more willing to address homophobia in my classroom and to be aware of differences of my students and their families and how to respect and support each person as an individual.

Another participant, Rebecca, said that she, "firmly believe[s] that your being out as a lesbian has benefited my learning because I was able to hear another person's perspective on a topic that I had never even considered." Each of the three participants addressed the comfort and safety that they felt with me, and how that sense of safety led them to ask questions that they might not have asked of a different teacher, lesbian or not. I feel my honesty with students led to reciprocal openness around this issue. Because students felt that I trusted them, and that they could trust me, they were willing to engage

with issues—the intersection of their religious beliefs with homosexuality—that they would not have had I not shown my willingness to both take risks and listen to ideas that were different from mine.

Of my three participants, Veronica seemed the most in conflict about the intersection of homophobia and her religious beliefs. The dialogue that began with our interview continued with our casual conversations before and after class. She told me that she'd never known an openly gay or lesbian person before, and that even though she was confused about what she is supposed to believe, she felt that this has been an important process for her. She wrote about her confusion in an email:

> In some ways the readings contradict my religious beliefs because I believe the Bible as truth and God's word and the Bible says that homosexuality is sin. At the same time, my religion is about love and having all sin covered by Christ's crucifixion, so I do not feel that homosexuals are any more sinful than myself (or anyone else) and homophobia or mistreatment of an individual because of their sexual preferences would also definitely contradict my religious beliefs. At the same time, if I believe that homosexual acts are sin than I do not feel right about condoning that sin (which is something I am still struggling with and that is really hard for me to take a firm stand on either way). Most of the readings were about being respectful and tolerant of different lifestyles which does not contradict my religious beliefs, but I guess they also present homosexuality to be a pure and right choice which does contradict my religious beliefs. Ahh, its so confusing to me.

I feel certain that Veronica might never have thought about the experiences of her future students who could have same gender parents if we had not addressed these issues in class. I feel even more certain that, had I not been out in class, she would not have engaged in a continual reevaluation of the function of homophobia in her religious beliefs. This seems to me a powerful statement about the importance of out gay and lesbian teachers.

Likewise, towards the end of the class session in which we talked about gay and lesbian issues, Rebecca asked if I would lead a whole class question and answer session. This led to questions about how I felt as a lesbian teacher in elementary school, how I would feel if my own children were in elementary school, and what responses to student homophobia I would find respectful. Emailed student reflection about this class session was mixed—some students felt that we talk about issues of race and homosexuality too much, and should just move on. But most students felt that the question and answer session combined with a text based discussion was very informative and helpful. Without my disclosed lesbian identity, I don't believe that this kind of learning or dialogue could have taken place.

By focusing on issues of social justice and multiculturalism in my classroom, including equal focus on homophobia, racism, sexism, and classism, I was pointing to multiple parts of my identity. Students read my race, gender, and class without my explicitly telling them. The students in this study all agreed that I should wait until I know my next group of students well before I come out to them. As I will describe in Chapter 2, the choice of when to reveal my lesbian identity with that group was not always completely my own. I decided, however, at the end of Year 3 that I would wait

until Cohort 4 and I had established a classroom space that felt safe on a variety of levels before coming out to them. The process of Year 3 put me in a place of active contemplation about how my teaching, researching and life intersect in complex and shifting ways. I believe that thinking about my stance, intentionally using my own classroom structure to identify that stance will help me learn how to be a better teacher to my conservative students—respecting their religious beliefs, and at the same time, pushing them to think about how homophobia affects the children that they will teach.

CHAPTER 3

LOOKING FOR ANSWERS: FORMING AN INQUIRY GROUP

I entered Year 4 with a strong desire to address the questions that lingered unanswered from my study the previous year. Based on my own experiences in an inquiry group (Aaron, Bauer, Commeyras, Daniell, Elrick, Fecho, Hermann-Wilmarth, Pinatone, Siegal, & Vaughn, in press) where kindergarten through university teachers came together to discuss classroom issues, pedagogy and critical inquiry, and to help each other explore how theory and practice could meet, I decided to create a year-long inquiry group of interested students in my own classroom. In planning the study, I designed the group so that the work that we would do together would be collaborative action research. Like the K-University group, I hoped that this group would be characterized by a sense of collaboration around our shared inquiry, open dialogue, and moments where our personal beliefs were clarified, challenged, or reaffirmed. While I chose the question that would guide the group, “How do our culturally held beliefs affect our teaching of diverse students through the language arts?” I hoped that inquiry group members would delve into issues that they’d been troubled by and wanted new insights into how to resolve before they enter their future classrooms as elementary school teachers. At the same time, I hoped they’d begin to think about themselves as teacher researchers.

An Introduction to Collaborative Action Research

The concept of collaborative action research can be situated within the realm of emancipatory pedagogy. Conceptualizing participation and collaboration simultaneously with teaching and research as exemplified in the work of my previously introduced theoretical mentors, Paulo Freire, Maxine Greene, and bell hooks, points to how praxis can come to life in classrooms through collaborative action research. The work of these theorists builds on each other in a kind of collaboration of its own, setting the stage for other teachers and students to negotiate their own transforming action together within and among their co-created classrooms. Hansen, Ramstead, Richer, Smith, and Stratton (2001) identified the often interchangeable language used to describe what I have called collaborative action research as "action research, participatory research, collaborative research, collaborative intervention research, transformative research, activist research, advocacy research, critical action research, and participatory action research" (p. 301). The common elements that they saw amongst all of these labels are "a social action *focus*, a transformative *objective*, and a participatory *process"* (p. 301; emphasis in original). They found, as I have found in my reading of studies labeled "collaborative action research" and "participatory action research" in teacher education, that not all research so called is particularly transformative or participatory.

Both Freire (1998) and Shor (1992) defined research as a natural occurrence within liberatory classrooms. As Freire (1998) wrote, "[T]here is no such thing as teaching without research and research without teaching" (p.35). Though there is a continual grappling with the student-teacher dichotomy, as discussed by Shor, this statement suggests that every member of a learning community, because they are all

teachers, are also all researchers. “I teach because I search, because I question, and because I submit myself to questioning. I research because I notice things, take cognizance of them” (Freire, 1998, p. 35).

Because Shor (1992) placed student culture and experience at the center of the curriculum, research by both teacher and student becomes a necessary part of the collaborative learning process. He described the empowering education and the critical classroom as a “research center” (p. 169). Without research and vigorous questioning by students and teachers, education could fall back to the less educative methods of the banking model of teaching. If students are engaged in researching questions and ideas that are important to who they are in the community, in their jobs, and in the country, the role of education could change from producing citizens who reproduce status quo oppression to creating opportunities for more citizens to actively participate in a just society.

In trying to teach my students to be teachers and researchers, I have found it most productive to begin with the self. In our writing class, we wrote about the everydayness of our lives, and through this self-study, this research, some began to see the need for change. When students take this kind of writing into elementary school classrooms, some begin to, like Hankins (2003) has, contrast their own lives with the lives of their students. This research can feed us as teachers in powerful ways. With the Cultural Memoirs assignment, students and I began to understand how who we are is shaped by past norms, by how our own norms silenced or are silenced. This learning provides us an opportunity to imagine things differently: “The act of critiquing requires an authentic self-reflectiveness, a thoughtfulness that informs knowing in the many contexts of everyday

life" (Greene, 1995, p. 61). This goal of teaching/reflecting/researching/learning by all members of the classroom community is certainly an ideal, and not all classroom members are willing to engage in it. Students have written in course evaluations and journals that they often write because it is an assignment to complete, that they are going through the motions of class because they have to. The authenticity of my classroom community is something that I can't take for granted, or assume is real. Setting up the structures for collaborative research, as I'll later discuss in terms of the inquiry group, doesn't always result in engaged learning and discussion.

Although there are occasional instances of collaboration action research among university teachers and their preservice teacher students (West, Wilmarth, Crumley, Dickerson, & Francis, 1999; Graham & Hudson-Ross, 1998), they are rare. This kind of collaboration between university teacher and student is most often found between instructors and their graduate students who are already inservice teachers. Often, especially in studies involving preservice teachers (as opposed to inservice teachers), the collaboration is between mentor teacher and preservice teacher but written about by teacher educators, keeping those involved in the collaboration as objects of the study (Rock & Levin, 2002; Levin & Rock, 2003). The research questions in these studies are created by the collaborative team, and while the focus is on better ways to teach struggling students, systemic reasons that those students might be struggling are often ignored. There is not an intentional focus on social justice or emancipation. Other collaborative action research studies discuss the value of collaboration among preservice teachers as a place for growth for these students (Krockover, Shepardson, Adams, Eichinger, & Nakhleh, 2002), or the value of research skills for beginning teachers

(Keating, Diaz-Greenberg, Baldwin, & Thousand, 1998). The preservice teachers remain the objects of these studies, written about by their professors. None of these collaborative action research studies addresses the unequal balance of power between professor and student as they are all focused on the relationships among students, or between student and mentor teacher. The ultimate power remains with the professor.

The collaborative action research studies in teacher education that I have found most reflective of the emancipatory and democratizing element called for by Freire, Greene, hooks, and Shor are in graduate education with in-service teachers or of research groups that consist only of teacher educators studying their practice together. Zollers, Albert, and Cochran-Smith (2000) studied the conversations held by a group of teacher educators and administrators (to which they belonged) studying the meaning of social justice in their teacher education classrooms. The dialogic nature—with participants of multiple understandings listening to and learning from each other—of this study reflects what is considered central in Freire's philosophy to true learning. McKernan and Powers (2000) examined how action and reflection in a democratic teacher education learning environment model a pedagogy that can be taken into public and private school classrooms. Using a critical theoretical lens and led by their professor Andrew Gitlin, teachers Bringhurst, Burns, Cooley, Myers, Price, Russell, and Tiess (1992) systematically studied their individual school contexts and raised questions in their research in order to initiate school change. They, too, struggled with issues of power within the group.

In thinking about what I wanted the collaborative action research to look like in my own teacher education classroom, I planned, through the inquiry group, to be both

teaching and learning the methodological practice with my students. Guided by feminist research where “the features of the [research] method are at least as important as the method itself” (Hollingsworth, 1992, p. 376), I formed a question that would hopefully lead participants and myself to create “social [change] in oppressed conditions,” and in which I would be equally vulnerable in the work that we would do (1992, p. 376). I hoped we would explore our own questions about how culturally formed beliefs affect the teaching and learning of diverse students using similar methods, analyze our data together, and return to our questions to revise, expand, and further explore them based on our collaborative dialogue. The students would be learning from me about the process of teacher research as well as about how to better meet the needs of their future diverse students, and I would be learning from them about their questions, what processes worked and didn’t work in collaborative action research in teacher education, and about my own questions about the intersections of religion, heterosexism and homophobia in teacher education classes. This collaborative reflection and action is Freire’s (1998) definition of “true learning” (p. 33). By working through this process as students and teachers together, we would have a more authentic process for understanding the knowledge that we were working to obtain.

This knowledge—how to be better teachers to religiously, racially, socioeconomically, and familially diverse students—falls under Freire’s (1998) definition of “thinking correctly” (p. 42). This way of thinking, of working towards justice and freedom, is “not something transferred but something that belongs essentially to the process of coparticipation” (p. 42). This coparticipation is the heart of classroom collaborative action research. For this equal participation to occur, the teacher-student

dichotomy must be resolved. The power of this resolution challenges the norm of the banking model of education. As Greene (1988) wrote, each time students and teachers are

> with others—in dialogue, in teaching-learning situations, in mutual pursuit of a project—additional new perspectives open; language opens possibilities of seeing, hearing, understanding. Multiple interpretations constitute multiple realities; the 'common' itself becomes multiplex and endlessly challenging, as each person reaches outfrom his/her own ground toward what might be, should be, is not yet. (p. 21)

Reaching for powerful possibilities for ourselves, our students, our communities, and our world is my interpretation of the goal of emancipatory pedagogy.

The Class/The Inquiry Group

My own inquiry question, "How do issues of religion and homosexuality intersect around readings, classroom talk, and written assignments in a preservice Language Education classroom?" came with a set of sub-questions:

- What are characteristics of dialogue (for example, language, silences, body language) about how religious beliefs intersect with our beliefs and understanding of sexual orientation, homophobia and heterosexism in a language arts preservice education classroom?
- How are the religious beliefs of preservice students and their teacher brought to bear in written and oral reflections on those with different privileges and oppressions than our own in the classroom?

- What preservice classroom structures and learning activities enable us to talk about how our diverse religious positions influence our thought and language (talk) about gay and lesbian students, and students with gay and lesbian parents?
- In what ways do preservice education students and their teacher express changes in their thinking about their religious beliefs about gay and lesbian people after reading and discussing children's literature dealing with homosexuality, exploring their own cultural influences through constructing Cultural Memoirs, and engaging in open dialogue about issues of homophobia and heterosexism in whole class, small group, and one-on-one conversations with their instructor?

As I stood in front of my class on the first day, these questions floating in my mind, I felt the same internal tension that I had when asking for participants in the previous year's study. I felt certain that the jump to participate by my Year 3 students was influenced by our semester and a half relationship where trust and openness had characterized our classroom conversations, my grading procedures, and their ability to challenge me on any number of issues. I decided that waiting until I knew my students a little bit to invite participation in this study would be the best option.

By the fourth class period (we met for 2 hours, twice a week), students were engaged in the classroom text and structure. Our *Harry Potter* discussion had enlivened students, and helped them realize that many different perspectives could be taken on the same text. During the first two weeks of class, we'd read and discussed reasons to include high quality children's literature in elementary school classrooms (Short, 1997) and had quick lessons on reader response from our children's literature textbook (Russell, 2001) and learned about and practiced using literature circles (Daniels, 2002). While this group

of students was not characterized by the same whole class enthusiasm as previous classes, nor were they as forthcoming in conversations during large group discussions, I chalked this up to beginning of the year jitters, and ended our *Harry Potter* discussion ten minutes before the end of class.

On the board, I wrote the group question, "How do our culturally held beliefs affect our teaching of diverse students through the language arts?" and proceeded to invite any students interested in investigating this question to stay after class to talk about how we might do that together over the course of our two semesters together. I told them that coming to this informative meeting would not bind them to participation, and that our investigation would be a collaborative one, with me taking on a question as well. As class was dismissed and I turned around to gather my materials from the day's work, I heard the usual end-of-class bustle, and imagined the bee-line that all students must be making for the door. Much to my delight, eleven students stayed to learn about how they could investigate the question with me.

An Outline of the Study

As students gathered a circle of chairs in the middle of the room, I thanked them for staying and asked them, as a group, what had encouraged them to do so. Little did I realize that the blank looks and non-verbal responses that I received would characterize almost all inquiry group and whole class discussions that we would have all year.

"Anyone?"

"I guess I was just curious," Maggie replied.

With no other offers or attempts at conversation, I dove into the purpose and structure of the study. I told them that my goal for the group would be for us to look at

how our own race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or any other closely held identity informs how we look at teaching and students. All inquiries under this broad question would be welcome, I told them, but each group member must commit to engaging with everyone else's question. I informed them of my own question, hoping that the shaking in my voice was only obvious to me, and that my topic wouldn't send students running from the room. When it didn't, I described how I envisioned the group, our collaborative inquiries, and our responsibilities to each other.

Participation in this group would include taped group discussions, taped discussions of classroom talk around texts with gay and lesbian themes, and analysis of the transcripts of those classroom discussions, co-writing and exploration of the intersection of religious identities and homosexuality, and permission for writing done as a part of the course to be analyzed and used as data. I told students that I would meet with group members individually twice a semester to talk about their personal responses to the classroom texts, as well as to answer questions and engage in discussion about their own inquiry questions. Group meetings would occur twice a semester so that we could share our inquiries, ask each other for help, and look for ways to inquire into our chosen topics more deeply. Students who participated fully in both semesters of the inquiry could use their work for the group as their course final for the spring's Language and Literacy class by writing up what they'd learned during their inquiry, or as a part of the collaborative inquiry group.

As I finished describing the study, my students and I stared at each other. The flat looks on their faces unnerved me as my heart pounded. Would no one join my study? Was this a futile effort? I later learned, when another of this class' instructors brought it

up in an email discussion, that the other four teachers of this cohort struggled with the same silent responses that I did. This particular group of students lacked an ability or desire to engage in large group discussions in all classes, not just mine. Because I didn't know this at the time, I wondered what they could be thinking—did they not ask questions because they didn't want to seem too eager to their classmates? Did my question make them uncomfortable? Did they think it would be too much extra work? Not knowing what else to do, I pulled out consent forms and asked that anyone who was interested in joining pick one up. I asked if we could meet the following week to discuss topics of interest to them so that we could dive into our work together. I fully expected to pick up a full stack of blank consent forms as students left the room. Instead, all students in attendance wandered to the table where the forms were sitting, read it over, and signed their names. Stunned, I said, "Okay! Great. Let's meet again next week. If you have any questions before then, just email me

The Inquiry Group Gets Started

As the eleven new inquriy group members and I pulled our chairs into a circle for our first official meeting, I asked if anyone had thought about ideas for their inquiry questions.

Ten second silence.

"Hmm." I wrote the guiding question, "How do our culturally held beliefs affect our teaching of diverse students?" back up on the board.

"Any ideas?"

Eight second silence.

Cindy ventured, "I don't know."

"You don't know? Does anyone have ideas about what they want to look at?"

Nine second silence.

"What we could do is brainstorm on the board. … We could think about some issues that we think are prevalent in school. Or that we don't talk about. For example, one thing that I've noticed is that we pretend that religion is not a part of our lives or our students' lives, and it really is. And who I am as a religious or spiritual person is going to affect how I choose to teach, and what I choose to teach, and how I choose to have discussions about things. Even though we don't talk about it, for me, it is bound up in how I see myself as a religious person."

I looked at the group for a response.

Six second silence.

"So, that's important to me, and why religion is included in my question."

Four second silence.

"Like Jianna, for example. She was raised in another country, so you could think about how did your national origin affect your own learning, and how might it come into play in your future teaching."

Three and a half second silence.

"Or you could think about if you're a southern Christian. If you were raised in the south as a Christian, how is that going to intersect with your culturally diverse students? And if you want to focus on race, or focus on gender or something."

Finally, Maggie jumped in. "I think it's interesting when teachers are um, like, from very different backgrounds than a majority of their students. Like, with race. Where a teacher is one race, and her students are a different race or a different religion or a

different, from a different place. And, like most of her class is made up of one background, but it's completely different from hers or his. And how they handle that. Because I think there's a lot of, like, prejudices that she or he has or that a lot of our students have. How does she deal with lines that are there already before she knows them? … it's hard for you to know where they're coming from, and it's hard for them to know where you're coming from."

I could barely contain my excitement at the painstaking participation. "Yes! That would be a fascinating question to investigate! Does that help others think of ideas?"

It was as though the flood gates had opened. We ventured into conversations about social class, levels of education, language barriers. Students threw out ideas that built as much upon the concept as upon their peer's deciding to share.

June began speaking softly, but her confidence grew with each word. "I think mine was race and region. Because, you know, whether I want to admit it or not, it affects how I'm gonna teach. It affects how I live. It's not something that we all want to be, like, 'Oh, well, I was raised in a white Southern Baptist home, and I have the white Southern Baptist thoughts.' You know."

Attempting to probe her to think about her question further, I questioned, "Would it be interesting to you to look at what you'll do when you have people thinking differently than you?"

"Mm hmm."

Sue ventured, "I'm interested in race because of what's going on at this time because almost all of the teachers are white, but almost all of the students are black. Or, Mexican Americans. So it would be really interesting to …"

Interrupting, Cindy added, “And, I guess, the economics of it. Because you’re gonna have … because, obviously, someone who is teaching who has that education is gonna have had, like, some monetary way to be able to get that education. And then you come into schools, and some schools are poor. I mean they have barely any resources. So. And, most of the time, those schools are in, like, areas that are not economically wealthy. You know? Whatever. But then you can go to a school where there are all kinds of resources, and these kids have more than you have. So.”

Alexa questioned, “So, economic differences, like, between the teacher and student?” and students nodded.

“I think that family structure, too. Like, if you have a really stable family …” Maggie attempted to further the conversation.

“Yeah,” the group agreed.

As Maggie finished her thought, “and you aren’t being pulled in and out of foster homes. Or. Um. Just really crazy lives,” less participatory members joined in.

Mae shared, “I teach piano lessons to a little girl and, um like they have to get their practice card signed, and I can always tell which weekend she went to her mom’s cause it’s never signed cause there’s never any time there, and her mom just …”

Probing again, Alexa asked, “Does that make you have, like, a different attitude toward her mom?”

“Well, and then I think, well, her mom probably doesn’t know about it because the little girl is kind of like, whatever. It might not be her mom, it might just be the fact of her going away.”

Andrea suggested, “Well, at least you don’t just assume that it’s her mom just being irresponsible.”

“Right,” Mae agreed.

Ginger added her own experience, “I have a thought about what Mae just said. I, um, taught the last two weeks of school to pre-K. And one of those little girls, her parents were divorced, and her mom, you know she had a step-dad and everything. But you could tell when she went to her dad’s house compared to when she went to stay with her mom. And it was amazing because, I mean, her mom would just bring her back, you know, hair everywhere, not really dressed nicely. Her dad would bring her in and talk to the teacher, was there right when school ended, and had clean clothes on. It was just a big difference.”

Mae fleshed out her thinking, “And like I said, maybe it’s just the child, but then I think, well her being the mom, she should ask the child what do you have to do for school or piano.”

Alexa concluded, “I think that if a parent isn’t involved, it isn’t always the parent’s fault, and like we automatically assume that the parent doesn’t care. Or that there are other circumstances if kids aren’t on time, or things aren’t turned in, or whatever.”

The conversation continued with Andrea bringing up Karen Hankins’ (2003) work—teacher research that took place in an area elementary school—that she’d read for another class. She commented on how well Karen worked with the parents in her class, even when it was difficult, and then posed the question, “What if the parents aren’t, um, I guess going along with your class? And aren’t helping the children because they don’t want them to be like you?”

Maggie interjected, “But, maybe they’re just intimidated. You know, like if they didn’t do well in school, or if they didn’t have the opportunity to go on and get a good education and work in a job that you really enjoy.”

“Yeah,” Annie added, “especially if you’re younger than them, fresh out of school, and they’re, you know, ten years older than you and you have got it together. Could we look at that?

I commented on the wide range of interests, and the group decided that, over an email list, we’d continue to discuss their individual questions. Delighted, I asked, “Does anyone have any other questions for me before we leave today?”

Apprehensively as she looked at her hands, Ginger said, “I really want to know why you picked your question.”

Unsure if I was ready to come out to this group, and not have that moment with the entire class, I took what could be considered the safe way out. I didn’t notice what Sue and Maggie later told me during individual meetings—most of them already knew of my sexual orientation because they had friends who had been in my class the previous year, or they had read a piece that I’d written (Hermann-Wilmarth, 2003) in which I discussed how being an out teacher was a risky proposition.

“Um. Because, first thing is that statistics show that the incidents of suicide and violence against gay and lesbian kids in high school is overwhelming. The greatest amount of violence is directed towards kids who either identify that way or don’t, but are perceived that way. Um. And I think that starting in elementary school is a way to stop that cycle of violence. So, we read in this class and in the next class—children’s books with gay and lesbian characters in them. … And um, having taught elementary school,

the most common—after “you’re so dumb”—thing to say to another child is “you’re so gay.” To put each other down. So, kids know that word, and they know that it is there, and they think that it is a negative thing. So, I want to talk to teachers about how to confront that. So, and it is hard, I think in the south where there’s a lot of um, religious, um, slamming up against each other with those issues. So, um. I strongly believe that, um, if a kid used the “n” word against another student in their class that we would not allow it, or you would talk about why it’s not ok, and I think that the same privilege needs to be given to other issues and it’s not.”

Sue stepped in, “So you want to help teachers to be prepared …”

“Yeah. And if we don’t talk about it in preservice classrooms, then when will we? And I have an interest in teacher education because I think, um, we don’t prepare teachers for the tough issues. I mean, I left the classroom! And I think it’s because I didn’t feel ready to confront issues of diversity. I mean, I read all the multicultural stuff, but I went into this school, and I didn’t know what to do. So I wanted to provide a space where we talk about well, what do you do when this kind of stuff that you don’t know what to do with comes up? And so, to provide a place where we could talk about what you do. So. That’s a main drive behind the larger question, the group, and my own question.”

There was more silence as the students looked at me expectantly. I continued, “And, there’s lots of other reasons that will come up, I’m sure, as we continue talking, and as you get to know me better. So.”

Another short silence was followed by the beginning of what was to be a year long dialogue between Jianna and myself. The other students watched as our poorly

articulated language—stops, starts, repeated words—exposed the care we were taking to remain open to each other during this initial foray into an issue this usually silenced issue.

Jianna ventured, “I think my question is going to be something about how do I teach a student who challenges my religious beliefs. Um. And I just wanted to ask you about what you just mentioned. So is it more that you want to help teachers know how to confront the name calling against homosexuality. Or, is it, like make it OK to talk about. Like, in other words, um, bringing up the issue directly. Like, it’s OK or it’s not OK. I mean like. Do you know what I mean?”

I replied, “Yeah. Yeah, I think those are two different issues, certainly, and um, the first. First, um, I want to talk about how teachers can address it when kids use anti-gay slurs in their speech. Because, we either ignore it as teachers, or we say it’s OK. Which, ignoring it is saying it’s OK, too. Or we participate in it as teachers. And I don’t think any of those things are OK. And I want to talk about how we can address that. But the other thing that I think is important is that, increasingly there are children with gay and lesbian parents in our classrooms and we need, just like we need to reflect African American families in our lit and in how we’re learning, we need to include all families, and not say that those families are bad. And so I want to figure out how to do that in ways that respect all people. So, not just respecting my beliefs in saying that, I think that’s an OK way to be. But respecting someone else who says that that isn’t an OK way to be but can they have that belief and at the same time, not damage that child? So, do you see how they’re two different things kind of?”

“Yeah, but it’s more challenging. It’s something to really think about. Because, yeah, but, really can you really say that race and homosexuals are the same thing? You

know what I mean, like, that's a hard thing for me to think about and it might take me a while."

"That's OK."

"I guess that's one of those things. Can you equate those as being the same thing? I really don't understand."

"Well, I think that people believe different things about that. And, while we might not agree on that, I don't, like I don't want to come across to you guys like, 'You're wrong and you're going to be a bad teacher because you don't agree with me.' So, this is a great start to that conversation because I'm trying to figure out how to bring gay and lesbian issues into class, but you should not be scared to bring up conversations like you're bringing up."

"I still want to ask what causes people to be gay—like is it a choice or is it not? And I think that determines how I can approach it. I'm just curious."

"And that can be part of how you look at the question—if you believe something about gay and lesbian people that is based on a cultural aspect of your life, you could use this study to think about what that might mean for you as a teacher."

"OK." As Jianna and I conversed, she'd left her seat in the circle and wandered up to the table that I was sitting on. Students had finished gathering their belongings and were heading together to their next class. We looked at each other awkwardly and each sighed a not comfortable sigh.

"Thanks for staying and exploring these issues, Jianna! I think this will be such an interesting study."

Jianna smiled and gently adjusted her bag over her shoulder. “I’ll see you next week.”

Initial Members of the Group

Over the course of the two semesters, through their writing, participation in discussions, and my observations of some of them in the field, I got to know most of the inquiry group members quite well. Figure 1 provides a graphic of how they sat during the gay and lesbian literature class, Figure 2 provides more description of the main characters in the group, and Figure 3 gives details about all group members. Below I have grouped the students according to who they sat with or interacted with when given the choice. I also include a more rich description of the four major players that I began to describe in Chapter 1.

Alexa, June, Mae, and Annie

As they would at each subsequent meeting, Alexa, June, Mae, and Annie gathered their chairs together for the first meeting. Only one member of their “in-class” clique had not joined the group, and like they did in class, this group kept conversation low and to themselves as other students pulled their chairs around. The social confidence of these women came through regularly in their small-group discussions in class—references to their sorority experiences, expensive vacations, and weekend shopping trips were frequent, peppering the din of the rest of the class’ discussion with squeals or laughter as they peered over personal pictures, journals, and magazine pages.

Of this clique, June was the only member who participated in the inquiry group through the final meeting. Always grinning, prepared for class, and worried about her grades, June was not afraid to push her classmates to elaborate on their ideas or opinions

during small group discussions. She later told me that listening to others helped her evaluate her own stance on issues that she wasn't clear about. She described herself as a family-oriented Southern Baptist southern belle. Her Cultural Memoir was filled with pictures of a loving family, accolades about her close-knit small town, and her love of her church and of God. She seemed genuinely interested in all members of the class, and was the one member of this clique who moved easily into conversations with her peers before and during class. She regularly asked me questions about my teaching, my studies, and after reading my Cultural Memoir, what it was like to be a lesbian elementary school teacher.

The remaining seven students in the inquiry group weren't as "clique identified" as the first four. While they certainly grouped themselves with their closer friends for discussions, sat together in class, or spent the in-class breaks with the same people they seemed to move amongst each other with more ease, and they welcomed other class members into their conversations with more regularity than the first group.

Lucy, Andrea, and Sue

Lucy, Andrea, and Sue rarely, if ever, spoke during class discussions. All three students, however, wrote prolifically in their Writer's Notebooks, found thoughtful and creative ways to respond to children's literature, and seemed to take seriously each assignment or reading for class. All three of these students stayed with the Inquiry Group through May; unfortunately, Andrea was unable to come to the final meeting and interview due to her work schedule.

Figure 1

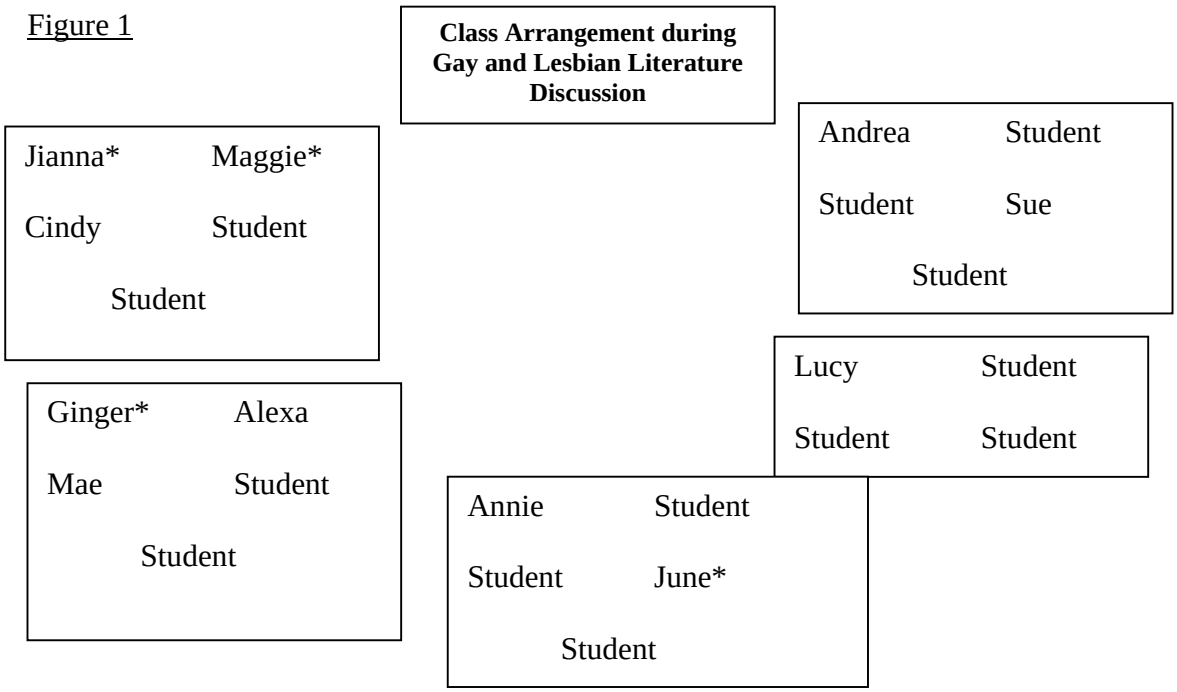

Figure 2

*Main Characters

Jianna— Is a conscientious student who is very concerned with pleasing the teacher (Jill)-when careless errors are noted on her written work, she emails Jill to apologize for unprofessional work. English is her second language. She enters class to talk about gay and lesbian children's literature with her Bible in hand. She initially denies the possibility of ever teaching students who have same-gender parents, claiming that this issue will never be relevant to her. At the beginning of the year, she is always sitting with Ginger (with whom she also carpools to school), but this changes by October. Eventually, she poses the inquiry question: How will I teach students whose families and lives challenge my religious beliefs?

Maggie— Serves as a mediator in most group work. She works in an inner city after school program and wants to teach in the same kind of school. She is best friends with Cindy. She tries, unsuccessfully to get peers to look at issues of privilege. Inquiry Question: How have other White teachers been successful in majority African American schools?

Ginger— Aligns herself with Jianna, and sits with her exclusively at the beginning of the year. Living at home, she has to read Harry Potter secretly-her father doesn't want the book in the house. She struggles academically in the class. Ginger challenges assertions made in Columbus articles about the role that Columbus and his men played in the destruction of Native American culture, and sends Jill email questioning Jill's sexual orientation before the class in which we discuss gay and lesbian literature. Initially she shares Jianna's inquiry group question before dropping out of the study when she gets a new job in January.

June— Is more “clique-identified” than any of the other major players, but willingly moves in and out of this clique for small group work, and during casual conversation before and after class. She calls herself "small-town Southern Baptist" after a guest speaker to the class uses those words in a derogatory way. June tells Jill that oppression of opinions and beliefs "comes from both sides." Inquiry question: How do White teachers successfully teach non-White students. She is also interested in interactions between teachers and parents, and wants to further investigate how issues of class and education come into play in these relationships.

Figure 3

Other Inquiry Group Members

Cindy—English is her second language. She is vocal about her liberal political views. Cindy often pushes classmates on their ideas, and often in ways that end conversations. Loves the reading in the Children's Literature class, but hates to write—most of her assignments are completed in a creative format rather than as more traditional written responses. Her best friend is Maggie. Cindy's inquiry group question concerned how teachers of a different race or ethnicity than the majority of their students taught successfully in culturally relevant ways.

Alexa—Easily one of the most prolific and thoughtful writers in the class, Alexa knew how to play the game of education well. She often talked in class and wrote in her writer's notebook about her experiences of having a sister with Downs Syndrome, and how that had pushed her to always be the perfect student. In her Cultural Memoir, the identities that she assigned herself paint a picture of a stereotypical white southern woman depicted in movies and literature: lady, white, Christian, upper middle class, and southern. Alexa dropped out of the inquiry group without ever identifying a research question.

Mae—One of the married students in the class, Mae joined the group after her friends did, telling me that she "might as well." The daughter of a minister and the wife of a man working to become a member of the clergy, Mae regularly spoke and wrote about her Christianity. Her Cultural Memoir was the story of a mission trip to Honduras where she highlighted her pride in being American, her status as middle class, her belief in traditional gender roles, and her enduring faith—made deeper by the lessons that she learned from the women they served in Honduras. She rarely participated in whole class discussions, but was active in small groups. Her participation and opinions were often peppered with references to the bible and to church. She dropped out of the group in late March, telling me that her job as a piano teacher combined with the work for school was too time consuming.

Annie—Annie rarely contributed to class or inquiry group discussions. I didn't get to know her very well before she stopped coming to the Inquiry Group meetings in April. Annie told me that she wanted to do creative writing for her final project instead of investigating an inquiry question.

Lucy—Lucy was very quiet both during class discussions and inquiry group meetings. It wasn't until our final one-on-one inquiry group meeting that she finally opened up, talking about her dreams for her teaching career, her fears about the job search, and the deep learning that she felt had occurred for her during the inquiry investigation. In her memoir, she described her love of family, her small-town youth, and her American, white, Southern Baptist heritage. As much as she enjoyed the "big city life" of our college town, for Lucy, "home is where the heart is," and her plans for teaching include returning to her small two elementary school county after graduation. For her inquiry group research, Lucy looked at class issues, comparing her experiences at two area schools.

Andrea— The semester before she came to my Children's Literature class, Andrea took an introductory education course in which she described reading texts by Vivian Paley, Karen Hankins, and Jonathan Kozol. The discussions that she participated in for that course fed her writing and talking during the two semesters of the inquiry study. She regularly referred to these authors during small groups and in her writing. Andrea was deeply involved in the campus' Christian fellowship, and in her Cultural Memoir, wrote about the shift from her every-Sunday-church-going as a middle and high school student to her views and experiences as a college student with worship and fellowship happening in diverse ways. Andrea's inquiry group question centered on socioeconomic issues in education.

Sue—Sue's silence during class discussion was usually mediated by a thoughtful look passing over her face and a pen scrawling in her notebook. When I observed her during her time in a fifth grade elementary school class, our post-observation discussions were filled with her questions about why, if the research has shown that non-traditional ways of teaching work, teachers continue to lecture, use workbooks, and demand silent rows of obedient elementary school students. One afternoon, she said, "I know that a workshop method might be harder, but we don't go into teaching because it's easy." Sue talked in our interviews and wrote in her Cultural Memoir about feeling very different from her traditional southern, white, Protestant family, even though she shares their identity. Like Lucy, she looked at class issues for her inquiry research, and compared her experiences at two local schools.

Cindy and Maggie

Cindy and Maggie were two of the most outspoken members of the class and of the inquiry group. Never afraid to confront a peer with whom she disagreed, Cindy sometimes polarized class discussions. Maggie usually stepped in to soften Cindy's words with often more balanced language that invited students back into the conversation. The confidence that they felt in class did not spill into Cindy's writing—she bemoaned the writing heavy assignments in both classes. Maggie, however, prolifically scrawled in her Writer's Notebook, detailing her experiences in classrooms, comparing texts from her different classes, and exploring events in her personal life. Both of these students participated actively in all aspects of the inquiry group.

Maggie described herself as a "nature-loving, open-minded, small-town white woman." While she frequently took an active role in leading the class both in whole and small group discussions, she took just as an active role as a listener. In her Cultural Memoir, she described a family experience that led to her compassion and desire to find humanity in all people. When her cousin became pregnant by an African American man without being married to him, the racism that rocked their family drove people apart. Maggie was horrified, and learned a valuable lesson:

> I have never been one to hold racist beliefs, and cases like this are exactly why. This has been a real life example to me of how destructive and demonstrative prejudice can be. It has taught me a lot about not getting caught up in your own image. It is very important to me to live a good life and make good decisions according to my own standards, not everyone else's. … I do my best to treat others the way I want to be treated. … When large scale issues confront me, I try

> to take a step back and think about what is really important to me. Then I decide on a course of action.

Ginger and Jianna

My relationships with the final two inquiry group members became more and more complex as the school year progressed, and they will be detailed in later chapters. Ginger and Jianna carpooled to school together, and initially sat together in every class, and Ginger's opinions or ideas frequently echoed Jianna's. Jianna, however, was much more likely to join hesitatingly large group discussion while most of Ginger's participation in class was during small group time. Because of her work schedule, Ginger stopped participating in the inquiry group early in the spring semester. Ginana participated fully through the end of the school year.

Ginger chose to identify herself in her Cultural Memoir by race, geographical background, religious and political affiliation, and middle class socioeconomic status. Her analysis of her own beliefs and of issues of privilege often remained on the surface. Because she grew up in the north, she felt that she viewed race differently than her southern peers:

> I think that growing up in the north and being white really helped me to see that skin color is that, nothing more than skin color. The color of skin does not determine the person and who they are. If you think about it, everyone is different, even if they are the same skin color—you don't have the same nose, or eyes as anyone else. I mean we even have different tones and shades than all of the other people in the world—even your parents. I don't look at skin color and prejudge anyone.

In describing her religious affiliation and sharing the time that she was saved during a church revival, Ginger wrote about how affiliation influences all of the decisions that she makes, including political decisions:

> Since I am foremost a Baptist, even more than that, a Christian. In knowing this, I began to see that being a Christian would lead me to be conservative. This step in my life would now define my politics. I have taken on a Republican stance, since I have many of the standards as they do.

Likewise, Jianna strongly and regularly spoke about her Christian identity in class and in her writing. When we spoke about the roles of women, she often pointed to the roles Biblical women played in taking care of the men who were always the leaders. She strived to emulate these women in a contemporary context. In her Cultural Memoir, she defined her roles as wife, daughter, and daughter-in-law in terms of both her Italian heritage and her religious beliefs. In questioning her competence as a new wife, she wrote,

> My mother always made sure her family was well fed. Frozen dinners were definitely out of the question. My mother-in-law was the same, and not only did she fix incredible meals and keep a house spotless, she also looked beautiful all the time and has always been a godly woman.

Jianna was never afraid to speak her convictions in class, even when they were unpopular. She had no qualms in disagreeing with me both in and outside of class.

And, We're Off!

And so our collaborative study began. I had no idea of the challenges, the learning, and the personal exploration that lay ahead for my students and me. Our shared

inquiries would take us to uncomfortable places where we found new insights or where we avoided eye contact and further conversation. Investigation of our own systems of belief in light of who we were or would be as teachers was harder for some than it was for others, and we each took our own paths. Some of us reached the goal together, and some of us didn't. Those of us who made it to the conclusion of the study together didn't feel that it was the end, but spoke of the hope of continued inquiry.

CHAPTER 4

"IT COMES FROM BOTH SIDES": FINDING THE BOTH/AND IN DIALOGUE AMONG AND BETWEEN STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

"I don't know. I mean, she handled the situation with her students calling each other 'gay' really well. But Jill, when she said, 'and I grew up small town Southern Baptist,' she said it like it was something she was better than now. And honestly, I almost got up and left class. But, I decided, no, that's rude. But really, I wanted to raise my hand and say, 'well, I'm still small town Southern Baptist.' I mean, if you want someone to listen to how you're open to everyone in your classroom, you *really should be open to everyone, too. It was like, she wanted to tell us how respectful she is, but didn't think about her level of respect for others. It just felt hypocritical."*

"So, what did you do?"

"Honestly, Jill, I just stopped listening."

There was a long pause in our conversation. I tentatively ventured, "It's just like when I hear someone call a gay person a fag. I no longer want to hear anything they have to say."

"Yeah." June looked at me thoughtfully and took a deep breath. "It comes from both sides."

Toward the end of our two semesters together, I had invited a colleague to come and talk to my students about how she has handled issues of race, class, bilingualism, and the rampant use of "gay" as a put down in her kindergarten class. I'd hoped that as a

white, middle-class, heterosexual woman she would be someone that my students could identify with, and likewise, would be willing to listen to as she talked about issues that they often resist. I was hoping, too, that her positive and engaging experiences with students whose complex young lives and non-white skin often seem to scare my white small-town students right back to their home town schools to teach would help them to rethink their opinions about teaching in culturally diverse classrooms.

As June recounted the moment in my colleague's talk where she qualified her stories with her background, I imagined the large circle that we had pulled our chairs into. I knew that while June's arc of that circle had most likely leaned back in their chairs, crossing their arms against any future words coming from this teacher, another arc had leaned forward, ready to hear more.

"It comes from both sides." That magical complex "it" that I'd felt myself working against all year long.

"It comes from both sides."

Is "it" resistance, silencing, ignorance, exclusivity? I came to this study wanting, mostly, to learn from my "small town Southern Baptist" students about how to engage in dialogue around homosexuality and students with same-gender parents in ways that would help them address or at least acknowledge how homophobic language affects students. I'd also come with a history of "it"—of resisting or silencing, of being silenced or being the silencer, or excluding or being excluded—either oppressing or privileging me in dialogue, depending on my context.

"It comes from both sides."

And, while I'd sometimes actively used "it" to make a point, to guide my activism, to find allies, in the classroom this "it" is often the wall that prevents the possibility of learning or growth or change around any issue. Indeed "it," whatever the definition, comes from both sides.

I struggled to find ways of conversing with many of my students around any multitude of sociopolitical issues. However, with some of my students, I succeeded. Something about the context of these particular dialogues with these particular students allowed us to accept the pieces of our identities that shape and inform how we hear words like "fag" or "small-town Southern Baptist." We remembered how those pieces have invited us in or left us at the door. June, as a member of the inquiry group, had committed to listening to the questions and research of all of the other members and to engaging in informational exchanges with each of us regarding our individual inquiries, even if that engagement meant stepping out on a philosophical limb. She and other members of the group brought this commitment into their relationships with me, each other, and their fellow students into classroom exchanges, occasionally influencing non-inquiry group members of class to engage in the same kinds of self-reflection and belief interrogation that were a part of their own studies.

After reading in my Cultural Memoir about the pain of homophobic language I'd experienced as a student, seeing pictures of my wedding to my female partner, and learning of my pregnancy, June asked out of the blue one day how my "wife" (her word choice) and I had decided which one of us would carry our child. She seemed genuinely interested in the reply. She had led her fall semester literature circle in many directions as they discussed Woodson's (1997) *The House you Pass on the Way*, a book about a young

girl struggling to understand her own sexuality. “I mean, all she was looking for was acceptance. I don’t really know how I feel about a girl that young saying she’s gay. And I know I wouldn’t have this book on the shelf in my classroom. But, you know, don’t we owe all of our students acceptance? Isn’t that our job as public school teachers?” Even in her confusion, June had taken a risky step in finding entry points into a dialogue that might otherwise rub up against her “small town Southern Baptist” beliefs. She transgressed her normative discourse by even considering the issue. How, in the context of a class, education program, school, and university where many students look alike, believe alike, and come from similar privileges, had she found the courage to do so? And would anyone else find this same courage?

What Does It Take?

A key question for me in this study concerns how to create the space for dialogue to occur within the context of my classroom. But, even as I attempted to create this space, resistance continued to stymie dialogue and learning during class discussions. In this chapter, with the help of my co-researchers Maggie and Jianna, I explore characteristics that need to be present for dialogic conversation to occur, places where those qualities were either problematic or missing, and in what ways those qualities were successful in my classroom and in my inquiry group.

The Call for Dialogue

Freire’s (1970/1993) call to dialogue within classrooms bears repeating here: “the teacher’s thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students’ thinking” (p. 58). This authenticity is not possible when students feel required to repeat the values and beliefs espoused by their teachers. That meeting place of ideas where my students and I

all feel welcome is one of the greatest challenges but most important goals of my teaching. While there are many reasons—both personal and political—that I embarked on a study of how my students' stated religious beliefs intersect with issues of homosexuality in education, that question of intersections has really become a facilitator for, I think, even deeper questions. The impetus for creating an inquiry group as a part of the study in the first place came from my belief that dialogue was the best way to answer the original question. How can teachers and students listen to, value, and learn from each other without giving up pieces of our identities or our strongly-held beliefs? How can we come to the table without leaving the marginalized or oppressive parts of ourselves at the door? Or can we?

During my first year of teaching undergraduates, I was faced with a student who questioned my stated stance as a believer in liberatory and democratic education by telling me in an end of the year email that I had not listened to him or valued him as a student (Hermann-Wilmarth, 2002). While his comments failed to take into account *his* responsibility in participating in the classroom culture and community, they did bring to light for me the ways in which I privileged voices in the class that made me comfortable and that reflected my own beliefs. In short, it seemed that I was using my power as the teacher to give voice to ideas and beliefs traditionally silenced in our conservative, white, southern climate at the expense of and in order to silence students who did not agree with me. Like June later said, "It comes from both sides."

Dialogic Structures in a Liberatory Classroom

Once I became aware of the need to create spaces for *all* voices, even those who had traditionally marginalized my own, in my classroom, I began to struggle with the

tension between the theory and the practice of dialogue. What could a dialogic teacher education classroom look like, particularly when most of my students are the products of a public school system dedicated to decidedly anti-dialogic education where the silencing of dissenting voices is much more the norm than education as a practice of freedom (hooks, 1994)?

> As Michelle Fine (1992) described, the
>
> practices of silencing in the public schools … preserve the ideology of equal opportunity and access while obscuring the unequal distribution of resources and outcomes, create within a system of severe asymmetric power relations the impression of democracy and collaboration among "peers" …, quiet student voices of difference and dissent so that such voices when they burst forth, are rendered deviant and dangerous, [and] remove from public discourse the tensions between … explicit claims to democracy and implicit reinforcement of power asymmetries … and the dominant language of equal educational opportunity versus the undeniable evidence of failure as a majority experience for low-income adolescents. (p. 116)

When I asked my students to engage in discussions about marginalized people after they had been indoctrinated for their entire educational careers with the idea that the United States provides equal opportunities for *all* people, it was natural that resistance and silence was often their first response. Michelle Fine (1992) again: "Silencing signifies a terror of words, a fear of talk" (p. 115). Similarly, bell hooks (2003) argued that

> when contemporary progressive educators all around the nation challenged the way institutionalized systems of domination (race, sex, nationalist imperialism)

> have, since the origin of public education, used schooling to reinforce dominator values, a pedagogical revolution began in college classrooms. Exposing the covert conservative political underpinnings shaping the content of material in the classroom, as well as the ways in which ideologies of domination informed the ways thinkers teach and act in the classroom, opened a space where educators could begin to take seriously what it would look like to teach from a standpoint aimed at liberating the minds of our students rather than indoctrinating them. (p. 1)

My aim as an educator is certainly not to indoctrinate my students into my way of thinking, but without a structure in place to help them see this, the contrast between their years of education as described by hooks (2003) and Fine (1992) and the kinds of texts and discussions that they are required to participate in for my classes could lead them to the conclusion that, indeed, indoctrination *is* my goal.

Freire (1998b) claimed that

> if teachers are consistently authoritarian, then they are always the initiators of talk, while the students are continually subjected to their discourse. They speak to, for, and about the learners. … And even when they talk with the learners, it is as if they were doing them a favor, underlining the importance and power of their own voices. (p. 64)

Some teachers invite student voice and dissent into the classroom, perhaps telling them like Maria C. Gonzalez (1994) that “you have a right to hold any opinion. Just know why you hold it, and be prepared to respond when I ask you what concepts that opinion is based on” (p.60). However, words are not enough to initiate dialogue rather than debate.

Actions that show students that the teacher can be trusted to both value student positions and allow for reciprocal challenging of teacher positions must somehow be in place. Gonzalez's many Mexican-American students initially resisted her bringing queer texts into their Mexican-American literature class, but once she helped them understand that she "[did] not expect to change opinions or minds" but "[expected her] students to learn to acknowledge and understand their assumptions" (p. 61), dialogue became more possible.

Reflecting on her own college teaching practices, bell hooks (1994) wrote of the experience of "learning when one's experience is recognized as central and significant" (p. 37) and suggested that "to listen to one another, is an exercise in recognition" (p. 41). Freire (1998a) insisted that this listening is essential to dialogic teaching: "I must open myself to the world of these students with whom I share my pedagogical adventure. I must become acquainted with their way of being in the world … [or] at least become less of a stranger to it" (p. 123). This listening to the diversity of our students' experiences, as Greene (1988) suggested, is the momentum behind possible learning and growth: "Multiple interpretations constitute multiple realities; the 'common' itself becomes multiplex and endlessly challenging, as each person reaches out from his/her own ground to what might be, should be, is not yet" (p. 21). Daniel G. Solozano (2000) employed this listening to student experience in order to create space for teacher/student dialogue from the first meeting of his community college sociology and Chicano studies classes: "I began the semester by engaging the students in a dialogue about social issues of concern to them and discussing how these issues affect their communities" (p. 17). When her students resisted her feminist politics in the classroom, Magda Lewis (2000) "[shifted]

[the class'] focus from the topic of discussion … and [refocused] on the dynamics in the classroom" (p. 92) helping students see how their own experiences outside the classroom were guiding the kinds of discussions that they entered into as a classroom community. Bringing student experience into the classroom by both acknowledging and validating that experience is the key component to dialogic teaching.

Ira Shor (1992) provided a powerful example of how he has negotiated his power as the classroom teacher with his students to create spaces for dialogue, even in the midst of resistance. Following Freire's (1970/1993, Shor & Freire, 1987) lead, Shor (1992) focused on the student-teacher relationship in his quest to create classrooms where empowering education occurs. He defined empowering education as "a critical-democratic pedagogy for self and social change. It is a student-centered program for multicultural democracy in school and society. It approaches individual growth as an active, cooperative, and social process, because the self and society create each other" (1992, p. 15). Empowering education implied for Shor much more than merely individual agency. It did not "teach students to seek self-centered gain while ignoring public welfare" (p. 16), but looked at how systems of oppression are at work inside and outside the classroom, continually recreating the societal norms that privilege a select few. Empowering education is a problem-posing pedagogy where students and teacher focus on "power relations in the classroom, in the institution, in the formation of standard canons of knowledge, and in society at large" (p. 31). Students were encouraged to resist, through active participation, traditional teaching and texts through questioning, engaged dialogue, and direct action.

The students in Shor's college English classes were usually non-traditional in that they were older and from working-class backgrounds, and were often students who were not successful at the banking method of teaching and learning employed throughout their educational careers. Students don't come to his classes looking for "self and social change," (Shor, 1992, p. 15) but ready to succeed this time at the deposit and withdrawal of information. They knew at this point that they need to play the game of school in order to access the opportunities that have privileged their wealthier peers. Thus, they resisted any last minute rule changes instituted by their professor.

He described a typical first day of class when students file into his classroom, already knowing who he is and how he will teach because he fills the role of teacher. "The students watched me with expectant gazes and mixed complexion, waiting for the professor to do education to them" (1996, p. 10). Instead of meeting those expectations of prescribed syllabus, long lectures, and papers where grammar counts more than ideas, Shor begins his classes by asking students why the subject is or is not important to them, and what they already know and understand about the topic to be studied. He continuously learns about the lives of his students, using their ideas, curiosities, needs, and experiences to guide the readings and class discussions.

How classrooms look and sound—where students sit and when students talk—can be political issues in classrooms where students are expected to participate. When students have become accustomed to silently sitting in the corners of rooms and only speaking after their raised hand has been acknowledged, a shift from rows into circles and more freely flowing discussions can feel more intimidating than empowering. Shor often opens discussion on the first day of class with students about how they want to sit,

and how they want to talk. Students vote on rows or a circle, raised hands or mutual consent. What works with one group of students might not work with another. “Choices and outcomes are apparently situated and localized, group-specific, not uniform or universal” (1996, p. 70). While some classes prefer a more traditional learning context, their power and decision making are central to that context in classes geared toward empowering education than they could ever be in banking method classrooms. Students are not expected to conform to an either/or classroom, but to negotiate their learning experiences through engaged dialogue.

Shor acknowledges that the authority that he, as the teacher, brings into the classroom upsets any balance of power:

> As the teacher, I am *inviting and allowing* the students to practice democracy rather than they having won this right *for themselves*. The experiment in negotiation is the result of my political initiative, not theirs, representing my long-term social development into such an agenda, not theirs. (1996, p. 74; emphasis in original)

Understanding that there is a political nature of every action taken by a teacher in a classroom is central to developing a trusting relationship between teachers and students. Regardless of how differently a classroom feels where the teacher claims an emancipatory pedagogy, students (and teachers) know that, just like in a traditional classroom, the teacher has the final word about course content and grades. Acknowledging this power, talking about it with students, and creating opportunities to balance it (by using grading contracts and co-creating reading lists or assignments, for example) helps students to see new possibilities outside of the classroom. Students

> can experience the class as a laboratory for alternative self-development, which is a political opening afforded by an alternative teacher to develop the students' (and teachers') democratic arts and critical thought. Even within these obvious limits and contradictions, once a process goes in motion by whatever means, it can take on an unpredictable life of its own. (p. 75)

Teachers hoping to create spaces for empowering education can use these contradictions as opportunities for dialogue about the larger world.

Looking at the Data: Analysis

Because the purpose of my study was to find ways to create dialogic conversations around my particular inquiry topic, as well as to create a successful inquiry group among interested students, I used the literature of liberatory pedagogy to guide the analysis of my data. Betty Shockley Bisplinghoff (1999) wrote that by reading fiction as she wrote up her research data, she was "collecting both information and developing sensitivities while under the influence of guiding preoccupations" (p. 172). She also wrote that "we read with selective attention, out of our own experiences and from our own questions" (p. 176). While Bisplinghoff wrote about fiction writers as her mentors, I saw Freire's work as a mentor to me both throughout the entire study and during analysis. I found other scholars along the way who helped me to refine my understanding of dialogue, particularly within the context of this study.

My data analysis began with the transcription of tapes from inquiry group meetings, class sessions, and one-on-one interviews with my participants. As I transcribed, I bolded text that stood out to me as intriguing because of how students spoke to each other, or the ways that they used words to express their opinions. After the

initial transcription, I gathered the written data from student assignments and email exchanges. After reading through all of them together, I returned to the texts of my mentors to help me define dialogue. In my telling about the study in this chapter and the next two, I have attempted to draw a picture of dialogue as it twisted and turned through the interactions of my students and myself. I layered our experiences on top of the words of Freire, Shor, hooks and Greene to find where we hit and missed, and to try to make sense of how and why. I brought hooks' (1994) questions to our interchanges, "Who speaks? Who listens? And why?" (p. 40) I looked in my data for places where my students and I reflected Freire's (1970/1993) requirement that the student-teacher hierarchy was dismantled, and where I relied on it. I also looked for places where students became teachers of each other and of me, and of places where students used power afforded to them by internal classroom privileges or by external societal privileges to determine whose voice mattered more.

I looked at my data for ways that our talk and writing mirrored my definitions of dialogic conversation. I returned to the bolded text from my initial transcription, and listened to the tapes again with the transcript in front of me, and the definitions of dialogue that I'd found in the literature and that I'd created for this study in my head. I wrote my understandings and analysis of the interactions among participants with the data and definitions close at hand. (To see an example of a bolded transcript with notes about dialogue, see Figure 4.)

Singh (2002) defined dialogue as "a relation we enter into, get caught up in, get carried away by, or are changed by" (p. 215). Likewise, Freire (in Shor & Freire, 1987) wrote that "dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they

Figure 4 Analysis Sample

Jianna: But, it is their belief still, I mean, you know what I mean? Like, we're not allowed to come in and impose our beliefs to influence at all, I don't think those beliefs should be brought in.

Cindy: When it comes to homosexuality, there is so much religion that comes into it, and I understand that it is written in the Bible and all, but isn't, like, isn't a part, isn't being Christian not judging?

Jianna: I …

Cindy: I'm not saying be acceptable, be a good everything, but just the fact that, you know, not judging anybody. You know, I mean, be like, I don't know that person, I don't know what they do, and accept it as that.

Maggie: I mean, you're going to have all kinds of students in your classroom that may be facing this situation through their parents, or through themselves, and so you being Christian is not going to change their lifestyle. And I feel like, by you having such beliefs and not being able to separate those from dealing with your students, you're going to alienate that child.

Jianna: **I think, OK, I think you guys, OK maybe I'm jumping to conclusions, but I think you guys are saying that, like that I would automatically just discriminate against those children and like hate them and treat them differently than I would anyone else in the classroom.** That's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is that, I don't agree with that, and there are a lot of people that don't agree with that but there's a lot of people that agree with that. And so I think that bringing it into the classroom is like, to show, or to influence somebody else to think that way. And I think you just can't do that. Because if I can't bring my religious beliefs into the class to influence with what I believe, then …"

Cindy**: So, you just don't address those kids at all …**

Jianna: **I would, well, if someone was to like to do something hateful or hurtful, I would address it to say, you know, there are different people that agree that it's right there's some people that agree that it's wrong.**

Cindy: **See I wouldn't do that. I wouldn't give right or wrongness to something into a classroom.**

Jianna: **But, I am addressing it.**

Cindy: **But, who is saying it's right, and who is saying it's wrong? Me? You? Like, I don't have the authority to say, "you're right" or "you're wrong."**

Jianna: **But I think you deal with things like that … Let's say something like that was brought up, in a current event. Bring that into your classroom, talk about it. Talk about why those types of behaviors aren't right. … I'm not afraid of it, I just think it's wrong. And that's my belief. And I'm entitled to that belief, just like someone entitled to have the belief that it's OK**.

Cindy: What would you say to a student who said they two moms or two dads?

Jianna**: I would just say that that's the way the world is. That there is that out there, and some people think it's OK, and some people don't think it's OK. That's where I would leave it. … Because for me to say it's OK goes against what I believe, and that's wrong. Like, I can't talk about that. ... And I don't think that I'm doing anyone any injustice by saying that I think that's wrong. I'm not saying, 'I hate you.' I'm not saying, 'You're awful for feeling that way.' I'm not saying anything like that. I'm just saying that, that's out there and some people think it's OK and some people don't. But for me to start teaching it like it's OK, that's what I have a problem with.**

Cindy***: I guess that's where the confusion was***. **… I thought you just didn't want to address it at all. Like you just saying that, yes, that's someone's choice, and that there are many people who have chosen that path, and there's many people who haven't chosen that path, who have gone the other way, then, I mean. I understand your view on that. I guess I misunderstood that you were just like, 'No, I'm not going to talk about it.'** … But just saying that there are a lot of choices in life and some people choose this and some people choose that, … doesn't devalue you as a human being.

Jill's notes: At the beginning of this exchange, Cindy and Jianna seem to be arguing, to be trying to prove that they are right. Once Jianna realized that she was being misunderstood, she clarified her position. Cindy listened, asked further questions, and her questions helped Jianna move from her original position of not wanting to address this at all in the classroom to addressing it in a particular way. Cindy might think it needs to be addressed further, but she states at the end of the exchange that she understands Jianna's position. That there had been a misunderstanding.

make and remake it," and that dialogue occurs when "we reflect together on what we know and don't know" (pp 98-99). In my analysis, I looked for places where students and I appeared to be listening to one another, reflecting on our own positions, gaining new understanding about our own ideas and the ideas of others, and strengthening our ideas about an issue, even if we didn't change to a new way of thinking. This, I saw as dialogue. When participants revisited positions that they'd held at the beginning of the conversation, using each other's words or the course texts to clarify their ideas or when participants pushed each other to clarify each others' positions so that they could better understand their differences, I labeled this dialogue.

Other interactions among participants were conversations filled with the mere exchange of ideas. As Freire (1970/1993) wrote, dialogue cannot "become a simple exchange of ideas to be 'consumed' by the discussants" (p. 70). The perspectives from which the students were speaking were so similar that no growth or reflection was necessary to continue the conversation; therefore, I did not label these conversations dialogue. The other kinds of exchanges I labeled as debate. Freire (1970/1993) wrote that dialogue is not a "hostile, polemical argument between those who are committed neither to the naming of the world, nor to the search for truth, but rather to the imposition of their own truth" (p. 70). When participants would not permit or acknowledge that the feelings or ideas of others were valid, when they were not open to new ways of thinking, or to the possibility that their positions could be changed or expanded, and when participants privileged their ideas over all other ideas, I labeled these exchanges debate.

During analysis, I tried to find places where participants met in dialogic conversation, creating places where we grew because we were both listened to and

challenged. I found that writing about these places helped me to make meaning and understand them within the larger context of my study and my teaching. As Laurel Richardson (2000) wrote, “writing is a way of ‘knowing’—a method of discovery and analysis” (p. 923). She continued, “writing as a method of inquiry … provides a research practice through which we can investigate how we construct the world, ourselves, and others” (p. 924).

Failure to Dialogue

Even as I see a liberatory and dialogic classroom space as a goal of my teaching, the authenticity, even the true possibility, of a dialogue among equals is questioned and critiqued by others. Burbules (2000) suggested that

> the insistence that a dialogue is somehow self-corrective, that if there are unresolved power differentials or unexamined silences and omissions within a dialogue, simply persisting with the same forms of dialogical exchange can bring them to light, seems not only counterproductive but itself a form of hegemony: if dialogue fails, the solution to the problem is more of the same. (p. 252)

Maggie, one of the inquiry group members, described feeling this tension during small group discussion in class. On the same day that my colleague had come to speak with our class, the students and I had read articles centering on issues of race and white privilege (McIntosh, 1998), class (Kellogg, 1998), gender (Lyman, 2000), bilingualism (Krashen, 2000), and homosexuality (Rofes, 1997) within education. Before discussion began, I hung butcher paper around the room with the theme of each article labeled at the top and asked students to write anonymous reactions to the texts on the community paper. Hoping

to include all student voices in a common classroom text, I then read the comments to the class before they broke up into small groups to discuss the readings.

Maggie's small group of five focused most of their discussion time on issues of white privilege, and many of the members of her group seemed to reflect the beliefs written on the "Race/White Privilege" butcher paper about Peggy McIntosh's (date) "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack": "It is even harder to be poor and white than poor and black." "Black people get more advantages than white people today." "Racism doesn't just come from white people."

As Maggie entered conversation with her peers, she felt alone at the table:

> I was in a group with people, like four other people, who did not share the same view points that I did. … One person was talking about how white privilege doesn't exist because she's been poor, and she's poor now because she's in college. And I was like, "But you're in college. And that's a huge privilege. There are a whole lot of people who don't ever get that chance, and if you were really in poverty, you would be working, you know 40 hours a week, or you know, two jobs, and you would be trying to support your family." I mean, you don't. I mean, I have no idea what that would be like because I have never been there, but I do know that there are people my age and younger than me who have to deal with that. … And so at the beginning I tried to, you know, say these kinds of things, and they were all just like, they just kind of shut it down. And I was like, OK. Like I kind of gave up. You know? I'm just going to forget about it with this … Because I didn't have anybody else who was like, "Yeah, I know what you mean." And supporting me, and so I just kind of felt overwhelmed. And I was

> like, “alright, this isn’t going anywhere.” You know, this would take a lot more than the time that we have. And so, um, I don’t know. I just, it was kind of eye opening for me.

Even as she tried to enter into dialogue with other students, the resistance she felt to conversation shut Maggie down. Burbules (2000) argued,

> while some may view dialogue as a benefit, or a potential benefit, others may regard it as a threat, and others as an impossibility. The rejection of dialogue, or the refusal to submit one’s views to questioning, compromise, or renegotiation, is not always a mark of irrationality. The very aim of dialogue to speak and understand across differences is not an unalloyed benefit to all potential parties to such dialogue. (p. 259)

Maggie and her peers all had beliefs that they were trying both to protect and promote. Perhaps Maggie’s peers found the directions that Maggie was trying to push the conversation as detrimental and intrusive to their ways of thinking. As Maggie and her peers both stepped away from the seemingly impossible dialogue, they might have been moving away from the threat that this subject matter in this particular context placed them under. There was no likelihood of “[understanding] across differences.” And while my goal of dialogue among my students around sociopolitical issues—listening to one another, reflection on one’s own position, gaining new understanding, but not necessarily changing that position—may have failed, I don’t believe that this moment (or the many other moments) of failure outweigh the benefits of attempted dialogic conversation among people with fundamentally diverging beliefs or identities.

The possibility for learning from and with each other is, in my mind, reliant on a dialogic goal. Freire (1970/1993) argued that "action and reflection cannot proceed without the action and reflection of others" (p. 107). And while to both Maggie and me this attempt at dialogue was utterly unsuccessful, and in fact was not dialogue at all, it might not have seemed that way to the four other members of Maggie's small group: They successfully resisted talking about an issue that they disagreed with. However, had I stepped into this attempted dialogue as the teacher with the classroom power to do so, or had Maggie, as a student whose ideas might be perceived as privileged because they were aligned with the teacher's, attempted to force the conversation with her resisting peers further, we would have been acting as who Freire labels as the dominator, "[denying] them their own right to say their own word and think their own thoughts" (p. 107). On the slippery slope of teaching with or teaching to and at my students, of opening the possibility for dialogue or reverting to the banking model of education (Freire, 1970/1993) where I know that my ideas and voice would be privileged, I would rather slide to an occasional failure. But the question remains, why does dialogue work among some who have strongly differing positions and not others? Under what conditions do students trust the dialogic process?

A Student/Teacher Dialogue: We Come Together from Both Sides

Of all of the inquiry group members, Jianna and I seemed most divergent in our ways of understanding the world. Of any participant, her thinking most influenced my own, not only because we had the longest philosophical journey to travel in order to meet each other, but because her commitment to engaging with me as *both* a student and a teacher constantly challenged me to self-reflect and evaluate my teaching practices. We'd

each had a Road to Damascus conversion experience that shifted us to deeper understandings of our own spirituality. These individual religious and spiritual commitments had been life-changing. Jianna wrote in her Cultural Memoir about leaving her Catholic roots as a teenager to join an evangelical congregation, severing for a time her relationship with her mother. When I embarked on my Religious Studies major in college and tried to share some of my new understandings and thoughts about Christianity with my own mother, her response was less than receptive. As I cut ties with my Presbyterian roots my mother lamented, "You're showing me that you don't believe anything I taught you as a child." Both Jianna and I resisted familial norms, risking relationships along the way, as we claimed our Christian identities. It was from these religious positions that we approached each other's spiritual understandings, and in my view, our hard-fought struggles make our ability to dialogue even more compelling.

Staking Out Our Positions

Peeking around the door to my cramped graduate student office, Jianna asked, "Are you ready?" As I invited her to sit down, I noticed that she was carrying a children's Bible. "You came armed!" Jianna laughed. "I left mine at home, so I checked this one out from the library. I'm ready to keep talking about scripture with you!"

With a Bible in her hand, it seemed that this first one-on-one interview of the inquiry study between Jianna and me would be a continuation of the emailed scripture swap we'd begun shortly after the class reading of a piece of gay and lesbian children's literature. This emailed colloquy occurred from the safety of my home, with texts from that long ago undergraduate Religious Studies major by my side for aid as my graduate studies have slowed my Biblical memory. We each drew from what seemed to be our

favorite passages—me citing images of Jesus as liberator of the marginalized (Matt. 20: 16, New Revised Standard Version), implorer of those with privilege to use that privilege in ways that help the oppressed (Luke 14: 13-14), and disrupter of the establishment (Matt. 12:9-14), and Jianna referring to the Leviticus codes and the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.

This exchange was the result of a comment I made on Jianna's response to Woodson's (1997) *The House You Pass on the Way*, Casement's (2002) "Breaking the silence: The stories of gay and lesbian people in children's literature," and Lewison, Leland, Flint, and Möller's (2002) "Dangerous Discourses: Using Controversial Books to Support Engagement, Diversity, and Democracy." In her response, Jianna contended that she could not accept the argument that gay and lesbian literature should be included in the elementary school classroom because she was a Christian, and Christians believe that homosexuality is a sin. She wrote:

> Both these articles promote the inclusion of homosexual literature in classrooms and curriculum and I am not okay with that. I am a Christian and for me homosexuality is a sin not because I say it is but because my God says it is. If homosexuals do not like that then that is their choice, but I love God and cannot accept something that grieves his heart.

My comment that *I* was a Christian and didn't believe that homosexuality was a sin, and neither did many other Christians that I knew, ignited Jianna's emailed question—"Is this just somebody's opinion, or can you find scripture that supports your stance?"

As I've said, this question began our emailed exchange of scriptural texts. Jianna later asked if she could borrow some of the books that I'd read that helped me to interpret

the scriptures the way that I did. When I did loan her a book (Furnish, 1994) she read them before she took them to her minister to see what he thought about them. Although our interview included much scriptural discussion, and much discussion about how we read the Bible differently, just like we all read children's literature differently, ultimately, Jianna took the words of her minister as Truth, and the ideas expressed in my books and by me during our interview as mere interpretation of scripture, and a flawed interpretation at that.

One Identity, Many Positions

While religious dialogue might not be recommended between teacher educators and their students, this extended exchange between Jianna and me laid the groundwork for our inquiry into how we could better meet the needs of students who challenge us. Jianna's inquiry study question was, "How can I respect students who challenge my religious beliefs without, at the same time, compromising those beliefs?" As we entered into that first interview, we seemed to be feeling out one another's claims to Christianity. Jianna's belief system matched that of students in my past three cohorts of undergraduates: Those who were most vocal about their Christianity typically held beliefs that fall under what Bruce Bawer (1997) labeled "legalistic Christianity," where there is a focus "on law, doctrine, and authority" (p. 5).

Carter Heyward (1999) posed the question, "Who is this Jesus whom people like me and unlike me claim to have met as a friend or brother, a lover or savior?" (p. 2). She described the "variety of double images—simultaneous images of power as well as vulnerability … a powerful presence and a suffering brother" (p. 9) that reflect Jesus the man. Heyward noticed, however, that this double image is missing from the political

platform of the Christian Right, where Jianna has told me that she situates herself. That Jesus is a socially and historically constructed figure (Pelikan, 1985) and the literal actions that he took as a human being are two gaps that Heyward (1999) saw in the message of conservative Christianity. One reason for this is

> that Jesus of Nazareth must be kept in the background precisely so that Jesus Christ as Lord and King of All can be fashioned and adored by those who are right. This Jesus Christ becomes thereby an icon of human aspiration for economic, intellectual, gender, racial, and other forms of social, political, and psychological control. (p. 18)

In both our interview and in classroom conversation, Jianna readily called on messages that she heard projected from her preacher. Heyward (1999) has suggested that, historically, there have been four images of Jesus reflected from the Sunday morning pulpit by conservative Christians: "Jesus Christ as authoritarian Lord; Jesus Christ as moralist; Jesus Christ as adversary against his enemies; Jesus Christ as obedient son of his Father" (p. 19). These images contrast starkly with the images put forth by Marcus Borg (1994) of Jesus as "spirit person," "teacher of wisdom," "social prophet," and "movement founder" (p. 30). These conflicting images expose a fundamental difference between the religious understandings and experiences of conservative Christians like Jianna, and more progressive Christians like me. Gary David Comstock (1993) captured the manifestation of these divergent understandings: "Christian Scripture and tradition are not authorities from which I seek approval; rather, they are resources from which I seek guidance and learn lessons as well as institutions that I seek to interpret, shape, and change" (p. 4). Because the central and common tie of our religious beliefs is so

differently constructed and experienced, it is easy to see how Jianna and I can express our similarly-labeled religious beliefs in such contradictory ways.

Moving Toward Both/And

Settling into the cloistered office environment for that first interview, Jianna seemed initially hesitant, worried that our previous emails had started her off on the wrong foot:

> "Yeah, I mean I guess with all of that I wrote down, I wanted to tell you that I don't want you to feel, like offended, because I don't want to come across that way, but I guess it's just defending how I feel about things, but I don't want to come across …"

I tried to reassure her: "Yeah, well we're both doing the same thing. We're both defending where we're coming from."

> "OK," she ventured. "Yeah. We're just explaining where we're coming from. … So for me the biggest thing is that I as a Christian feel like I need to share the truth of the Bible and salvation of people. And I don't want to come across in a way, you know like I said, that is going to push religion down somebody's throat. I mean, that's just not cool. I mean, that's not what God does. So, but I do feel like we need to talk about and share. So when I see something that contradicts what the word of God is saying, like, I want to try to clarify that because I mean, I don't want anyone to be led in the wrong direction or be led astray or, you know. That's just where I come from.

And this began our first face-to-face dialogue about how we could, from our own particular religious positionings, address the needs of students for whom gay and lesbian issues are pertinent. We first meandered through Paul's ideas about slavery:

> Jianna: "OK. I can see where you're coming from but, at the same time, it doesn't come right out to me and say, OK. Let's have slavery. I think he was just addressing a present issue that was around at that day and age."

concepts of reader response as it applies to both children's literature and Biblical text:

> Jianna: "I know especially, like with *The Devil's Arithmetic* we definitely have a lot of interpretation of it, even within our class. And I think that even with the Bible, yes, because there is historical context you have to take consideration."

and the meaning of "Jewishness" during Hebrew Bible times and today:

> Jill: "I think that we don't live by the Levitical Codes anymore, even though Judaism is a part of Christian heritage. People eat shellfish and mix their fibers, you know? And part of the essence of being Jewish was that you didn't do those things."

This relaxed, give-and-take conversation stands in stark contrast to Jianna's earlier written and spoken language surrounding her religious positioning. At the time that our children's literature class read texts about gay and lesbian children's literature, Jianna had not yet begun her own inquiry research. In her small group's discussion about the previously mentioned articles there were no traces of dialogic conversation. Some participants in the discussion seemed to align themselves with another group member, and then against Jianna. Defensiveness ruled the conversation:

Jianna: Like to me this [homosexuality], this in my view is, that I think it's wrong, but in somebody else's view is that it's right. Right there, there's two different beliefs. And so my problem and issue with it is that, if they can come in and talk about that as being a belief that they can talk about it and teach about it, then why can't other religions come in and talk about their beliefs?

Cindy: Because you're bringing religion into what you believe. Like, that's not a religion. If someone is gay, that's not their religion. Just like being heterosexual is not your religion.

Jianna: But, it is their belief still, I mean, you know what I mean? Like, we're not allowed to come in and impose our beliefs to influence at all, I don't think those beliefs should be brought in.

Cindy: When it comes to homosexuality, there is so much religion that comes into it, and I understand that it is written in the Bible and all, but isn't, like, isn't a part, isn't being Christian not judging?

Jianna: I …

Cindy: I'm not saying be acceptable, be a good everything, but just the fact that, you know, not judging anybody. You know, I mean, be like, I don't know that person, I don't know what they do, and accept it as that.

Maggie: I mean, you're going to have all kinds of students in your classroom that may be facing this situation through their parents, or through themselves, and so you being Christian is not going to change their lifestyle. And I feel like, by you having such beliefs and not being able to separate those from dealing with your students, you're going to alienate that child.

By the time the class was moving away from small groups, Jianna had clearly stated that homosexuality was not something she was willing to deal with in her classroom, regardless of whether or not she had students with same gender parents or not:

> Jianna: I don't have a problem with saying that there are different types of families, but that's where I would leave it. I wouldn't go into same sex families, because, you know, then I feel like I am promoting that belief system and I am talking about it. And another reason that I would have a problem with the literature is because it does go into detail people would feel, and it and it brings all these emotions out and I think that could really influence children and you know, lead them in the wrong way. I just, I just don't think that's something that needs to be brought into the classroom. I'm not saying, "Hey, you know, don't be that. Don't … whatever." I'm not. I'm just saying I don't want to deal with it in my classroom. I don't think it needs to be in the classroom.

As we moved into a large, whole class circle to debrief the small group conversations, Jianna remained fairly silent. Other members of the class repeated some of the assertions she'd made in her small group, and Maggie and Cindy joined in the lively discussion. I felt myself watching, not interjecting, wanting the variety of students to control the conversation. My voice, I thought, had already been heard through the choosing of the texts. Discussion continued in groups of two, three, and four as students filed out of class together.

Along with the other members of the inquiry group, Jianna received the transcripts of all five of the small group discussions—we had a gathering planned for a week and a half after the "gay and lesbian" class so that we could share what we'd

noticed in our talk with each other. I was curious about how Jianna would react to the differences in group discussion, and if she'd interject some of our scriptural banter. Arriving a little late, Jianna joined the group around the large conference room table in my department's meeting room. As she sat down, she admitted apologetically that she had only read two of the five transcripts. As members of the group discussed the differences among the five small group discussions, Jianna listened intently. In every other group aside from hers, there had been more consensus. Either students had agreed on whether or not homosexuality was an appropriate topic for elementary school students, or students discussed at what age and to what extent a discussion around gay and lesbian issues would be appropriate. In one group, there appeared to be more consensus because the dominant voice in the group became the prevailing opinion, not allowing for divergent opinions to be voiced like it was in Jianna, Maggie and Cindy's group. Jianna, Maggie, and Cindy's discussion, the members of the inquiry group agreed, was the most polemic of the five.

At Jianna's next words, I think that my mouth physically dropped open. "Well, if we hadn't read this and talked about it, I wouldn't know to address it in my classroom. Seeing how other people might approach it helps me see how I might." Not only had there been a shift from, "I don't want to deal with it in my classroom," but she seemed to be genuinely glad that *I* had chosen to deal with issues of homosexuality in *my* classroom.

Later that week at our interview, the change in her thinking was even more apparent. However, she maintained her scriptural stance about the sin of homosexuality:

Well, how do I put this? Um. It's not that I want to undermine you or anyone else,

> it's just that I believe that if you are to be in a right relationship with God, we do our best not to sin. And if we do sin, we need to ask for forgiveness so that we can still be in right with God. And I think that based, and I'll say, based on the way that *I've* read the Bible and that *I've* understood it, um, I feel that anybody that chooses to walk in what I see as sin um you know, one day will go before God's, you know, throne and you know, God will say, "Depart from me you who live in iniquity. I don't know you." Because we choose to maybe disregard some things in the word that he did consider sin. And when we choose to live in disregard of that sin, then we're not really making him the lord of our life because we're saying, "OK God, I'm going to all this, but just not this." And it's not just homosexuality, it can be a lot of other things… It just makes me sad because I don't want anyone to get before God and then not be accepted into heaven because they didn't make Christ the lord of their life. So, that's kind of where I come from.

Jianna also expressed an understanding that her position was not the only position to be valued in her future classroom:

> Well, I always believed that I didn't want my students using any kind of derogatory um terminology with one another. So, if that were to come up, I would definitely address it, and just be like, you know, "You don't say that. It's not right." And I would explain why. So that hasn't really changed because I already felt that way before the readings. What *has* changed is that, um, before hand I never really thought about the need to have to address it at all in the classroom in regards to, you know, if I had a family who has parents that were homosexual, or

> if there was a kid that was. I never really thought about having to address it. Now, I see that it could be a prevalent issue, so I do need to address it. But I think that I've come to the conclusion that I would just say, you know, "There are people out there who believe it's OK to practice it. And there's people who don't agree with that and, you know." I think I would just kind of leave it at that. I mean. I wouldn't feel comfortable bringing a book in like *The House You Pass on the Way* because I just feel like that is much more intimate and shedding much more cultural light on that, and I just don't feel like I have an obligation to that, so. And I have to be honest, because I don't know if I was teaching a family, if I would necessarily just talk about that kind of a family unless I knew that there was a student in my classroom that, you know, could identify with it, or if their family was that way or whatever … cause I wouldn't want them to feel singled out. That's one thing I've learned from readings and from our class discussions is to talk about that there are families like that. You know. Um. I don't think I'd have to go into much more detail. Because I wouldn't go into much more detail about other families either. So.

"It comes from both sides": Finding Our Way Out of the "it" Bind

As our first semester of inquiry, learning, teaching, and dialogue came to a close, Jianna dove head first into her personal inquiry question. She wasn't sure where to begin, so I hesitatingly offered her several reading selections about how teachers had addressed issues of homosexuality with their students. I worried that the selections that I had chosen would appear too one-sided. I wasn't sure, I told her, if any of what I had to offer was

written from her theological perspective. She shrugged and told me that she'd pick and choose.

I still marvel over the beginnings of our engaged dialogue. How had we gone from incompatible approaches to an issue to a dialogic conversation even as we maintained our firm stances in our original positions? That original "it" of resistance, silencing, ignorance, and exclusivity coming from each of our sides was shifting. Or, at least our sides were shifting. It seemed that we were no longer occupying binary space, but finding common ground within our established and firmly maintained dichotomous positions. At what moment had we moved from defending to questioning? More specifically, when did Jianna trust that a) I would not abuse my power as the teacher to penalize her for her stance, and b) we could acknowledge and actively participate in this collaborative learning from each other?

Freire (1970/1993) wrote that "education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students" (p. 53). Maxine Greene (1988) posed these questions: "Does not one have to act upon one's freedom along with others—to take the initiative, to break through some boundary? Does not one have to claim what are called 'human rights' to incarnate them in the life of community?" (p. 3). If as teachers we are striving to create a community with the possibility of freedom in our classrooms, we cannot be the only classroom member working towards that freedom. Clearly, Jianna wants to learn how to value all students in her future class—over the course of that first semester, she recognized how ignoring an issue that contradicted her strongly held religious beliefs could be damaging to children. As she was learning to break through this

boundary issue, I was having to learn how to hear her thinking between the lines of religious language that has previously marginalized me with its accusatory tones. We had to "act upon [our] freedom along with [each] other."

In order to become an authentic community, teachers must provide spaces, share power, and anticipate resistance so that they can work with students to create a classroom with a common goal. Looking closely at practice, Greene (1988) drew a picture of what it might mean to imagine the boundaries of classrooms as more fluid: "We might think of freedom as an opening of spaces as well as perspectives, with everything depending on the actions we undertake in the course of our quest, the *praxis* we learn to devise" (p. 5; emphasis in original). Greene (1995) argued that we are called as teachers to "find ways of creating situations in which persons will choose to engage in cooperative or collective action in order to bring about societal repairs" (p. 66) within our teaching and learning communities. In order to change our lives, to live better lives, to revise our living, we have to think about and critique the most normed aspects of ourselves. This is not a solo act. The ideals of freedom from oppression must be discovered collaboratively. "They have to be realized within the transactions and interchanges of community life. Moreover, they have to be *chosen* by living individuals in the light of the individuals' shared life with others" (Greene, 1995, p. 66; emphasis in original). In a classroom community, the collaboration of the students and teacher to find ways to create a more just society must be based on the lives of all members of the community and take into consideration how those lives affect each other.

Without having the benefit of course readings on emancipatory pedagogy, Jianna put her faith in the process. Her courage in asking that original question over email, "Is

this just somebody's opinion, or can you find scripture that supports your stance?" was the beginning of our dialogic space. Challenging the teacher's position can be a dangerous act. She, as Greene (1995) implored students and teachers to do, actively chose to engage in the "transactions and interchanges" of our experiences "in the light of [our] shared [lives]" (p. 66). Perhaps the high grade on her paper, even though I clearly stated that I disagreed with her position, helped her to trust that we could build a relationship around the issue of homosexuality. Or, perhaps this trust began during that first book group around Harry Potter when I helped create space in a hostile setting for her dissenting voice. Regardless of when it occurred, we had found a place where a challenge was not a threat, but an opportunity for understanding.

Reciprocal Learning

Once our dialogue began, Jianna and I never looked back. She took seriously my claim that I situated myself as a student of my students. She borrowed a page from Shor (1992, 1996) when, repeatedly over the course of both semesters, she offered advice for making our class a more dialogic place for *all* students. I was frustrated by the frequent lack of conversation in class, especially in contrast to the rich engagements among the members of the inquiry group and me (which will be discussed in the next chapter). Reminded by Shor (1992) that in critical communities "students are invited to join the teacher in studying their community and conditions, as co-researchers of their own culture" (p. 169), I took advantage of the one-on-one interview sessions to ask members of the inquiry group for their suggestions on how to bring elements of our dialogue into the classroom setting.

Like Maggie and me, Jianna had noticed the resistance of many members of our class to discussion about sociopolitical issues. When I asked her specifically how I could alter the structure of the class so that students might feel the level of ease and safety that she felt in dealing with issues of sexual orientation in particular, she theorized, based on her own experiences and struggles with the topic, why it hadn't worked:

> I don't know because, like I've said, with us I've just kind of felt really comfortable and not just in the inquiry group but in class, you know? I mean, I haven't felt threatened at all, and I don't know why other people in the class have. … I know when we had our first discussion in class on this issue, I was worried. I wasn't sure how you were going to come across, or if I was going to be attacked for believing what I did. And maybe other students felt that, too.

McLaughlin (2000) described the challenges of dialogue among students and teachers and found that students felt silenced when the "teacher is so consumed with the control issues in the lesson that listening is not possible" (p. 19). My power to write the syllabus, choose the texts, and require that students both write and talk about issues that already felt threatening and uncomfortable to them might have led to underlying assumption that I wouldn't be able to hear any student critique of the difficult topics. Or worse, students might fear that I would hear only their negative responses to the texts and not their rational for critique. These assumptions could have led to resistance.

> Or, maybe they just don't even want to approach it. Maybe they're afraid. … It seems like it might be something on their part, it might be something that can't be fixed until *they're* willing to open up and just talk about it. I mean, I don't know.

Jianna's critique of her classmates brings to mind hooks' (1994) assertion that "education can only be liberatory when everyone claims knowledge in a field in which we all labor" (p. 14). She recognized what I suspected—I couldn't force students to discuss issues that they weren't willing to think about. However, Jianna softened her critique with her deeper understanding of who her classmates were:

> One thing I was thinking about was that, when you had asked me if I felt threatened. I think one big struggle with me is, you know, "OK, God, how do I handle this?" Because … I feel so adamantly about how I believe, and …I want to honor that. … So, that can be a really hard place. Because at the same time, I want be fair, and I want to make sure that my thinking is right about what I'm thinking about and I want to make sure that at the same time it lines up with God's word and so it's a really hard thing to do. Because a lot of times I'm like, "OK, gosh am I being accepting of this?" And I don't want to come across as being accepting of it. You know? But at the same time, I don't want to, you know, administer disrespect or anything like that. And so, that's just been one of the hardest struggles. And maybe that's another thing that other people struggle with, and so they don't even want to approach it. Because they're thinking, "Gosh if I approach it then I'm dishonoring God and I'm dishonoring his word." And, you know, and I'm talking about people who are coming from a Christian perspective like I am. … Because I can't necessarily speak for someone who doesn't come from the same background or same belief system that I do. So I'm just offering that insight from my perspective. So, um, maybe that's what it is. A religious internal struggle. Because you want to make sure that you're true to what you

> believe. Or, like I said, maybe it was just a matter of that they were feeling attacked. You know? Maybe that's what it was, and they felt that if they engaged in a conversation or even listened to someone else, maybe they felt challenged that it would somehow compromise, you know, their own beliefs on the matter. Or something like that. You know what I mean?

At the same time, she offered critique that could aid in shifting student resistance into dialogue by telling me what had and had not felt threatening to her:

> I felt like there was a little bit of tension in the small groups, but I knew that when we disagreed that it wasn't a personal attack on anyone, but I guess there was just a little of that, um. But in the whole class discussion, it didn't feel tense at all. Because people were hearing and getting their points out. And taking turns. So, I didn't feel any tension at all.

Jianna's small group in the fall and Maggie's in the spring exhibited more characteristics of debate, while our large groups during those same classes were filled with more carefully considered words from the eight to ten students (some inquiry group members and some not) who regularly participated in these larger meetings. Jianna referred to Alexa:

> Because, you know, like Alexa was sharing in class how she viewed a challenge and a threat differently. She was in that women's class, and that professor was pushing her beliefs on her where it made her feel threatened where she didn't want to speak up, do you know what I'm saying? So I think that's important that you just say, "OK, well here's where I stand, but everyone's entitled to believe how they want." And that's what creates that safe space.

As Maggie informed me, my attempts to bring diverse voices anonymously to the class—with a script created from responses to gay and lesbian children's literature in the fall (to be discussed in Chapter 4) and the butcher paper in the spring—had failed to establish places where students felt that all ideas, not just mine or those of the loudest members of their group, were valued. Jianna understood the complexity of trying to shed light on multiple voices when she spoke of the created script in the gay and lesbian literature class session:

> I would probably change taking excerpts of peoples' words because sometimes, like, we don't know the context, and so people might get the wrong idea of what was being said there. So, I think that would be the issue with that. I think I would just stick with having people bring in their professional responses and just, you know, share them within their groups. But, then, sharing them in groups might sometimes be more difficult. People might not share as much as when you take an excerpt out, but, um, I guess that would be the change I would make.

As Jianna became more and more forthcoming with her critique, I felt like she had been the one immersed in readings about critical inquiry and liberatory pedagogy. Perhaps in light of our own dynamic dialogue around religion and homosexuality, the solution to the debate/dialogue binary seemed obvious to her:

> And I wonder, you know, what if you were to have a class discussion on that? And just be like, you know, "Look we're talking about this subject, and there are some people who seem a little apprehensive about talking about it or whatever. What can we do to have dialogue about this?" I wonder if that would be a good place to start?

She saw how the pedagogy enacted within the inquiry group resulted in co-learning and co-investigating among all inquiry group members, including me. Her suggestion reminded me that this pedagogy should not be a privileged one, reserved for those who committed themselves to dialogic research and conversations by joining the inquiry group. I am reminded by bell hooks (1994) that teachers committed to emancipatory pedagogy do not expect that their students reflect and act alone, as it seems I expected my non-inquiry group students to do. They were not privy to the same levels of personal sharing of past experiences that the group members were, simply by the nature of our smaller gatherings and individual meetings.

The risks that I took in stepping into the potentially contentious waters of religious conversation with Jianna were not the kinds of risks that I willingly took with the class as a whole. Like Jianna, I wonder what would have happened if I'd opened the same kind of spaces in class as I did in the inquiry group? I'd hoped that by requiring students to engage in texts that might challenge strongly-held beliefs and then sharing the diverse voices of all class members anonymously, I would empower students to speak without a fear of being silenced. But hooks (1994) was clear that mere empowerment is not the goal of emancipatory classroom pedagogy. As a teacher, she expects students to engage in questions about power with her and she with them. She invites and expects critique of the classroom and larger communities in terms of voice: "Who speaks? Who listens? And why?" (p. 40). Engaged pedagogy is a continual learning process, and it is from this collaborative and dialogical learning that action stems. Jianna pushed me toward collaboration with all class members in order to increase the potential for dialogue.

Moving Towards the Edge

Jianna expressed the dichotomy between classroom space and inquiry group space when she advised me to just say where I stand on issues and invite the rest of the class to do the same. That, she contended, would be enough to create a space safe enough for dialogue to occur.

But, I thought I'd done that—perhaps using a more subtle method—with scripts and butcher paper and my oft-repeated, "I expect that we'll all have different opinions here, and that's OK!" Surely, I thought, my students could pick up on my stance from both the texts on the syllabus and the questions I asked them to explore surrounding those texts. Möller and Allen (2000) suggested that, as many innovative or creative methods that I might use to ensure that students' voices were heard, in reality around controversial or threatening texts "there were no safe places" (page number).

Fecho (2004) brought to light the idea that threat is always present in classrooms where critical inquiry pedagogy is enacted. In fact, at the beginning of the class session described by Maggie, I asked students to think about a quote from his book. I wrote it on the board, expanding it to encompass the issues the class had read about:

> Far too many schools prefer not to raise significant questions about race, [class, gender, sexual orientation, or language diversity] because they make many White, [middle class, heterosexual, English speakers] feel threatened. However, by not raising those questions, educators daily cause many children of color, [working class backgrounds, same-gender parents, non-English speaking homes] to feel threatened by the silence. Why is the latter tolerable although the former is not? (p. 88)

If teachers and teacher educators are going to raise issues that speak to the marginalized, *somebody* is going to feel unsafe. This is an uncomfortable edge that I think is necessary. The inquiry group moved towards that edge together, investigating their own issues of discomfort. Why did they not fall off?

CHAPTER 5

COLUMBUS COMES OUT: CLASS DIALOGUE ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

"Most teachers simply aren't prepared for this." Inquiry group participant Andrea spoke in class the feeling that many of my students in this and other classes have vocalized around a myriad of issues, from racism to homophobia to Christopher Columbus. Even if teacher educators, as Carol Brunson Phillips (1998) wrote, prepare "teachers to acknowledge that the diverse racial and cultural contexts of children and families are important to maintain and emphasize in the educational process," there is a gap in how we "fully prepare teachers to understand in conceptual and practical ways how to eliminate the impact of society's negative responses to diversity" (p.56). While she wrote particularly about racial and cultural bias, her assertions ring true in my experiences with a variety of controversial topics: Students might be willing to read or talk about issues that they find challenging, but they want to leave those discussions at *my* classroom door. I wondered if something more than a surface treatment of controversial issues would help students think about ways to integrate those issues into *their* classrooms.

In this chapter, I return to the Children's Literature class and the first semester of the study to look at how I attempted to teach students to engage in dialogic conversation, rather than immediately silence conversations about topics that they found controversial or difficult. I wanted to create a space for dialogue that would help my students "achieve

understanding from a variety of perspectives, standards and criteria" where they would "be encouraged to come to a more sympathetic understanding of the different points of view and to appreciate different perspectives on life" (Singh, 2002, p. 216). If teachers have engaged in dialogue about how to address controversial issues when they arise in the curriculum—as Columbus or the Civil War might—or in classroom culture—as racism, sexism, or homophobia might—perhaps they will feel prepared when the moment comes.

The Children's Literature class presented a forum for the kind of dialogue that I was hoping for. Singh (2002) defined dialogue as "a relation we enter into, get caught up in, get carried away by, or are changed by" (p. 215). Most students came to class well prepared for discussion—perhaps because the texts to be discussed were mostly enjoyable children's literature with supporting articles. During the fall semester, I heard reports from another of the students' professors that conversations begun in our Children's Literature Class continued in the hours following class. Students assured each other, I was told, that their differing opinions on, particularly, the desire and reasoning behind their feelings whether to use books with gay and lesbian characters or not did not change their respect for each other. Apologies were made in this professor's class for statements made in my class that might have come across as divisive or attacking. Singh (2002) wrote that "with regard to controversial moral or value issues, … dialogue would aim to achieve understanding from a variety of perspectives, standards and criteria that people apply in their defense and criticism of judgments" (p. 216). This appeared to be the case during the discussion of gay and lesbian issues, as well as during the discussion

surrounding the myth of Christopher Columbus which one student in particular found challenging.

Timing is Everything: When do you introduce what topics?

This Children's Literature class was only the second time that I required all students to read a book with a gay or lesbian character (one time before, *Holly's Secret* [Garden, 2000] had been one of four contemporary realistic fiction choices for one class session). I learned with my previous students that while some appreciated the story and the need for tolerance (some even noting the difference between "tolerance" and "acceptance") in public schools, they could easily dismiss the books because, as I was told over and over again, "I just can't relate to feeling like this." Other students felt dismayed at this level of dismissal. One student in the previous class emailed me that knowing "that my views are not popular, I did not speak up as much as I should have in class." She noted that her colleagues often said that they would never have to deal with gay or lesbian issues because they wouldn't allow them to come up in their classrooms. Macedo and Bartolome (1999) noted that this is a common escape route used by teachers:

> By focusing primarily on teaching methodology [as opposed to multicultural issues] with respect to the education of culturally different students, even well-intentioned educators who want to give subordinated students voice fall prey to the weight of their complicity with the dominant ideology, which often remains beyond interrogation. (118)

Another student reported that she was shocked into silence when she heard a colleague say that, if she gave a child up for adoption and she found out that the child went to a gay couple, she would want the baby back. I was dissatisfied by my inability to provide space

for multiple perspectives about these books, and also that I was unable to help students be more open to thinking about using literature that challenged their thinking and beliefs.

In frustration, I talked with my mentor and children's literature scholar Joel Taxel about how I could approach these books in new ways. Knowing that I always include an exploration of Columbus books on my syllabus, he suggested that I place this class before the "gay class" so that students are more in a place to question ideas that they'd previously known as truths. Because it is a centuries old story, Joel's experience had been that Columbus can be a safer gateway to discussing more contemporary, but just as challenging issues.

Would Columbus Be Smooth Sailing?

I taught the children's literature class during the fall semester when my students spent the month of October in an elementary school classroom. As part of our discussion of historical fiction, we read Jane Yolen's *Encounter* (1992a) and Michael Dorris' *Morning Girl* (1992) along side articles exploring the Columbus myth presented in American culture as truth (Yolen, 1992b; Ingber, 1992). We read these texts after students returned from the field in November, and many had taught the traditional song and dance of "in fourteen hundred and ninety two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue," following the same curriculum that their mentor teachers (and, likely, their own elementary school teachers) adhered to. Upon their reading of another perspective to this story, many students, including those in the inquiry group, expressed in their writing and during class discussion outrage about the missing pieces in their own educational backgrounds, and anger that this myth is perpetuated today.

Some inquiry group members took a critical approach to the readings and to their past educational experiences. Jianna's statements are filled with indignation that I can only hope follow her into her teaching:

> When we keep silent and allow history to be altered, we are giving someone else power over us. We give them power to take advantage of us and strip us of our identity. … As future teachers, we must make it a point to stop this … [because] by not acknowledging the truth of [our] ancestors' past, [we] choose to condone their actions.

Likewise, Alexa wrote after reading *Encounter* (Yolen, 1992a):

> Why aren't we taught this in school? Is it necessary to show these other points of view to our students? I believe that it is. When I started reading, … I felt almost cheated that I had never heard of these things before and that I had not been given the opportunity to question whether or not Columbus actually 'discovered' the new land.

Not all students appreciated the Columbus texts. Ginger wondered after reading Yolen's (1992a) text about the Taino people what the purpose was:

> What kinds of memories would *Encounter* offer to the Taino people, if there is not much information left on them? I understand that as Americans we could honor them as a people that once lived and was [sic] killed off by Columbus, who would benefit from that memory and honor? Not the Taino people.

Ginger seemed offended by the presentation of this perspective that contrasted so drastically from the version of the Columbus story that she'd always held as truth. About the diseases brought to the Native Americans, Ginger wrote, "The whole idea of these

unfortunate circumstances of the fatal sickness … was just that. Unfortunate." Later she wrote, "Let's think about this, Hitler was a dictator with the full intention, until he was stopped, of wiping out all Jews. Does that stop us from recognizing his ability as a leader and speaker?" She concluded by stating that the encounter described in Yolen's (1992a) book was "unlucky for the natives" and that it didn't seem "that what happened to the native Taino people … could be helped."

While most students' experiences of the texts were similar to Jianna and Alexa's, some students expressed dismay at the readings (although none as intensely as Ginger). Many wondered how to share this new understanding in elementary classrooms, worried that parents might not appreciate the destruction of a myth so perpetuated in American culture. In our class discussion, many students expressed their beliefs that, now that they knew of text with alternative perspectives presented, they would feel fraudulent not sharing these with their students.

As we continued to discuss the two children's literature texts of the day (Dorris, 1992; Yolen, 1992a), the issue of authorship came up. We had, in a previous class, read Mildred Taylor's (1977) Newberry Acceptance Speech in which she discusses how her African American heritage and the stories of her father's childhood bring power to the stories about the Logan family in her award winning book, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976/1991). Occasionally, in their responses to multicultural literature, my students had written that, because they didn't belong to the racial or socioeconomic group that the characters belonged to, they couldn't connect with the story.

I asked during the Columbus class if they still believed, as they said they did after reading Taylor's speech, that an author needed to belong to the group about which she

was writing for the work to come across as authentic, or if they personally needed to belong to the group in order to make connections with the text. Jane Yolen, I reminded them, was after all white and Jewish—not Taino or of any other Native American tribe. None of my students were Native American, either. Greatly moved by *Encounter* (Yolen, 1992a), students immediately said that the right author could help anyone identify with the plight or life of the characters in the story, regardless of race or time period or culture. In particular, June made the comment that Yolen and Dorris had helped her to step into the shoes of someone in another culture, and that had brought the issue to life for her. Another student made the statement that, after reading the Columbus texts, her job as a teacher had just become harder. She said she knew that she would feel compelled not to protect her future students from issues that face society, just because they are hard to hear and difficult to find developmentally appropriate ways to discuss. “I don’t know how I’m going to talk about what Columbus did with first graders, but I can’t just skim over it!” Punching her comments with flailing hands this student emphatically added, “And it isn’t just Columbus. Imagine all of the other historical events I’ll have to relearn so that I’m not miseducating!” June joined in, “Yes. As teachers it is our job to teach. Not to shelter. We should talk about challenging things so that our students don’t feel like we did [reading the Columbus texts] when they find out the truth later.”

As class ended, I was elated by the indignation my students voiced about their lack of historical knowledge. Students expressed their need to become more educated about historical events, and asked for suggestions about how to start this inquiry. I suggested visiting different museums and historical places within driving distance of our university, as well as that they read books like *Lies My Teacher Told Me* and check out

periodicals such as *Teaching Tolerance* and *Rethinking Schools* that give suggestions about how real teachers have countered historical myths in their classrooms. In my teaching journal, I compared this class session to how I felt when I took my first women's studies class. My students had spoken about teaching the way that I felt about feminism—nothing would ever be the same again. They now knew better, and would work to change things for themselves and their students.

The delight that I always feel after an invigorating class where students use texts to willingly push themselves beyond their comfort zones washed over me as I gathered my belongings. As students put their assignments on the front table, Ginger approached me.

"I wanted to hand this to you, um, and to tell you that some of my opinions about what happened when Columbus came over have changed."

I raised my eyebrow. I hadn't yet read her response paper, so I merely responded, "Really? Did you write your new ideas onto this paper?"

"No, but I just wanted you to know."

Had Ginger engaged in Singh's (2002) definition of dialogue—getting "caught up in, get carried away by, or are changed by" the interchange among members of her discussion group (p. 215)? When I read Ginger's paper, I was horrified by her praise of Hitler's leadership and her blasé treatment of the diseases inflicted upon the Taino. I emailed her, asking her to clarify what ideas had changed for her. In her rewriting of the response, she continued to exalt Columbus' skill as a navigator, and to claim the importance of sharing that skill with her future students. However, she no longer questioned the truth concerning the use of the Taino as slaves by Columbus and his men,

"Slavery is a horrible thing, and nobody should ever be subjected to it." After reading pieces of Columbus' diary at my suggestion, Ginger further changed her view, "I can see that Columbus' intentions were not all good." This change in Ginger's thinking from an extreme to a more moderate position based on dialogue with her colleagues, and further reading (which, I believe, she would have been closed to without the classroom dialogue) gave me hope for our next class session during which we would discuss texts with gay and lesbian characters and how we felt about the inclusion of these kinds of texts in the elementary school classroom.

Making the Leap: From Columbus to Gay and Lesbian Characters

In preparation for the next class, students began emailing me their initial thoughts to the required articles—"Breaking the Silence: The Stories of Gay and Lesbian People in Children's Literature" (Casement, 2002) and "Dangerous Discourses: Using Controversial Books to Support Engagement, Diversity, and Democracy" (Lewison, Leland, Flint, & Möller, 2002). These articles present ideas concerning gay and lesbian literature (and other controversial texts that address issues of race and nationality) such as "one of the most effective ways to demonstrate sensitivity to gay concerns is inclusion of excellent quality gay and lesbian-themed literature in a curricula and classrooms" (Casement, 2002, p. 205) and "the [controversial] books are important, but only serve as catalysts for conversations about meaningful real-world topics—topics that too often stay outside the classroom door" (Lewison, Leland, Flint, & Möller, 2002, p. 224) that many students hadn't confronted before. The emailed responses covered a wide range of perspectives, from outright rejection of such ideas to confusion on where they stood to acceptance and a desire to promote these ideas in their future classrooms.

We began the next class session sitting in a circle of chairs in the middle of the room. Hoping to ensure that the diversity of positions on these texts were heard at some point during the classroom discussion, I had constructed a script using words from every emailed response to the texts. I attempted to balance the script so that one set of opinions didn't dominate the beginning or the ending of our reading. Before class, I cut the scripts into strips and passed a strip to each student so that they'd be read in the same order that you see them here. Nobody knew whose words they were reading or which of their words were used.

Class Script

Why can't we incorporate this literature into the class so students are aware that not everybody has the same families?

When and is it appropriate to talk about certain topics? When do we know when to stop or not even talk about it at all?

Children should learn that everyone is not the same and that these differences between us make each of us so unique.

I think that many people forget how beneficial implementing these texts could be and just think about their own personal opinions.

Homosexuality is not something that I believe in and it goes against my morals, so to include literature of the sort, I would feel like I was supporting a cause that I believe to be wrong.

Maybe I just grew up in a sheltered environment, but I did not know that there was such a thing as being gay or lesbian when I was in elementary school and I do not think many of my classmates did either.

I am definitely going to censor the books that my students have access to in the classroom and I am not willing to put my job on the line in order to read a controversial book in my classroom.
I am not trying to choose those religious beliefs over others religious beliefs; I am just trying to stay out of the issue.

Although, I do not choose to implement these books into my classroom, I do think these books should still be written and published. There are plenty of children who will benefit

from this literature. I will even recommend these books and authors, with the parents' consent, to students who are growing up in gay or lesbian homes or who believe that they are gay or lesbian.

I want to do what is best for my students so how can I, as a teacher, keep from choosing literature that does not reflect my own biases?

How can I choose literature that is multicultural, but not controversial or offensive to some parents?

I think that this literature is more likely to be put into a classroom in the city before it would ever be put into a class out in the country.

This article was one that I really haven't thought about before because I really don't want to have to think about it.

I am the type person that hates confrontations so much that I just try to avoid them all together. I know that this isn't the way that I should teach children, but I really don't want to rock the boat.

This is a hard subject for me to deal with.

I feel that ***children*** should not be exposed to this topic, simply because it is not a topic that children should deal with.

Casement labels someone in a conservative position as being extreme in language and action, and says that they look at those who oppose them as being anti-Christian and pro-Satan. I consider myself to be a conservative person, but I do not believe that someone who is a homosexual is pro-Satan. I do not agree with their decision to be homosexual, but I do not possess the qualities mentioned in the article. Thus, I feel that Casement takes a very stereotypical view of those who oppose her beliefs.

I feel that if parents are so strongly against the discussion of gay and lesbians in the classroom, then we, as teachers, need to leave it up to them to talk with their children about such topics.

I would like to use literature with gay or lesbian characters in my own classroom.

Should homosexuality be considered as multicultural?

We all want the best for our students, however, what is best?

I do believe, that we can touch on controversial issues and teach acceptance, without zoning in on one controversial issue; however, the argument then arises, that silence or keeping issues buried, will not be productive. I am so torn on this issue, because I truly do not know how to approach this.

Children's literature is probably the safest way to address difficult topics, so I suppose I can't oppose to such books in my classroom.

How can I rationalize the need for gay and lesbian-themed books in my classroom to a parent or community member who hates gay people?

Who decides what is "right and wrong" when it comes to children's literature?

I think that most of my reasoning is stemmed from my morals, values, and religious beliefs. I understand that most of us will be teaching in a public school that is supposed to be separate from church, however, we all know that almost nothing in this society is that way.

Because of my Christian beliefs, I do not accept homosexuality.

So are homosexuals born or created?

I know what the Bible says.

There are other things that are becoming more acceptable. Sex before marriage is another one. People living together before marriage. So should we start including literature in the classroom that involves stories of people living together and sharing a bedroom before marriage?

Literature including homosexuals will not be on the shelf in my classroom unless I am forced to have it there.

I was proud of Ms. Hefferman for introducing Slave Ship to Freedom Road to her students even though she questioned it. Ms.Hefferman and the four reasons for using controversial language touch on in the article, gave me courage to invite controversial literature into my classroom.

What I do know is that students are dead because they choose to end their life, but just because they identified themselves as homosexual does not give me enough proof for why a particular student might have committed suicide.

When I think of multiculturalism I think of other countries, customs, religions, and ethnic groups. When I think of homosexuality I think of a lifestyle.

I am a Christian and for me homosexuality is a sin not because I say it is but because my God says it is.

This topic is very controversial and many of us will probably attempt to avoid talking about it in our classrooms; some of us will do it because they will not have an idea how to start the discussion, others will simply be afraid of parental reactions.

Is not excluding gay/lesbian literature from our curriculum almost like excluding multicultural issues?

I think that as citizens of the United States we have a responsibility to support all children from all different types of families, thus putting our personal feelings aside.

If we as teachers feel threatened to introduce gay and lesbian literature into the classroom, then how do we expect students that come from these types of families to feel comfortable in our classroom? I think that every student deserves respect in the classroom, and I think that giving students a variety of literature to read, regardless of the family content, is only one way that we can vividly show our support. Students should not feel threatened to come into our classrooms and openly participate because of their family situations.

Things like sexual orientation should be left at the door of the school.

Here in Georgia, presently, it is not openly acceptable to be homosexual.

I truly believe that it is more acceptable to let the children who live in these situations read this material and keep it to themselves.

How do I react to a parent that tells me I am teaching something that suggests I am teaching his or her children "sinful" behavior?

What Happened?

We circled the classroom two times, reading the diverse opinions and questions posed by each other. The steady tones coming from each class member's mouth were starkly contrasted by the raised eyebrows and seat shifting when the more polemic statements were read. After the final statements and questions were read, students stared at me expectantly. And silently. Taking a nervous breath, I asked them to get into their small groups to talk about the articles, the literature and the words that they'd heard during our read-around.

Before they wandered into their cloistered groups, I said, "I want you to think about this question. Um. Because I was thinking about this as I was reading your

responses. We talked, we've talked a lot about, um, getting into other people's shoes with the issue of authorship, um, lately. And a lot of people talked about, in their *Morning Girl* response that they felt like they were really in the shoes of the characters and it really helped them understand them better. So, I wondered, when are we more willing to step into other people's shoes and why is that? I want you to bring that question into your conversations."

What did students talk about?

Nobody addressed this final question, nor did anyone make a connection back to their experiences with the Columbus texts unless I specifically asked them about it when I came around to their group to listen in on the discussion. At least on the surface, students didn't make the kind of connection between the two issues that I'd hoped. There was a variety of kinds of engagement with each other and with the issues. Some merely brushed over the issue with everyone agreeing on how homosexuality should (or should not) be treated in the classroom. One of these groups appeared to be made up of people all of the same mind while the other allowed the dominating opinion to silence the one student with a marginalized view. Other students troubled the complexity of knowing how to approach a topic that they found morally wrong, but that might be a central part of their students' lives. The dialogue in these groups served a deeper purpose than that of the previous groups'—students engaged with each other and the topic to think about solutions as opposed to agreeing and moving on to other topics of conversation. The final group reached a level of dialogue that exemplified Freire's (1970/1993) hope for dialogic learning:

> Dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's 'depositing' ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be 'consumed' by the discussants. Nor yet is it a hostile, polemical argument between those who are committed neither to the naming of the world, nor to the search for truth, but rather to the imposition of their own truth. Because dialogue is an encounter among women and men who name the world, it must not be a situation where some name on behalf of others. It is an act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another. The domination implicit in dialogue is that of the world by the dialoguers; it is conquest of the world for the liberation of humankind. (p. 70).

The students engaged in this final discussion recognized each other as equal humans with different opinions whose experiences could educate each other more fully.

Groups 1 and 2: Mutual Confusion Leads to Dialogue

In the first two groups, confusion permeated discussion. Conflict about how to mediate their personal beliefs about homosexuality with their beliefs about teaching every child with compassion and justice ruled the dialogue. They were also very concerned about their teaching environment—would they be putting their jobs in jeopardy because of parental or administrative concerns with the issue? By questioning the text and their own beliefs and experiences, the members of these two groups entered dialogue from a place of inquiry. Freire (1970/1993) suggested that this is the only place to truly grow intellectually: "For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the

world, with the world, and with each other" (p. 53). Bouncing ideas off of each other, these two groups, rather than coming to concrete conclusions, made discoveries, took risks, and thought deeply about their approach to controversial issues and texts.

Comparing the difficulty of teaching Columbus from a new perspective with addressing gay and lesbian issues, June stated, "I think it's different to read books like this [with gay or lesbian characters] because parents could get mad about it, and I don't think that parents would get really really mad about if you brought in Columbus."

"Yes," Annie added, "because you're not talking about morals. You just take the innocence out of a child when you do that."

I pushed Annie, saying that talking about sex wasn't the issue, but talking about different family structures was, "So, what happens if you have a kid with same gender parents in your class?"

Annie replied, "Well, I guess I think that would definitely be different, um, because if the kids know about it, then you know that the issue is already like raised. And I think dealing with it. I mean, teaching the kids to accept them would be OK, but not necessarily to accept the lifestyle that their parents have, you know?"

"Yes." June's face was contemplative as she took a breath and tried to put her thoughts together. "I think that there's a way to teach the students in your class to know how to respect each other and be accepting of one another, no matter what lifestyle they live or their family lives, you know that everybody needs to respect one another. But I think there's a way you can do that without point blank telling the whole class how their lifestyle is. I think that's one thing I definitely want in my classroom, is everyone to feel accepted and loved in my classroom. But when it comes down to an issue, you know if

other students are making fun of somebody, I'm going to put a stop to that. But I think you can do that without explaining to everyone else, you know, what's going on in their life. I think you can say, 'Everyone's different. Everyone has different issues in their life, and you know, we need to love and respect everybody.' And I think you can just leave it at that instead of going into more details."

Before I moved on to the next group, I asked these students what it was like to participate in the script reading. June replied, "That's what I was saying earlier, that it was just really powerful, like …" Annie continued her thought, " To hear like one person totally against it, and then another who is for it."

"Yeah," said June, "Like, when I read this one, I was like—I read 'I know what the Bible says,' and I was point blank. Blunt. And, like, I don't know, like I read that. And I don't know, not that I disagree with it, but I was just like, I felt, I don't know."

Before this class, Annie and June might have never thought about what to do if the issue of homosexuality were to arise in their future classrooms. Perhaps they never thought that it would be an issue that they would have to deal with. In my class, however, their willingness to engage with an issue that they so clearly find immoral speaks to their willingness to dialogue. Freire (1970/1993) wrote:

> The radical, committed to human liberation, does not become the prisoner of a "circle of certainty" within which reality is also imprisoned. On the contrary, the more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can better transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into dialogue with them." (p. 21).

While June and Annie might not see themselves as "radicals," others who approach the world from a similar reference point to theirs might. Annie and June were, as Freire suggests, "not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled," as they took steps to think about who they would be as teachers of diverse students. They had to begin to see the world through a wider lens—to step out of their "circle of certainty"—and their dialogue enabled them to do that.

Likewise, students in the next group troubled their responsibilities as teachers. Before reading these texts, members of this group might not have thought about the importance of addressing the needs of children in the gay and lesbian community. About the articles, Lucy said, "Like, there's a couple of things that I read that, um, like she says, ' … Children will begin to see themselves and families in books, and straight kids will see that the experience and feeling of gay and lesbian youth are not so different than their own.' And I was really thinking how one really positive thing was, you know they were talking about how gay and lesbian kids were committing suicide because they were so unaccepted, and you know. Well, I don't know if I would talk about it or not, but I would probably … I just feel like, you know, kids need to be aware that they're still people. And that we should respect them, and that we shouldn't, like, tease them about it, um. And then, it's up to them if they want to accept, but I'm not for exempting. I think they should realize that they're still people and they have feelings and emotions and that's the thing that I agreed with when I was reading the article."

Another student agreed, "Yeah, I don't know if I would, you know, with the whole class because, you know, like how it talked about parents might call for your dismissal, but maybe if I knew of a child, like that came to me for help, or that the parents

had told me, if their parents had told me about them or something, then maybe I could suggest …"

Students leaned in and nodded in a collective, "Yeah," with Lucy finishing her colleague's thought, "Books like that somebody could read, like, with the parents' consent. Like, if they …"

As Lucy's voice trailed off, another colleague picked up her idea, "Yeah, cause, like, if you don't have any kids in the class that are either gays or lesbians that are rejected, then maybe you would never bring, and if you did, if you did have that issue coming up, then you probably should talk about it. You certainly shouldn't hate them!"

Lucy concluded, "Yeah, I definitely don't think that you should just push issues like aside. I feel like they might come up with, like, teasing or hurt feelings towards someone. You can't just push that aside. It should be talked about, even if it's just, like one-on-one with the student or in a small group, it needs to be discussed." When her colleagues nodded, she continued, "I just think it should be brought up if you do end up having a child in your classroom that maybe does have same-sex parents, and I think it should be addressed, especially other students know about it and they are, you know. Then I think it would be a good time to read a book about it just to let them know that, it is not necessarily common, but it makes it a bit easier for the student. But I don't know if I would, you know, read a book about it just for the heck of it."

At this, Lucy's group discussed their fears about including such controversial literature in their classrooms. One said, "Yes, like, I would be worried about my job, like, seriously if I just …" Followed quickly by, "And the parents, you know?" Lucy agreed, "Yeah it is a controversy." Then, she returned to the text of her response to the articles to

clarify her position, “One of the questions I wrote was, ‘Are books about social issues too disturbing to include in an elementary school classroom?’ And I think it just depends on how you go about incorporating those books. Like, they definitely shouldn’t just be thrown on the shelf for students to pick up and read, and then just walk away from. Like somehow, you should monitor the books that students read so you can discuss the book with them.”

Like members of Annie and June’s group, students in Lucy’s group were initially tentative about the inclusion of gay and lesbian issues in their hypothetical classrooms. These students, as Shor (1996) suggested, “[experienced] the class as a laboratory for alternative self-development” (p. 75). Through dialogue around a text that they might never have encountered outside the boundaries of this class, they began to envision themselves as a new kind of teacher—one who wouldn’t ignore controversial issues because it is easier, one who thinks about how to work within the confines of parental and administrative concerns while still addressing the needs of all of their students, one who thinks about her pedagogy, rather than just repeating the pedagogy of the past. The students in this group were willing to take risks by challenging themselves to a new vision. The dialogue with other struggling and conflicted colleagues provided a safety net for this risk.

Groups 3 and 4—One Way Conversations

A third group of students ran out of topical conversation and shifted into talking about the difficulty of getting a job in a local county quickly, as they all agreed that there was no question: Gay and lesbian issues are a part of the world, so they should be a part of classroom teaching.

Sue said, “I think it’s important to bring it up somehow, even if it is just like in a picture book. Just to, like help tolerance issues in society. Not just if you have a gay student, but just so students are at least introduced so they could be more tolerant.”

Andrea agreed, “Maybe if they can just be exposed to talk about that because they’re still going to be immature about it until they learn about it.”

Before class, Sue even did research on the rights of gay and lesbian people in our state, telling her group that the possibility of having students with same-gender parents is likely because, “You can adopt children in Georgia if you are gay, and I was researching it, and it’s in way more states than I thought. Like, I thought it was hard to do, but Florida is the only one where you can’t.”

Sharing the experiences of gay people that they know, the students in this group had different comfort levels about the extent that they would address the issue, but all said that they wanted gay and lesbian people or issues to be a part of the fabric of their classroom. Freire (1970/1993) wrote that “dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person’s ‘depositing ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be ‘consumed’ by the discussants” (p. 70). Without a desire to change their positions, or students in the group that challenged their approach to gay and lesbian issues, dialogic conversation was absent from this group. Students left the conversation with more information and with their ideas confirmed, but with no increased reflection on the issue.

A fourth small-group focused mostly on their Biblically-based opposition to addressing gay and lesbian issues in their classrooms, even if they happened to teach a child with same-gender parents. While they concentrated a little bit on the texts for the day, the center of their conversation focused on their moral opposition to homosexuality.

Mae started the group's discussion with an interrogation of sorts. After one student asked, "What do y'all think about the article?" Mae sighed and responded simply, "Well." The first student continued, answering her own question, "Kinda in my response, I tried to keep an open mind when reading the article, well, actually, I don't think it is right, but that I think it is important."

Beginning her line of questioning, Mae asked her colleague, "But would you put it in your classroom?"

The student ventured, "Yes, I think …"

Interrupting her, Mae accused, "You would?" She then went around the circle, "Would you ?" Every other student in the group responded that they wouldn't include gay and lesbian literature with Mae concluding, "I wouldn't either."

This interrogation set the tone for the rest of the discussion. For a dialogue to occur, Habermas (1990) suggested that "participants in an argumentation are forced to make substantive normative presuppositions" that include "to respect one another as competent subjects; to treat one another as equal partners; to assume one another's truthfulness; and to cooperate with one another" (p. 83). The tone set by Mae suggests that she did not come to the group with these presuppositions in hand. One student clearly came with questions that reflected the discussions in June, Annie, and Lucy's groups. Instead of challenging their own positions, the other students used their agreement on the issue to dominate discussion. Like Sue, Ginger did some research before coming to class: "Well, I was going to say. I found an article from 'Focus on the Family.' And it shows, um, that it is really not, you know, just because it supposedly that you can be born like that, does that make it right. There are people who have changed. It might be just what

you've been exposed to in your family. But does that necessarily make it right? I mean, it just shows that, there are people who can deal with that, and if, and you could overcome it."

Mae agreed, "I mean, I think we all believe in the Bible, and the Bible says God created everything, and if God created someone in that way, then He contradicts Himself."

Continuing from the assumption that, not only did all group members "believe in the Bible," but agreed with their interpretations of the Bible, these two inquiry group members added their experiences with lesbians to the fabric of the conversation. Ginger's cousin, an out lesbian, centered Ginger's thinking both for her textual response paper, and the group discussion. This first-hand relationship with a lesbian shifted the conversation to discussants' beliefs about God's creation of people. Both Mae and Ginger actively and openly shared their belief systems, which include a male-gendered deity.

Ginger said, "My big thing is that my cousin thinks that God has put that in her. But I showed that it's not. Because He would not put something like that. I mean He would not. Because you couldn't get into heaven. He would not make them do something against Him so He could destroy them."

Mae added, "I know in my paper, I used a scripture that talks about I think all the people that get into heaven, and it includes murderers. And God didn't create people to be murderers. He didn't created people to be drunk. And he didn't create people to be homosexuals."

Ginger and Mae led their group's continuing discussion about their belief that homosexuality is a sin because, they believe, that one's sexual orientation is a choice.

Mae's experience with a lesbian was through her father, and helped her to bring light to her belief about the sin of homosexuality. "I think they can go to help it. My dad is a pastor, and he knew this girl and she was in jail, and she wrote my dad saying how she had gotten her life in order and all of this type of stuff. And at the end of the letter she said that he felt like he needed to know that she was a lesbian. And so, he wrote her back, and he gave her scripture on it, and he said you know I don't feel that, I'm not condemning you for that, but it's a sin. And if you believe yourself to be a Christian, then you need to address this sin. And, I don't think she ever wrote him back, but that's just one way to look at it."

Another student suggested that *she* doesn't believe that homosexuality is a choice. Her male cousin, she shared, attempted suicide three times because of the contradiction between his religious beliefs and his homosexuality. Ginger countered her colleagues' statements saying, "One of the scriptures like that I put in here, 'Not only those who commit all these different sins, but those that, you know approve of them.' They are also considered to be simple in mind. But then, God does give you that hope that you can change and He will help you, and you still do have that hope of becoming, I mean going to heaven. You just have to overcome it. And God will help you overcome anything that you put your mind to."

Ginger's comments—insinuating that this student's cousin is "simple in mind," effectively silenced her colleague for the rest of the conversation. Freire (1970/1993) wrote that "the man or woman who proclaims devotion to the cause of liberation yet is unable to enter into *communion* with the people, whom he or she continues to regard as totally ignorant, is grievously self-deceived" (p. 43). Ginger refused to allow another

student's ideas to enter into communion with her own. By paraphrasing Biblical phrases with authority, she used social privilege to advance her belief as the correct one, not allowing for any alternative to this personal reality.

Their group ended their discussion with Ginger repeating the words that she'd written in her article response, "How can anyone know for sure whether student suicides are directly related to homosexuality or anything else for that matter? What I do know is that students are dead because they choose to end their life, but just because they have identified themselves as homosexual does not give me enough proof for why a particular student might have committed suicide. I question these suicide statistics." Ginger, perhaps because she did not agree with the results of the study presented could not accept their results. New information could not sway her opinions. This contradicts Freire's (1970/1993) requirements for dialogue:

> Dialogue cannot exist without humility. … Dialogue, as the encounter of those addressed to the common task of learning and acting, is broken if the parties (or one of them) lack humility. How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own? How can I dialogue if I regard myself as a case apart from others—mere 'its' in whom I cannot recognize other 'I's? How can I dialogue if I consider myself a member of the in-group of 'pure' [people], the owners of truth and knowledge, for whom all non-members are 'these people' or 'the great unwashed'? (p. 71)

In Ginger's feeling of correctness, she moves her opinions into the realm of fact, and those who disagree with her into the realm of "the great unwashed." She, and to a lesser extent, Mae were not willing to allow for alternative positions on the issue of

homosexuality. They believed that they were right, and there was no questioning of this position. Freire again:

> Dialogue is the encounter between [people], mediated by the world, in order to name the world. Hence, dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming—between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them. (p. 69).

Mae and Ginger's silencing of their colleagues using their own understandings of Biblical text and privileging their experiences with lesbian people over their colleague's first-hand knowledge, denied the possibility for dialogue to occur.

Group 5—Polemics Turn to Dialogue

The dialogue of the fifth small-group was discussed in the previous chapter—Cindy and Jianna dominated the conversation with their opposing views, but left with words of respect for each other, though they didn't change each others' positions on the issue. To get to this point, their dialogue took some sharp turns with loud voices and interruptions and many places of clarification. After some initial interrupting and defensive talk, Jianna started to clarify, "I think, OK, I think you guys, OK maybe I'm jumping to conclusions, but I think you guys are saying that, like that I would automatically just discriminate against those children and like hate them and treat them differently than I would anyone else in the classroom. That's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is that, I don't agree with that, and there are a lot of people that don't agree with that but there's a lot of people that agree with that. And so I think that bringing it into the classroom is like, to show, or to influence somebody else to think that way. And I

think you just can't do that. Because if I can't bring my religious beliefs into the class to influence with what I believe, then …"

Cindy pushed her, "So, you just don't address those kids at all …"

And Jianna responded, "I would, well, if someone was to like to do something hateful or hurtful, I would address it to say, you know, there are different people that agree that it's right there's some people that agree that it's wrong."

When Cindy disagreed, "See I wouldn't do that. I wouldn't give right or wrongness to something into a classroom," Jianna wanted to be sure that Cindy understood that Jianna wouldn't push issues under the rug, "But, I am addressing it."

Pushing Jianna again, Cindy asked, "But, who is saying it's right, and who is saying it's wrong? Me? You? Like, I don't have the authority to say, 'you're right' or 'you're wrong.'"

Jianna's response sheds light on how she will approach *any* issue that comes into her classroom, "But I think you deal with things like that … Let's say something like that was brought up, in a current event. Bring that into your classroom, talk about it. Talk about why those types of behaviors aren't right. Because that is different than talking about all the actual acts themselves and the actual emotions and feelings associated with it, and the feelings that people have when they're experiencing it, I don't agree with that. I don't think that needs to be brought into the classroom. And I'm not afraid of it, I just think it's wrong. And that's my belief. And I'm entitled to that belief, just like someone's entitled to have the belief that it's OK."

Similar to students in other groups, Cindy's personal experience with a gay person expanded her discussion during this "in theory" dialogue, "Like, one of my

friends, her brother is gay. He went to the same high school as my brother, and they ragged on him because … and he had to move to a different school, you know?"

Jianna's compassion for people came through in her response, "I'm not saying that that's OK."

Interjecting, Maggie tried to point to how the positions that elementary school teachers take have long-lasting consequences, "But see, I think that early education could prevent that."

Continuing their conversation, Cindy asked Jianna what she would say if students told her that their family constructions were non-traditional, with one dad or a step-parent or same-gender parents. Jianna's response showed her coolness when put on the spot, and also her strength of convictions, "I would just say that that's the way the world is. That there is that out there, and some people think it's OK, and some people don't think it's OK. That's where I would leave it. I wouldn't take it any further than that. Because for me to say it's OK goes against what I believe, and that's wrong. Like, I can't talk about that. Like for me, that's wrong. And I don't think that I'm doing anyone any injustice by saying that I think that's wrong. I'm not saying, 'I hate you.' I'm not saying, 'You're awful for feeling that way.' I'm not saying anything like that. I'm just saying that, that's out there and some people think it's OK and some people don't. But for me to start teaching it like it's OK, that's what I have a problem with. Because that's not for me."

Finally, Cindy felt clear on Jianna's position, "I guess that's where the confusion was. Was I thought you just didn't want to address it at all. Like you just saying that, yes, that's someone's choice, and that there are many people who have chosen that path, and there's many people who haven't chosen that path, who have gone the other way, then, I

mean. I understand you're view on that. I guess I misunderstood that you were just like, 'No, I'm not going to talk about it.' You know? Because that child would be like, 'huh?' But just saying that there are a lot of choices in life and some people choose this and some people choose that, doesn't make anybody different, or it makes people different, but it doesn't devalue you as a human being."

Transcribing this group's discussion, I was struck by the dialogic nature of the discussion from beginning to end. As Singh (2002) suggested, their dialogue was a "communicative relation, … guided by the spirit of discovery, exploration, interrogation and the norms of respect for persons, [and] equalitarian reciprocity." (p. 215) Students explored each other's thinking until they felt that they clearly understood the others' thoughts and opinions—not needing to agree, but needing to understand. As required by Freire (1970/1993), this group's dialogue was characterized by constant reflection on one's own, and on each other's positions: "In dialectical thought, world and action are intimately interdependent. But action is human only when it is not merely an occupation but also a preoccupation, that is, when it is not dichotomized from reflection. Reflection is essential to action" (p. 35).

As the time for small-group work came to an end, students re-joined the circle that we created at the beginning of class. Where the script provided a space everyone's voice during the opening of the class session, the debriefing session at the end of class was dominated by a few people. Mae and others in her group repeated their opinions in this large group setting with members of Andrea and Sue's group contradicting almost every statement. Cindy, Maggie and Jianna occasionally joined in with statements about the role of teachers as informers and to help end violence towards those who are

different, but the dialogic nature of their small group, as well as June and Lucy's groups was entirely missing from this end-of-class meeting. After fifteen minutes of back-and-forth arguing, I brought the class to a close by saying, "Clearly this conversation isn't over, and there are lots more opinions to share, so I hope that you continue to think and talk about who you will be as a teacher, and how you will welcome a diversity of ideas into your future classroom." As students filed out of class, it was later reported to me, the conversations did continue with students eventually agreeing to disagree.

Is there a connection between the two classes?

While the connection between the Columbus class and the gay and lesbian literature class is not immediately clear, I believe that the dialogue in the second would not have been so rich without the ground work laid in the first. In the Columbus class, students actively embraced the texts and challenges to a widely accepted-as-truth American myth that Columbus was a hero who "discovered" America, while in the class centering on a very controversial topic—gay and lesbian themed literature—some students rejected the idea of even accepting that students would be aware of these issues, and others readily stating the importance of inclusion of these texts in their future classrooms. Students came to the gay and lesbian issues class having participated in an open dialogue where drastic belief shifts had been made in a supportive and safe classroom space. By beginning the gay and lesbian class with a script that included voices that disagreed with each other and with the instructors view points, students could find security in divulging a diversity of viewpoints, and with voicing confusion around a very complex issue. The safety that they had experienced in the Columbus discussion seemed to carry over into the gay and lesbian class, and it is clear both from students'

written responses and from the transcripts of their small-group discussions that most were not afraid to state and support their points of view.

Dialogue Equals Power

Dialogue has power. Singh (2002) wrote that the purpose of dialogue "is not necessarily to achieve consent but to achieve social justice for everyone" (p. 218). In the three groups where dialogue occurred, students opened their minds to the ideas and opinions of others, and in the process, expanded their abilities to interact with people who are different than they are. At the end of the day, students in these groups didn't always agree with each other. In fact, some still didn't know what they believed. But, *I* believe that they will be more prepared to extend a welcoming hand to more students in their future classrooms. Freire (1998) wrote:

> In my relations with others, those who may not have made the same political, ethical, aesthetic, or pedagogical choices as myself, I cannot begin from the standpoint that I have to conquer them at any cost or from the fear that they may conquer me. On the contrary, the basis of our encounter ought to be a respect for the differences between us and an acknowledgment of the coherence between what I say and what I do. (p. 120)

While Mae and Ginger and other members of their small group used religion as a conquering tool in their group, students in groups one and two were working at the end of class to help their words and actions coincide. Even if they don't believe that homosexuality is a morally valid expression of self, they have *said* that, in their roles as teachers, they want to welcome *all* students. They are working to gain the tools to *act* this way, regardless of who the students are, or what kind of family they come from. And

Cindy, Jianna and Maggie engaged in dialogue as “an act of creation” (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 70). Not only did Jianna work through and vocalize her ideas and positions as a future teacher around the issue of homosexuality, but Cindy and Maggie—who could have dominated their group in much the same way that Mae and Ginger dominated theirs—used dialogue to engage in the give and take, the listening and responding, the challenging and being challenged that they will need to create spaces in their future classrooms where dialogue is welcomed. When they are again in positions of power as teachers with grading and pedagogical privileges, or when their opinions or approaches to controversial issues put them in a marginalized position their active role in dialogical conversation could serve as a model. Dialogue is challenging and sometimes threatening to firmly held convictions. Is this why some students remained in the study and some left?

CHAPTER 6

INQUIRING INTO INQUIRY

And I think that most [students] in our class are thinking … that everything's fine, and that they're views are certainly right about all of these issues. I mean, and I think that a group like ours wouldn't, I mean, those students wouldn't get anything out of it because they don't really care. They don't have anything to learn. They're not trying, you know what I mean? Those of us in the group, like, I guess didn't think like that. We might not have agreed with each other, but I think that's why the group was good. But, I mean, like I'm only 22, and I mean, I'm sure that there's a whole lot of stuff that I don't know, and I mean, you know, who's to say what I'll be thinking in 5 years? Or, you know, who knows what will happen? I don't know, I think you have to be aware of what you think and you have to question yourself. And if you don't question, and if you don't think about them and educate yourself a whole lot, then you can't argue with anybody. You're just. I mean you can't just say, "This is so because I think that." You know, you'll have people who say, well I think this, and if you don't have evidence or anything to support you, then your argument's pointless. Listening and learning with the group taught me how do question and think about my own beliefs. –Maggie

I created this study after several years of participation in an inquiry group made up of elementary, middle, high school, and university educators (Aaron, Bauer, Commeyras, Cox, Daniels, Elrick, Fecho, Hermann-Wilmarth, Hogan, Pintaone, Roulston, Siegel, & Vaughn, in press). I learned that support from a community of

researchers is important when doing critical inquiry. Without the support and intellectual collaboration from the members of this K-16 inquiry group, I might have felt frustrated with the constant risk, the regular brick walls, or the daily challenge of pushing my students into new territory around issues of race, class, gender and sexual orientation in elementary schools. Conversations with my colleagues from this original group—either during planned meetings or over coffee, at the end of other meetings, before classes—helped me feel a sense of camaraderie. Other people, though doing different research but still *critical* research, felt the same frustrations that I did. Both our formal and casual conversations about our work helped us work through the challenges, and mitigated our feelings of solitude.

This sense of collaboration, of intellectual support, of group learning was the impetus for creating an inquiry group with my own students for this study. As Ropers-Huilman (1999) pointed out, “To me, the power that comes with the act of setting ourselves up to communicate and make meanings for and about others comes with both obligations and opportunities, which, while not entirely clear, are both worthy of committed exploration” (24). I hoped that by setting up a group of critical inquirers, my students would be more willing to push themselves to explore challenging issues, particularly because participation in the group was entirely voluntary. I was dismayed that, by the end of the second semester of the study, our group meetings consisted largely of my asking students where they were in their research, my offering of suggestions of further reading, and students either staring at me or taking notes. Missing was the sense of collaboration as I’d come to understand it based on my experiences in the inquiry group that I’d previously participated in.

But, as Maggie's quote suggests, *my* definition of collaboration and collaborative learning wasn't the only one at play in the inquiry group. My interviews with participants at the end of the study helped me to see that by assuming that I could recreate an inquiry group with very different participant (preservice vs. inservice teachers) doing very different research (text-based vs. classroom) I missed the valuable and very real collaborations and learning that occurred among inquiry group participants. Where I thought I had seen failure, students experienced growth and learning. Where I felt disappointment, students felt a desire to continue learning in collaborative communities. Clearly, I wasn't seeing. I was too busy comparing.

Where was I Seeing Failure?

Students had different reasons for joining the inquiry group, and students who chose to stick with it throughout both semesters did so for a variety of purposes. Ropers-Huilman (1999) wrote of her own qualitative inquiry project participants that "our motivations for participating in the project varied, as did our commitments to individual aspects on which we could focus" (22-23). She posited that, as co-researchers, "We are acting as witnesses in active and dynamic knowledge discourses. … we are acting as witnesses when we participate in knowing and learning about others, engage within constructions of truth, and communicate what we have experienced to others" (23). Participants in our inquiry group created a community with each other that I was not always completely aware of.

When participants met with me individually throughout the semester, I was pleased with the reading and writing that they were doing. I felt like each was personally engaged with their topic in ways that challenged them to think about who they would be

as teachers. Critical inquiry was happening, but the collaborative piece of the study that I'd hoped would help participants see beyond their lives as students into teachers who would find like-minded colleagues to engage in teacher-research with seemed to be missing. I decided that my final interviews with each student would address this issue of collaboration.

Why did students stay? Why did they leave?

I think that some of the people in class don't listen to other people with an open mind, maybe. I mean, like, I listen to people with other viewpoints than my own, and like, at least try to understand where they're coming from. … I don't have to agree with it, but I can at least admit, "Oh, that's a good point" or "I see what she means." ... But I think that some people in our class are really (pause) set in their ways, and not really, you know, listening. They might sit here and say that they're listening, but they're not really. You know what I mean? Like they're just kind of looking and, "Yeah, ok" but you're never gonna make them even understand why you think a certain way. … So, I think the people in the group were more laid back, and more understanding of the fact that everybody has different opinions, but that's OK. –Maggie

By the end of the second semester, the inquiry group had dwindled from twelve members (including me) to eight. Small group conversations in class around issues of diversity were often either polemic or silent, with students seeming to talk as they merely waited for class to end. Inquiry group members attempted to lead these small groups, but as Maggie's statement highlights, their efforts often fell on deaf ears. As I thought about the dynamic of these remaining group members with each other and in class, I was pleased. However, I was unsure as to how successful the collaborative aspect of the study

had been. Inquiry group students engaged in the kinds of questioning of text and ideas during class that I had encouraged then to do in their individual studies, and that I'd encouraged the whole class to do through course readings (eg Hade, 1997). As discussed in Chapter 3, Maggie tried to lead her small group discussions down a path that would question definitions of poverty and issues of race and gender. Likewise, Sue was outraged when students wrote during the butcher paper activity (discussed in chapter X) that they "were tired of talking about [race, class, gender and sexual orientation]." She sat down with her small group, and this usually quiet student demanded of her colleagues, "How dare we say that we are tired of these conversations! These conversations are about our students!"

Our group meetings, however, remained quiet question-and-answer sessions about how they should approach their research. "What books should I look at?" "How should I do a text search online?" "Am I doing this right?" There seemed to be very little collaboration going on—I was merely serving as the "research expert" to guide them in their inquiries. The excitement that I felt after the first semester waned as the disconnectedness of the second semester set in. What had gone wrong? Where was the collaboration? Was there some connection between topics raised in class and the decision to remain in the inquiry group? And what kinds of experiences of the inquiry group did the members who stayed report? Were they as disappointed as I was?

Where did dialogue go?

After the thrill of the Columbus class and some exciting dialogue in the gay and lesbian literature class in the fall semester, the silence permeating class sessions during the spring semester was particularly frustrating. Singh (2002) wrote that "dialogue

relations take time to build up. They are developed over time" (p. 223). Likewise, in her discussion of how to prepare teachers to engage in teaching that promotes social justice, Phillips (1998) posited that "unlike some lessons that can be taught quickly, helping adult student find their voice to change … conditions requires work over time" (p. 56). Looking back on class transcripts from the fall semester, I saw how a change in both the structure of the class and the inquiry group affected the dialogic nature of our class and the collaborative nature of our group.

During the fall of the inquiry study (Children's Literature), our class met twice a week for an hour and a half each session. The schedule moved to a one time, three and a half hour session per week for spring's Language Arts Methods class. While our contact hours were the same, the disruptive nature of a once a week class, and with the sometimes controversial nature of the topics that we discussed prevented the kinds of connectedness around issues that we'd established in the fall. And because most of my students' classes had shifted to this once a week schedule, they talked about feeling exhausted in their classes. Remaining engaged in intense conversation and dialogue for two 3 and a half hour classes per school day took its toll on my students.

The dialogue that took place in the Columbus class and the gay and lesbian literature class occurred in an environment of trust. Our twice weekly sessions gave us a sense of flow—a read aloud, discussion of the supplemental articles in whole or small groups, a break, small group discussion of the chapter and picture books of the day. Our relationships could be mediated within that predictable structure. A critical inquiry pedagogy as called for by Freire centers on relationships among and between students and teachers (Cruzon-Hobson, 2002). These relationships created space for discovering

the unknown within their boundaries. Because students knew what to expect by the time the Columbus class rolled around, they trusted each other and the text. They knew that there would be a place to listen to divergent voices, for them to test new ideas with each other, and for growth around issues to occur. The inclusion of multiple voices at the beginning of the gay and lesbian literature class through the class script was my way of reinforcing the idea that all ideas were welcome—that students could trust that their grades wouldn't be jeopardized or their ideas wouldn't be silenced or ignored just because they were different than the teachers'. These ideas were the foundation for our dialogue. "The precondition for this environment of trust is that the teacher attempts to experience the intellectual habitus of his or her students, and that the teacher is able to encourage students to recognize those differences that might exist among them" (Curzon-Hobson, 2002, p. 185). During the Children's Literature class, there were ample opportunities to create relationships of trust, both through intellectual and personal connections and dialogue. Curzon-Hobson (2002) again: "This 'inclusiveness' of the pedagogical relationship ensures that even in conflict one is confirming the other, for there not only exists a collective critical space, but also a collective caring space in which potentialities are realized, celebrated and rewarded" (p. 186). Both uncontrollable (the scheduled time for our class) and controllable (students' willingness to engage, the order of topics covered, the texts) factors changed the nature of the space within which we operated in the spring.

The infrequent face time between myself and my students—and not only inquiry group members—in the spring played a role in my interpretation of the collaboration among inquiry group members. Not only did our classroom space feel unsettled as we

entered—the room was scheduled to be used until five minutes before class started, so I missed the usual comfortable and informal conversation time that had in the past given me a feeling of easy rapport with my students—but students often rushed off after class, needing time in the computer lab to finish up assignments for their next class. It became challenging to schedule inquiry group meetings around students' exhausting schedules, and as students dropped out of the group, meetings among our dwindling members became informal chats in the hallway before class, dead-end group emails. I longed for the kind of discussion that was occurring at the end of the fall semester.

Another difference between fall's Children's Literature class and spring's Language Arts Methods class was the content. In Children's Literature, provocative issues were the daily texts. The books I put on the syllabus centered on the issues that I wanted students to address as they thought about themselves as future teachers. We talked about the pedagogy on a platform of texts addressing social justice issues. Conversely, in Language Arts Methods, most of our texts dealt explicitly with the teaching of writing and the creation of Writing Workshops. This was the first semester that I taught this class one time per week. In the past, I had integrated texts that dealt with issues of race, class, gender and sexual orientation throughout the semester so that we could talk about writing as a forum for students to write about their lives. With the once a week format, I felt pressure to fit in all of the readings about writing pedagogy in the six sessions before students went into the field. I only addressed social justice issues through read alouds and in my one-on-one conferences with students about their cultural memoirs. If they so chose, students could avoid any engagement in these discussions.

Who wants to inquire?

Many of my students embraced the "celebration/tolerance model" of multicultural education discussed by Boler and Zembylas (2003). They stated a desire to treat all students equally, as they said in their discussion of gay and lesbian texts. But, they also implied that they do not feel that this desire for equal treatment means that they need a GLBT inclusive curriculum because, as Boler and Zembylas (2003) stated, "those issues are a private family matter" (p. 113). As I wrestled with the decline in inquiry group members, I wondered if it wasn't merely the disconnection of the spring semester that propelled the four students who dropped out of the study away from our challenging discussions. They got an initial taste of how I expected them to look at multicultural issues through the class' discussion of *my* inquiry topic during the gay and lesbian literature class. Perhaps the discussion got too personal.

In this study, as in Reynolds and Trehan's (2001) participative qualitative study, I wanted our differences of opinion, of experience, of identity "rather than [be] overlooked or obscured, be recognised as the basis for understanding, confrontation and change, both within educational programmes and as a consequence in other, wider, social settings" (p. 357). Did some of the students in the inquiry group think that I expected them to either comply with my approach to issues or remain silent? As a society, have we been so trained to conform that any stepping outside of the lines, even within the boundaries of a group, too risky, too uncomfortable? Were these students too used to blurring the lines of difference so that, as many say during discussions of racism, they "don't see color" or sexuality or gender or class? Was acknowledging the differences too much of a step outside of the lines for them? As the facilitator of this group, I felt the constant tension of

"avoiding irreconcilable fragmentation yet resisting the ever-present pull to consensus … reflected in the frequent use of terms like 'respect', 'understanding', 'tolerance'" (Reynolds & Trehan, 2001, p. 366) which gloss over a deeper understanding of institutional "isms." I hoped to take this group to a place that moved beyond "mutual respect" (Reynolds & Trehan, 2001, p. 369) around controversial issues, but encouraged participants—including myself—to question and challenge our assumptions around the issues being investigated. Likewise I worried, as Macedo and Bartolome (1999) warned, about becoming a perpetuator of false inquiry, where members of the group talked around deeper issues of racism, sexism, classism and homophobia by ignoring our participation in these institutions, while patting ourselves on the back for our willingness to begin the discussion:

> These liberal educators also often fail to understand resistance as a form of cultural production that, in some real sense, gives witness to the emergence of submerged voices of subordinated students. By not understanding the critical role of cultural resistance as a learning tool and as an expression of voice, these well-intentioned liberal educators will, at best, embrace a form of charitable paternalism and, at worse, reproduce the very dominant ideological elements they purport to eradicate through the teaching of tolerance. (p. 118-119)

Was putting students into situations that pushed them to do this kind of critical challenging of themselves going too far for some inquiry group members? A snapshot from my research journal of the inquiry group meeting that occurred immediately following the gay and lesbian literature class (as soon as the rest of the students had left the room) gives a little bit of insight:

The inquiry group members and I pull our chairs into a tight circle after (what I've come to call) the "gay class." Maggie tells us about a creationist website that her boyfriend sent her. "And you know, Creationism, whatever. I don't care what you believe, but this is crazy." Apparently, a high school student won a creationist science fair for his study about how women were created to be housewives because their hips are set lower, so therefore they can balance laundry baskets more easily. "I mean, where is his mother? He's got to have a mother that supported him! And I'm telling you, if he were my son, he'd be grounded!" The rest of us laugh both at her animation and the science of laundry basket carrying.

As we settle in our chairs, I ask the group how they thought discussion went today. June jumped right in, "I thought it went fine. Like, like I love to talk about stuff like that. Like, I know it makes some people uncomfortable, but I think that different views make the world go round. And like, I don't have a problem with me and you arguing about something, cause, when we walk out that door, it's Jill and June again. So I thought it was fine. I thought it was good for us to be exposed to other opinions and other ways of thinking. But, the only thing that bothered me was that I think that some people take it personally. I think that's what, that's my only concern about having discussions like that. It's like, I can do it. I'm fine, you know, now. But I think other people walked out of this room personally naming names."

Nodding, Cindy added, "I agree with June. I'm so for discussion groups about controversial topics, but, at the same time, we were very, I felt like we were very respectful and, like, just discussing it as an issue versus, like, personal attacks on people that have different opinions."

Alexa countered her classmates, "But, I think it's hard for some people not to take it as a personal attack, you know? Because some people are just so passionate about what they believe, and they just believe that they are absolutely right, and when someone has a different view, to them it's like saying, 'You're wrong.' Not, you know, 'I see it differently.' To them it is like saying, 'What you think is wrong.'"

Mae nodded, "I am the kind of person who hates confrontation. I just hate conflict …and I worry that people will hold things against me."

Jianna's reply showed how she and Mae, with similar religious views, differed from each other when it came to discussing those religious points of view: "Things got heated up, and stuff, in my group. But I don't think it means that I think someone's making a personal attack on me, it's just the way I am. I get very passionate. I was hoping that people don't think that I was personally attacking them, or that I can't stand them or anything like that. So, it is a little bit uncomfortable because we do get a little heated up about things."

Maggie added, "I didn't take anything, you know, personally because I knew that people would think differently than I did."

Two of the vocal students in this exchange left the inquiry group: Mae saying that her work and home schedules were too busy, and Annie because she wanted to focus on creative writing rather than write about an inquiry topic. Both of these women felt a little bit uncomfortable with the level of exchange that occurred—pushing them to clarify their own positions in the company of students who didn't agree with them was challenging in an unsettling way. Conversely, students who remained in the study found the challenge a part of intellectual discussion. They were willing to dialogue, understanding that people

would come from different places, and that that was fine. As discussed in the previous chapter, Jianna and June are two prime examples. While their beliefs and stated moral values often stood in opposition to those of the rest of the inquiry group members, they found that the initial discomfort of pushing past their comfort zones worth it so that they can be the best teachers to their future students. When asked in her final interview if her inquiry into how to approach students whose very lives challenge her own religious integrity and beliefs, Jianna said:

> Well, I definitely feel comfortable now, you know, with how to handle that situation if it comes up in the classroom, whereas before, as I said, you know, well, I'd just kind of ignore it. But, I can't because it *will* come up, so now I feel comfortable in how I would. But then, at the same time, I know that I don't know *every* situation that's gonna arise, so, you know, I kind of need to keep investigating stuff. Keep researching and keep reading about it. Cause, like, every article that I read, a new situation presented itself, and I was like, "Oh my gosh! How would I handle this?" You know?

After our gay and lesbian literature class, Jianna decided to further investigate the topic of gay and lesbian issues in education. Instead of shutting herself off to ideas that she found morally incongruent with her own, this inquiry group member took a decidedly critical stance.

Conversely, Ginger ran from the topic in public spaces. She came to the study as Jianna's shadow—as soon as Jianna stated her inquiry topic (right after the gay and lesbian literature class), "How do I justly teach students who challenge my moral beliefs?," Ginger asked Jianna if she could co-research with her. The two students

carpooled to school together, both labeled themselves conservative Christians, and initially sat together in class. Before the gay and lesbian literature class, I had not come out to my students, although because some students knew former students, they knew that I am a lesbian. During the week between the Columbus class and the gay class, Ginger sent me this email:

Jill,

I just have a question for you. this is something that I have been wondering. I have heard something through the grapevine, and I just wanted to see if it was true for myself—I try not to go along with what everybody else says. Here it is, but you don't have to answer it if you don't want to—Are you a lesbian? See you in class on Tuesday. Have a great weekend!

Ginger

I decided not to respond over email, but to give Ginger (or any other student) the opportunity to ask me this question in class. While listening to the tapes of that class, I was surprised at how pointedly I asked, "Does anyone have *any* other questions that they want to ask me? About anything?" no less than 3 times. During the follow-up meeting with the inquiry group, I asked again, "Does anyone have any more questions for me? About the class? My topic? My interest in the topic?"

Ginger didn't ask, so I finally responded to her email:

Hi Ginger,

I've been thinking about your question for a while—I hoped you would ask it in class on Thursday—I thought I gave ample opportunity both in class and in the inquiry group. It seems much more appropriate when asked in a group and in a context. It seems that you

feel this is an important question, and because we belong to a community together (both our class and our inquiry group) it might seem important to others, as well. Why don't you ask in a forum where we can all talk about the question and why it is or is not important? There will be opportunity in class next week!

Have a great weekend!

Jill

Ginger's response left me curious about her true interest in her inquiry topic, as well as her approach to me and to our class:

Jill,

I should have said this earlier when I asked you a question the other day—I was not only curious, but it would be nice to know the answer for the inquiry group topic that I am working on. If you don't want to tell me, or you can't, just let me know that. See you in class tomorrow.

Thanks,

Ginger

Ginger's email showed me that she was aware of the power relations surrounding the outing of a teacher. By not answering her question over email, but by giving her the opportunity to ask it in class, I was hoping that Ginger would take responsibility for her question. I also didn't believe that me being a lesbian was an issue to be whispered about—it isn't something that I'm ashamed of or keep intentionally a secret, and if it was something that was being gossiped about, I'd rather have it in the open. Two factors could have been at play in Ginger's decision to question me over email and not in class: First, Ginger could have been attempting to gain power in our class. By only asking such

a personal question in a private forum, Ginger might have wanted to "have" information that other students didn't. Or, perhaps she already knew that I am a lesbian.

As a student, Ginger struggled in my class. She regularly received low marks on her assignments, either because of blatant punctuation and grammatical errors or because she failed to address the assignment. When I observed her in her field placement, she struggled so much that her mentor teacher and I scheduled extra observations and conferences with her, and asked the director of her cohort to observe her as well. By suggesting that my sexual orientation was information that I perhaps *couldn't* tell her, Ginger sent me a message that she knew that homosexuality can be punishable. Was she attempting to punish me, or show me that she had the power to punish me, for my assessment of her as a student? After the last email, she no longer pushed the question. As Ginger was telling me that she needed to leave the study one afternoon after class, I asked her why she hadn't brought the question she'd raised over email into class or inquiry group discussion. She replied, "It's too private a topic to talk about with so many people." Regardless of the multiple issues at play, our email exchange left me feeling threatened.

Our email exchange occurred at the end of the fall semester, and shortly after the spring semester began, Ginger dropped out of the study. She had gotten a new job that she said would take too much time for her to dedicate any extra time to academics. Likewise, Mae—who joined the group because, as she told me, her friends June, Annie and Alexa belonged—said that she left the study because of a commitment to her job as a piano teacher. Annie stopped coming to meetings, and dropped out officially towards the end of the semester because, as she emailed, she wanted to write a creative piece for her

final paper in my class, rather than write anything about her inquiry topic. Alexa stopped coming to meetings, but never told me that she was leaving the study.

Who wants to get critical?

As the study came to a close, I was curious about why the seven remaining students *hadn't* left the group. These students, like their colleagues, had jobs that took lots of extra time and energy (in fact, her job kept Andrea from ever completing her final interview) and had the same academic obligations as the inquiry group members who decided not to complete the project. In her exploration of the careers of critical theorists in education, Elizabeth Heilman (2003) asked "What kinds of life experiences lead to critical work?" (p. 247) While our two-semester inquiry pales in comparison to the body of work that the educators in Heilman's analysis have created during their illustrious careers, there are commonalities between the group of well-known scholars and members of the inquiry group who stayed through the entire study.

Inquiry group member' self-selected topics provide some insight into their own past educational experiences or current questions as they looked to their own futures as elementary school teachers. Jianna posed the question, "How can I meet the needs of all of my students, even those who challenge my religious beliefs?" Maggie, a White woman who wants to teach in inner city schools asked, "How do white teachers teach in culturally relevant ways in non-white settings?" June also investigated the role of white teachers in multiracial settings. She was also keenly interested in parent-teacher relationships in these kinds of schools. As an Asian American woman, Cindy was concerned with what it would mean to be teacher of color in a white school. Andrea, Sue and Lucy questioned how the socioeconomic status of the majority of a schools' students

effects how students are taught. Mainly, like the scholars analyzed by Heilman (2003), participants in this study "are broadly united by their concerns about how society and institutions fail and oppress children and by their dedication to the education and development of both individuals and society through a commitment to democracy, diversity, and social justice" (p. 248).

Some of the participants had "early experiences with and understanding of marginalization [and] conflict with established educational institutions" (p. 248). Jianna and Cindy entered American school with a first language other than English. At the university, Jianna was minoring in Spanish (although her first language is Italian) so that she could better address the needs of the growing population of Spanish speakers that she knew she would encounter in local schools. Cindy wrote prolifically about her marginalization from her Asian community because she was engaged to a white man. Maggie worked in an after school program where she regularly engaged with students whose experiences of racism and classism opened her eyes to her own privileges as a middle class white woman. Sue talked and wrote about how she felt different from her family and students in her elementary, middle and high schools—politically liberal, vegetarian, troubled by the sexism that she experienced. Andrea's interracial relationship exposed her to racism in new ways. On the second day of class in the fall, she told me about how she'd felt disappointed in the youth at church the first time she brought her Chinese American boyfriend to her all-white church group—nobody talked to them. Lucy and June, both actively involved in their own churches talked about feeling called as Christians to learn about how to create classrooms that included every student.

Heilman (2003) wrote that "what we learn stays with us to the extent that it is a part of dynamic and personal experience—the same is true for what we theorize" (p. 251). More so than their peers who left the study, the remaining participants had either experienced or seen a need to challenge status quo ideas. They invited the challenge in class discussions, in their writing and in their pursuit of their inquiry topics. The students who left the inquiry project rarely joined groups in class with students who didn't think along similar lines, and usually professed socially normed ideas about controversial topics if they engaged in the issue at all. Like the theorists in Heilman's (2003) study, the inquiry group participants who didn't quit seemed to have a "need to reconcile multiple cultural, social class, and gendered ways of being … within [their] families as well as in interactions with wider communities" (p. 255).

Where was the collaboration?

Before my final interviews with inquiry group participants, I thought that the collaborative aspect of our study had failed. I learned that I was wrong. *I* might not have witnessed the collaboration, but students clearly felt that participating in the inquiry group not only helped them to stay on course with their own research, but provided ideas for their own future research. Andrea couldn't make it to any of the final interviews because of her work schedule, and Cindy came to a final group meeting where she shared her research and engaged with June about how they'd learned to listen to people with very different view points during the study, but left town before the two of us could meet on last time. Likewise, June couldn't stay in town for a one-on-one interview because of a busy work schedule, but the remaining group members sat down with me to talk about the inquiry group and their participation in it.

Consistent with their understated and quiet approach to all of our previous discussions, Sue and Lucy briefly stated that they liked hearing what other group members had to say, and that when they felt overwhelmed with their research projects, it was nice to know that others were in the same boat. Lucy said, “I’d just call Andrea or Sue, and we’d try to figure out when we were going to get everything done! I was glad that I wasn’t alone. Andrea had already read and owned so many of the books you suggested. It was nice to share and get recommendations on which she liked best.” Sue felt like her research into discrepancies between schools with students in lower socio economic classes and those with middle and upper middle class students helped her understand some of the teaching that she saw during her field placements. She and Lucy, who also looked as the effects of socio economic status on school culture, shared resources and talked about their experiences in two very different local schools. Sue said that it would be important to her to find or create a group of teachers who was interested in issues of social justice when she begins her teaching career so that “we can help change situations and systems that need to be changed.”

Maggie and Jianna both spoke at length about their participation in the inquiry group. When I asked Maggie how it felt to be a member, she responded:

> I liked it because … it gave me a way to to do this, to research something that I was interested in without, you know. Because if it was something that I was to do on my own, it would get pushed back because, I don’t feel like doing that now, or whatever.

Jianna found the project itself to be a push to investigate an issue that she truly wanted to know more about. But she also found the collaboration to be a learning opportunity:

> And it was interesting to hear viewpoints of everybody else because they all did really good research and really interesting things. I thought it was helpful to hear what they did, also. And so, like, even more so than if it had just been, just me doing a research project. I enjoyed sharing it because I was interested in what they were doing and what they found and what they thought. You know, how peoples' thoughts might have changed or if they didn't change, or whatever. So, I liked it.

Like Sue and Lucy, Jianna also found the group aspect of the study to be a powerful motivator:

> I enjoyed it this way, and it also kind of gets you accountable every time we had to meet with everyone, like, "Are you doing your research?" And you know, what are you going to bring to the group and everything, so, yeah. And I guess, just doing the same type of inquiry into that stuff. Yeah, because it shows that other people are interested just like you, you know? So that also kind of keeps you excited and motivated.

Both Maggie and Jianna also hope to find a collaborative research group once they begin their careers as teachers. Jianna said that she liked the current group but really hopes to find researching teachers when she has her own classroom—she learned how a collaboration can help her explore different ways to address issues that challenge her:

> Where as it would be helpful as well when I'm in the classroom setting, but, um, like if it happens before, I mean if I have a situation before having a group, then I wouldn't know what to do. Necessarily. I mean, I'd know to look up stuff but, right there on the spot (snaps), I'd be like, oh my gosh, what do I do? You know?

> So, um, I think it's been helpful to have it before actually being in the field. But then, actually having it while you're teaching it's also a place where you can go and talk to other people and be like, you know, here's what's happening, and then get feedback from people, too. And so, that would be real helpful, too.

Likewise, Maggie learned the value of research through her participation in the group, and hopes to continue researching collaboratively. For her, the diversity of opinion was important to intellectual growth:

> And, um, it just helps me realize about all of the research there is to be done and that teachers, even if we haven't taught yet, but, it's important that we go ahead and start it, and to kind of know what's out there and, I mean it goes with professionalism. Like, you have to. You can't just say, "OK I'm a teacher now, and so for the next 30 years, whatever goes on in my classroom, that's it." I mean, you have to realize that there's all these different problems and issues and, um, I mean it will come up sometime in your teaching career, and you can't just ignore them, and you don't want to be blindsided because you haven't read anything or you haven't looked at anything and so, it was helpful. And I think as a whole group of teachers, again, you'll have a whole difference of opinion, and different view points and different cultures, and so I think that's what's beneficial about doing it with a group. And I think it would definitely be worthwhile to create a group when I'm a teacher. I know teachers. They think that they don't have time, "I don't have time to do that," and they might not do it just to do it, but I think it would be worthwhile to go to the administrator or principal or whatever and say, "you know, this would be worth an hour of professional development." You

know, to research and get together and talk, or whatever. So they could be working towards something, but also be participating in something valuable.

Maggie's experiences in our inquiry group helped her to think about how she might approach future issues as she enters her teaching career. She had a realistic understanding of how her future colleagues might approach the idea of research, and can use the format of our inquiry group to help her create spaces for like-minded teachers to address issues that arise in their classrooms.

Redefining Expectations

My final conversations with these students helped me to see that where I had seen failure, students found a place of learning, motivation, and hope for future teaching collaborations. By expecting this inquiry group, comprised of preservice teachers and their instructor, and doing text based research, to look and feel like an inquiry group of inservice teachers with years of collective classroom experience doing classroom research, I was setting the group up for failure.

My hope when I proposed this study was that participants would engage in learning and dialogue around issues that are a regular part of elementary classroom life, but that regularly get skimmed over by a surface treatment of multiculturalism in teacher education classes. In my vision of our inquiry group meetings, my students and I gathered together, much in the same way that graduate students and their advisors do, to challenge each other in respectful debate, discuss texts, and lead each other to new readings and experiences. Instead of seeing dialogue only as spoken words among members of the inquiry group, I should have been more informed by Freire (1970/1993)—my definition should have been more encompassing. He wrote that dialogue "is an act of creation" "it is

an encounter among men and women who name the world" (p. 70) and that "for the dialogical, problem-posing teacher-student, the program content of education is neither a gift nor an imposition … but rather the organized, systematized, and developed 'representation' to individuals of the things about which they want to know more" (p. 74). We saw in Chapter 4 how inquiry group members worked in class to engage in active dialogue with their colleagues. Likewise, they worked through their own research. Their encounters with each other and with me became a mediated form of dialogue. Together, we worked to name the world, even if that naming didn't occur within the boundaries of an inquiry group meeting. The dialogue that we engaged in didn't end with the semester. Inquiry group members want to continue to find ways to name the world with their future colleagues through future inquiry and future dialogue.

CHAPTER 7

INCLUSIVE MULTICULTURALISM: IMPLICATIONS AND ACTION

> Dreams are visions for which one fights. Their realization cannot take place easily, without obstacles. It implies, on the contrary, advances, reversals, and at times, lengthy marches. It implies struggle. (Paulo Freire, 2004, p. 32)

One of the first classes that I took as a graduate student was called "Sociopolitical Perspectives of Literacy." The professor, Michelle Commeyras, asked us to think about a question as we approached our work together: What dream for the world do I have? She asked us to create a vision of the world that we wanted the children that we knew, or who were yet to be born, to grow up in. She asked us to consider how we would work toward that vision through our research and our teaching. The question that I posed in the inquiry group for this study, "How do issues of religion and homosexuality intersect around readings, classroom talk, and written assignments in a preservice Language Education classroom?" and the subsequent teaching and researching that I did around that question with my preservice teachers is part of my answer to her call. That call became even more personal to me when I had a child—Arden—and started to think about the world that I brought him into. Freire (2004) wrote, "In reality, the world transformation that dreams aspire to is a political act" (p.32).

If I want to take seriously the call to transform the world, not only because I believe that transformation is necessary for a just and egalitarian society, but because I

want my son to grow up with the understanding that hope that leads to struggle can bring about change, I must take what I've learned from and with the inquiry group participants into other teacher education classrooms. My vision for the future of teacher education extends beyond the inclusion of gay and lesbian literature on children's literature syllabi in departments of education across the country. But that is a start. My dream for Arden is that he grow up in a world where the concept of multicultural education expands beyond the triad of race, class and gender, and becomes inclusive of language diversity, ability, sexuality, nationality, and, yes, religion.

My work in this study has focused on gay and lesbian issues for very personal reasons, but also because the resistance to gay and lesbian issues is more often vocalized by my students and has often been cloaked in religious rhetoric. As discussed in Chapter 4, Mae and Ginger used religion to privilege their views over the views and experiences of others during their discussion of the inclusion of gay and lesbian themed literature in their future classrooms:

> And you know what? … I don't want children in my class thinking that I condone it. And I think having it in the classroom is, like, "Yeah, it's OK." Because I don't think it's OK because I know what God says about it. And I don't want God seeing me exposing innocent children to this. –Mae

I fear that Ginger and Mae's use of this kind of language and silencing of their classmates without hesitation speaks to the increasing power of the Christian Right in this country. However, my experiences with other inquiry group members in this study bring me hope. Though the influence of the religious right is steadily making its presence known in public education, some of my students who identify with these religious ideologies have

found ways to reconcile those beliefs with actions that do not harm, and in fact support, students with same gender parents.

A Lesbian Teacher Meets the Religious Right: No God! No Gays!

As I think about Freire's (1970/1993) words that ushered me into this study, that "education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students," (p. 53) I think about myself as a student of the other members of the inquiry group. What did they teach me? Where was my transformation? How did that transformation occur in a way that makes this study unique in teacher education?

On a recent visit to the Midwest, I learned that the language and regular references to God and Jesus that have become a part of my daily life are not the norm across the country. Living in the in the Deep South, I have become accustomed to being told by colleagues, grocery store clerks, parents of my elementary school students, students themselves, and telephone solicitors to "Have a blessed day," or to hearing regular references to Jesus in casual conversation. My undergraduate students have brought Bibles to class, read Bibles in class, signed emails to me with phrases like "For His Glory," "In God's Name," or with a scriptural reference. "The Bible Belt" is a well-earned appellation.

Because I don't have the need or desire to express my religious beliefs in such open ways or with the expectation that anyone that I might be talking to or emailing would share my particular beliefs, I often prickle when others hold that assumption. In the past, I would roll my eyes and shake my head as I described to colleagues behaviors such as a student reading the Bible or making scriptural reference during class discussion.

I found myself not valuing students' opinions as much when they based them in their religious beliefs because it seemed that these students rarely explored their beliefs deeply—always relying on their expressions of Christianity, and the presumed understanding of their positioning as Christian to justify their statements and actions.

I've learned that, in order to have dialogue, I have to change how I listen and how I respond. While students are expected to back-up their reasonings and opinions whether they are Biblically based or not, I no longer view my more openly religious students as less serious about the teaching profession, or less able to fulfill their roles as public school teachers. Colleagues who identify as conservative Christians have told me that academia discriminates against Christianity. While I believe that words like "discrimination" are more fittingly used to describe what happens when marginalized groups are systematically denied the same rights as groups who are more welcomed by dominant society, the feelings of these colleagues is how they experience our shared context, and have helped inform me about how to approach my religiously conservative students.

Jianna, June, and Lucy taught me that having their beliefs respected gives them the space to hear how their initial positionings might be disrespectful to others. I have learned that by listening to and trying to understand where my religiously conservative students are coming from, I can help set a place for all of us at the table. From the outside, it appears that we come from two separate camps—one says, "No God in class!" and the other, "No Gays!" In this study, I have successfully opened and facilitated respectful dialogue across these polemic positions. My religiously conservative students have been able to put a face on the gay and lesbian community, and I have been able to

see how, as Christians, these same students feel called to care about *each* person that they encounter. As Greene (1988) suggested, I had to re-imagine the boundaries between myself and my students—and not merely to solve the "teacher-student contradiction" (Freire, 1970/1993). I had to re-imagine the boundaries between members of the Christian Right and a Lesbian Teacher. Greene (1988) wrote, "We might think of freedom as an opening of spaces as well as perspectives, with everything depending on the actions we undertake in the course of our quest, the *praxis* we learn to devise" (p. 5; emphasis in original). Greene's (1995) assessment of unimaginative banking education is that it ignores those at the heart of the classroom. Those who imagine new ways of teaching with freedom as the educational focus "are interested in beginnings, not in endings" (p. 15). I had to initiate beginnings because, in my past teaching, issues of religion and homosexuality had resulted in endings and no possibility for dialogue.

Changes in Teacher Education

How can we prepare our sometimes naive preservice teachers to meet the needs of gay and lesbian headed families? Within my larger research question, I identified four questions to look at throughout this study. These four questions, mentioned in Chapter 3, and bulleted below, have helped me to create some recommendations for how to better prepare preservice teachers to meet the needs of a student population that includes the children of gay and lesbian parents, as well as children who have close friends and family members who identify as gay or lesbian, or who might one day identify as gay or lesbian themselves.

- What are characteristics of dialogue about how religious beliefs intersect with our beliefs and understanding of sexual orientation, homophobia and heterosexism in a language arts preservice education classroom?
- How are the religious beliefs of preservice students and their teacher brought to bear in written and oral reflections on those with different privileges and oppressions than our own in the classroom?
- What preservice classroom structures and learning activities enable us to talk about how our diverse religious position influence our thought and language about gay and lesbian students, and students with gay and lesbian parents?
- In what ways do preservice education students and their teacher express changes in their thinking about their religious beliefs about gay and lesbian people after participating in course activities and assignments that address gay and lesbian issues during whole class, small group, and one-on-one conversations with their instructor?

I learned from my participants that, given the opportunity and the structures in which to discuss challenging issues, dialogic growth around challenging issues is possible. Students in this class, and in previous classes, have told me either outright in class assignments or anonymously in course evaluations that their religious beliefs play a large role in the positions that they will take in the classroom, and in the topics that they will be willing to discuss with their students. I found that by not silencing religion in my class—by saying, even, that I knew that students didn't leave their religious beliefs at the door, and that I welcomed *all* religious identities in my classroom—even though because

of the legal separation of church and state in our country, religion is *supposed* to be silenced in public school classrooms, students felt free to honestly identify where they felt uncomfortable with gay and lesbian issues and why. There is not the time or the space in courses like mine that have a very specific content (teaching about children's literature or teaching about language arts methods) to look deeply at different approaches to religion, and how people who may claim the same religious identities interpret that identity differently. However, based on my conversations with Jianna and on the prevalence of religious talk in the media, I think finding a place for this discussion with preservice teachers could benefit education in the long-run.

Straut and Sapon-Shevin (2002) label four "barriers to inclusion" of gay and lesbian issues in teacher education: "assumptions, invisibility of the hegemonic norm, counterhegemonic practices, and curricular gaps" (p. 30). Like some of my students, the students that these teacher educators have encountered assume the heterosexuality of all members of their class, and of their future students. When a student was challenged for his stereotyping of gay men, he apologized for hurting the feelings of the offended teacher. Straut and Sapon-Shevin asked the important question, "How do we convey that this isn't about 'hurt feelings' but is, rather, a pedagogical concern related to classroom climate?" (p. 31). In my class, I attempted to make gay and lesbian issues more than merely an add-on to the current curriculum—they were a part of a larger multicultural lens through which I saw my teaching. Straut and Sapon-Shevin make concrete teaching suggestions for programs, like the one that my university utilizes, where students take subject area courses. For language arts courses, they suggest using, as I did in the children's literature class, literature that deals with families that differ from the

heterosexual norm or youth who identify as gay or lesbian. I also tried with the reading of articles and chapters about gay and lesbian issues in education (citation) in the language arts methods class to talk with students about how to invite children to write about their diverse families as well as to feel safe sharing their lives in class in the same way that their peers from more traditional families do.

Inclusive Multiculturalism

While Straut and Sapon-Shevin (2002) make wonderful suggestions for ways to naturally integrate gay and lesbian issues across subject areas, this model can be problematic. At my own university, students could have one of three or four instructors for their children's literature and language arts methods classes. During the three years before my study, and during the study year itself, none of my colleagues who taught a section of the children's literature class or the language arts methods class asked their undergraduate students to address gay and lesbian issues. Likewise, I don't know if my students' instructors in the science, math, reading, or elementary education departments required them to address these issues, or if they challenge a heterosexual assumption through the language they use about children and families or in their approaches to teaching. If there is no push to change the model used by a university, Straut and Sapon-Shevin's suggestions should be made available to instructors. However, if colleges of education took a more direct approach to teaching a more inclusive multicultural model, the likelihood of all preservice teachers being taught about and encouraged to dialogue about gay and lesbian issues is much higher.

Ladson-Billings (2001) provided the model for her university's four semester Teach for Diversity program which invites participants into a multicultural way of

teaching that is inclusive of race, class, gender, and language diversity. While this program is intended for graduate students, I believe it could be adapted for an undergraduate teacher preparation program. This model for multicultural teaching could have a powerful impact on schools of education across the country. Including gay and lesbian issues in this model would not only expand the definition and understanding of multicultural education, but help teachers engage in dialogue about the myriad issues that will greet them in the increasingly diverse student populations that meet them each year in their classrooms.

The first class that students in the program described by Ladson-Billings (2001) take is a general seminar on teaching and diversity. The intent of this theory-based course is to prepare students for teaching settings that look and feel different than their own experiences. “The readings in this course deal with perspectives on race, class, gender, and language” (p. 153). Texts that address the issues faced by children with gay or lesbian parents would meet the philosophy of the program:

> To prepare teachers who accept and promote access and equal opportunity for all students to the central areas of learning in the school and classroom, and who affirm educational equity with curriculum, instruction, and schooling practices for students who are marginalized. (pp. 151-152).

This class would be an ideal time for students to be introduced to terminology about the gay and lesbian community as well as “foundational information about lgbt people living in society,” a necessary step for preservice teachers according to Straut and Sapon-Shevin (2002, p. 34). In Ladson-Billings’ (2001) model, this course is the place for visits from local principals, activists, and teachers. Finding representatives from the local gay and

lesbian community could help preservice teachers put a face on a topic they hear about in the news. Stories told by children of same-gender parents who have graduated from elementary school, and by parents themselves, about their positive and negative experiences in public school could provide a space for learning, questions, and understanding. Resources for finding these speakers could come from COLAGE (Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere), a national organization with many local chapters. Other speakers could come from local gay and lesbian youth organizations to talk about the impact of school-based homophobia on children and their families. In Georgia, the ACLU has a program called The Sticks and Stones Project that deals mostly with middle and high school legal issues, but they have provided valuable resources for my own classroom about laws regarding bullying and a teacher's responsibility when he or she hears gay slurs being used in the classroom.

Another first semester course in Ladson-Billings' (2001) model is called Culture, Curriculum, and Learning. "This course is designed to help students understand the intersections of culture …, curriculum, and learning" and works to "assist students in recognizing the pervasive ways that culture impacts human endeavors" (p. 153). This class provides an excellent opportunity to talk about how the religious beliefs of some shape the school curriculum for many. Articles such as Berliner's (1997) "Educational Psychology Meets the Christian Right: Differing Views of Children, Schooling, Teaching, and Learning" could help begin a discussion on how the religious ideology of the Christian Right is entering the classroom through the influence of school boards and local government officials. Recent examples of how religion and public school have brought unwanted media attention to local schools, such as Boyer's (2005) article "Jesus

in the Classroom" could further the discussion. Boyer discussed a California school where a fifth grade teacher's Christian revelation led him to seek out Christian curricular materials that both proselytized a particular Christian message *and* met his state's social studies curricular standards. Parents and administration took issue with his (illegal) proselytizing while the teacher claimed he was merely meeting the standards set by the state. Students could use this class to create or find curricula for their future classrooms that acknowledges the diversity of religious beliefs present in the United States, how religion was key to the founding of the country, look at how the founders of the country used religion in their own lives, and how the diverse local religious communities impact social structures that affect public schools. Censorship, dress-code, and holidays could be examined for their links to religious communities. Students could use this class to examine their own religiously based biases and beliefs, and discuss how they might come to play in the classroom.

In the second semester of Ladson-Billings' (2001) model, preservice teachers take three methods classes (Health, Physical Education, and Social Studies, Literacy and the Arts, and Mathematics, Science, and Environmental Education). In the new model that I am proposing, these classes would be taught through a more inclusive multicultural lens, and could take Straut and Sapon-Shevin's (2002) suggestions into consideration. Because Ladson-Billings' (2001) model is intended for graduate students, these three courses could be split into several more courses for undergraduates so that the necessary curricular content could be taught. But, because students would have already been, in the first semester, exposed to the idea that gay and lesbian issues are a part of an inclusive multicultural program, including these issues along side issues of race, class, and gender,

would be more natural than it has been in my courses. After this semester in Ladson-Billings' model (which, for undergraduates, could be several semesters), students spend a semester student teaching. Unlike students at my university who graduate the same semester that they student teach, students in Ladson-Billings' model return for a final semester at the university. This, I believe, could be the opportunity for much growth. If teacher education programs are not prepared to add a final semester, they can provide ongoing opportunities during student teaching seminars to discuss and debrief the issues they have raised throughout their preparatory program in light of their current experiences in classrooms.

One of three final classes in Ladson-Billings' (2001) model is Social Issues in Education. Questions raised in this course are "What are the social purposes of schooling? How does a society make priorities about education and schooling? What are the major issues and challenges facing contemporary schooling?" (p. 157). Students will return from their student teaching experiences filled with stories about classroom and school-wide issues, and ways that their mentor teachers and the administration approached these issues. Using these experiences to answer the central questions of the course, students can be asked to think about how issues of race, class, gender, ability, language, sexual orientation, and other cultural categories impacted the actions they saw taken in their schools. Texts for the course could include books like Ladson-Billings (1997) *The Dreamkeepers* and Letts and Sears (1999) *Queering Elementary Education: Advancing the Dialogue about Sexualities and Schooling*. Because the preservice teachers will have been a part of classroom discipline, parent-teacher conferences, and faculty meetings, teacher educators could create scenarios for students to role-play so that

they have the opportunity to think about how they will respond in certain situations based on their previous experience and the modeling that they had in their student teaching experiences. Some examples of scenarios are students using gay slurs in class, parents complaining that their child is the target of anti-gay comments, their child is a target of bullies because he or she has same-gender parents, their child is a target of bullies because he or she expresses gender in a non-stereotypical way. A wonderful resource to see how other teachers have approached gay and lesbian issues is the film *It's Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues in Schools* (Chasnoff & Cohen, 1996).

Students could also look in this final class at statistics about success in public schools. Who is typically more successful and why? How have society and school systemically privileged a particular kind of student and why? Who drops out? What kinds of kids are homeless and why? How can schools be more inclusive of those who are consistently left on the margins?

Students in my study told me that talking about gay and lesbian issues in a relatively safe classroom environment where they knew that they would be valued, even if they disagreed with the instructor, and where they were provided with quality reading materials and models of teaching and learning that were respectful of them as students helped them think about who they would be as teachers. This model for teacher education that includes, from the beginning, the kinds of structures that I provided in my class, could alter the way that preservice teachers think about gay and lesbian issues and elementary education.

Of course, even if all of these recommendations were put into place in a teacher education program, they could be met with the kind of resistance that I have regularly

met in my own classroom. The key to reaching students, I found in my study, is to provide a space for honest dialogue. Implementing new curricula without implementing a liberatory pedagogy with dialogue as the goal would, I believe, compound the problem—students could leave the class feeling even more negatively about gay and lesbian issues.

A Political Study, A Personal Study

After hearing about my study, a professor at a Midwestern university said, "I have no time or tolerance for the Religious Right" I had to take a step back and think. I was reminded of June's comment at the end of our two semesters together during our final group interview: "It comes from both sides." Indeed, it does. When I ask my students to bring their honest ideas and positions to class, but to bring them with an openness to the ideas and positions of others, I must include my students who profess a conservative Christianity. However, the openness is what is key, and what makes this positioning possible for me. Indeed, if I expect my students to at least entertain the ideas that I bring to class, I must afford them the same consideration.

My intolerance comes less with students for whom my classroom is the first time the issue of gay and lesbian students or families with same-gender parents has been presented in a positive light, or in a way that asks them to think about real people and real faces and real students that might enter their future classrooms. My intolerance comes more with members of the academic community. I am angered that, after years of well-received literature about the importance of multicultural education that shed light on how silence around issues of race, class, or gender promotes status quo oppression, many in teacher education are not willing to see that silence around gay and lesbian issues does the same thing.

A well-meaning professor from another university trying to mentor me before I stepped onto the job market said to me, “My advice to you as you look for a job is to stop being political. I know this lesbian-identity thing might be important to you. But, frankly, nobody else cares. Move on. I don’t announce my sexuality as I walk into a room.” Like some of my own undergraduate students, it seems, this professor of color who does work in multicultural education, believes in a silencing “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy when it comes to gay and lesbian issues.

Of course, once I get that job, I will have to publish, publish, publish in order to keep it. In preparation for my study, I conducted an exploration of the silence around children’s literature with gay and lesbian themes in the literature for teachers and teacher educators. In the resulting paper, I looked at how that silence feeds and perpetuates the dominant heterosexist cultural and classroom ideology, as well as how this silence is in a chicken-and-egg relationship with the publishing industry and the relatively low numbers of children’s books published with gay and lesbian themes. I also provided a brief analysis of the three books—*Holly’s Secret* (Garden, 2000), *The House You Pass on the Way* (Woodson, 1997), and *The Misfits* (Howe, 2001)—that my students read discussing how these novels both uphold and challenge cultural heterosexism. I first sent this manuscript to a widely read journal with an audience of teacher educators and of elementary school reading teachers. The journal editor responded, after glowing praise from three of four reviewers, that the topic wasn’t appropriate for elementary school teachers. When I submitted the same manuscript to the middle school journal of the same organization, the editorial board sent the paper back with a letter that said that they’d already read the manuscript, gave me the address of a teacher education journal with a

smaller audience, and that my work didn't fit in this middle school journal as it was written about literature that was aimed at an elementary school audience. I then sent the manuscript to another widely read journal with an audience of teacher educators and elementary school language arts teachers. One reviewer said to publish it largely as it is, and the other suggested revisions for resubmission. The outgoing editors of this journal told me that they had no more room in their remaining journals, and that I should either resubmit the manuscript to the new editors a few months later, or find another journal to submit it to. Because the peer reviewers gave such high praise to my writing and how I addressed the subject matter, I can only wonder if homophobia plays a role in the decisions that these editors made.

If teacher educators don't set an example of inclusive multicultural education in our treatment of colleagues or in the journals that are widely read by both academics and teachers in the field, gay and lesbian students and children of gay and lesbian parents will remain marginalized. If we in the academy are not willing to address these issues, then how can we expect our students and classroom teachers to? If we in the academy continue our silence around gay and lesbian issues, I believe that we are complicit in the statistics that show the experiences of gay and lesbian youth and the children of gay and lesbian parents.

The questions that I brought to the inquiry group gave me insight into the possibility for change. Jianna, June, and Lucy all came to the group and to the subject matter from a religiously conservative perspective. Through dialogue, all three of them found ways to include the children of gay and lesbian parents in their vision of themselves as teachers in some way or another without compromising their own religious

integrity. Jianna said of our class that addressed gay and lesbian children's literature, "Well, if we hadn't read this and talked about it, I wouldn't know to address it in my classroom. Seeing how other people might approach it helps me see how I might." I believe that, as teacher educators, we have a responsibility that extends beyond teaching methods. We must set an example to our students of radical inclusively. By regularly including on our syllabi texts that spur discussions about how to be culturally-relevant teachers to *all* kinds of students, we norm diversity. It is also our responsibility to create spaces for dialogue around difficult and controversial issues for our students. While some students can create these spaces in regular classroom discussions, Maggie found that her efforts weren't always appreciated by her colleagues: "And so at the beginning I tried to, you know, say these kinds of things, and they were all just like, they just kind of shut it down. And I was like, OK. Like I kind of gave up. You know?" The inquiry group provided the opportunity for dialogue among students who, while they often brought a diversity of opinions to an issue, desired to learn among that diversity.

Lastly, I think it our responsibility as teacher educators to follow our students out the door. There are no studies that explicitly inform us about the links between multicultural teacher education and multicultural teaching about gay and lesbian issues. While Jianna, June, Maggie, Lucy, Cindy, Sue, and Andrea professed the desire to continue finding ways to meet the needs of their diverse students in their future classrooms, they have no concept of what that will actually look like. And neither do I. If I don't find a way into my students' classrooms, I will never know how what we did together in the inquiry group affects their teaching of diverse students. Will the pressures

of a testing heavy curriculum shift their focus? Will they find themselves isolated? Will they find other teachers who are interested in the same issues that they are?

As the students from the inquiry group enter the profession, I wonder how their inquiry stance will lead them. While I know that Jianna won't raise gay and lesbian issues explicitly in her classroom, I wonder if she'll be faced with them, and if so, how her inquiry and dialogue will inform what she does. I also wonder how she'll approach challenging issues in her classroom. Has she learned how to find resources? Ask questions that lead to dialogue among students and parents? And how will Maggie bring her learning into the profession? How will she talk about families with her students? How will she open dialogue with parents who disagree with her approaches to teaching or to controversial issues?

Both Jianna and Maggie have agreed to continue in a three-person inquiry group with me as they enter the teaching profession, and I enter my first academic job. We have agreed to ask each other honest questions and give each other honest feedback so that we can better meet the needs of our students. Jianna has already begun asking pedagogical questions about writing and literature—one of her African American students used the word "nigger" in class, and she emailed me for resources about the history of the word, what books would be appropriate to use to talk about its meaning, and how she could use the students' journals for further discussion of the issue. Maggie has told me (but not the group) about how she handled a challenging situation with a student in her student teaching class, asking for ways that she could have better addressed the issue. Through email discussions, sharing of teaching journals, and visits to each other's classrooms, I hope that we find the same levels of dialogue, of learning, and of teaching that we found

in the inquiry group. Through this dialogue, we might be able to make school a more welcome place for our diverse students.

Hopeful Implications

My hope for the future, my hope for my son Arden, is in my hands, as well as in the hands of teacher educators and classroom teachers. I look at him and know that, while this particular struggle won't end before he enters elementary school, along with my colleagues from the inquiry group, I can make Arden's struggle a little bit less painful. I believe that public school is for everyone, and because of this *should* be democratic and radically inclusive. I want to send Arden to public school when he is old enough. I believe he will be exposed to diversity and wonderful teaching and be given fabulous opportunities when he is there. But, I am not willing to send him to a school where he will be the target of anti-gay harassment because of who his parents are, or where teachers are too afraid to stand up for *all* students. I've found a good private school in the city where my family is moving just in case. I will continue to prepare teachers to meet the needs of their diverse students by facilitating dialogic moments in my teacher education classrooms, and by asking preservice teachers to challenge their assumptions that might be religiously based. By opening the door for dialogue among teachers and teacher educators, we open the possibility for change that allows and expects a diversity of students whose lives can make our classrooms more vibrant and interesting places.

Appendix A:

Timeline of Graduate Studies and Teaching at the University Before the Inquiry

Year 1

Fall Semester:

- Taught Children's Literature
- Met Anthony
- Used similar syllabus to previous instructors of this class—no inclusion of books with gay or lesbian characters

Spring Semester:

- Taught Language Arts Methods
- Continued to struggle with Anthony
- Students completed Cultural Memoirs Project using mostly pictures and flowery writing
- I completed Cultural Memoirs project, coming out to my class in the process.

Summer Semester

- I write about struggles with Anthony
- I am a student in a graduate class where a peer says about using books with gay and lesbian issues, "You put garbage in, you get garbage out."

Year 2

Fall Semester:

- Taught Children's Literature
- Initiated Monday Morning Cultural Artifact activity
- September 11, 2001 occurred in the beginning of the semester, creating a different kind of trust among the members of the class
- Asked one group of students to read *Holly's Secret* (Garden, 2000), a book about a girl with two moms

Spring Semester:

- Taught Language Arts Methods
- Did the Power Walk for the first time
- Students read and discussed (and resisted) articles that addressed issues of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation and thought about how those issues come into the language arts classroom

Year 3

Fall Semester

- Taught Children's Literature
- Came out to students through "Identity Activity" on the first day of class
- Every student read a book with a gay or lesbian character (*Holly's Secret* [Garden, 2000], *The Misfits* [Howe, 2001], or *The House You Pass on the Way* [Woodson, 1997])

Spring Semester

- Taught Language Arts Methods
- Did the power walk
- Asked students to read the articles about race, class, gender, and sexual orientation
- Did a study hoping to learn about how to teach religiously conservative students about gay and lesbian issues while we all remained respectful of each other—none of the students who were silent during these discussions participated in the study

Appendix B
Timeline of the Inquiry, Fall 2003-Spring 2004

August

- Met students in Children's Literature Class
- Described intent of the study during second class meeting
- *Harry Potter* class

September

- Jill held a meeting for students interested in inquiry, and described her inquiry group question. Students talked about their inquiry interests, but wanted more time over email to decide what their exact topic would be.
- Students in the inquiry group sent emails about topics that seemed interesting to them. Only Ginger and Jianna chose a topic.

October

- Students spent four weeks in the field
- Jill observed Jianna and Ginger in their classrooms

November

- Columbus class
- Jill received email from Ginger inquiring about her sexual orientation
- Jill received email from Jianna regarding Christianity and homosexuality
- Jill began email dialogue with Jianna about scriptural references to homosexuality
- Gay and lesbian literature class
- Inquiry group meeting immediately following gay and lesbian literature class
- Transcribed class discussions of gay and lesbian literature and post-class inquiry group discussion

December

- Emailed transcripts to inquiry group
- Met with inquiry group to analyze transcripts and discuss dialogue during the gay and lesbian literature class
- Met with inquiry group members individually to talk with them about the gay and lesbian literature class and about their own inquiries. Jianna and Jill talked about scripture and Christianity during this meeting.

January

- Students begin Language Arts Methods class
- Begin Cultural Memoirs project. Students identified different cultural identities so they could incorporate five into their memoir
- Ginger dropped out of the study, saying that her new work schedule was too busy.
- Met with remaining inquiry group students about their topics. Some students asked for books and articles to read.

February

- Students and Jill shared their memoirs in mid-February during the class before their four week field experience
- Jill's sexual orientation was confirmed for students who didn't know for sure that she is a lesbian when they read her cultural memoir
- Jill told the class she was pregnant before they go into the field
- Jill observed June and Sue during their field experience

March

- Students were in the field through mid-month
- Students began peer and teacher conferencing in class—some inquiry group members conferenced with Jill and with each other about their research
- Mae dropped out of the study

April

- Students read selections about issues of race, class, gender, language, and sexual orientation and talked about whether those issues were central to the language arts curriculum
- Class visitor talked about how she addressed her kindergarten students who used the word "gay" to put each other down
- Inquiry group members turned in their final research write-ups
- Annie dropped out of the study

May

- Jill met with inquiry group students who shared their studies with each other and asked each other questions about their work
- Jill met with Lucy, June, Maggie, Sue, and Jianna individually to talk about what it had been like to be a member of the inquiry group. Cindy and Andrea couldn't meet because of work conflicts.

Appendix C
Data Sources

I. Data Sources

A. Student Writing
- Response papers for Columbus literature
- Response papers for gay and lesbian literature
- Email responses to gay and lesbian literature articles
- Cultural Memoirs
- Inquiry Group member research write-ups

B. Transcripts
- All inquiry group meetings
- Gay and lesbian literature discussions
- Whole class discussion of gay and lesbian literature class
- One-on-one interviews with inquiry group members

C. Research Journal
- Notes by Jill taken during and after class
- Notes taken by Jill after inquiry group meetings and one-on-one interviews with inquiry group members

D. Syllabi
- Children's Literature Class (See Appendix D)
- Language Arts Methods Class (See Appendix E)

II. Unplanned Data Sources

A. Casual Conversations
- Discussions with inquiry group members after class
- Discussions with inquiry group members during their month in the field

B. Personal emails
- Ginger's emails regarding Jill's sexual orientation prior to gay and lesbian literature class
- Jianna and Jill's email exchanges about scripture prior to gay and lesbian literature class
- Maggie and Jianna's emails regarding their future involvement in inquiry study

C. Field observations
- Jianna
- Ginger
- June
- Sue

Appendix D
Children's Literature Syllabus
Fall Semester, 2003

ELAN 3110
Instructor
Fall Semester, 2003
10:10 A.M. – 12:05 A.M.
Mon./Wed. Room 520 , Aderhold Hall

Jill Hermann-Wilmarth,

126 I Aderhold Hall
email: jillhw@peoplepc.com

Required Texts:
1. Short, K. G. (1997). *Literature: A Way of Knowing*. Stenhouse: Portland, ME.
2. Russell, D. L. (2001). *Literature for Children: A Short Introduction*. New York: Longman.
3. Children's literature. If you wish to buy books, I would recommend checking out used book sites on the web or used bookstores in town. Children's books are pretty easy to find. This takes a bit more time but results in quite a savings. Otherwise, the online bookstores are an easy way to get books, and buying several at once reduces postage. Or, if you don't want to buy your books (which I recommend, as it will help you begin to build your classroom library), find them at the libraries: the CMC on the second floor of Aderhold, or the Athens-Clarke County library on Baxter St. We'll also do Scholastic book orders. **Start locating books at the beginning of the semester. I will help you find a book 2 weeks or more before it is due. That you cannot find a copy of a book will not be an accepted excuse.**
4. Readings to be found in OIT.

Course objectives:
- Survey literature for grades K through 5
- Become familiar with criteria and resources for selecting quality literature
- Understand and participate in responses to literature
- Become familiar with methods for supporting responses to literature
- Begin to understand oral language and development
- Explore language diversity (dialect and additional languages) and classroom implications
- Become familiar with methods for supporting oral language in the classroom

How the class operates:
Most importantly, this is OUR classroom. What occurs within the parameters of this course is the equal responsibility of each member of the class. It is not only your own learning you are responsible for, but everyone else's as well. This truth affects your preparation, your participation, the way you state ideas, listen to and discuss others' ideas, and the products you create. I view myself as particularly, but not solely, responsible for providing resources and guiding questions, planning a class agenda, maintaining a pace and depth of work to maximize learning, and assessing and evaluating your work.

As there will be little lecture, *preparation*, *participation* and *promptness* are crucial. I expect:

1. that you will have read all assignments and prepared all responses prior to class.
2. that you will bring all materials necessary for class discussion (your own copy of the text, your literature response, etc.) to class.
3. that you will contribute to our discussions through listening and commenting.
4. you to check your email at least twice a week for any messages that I might need to get to you—please check one time on the weekend, before Tuesday's class.
5. you to be on time and present to every class unless you have an emergency or a serious illness. More than 2 excused absences will result in a 5 point overall deduction per absence. Every tardy after your second will result in a 2.5 point overall deduction in your grade.
6. you to practice academic honesty.

Assignments:

I believe that work that merits an A is excellent work, truly pushing the boundaries of the assignment and using it to thoroughly investigate questions and attempt answers. B work is good, completed with thoroughness and thoughtfulness. If you are doing C work, you are just completing assignments. When I evaluate your assignments and projects, I will look for the following:

1. Have you fulfilled the purposes of the assignment? Does your work evidence your learning in this area?
2. Have you examined the resources and thoroughly supported your work? Have you synthesized the discussions and readings and applied them?
3. Are your thoughts and ideas apparent? Have you invested your work with creative thought and expression?
4. Is the work presented well? Is it organized clearly, showing your grasp of the ideas you are expressing?
5. Have you edited your work so that your presentation is professional and accurate?

Ongoing assignments:

Professional reading responses. (15 points)

Each week by Monday at 5 PM, write a one page response to the professional reading that is due that week, and email it to me. Pose a question, respond to another's question, bring up a topic that you found troubling or enlightening, connect your reading to other texts. Quote from at least one other reading that will help you think about the question or topic. (This would include text, children's books, articles, or other conversations you have had and can cite.) Include the page and source on subsequent quotes. Bring all readings and responses to class with you each week. Even though this is over email, it should be a considered, edited writing.

Chapter books—Children's literature response journal. (30 points)

This is an ongoing record of your responses to the assigned literature that you read on your own. Read 1 of the books from the list for each genre. For your responses, do at least two traditional written responses, then for the others, choose a response option from

the list. Make sure that the time and thought you put into these is commensurate with your written responses.
This is not a summary of the work; this is what you make of the piece, how you compare it with others we've read, what connections you make to the professional readings, and what questions it brings up for you. The primary emphasis is on you as a reader, not your anticipating future uses of the books. You can respond to ideas, style, characterization, illustrations, setting, format, etc. Respond to each chapter book. Please type written responses, and put artistic responses in sleeves. Date your responses and be sure to include author, illustrator, and title of the work. Keep in a folder and turn in weekly. There will be twelve responses.

Picture Books/Annotated Bibliography (15 points)
Read 2 picture books per week that we are in class together, connected to the genre that we are studying. Go to the QCC website and find the objectives for a particular grade level (over the course of the semester, use each of K-5) so that you can select picture books that will integrate within the objectives of a particular subject (science, social studies, art, music, math, health, language). Fill out the form we create in class to show the research process to find your book. These will be turned in periodically and will form a bibliography of picture books. You are responsible for bringing the folder with these forms every day to class, along with the 2 picture books that you've read. While you are in the field, add any picture books that you read with your class, or with individual students.

Projects:
Reading autobiography. (10 points)
This is a short paper about who you are as a reader (4-6 pages, double-spaced, typed in 12 point font). Organize your autobiography chronologically or categorically. Think about and write about questions like these (but, please don't feel limited by these!): What did you read as a child? When? Where did and do you read? How did you/do you choose books? Who influenced your reading (positively or negatively) and how? How do you use reading? This is not a report on your reading life but a thoughtful interpretation of who you are as a reader today and how you came to be so. You will turn in one copy that I will keep to compare with your final reflection, so also keep a copy for yourself. Due: September 2 at the beginning of class.

Field assignments.
A. Please do all three of these assignments, but choose only two of these to write up formally: one due the first Thursday after you return to class, the second due the following Tuesday. (5 points each)

1. Read a book whole-class and gather variety of responses from your students. Tell me why, in two to three pages, you chose these particular responses. What do they tell you about your students? Your reading? Your students' reading? Your students' language?
2. Read a book with a child and talk about it. Describe your conversation and the child's responses, and reflect on the process in two to three pages.

3. Integrate literature within your three-day lesson plan for your Early Childhood class and give me a copy. Describe, in two to three pages, how the lessons went. In what ways did the literature aid your lesson? What would you do differently with literature next time? How fundamental to the lessons was the literature?

B. Keep a journal of field reading. What are you reading—to yourself, to your students, with your students? How are you modeling reading to your students? How do others (your mentor teacher, the media specialist) model reading to your students? Are there reading programs in place that determine what literature your student read? What do you think of these programs? This is due the Tuesday that you return to class. (10 points)

Final reflection (10 points)
This final project draws from your reading autobiography, your journals, and your class discussions. You should reflect on what you have read, what you have observed, and what you have written to describe your growth over the semester as a reader and as a future teacher of reading. Write 3 to 5 pages, typed in 12 point font, double-spaced. Due: _____ by 10:00 a.m. in my box, 125 Aderhold.

Tentative Course Calendar:

#	Date	Topic	Readings to be discussed
1	T 8/19	Introduction to course and each other. *What are identities do we bring to our reading?*	
2	Th 8/21	What is Children's Literature? What is response to Literature? How does literature fit into the classroom?	Chapter 1 in Short Chapters 4 and 5 in Russell
3	T 8/26	Why Read Children's Literature? How is it included in the classroom? What do the "experts" have to say?	Chapter 2 in Short *
4	Th 8/28	Fantasy *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (Rowling)	Chapter 10 in Russell
5	T 9/2	Language Acquisition and Development Acquiring the Human Language	Glazer (OIT)*
6	Th 9/4	Literature Circles	Chapter 4 in Short Harvey Daniels piece*
7	T 9/9	Folklore Read one of these *Cut from the same cloth* (San Souci) *The People Could Fly* (Hamilton) *The Tales of Uncle Remus: The Adventures of Brer Rabbit* (Lester)	Russell, Ch. 8 Yolen "American Cinderella" (OIT)* Lester on the writing of the *Uncle Remus Tales* (OIT)*

8	Th 9/11	Oral Language/Linguistic Diversity	Delpit piece Short, Ch. 3*
9	T 9/16	Realistic Fiction 1 Read one of the following: *Holes* (Sacher) *Hatchet* (Paulsen) *The Great Gilly Hopkins* (Patterson) *Yolanda's Genius* (Fenner) *Walk Two Moons* (Creech)	Russell, pp 209-218
10	Th 9/18	Why Multicultural literature? Literature in the classroom	Ch. 3, Russell * Hade "Reading Multiculturally"*
11	T 9/23	Poetry Read one of the following: *All the Colors of the Race* (Adoff) *Honey I Love* (Greenfield) *Cool Salsa: Bilingual Poems on Growing up Latino in the United States* (Carlson)	Russell, ch. 9
12	Th 9/25	More Realistic Fiction—disabilities in the classroom Everyone read and respond to *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key* (Gantos)	
13	T 10/28	Realistic Fiction 2 *Wringer* (Spinelli) *The Wild Kid* (Mazer) *Because of Winn-Dixie* (DiCamillo) *Philip Hall Likes Me. I Recon Maybe* (Greene)	**Field journal due**
		Fall Break	
14	T 11/4	Science Fiction *The Green Book* (Walsh) *The Giver (*Lois Lowry) *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (O'Brien)	**Field write ups are due**
15	T 11/11	More discussion of historical fiction Author's perspective and historical fiction Read picture book *Encounter* (Yolen) Read *Morning Girl* (Dorris) (the response to this book can be integrated into your professional response, instead of in the response journal)	Yolen * Ingber * Selections from *Rethinking Columbus* *
16	Th 11/13	Realistic Fiction 3—familial and sexual diversity in the classroom Read one of the following *Holly's Secret* (Garden) *The Misfits* (Howe) *The House You Pass on the Way* (Woodson)	Casement * Lewison, et al *
17	T 11/18	Even More Historical Fiction Read one of the following:	Russell, pp.219-224.

		*Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry (*Taylor) *The Watsons go to Birmingham—1963* (Curtis) *Number the Stars* *The Devil's Arithmetic*	
18	Th 11/20	Picture Storybooks Read in class (bring examples) one book from each of the following categories: 1) child's inner world 2) child's family world 3) child's social world 4) child's natural world 5) child's aesthetic world child's imaginary world	Russell, Chapter 7
19	T 11/25	Non-fiction and Biography Read one book for each of the following subjects, and bring two to class: Social Studies Science Math Language Study The Arts	Ch. 12 in Russell
20	T 12/2	Contemporary Realistic Fiction Read *Maniac Magee* to discuss topics in contemporary realistic fiction—intersect your reading of the novel with the article for today	Enciso article (OIT)*
21	Th 12/4	Read one chapter book biography. Show me the book no later than 11/25—you must check with me to make sure that your choice is adequate. If you are interested, this would be a great time to reread books like *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*, or books about authors that you've come to enjoy this semester—*Knots on My Yo Yo String* is Spinelli's autobiography.	

Appendix E
Language Arts Methods Syllabus

ELAN 4120 Language Arts Methods **Spring, 2004**
Jill Hermann-Wilmarth **Room 116, 12:20-3:50**
Email: jillhw@peoplepc.com **Phone: 542-5674**
Office (126 I) hours: By appointment

Required Text:
Fletcher, R. (1993). *What a writer needs.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann
Fletcher, R. & Portalupi, J. (2001). *Writing workshop: The essential guide*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
Harwayne, S. (2001). *Writing through childhood: Rethinking process and product.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
Selected Text: (choose one)
Fox, M. (1993). *Radical reflections: Passionate opinions on teaching, learning and living.* New York: Harcourt Brace and Company.
Laminack, L., & Wood, K. (1996). *Spelling in use*. Urbana, IL: NCTE.

Children's Literature: (both are required)
Bruchac, J. (1998). *The heart of a chief*. New York: Dial Books.
Ryan, P. M. (2000). *Esperanza rising*. New York: Scholastic.

Suggested Text:
Calkins, L. (1994). *The art of teaching writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann
Chancer, J & Rester-Zodrow, G. (1997). *Moon journals: Writing, art and inquiry through focused nature study*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
Fletcher, R. *A writer's notebook: Unlocking the writer within you*. New York: Avon Books.
Fletcher, R. & Portalupi, J. (1998). *Craft lessons.* York, ME: Stenhouse.
Fletcher, R. & Portalupi, J. (2001). *Nonfiction craft lessons.* York, ME: Stenhouse.
Additional chapters and articles will be provided in class, or on a CD later in the semester.

Purpose and Goals: The guiding philosophy behind this class is that best practices require teachers of writing to *write*, to they see themselves as writers, to recognize the varieties of ways in which writers practice their craft, and in doing that, to gain an understanding of their own writing processes and to increase their effectiveness as writing teachers. The combined goals of this class are not only to introduce you to the writing workshop approach to writing instruction and to help prepare you for your field work, but to ultimately guide and encourage you in your own growth as a writer. In the course of that pursuit, we will explore what writing is and what it is becoming, and what the changes in writing mean to us as creative persons. Hopefully, when you leave this class, you will love writing. If love doesn't come, then hopefully you will have found enjoyment and a creative release that will impact your development as a teacher and an individual. Intrinsic to the teaching of writing is an understanding of literacy and the

ways in which literacy operates both in and out of the classroom; therefore definitions of literacy as a concept that stretches beyond reading and writing will also be introduced.

Outline of Requirements

Attendance: You are expected to attend every class and to be on time unless you have an emergency or a serious illness. More than 1 excused absence (because we meet only once a week, missing one class is equivalent to missing a week of class) will result in a 5-point overall deduction per absence. Every tardy after your second will result in a 2.5-point overall deduction in your grade. *We will have a 10 minute break as close to the middle of class as possible. Leaving class during writing time or discussion time—except for an emergency—is not acceptable.*

Participation: Acknowledging that we all have varying comfort levels of class participation, it is expected that everyone will support the class community and their own learning by engaging in class discussions. The class will generally follow a writing workshop and reading group structure. There will be very little lecture in this class; therefore, it is vital that you come to class having read and reflected upon the assigned material. In short, you are expected to *attend* to the material and pay attention to our class discussions. If you use your class time for other than our mutual work—homework for other classes, reading *The Red & Black*, etc.—I will consider you not in attendance and count you as tardy. You are also encouraged to think beyond the confines of this class and enliven our discussions with your reflections on other readings and experiences. Writing classes must, by definition, be safe and nurturing spaces, and we will work together to create the kind of supportive learning environment in which good writing can flourish.

Grading Policy: I believe that work that merits an A is excellent work, truly pushing the boundaries of the assignment and using it to thoroughly investigate questions and attempt answers. B work is good, completed with thoroughness and thoughtfulness. If you are doing C work, you are just completing assignments. When I evaluate your assignments and projects, I will look for the following:

6. Have you fulfilled the purposes of the assignment? Does your work evidence your learning in this area?
7. Have you examined the resources and thoroughly supported your work? Have you synthesized the discussions and readings and applied them?
8. Are your thoughts and ideas apparent? Have you invested your work with creative thought and expression?
9. Is the work presented well? Is it organized clearly, showing your grasp of the ideas you are expressing?
10. Have you edited your work so that your presentation is professional and accurate?

If I feel that your work does not meet the level of either an *A* or *B*, I will request a conference so we can discuss ways to improve your performance in the class.

Academic Honesty: You are to practice academic honesty as defined by the university.

Email: Please check your email twice a week for any messages I might need to send you. Likewise, I will check my email daily for any messages from you.

Late Work: All work is expected at the start of class time on the day it is due. Turning in work within the 24 hours following the due time will result in the deduction of half a

letter grade; after 24 hours, a deduction of a full letter grade per day will result. No paper will be accepted three days after the due date.
Cell Phones and pagers: Please turn them off when you enter class.

Note: This syllabus is open to change depending upon the needs of the class.

Assignments:
All written assignments should be done in 12 pt. Times New Roman font, *double-spaced,* unless you need to alter size, format and font for creative purposes. **All papers should be revised, proofread, and edited before they are turned in.**

Assignment	Weight	Due Date
1. Think Cards	8 pts.	Daily
2. Skills Presentation/Mini-Lesson	5 pts. each	1/29
3. Cultural Memoir	12 pts.	2/12
4. Chapter Book Evaluations	5 pts. each	(Heart of a Chief)2/5 (Esperanza) 4/15
5. Book Review	5 pts.	4/1
6. Working Writer's Notebook/Evaluation	25 pts.	4/22
7. Field Experience Teaching Journal	20 pts.	3/25
8. Final Writing Piece	10 pts.	4/29

Explanation of Assignments:

1. Think Cards

Your own searching and inquiry are vital to this class, so it is important that you read the material with a critical and responsive eye. These think cards will allow you to focus some of your more crucial thoughts about the class readings. The think cards are to be written on large index cards and will be due *at the beginning* of each class. On them you should note important quotes/ideas/concepts about the class readings and, in addition, pose at least two questions. The questions should reflect things you don't understand, things you wonder about, things that provoke you or make you think about your own teaching and learning processes. We will use these to generate whole and small group discussions on the readings. If you want to type them instead of writing to save time, hand cramping, etc., that is fine. It might be helpful for you to have the quotes you pick from the text on your computer for future reference. If you choose to do this, make sure not to go overboard. One of the points of using a card is so that you don't write a book! There should be a think card for each reading selection of the day (for example, if there is a reading from Fletcher and one from Harwayne, you should complete two think cards).

2. Skills Presentations

Working in groups, you will present a conversation to the class regarding how to teach the "mechanics" of writing within a classroom using the writing workshop format. Each group will choose a writing skill on which to focus, and each member of the group will be required to read and be able to discuss one article or book chapter on the group's

selected skill. Skills to be addressed can include grammar, punctuation, handwriting, spelling, vocabulary, structure, etc. An accompanying annotated bibliography of your readings will be required.

3. Writers Workshop Mini-Lesson/Literacy Center

The mini-lesson is to be prepared to fit within a writing workshop and can be used in your field work. We will follow the format established by Fletcher and Portalupi in *Craft Lessons*; I will provide you with a model. The focus of your mini-lesson can arise out of your own needs as a writer or be a lesson you anticipate would benefit your future students. A detailed outline of a literacy center design and facilitation is also an option

4. Cultural Memoir

Since discovery is an important part of the writing act, you will be asked to create an artifact that represents you and the cultures that have shaped you. "Culture" can be defined any way you wish. While this memoir should be written, it does not have to be limited to words; in fact, it is my hope that you do not restrict yourself to words but also include images, colors, objects, even sounds and movement. On the due date, we will create our own gallery, where your memoirs will be viewed and your peers will be given the opportunity to respond to your work.

.5. Book Review

You will select one book from the Selected Text list at the beginning of the syllabus to read while you are in the field. We will form in-class reading groups to discuss not only the content of these books, but how you see the author's ideas at play during your observation (or how the ideas presented are absent from the classroom in which you are observing). In your 3-4 page book review, you will address the main themes of the book, what you found valuable or not, how you would or would not use the ideas as a teacher, etc. Use quotes and examples from the text.

6. Children's Literature Review

We will form literature discussion groups (that reflect our book groups in 3110) to discuss the ideas in the literature, but also to discuss the author's craft: How does the author draw you into the book? How does s/he use descriptive language? What role do specifics play? What structure/tone/voice does the author use? You will write a three-page review of the book that focuses on the writing techniques the author uses, drawing upon Fletcher's *What a Writer Needs* for your observations.

6. Working Writer's Notebook/Evaluation

You will keep a writer's notebook throughout the course, starting this week. You are to write in this notebook for a minimum of 15 minutes a day, four days a week—you get the choose the days. It will be exactly what it says it is—a working writer's notebook, a catch-all for your thoughts, dreams, ponderings; for comments and reflections on the class readings and discussions; a gathering place for your writing ideas, false starts, practices, exercises, freewritings, etc. This notebook is your discovery zone where you hopefully will develop yourself as a writer and teacher of writing. I don't expect neatness; in fact, I wouldn't mind if your creative energy sometimes EXPLODED

on the page in multiple colors and combinations of images and words. I would love it if your notebook makes you laugh out loud sometimes, wipe away a tear sometimes. *In grading your notebook, I will be looking for thoughtfulness and risk-taking, connections between what you read and what you write, and the establishment of yourself as a working writer; in short, I'll be looking for your development and progress as a writer.* At the end of your notebook include a 2-3 page **evaluation** of your notebook, employing the same critical lens you used in your book reviews. How well did you, as a writer, use the techniques discussed in Fletcher's *What a Writer Needs*? How well did you use descriptive language? What kinds of voices came through in your writing? What role did specifics play? How often did you "write small"? Unlike the notebook, which can be messy, this evaluation should be expertly presented, edited and proofread. It will be worth 5 of the 25 pts.

7. Field Experience Teaching Journal

For the weeks you are teaching writing during your field work, you will keep a journal on your experiences, observations, and thoughts on the **writing** instruction and practices taking place in the classroom. These entries can be basically documentary—what mini-lesson was presented, what happened to whom, who said what, how the students responded. At the end of each week, you will write a longer reflective piece about your observations. To help frame these observations, you will choose one quote a week from our class readings and discuss how your teaching experiences are reflected in (or contrasted to) the quote. (I'd suggest drawing on the quotes that you put on your Think Cards.) In these reflective pieces, you should ponder, question, challenge, and generally cogitate about what happened in terms of writing in the classroom during the week. These weekly entries need to be as rich and detailed as you can make them. Focus on the individual children in the class—What do you observe about them? What seems to "work" for them as they develop their reading and writing literacy? What seems to block them? What do you notice about yourself and your own reactions as you progress through the month? How does the mentoring teacher operate in the class? These journals should be thoughtful, critical, creative, insightful, and even provocative. If you find it helpful, collect artifacts from the class (photographs, student work, teacher ideas) to include in your notebook and discuss them.

8. Final Writing Piece

This piece (or pieces) can be anything you desire to develop from your semester of writing. These pieces can be any genre—poetry, prose, fiction, non-fiction, essay, or a combination. You could use the book *Moon Journals* to guide a science/art/writing project. You could choose the book review book that you *didn't* read, and do an in-depth review, looking at other texts to really create a strong academic piece. You could take an entry from your Writer's Notebook and write the first chapter of the Great American Novel with it as the seed idea. The options are pretty endless. Using the writing workshop approach, you will participate in peer conferences, whole group sharing, and student-teacher conferences to gain feedback on your work as you revise and refine. We will publish these pieces in the form of an oral reading during our Writers' Celebration. Participation in the Writers' Celebration is required.

Date	Focus	Readings/Assignments
January 8	Introductions: Teachers as Writers *Power Walk*	
January 15	The Nitty Gritty of Writing: Building a Home in a Writing Classroom	Assignment: Think cards Readings: *Fletcher/Portalupi (WW): chs. 1,2 *Fletcher: [WWN]: ch. 1 *Harwayne: chs. 1,2
January 22	Writing about Ourselves: Starting with Memoir	Assignment: Think cards Readings: *Fletcher/Portalupi [WW]: ch. 8 *Fletcher: [WWN]: chs 2,3. *Harwayne: ch. 3, 4 *Calkins "Memoir" (provided in class)
January 29	Writing Developmentally through the Blending of Creativity and Skills: The Role of Mechanics in Learning to Write Teri comes Mini-lessons: Figuring Out What They Need When They Need It *Skills and Mini-Lesson Presentations*	Assignment: Think cards Annotated bibliography of skills readings Mini-Lesson Readings: *Fletcher/Portalupi (WW): chs. 3,4 *Harwayne: ch. 6, 7
February 5	Creating the Written World: Writing as Seeing, Writing Small *Heart of a Chief* Discussion (bring the book!)	Assignment: Think cards *Heart of a Chief* Review Readings: *Fletcher/Portalupi [WW]: 6,7 *Fletcher: [WWN]: ch. 4 *Harwayne: ch. 5
February 12	*Memoir Sharing*	Assignment: Think cards Cultural Memoir Readings: *Fletcher: [WWN]: chs. 5,6, 10, 13 *Calkins: "Making Meaning on the Page" and "Rehearsal" (OIT)

March 25	The Heart of the Matter: Peer and Student-Teacher Conferencing	Assignment: *Field Journal Due* Think Cards Readings: *Fletcher/Portalupi [WW]: ch. 5 *Harwayne: ch. 8 *Calkins: "Conferring" and "Learning to Confer" (OIT) *Fletcher [WWN]: ch. 12
April 1	Book Discussion Giving the Grade: Assessment, evaluation and publication	Assignment: Bring Selected Reading Book Think cards Book Review Due Readings: *Fletcher/Portalupi (WW): chs. 9,10 *Harwayne: ch. 10 *Calkins: ch. 19 *Fletcher [WWN]: 6,7,8
April 8	Images of Literacy Film: *Rabbit-Proof Fence*	Assignment: Think cards Readings: *Fletcher/Portalupi [WW]: chs. 11,12 *Calkins: "The Home-School Connection"
April 15	The interplay of reading, writing and culture *Esperanza Rising* (Bring the Book!)	Assignment: Think cards *Esperanza Rising* Review Due Readings: Selections from Rethinking Schools
April 22	Exploring Genres: Poetry Final Conferencing and Questions	Assignment: Think cards Writer's Notebook and Evaluation Letter Due Readings: *Fletcher [WWN]: "Final Thoughts" *Harwayne: ch. 9
April 29	Writer's Celebration	Assignment: Final Writing Piece Due

Appendix F
Power Walk

- Walk if you've ever lived outside of Georgia
- Walk if you've ever traveled west of the Mississippi
- Walk if you've ever traveled to Europe
- Walk if you've ever traveled outside of the US and Europe
- Walk if your parents have never been divorced
- Walk if you are an only child
- Walk if one parent stayed home when you were a child
- Walk if either of your parents is not literate
- Walk if you grew up in the suburbs
- Walk if your parents went to college
- Walk if your parents have a graduate degree
- Walk if you are the first in your family to go to college
- Walk if (before last semester) you consider yourself a reader
- Walk if you intentionally read books about people who are different than you are
- Walk if any one in your family has ever been to jail
- Walk if you have ever been fired from a job
- Walk if there is alcoholism in your family
- Walk if you or your family has ever been on food stamps
- Walk if English is not your first language
- Walk if you can fluently speak more than one language
- Walk if there is mental illness in your family
- Walk if you moved more than 3 times before you turned 18
- Walk if your scores on a standardized test have ever negatively affected your education
- Walk if you don't practice Christianity
- Walk if you are a member of a minority group

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