PENDLETON, MELISSA JOY WRENN. Text-Based Discussions: Lessons Learned from One Fifth Grade Classroom. (Under the direction of Dr. Angela M. Wiseman).

The purpose of the present study was to investigate text-based discussions in a fifth grade classroom. Laura, a purposefully selected fifth grade teacher, and 11 of her students participated in this three-month study at Greenwood Elementary School, a rural, Title I school with approximately 82% of students receiving free or reduced priced lunch. Data sources were consistent with qualitative research (i.e., classroom observations with field notes, audio recordings, interviews, artifacts). Data were analyzed and collapsed into four themes using constant comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The first theme focuses on how the teacher's choices influenced students' discussions. The remaining three themes explain how students co-constructed meaning, engaged in unsanctioned talk, and explored their identities related to race, gender, and socio-economic status. The findings from this study validate existing research on dialogic talk and highlight the importance of identity and classroom talk, as well as the problems of unsanctioned talk. The themes have implications for policymakers, practitioners, and future researchers.
Text-Based Discussions: Lessons Learned from One Fifth Grade Classroom

by
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DEDICATION

For Grandma and Pa—whose lives and deaths made all of this possible.

d. 6/26/08
BIOGRAPHY

Melissa was born in North Carolina and spent much of her childhood moving around the United States as part of an Air Force family. She earned her bachelor's degree in English from Meredith College. During her nearly 11 years as an elementary school teacher, Melissa earned her master's degree in Education from Walden University and certification from the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards. Her research interests include classroom discourse and critical literacy.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My favorite quote from adolescence was a line from *Orpheus Descending* by Tennessee Williams—"We're all of us sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins." In many ways writing my dissertation has been a solitary journey. I worked hour after hour in silence. I spent months revising while sitting in a little chair staring at two screens and surrounded by perfectly scattered stacks of books and papers. But unlike Val in Williams' play, I recognize that I am not alone. Along this journey I had a network of supporters who helped me progress, and without them I never would have completed this goal.

First, I would like to thank God for all of His answered and unanswered prayers along the way. He was always a place for me to turn and a source of constant strength. My favorite Bible verse has always been 1 Peter 5:7—Cast your anxiety upon Him for He cares for you. That has been my mantra through this process.

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My children, Montana and Lucas, know firsthand that education comes with sacrifice. At times, I was frustrated because it was nearly impossible to work while they were home,
yet I came to appreciate the stolen hour or two they would allow me to concentrate. Even more so, I appreciated the times I would steal away to play with them. We played countless games of corn hole and watched reruns on Netflix to assuage writer's block. More than anything, they kept me grounded and helped me keep the mountain in perspective. And when Lucas said, "I ban you from your chair today!" I knew where my attention was most needed.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Reading, writing, and number may be the acknowledged curriculum 'basics,' but talk is arguably the true foundation of learning" (Alexander, 2008, p. 9).

Background

A large number of students in America are silenced by formalized curricula, school structure, or even classroom relationships. While calculating the exact number of students whose school experiences are shrouded in silence is impossible, evidence repeatedly suggests that students in poverty, who identify as racial minorities, and who are lower-tracked have access to an inequitable curriculum often resulting in silenced voices and ideologies. All students are at risk of becoming participants in culture of silence (Rubin, 1990); however, underrepresented groups may also experience these inequities in the form of subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 2005). Marginalized young people are often separated from their dialogic, personal experiences and subjected to practices more closely aligned with White, middle-class primary discourse (Delpit, 1995/2006; Heath, 1983; McCollum, 1989).

Researchers recognize that dialogic experiences help students with aspects of literacy, including writing (Dyson, 1990, 1993), comprehension (Goatley, Brock, & Raphael, 1995; Juzwik, Nystrand, Kelly, & Sherry, 2008; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991; Palincsar & Brown, 1984), vocabulary (Greene Brabham & Lynch-Brown, 2002), and oral expression (Mol, Bus, & de Jong, 2009). Dialogic talk demonstrates qualities of real-world conversations in which participants share the responsibility of communication (Gambrell, 1996) and have opportunities to generate new meaning together (Bakhtin, 1981). In addition, dialogic
teaching is collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative, and purposeful (Alexander, 2006, p. 28). When children experience highly dialogic classrooms with engaging conversations about text and related concepts, meaningful school experiences are likely to ensue. Yet, the students who may benefit most from such instruction often receive the least of it, leaving many unanswered questions about how a teacher might maintain highly dialogic discussions that reflect students’ literacy learning and identities. Additional research is needed to understand how students’ individual characteristics influence classroom discussions (Reznitskaya & Glina, 2013), as well as how teachers encourage dialogic conversations (Aukerman, Belfatti, & Santori, 2008). Upon consideration of how students in a racially diverse, lower-tracked classroom navigate classroom discourse, specifically during text-based discussions, the need in literacy research becomes even more prominent. Therefore, further research is needed to understand how students and teachers find ways to assert power and identities through multiple ways of knowing during text-based discussions.

**Statement of the Problem**

Historically, students in westernized classrooms experience limited opportunities to engage in dialogic talk (Alexander, 2006). In the United States, national education policies, such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) and its amendment that funded the Reading First program (U. S. Department of Education, 2009) have exacerbated the problems with classroom talk; neither policy supported a strong dialogic presence for student talk in elementary classrooms. In *Put Reading First* (National Institute for Literacy, 2001), a summary report jointly funded by the National Institute for Literacy, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NIHD), and the U.S. Department of Education,
teachers received models to use as questioning guides during reading comprehension instruction. However, the sample questions required students to respond with short answers using little prior knowledge and few meaningful interactions with the text. Moreover, the sample transcript given in the summary mimicked the limited interactions literacy researchers have cautioned against (e.g., Cazden, 1988; Duffy & Roehler, 1987; Reninger & Rehark, 2009; Reznitskaya, 2012).

In contrast, the expectations of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association [NGA] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010) are students will, beginning in kindergarten, participate in conversations that involve several verbal exchanges (i.e., CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.1.B). By the time students are in the fifth grade, they will regularly contribute to discussions, elaborate upon their classmates’ comments, and analyze comments for accuracy and effectiveness (i.e., CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.1). Despite claims from U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, the CCSS are not a federal policy (Duncan, 2010), the federal government required states receiving "Race to the Top" funding to adopt the CCSS (Ravitch, 2013), which resulted in shared English language arts (ELA) and mathematics standards in K-12 classrooms in 45 states. As a result of this policy shift, now is an opportune time to investigate elementary classroom discussion practices.

Researchers have consistently argued against practices that limit opportunities for students to engage in dialogic talk. They acknowledge many problems for students' learning occur in teacher-directed classrooms. In a conversation about discourse Bloome argued, "Students have been constructed as passive recipients of knowledge, passive in their body,
passive in terms of being acted upon, passive in terms of their own relationships to each other, to academic knowledge, and so forth" (Bloome & Willis, 2013, p. 65). Passivity cannot co-exist with dialogic talk, nor does it reflect the field's understanding of discussions as focused, purposeful conversations (Bridges, 1988; Brilhart & Galanes, 1995; Slavin, 1990) in which all group participants contribute to conversations as "partners in the development of understanding" (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003, p. 707). When teachers control turn-taking, students make fewer contributions to discussions and exhibit less complexity in their responses (Almasi, 1995; Cazden, 1988); moreover, students have less agency in the classroom power structure during teacher-controlled interactions (Almasi, 1996). Often teacher-controlled discussions involve low-level questioning practices (Durkin, 1978/79), which do little to help move students toward reading comprehension (Langer, 1985) and may prevent discussions from developing (Raphael & McMahon, 1994). Although students may express contrary views with the potential to begin a classroom discussion, teachers often silence them (Hollingworth, 2009). Rubin (1990) observed that "sometimes students learn more about silence than about talk" in teacher-controlled discussions (p. 3), which is problematic for students of all ages.

Engaging in dialogic discussions about texts influences students' learning in a variety of ways and provides them opportunities to share cultural experiences. Group discussions improve children's oral language skills (Mol et al., 2009), abilities to generate persuasive arguments (Reznitskaya, Anderson, McNurlen, Nguyen-Jahiel, Achodidiou, & Kim, 2001), and comprehension-based reading skills (Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Raphael & McMahon, 1995). Affective constructs such as motivation and engagement also improve when discourse
is responsive and interactive (Almasi, McKeown, & Beck, 1996; Gambrell, Hughes, Calvert, Malloy, & Igo, 2011; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). Additionally, participation in dialogic talk about texts may allow students to make cultural connections (e.g., Broughton, 2002; Chi, 2012; Egan-Robertson, 1998), which are important because students' and teachers' ideological and cultural values influence classroom discourse (Heath, 1983; Medina, 2010) and form their individual identities (Gee, 2001).

Although researchers and practitioners understand the importance of classroom discussions, teachers find implementing dialogic talk difficult (Alvermann, O'Brien, & Dillon, 1990), even when intentionally trying to do so (Christoph & Nystrand, 2001; Kucan, Hapgood, & Palincsar, 2011). Some researchers encourage teachers to facilitate talk and lead conversations as necessary (McIntyre, Kyle & Moore, 2006) and to be deliberate in their talk moves by opting for accountable talk (Michaels, O'Connor, & Resnick, 2008) or exploratory talk (Mercer, 1995) practices. Unfortunately, the research on discussion has not transferred into frequent practice in westernized classrooms, and students continue to experience limited dialogic opportunities (Alexander, 2006; Nystrand, 2006). Even researchers may find maintaining open discussions difficult in literacy classrooms (i.e., Aukerman et al., 2008).

Given the discrepancy between researchers' recommendations for discussion and the actual ways teachers and students engage in talk, considerations of the dialogic continuum become important. Classroom talk occurs along a continuum ranging from monologic to dialogic talk, and teachers lead conversations differently depending upon their intentions (McIntyre et al., 2006; Reznitskaya, 2012). Researchers do not claim all talk should be dialogic or student-centered; rather, students need to engage in more discussions and spend
less time at the monologic end of the continuum. However, many questions remain about how to increase the frequency and quality of dialogic opportunities for students, particularly lower-tracked students who spend approximately 75% less time than their higher-tracked peers in classroom discussion (Applebee et al., 2003). Additionally, scholars widely recognize that students benefit from hearing their own voices and seeing their personal beliefs become part of classroom discourse, yet more research is needed to explore how students connect to their home and social communities during talk (Medina, 2010; Snell, 2013). The present study addresses both needs in research by investigating classroom discussion practices and how students exhibit identity through dialogic talk in a racially diverse, lower-tracked fifth grade classroom.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to inform the literacy community about text-based discussion practices in a fifth grade classroom. The student participants for this study belonged to a racially diverse and lower-tracked classroom in a school with approximately 82% of children receiving free or reduced priced lunch. Students in lower-tracked classrooms often experience limited opportunities for discussion (Applebee et al., 2003; Gritter, 2012), yet in the participants in this study engaged in dialogic talk as part of a curriculum designed to incorporate text-based discussions. Specifically, the present study explains how students participate in talk during conversations about texts by answering the following research questions:

1) In a racially diverse, lower-tracked fifth grade classroom, what happens when a teacher and her students participate in text-based discussions?
2) How do students exhibit identity through discussion in their fifth grade language arts classroom?

**Significance of the Study**

The present study contributes to the field of literacy by demonstrating how traditionally marginalized students participate in dialogic conversations about texts. Using case study methodology and applying a sociocultural theoretical lens, I explain how the members of a purposefully selected classroom experience talk, with and without the teacher's presence, and exhibit identity during their conversations. Literacy researchers and practitioners who seek to change the landscape of talk in classrooms will find this study relevant as it provides a unique portrait of students—racially diverse, lower-tracked fifth grade students, in a high poverty school—engaging in dialogic text-based discussions in year two of the CCSS. The findings highlight how one teacher and her students make decisions that support dialogic talk, yet they also suggest some of the pitfalls students may encounter in text-based discussions. Moreover, this study extends existing research on the roles of teachers, students, and texts in classroom discussions and contributes to the growing body of research on discussion and identity in literacy classrooms.

**Definition of Terms**

Select terms used in this study are defined below for clarity.

**Community of practice:** Social environments in which members connect with one another for a common purpose and share the responsibility of the work (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1988).
**Dialogic**: Classroom talk in which participants share ideas and the responsibility for the conversation (Gambrell, 1996) and generate meaning together (Bakhtin, 1981).

**Discussion**: A focused, purposeful conversation (Bridges, 1988; Brilhart & Galanes, 1995; Slavin, 1990).

**Discourse**: Literacy practices infused with "ways of knowing, definitions of knowledge, rationality, social identity, social hierarchy, power relations, ways of using spoken and written language, and ways of being" (Bloome et al., 2008, p. 57).

**High spectrum discussion**: Term used in this study to describe talk that is highly dialogic through which participants exchange ideas and co-construct meaning (e.g., Reznitskaya, 2012).

**Lower-tracked**: Classroom identified as including more students who struggle with school-based literacy practices compared to other classrooms (Cazden, 2000).

**Low spectrum discussion**: Term used in this study to describe teacher-centered talk in which students respond to given questions or prompts and experience little interaction among themselves (e.g., Reznitskaya, 2012); also describes talk that involves limited meaning making in peer-only conversations.

**Mid-range discussion**: Term used in this study to describe talk that is between the monologic and dialogic ends of the continuum. Reznitskaya (2012) refers to this type of talk as transitioning.

**Pressing**: A discussion technique in which one conversant actively tries to elicit more talk or explanations from another by asking follow-up questions (McElhone, 2012; Wolf et al., 2005).
**Substantive engagement:** Refers to the practice of students being immersed in an activity and demonstrating a desire to participate (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991).

**Text-based discussions:** Conversations that are based on texts students have read or produced. These discussions may involve whole or small group conversations and may be led by students, teachers, or a combination.

**Uptake:** Incorporating comments made by another conversant into one's own talk (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991).

**Unsanctioned talk:** Term used in this study to describe talk not aligned with the classroom teacher's expectations for discussion.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

"Language mediates between ourselves and the two components of our environment, the natural environment and the social environment; and it does so in such a way that each becomes a metaphor for the other” (Halliday, 1978, p. 162).

Introduction to the Chapter

Chapter 2 presents sociocultural theory as the framework for this study and analyzes existing research on classroom discussion. Many major works in sociocultural theory and more than 140 books, chapters, and peer-reviewed articles about discussion were examined for this literature review. First, I discuss how sociocultural theory, including understandings of communities of practice, inform this study. Second, I present the historical context of discussion research beginning with the 1920s and continuing to the present. Then, I explain what researchers have concluded about effective discussions and follow this section with the major influences on classroom talk as represented in the research—teachers, students, and texts. Research studies related to discussion and identity are analyzed and included in this review, and I conclude with a chapter summary.

Theoretical Framework

Sociocultural theory encapsulates many different ideas, but one of its most fundamental assumptions is that people's experiences directly relate to their previous interactions and their social and cultural contexts (Bakhtin, 1981; Halliday, 1977, 1978; Heath, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Wertsch, 1991). Vygotsky (1978) argued that a person's histories are composed of past experiences and perceptions, including linguistic experiences. These histories form "the sociocultural experience of the child" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 94).
Bakhtin (1981) described this relationship between language and experience as a "living discourse" (p. 259) that changes over time depending upon one's social and dialogic interactions. Understanding the context in which these interactions occur is critical (Fish, 1980) because the social and cultural factors influencing learning change throughout a person's lifetime (Halliday, 1977, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). Children begin to understand the world through their initial language experiences (Halliday, 1977, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978) and actively interpret the world around them as they interact with others and develop an awareness of language, community, and ideology. Fish (1980) maintained, "interpretation is not the art of construing but the art of constructing" (p. 327). The acts of constructing knowledge and meaning give sociocultural theory malleable qualities because personal experiences vary greatly. Despite the flexible nature of human interactions regarding experiences, perceptions, and language, histories are firmly situated within an individual's or community's past and present experiences.

Literacy researchers often apply sociocultural theory as a framework when developing understandings of how students and teachers negotiate meaning in classroom contexts. The majority of the sources reviewed for this study used sociocultural theory or a closely related theory (e.g., sociocognitive theory, sociolinguistic theory) as a theoretical lens, suggesting scholars perceive students' dialogic experiences are related to their prior experiences, and many literacy researchers rely on sociocultural theory to situate their understandings of talk as part of children's lived experiences. In the following sections, I closely evaluate the application of sociocultural theory in discussion research and explain how this framework supports the present study.
The Sociocultural Nature of Discussion

Sociocultural theorists believe exposure to different types of language (e.g., expressive, receptive) and social behaviors through everyday living shapes linguistic experiences (Halliday, 1977, 1978; Heath, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978). Halliday (1977) explained, “Meaning takes place in an environment, not in solitude” (p. 65). In other words, individuals make discourse decisions based upon their interpretations of previous experiences in light of present conditions. Each dialogic utterance is the product of a lifetime of social encounters (Bakhtin, 1981). These utterances become particularly important in literacy research as students construct meaning with their peers and teachers in school settings. In their classroom conversations, students build upon one another's understandings of texts to create new interpretations, which inform their future literacy encounters.

Children may benefit when their classroom talk experiences resemble real-life communication and include complex social interactions and opportunities for meaning making (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Heath, 1983; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). In order for meaningful discussion to occur, students need substantive engagement (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991) and opportunities to incorporate their knowledge of community and cultural experiences into the formalized curriculum (Dyson, 1993; Heath, 1983; Medina, 2010). Heath (1983) observed fifth grade students identified as struggling readers and writers during an interactive science unit. As part of their unit requirements, students interviewed community members, consulted authentic texts (i.e., seed catalogues, weather reports), and engaged in meaningful conversations with their peers. Although their academic growth cannot be attributed to a single factor, these students clearly excelled during their
sociocultural learning experiences and appeared to grow in their literacy skills and content knowledge through their participation in authentic discourse. Similarly, Eeds and Wells (1989) noted teachers and students developed new ideas and interpretations of texts after their participation in literature discussion groups. The ability to make group contributions based upon personal and social connections to texts also influences how students co-construct meaning (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Students' abilities to participate in classroom discourse that allows them to share their personal experiences and relate these experiences to one another and text may be beneficial to their overall literacy development.

Students' home literacy acts involving reading and writing for daily living may not always correspond with formal school discourse practices (e.g., filling out forms, preparing grocery lists, oral-story telling), and researchers have documented how some students experience problems at school when their home and institutional literacy practices differ (Delpit, 1995/2006; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). An inability to appropriate their social contexts in school settings during literacy instruction creates complications for students. Moreover, teachers sometimes reject students' comments during classroom discussions because they are not aligned with the dominant school discourse. Almasi and her colleagues (1996) observed that fourth grade students showed less engagement during literacy-based discussions after their teacher invalidated their discussion responses by redirecting instead of exploring students' comments. Teachers' rejections negatively impacted students' discourse practices. On the other hand, students and teachers may implement a permeable curriculum (Dyson, 1993, p. 51), in which students have opportunities to use their social contexts to promote their formal literacy development. In a permeable curriculum students may provide
examples from their lived experiences or change the direction of conversations about texts as they act as decision makers within lessons and contexts structured by the classroom teacher, resulting in meaningful learning experiences. The ways in which teachers approach students' participation in text-based discussions influence how students engage in classroom talk.

Another strand of sociocultural theory aims to explore how individuals interact and build meaning together within multiple social and cultural contexts. Street (2007) explained approaching sociocultural theory with a heavier emphasis on broader social contexts affords researchers the opportunity to promote social justice and "social transformation" (ix) for traditionally marginalized groups. Critical sociocultural theorists seek to understand how issues of identity, agency, and power influence students' learning (Moje & Lewis, 2007). They consider how teachers position themselves during classroom learning and question how the interactions between teachers and students may influence students' identities and abilities to make decisions about their own learning. Ballenger (1999), during a three year study of Haitian and Haitian-American pre-school children, explored how her students negotiated meaning from texts. Her attention to detail and inclusivity of participants and their families in the classroom context demonstrates how responsive teaching that considers students' power and identities can influence their learning and represents the basic components of sociocultural theory. More recently, Aukerman (2007) adopted a critical stance by investigating power relationships in classroom talk. These studies illustrate the ways students engage in discussion and the relationship between students' identities and participation, which are important considerations when investigating how students make meaning through talk.
As mentioned previously, sociocultural theory was a dominant theory in literature reviewed for this study. By applying a lens which opens classroom talk to an interpretivist theory (i.e., adaptable based upon the researcher's assumptions and observations; Merriam, 2008), researchers acknowledge ways students' personal lives, lived experiences, interactions, and community histories influence their classroom talk. In order to observe students' lived experiences from a sociocultural perspective, I investigated text-based discussions in a racially diverse, lower-tracked fifth grade classroom and focused on interactions during discussions and ways students exhibited their identities in classroom talk. Also, this study incorporates some elements of revised sociocultural theory (Moje & Lewis, 2007) by questioning how students exhibit identity. My understanding of sociocultural theory as way to explore human interactions establishes my perception of discussion as constructive and malleable based upon participants' previous and current discourse experiences, particularly as they participate in communities of practice.

**Communities of Practice**

Communities of practice provide a context for students' choices to inform their learning as they negotiate meaning and participate in shared work with their peers (Wenger, 1988). Learning within a community of practice is situated within a given context (i.e., whole group discussion, book club), in which learning not just happens in a situation, but also the practice itself creates the condition for learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As students participate in the work of the community, they receive little direct instruction and actively contribute to their own learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1988). In schools, teachers
can provide communities with a focus (i.e., discuss a specific text, complete a given task); however, the teacher does not maintain an authoritative position (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Communities of practice are "a set of relations among persons, activity, and world over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98) through which members exhibit a "mix of power and dependence" (Wenger, 1988, p. 77). Within groups, members connect with one another for established purposes and complete shared work in social environments (e.g., classroom, carpentry guild). Additionally, members will have various positions (e.g., novice/newcomer, expert/oldtimer) and levels of participation (e.g., legitimate peripheral participation, full participation) (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1988). People may belong to multiple communities of practice and have different positions in each (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1988). For example, an expert flutist may mentor others in her musical ensemble, but she may be a novice in her writing club, thereby exhibiting different positions across settings.

In terms of discussion research, students’ social communities and classrooms represent macro-communities; whereas, small groups or an individual family unit may form micro-communities. Broughton (2002) conducted a study examining sixth grade girls' subjectivity enactments during researcher-led text-based discussions. Although Broughton adopted a poststructuralist perspective, her theoretical framework also emphasized the social nature of students' learning as she suggested students' subjectivities (i.e., constantly changing identities) influenced their school experiences. The girls and Broughton enacted certain subjectivities (i.e., religious student, cooperative participant) in small groups (micro-
communities); however, Broughton also examined the girls' family units and their larger social contexts (i.e., macro-communities). Each community influenced the girls' identities and interactions with texts and each other differently, yet all of the girls' talk about texts was related to how they acted out their identities, or as Broughton described, performed their subjectivities. To illustrate, in one discussion, Buffy, a participant, described her experiences as a Hispanic female. As a result, the other members of the group could potentially incorporate Buffy's expression of her identity into their own value-systems.

Some researchers have investigated both whole group and small group interactions and found that each community supports student talk differently, especially in terms of how students are positioned as authorities or recipients of knowledge. A teacher may choose to allow students to bring cultural conflicts into classroom discussions (e.g., Medina, 2010) or restrict students' conversations to teacher-centered formats (e.g., Duffy, 1983; Durkin 1978/1979). Also, teachers can act as experts and support students as they become experts themselves. Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to the act of a teacher/master relinquishing authority in a community of practice as decentering. The act of decentering is fundamental to the function of a community of practice, and "to take a decentered view of master-apprentice relations leads to an understanding that mastery resides not in the master but in the organization of the community of practice in which the master is a part" (p. 94). In other words, in a true community of practice, masters and apprentices work together to promote shared work and goals. Students are not repositories in which the teacher/master deposits information (Freire 1970/2000). Rather, apprentices transition to mastery through their experiences in the community that involve interactions with other apprentices and masters. In
this study, I use the term *novice* to refer to apprentices or members of a given community of practice who participate and contribute to the work, but who still need support. *Full participants* are capable of creating new communities of practice following the same principles (see Figure 2.1; Lave & Wenger, 1991). In this study, the term *expert* refers to community members (i.e., the teacher, other students) who exhibit leadership qualities and demonstrate *full participation*. Regardless of the level of participation, both novices and experts can be active members of a given community.

*Figure 2.1. Conceptualization of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).*

Positioning in discussions is complicated because by assuming one’s own position in a conversation, one is automatically assigning someone else to his or her position (Harre & Van Langenhove, 1991). Positions such as novice and expert influence students' participation within a community system. If a teacher assumes an authoritative position and students remain passive, they may never transition to expert status in the community. On the other
hand, making active contributions to shared work helps students become experts (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and teachers help students transition to full participation in group talk by sharing authority (Aukerman, 2007).

Children's participation in community talk often depends on how the teacher and other students position themselves. Positions are negotiable and change in conversations (Harre & Van Langenhove, 1991). Alvermann (1996), using a sociocultural theoretical framework, found that gendered positioning (i.e., expectations for boys and girls) influenced eighth grade students' participation. Black (2004) adopted a similar approach in a fifth grade classroom and concluded that classroom talk reflects values of social positioning (i.e., high ability pupil). More recently, positioning in discussion research has focused on how identity influences students' participation (e.g., Aukerman, 2007; Collins, 2011; Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006; Handsfield & Crumpler, 2013).

The methodological design was based upon the primary assumption that members of a classroom form a macro-community, and within this construct micro-communities exist. Current researchers are actively investigating how classroom members interact and how these interactions reflect and influence students' identities (e.g., Handsfield & Crumpler, 2013; Rogers & Elias, 2012). For these reasons, I adopted a sociocultural theoretical framework and investigated classroom interactions during text-based discussions within the larger class community and among smaller groups within it. I now transition from theoretical underpinnings to the historical context of discussion research.
Historical Context of Discussion Research

In many ways, the main structures of classroom talk in America have remained largely unchanged over the past 200 years despite developments in discussion formats and discussion strategies. The stagnation of classroom talk remains a challenge for those aiming to reform classroom discussions. Attending to the historical context of discussion research provides insight into current discussion practices. In this section, I explain the recitation foundations of discussion, the movement toward dialogic instruction, and the current state of discussion research.

Recitation Foundations

Approximately 85 years ago Thayer (1928) expounded upon the importance of changing recitation practices in classrooms to dialogic patterns. Prior to the 1800s, students had limited engagement with their teachers due to large class sizes (sometimes up to 284 students per teacher) and the structure of school learning (Thayer, 1928). Students typically spent two 20 minutes periods per day directly in front of their teacher engaging in recitation-style talk and the remainder of the day at their seats. Thayer lamented the presence of outdated recitation practices and teachers’ habitual use of prefabricated questioning during classroom instruction.

In the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, scholars continued to find recitation dominant and problematic in American classrooms. Students’ talk continued to follow a turn-taking pattern in which they responded to the classroom teacher rather than one another (Duffy, 1983). In their landmark works, Cazden (1988) and Mehan (1979, 1982) labeled recitation-style conversations as initiate-respond-evaluate (I-R-E). Most westernized
classrooms continue to be dominated by the I-R-E pattern (Alexander, 2006; Nystrand, 2006), the same recitation pattern Thayer (1928) identified as ineffective. In I-R-E, a classroom teacher initiates a discussion by asking a question with a known response (Cazden, 1988). A student provides the response, and the teacher evaluates the response for correctness.

The I-R-E pattern presents problems for students in literacy classrooms in several ways. First, students develop ideas about texts and the world through meaningful conversations (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988), yet I-R-E does not foster opportunities to co-construct meaning (Cazden, 1988), particularly in small group settings (Nussbaum, 2002). Secondly, White students perform better in a recitation-style talk structure than students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, possibly because of home discourse practices (McCollum, 1989). These findings suggest recitation does not promote learning and may be particularly detrimental for students not identified as White.

**Moving Toward Dialogic Instruction**

The movement toward considering dialogic instruction began in the late 1970s, with classroom-based research rapidly following theoretical developments. From 1978-1982, theorists in the fields of linguistics, psychology, and literature produced influential works that continue to challenge scholars to consider how individuals make meaning of texts. Halliday's (1978) work on meaning making pushed the field further by suggesting each person’s ability to construct meaning is based on a series of unique reactions to language events. During this same time, Rosenblatt’s (1978) transactional reader response theory explored the relationship between the reader, the text, and the poem. The poem is the meaning created by the
transaction between the reader and the text, and readers move along an efferent/aesthetic continuum as they engage with a text. Pressley and his colleagues (1992) explained transactional instruction occurs in reading groups and proposed comprehension involves interactions among teachers, students, and texts. They argued, “Transactional instruction encourages students to develop comprehension strategies that are much more sophisticated than many students would discover on their own in the richest of literary environments” (p. 530). In addition to transactional reader response, Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of discourse and Fish’s (1980) *interpretive communities* contributed to scholars’ understanding of how students interact in meaningful conversations about texts by exploring how students' previous and current experiences inform their talk. Discourse is a living concept that simultaneously evolves and is constructed; its form takes shape based on the discussion members' prior knowledge, previous experiences, and current interactions (Bakhtin, 1981). The common theme among these theorists is the interpretative nature of language experiences. A person approaches a text through the lens of his or her perceptions of the world and experiences change based upon dialogic encounters (e.g., reading, writing, listening, or speaking). Perhaps changes may include an increased understanding of a text or the world because, as Halliday (1977) observed, social experiences mediate interactions with texts.

From the mid-1980s to mid-1990s, interest in group learning grew for practitioners and scholars. Many practitioners and some researchers moved toward considering reading and writing workshops (e.g., Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983) and cooperative learning (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, 1985; Slavin, 1990) as desirable practices that may lead to positive feelings and increased achievement (Johnson & Johnson, 1985). During cooperative
group activities, students have opportunities to discuss reading and writing together. Research on group interactions sparked a paradigm shift in the field, and reading and writing, while still maintaining separate qualities, began to be viewed as literacy (Pearson, 2009).

Research in discussion grew during the decade following the cooperative learning movement. Throughout the 1990s, researchers actively investigated discussion strategies (Alvermann & Hayes, 1989; Beck, McKeown, Sandora, Kucan, & Worthy, 1996; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Goatley et al., 1995; Goldenberg, 1992/1993; Rosenshine & Meister, 1994; Short, 1990), effective talk qualities (Almasi, 1995; Almasi et al., 1996; Anderson, Chinn, Chang, Waggoner, & Yi, 1997), and the purposes of classroom talk (Alvermann, 1996; Barrentine, 1996; Dyson, 1990, 1993; Morrow & Smith, 1990; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Overall, findings from this period touted the importance of classroom talk and noted numerous positive effects on students' learning and suggested several options for implementing text-based discussions (e.g., Reciprocal Teaching, Questioning the Author, Book Clubs, Grand Conversations, Instructional Conversations).

Despite the well-documented and widely accepted notion that dialogic instruction is effective, discussions continue to be inconsistently implemented in American classrooms. Beginning with Durkin (1978/1979) and continuing to today (e.g., Alexander, 2006; Certo, Moxley, Reffitt, & Miller, 2010; Elizabeth, Anderson, Snow, & Selman, 2012; Lawrence & Snow, 2011), researchers acknowledge teachers have difficulty maintaining dialogic classrooms. In an effort to help teachers expand opportunities for classroom talk, researchers have provided professional development to teachers (e.g., Aukerman et al., 2008; Certo et al., 2010; Christoph & Nystrand, 2001). Some professional development has proven to be
successful for developing classroom talk. For example, Gambrell and her colleagues (2011) conducted a seven month long, mixed methods study with students in grades 3 through 5 and found that teachers learned how to promote small group discussions in their classrooms through professional development modules involving the exchange of pen pal letters between students and adults. The authors discovered students had positive feelings about participating in the pen pal project and contributed responsive and critical comments to the small group discussions. Similarly, Juzwik and her colleagues (2008) observed Ms. Gomez, a seventh-grade teacher, create opportunities for students to discuss texts by elaborating upon one another's responses. In contrast, McElhone (2012) found approximately 20% of teacher talk in 21 classrooms in grades 4 and 5 demonstrated high conceptual press patterns that involved asking students to provide more information or to engage more deeply and critically with their thoughts. The pressing strategy allows students to continue to engage with a text instead of ending talk before the full potential of the discussion has been reached (Wolf et al., 2005). Research emphasizes the importance of dialogic teaching, but teachers do not appear to be able to maintain high levels of dialogic talk in their classrooms. Researchers acknowledge discussion spans a continuum (Alvermann et al., 1990; McIntyre, 2006; Reznitskaya, 2012), and even experts may have difficulty with sustaining dialogic instruction over time (Aukerman et al., 2008). Reznitskaya (2012) describes the Dialogic Inquiry Tool (DIT) which determines the qualities of classroom discussions ranging from monologic to dialogic (see Table 2.1). Practitioners and researchers seeking to evaluate classroom discussions may find the DIT useful.
Table 2.1

*Summary of the Dialogic Inquiry Tool (Reznitskaya, 2012)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Talk</th>
<th>Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monologic</td>
<td>brief, unconnected responses; IRE, teacher control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitioning</td>
<td>some student initiated conversation shifts; some sharing and co-constructing meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogic</td>
<td>equity in talk; open questions; personal connections; co-constructing meaning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given existing research that establishes the importance of discussions and difficulties within classrooms maintaining open dialogue, I argue a different approach is warranted. The current study draws attention back to classroom talk and examines how discussions unfold in a natural environment free from researcher intervention and with the students most likely to be marginalized and separated from meaningful talk—racially diverse, lower-tracked students. Given the broad scope of discussion research in recent years, a return to those initial research questions of the 1980s, which investigated the fundamentals of classroom talk, offers valuable insight into students’ current dialogic experiences.

**Political Influences on Discussion Research**

In the years leading up to No Child Left Behind, scholars continued to explore literacy-based classroom discourse. With the emphasis on group discussions and co-constructing meaning, social contexts of class discussions became more relevant for understanding literate processes. Dyson (1993; 1999) emphasized the importance of
individual experiences on the related areas of writing and talking. She explained engaging in writing and related conversations helps students participate in learning communities. Talking about texts, including their own, helps children develop their social view of the world, and this type of interaction may help students feel like they belong to the classroom community. Gambrell (1996) rationalized, “Discussion brings together listening, speaking, and thinking skills as participants engage in exchanging ideas, responding, and reacting to text as well as to the ideas of others” (p. 27). Researchers proposed that discussion was a valuable component of literacy education.

However, the political climate of education in the early 2000s suggested a different perspective. The highly influential Report of the National Reading Panel (NRP) (NIHD, 2000a) explained, "[Comprehension] improvement occurs when teachers demonstrate, explain, model, and implement instruction with students in teaching them how to comprehend a text" (p. 4-47). A natural setting with teachers and students asking questions and discussing texts is ideal for literacy learning. Ironically, this information only appears in the report that is several hundred pages and does not appear in the brief Summary Report (NIHD, 2000b); instead, educators learned desirable classroom talk involves teachers asking students questions and providing immediate responses, reflecting the type of problematic recitation practices that have historically dominated American schools. While no one can say with certainty that researchers and educators were more likely to read the Summary Report than the NRP, the difference between the two versions is markedly noticeable; furthermore, the entire report has been criticized for its lack of emphasis on dialogic practices (Wilkinson & Son, 2011).
In 2001, American legislation known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was enacted and required standardized testing for all schools receiving federal funding (Darling-Hammond, 2010). NCLB legislation, along with the Reading First Program, a highly structured government funded reading initiative, emphasized testing and basic skills. About this same time, researchers desiring funding from the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) grants were required to follow experimental procedures in response to the trend emphasizing "evidence-based pedagogy" (Nystrand, 2006, p. 393). The legislation did not encourage the growth of discussion research and practice, yet some researchers persisted during the NCLB era and continued to expand the field's understandings of how students engage in talk in literacy classrooms (e.g., Applebee et al., 2003; Chinn, Anderson, & Waggoner, 2001).

Despite an extant body of research, further studies in discussion are needed (Lawrence & Snow, 2011; Murphy, Wilkinson, Soter, Hennessey, & Alexander, 2009; Wilkinson & Son, 2011), particularly at the primary level (Lawrence & Snow, 2011) and especially in light of recent curriculum changes in states adopting the CCSS. At the time the study began, 45 states shared common discussion standards in all elementary grades (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). New discussion research should continue to address affordances and constraints of student-led and teacher-led discussion groups (Lawrence & Snow, 2011), as well as how discussion informs students' learning across texts (Wilkinson & Son, 2011). Although Murphy and her colleagues (2009) do call for more quantitative studies, they also note further investigations of discussion practices in rural settings are needed, as well as studies not using a protocol designed by the researcher. These needs, coupled with the
emphasis in the CCSS on speaking and listening, make now an opportune time to investigate discussions in elementary classrooms.

**Effective Discussions**

Effective discussions operate at the high end of the dialogic continuum and tend to be open-ended. Moreover, they are focused conversations in which all group members should feel valued (Brilhart & Galanes, 1995) and participate "in a free and open exchange of ideas" (Gambrell, 1996, p. 26). Researchers have documented multiple ways for students and teachers to interact in authentic, effective discussions and recorded the effects on achievement for vocabulary (Greene-Brabham & Lynch-Brown, 2002; Reznitskaya et al., 2001; Whitehurst et al., 1988), comprehension (Greene-Brabham & Lynch-Brown, 2002; Juzwik et al., 2008; McElhone, 2012; McKeown, Beck, & Blake, 2009; Morrow & Smith, 1990; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Rosenshine & Meister, 1994; Sandora, Beck, & McKeown, 1999), and engagement (Almasi et al., 1996; Applebee et al., 2003; Chinn et al., 2001; McElhone, 2012). Furthermore, in a meta-analysis of early education discussion research, Mol and her colleagues (2009) found that 64% of young children who participated in talk about texts demonstrated improved oral language development. In a separate meta-analysis, Murphy and her colleagues (2009) argued that simply increasing talk through a specific discussion protocol does not necessarily mean students' achievement will increase. Rather, the qualities of the talk itself are also important.

In the context of real classroom talk, discussions of all lengths have the potential to be meaningful and impact students' learning. Quality discussions may be microgenetic (i.e., occur in a single event) or ontogenetic (i.e., occur over time) (Almasi & Garas-York, 2008).
In the present study, as in many classrooms, students engaged in both microgenetic and ontogenetic discussions. Dialogic qualities (e.g., engaging in higher order thinking, co-constructing meaning, and assuming personal stances; Reznitskaya, 2012) may occur in discussions extending over time or critical incidents of talk.

Despite several widely known strategies (see Table 2.2), maintaining dialogic instruction often eludes teachers, as discussed previously in this chapter. Furthermore, students in diverse classrooms experience more recitation-style discussions than their same grade level peers who are White or have a higher SES. In a study of 974 middle and high school students in 19 schools, Applebee and his colleagues (2003) found lower-tracked students engaged in 3.7 minutes of discussion per class compared to higher-tracked students who participated in 14.5 minutes per class. Even when the teacher was the same, lower-tracked students in sixth grade received more threats about their performance, spent more time determining one correct answer, and engaged in fewer controversial conversations than their higher-tracked peers (Gritter, 2012). Tracking engenders unequal access to the curriculum across SES and racial groups (Darling-Hammond, 2004). The complexities surrounding the creation of dialogic opportunities and the challenges facing lower-tracked students make discussion inquiry a necessary step in the field of literacy research. Moreover, the studies of lower-tracked students have been focused on middle and high school students, yet elementary students, such as those selected for this study, may also be tracked and are not well-represented in existing literature. Cazden (2000) argues tracking occurs within elementary classrooms when teachers homogeneously group their students, yet Laura's students experienced tracking consistent with literature on middle and high school
classrooms (e.g., Applebee et al., 2003; Gritter, 2012) because the highest achieving students were placed in a separate classroom.

Table 2.2

Summary of Discussion Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Identifying Qualities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinn, Anderson, &amp; Waggoner (2001)</td>
<td>Collaborative Reasoning</td>
<td>Silent reading followed by a central, focusing question, with students arguing their positions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beck et al. (1996)</td>
<td>Questioning the Author</td>
<td>Follow a set of queries, extended responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eeds &amp; Wells (1989)</td>
<td>Grand Conversations</td>
<td>Open-ended, student-led, active inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palincsar &amp; Brown (1984)</td>
<td>Reciprocal Teaching</td>
<td>Release responsibility to students over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raphael &amp; McMahon (1994)</td>
<td>Book Clubs</td>
<td>Includes time for reading, writing, community share, and instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sipe (1999, 2000)</td>
<td>Interactive Read Alouds</td>
<td>Shared text, talk during reading, time for sharing ideas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Major Influences in Discussion

The RAND comprehension model (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002; see Figure 2.2) situates comprehension as the outcome of interactions among the text, the reader, and the activity, with the understanding these interactions occur within a sociocultural context. This model proved useful in framing my thinking about discussion. Given that the major influences in discussion are teachers, students, and texts—all of which are bound by the sociocultural practices within and across communities—I developed a complementary model
of text-based discussion (see Figure 2.3). In accordance with the RAND model, the 
influences of the teacher, student, and text prove central. The middle circle in the redesign 
represents meaningful discussion; whereas, the center represents comprehension in the 
original RAND model.

*Figure 2.2.* RAND Comprehension Model (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002).

*Figure 2.3.* Discussion Influences Model (adapted from RAND, 2002).
Overall, literacy research attends to the influences teachers, students, and texts have on classroom discussions and acknowledges the influences of students' school and home communities. The redesigned RAND model illustrates each of the three components necessary for dialogic discussions. Dialogic talk occurs when the teacher, student(s), and text interact within the context of their community. This model captures the essence of how text-based discussions are represented in the literature. In the following sections, I analyze how extant research suggests that teachers, students, and texts influence classroom talk.

**Influences of Teachers.** Teachers influence classroom discussion practices at the curricular and interpersonal levels. From the curricular perspective, teachers who emphasize discussion include more authentic literacy tasks and natural conversation elements in their literacy instruction (e.g., Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). When teachers assume an active role in facilitating discussions, students have more opportunities to engage deeply with texts (Goldenberg, 1992/1993) and develop their critical thinking (Beck et al., 1996). As facilitators, teachers begin to relinquish their authority in the group to students (Aukerman, 2007; McIntyre et al., 2006), yet research suggests that teachers are more inclined to engage students in I-R-E discussion (Alexander, 2006; Almasi, 1995; Alvermann & Hayes, 1989; Duffy, 1983). Almasi (1995) found that when fourth grade teachers led discussion groups I-R-E was used 85% of the time. Similarly, Goldenberg and Patthey-Chavez (1995) concluded that teacher talk accounted for approximately 60% of all spoken language during small group instruction in a fourth grade classroom. These studies demonstrate a top-down approach to discussion results in more teacher talk and fewer opportunities for students to construct meaning and develop their ideas.
On the other hand, when teachers ask students to think deeply and meaningfully about texts, students’ responses increase in complexity (Beck et al., 1996). Students who participated in Collaborative Reading generated longer and more complex arguments with an increased reliance on textual support with words spoken increasing from 66 per minute to 111 per minute on average for the fourth grade participants (Chinn et al., 2001). Also, when teachers used Questioning the Author to help students focus on the author’s position, student talk doubled (Beck et al., 1996). Considering the amount of talk is important because the number of student talk moves predict academic rigor (Wolf et al., 2005). Teachers may facilitate extended conversations by directly adding to the conversation or scaffolding students so they can extend their own talk, often by pressing them for a deeper response (McElhone, 2012; Wolf et al., 2005) or practicing uptake (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991).

Although the amount of student talk is important, the context surrounding the talk also matters (Murphy et al., 2009), and the teacher's presence in the group has a significant influence on how discussions unfold. Researchers disagree about the exact roles teachers should play in classroom discussions. Some studies concluded the presence of teachers in group talk can help students develop their ideas (Maloch, 2002), and others argued teacher presence decreases talk complexity (Almasi, 1995) and results in more limited responses from students (Hulan, 2010). Almasi (1995) conducted a study with 97 fourth grade students in a suburban area and concluded that students assumed responsibility for 94% of discourse in student-led groups but only 38% of discourse in teacher-led groups. Furthermore, in the student-led groups, 26% of student responses showed high complexity, whereas only 15% of student responses in the teacher-led groups met those criteria. Similarly, Hulan (2010)
analyzed teacher and student-led discussions in a low SES, urban third grade classroom. She found students spent more time engaged in complex talk when the teacher did not participate in the discussion. The results do not suggest that teachers should avoid participating in discussions; rather, they highlight the importance of student-led discussions and the willingness of students to wrestle with a text when the teacher, as an authority, is not readily available with the "right" answer. Similarly, some scholars adopt the position that teachers should empower students in discussions by yielding the authority of the deciding the direction of talk to the students (Aukerman, 2007, 2012; Bignell, 2012). In some ways, completely relinquishing authority is not practical and is akin to trying to maintain purely dialogic classrooms because neither has been documented in naturalistic environments and sustained over time.

Some studies suggest teachers should balance the talk interactions in classrooms. For instance, through accountable talk procedures, teachers establish expectations, model, and provide time for students to practice engaging in discussion (Michaels et al., 2008). Another way to promote balanced talk is to create opportunities for contingent discourse, in which the discourse experiences are unique to the students, text, and discussion (Kucan et al., 2011). Essentially, teachers facilitating contingent discourse are highly responsive to students and adapt discussion depending on the text and group dynamics. Kucan and her colleagues did not fully address how a teacher might adopt contingent discourse, but they did compare these practices to instructional conversations (Goldenberg & Patthey-Chavez, 1995) and questioning the author (Beck et al., 1996). Additionally, contingent discourse qualities are closely aligned with qualities of dialogic discussions. Bloome and Willis' (2013) approach to
discussion suggests students benefit when given opportunities to critically examine their own language use and actively participate in classroom discussions. Moreover, teachers can encourage students without pressuring (Almasi et al., 1996; Aukerman, 2007) or silencing (Hollingworth, 2009) them. Building a classroom culture with established classroom norms (McIntyre et al., 2006; Sipe, 1999) and ample time to practice engaging in discussion (Almasi, O'Flahavan, & Arya, 2001; Palincsar & Brown, 1984) are other ways teachers can create environments conducive to text-based discussions. Almasi and her colleagues (2001) suggested students benefit when teachers balanced approach to scaffolding, yet facilitating talk in a way that has the right amount of scaffolding and student freedom remains difficult for teachers.

As explained above, when teachers increase opportunities for students to talk, the outcomes of the discussions contribute to curricular learning and community interactions. While research does demonstrate how a teacher can positively or negatively influence literacy discussions, little data exists explaining how an upper elementary teacher of lower-tracked students might travel the dialogic continuum in talk about texts and lead students into more complex discussions. More research is needed to identify how students who are most likely to receive decontextualized instruction participate in talk reflecting contingent discourse and other qualities of effective discussions. The present study contributes to research by conducting an instrumental case study in a classroom where the teacher intentionally tries to relinquish authority to her students and engages them in open conversations. However, she still maintains an active role in making curricular decisions and focusing discussions. Given the vast amount of research on teacher behaviors and influences
on discussions, examining the teacher's actions within the context of whole and small group interactions that span the continuum can provide valuable information about the discussion qualities that move students toward dialogic participation.

**Influences of Students.** Students' abilities to co-construct meaning with their peers influences the nature of classroom talk (e.g., Ballenger, 1999; Barrentine, 1996; Beck et al., 1996; Eeds and Wells, 1989; Heath, 1983; Wiseman, 2011) and their positions in the class (e.g., Aukerman, 2007; Alvermann, 1996; Black, 2004; Maybin, 2013). Literacy research that explored how students co-construct meaning through talk in the 1980s (e.g., Eeds and Wells, 1989; Heath, 1983) revolutionized the field's perceptions of discussions. Heath's (1983) work in the southeastern United States with Black and White families established that talk helps students achieve in classroom learning, but she also explored how students' dialogic experiences at home may be reflected in the context of formal school learning. In addition to their individual significance, the works in these three categories also highlight the importance of identity in discussion. In the following sections, I will discuss the influences of co-constructing meaning, peer relationships, positions on classroom discussions, and the importance of identity across the three topics.

**Co-constructing meaning.** Meaning construction separates discussion from recitation. Students and teachers mediate each other’s responses resulting in elaboration of everyone’s ideas (Duffy & Roehler, 1987). Almasi and her colleagues (1996) aptly described co-constructing by using a carpentry metaphor and argued that students share tools on a "cognitive worktable" (p. 131). Each group participant has the tools to contribute to an
overall shared meaning. When students discuss texts together in a respectful environment, meaning construction is more likely to occur.

Despite well-documented findings demonstrating that students co-construct meaning in text-based discussions, recent works continue to reveal new understandings about how students negotiate meaning. Wiseman (2011) observed kindergarten students transfer knowledge about a text to partner discussions during interactive read-alouds. Then, through talk, some students began to realize racial differences among the students (i.e., skin tone), illustrating how students use text-based discussions to consider identity constructs such as race. In a case study of fifth grade ELL students, Medina (2010) observed students may contribute to discussion by accessing their personal, cultural experiences when responding to texts and peers. Additionally, students may share traumatic experiences with their classmates through discussions (Dutro, 2009) and writing about texts (Dutro, 2010). These discussions may challenge students’ beliefs as they encounter material conflicting with their sociocultural experiences and explore their ideological differences with the text and one another. Medina (2010) suggested more research is needed that investigates students' connections to their everyday lived experiences (i.e., cultural traditions, media use) and ways they create meaning. While much is known about co-constructing meaning, questions remain regarding how identity influences meaning construction and text-based discussions in general, and the present study attends to these gaps in research.

**Peer relationships.** Across the grade levels, peer relationships have been found to influence classroom discussions (Elizabeth et al., 2012; Goatley et al., 1995; Maybin, 2013; Moller, 2004). In a study with lower-tracked, ninth grade students, Christoph and Nystrand
Moller (2004) drew a similar conclusion in a case study of fourth grade students when students engaged in peer scaffolding to help a classmate actively participate in discussions about texts. Almasi (1995) conducted a mixed methods study with 97 students in grade 4 and found, in peer-led groups, student talk accounted for 94% of all dialogue and resulted in students being more likely to resolve interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts with text. In another article, Almasi, O'Flahavan, and Arya (2001) concluded peer discussions are more proficient when students sustain their own talk without interruption and when they rely on interpretive tools (e.g., intertextual connections, experiences).

Despite the benefits of peer-only groups, researchers have documented several concerns. First, children may not fully express conclusions in their arguments when working in peer-only groups (Anderson et al., 1997). The lack of expression may be problematic because students are not fully articulating their ideas and moving the conversation toward its original foci. Even more alarming is that students may engage in unsanctioned talk during peer-only interactions, yet few of the studies reviewed for this chapter addressed problems with unsanctioned talk. Maybin (2013) observed 10 and 11 year old, racially diverse students used profanity outside of class, suggesting peer-only interactions may significantly differ from teacher-student interactions. Elizabeth and her colleagues (2012) found that students in third through sixth grades engaged in disputational talk characterized by "chaotic bickering" and disrespect among peers (p. 1229). In addition to the troubling peer interactions, the talk itself was not exploratory in nature and remained at the lower end of the discourse continuum. Both studies leave many unanswered questions about what really happens in text-
based discussions, including those times when the teacher is not present. Lensmire (1994, 2000) also concluded peer interactions may have negative, unanticipated consequences on students' learning. While Lensmire's work did focus on writers workshop, his findings inform the present study because of his exploration of how students engaged in talk. He concluded students may exclude one another based on gender and race (1994), and they may form friendship groups (i.e., micro-communities within the classroom community; Lensmire, 2000). Exclusivity in classrooms may result in unintentional and intentional bullying of students. While the current study did not specifically investigate bullying in classroom talk, it is important to note that these instances have been documented in the literature with elementary children during peer discussions. Moreover, data related to unsanctioned talk during text-based discussions is limited, but clearly a connection between unsanctioned talk and identity (i.e., excluding based on race and gender) exists. By approaching classroom talk broadly and investigating what happens during text-based discussions in a racially diverse, lower-tracked classroom, the present study provides insight into how students engage in unsanctioned talk.

**Positions.** The ways students exhibit positions of status reveal power dynamics in classroom talk (Aukerman, 2007; Clarke, 2006; Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006; Moller, 2004). In an ethnographic study of fifth grade students, Clarke (2006) concluded that girls were more reflexive and adapted to talk differently than boys, and their actions restrained boys from exercising power in group discussions. Gendered positioning has been observed in other studies (e.g., Alvermann, 1996; Christianakis, 2010; Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006; McCarthey, 1998), with mixed results regarding who has more power during discussions, yet the
consensus remains that gender influences power dynamics in peer positioning. Students who demonstrate behaviors most aligned with gendered norms experience the greatest rewards through *symbolic capital* (Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006). Similarly, race has been found to influence students' positioning, especially when considering how students' cultural awareness becomes part of classroom discourse (e.g., Christianakis, 2010; Egan-Robertson, 1998; Dutro, Kazemi, Balf, & Lin, 2008), and the present study extends this specific research by investigating how students exhibit identity during text-based discussions.

Social positions impact children in peer groups (Christianakis, 2010), and children are more sensitive to social influences when participating in open discussions with their peers (Anderson et al., 2001). Furthermore, social positioning may take the form of deficit positioning (Collins, 2011). Collins observed a second grade student identified with specific learning needs being repeatedly isolated from his peers, yet when they recognized his artistic talent, they sought out his expertise. Snell (2013) drew a similar conclusion in a study of 9 and 10 year-old students and found that students whose talk reflected the dominant discourse were identified by their peers as better students. These studies are significant because they reflect how peers can position one another in ways that can help or hinder discussions and learning. When students accept their peers' social positions and view them as valuable group members, co-constructing of meaning can occur. However, when students devalue one another, the experiences of the members singled out as being different, as well as the group as a whole, become more limited. Further developing an understanding of the nature of students' interactions during discussions is necessary, and the present study addresses this
gap in the literature through its focus on marginalized students and their participation in text-based discussions.

**Identity and participation.** Students' participation in classroom discourse can influence how they perceive themselves and portray their identities to others. While students may find exploring race and gender (e.g., Broughton, 2002; Henry, 1998) or sexuality (Blackburn & Clark, 2011) empowering, feelings of isolation from the curricula may result in limited participation in classroom discourse (Ma'ayan, 2010). One way educators consider young children's identities during literacy-based discussions is to explore their ways of being, ways of interacting, and ways of representing (Rogers & Elias, 2012). These categories reflect how students' identities may depend upon circumstances, text selection, or perceptions of interactions with their peers and teachers. Similarly, Hall (2012) found that middle school students might be perceived as a poor reader in one set of circumstances, but they may self-identity as strong readers depending upon the situation. In summary, the ways students exhibit identity in classroom discussions are based upon many complex factors.

**Influences of Texts.** Of the three major influences on text-based discussions represented in the literature, the least studied is text. Researchers agree that selecting an appropriate text makes discussions more likely to be successful (e.g., Almasi et al., 1996; Pantaleo, 2007). Moreover, students use texts to help them consider their own experiences (Heath, 1983), and appropriate text selection can lead to increased engagement (Almasi et al., 1996) and understanding (Goatley et al., 1995; Raphael & McMahon, 1994). However, students may not know how to interact with texts in traditional ways, especially if they do not receive exposure to texts at home (Ballenger, 1999). In one study, Haitian-American
preschool students treated the text as a member of the group and not an authority (Ballenger, 1999). These students assumed the text did not present the only valid perspective. Ironically, challenging the authority in a text is considered an indicator that students are positioned as knowers (Aukerman, 2007), so arguably, lack of exposure to texts may not be as problematic for discussion as other literacy concepts.

The types of texts used in discussions are also important. Raphael and McMahon (1994) suggested mixing text types influenced the quality of students' book club discussions. Similarly, Alvermann and her colleagues (1990) observed that open-forum talk in middle school classrooms was more likely to include multimedia texts than recitation-style discussions; also, students may incorporate talk about popular media during discussions as a way to make sense of texts (Chi, 2012; Wiseman, 2012). Despite the traditionally narrow definition of text in discussion research, this study adopts a broad understanding of text and includes discussions about visual and linguistic texts in a fifth grade classroom.

**Chapter Summary**

Sociocultural theory informs this study and addresses the complex nature of text-based discussions. Classroom discourse practices have remained largely consistent over the past 200 years, and despite developments in discussion research, recitation remains the dominant practice in American classrooms. Overall, researchers agree that more open-ended discourse patterns benefit students, yet such dialogic discussions are difficult for teachers to maintain. When classroom discussions do occur, there are three major influences—teachers, students, and texts. Issues related to identity affect each of these constructs. More research is needed that investigates how teachers and students participate in classroom talk.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

"No aspects of knowledge are purely of the external world, devoid of human construction" (Stake, 1995, p. 100).

Introduction to the Chapter

This naturalistic, qualitative study investigated text-based discussions in a racially diverse, lower-tracked fifth grade classroom. Qualitative data collection methods allowed me to capture the participants' experiences with minimal interference in the classroom environment. Over a three-month period, I examined text-based discussions to investigate how students participated in dialogic talk and exhibited identities in their fifth grade classroom. The following research questions guided this study:

1. In a racially diverse, lower-tracked fifth grade classroom, what happens when a teacher and her students participate in text-based discussions?
2. How do students exhibit identity through discussion in their fifth grade language arts classroom?

Chapter 3 begins with the methodological foundations of this study and an overview of the research site and participants. Next, I describe data collection and data analysis procedures. Then the validity and reliability of the study are addressed, and the final section includes limitations of the study and my subjectivity statement.

Methodological Foundations

In order to investigate dialogic practices in a racially diverse, lower-tracked fifth grade classroom, I applied case study methodology to observe one group of students and
their teacher in a public school classroom. This instrumental case study informs researchers and practitioners about text-based discussion practices and follows rigorous methodological standards. In the following sections, I discuss case study methodology and explain this study's research design.

**Case Studies**

Case study methodologists explore authentic, real life situations (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995), and readers may generalize the findings to similar circumstances (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Stake, 1995). Cases may be intrinsic (i.e., unique to a specific case) or instrumental (i.e., used to understand a general issue) (Stake, 1995). Instrumental case studies analyze a situation, person, or group of people; readers may then apply the findings to similar circumstances (Stake, 1995). The present study informs the research community about the complex interactions between one teacher and her students as participate in text-based discussions in hope that readers can generalize the findings to comparable settings.

Case study methodology requires cases to be bound to a limited number of participants and a finite amount of time (Creswell, 2013; Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Merriam, 2009). By including a bounded system in case study research a scholar acknowledges “the case is a specific, a complex, functioning thing” (Stake, 1995, p. 2). The bounded system for this study included one teacher and her students during text-based discussions over a three-month period (see Figure 3.1), allowing time for prolonged engagement with the participants. Prior to observing the bounded case, researchers should develop a case study protocol that allows for the possibility of changes to the research questions and analysis as the case develops (Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). I developed a
case study protocol but made adjustments as needed (i.e., changing the field note format, adapting the interview questions, revising researcher memos), thereby enhancing the quality of this study and demonstrating the rigor of case study research.

Figure 3.1. Model demonstrating how the case was bound.

Description of the Research Site

The research site for this study was Laura Carter's (all names are pseudonyms) fifth grade classroom at Greenwood Elementary, a public school located in a rural school district in a southeastern state in the United States. In the following sections, I will discuss the selection process, describe the setting, and introduce the participants.

Site Selection and Access

Prior to beginning the study, I considered several research sites. However, I selected Greenwood Elementary School because I sought a teacher of racially diverse students who
had an anti-deficit approach to instruction and believed in challenging all students regardless of their at-risk status. As a former employee of the district, I was familiar with the schools, so I contacted Mrs. Bell, the principal, at Greenwood Elementary School, and she invited me to informally visit the fifth grade teachers. Laura was at this meeting. I first met Laura several years prior to the study as part of our service on an educational committee. During our tenure together, I noticed how Laura demonstrated a passion for helping her students through an anti-deficit approach to teaching as she worked to advocate for them. Laura and I had not seen one another since the end of our committee service. At the meeting, Laura expressed an interest in the possibility of a research study, and she invited me to visit her classroom.

During my five informal visits between October and December 2013, I became familiar with the students in Laura's classroom, her procedures, and her teaching style. Laura understood that I was a guest and not a researcher during my informal visits, and no data were collected at these times. Because of my experiences during these informal visits, I selected Laura as the teacher participant for this study.

In early January of 2014, I received approval from North Carolina State University's Institutional Review Board to conduct this research study (see Appendix A). Next, I sent copies of the approved research protocol, recruitment letters, and informed consent to the district's central office. After receiving approval at the district level, I requested Mrs. Bell's permission to conduct the study at Greenwood Elementary, and she agreed. On January 23, 2014, I met with Laura to explain the details of the study; at this time, she signed the teacher informed consent document and received students' informed consent materials. On February 6, 2014, I returned to Laura's class, collected the signed student consent forms, and read the
assent script to students. Altogether, 11 of Laura's 16 students consented to participate in the study.

I purposefully selected Laura as the teacher participant, and the consented students volunteered. Regardless of the selection method, participants should be willing and not pressured to participate in a case study (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Neither Laura nor her students were pressured to participate in the study, and students were not penalized for choosing not to participate.

The School

Greenwood Elementary School was a Title I public school with kindergarten through fifth grades. The racially diverse school population included 528 students who identified in the following ways: 43% Black, 27% White, 27% Hispanic, 2% multiracial, and .5% Asian. Approximately 82% of the students received free or reduced lunch, and the school had a history of scoring below the district average on standardized tests in reading and math, with fewer than 34% of students scored at or above proficient in reading.

In the community, Greenwood Elementary School was recognized for its diversity and relaxed environment. The staff exhibited camaraderie, and the principal was known for her easy-going yet effective administrative style. The teachers at Greenwood Elementary School used a packaged literacy program and followed instructional pacing guides (i.e., timelines for teaching standards) mandated by the district. Laura mentioned having the flexibility to make curricular decisions that she felt were best for her students.

The fifth grade teachers at Greenwood Elementary School team-taught. One teacher taught language arts and social studies to a group of children, while another taught math and
science. After approximately two hours of instruction, the teachers switched students, and each quarter the classes rotated which content area they had first (see Table 3.1 for sample schedule). According to Laura, school members clustered the students labeled academically gifted into one classroom. The remaining students were sorted randomly into three other classrooms. The students stayed together as a group all day, with the exception of children receiving pull-out services (e.g., English Language Learner program [ELL], tutoring, exceptional children's program). Laura's lower-tracked class was selected for participation in this study. At the time the study began, Laura identified this group of students as the second lowest achieving in the fifth grade based upon the number of students performing below grade level and considered at risk.

Table 3.1

*Laura's Quarter 3 Schedule for Observed Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11:30-11:35</td>
<td>Transition: unpack, check reading logs, and homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:35-12:10</td>
<td>Social Studies/Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:10-12:40</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:40-1:10</td>
<td>Recess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:10-1:15</td>
<td>Transition to ELA block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:15-1:45</td>
<td>ELA block: Whole group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:45-2:45</td>
<td>ELA block: Small group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Classroom

Laura's large and inviting fifth grade classroom faced the school bus lot, and students sometimes peeked out the window to observe other children, faculty, and staff. Laura did not chastise students for this behavior, as she tended to embrace their curiosity. The class only had a few basic rules and no list of consequences. Laura's classroom was not a utopian situation full of perfect children, but her high expectations and ethic of caring (Noddings, 1988) resulted in a peaceful, almost Zen-like quality, and minimized classroom behavior problems.

The physical arrangement in Laura's classroom suggested a collaborative working environment. A kidney-shaped table stood in the center of clusters of students' desks, and when Laura was not using the table for small group instruction or conferences, students migrated there to work and share resources for projects. Two working desktop computers sat atop a wall-length counter where students often took assessments, played games, and created projects. Students also enjoyed working on the floor behind Laura's desk or sitting on the windowsill.

Instruction. Laura used multiple resources to teach ELA and social studies. In some ways she had two curricula—one mandated by the school and the other driven by social justice and critical literacy. Laura negotiated the two curricula by using the school's reading program materials (e.g., basal stories, online testing passages, vocabulary presentations, audio versions of stories, student workbook), trade books that presented multicultural and critical perspectives, and visual images designed to elicit conversations about social issues (see Figure 3.2).
Figure 3.2. Sample images used as texts.

**Grouping.** The literacy instruction in Laura's class was divided into two distinct phases—whole group and small group instruction. Strategy instruction anchored whole group instruction and followed a consistent structure. On Mondays, students were introduced to vocabulary words. On Tuesdays through Thursdays, students worked on a specific reading strategy or skill. At some point during the week, students read the basal reading story.

Small group instruction in Laura's classroom involved a mix of homogeneous and flexible grouping, with students often participating in more than one group. Each day, Laura assigned students a worksheet or closed task related to the week's topic, and they self-selected at least two center activities. While students completed independent work and centers, Laura met with small groups identified by college mascots. For the purposes of anonymity, I will refer to these groups as the Bulldogs, the Rams, and the Cougars. The Bulldogs worked on basic comprehension and vocabulary instruction. Sometimes one or two
students met with Laura, and sometimes as many as nine students crowded in around the kidney table. A student might attend the Bulldogs’ session then come back with the Rams or Cougars. The Rams’ group worked on the strategy or skill for the week by playing games, using technology, or creating multimodal products, among other activities. The Cougars, also known as "book club," read novels about social issues (i.e., poverty, racism, genetic engineering, death). All book club selections were either at the top or above the consented students' reading ranges (see Appendix B for book club selections). Laura intentionally selected high quality books that represented her students' identities and explored controversial issues.

**Social studies.** During the social studies lessons, Laura followed a structure similar to the ELA block, but the topics often extended for several weeks. I observed units on regions, government, education, and families during the study. Daily lessons either followed a workshop format, beginning with a mini-lesson followed by small group time, or involved a whole group discussion around a central topic. Unlike small groups during ELA, in social studies students typically worked in self-selected groups. Laura believed students felt more comfortable working with children of the same gender given the controversial topics often discussed in class and did not normally interfere in the peer-selection process. She emphasized ELA skills during the social studies block and considered this time part of her literacy instruction.

**Discussions.** In Laura's classroom, discussions occurred during whole and small group instruction and varied in length. In both types of instruction, Laura would often begin discussions by asking an open-ended question. Students' response patterns varied widely and
ranged from raising their hands to speak or calling out without being acknowledged by the teacher. In whole group discussions, students were more likely to raise their hands; however, Laura appeared to try not to limit students' responses. In small group discussions, Laura initiated discussions by asking students to prepare written responses or by asking an open-ended question. Typically, students did not raise their hands at this time, but they did sometimes look to her for approval before commenting.

**The Classroom Teacher**

Laura, who described herself "a humanitarian at heart" (interview, May 5, 2014), had a personal interest in the lives of children from diverse backgrounds and felt compelled to advocate for her students and provide them with compassionate instruction. To some degree, Laura identified with her students' struggles for social justice because people often perceived her racial identity as Hispanic and treated her differently as described in the following excerpt:

> When I came down here, in my bubble, I was just Italian, and there were lots of Italians, but down here, lots of people would think that I was Hispanic because of my skin tone. It's funny because you kind of get a different attitude from other people based on that or that my husband is [a different race], so you know, I can relate to [the students] in some of their social struggles they might go through. (interview, May 5, 2014)

Laura, a seven-year veteran teacher, selected texts that represented marginalized populations and encouraged conversations about issues related to gender, race, social class, and religion because she desired to be responsive to students' needs and interests while maintaining high expectations for them. Laura mentioned that some of her colleagues did not share her opinion of the lower-tracked students' abilities, yet she continued to provide
opportunities for her students to engage in high quality text-based discussions. She said, "Yeah, I'm sure they do struggle a little bit more with the book levels and whatnot, but they do it. And they do it well, in my opinion" (interview, May 5, 2014).

The Students

Sixteen students (8 males and 8 females) were enrolled in Laura's fifth grade language arts classroom. Of the 16 students, 7 were Black (44%), 5 were Hispanic (31%), and 4 were White (25%). According to Laura, this class was identified as the second-lowest achieving class in the fifth grade, and half of the class received letters indicating they were at risk of failing the school year based on standardized benchmark scores. Eleven of Laura's students (4 males and 7 females) consented to participate in this study. Of the 11 students, 5 were Hispanic, 4 were Black, and 2 were White.

Focal group. Laura and I purposefully selected a focal group of 6 students to represent her classroom demographics; ratios for gender, ethnicity, and proficiency levels of the focal group were comparable to those of the whole class (Merriam, 2009). Of the students selected for the focal group, 3 were Black, 2 were Hispanic, and 1 was White. We selected 4 girls and 2 boys for the focal group. During data collection, I followed the focal students more closely than other consented students and later interviewed them, but data from Laura and all 11 consented students were included in the analysis (see Table 3.2 for summary of students).
Table 3.2

Summary of Characteristics of the Consented Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nikki*</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jai*</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman*</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex*</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia*</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diamond*</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layla</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briana</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltazar</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julio</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Focal students indicated by *.

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative researchers investigating classroom discussions have consistently relied upon data collection methods such as participant-observations, field notes, audio recordings, artifacts, and interviews. Using multiple data sources illustrates sound qualitative research practices (Merriam, 2005; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009), and I employed all of these data collection methods (see Table 3.3 for summary) in this case study and describe each one in the following sections.
Table 3.3

*Summary of Data Sources Collected during the Study and Included in Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artifacts</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio recordings</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Observations</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews (formal)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews (informal)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Reflections</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participant-Observations**

Researchers commonly operate along a participant-observer continuum when gathering observational data (Purcell-Gates, 2011; Stake, 1995). Most often, qualitative researchers act as quiet observers, but they may assume a more participatory stance in some settings (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Stake, 1995). For this study, I adopted a position at the observer end of the continuum and attempted minimal interference with the naturalistic setting. Notably, two exceptions required my role shift to the participatory end of the continuum. First, prior to beginning my observations, Laura and I explicitly discussed my interactions with her students. Laura said she felt comfortable with my answering students' questions if they directed them to me, and I did so. Secondly, I occasionally asked Laura to place members of the focal group together to allow for data collection. Laura agreed any time I asked her to make these changes, but I always deferred to her as the classroom expert.

To a small degree, my presence in the classroom influenced Laura and her students. At the beginning of the study, students stared at me or tried to peek at my laptop screen. However, they soon appeared to ignore the quiet clacking of my keys and the audio recorder
during discussions. Students made references to being recorded in only 2 of the 39 audio recordings that I collected. When I asked Laura during an informal conversation how she felt about my presence in her classroom, she compared it to being on a reality TV show. At first, she found herself looking over at me or wondering what I was typing, but after a while, according to Laura, I just became part of the classroom environment. During my interactions with Laura from October 2013 to May 2014, she mentioned feeling uncomfortable by my presence once when she forgot we had a scheduled observation and planned a lively lesson on the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution. At this time, she led the class in a rousing rendition of a sing-a-long version complete with choreographed movements and a paper microphone. After class, Laura mentioned being nervous during the lesson, yet she continued with her original plans.

Over the course of the study, I visited Laura's classroom 26 times for observations ranging from 30 minutes to 2 hours, with most visits being 90 minutes (see Table 3.4). These observations did not include my 5 informal visits as an invited guest prior to beginning the study. In addition to these observations, I visited Laura's classroom 4 other times—to obtain her consent and describe the study, to conduct semi-structured interviews, and to informally check-in with Laura about her comfort with the study's progression. Altogether, I had 14 weeks of contact with the study participants between January 23, 2014 and May 5, 2014. The number of observations varied depending on Laura's schedule and inclement weather. Also, Laura asked that I begin the study by only visiting twice a week, but later she felt comfortable with more frequent observations. Laura allowed observations on Mondays through Thursdays due to her assessment schedule and weekly plans. Because Laura
integrated ELA into her social studies curriculum, I observed instruction during both times totaling 12 social studies periods and 19 ELA blocks over a period of 5 novel studies, 2 basal reading program units, and 3 social studies units.

Table 3.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
<th>Length in Minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I used three tools to record data: a personal laptop computer, a digital audio recorder, and an iPad. With my laptop computer, I documented my observations in the form of field notes. I used a digital audio recorder to record text-based discussions in various group settings allowing me to address my research questions. Prior to audio recording participants, I always asked for their permission. Further, I taught the students how to turn off the audio recorder to allow them to stop recordings at any point. Notably, students never chose to stop the recorder during a group discussion or refused when I asked permission to record them.

Field Notes

In my study, field notes included descriptions, quotes, and my personal reflections of the case (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Merriam, 2009). During my classroom observations, I wrote field notes on a laptop computer and documented the
features of the classroom, the instructional practices of the teacher, and whole and small group text-based discussions. Direct quotes from participants and my general impressions were included in the field notes (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Emerson et al., 1995). As a way to build a rich, thick description and familiarize myself with the research setting, I began each day’s observation by recording my initial impressions of the classroom and noting qualities about the environment unique to each day (Emerson et al., 1995). For example, I wrote the following on March 17, 2014:

When I came in this afternoon, I noticed the arrangement of the desks were different.

Today, the students' desks are in a u-shape. In the middle of the u, is the teacher's kidney-shaped table with 7 chairs.

Upon concluding each classroom observation, I immediately expanded the field notes (Emerson et al., 1995). I quickly noticed that my field notes needed to be restructured to ensure the essence of the classroom experience was being documented, so I adjusted my observation protocol and increased the details and information in my field notes. Many novice researchers focus primarily on spoken words instead of capturing the entire experience of the participants (Emerson et al., 1995). By reflecting upon the quality of my field notes, I improved my data collection and analysis processes.

**Artifacts**

Artifacts support observations and other forms of data by offering insight into the participants' current experiences (Creswell, 2013). Over the course of a case study, a researcher may collect many relevant documents and include these as data for analysis (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). For this study, I collected
written and visual artifacts by taking photographs of them with an iPad; then, all artifacts were annotated as part of the data collection process (Yin, 2009).

The students' artifacts included workbook pages, letters to characters, travel brochures, Class Constitutions, and other documents related to the text-based discussions that occurred in Laura's classroom. In order to comply with the district's confidentiality requirements, students' names were covered with a numbered card any time I photographed their work. I used the same identification numbers that Laura used for classroom organization purposes so as to not draw attention to the non-consented students. Later, I attached pseudonyms to the consented students' numbers. I never photographed work belonging to the five non-consented students.

I collected several types of artifacts from Laura including the following: copies of lesson plans, photographed pictures and graphs that she placed on the interactive whiteboard, shared writings from the class, models of projects, and reflections. The reflections were not part of my original research design. However, on March 26, 2014, Laura asked if she could record her reflections of her students and our informal interviews because she was interested in the research process and wanted to contribute even more to the study. Laura said that after our informal talks and member checks, she often reflected upon her replies and the types of questions I asked. I reiterated that she did not have to write reflections as part of her participation in the study, but because of her willingness and my interest in including her reflections as data in the study, I amended my IRB application. On April 16, 2014, I received permission to collect written reflections from Laura. The first was a reflection on her experiences as a participant in the study and her perceptions of her strengths and weaknesses.
in her teaching. For the second reflection, I gave Laura a copy of a transcript during which several important events occurred. I asked her two questions: 1) How would you describe the group dynamic? 2) What do you notice about this discussion? Laura answered these questions in a detailed reflection, but she also coded the transcript. I had included member checking in my research design, but Laura's coding added even more depth to this process, which will be discussed further in the data analysis section.

**Interviews**

Interviews offer valuable insight into the participants' experiences and contribute to the richness of data in case study research (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Effective interviews require the right participants (Yin, 2009) and a responsive researcher (Stake, 1995). Many methodologists also advise against asking too many questions and suggest being prepared to adjust the protocol depending on how the interview proceeds (Creswell, 2013; Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

Semi-structured interviews occur during a specified amount of time and follow an interview protocol (Yin, 2009), yet the researcher endeavors to maintain a conversational tone (Creswell, 2013). In this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with Laura and the six focal students. Laura's interview was approximately 45 minutes, and the students' interviews were approximately 15 minutes each. During these times, I followed my interview protocol in order to learn more about the participants' backgrounds and experiences (see Appendix C for teacher interview protocol; see Appendix D for student interview protocol). All semi-structured interview questions were piloted with an adult not affiliated with education prior to beginning the study and adjusted for clarity (Creswell, 2013). I conducted
the students' semi-structured interviews during Week 10 of the study because that best suited Laura's schedule and was toward the end of data collection. For these interviews, the students and I talked in a quiet hallway in the school where we sat in chairs on either side of a desk that held the digital audio recorder and a copy of the interview protocol. I interviewed the six focal students individually and transcribed their responses verbatim.

One unanticipated event occurred during a student interview when Diamond asked to stop the interview; I immediately complied. Later, when she felt more comfortable, we continued talking without the audio recorder. After her interview was completed, I typed notes summarizing her responses. During my next observation, I asked Diamond if she was comfortable with my including the information she shared with me that was not recorded, and she gave her consent.

Laura's interview was conducted in Week 14 after all observations had been completed. During her 45-minute planning period, Laura and I met in her classroom and sat at her kidney-shaped table in the center of the room. I used a digital audio recorder to document the interview and transcribed it verbatim.

Informal “check in” interviews were conducted in order to gain insight into Laura's perceptions and clarification of events I was observing (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). I conducted four informal interviews with Laura. Each time, she clarified information about her classroom activities. At these times, I learned more about Laura as a person and professional as we discussed data that I collected from her classroom. Although I intended to only take a few minutes of her time, Laura was eager to discuss the study, and we often talked for the duration of her lunch period.
Several options for conducting qualitative data analysis exist (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and I selected constant comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) with an open coding scheme (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2013; Dyson & Genishi, 2005) and axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) (see Figure 3.3). Constant comparative analysis involves comparing an incident from the data with other recorded incidents and determining similarities and differences. The observed similarities and differences become the initial set of codes. Similar incidents share codes, and new codes are created as differences among the data emerge. The specific properties and qualifying characteristics of each code are recorded in a master coding list or codebook. For this study, the master coding list was ongoing (Stake, 1995) and operative (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In an operative coding scheme, the researcher keeps an ongoing list of codes throughout data collection beginning with initial data collection. As data collection continues, the researcher adds new codes to the master coding scheme and clarifies the properties and characteristics illustrating the reflective nature of axial and open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Axial and open coding are concurrent processes. Essentially, axial coding involves "relating concepts to each other" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 195), and open coding refers to the practice of grouping raw data into categories, comparing categories, then regrouping the data into related concepts. In an open coding scheme, the researcher examines the data and looks for emerging themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2013; Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Merriam, 2009). I chose to collapse the data into themes (Merriam, 2009) rather than continue constant comparative analysis to
the point of core integration and generating grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), which is an accepted practice in qualitative data analysis (Merriam, 2009).

Figure 3.3. Data analysis procedure summary.

Application of Constant Comparative Analysis

Throughout data analysis, I relied on three major assumptions of qualitative research to guide the process: 1) Coding begins with initial data collection (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994); 2) Ideally, researchers will have fewer than six codes at the conclusion of data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994); 3) Research questions should guide the analysis process (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Beginning on the first day of data collection, I analyzed the data using Nvivo 10, a qualitative software program and created a codebook using Microsoft Office. After each day’s analysis, I updated the codebook with new codes, established their properties, and determined which codes were conceptually low and high (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I identified in vivo codes as low codes, but categories of
race and gender as high codes because they represented larger umbrella concepts.

Additionally, I engaged in peer debriefing to ensure the clarity of the coding properties.

All data were analyzed using constant comparative analysis and reviewed in Nvivo 10 at least three times. First, I applied open coding to all data sources. Then, after coding the data from March 22, I realized no new codes had been created in the past three observations. At this point, the data analysis became more deductive, and I applied previously created codes. When new codes emerged (e.g., religion), I applied the new code to all existing data. After all of the data had been collected, during post hoc analysis, the development of six additional codes required me to analyze the data again.

Using Merriam (2009) as a guide, I collapsed the codes in three phases. During the first phase, I grouped codes together based upon similarities and reduced the data from 95 categories to 7. Then, I made identifying statements about each of the major categories to further identify similarities and differences across the data. After peer debriefing four times during this final analysis process, I arrived at four themes, which will be discussed at length in Chapter 4.

**Secondary Analysis**

In addition to constant comparative analysis, which was the primary method for this study, I used the Dialogic Inquiry Tool (DIT; Reznitskaya, 2012) as a way to more closely examine classroom discussions. The DIT allows teachers to determine discussion quality in their classrooms by describing talk indicators (i.e., authority, questions, feedback, meta-level reflection, explanation, collaboration) on a six-point continuum ranging from monologic (1) to dialogic (6) qualities. I selected the DIT for two reasons. First, the literature Reznitskaya
used to support the rationale for the DIT aligned with my beliefs about discussion based upon my own readings of the same works. Second, I sought a tool for identifying a spectrum of dialogic characteristics. I used the DIT to support my own analysis (e.g., low-spectrum, high-spectrum) by classifying transcripts along the continuum (see Appendix E for sample monologic and dialogic transcripts). As I went deeper into analysis, I validated my coding by scoring sample transcripts at the low, middle, and high levels of the dialogic continuum for all six indicators. The DIT was useful for determining talk quality during classroom interactions.

Throughout the analysis and data collection processes I refined the research questions. Case study methodologists agree that researchers should be flexible and make changes to the research questions and analysis as the case develops (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). I made changes to my research questions throughout the study, while still maintaining an open analysis process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). During the final analysis phase, I ensured the themes matched the research questions that I intended to answer (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Overall, three themes answer question one, and one theme answers question two (see Chapter 4).

**Validity and Reliability of the Study**

Validity and reliability provide the structure for researchers to verify qualitative studies (Creswell, 2013). The ability to use the data to convey meaning to others is a key indicator of a study's validity and reliability (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; LeCompte, 2000). In my study, I addressed issues related to internal validity, external validity, and research reliability (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009) (see Table 3.5).
Table 3.5  

Qualities of Validity in Case Study Research (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Validity/Credibility</th>
<th>External Validity/Transferability</th>
<th>Research Reliability/Consistency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td>Rich, thick description</td>
<td>Case study protocol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member checking</td>
<td>Clarifying researcher bias</td>
<td>Audit trail</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer debriefing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Prolonged engagement and persistent observation</td>
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**Internal Validity**  

Case study research typically achieves internal validity through triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and prolonged engagement and persistent observation (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). In this section, I describe how this study addresses each of these validity constructs.

**Triangulation.** To achieve triangulation, I closely analyzed my data sources and examined how each one supported my findings (Creswell, 2013). I used multiple data sources such as transcribed interviews, field notes, and collected artifacts to confirm and support my themes (LeCompte, 2000; Yin, 2009). I relied on interviews to support themes from the field notes and other data. For example, as described earlier, Diamond discussed bullying during her interview. Also, I had noted instances of Diamond being bullied in my field notes. Diamond and Nikki mentioned these bullying events in their semi-structured interviews, and Laura coded a transcript at "rude to [Diamond]." In this way, three data
sources supported each other and the findings. Also, as part of my triangulation efforts, I included alternate interpretations (Stake, 1995) in my researcher memos.

**Member checking.** Participant review informs qualitative research (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009), and I engaged in member checking with Laura by asking her to describe portions of transcripts. In one instance, Laura wrote a reflection about an event and coded the transcript. I did not ask Laura to code the transcript, but it provided valuable information because I compared Laura's coding with my own. During a peer debriefing session, my colleague noticed how closely aligned our codes were and asked if I had provided Laura with a copy of my codebook. I had not done so, but the close alignment between Laura's codes and my codebook indicates validity. Further, I shared all themes and subthemes with Laura, who agreed with all aspects of my findings.

**Peer debriefing.** Peer debriefing allowed me to justify the findings to knowledgeable peers and to respond to their perspectives while data analysis was still in progress (Creswell, 2013). Through this process, a peer reviews data and determines if the researcher has made appropriate claims and decisions (Merriam, 2009). Altogether, I conducted 11 peer debriefing sessions with two other qualitative researchers spanning from initial to final data analysis. During these sessions, we evaluated my data collection process, coding definitions, research questions, and analysis process. Their questions and comments helped me to clarify coding definitions and themes.

**Prolonged engagement and persistent observation.** In qualitative research, spending extended time with the participants is a validation strategy (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). The researcher should stay engaged with the case long
enough to exhaust codes and begin to develop themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For this study, I was formally engaged with the participants from January, 23 2014 to May, 5, 2014. Including my 5 informal visits when I did not collect data, I had 19 weeks of contact with the participants. Due to the recruitment process, school breaks, and inclement weather, my weeks of contact were not consecutive. I became familiar with the classroom culture and sustained a lengthy period of interaction between the participants and myself (Creswell, 2013; Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Merriam, 2009).

**External Validity**

External validity addresses concerns about how readers can generalize or transfer a study's findings to other settings (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). Case study researchers experience challenges to external validity (Merriam, 2009 Yin, 2009) because exact replication is nearly impossible (Merriam, 2009). Interactions in other racially diverse, lower-tracked fifth grade classrooms may be similar to those in Laura's classroom, but never identical. However, the findings may help other researchers and practitioners make generalizations about similar situations. In this study, I used two external validity strategies—rich, thick description and clarifying researcher bias (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995).

**Rich, thick description.** Readers begin to understand how to apply the findings to new situations by reading rich, thick descriptions in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, rich, thick descriptions explain themes (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). In order to achieve external validity through rich, thick descriptions, I described the design and analysis processes, the nuances of the case, and the findings (see Chapter 4) in detail. Other
researchers can retrace my data collection and analysis steps and use detailed descriptions of the case and themes to determine the external validity of my findings.

**Clarifying researcher bias.** Researchers' biases may impact a variety of components in a given study (Creswell, 2013; Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Stake, 1995; Willis et al., 2008). In order to address my biases, I have written a subjectivity statement (see below), in which I briefly explain my philosophy of education, biography, and other information that may give readers insight to my researcher bias. By including the subjectivity statement, I acknowledge ways my role as the researcher may have influenced the outcome of the study.

**Research Reliability**

Reliability means a study's findings are logical based upon the data sources (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Merriam argued "the results [should be] consistent with the data collected" (p. 221, emphasis in original). In order to achieve reliability, with specific attention paid to consistency, I followed a case study protocol (Yin, 2009) guided by my research questions and the overall case study design. As part of this process, I maintained a chain of evidence (Yin, 2009) and catalogued each data source in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. In addition to this organization method, I used the color codes in Nvivo 10 to group data into categories: observations, peer-to-peer discussions, member checking, and interviews. Using data organization methods supported by Merriam (2009) and Wolcott (2009), I created electronic file folders for each consented student, audio files, transcriptions, and researcher memos. The chain of evidence demonstrates the reliable nature of this study.
As part of my research protocol, I used an audit trail to document each step of the research process including recruitment, data collection, and peer debriefing sessions (see Appendix F for audit trail). For each observation, I listed the date, time, observation number, subject, key events, type of data, and participant source. The case study protocol and transparency of the data collection and analysis processes contribute to this study’s reliability.

**Limitations of the Study**

Two major limitations influence this study. First, members of the research community may view the number of participants as limitation. However, I agree with Yin (2009) and believe the benefits of case study research have the potential to outweigh any possible limitations. Moreover, naturalistic generalizations, during which the reader is made aware of existing literature, explicit details of the case, and coherent analysis procedures, allow readers to draw their own conclusions about the scope of this study’s limitations (Stake, 1995).

Secondly, due to the highly subjective issues related to the questions in this study (i.e., identity, diversity), I may make inaccurate assumptions about students' identities and intentions based upon my own status as a White, middle-class, Protestant, American, female. Willis and her colleagues (2008) cautioned literacy researchers to refrain from assigning judgments to behaviors exhibited during classroom discussions based on the researcher's personal identities and values. In order to address this issue, I adhered to rigorous validity standards (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009) and provided rich, thick descriptions of observed events and clarified my own researcher biases through a subjectivity
statement (see below), so readers can determine the validity and reliability of the study independent of my ideological beliefs (Willis et al., 2008).

**Subjectivity Statement**

Documenting my personal biases informs readers about my beliefs that may impact the findings of this study (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Willis et al., 2008). I am a White woman in my mid-thirties currently enrolled in a doctoral program in curriculum and instruction with a focus on literacy education. My philosophy of education centers on my beliefs in creating multiple opportunities for students to master concepts and integrating discussion into all subjects. As a former elementary teacher, I frequently planned opportunities for my students to engage in talk and recall my own struggles with implementing dialogic learning.

As I consider issues of identity and talk, I am aware of my own ideological constructs and biases. Because I recognized the limitations of researcher bias, I strived to be careful when making assumptions about Laura's values and students' identities. In order to combat researcher bias, I acknowledged my status of entitlement and privilege (e.g., Gay & Kirkland, 2003). I believe a particular challenge was explaining participants' identities without using westernized values (Willis et al., 2008). In order to address this issue, I solicited the help of a colleague who is an expert in anti-deficit teaching and learning. My colleague evaluated all of the profiles and theme 4 (see Chapter 4) for instances of deficit language. Notably, my colleague and I share similar backgrounds.

As a literacy researcher, I work to accurately reflect my participants' voices and try to situate my findings in ways that challenge preconceived notions about identity and interactions in text-based discussion practices. I value the social nature of communities of
practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1988) and talk (Bakhtin, 1981; Halliday, 1977, 1978). As a critically conscious person, I attempted to generate findings independent of my privileged position; however, given the subjective nature of qualitative research, my biases likely played a role in the study. I intended to embrace the voices of my participants and amplify them by drawing meaningful conclusions about their experiences as part of a racially diverse, lower-tracked fifth grade classroom.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I explained the methodology for my instrumental case study designed to understand text-based discussions in fifth grade language arts classroom and how opportunities to discuss texts reflect students' identities. This study relied upon four data sources: classroom observations with field notes, audio recordings, artifacts, and interviews. I applied constant comparative analysis to my data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and collapsed data into larger themes (Merriam, 2009). This study has internal and external validity and research reliability, as evidenced by triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, prolonged engagement and persistent observation, rich, thick description, researcher bias clarification, the case study protocol, and an audit trail. Despite limitations, the findings contribute to existing research on text-based discussions.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

"Authority in the written word does not rest in the words themselves, but in the meanings which are negotiated through the experiences of the group" (Heath, 1983, p. 196).

Introduction to the Chapter

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the present investigation of text-based discussions in a fifth grade classroom with racially diverse and lower-tracked students. Specifically, this chapter includes each of the four themes resulting from constant comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) of qualitative data (i.e., field notes, audio recordings, interviews, artifacts) I collected over a three-month period in Laura's classroom. Additionally, my understandings of sociocultural theory framed this study and informed the data collection and analysis processes. All data were collapsed into four themes that answer the following research questions:

1) In a racially diverse, lower-tracked fifth grade classroom, what happens when a teacher and her students participate in text-based discussions?

2) How do students exhibit identity through discussion in their fifth grade language arts classroom?

The first theme focuses on the teacher's pedagogical decisions, and the remaining themes explain how students co-constructed meaning, engaged in unsanctioned talk, and explored their identities during text-based discussions. This chapter further explains the themes and related subthemes, and the findings are discussed within the context of existing literature in Chapter 5.
In a racially diverse, lower-tracked, fifth grade classroom, what happens when a teacher and her students participate in text-based discussions?

Three themes answer the first research question for the present study. First, Laura made specific instructional decisions that supported dialogic talk. Second, students created opportunities to co-construct meaning by assuming assertive stances, incorporating media references into talk, and engaging in pressing discourse behaviors. Finally, students engaged in unsanctioned talk that interrupted their learning during text-based discussions. In the following sections, I describe each theme and its related subthemes.

Theme 1: The Classroom Teacher’s Intentional Pedagogical Decisions Increased Dialogic Talk

Laura intentionally provided opportunities for discussions through her selection of texts and scaffolding, and students responded to her pedagogical decisions by demonstrating dialogic talk qualities. People who adopt a deficit perspective maintain that lower-tracked students are not capable of dialogic participation, yet Laura's students engaged in discussions that demonstrated dialogic qualities. In the following sections, I describe Laura's intentional pedagogical decisions that enhanced student talk and discuss their influences on students' participation in text-based discussions.

Texts about social issues. In this classroom, students' discussions had more dialogic qualities when reading texts about social issues. Laura purposefully selected texts that she described as reflecting her students' backgrounds or controversial issues she believed would generate discussion (e.g., racism, sexism, genetic-engineering, environmental issues, families). Her decision to incorporate texts about social issues (e.g., race, gender, poverty,
genetic-engineering) resulted in more dialogic talk compared to times when students read texts that were not about social issues, such as reading workbook materials.

One of Laura's primary approaches to beginning discussions of texts about social issues was to ask open-ended questions (e.g., "What do you think about…?"). For example, she asked the small group reading *Killer Species: Menace from the Deep* (Spradlin, 2013), "Do you think this is a good type of lock for their business? Why or why not?" (field notes, April 2, 2014). In this instance, Mia, the first to respond, said, "Good because if they didn't have electromagnetic lock on the door and they had just a key they…they can keep their card in their wallet" (field notes, April 2, 2014). Jai agreed with Mia, but Alex suggested a lock with fingerprint identification would prevent "sneaky people" from trying to steal the genetic experiment (field notes, April 2, 2014). From this point, students began to engage in a sustained conversation with 20 exchanges, reflecting the structure of real world talk, one of the more desirable qualities in text-based discussions.

Later, when I asked focal students during their individual interviews to recall a time they participated in a "good discussion," two students described the locked box discussion, which I had already coded as a high spectrum event during open coding. Jai explained how the event unfolded:

They had this lock on this special door in the book *Killer Species*. I said it. She asked like, "What was it like?" I said it was controlled by a computer, which locks and unlocks everything automatically, but they have to have something special to open it, and that way nobody else can get in except that main person and that's why it's easier and that's why it's easier for it to not get stolen and it's safer. That was my idea. (interview, April 16, 2014)
In this excerpt, Jai took information from the text and voiced ownership of how she extended the group's ideas. While Mia did not recall the event in vivid detail, she referred to the conversation about the locked box and commented, "We all said three or four answers to it that were really good" (interview, April 16, 2014). This example of a dialogic discussion is significant because it reflects the type of talk typical in Laura's classroom when students read texts about social issues.

**Making sense of global issues.** As part of their participation in discussions of texts about social issues, Laura's students made sense of global issues, particularly war. These children are part of the post 9/11 generation having never lived in a time when America was not at war, and students used texts about social issues to make sense of the Afghan war. For example, when discussing racism in *Zora and Me* (Bond & Simon, 2010) in a small group, the following exchange occurred:

Laura: I think what I’m hearing is that there are times to be safe about what she's thinking, but there are times to watch her back.

Alex: You know how Americans see Afghanistan as bad people. Like if you're Afghanistan we'll probably hurt you and kill you. (field notes, April, 29, 2014)

Alex mentioned war and Afghanistan on other occasions as well. When discussing the pros and cons of immigration in small groups, Julio and Alex had the following exchange:

Alex: We definitely shouldn't let them ride planes for what they did on 9/11. 9/11 happened and people wonder, "Why not let us come to your country? That's not fair."

Julio: That's a bad thing?

Alex: Yeah! 9/11! (transcription, April 9, 2014)

On the day students first began learning about the Constitution, Alex initiated a whole class
conversation about the conflict between the ideology of the document and the practice of war in America as documented below:

Alex: Why do we have war if the Constitution says we need peace and tranquility?

Nikki: To keep us safe.

Alex: It makes no sense.

Jai: It's because we're people, and that's what we do.

Laura: You're right. It's a contradiction. (field notes, March 26, 2014)

Alex had a specific interest in war histories and told me in his interview, "I'm all about war and histories. I love war history" (April 16, 2014). Although Alex had prior knowledge about war, he used his experiences with the Constitution and a text about racism as a way to make sense of his understandings about war. The texts were neither about war nor Afghanistan, and Laura was not asking students to consider war as a topic. Instead, Alex used the text as a way to interpret a global issue. For example, he saw a direct conflict between the peace and tranquility promoted in the Constitution and the acts of war in which America engages.

The use of texts that addressed racism, immigration, and American ideology provided a context for students to engage in dialogic talk that helped them interpret their understandings of war. In all three of these examples, Alex instigated the talk about war, but his classmates were able to articulate their own ideas about war as part of the discussion. For example, Julio did not appear to consider the terrorist attack on 9/11 related to problems with immigration until Alex suggested it. Similarly, Jai explained war happens because "it's just what we do" (field notes, March 26, 2014). In Jai's comment, she said, "we," suggesting that she identifies as a citizen of country at war. However, her tone and phrasing suggested she
may have been frustrated with war. Overall, the incorporation of these texts about social issues provided a context for students to engage in dialogic talk and interpret global issues.

**Making sense of personal trauma.** When discussing texts about social issues, participants mentioned personally traumatic events. For example, students shared the traumatic event of premature birth when discussing *Zora and Me* (Bond & Simon, 2010) in a small group. During this discussion, students and Laura created poems representing their perceptions of the text. Laura shared with the group, "You always like to think a baby gets love" (field notes, April 24, 2014). Laura's comment related to the text's exploration of parent and child relationships. The following discussion occurred:

- Mia: I was premature.
- Diamond: My cousin weighed two pounds.
- Laura: She had to stay in the hospital in a special…
- Diamond: Incubator. [She proceeded to describe how the baby would respond to the mom, dad, and brother.]
- Laura: Babies can receive love even though they can't talk.
- Alex: Remember the baby that held the doctor's hand? [referencing the text]
- Jai: My sister was also like that. She was supposed to be born in March, but she was born on December 18. My mom had gotten sick.
- Laura: Do you think she could get love and give love back when she was that tiny?
- Jai: Yeah, but it wasn't an easy year. One thing for sure.
- Laura: Sometimes love is hard, right. [Students nod in agreement.] (field notes, April 24, 2014)
Here, students used *Zora and Me* to help them interpret the traumatic experience of premature birth. Jai, Mia, and Diamond had personal experiences with premature births, and Alex, who did not share a personal connection with the group, anchored the talk in the text. All group members demonstrated dialogic qualities (i.e., student controlled turn-taking, shifting the direction of the talk, connecting ideas) as they made sense of the traumatic experience of premature birth while discussing *Zora and Me*.

Sometimes group members related to texts about social issues in ways that elicited strong emotional connections. In these instances, participants did not build upon one another's ideas in the sense of co-constructing meaning, but they demonstrated a sense of freedom with idea sharing and provided extended examples to the group, which indicates a mix of transitioning and dialogic qualities (Reznitskaya, 2012). To illustrate, on February 6, 2014, students demonstrated transitioning and dialogic qualities when discussing a reading passage about a girl who had been humiliated at the park and did not want to go back there. The passage had strong social undertones, despite being a standardized text. The group talk became more dialogic when Laura highlighted those qualities and asked the class to "Think of a place where something bad happened. Partner up to talk about a place and if you would avoid it" (field notes, February 6, 2014). Students engaged in lively discussions in pairs then returned back to the whole class. At this time, Jai and Laura made strong personal connections related to trauma. Jai shared with the class that she hid in a private place in her house when her parents were fighting. She said, "My sister was trying to stop them, and I sat there and tried to close my ears." Laura said that she wanted to share about a special place too and told the class about her best friend who died when they were in the 9th grade. She
said, "It was my first funeral...Every year on July 1, we gather back at his gravesite and tell stories about him." Like Jai, Laura did not elaborate beyond her initial sharing. Students wanted to ask her more questions, but Laura ended the discussion. These interactions demonstrated that Laura and her students attempted to make sense of traumatic events through the discussions of texts related to social issues, yet they did not always want to expand upon their contributions to the talk. In these examples, Jai and Laura did not elaborate beyond their initial statements, nor did they mention these events again during the study. Their desire to limit personal sharing suggests that group members may have varying levels of comfort when discussing traumatic events in text-based discussions.

**Increasing dialogic opportunities though scaffolding.** As Laura's students attempted to understand texts and engage related discussions, she often scaffolded their discussions. Data analysis revealed that Laura shifted her role from facilitator to participant depending upon the text and needs of the students. During monologic talk, Laura controlled turns and topics (see Appendix E for monologic transcript). In contrast, when Laura scaffolded students' learning and maintained a decentered approach (i.e., responsibility of community work is equally shared; Lave & Wenger, 1991), discussions were more dialogic. In this study, Laura typically scaffolded students' talk by eliciting a personal story or redirecting their attention to the text as described in the following sections.

**Scaffolded learning when the teacher elicits a personal story.** Laura's students became more active participants in text-based discussions when she shared personal stories related to the text and invited them to share their own. In our informal conversations, Laura emphasized the importance of relevant talk and her desire for students to be active
participants in discussions, and in practice, she scaffolded students' talk as a way of helping them to meet this goal by eliciting personal stories. One representative discussion demonstrating how Laura used personal stories to scaffold students' participation occurred when the whole class prepared to read a basal story about a jealous gymnast. Students were particularly interested in the topic because, at the time of the lesson, the 2014 Winter Olympics were underway; however, students appeared to have difficulties with the discussion on author's purpose that Laura had planned, and the talk remained monologic. Laura then tried to help students connect to the text through personal experiences with jealousy. At first, Laura invited students to share personal stories relevant to the text, but the students did not reply. However, when Laura made a connection to jealousy by telling a personal story, the dynamic of the talk shifted toward more dialogic behaviors and students began to contribute to the discussion (see Table 4.1). Laura told her students about a time she destroyed modeling pictures of her sister because she was jealous (field notes, March 20, 2014). When Laura and her sister were children, they participated in a fashion show by modeling clothes for a local boutique. Laura wore mustard colored leggings with a purple top with mirrors, and her sister modeled a black skirt with a black and white jacket. The fashion show was reported in her small town newspaper, but only one picture from the event graced the paper. "Who do you think it was?" Laura asked the class. The class yelled out, "Your sister!" Laura then told about getting 10 pictures in the mail, but in a fit of jealousy, she ripped the photographs into little pieces. After telling her story, Laura asked, "Anybody else?" Students' hands flew up into the air; then, Alex, who had previously denied being jealous, said, "I'm a mama's boy, and I've been jealous. I'm a mama's boy. I've known her 11
years!" Alex told about his little brother usurping his spot in the bed with their mother and their ensuing fight, after which Alex got into trouble. As Alex recounted this event with an animated voice and dramatic pauses, he leaned forward on his desk while his feet sat in his chair indicating that he was comfortable in the environment and engaged in the conversation.

Students continued to listen to one another's comments and incorporated their own responses for the next several minutes.

Table 4.1

*DIT Indicators from Scaffolding Learning with a Personal Story on March 20, 2014*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-scaffolding /Monologic</th>
<th>Post-scaffolding/Moving Toward Dialogic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laura had exclusive control of talk.</td>
<td>Students reacted to one another's ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students' responses did not relate to one another.</td>
<td>Laura pushed them to think more deeply about the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student responses were short or non-existent.</td>
<td>Students took personal positions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students shared similar experiences.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the example of the jealous gymnast discussion, Laura's act of eliciting personal responses allowed students to become more involved in the discussion. When students discussed the author's purpose in a low spectrum, evaluative exchange, students seemed interested, but their responses did not suggest a deep understanding of the topic. For example, Diamond was unable to answer questions about the author's purpose, but she clearly identified with jealousy and was able to consider its effects on actions in the real and
fictional worlds. Similarly, Alex did not respond at all during the low spectrum portion of the talk; however, once Laura introduced her personal story and elicited others, Alex responded with an enthusiastic account of being jealous of his brother, which sparked several minutes of sustained discussion about jealousy. This example demonstrates how students' talk about a text can become more engaging and their participation more involved once the teacher provides scaffolding to support the students in their talk and understanding of a text.

Students' engagement and interest carried over into the reading of the story and follow-up activities, including talk about author's purpose, which was Laura's original objective.

*Scaffolded learning when the teacher redirects students to the text.* Laura redirected students to the text, as an instructional strategy, which increased dialogic qualities in discussions. Close analysis of two small group discussions about *Runaway Twin* (Kehret, 2009), which occurred at different times in the study, illustrates the dialogic qualities of students' talk when Laura scaffolded their learning by redirecting their attention to the text. Julio, Baltazar, Roman, and Laura engaged in a dialogic conversation about *Runaway Twin* (Kehret, 2009) on March 24, 2014. The boys required support to comprehend the text and participate in the related discussion (see Table 4.2).
### Table 4.2

*Dialogic Qualities in Runaway Twin (Kehret, 2009) Discussion on March 24, 2014*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription</th>
<th>Dialogic Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laura: Do you know <em>The Wizard of Oz</em>? Baltazar said he was unfamiliar with the movie, but he gave a brief retelling of the plot.</td>
<td>Using media knowledge to scaffold understand of a text*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman: They wanted to stay together during the tornado.</td>
<td>Student managed turn+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura: It's impressive and shows how much she cares about Snickers.</td>
<td>Teacher agreed without evaluating the response+; also returned the attention to the text as part of her scaffolding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltazar: I think they should stay together.</td>
<td>Student managed turn+; student assumed a personal position+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura: Why?</td>
<td>Teacher pressed student to think more deeply+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltazar: Snickers protected her from those bad boys.</td>
<td>Student gave example from the text as a result of scaffolding*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura: I agree. They can protect each other.</td>
<td>Teacher linked students’ responses together+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltazar: Yes.</td>
<td>Student managed turn+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Laura, Baltazar, and Roman participated in this discussion. ^ indicates monologic talk. + indicates dialogic talk. * indicates transitioning talk.

Here, Laura used a media reference to initiate the scaffolding, but she also redirected Baltazar's attention to the text when she said, "It's impressive and shows how much she cares..."
about Snickers” (field notes, March 24, 2014). From this point in the conversation, Baltazar was able to directly connect the danger of the tornado with the reason Sonny and Snickers should stay together in the storm. Laura did not adopt an evaluative position, and the discussion maintained dialogic qualities, with some transitioning qualities as well. For example, Baltazar said, "I think…," and Laura joined the boys' ideas when she said, "I agree; they can protect each other" (field notes, March 24, 2014). The high instances of dialogic qualities in this discussion allowed Roman, Baltazar, and Laura to discuss the text as a community of practice. Laura adopted a decentered approach by relinquishing control of the discussion and sharing the turn-taking responsibility with students as an equal group member.

On February 11, 2014, Laura and another group of students engaged in a discussion at with transitioning qualities on the DIT about Runaway Twin (Kehret, 2009). In both groups, Laura asked students to think more deeply about the nuances of the text by asking them to reflect about a specific line, but the nature of the talk was significantly different because Laura did not decenter this conversation (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3

Dialogic Qualities in Runaway Twin (Kehret, 2009) on February 11, 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription</th>
<th>Dialogic Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laura: Do you see here it said a snake is like a tornado? How is a snake like a tornado?</td>
<td>Teacher posed a question to the group designed to lead students to a certain response *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jai: Some snakes wind around. They are pretty sinister.</td>
<td>Teacher managed turn^</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.3 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Narrative Annotation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Layla: I think it compares because...[at the same time as Jai]</td>
<td>Teacher managed turn(^\wedge); student takes a personal position(^+)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jai: It wraps around.</td>
<td>Student continued speaking and elaborated response(^+)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia: They both coil around.</td>
<td>Teacher managed turn(^\wedge); responded to teacher not another student(^\wedge); reported facts(^\wedge)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa: They both kill people.</td>
<td>Teacher managed turn(^\wedge); responded to teacher not another student(^\wedge); reported facts(^\wedge)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura: Yeah, they're both dangerous.</td>
<td>Teacher evaluated the response(^\wedge)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Laura, Layla, Jai, Mia, and Rosa participated in this discussion. \(^\wedge\) indicates monologic talk. \(^+\) indicates dialogic talk. * indicates transitioning talk.*

The second discussion included a wide range of talk indicators, and students only talked to Laura, which clearly indicates monologic talk. Although the transcription indicates student control of talk, Laura actually controlled the turn-taking because students looked at her and she nodded before they talked. At the end, Laura evaluated the talk by saying, "Yeah, they're both dangerous" (field notes, February 11, 2014). The presence of talk at both extremes of the dialogic continuum is significant because not all group members participated equally, and students followed a teacher-student response pattern by directly addressing their talk to Laura. Whether the students understood the complexity of the text or the author's purpose in using figurative language remains unclear. Certainly, they understood that snakes and tornadoes are both dangerous, but they may have drawn these conclusions without...
accessing the text, which is unlike the first example in which Laura's reference to the text as a way to scaffold students' talk and maintained a decentered approach.

Although the text was the same, these scaffolding experiences differed because Laura and her students discussed texts by engaging in talk at various stages of the dialogic continuum. When Baltazar and Roman approached the line in the text about the snake and tornado, they expressed confusion. Laura supported them by making a related media reference (i.e., *The Wizard of Oz*); then, when Roman made a reference to the text, Laura immediately anchored her response with more textual evidence (i.e., direct reference to Snickers, a character). The first excerpt included mostly dialogic qualities that stemmed from Laura's initial scaffolding, and the qualities of the second excerpt were more monologic and did not demonstrate the level of community interaction evidenced in the group with Baltazar, Roman, Julio, and Laura. Scaffolding paired with decentering, as demonstrated by Laura's actions in the first transcript, resulted in more consistent dialogic talk.

**Theme 2: Students Created their own Opportunities to Co-Construct Meaning in Discussions**

As part of their participation in text-based discussions students created their own opportunities to co-construct meaning in three major ways: assuming an assertive stance, incorporating media references into talk, and engaging in pressing discourse behaviors (i.e., asking follow-up questions, asking for clarification; Wolf et al., 2005). In the following sections, I describe these three ways students co-constructed meaning during text-based discussions.
**Assuming an assertive stance.** The students in Laura's classroom sometimes transitioned into dialogic talk by taking an assertive stance. The acts of assertion in Laura's classroom aligned with the assumption that members of a community of practice do not "learn from talk" but "learn to talk" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 109, emphasis in original). As members of the classroom community, Laura's students adopted assertive stances when they were among peers acting as equals, when one peer was dominating, and when they were challenging Laura.

**Taking a stance when students against an equal peer.** Students often shared the responsibility for the focus and direction of the conversation in peer-only groups, yet even when students demonstrated equal status, they sometimes assumed assertive stances, which helped them co-construct meaning and transition into talk with more dialogic qualities. One illustrative event occurred when Layla and Jai read and discussed a passage about a sheep dog named Nipper. At first, the girls engaged in lower spectrum talk primarily focused on understanding the directions. However, Layla and Jai's conversation shifted when they experienced confusion about Nipper as transcribed below:

Layla: I thought Nipper was supposed to be a fish.

Jai: No.

Layla: Like a piranha because it's like Nipper. And it like nips someone.

Jai: I don't know.

Layla: No, I think that's a good definition for a sheep herder because I think sheep dogs like nip the sheep so they run in a certain direction.

Jai: No, they kind of like. You know how dogs have their claws; they kind of poke them with their claws.
Layla: Actually, they like bark in front of them.

Jai: Yeah, they do that.

Layla: Or growl.

Jai: They bark at them.

Layla: Okay, I thought it was fish. (transcription, April 2, 2014)

In the excerpt above, Layla was confused about Nipper's species. She associated Nipper with an animal that bites, like a piranha. At first, Jai was unclear too. Then Layla assumed an assertive stance in the conversation by saying, "No, I think…" Likewise, Jai followed the same format with her talk. When the two girls disagreed with one another, they provided a rationale for their thinking, which moved their talk into the mid-range of the continuum as indicated by their sharing opinions and providing justification for their ideas.

For example, Layla's statement, "Actually, they like bark in front of them," suggests a change in her initial thought about Nipper (transcription, April 2, 2014). The girls participated in two additional exchanges until Layla brought the talk full circle by acknowledging her initial misconception. Through their participation in this conversation, both girls understood Nipper was a sheep dog and conceptualized behaviors he might demonstrate. However, until the girls adopted assertive stances, their talk was at the lower end of the continuum, and they were confused about the text. By challenging one another, both girls demonstrated a changing perspective, which Lave and Wenger (1991) describe as a fundamental part of participating in a community of practice. Layla and Jai co-constructed meaning through the conversation that followed their assumption of assertive stances.
**Taking a stance against an 'expert' peer.** When students worked in peer-only groups, one or more students often emerged as experts. Expert students helped organize the group, provided outside knowledge, and the other students deferred to them when making decisions. Nevertheless, expert students did experience challenges from their classmates. Of note, data analysis conducted in this study did not demonstrate a consistent pattern for times when students challenged expert peers. However, data analysis did reveal that the act of taking an assertive stance resulted in two significant changes in the talk. First, the student who challenged the expert moved toward full participation in the group. Second, the discussion itself transitioned to the higher end of the continuum. These two outcomes suggest taking an assertive stance may be required in order for some students to engage in dialogic behaviors during text-based discussions and contribute to meaning making within the group.

An illustrative event of a student taking an assertive stance against an expert peer occurred when Diamond challenged Alex. On March 25, 2014, students read a passage called "City Blues" about a girl who goes to visit her grandmother in the city. At this time, Alex, who nearly always acted as an expert in the classroom community, and Diamond worked together out of necessity rather than choice. No students wanted to work with Diamond, and Alex, who left his group when the other members would not let him be the writer, did not have a partner. Diamond appeared happy to be working with Alex and did not question him when he described how they would progress with the assignment. She allowed him to lead their talk and followed his directions. However, when Diamond and Alex began to discuss the word *jagged*, the nature of their talk changed. Diamond began to exhibit dialogic behaviors by extending her ideas and sharing the responsibility of the talk. Alex resisted her
at first, but she continued to pursue the meaning of the word. In the transcription below, Diamond tried to convince Alex to search for *jagged* in the dictionary:

Diamond: Let's look in the dictionary.

Alex: We don't need a dictionary; we just look at the context clues. Easy. It says "jagged mountain skyline." At the brown and *jagged* mountain skyline, so think of the mountain skyline. Think about it, if you're up in the mountains and you look at the sky, what do you see? You see white and what?

Diamond: Blue.

Alex: Blue, so it's what kind of color? It's light blue right?

Diamond: Sky blue.

Alex: So what do you think *jagged* means? A nice sky blue?

Diamond: Okay.

Alex: Yeah, so a nice, sky blue. We don't need that [referencing the dictionary].

Diamond: I'm about to shut it.

Alex: A nice sky blue [writing down the answer]. You don't need *jagged*. It's easy; just use your context clues.

Diamond: I'm trying to find it. A-g-o. Found it! [Diamond continued to look through the dictionary.]

Alex: What does it mean?

Diamond: It means uneven and sharp as in a *jagged* nail.

(transcription, March 25, 2014)

In the excerpt above, Alex did not want to use the dictionary to determine the context clues for *jagged*. Applying context clues as part of comprehension does not involve using a dictionary. However, Diamond seemed to understand that blue was not the correct definition
of *jagged* and believed the answer could be found in the dictionary. She held onto the
dictionary even after Alex said it was not necessary. At this point, she took an assertive
stance as a member of their group. Because of Diamond's actions, both students reached a
better understanding of the word *jagged*. Diamond also supported the definition by giving an
example of a staple. Additionally, Diamond did not hesitate to agree that *jagged* was "pointy
and sharp," unlike when Alex first asked if she agreed to their answer. Diamond's assertive
stance not only led to their understanding of the definition, but also transitioned the talk into
the dialogic range of the continuum.

**Taking a stance against Laura.** As students took assertive stances in text-based
discussions, they sometimes challenged Laura's position as an authority figure. Within the
countext of the class community, Laura encouraged students to express themselves and their
ideas; however, she also enforced her own expectations for desirable behavior and
participation. In the illustrative event described below, Roman and Baltazar assumed
assertive stances when they used their talk to oppose sanctions enforced by Laura.

As part of their social studies unit on government, Laura directed students to compose
their own Constitutions using the primary text as a model. Students self-selected their groups
and used a video, notes, and their social studies text as resources. In this particular instance,
Roman and Baltazar worked together to create their own Constitution. During the whole
group portion of the lesson, the boys played with yo-yos. Laura took the toys away and said,
"This freedom is unacceptable" (field notes, March 27, 2014). At the time, the boys looked
upset they had lost their yo-yos but remained quiet; later, the loss of their toys became the
driving force behind their discussion as they prepared to write their Constitution.
At first, Roman and Baltazar were reluctant to begin working and questioned the purpose of the activity, but an interesting development occurred in their talk as the boys realized they could use this opportunity to define their freedoms. Roman said, "I'm about to put play our devices and yo-yos" (transcription, March 27, 2014). Baltazar quickly agreed and from there, the boys continued along this theme. Baltazar added, "And we have to have electronics stuff. Ipods, Playstations" (transcription, March 27, 2014). The boys named several more electronic devices. Throughout their discussion the boys were enthusiastic and continued to add freedoms they viewed as important such as "getting paid for work" and "having sleep time" (transcription, March 27, 2014).

As Roman and Baltazar engaged in a quick-paced, dialogic discussion, they continued to support their suggested freedoms with personal examples and justifications. In the end they were satisfied with their product, and Laura invited them to share their work in front of the class. When they waited to present, both boys walked around in nervous anticipation. Then, Roman began the presentation by loudly stating, "We will have the right to play with yo-yos" (field notes, March 27, 2014). Despite Laura's questioning whether or not their amendment would help them learn, the boys kept their freedom listed as part of their Constitution and maintained their autonomy in the class setting.

Roman and Baltazar did not appear to be invested in their discussion and related text production until they began to advocate for themselves. By assuming assertive stances, the boys accomplished two objectives. First, they became engaged in the formal task of creating a Constitution together. Second, they demonstrated expert understanding that the Constitution was created to protect individual's rights. These students believed in their right
to play with yo-yos in class if they desired to do so and directly challenged Laura by inserting this freedom into their Constitution. Their assertive stances resulted in increased dialogic talk that allowed for co-constructing meaning and led both boys to understand how the Constitution protects freedoms, which was Laura's objective for the discussion and related product creation.

**Incorporating media references into their talk.** Students frequently made references to popular media during text-based discussions in order to extend their thinking or to clarify their ideas as part of the meaning construction process. In terms of meaning construction, the times when students used media references were particularly important because students used them to build background knowledge, support their ideas, and focus their conversations. Below, I describe key events illustrating these three categories and discuss how students built upon media references to co-construct meaning.

**Building background knowledge with media references.** Laura's students used media references as a way to build background knowledge when preparing to read texts. For example, when Nikki, Layla, Jai, Julio, Mia, Laura, and two non-consented students met to discuss the possibility of selecting *Killer Species: Menace from the Deep* (Spradlin, 2013) as a book club text, students used media references as an entrée into the discussion and a way to build background knowledge. Because non-consented students were present, I was unable to audio record their conversation, but the discussion began with Laura showing students a picture of the book cover and asking about the terms menace and species. Then, students began to speculate about the book's topic and incorporate media references into their talk. Nikki initiated the media references by saying it looked like a movie she had watched "about
15 people getting lost on a stranded island and a huge alligator is after him" (field notes, March 31, 2014). Nikki used her media reference to launch an argument that the image was not of an alligator because its mouth was "pointy, and alligators don’t have pointy mouths." After a brief discussion with many students contributing about the similarities and differences between crocodiles and alligators, Jai said it reminded her of Jurassic Park because "they're giant reptiles chasing you." Laura agreed Killer Species reminded her of the movie as well, and Jai continued, "You can tell it's dangerous because of its red eyes. Red eyes mostly mean you've gone insane." At this point in their interactions with the text, students were not aware that the text was about genetic engineering; nevertheless, Jai's connection to Jurassic Park was directly related to the book's plot. Later in the conversation, Jai excitedly said, "I know what they're doing! They're combining so many animals and making it killer!" Nikki was quick to reply, "Cool!" For these two students, in particular, the use of media references helped them build background knowledge related to the text. Nikki's media reference informed the group about the traits of alligators and crocodiles. Furthermore, Jai's Jurassic Park reference may have helped students become more prepared to read the text because she explicitly connected the genetic engineering in the text to similar events many of the students had observed in film. Unfortunately, the conversation about Killer Species (Spradlin, 2013) was interrupted by a school wide announcement over the intercom. Students continued to remain excited about the text, but the direction of the conversation shifted post-announcement.

Students used their media references as a way to help themselves and others build meaning. For example, Jai mentioned Jurassic Park and later used that example to articulate
her understanding of the plot in *Killer Species* (Spradlin, 2013). Nikki was able to connect her own media reference and Jai’s to build understanding that not only was there a suspenseful fear element, as described in her media reference, but also, genetic engineering of animals was happening. Making media references as part of building background knowledge demonstrates the importance of opening students' talk to include their social experiences (e.g., watching movies, reading magazines, watching TV).

Co-constructing prior knowledge through media references also occurred in whole class settings. One illustrative event occurred when students gathered together at the front of the room and looked up at the interactive whiteboard where a passage called "Kudzu, Superhated Superhero" was posted (field notes, April 29, 2014). Immediately, Diamond raised her hand and talked about how this story was like when Superman saved Lucy (meaning Lois Lane) in the movies. Layla followed this comment by mentioning how Spiderman was hated by citizens, but he was actually saving people. Laura complimented their connections, and Alex contributed, "You can think of it two ways. Create mass destruction that costs a lot of money, and there's a lot of crime. He has to deal with a lot of people." Alex acknowledged that Spiderman created destruction in the business of saving lives. These connections to superhero films helped prepare students to complete their assigned reading task, and they clearly understood the ways that kudzu helps and harms just like Spiderman.

In both small group and whole class settings, students used media references from their social lives as an access point for building background knowledge with other classroom members. In each example, a student initiated the media reference demonstrating that
students may rely on their media experiences to help them build understanding with a range of texts. Students used their media experiences as a way to construct background knowledge with their peers, suggesting a link between students' outside of school media experiences and how they understand and discuss academically-sanctioned texts.

**Supporting ideas with media references.** Students used media references to support their ideas when co-constructing meaning during discussions. An exemplary occasion happened during a vocabulary rotation activity on March 31, 2014, in which Laura posted seven charts around the room—one for each vocabulary term. Students moved around the room in small groups and answered one question per vocabulary word on the chart paper. Laura expected the groups to discuss their answers together and write a shared response on the paper. Jai, Nikki, and Layla extended their talk by incorporating references to a TV show and its companion text into their conversation about vocabulary words. *Abandoned* was the first term to which the girls responded. At this point, Nikki told a story about a time she was with her brother at a creek when they believed a ghost was causing strange noises. Jai mentioned reading an R.L. Stine book in which a character's skin was peeled off, and Layla wondered if it was like sunburn. Nikki continued with her ghost story and told about "an old woman and an old man" dying in the same creek where she and her brother heard the sounds. References to the R.L. Stine book and corresponding TV show continued to be interspersed in their talk for the next several minutes as the girls rotated around the room. When the girls arrived at the chart reading, "What is it like in a *cavern*?" They continued to talk animatedly about the "scary show" they saw on TV, including how people wore chains. Nikki mentioned chains and saws being present in a cavern, which was the vocabulary term. Jai agreed and
added that a lantern might be in a cavern; then, Layla read the question aloud again. At this point, Nikki said she spent the night in a cavern, and Layla told about visiting caverns in a nearby state. Jai thought it would be scary at midnight. Together, they decided to write, "Have you ever been in a cavern? It is awesome. You need a helmet, an axe, a flashlight, and a knife" (field notes, March 31, 2014). This writing shows elements of all three girls' contributions to the discussion and resulted from their knowledge of media that depicted the experiences a person might have in a cavern.

The vocabulary rotation activity illustrates how students built meaning together by continuing to add to one another's comments about a popular television show and a related text. As students talked, they linked the terms across the charts. Moreover, the primary way they extended their talk was through media references, and the girls were able to see how the terms were related as they shared "scary" experiences with popular media and co-create meaning together.

**Focusing the conversation with media references.** Throughout the study, students used media references to focus conversations about texts. Generally, these references had subtle effects on meaning making. To illustrate, Alex asked Julio during a small group discussion in social studies conversation about immigration, "Did you see *Olympus has Fallen*?" and shifted their talk to destruction and the economy based upon his understanding of the film (transcription, April 9, 2014). Similarly, Jai asked the *Zora and Me* (Bond & Simon, 2010) book club group, "Why didn't they do like 'CSI' and uncover the body?" (field notes, April 29, 2014). Her question resulted in Alex referring to an example from the text and Laura supporting his comment. However, during a social studies lesson, when the whole
class discussed the families unit in their social studies text, a media reference focused the conversation in an intense and dramatic way (field notes, April 29, 2014). Jai initiated a change in the conversation away from the ideas in the social studies textbook and toward domestic violence by saying, "You have to trust your blood family too, but they have to earn it. You might not be able to trust everyone in your family because someone might hurt you or be mean to you." Laura mentioned how families can fight and still respect one another, but sometimes there may be physical abuse. She asked the class, "What do you think?" Diamond was the first to respond by sharing an example by saying, "No, there was this play called Madea's Happy Family, and Shirley had passed away and they were telling their secrets."

She continued to tell an extended summary of the play. Students laughed at Diamond, but she proceeded to tell about the abuse a young girl in the play experienced. She ended with, "She got the r-word by her uncle." Laura replied, "Let's not go there, but let's just say she got harmed by her uncle. So they don't get that privilege of being called family anymore."

Despite being laughed at by her peers, Diamond's media reference directly aligned with Jai's comment about domestic violence and refocused the conversation. Jai jumped back into the discussion and said:

> They are still technically your family, but you're in their care until the state takes you away, but you don't have to deal with that. You can call the police, and they will take you away. To our opinion, they are pretty much psychos that are trying to kill you. (field notes, April 29, 2014)

Julio raised his hand and added, "I think they're not your family. Like if they abuse you, they are not your family, but if they're just hitting you like that then they're trying to make you better" (field notes, April 29, 2014). Alex was undecided and said the following:
...DNA will show that no matter what you are still family. It's different about by being abused almost every day and nobody stops it. I think you have all rights to pull yourself away. You have the right to pull yourself away from her life, but you never have the right to say she's not your mom. No matter how you feel, it's still your mom and dad. (field notes, April 29, 2014)

Briana mentioned that some people may have even more challenges when reporting domestic violence. She said, "Say, if you're like Hispanic and don't live with your mom. Like your mom lives in the US and your dad lives in Mexico" (field notes, April 29, 2014). She expressed concerns about deportation and questioned whether or not the police would send someone who filed a complaint to a different country. Laura concluded, "Yeah, so sometimes people might not say something because they're afraid of the consequences" (field notes, April 29, 2014).

Overall, this discussion exemplifies how Laura's students co-constructed meaning about a complex issue when a media reference focused their conversation. Throughout these exchanges, Laura moderated the discussion, but the students led its direction, based in large part from Diamond's detailed explanation of the domestic violence described in a play by Tyler Perry. Each participant in the discussion added a new thread to the talk as they worked together to decide how family might be defined. Diamond's media reference provided a clear focus for the conversation about domestic violence. Students wrestled with complex ideas such as reporting violence and interacting with abusive family members. These ideas differed drastically from those represented in the social studies text, which largely focused on family structure and members’ roles. Instead, students talked about a serious issue that was part of their larger social contexts in the safe environment of their classroom and co-constructed meaning together.
Engaging in pressing discourse. Pressing discourse, a component of high quality discussions in which one conversant actively tries to elicit more talk or explanations from another by asking follow-up questions (McElhone, 2012; Wolf et al., 2005), allowed students to delve deeper into concepts by helping them to articulate their positions on issues related to texts and generate practical understanding about content area topics. Importantly, Laura did not explicitly instruct her students to engage in pressing discourse behaviors. Rather, as part of their participation in peer-only discussions, the students pressed one another during conversations about texts. In each of the following examples, students directed their conversations, independent of Laura, and used pressing as a discussion technique to co-construct meaning within the context of small group discussions.

Articulating positions about issues. Through pressing discourse behaviors, students articulated their positions about key issues related to texts. For example, in April, Laura and her students participated in a series of text-based discussions during which they considered whether or not animals should be kept in captivity. First, the class considered an image (see Figure 4.1) and watched a video. These texts acted as a focal point for the class debate, and students referred back to evidence from each source as they prepared their arguments. Second, students divided into three groups depending on their opinions: 11 voted yes to zoos, 3 voted no to zoos, and 2 were undecided. In these groups, students practiced forming position statements and prepared to debate their classmates. For the final part of the zoo talk lesson, one representative from the yes group and one from the no group presented an argument and a different group member offered a rebuttal. At the end of the presentation of arguments, Laura asked the undecided group to confer then make a deciding statement about
which side had the most convincing argument.

*Figure 4.1.* Image students used to discuss animal captivity.

During the zoo debate event, Nikki and Diamond discussed whether or not they believed animals should be kept in captivity. As the only undecided members in the class, they discussed both the pros and cons of zoos and had the task of deciding whether the yes or no group was more persuasive. Nikki's pressing questions helped Diamond finally decide her position as anti-zoo:

Nikki: Yeah but, I mainly think. I mainly think not because like I said, would you like to be in a cage?

Diamond: No.

Nikki: Would you like to get experimented on?

Diamond: No.

Nikki: Would you like to be questioned or to be tortured?

Diamond: No.
Nikki: Or anything like that that they're doing?

Diamond: No.

Nikki: So…

Diamond: For me, I don't want to be in a cage. I don't want to be. I just want to be free. Free like an animal. Like a flying bird or something.

Nikki: Yeah, but it's also good because like the video said, they make their homes look like the wilderness, but it's not the wilderness.

Diamond: It's just plastic trees! Plastic!

Nikki: Yeah, but what happens if the cheetah wants to go to another country? Or something like that? He can't because he realized that he's stuck in a cage. What are you gonna…Oh, I would get creeped out if I was being watched through a cage. Like for example, pretend I'm like a Siberian tiger and you're looking at me and I'll be like it'd be scary. (transcription, April 10, 2014)

After Nikki's questions, Diamond took a definitive position against zoos. Even when Nikki wavered back to considering how zoos might be positive, Diamond argued, "It's just plastic trees! Plastic!" (transcription, April 10, 2014). Nikki then returned to posing questions that supported the no side of the debate. Together, the girls decided animals should not be in captivity. As the girls discussed their positions on zoos, Nikki questioned Diamond four times in rapid succession. Diamond synthesized Nikki's questions into her own response showing how she used the pressing questions to make meaning (see Table 4.4). Likewise, when Nikki responded to Diamond, she began to use the first person and imagine captivity from the animal's perspective. Part of Nikki's response included the statement, "I would get creeped out if I was being watched through a cage" (transcription, April 10, 2014). Here, she
answered the question she posed earlier and built upon Diamond's comment, "Free like an animal" (transcription, April 10, 2014).

Table 4.4

Coordinating Nikki’s Questions and Diamond’s Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nikki’s Questions</th>
<th>Diamond's Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would you like to be in a cage?</td>
<td>For me, I don't want to be in a cage. I don't want to be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you like to get experimented on?</td>
<td>I just want to be free. Free like an animal. Like a flying bird or something.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Throughout this text-based discussion, Nikki and Diamond co-constructed meaning through pressing, which was significant because Nikki’s pressing questions helped Diamond articulate her thoughts clearly and deeply. Diamond was able to clearly articulate her position as anti-zoo in the debate based upon her synthesis of visual images, film, text, and pressing questions. Equally important, Nikki, a student who consistently demonstrated many reading strengths, described both sides of the argument clearly, then assumed a definitive position as anti-zoo as part of her experience in the conversation. Together, through pressing discourse, the girls helped one another construct meaning as they articulated their anti-zoo positions.

Students demonstrated a similar outcome when engaging in pressing discourse behaviors while discussing fictional texts. One illustrative event occurred during a book club meeting focused on *Bud, Not Buddy* (Curtis, 1999). Laura had given each student a question stem (e.g., Why do you think…?) and told them to prepare one question per person then
discuss their responses. She worked with other students at this time and was not present in
the group. The following exchange occurred toward the end of the group's session:

Diamond: I think he should go with him because he needed his help and if he needed
his help…

Mia: But why was it right?

Diamond: It was right because since the guy was going to do him a favor, he had to
do a favor back.

Alex: I think he should get in the car. I would get in the car because I was hungry at
that time, so I would get it. Plus, he had a car.

Nikki: What if he kills you?

Alex: Well, I'm trying to say what if he told you to get in the car and the man took
you to be rich? Think about it. The man came up…

Nikki: Well, what if he wants to hurt you?

Alex: Well, you ain't gonna know that, so that's why you got to try everything new.
(transcription, March 25, 2014)

In this excerpt, students quickly added to one another's comments and pressed others
for more information. Students responded to pressing discourse moves by thinking more
deeply about the text (see Table 4.5). For example, when Alex said he would get into the car,
Nikki asked two different questions which encouraged Alex to consider new thoughts. Also,
Mia, the facilitator of this portion of the discussion, pressed Diamond to give clarification of
her response by asking her to tell "why" Bud should get in the car. Through this conversation
students explored their assumptions about character motivation and made decisions about
their perceptions of the text. Even if their opinions did not change, students added to one
another's comments and consider different possibilities for interpreting the text in response to
their engagement in pressing discourse.

Table 4.5

*Pressing and Corresponding Comments in Talk about Character Motivation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instances of Pressing</th>
<th>Corresponding Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alex: Was it right?</td>
<td>Mia: I'm just saying was it right. Layla: I guess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia: But why was it right?</td>
<td>Diamond: It was right because since the guy was going to do him a favor, he had to do a favor back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikki: What if he kills you?</td>
<td>Alex: Well, I'm trying to say what if he told you to get in the car and the man took you to be rich? Think about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikki: Well, what if he wants to hurt you?</td>
<td>Alex: Well, you ain't gonna know that, so that's why you got to try everything new.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia: Layla?</td>
<td>Layla: I wouldn't go with him because rich people can sometimes be really evil.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Co-constructing understanding of real-world knowledge through pressing discourse.*

When students asked pressing questions in text-based discussions, they occasionally co-constructed understanding of real-world knowledge. In this study, real-world knowledge refers to how people encounter text-based concepts (e.g., the North Pole, government) in contexts outside of school. An illustrative example of students developing real-world understanding of content occurred when Layla and Jai worked together to read, discuss, and answer questions about the three branches of the United States federal
government. The girls engaged in the following in-depth conversation about practical applications of government:

Jai: Why do we have all the branches?
Layla: They need them to help the government to provide money for jobs.
Jai: Why don't they just have one big government?
Layla: A lot of people approve this stuff, and they need more people to approve the laws.
Jai: Why don't they just put all these people in one branch?
Layla: That could work, but we also need an executive branch and a judicial branch, if we're using just one. (transcription, April 1, 2014)

The girls' conversation progressed through several related topics, eventually returning to the role of president, which sparked a related conversation about careers:

Jai: If you were president, what laws would you make?
Layla: I know. Super Bowls can only be on Fridays because I've never been able to watch one.
Jai: Mine is so kids can have jobs and make money for themselves.
Layla: That's a great idea. (transcription, April 1, 2014)

Throughout this conversation, both girls participated as speakers and listeners and made comments or posed questions that progressed the conversation. For example, Layla's comment about computer use led to speculation about the president's activities. Similarly, Jai's questions prompted conceptual thinking about the government and society in ways that went beyond the questions included in the social studies text. As their talk evolved, both girls developed practical understanding of the federal government, as well as explored how this
knowledge might influence their own lives. They understood that jobs and the economy were related to laws and even considered their future employment opportunities.

Students arrived at these understandings by engaging in pressing discourse, which suggests that students’ opportunities to discuss a text builds students' real-world understanding as well as knowledge of the text itself. To clarify, when students pressed one another during discussions, they demonstrated sophisticated understanding of content area knowledge that extended beyond the concepts covered in the text. The social studies text did not mention the challenges the president faces in carrying out daily duties or how laws can result in job development. Nevertheless, the girls’ talk transitioned directly from law creation to employment opportunities, and much of their discussion was guided by Jai’s pressing questions, which yielded co-constructed meaning.

Theme 3: During Peer-Only Text-Based Discussions in this Classroom, Unsanctioned Talk Interrupted Students' Learning

During text-based discussions, students sometimes engaged in unsanctioned conversations that changed the nature of their talk and interrupted their learning. For the purposes of this study, unsanctioned talk refers to conversations that occurred when students were supposed to be engaged in text-based discussions. When Laura observed students participate in unsanctioned talk, she corrected their behavior by redirecting them or simply telling them to stop. However, Laura did not always know students were engaged in this type of talk as it typically occurred in peer-only groups. This observation is not a condemnation of Laura’s instruction because during all of my classroom visits, Laura was engaged with students for nearly every minute, yet given the nature of small group instruction, she was not
able to directly monitor each student at all times. Therefore, even when a teacher is diligent and purposeful about encouraging meaningful conversations about texts, students may engage in unsanctioned conversations.

Unsanctioned talk was reflected in the study in two major ways. First, unsanctioned talk occurred when students encountered difficulty with the text or the task. Understanding that students who had intentions of engaging in sanctioned talk deviated once the text became too difficult leads to significant insight for what might cause students to veer off-topic when engaging in peer-only conversations. Second, students silenced their peers by making unsanctioned comments (e.g., bullying, bragging, racist talk). Laura expected her students to talk about texts using respectful language and upholding her classroom rules. In the following sections, I will discuss the two areas in which unsanctioned conversations interrupted students' learning.

**Difficulty with texts and unsanctioned talk.** Sometimes when students encountered tasks or texts that were difficult for them to complete, they engaged in unsanctioned conversations in peer-only groups. Often when students participated in unsanctioned talk they appeared to be appropriately engaged as evidenced by their animated voices, hand gestures, postures, and proximity to the text. However, once students encountered difficulty with the text at the decoding or conceptual levels, their actions and comments reflected unsanctioned talk rather than progress toward lesson mastery.

I selected two instances of unsanctioned talk to describe how students shifted away from the learning objectives in peer-only groups. Both events shared common traits (see Table 4.6). In the powers of government discussion, the class had just completed a brief
review of the material in their textbook when Laura directed students to select a partner then create a flip book describing the powers of federal and state governments. Jai and Layla sat together in their usual spot at the corner by the computers near the wall and prepared to work on the assignment. The girls were not particularly enthusiastic about the text and related task, but they began talking immediately; however, they encountered difficulty when trying to complete the task. Instead of discussing the powers of the government, Jai initiated an unsanctioned conversation exploring the proverbial chicken or the egg debate:

Jai: What came first the chicken or the egg?

Layla: The chicken came first because dinosaurs are related to chickens.

Jai: How is that possible? (transcription, March 26, 2014)

Layla speculated that a dinosaur chicken got really big and laid an egg; then, she decided that a lizard and a chicken had an egg. At this point, Jai responded, "We can never answer the world's questions. You know that, right?" The girls continued to discuss the chicken and egg for several more minutes. They completed the assignment, but their work lacked depth and did not reflect understanding of the powers of government. For example, Jai and Layla wrote, "Judicial, executive, legislative all makes laws to help" as an example of powers belonging just to the states (artifact, March 26, 2014). From a distance, the girls appeared to be discussing the text and completing the task together; however, close analysis revealed that Jai and Layla's discussion was characterized by unsanctioned talk. Additionally, Jai and Layla’s finished product lacked depth and included inaccurate information, which demonstrates that despite their intention of participating in the discussion and creating a product together, the girls never completely understood the content, especially when compared to the work of
other students who did not have unsanctioned conversations while working on this task. Briana, Mia, and Rosa demonstrated a clear understanding of the powers unique to the national government and shared powers at the federal and state levels. Their discussion was focused on understanding the concept and did not deviate into other topics, and their work demonstrated proficiency.

A similar event occurred on March 26, 2014, when Laura put a biographical article about George Washington Carver on the document camera in her classroom. She asked the whole class questions about the image and any facts they might already know about him. After a few minutes, students separated into pairs to read a two-page story about George Washington Carver and answer related questions. Laura instructed them to discuss the text while they completed the assignment. During this time, Roman and Baltazar selected to work together, and I recorded their talk while they worked. Initially, the boys began to do the task as directed. They took turns reading and made occasional related comments. However, as they read, neither student could understand the words "agricultural" and "Tuskegee." Immediately after being unable to read the second word, unsanctioned talk began. For approximately 15 minutes, Roman and Baltazar appeared to continue working. Their heads were together as they lay on the floor. Their papers were in the appropriate places. Their voices were quietly animated. However, they were also engaging in unsanctioned talk:

Roman: Dude, look at Jai. [They laughed].

Baltazar: I got to cut my nails, man.

Roman: I already did, but I got this one. (transcription, March 26, 2014)
They continued talking about their nails. After a few more exchanges, Baltazar began to read the passage again; then, he read a question about agriculture. At this point, he said, "Dude, I don't know that," and Roman replied, "Blah, blah, blah" (transcription, March 26, 2014). They did not make any other attempts to return to the sanctioned task. Instead, they began to make random noises and talk about fighting and "cracking noses" (transcription, March 26, 2014). For the remainder of the conversation, Roman and Baltazar plotted how to steal back a lead pencil that a classmate took from Baltazar. When Laura finally gave a warning that time was over, Baltazar exclaimed, "We didn't even do nothing!" (transcription, March 26, 2014).

Roman and Baltazar intended to follow Laura's directions and discuss the text because when they first sat down together they discussed the expectations of the assignment and quickly began to work, yet when they encountered difficulty with the text, they began to have an unsanctioned conversation. During this time, they made fun of a classmate, talked about fighting and stealing, and used profanity. At times the boys seemed to know they should be getting back on task, such as when Baltazar asked, "So what do we do?" (transcription, March 26, 2014). However, the boys could not successfully return to the text about George Washington Carver.

When students began unsanctioned talk because of problems with texts, their progress stopped and no group members demonstrated dialogic participation. Neither Jai nor Layla understood the functions of government and could not use the text to support their understanding. Likewise, Roman and Baltazar could not successfully discuss the text when
they encountered difficulty at the decoding level. In Laura's class the combination of
difficulty with texts and unsanctioned talk interrupted learning.

Table 4.6

Summary of Traits in Representative Unsanctioned Talk Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Powers of Government</th>
<th>George Washington Carver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer-only</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using teacher-selected text</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Began with sanctioned task</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicated confusion related to topic</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty decoding text</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produced a final product</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Silencing others through unsanctioned talk. As some students participated in
unsanctioned conversations, their voices were silenced by their peers. At these times, one or
more students made comments that negatively influenced others' participation in group
discussions. Unsanctioned conversations involving peers silencing one another occurred in
various settings, but most often when Laura was not present. During data analysis, I
categorized unsanctioned conversations in which peers diminished others' voices in three
groups: bullying others, bragging, and making racist comments. By far, bullying occurred the
most often of these categories, and it was nearly always focused on Diamond. I observed Jai
being ignored and made fun of behind her back, but instances involving Diamond being
bullied occurred during many of my observations. Jai and Diamond mentioned being bullied
in their formal interview. When students engaged in bragging and making racists comments,
they did not appear to target specific students in the ways that Jai and Diamond were targeted during bullying; nevertheless, students silenced their peers during these activities. Bragging and making racist comments were isolated incidents, but the interruption on students’ learning was significant. In the following sections, I describe selected events that demonstrate how unsanctioned talk influenced the nature of students’ discussions.

**Bullying others.** Beginning with the first day of data collection and continuing throughout the study, I observed that Diamond was subjected to bullying (i.e., being ignored, rudeness, eye rolling, shunning). Notably, other students were aware of bullying in class, and three focal students mentioned bullying in their interviews when I asked about their experiences working in small groups in Laura's classroom. For example, when describing a discussion that did not go well, Nikki said, "We were like misbehaving….so we were reading and some girls were making fun of another girl. Lying saying that girl was making noises while another girl was reading. So it all started up a fight" (interview, April 16, 2014). She continued, "Everyone started yelling and everyone got in trouble and stuff" (interview, April 16, 2014).

During her interview, Diamond mentioned that she did not like participating in the *Bud, Not Buddy* (Curtis, 1999) book club because she felt like the other kids were picking on her and not listening to her. Diamond was frustrated that students would tell her to hurry up and acted like she did not do a good job when reading aloud. Because of these experiences, Diamond, who initially demonstrated the most excitement about the *Bud, Not Buddy* book and had prior knowledge of the content, felt like her experience with the text was
unsuccessful. Diamond believed that her classmates did not always listen to her during discussions.

The excerpts below, taken from transcriptions of two different book club meetings in March, illustrate ways bullying occurred during class. In the first event, Diamond's classmates engaged in unsanctioned talk when Nikki called her "stupid":

Diamond: Define if Bud will go home.
Mia: Define?
Alex: How will we define that?
Nikki: Like, I have no idea.
Mia: Define that? We just answered that question.
Alex: Define. What does define mean again?
Nikki: Like tell what it means.
Alex: Like draw conclusions, right?
Mia: The question that she asked, I just said that.
Nikki: Yeah, cause she's stupid. (transcription, March 25, 2014)

In an excerpt from the following day, Alex and Mia chastised Diamond, and Layla told them to stop:

Alex and Mia: Be quiet! [to Diamond]
Mia: Let Layla read!
Layla: Listen guys, Diamond isn't saying anything.
Alex: Yes, she is!
Layla: No, she isn't. She isn't doing anything.
Mia: Yes, she is. (transcription, March 26, 2014)

At this point, Mia and Alex began to berate Layla for not being prepared for the book club meeting. The students started to yell at one another, drawing Laura’s attention to the group. Laura left the group she was working with to monitor the *Bud, Not Buddy* group more closely. When Laura reflected upon the transcription from this text-based discussion, she highlighted three lines and wrote comments describing the talk (see Table 4.7).

Table 4.7

*Bullying in Book Club*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription</th>
<th>Laura's Written Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alex: Can we get back to the discussion? Y'all can talk about that later.</td>
<td>trying to get back on topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex and Mia tell Diamond to be quiet and let Layla read.</td>
<td>rude to Diamond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layla: Listen guys, Diamond isn't doing anything.</td>
<td>trying to defend Diamond/fix it, but then Alex &amp; Mia are rude to Layla</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In these examples from the *Bud, Not Buddy* book club, students participated in unsanctioned talk that resulted in bullying behaviors. Diamond experienced bullying as the primary target, and students acted aggressively toward Layla after she tried to stop the mean comments directed at Diamond. In both instances, students were in small groups without Laura, which suggests they knew she would not condone these comments or behaviors. Nevertheless, bullying occurred in Laura’s classroom and was often targeted at one particular
student. As indicated in the first book club excerpt, Diamond's participation changed when students talked over her, then Nikki called her "stupid." On the second day, after Alex and Mia raised their voices at her, Diamond did not speak again until Laura came to the group. Also, Layla was almost in tears after the group directed negative attention toward her when she tried to defend Diamond. Neither Layla nor Diamond appeared to have any interest in the remainder of the day's discussion, even when Laura joined the group. Not only did Layla and Diamond's participation change, but the bullies' participation changed as well. The other students engaged in unsanctioned talk instead of developing their own learning to the detriment of their peers' well-being. Therefore, when students engaged in bullying, no one's learning progressed because the nature of the discussion changed from productive to negative.

In addition to data gathered from observations and interviews, Laura's reflection on this event offered significant insights into how students diminish others' voices through bullying; she wrote:

I work hard to model positive cooperation with all, and I am appalled by the lack of focus and rudeness from some members of this group. (reflection, April 25, 2014)

Laura commented upon the "power struggle" in the group (reflection, April 25, 2014). She added, "The purpose of allowing them to work on their own is to be leaders but not in a way that is demeaning and uncooperative with the other members of the team" (reflection, April 25, 2014). Laura recognized that students needed to continue to work together in groups and planned to consider ways of holding students accountable for their participation. Laura's comments reflect her struggle with unsanctioned talk and group dynamics in text-based
discussions. Laura was aware that removing opportunities for group interaction would not solve the problem, and she remained open to exploring ways to correct the serious issue of bullying in her classroom. Students knew, as evidenced from their interviews and Layla's actions in the group, that bullying was happening and was not acceptable. However, even in this diverse classroom bullying occurred, largely in the form of unsanctioned talk, and interrupted students' discussions and learning.

**Bragging.** A second way in which one student was silenced by another occurred during a single, critical incident when Alex was bragging about his abilities during the zoo debate, previously described in this chapter. At this time, Alex and Roman represented the yes group. Alex often acted as an expert during text-based discussions. He provided support for his responses, connected cross-curricular ideas, and spoke with confidence. His responses during the zoo debate were no exception. During the small group portion of this activity, Alex was animated and talked quickly. He dominated his group's planning time offering several examples that supported an overall thesis of removing animals from the natural world will harm humans. Roman was able to contribute a few comments to his group's planning time, and he listened attentively, nodding his head in agreement much of the time.

When it was time for students to begin the formal debate phase, Alex and Roman walked to the front of the room. Laura gave each student one minute to speak. Roman began his opening statement slowly and with hesitation. He said, "I think there should be no zoos because one day about what about an animal gets upset like imagine a lion gets escaped and it could cause lot of damage to people and…” (field notes, April 10, 2014). At this point, Alex, who had been sitting with arm casually draped around Roman's shoulders said, "I'm
going to rock this speech" (field notes, April 10, 2014). Once Alex spoke, Roman stopped talking and leaned forward with his elbows on his lap and remained slouched until time ended. When it was Alex's turn for the rebuttal, he confidently argued:

I think we shouldn't have zoos. Think about the food chain. The food chain goes the little bird eats the plants. And say if an animal reacts to a bad touch and they get lonely and their mind they will attack and the zoo gets sued and they won't have enough money to provide for the animals. A lot of people like the new gator bag or zebra coat that came out. Think about it if the animals. You can't keep them trapped in cages all their lives. If you do that, then the animals don't have no purpose in life. So treat others the way we want to be treated. That's all I have to say. (field notes, April 10, 2014)

During the zoo debate, Alex's interruption derailed Roman's contribution to the discussion. Roman's posture changed abruptly, and he immediately stopped talking. This event reflected the same practice that happened in the small group debate preparation talk when Alex's interruptions stopped Roman's contributions. Roman's talk during the discussion and the debate itself were influenced by his interactions with Alex. In contrast, Alex's experience was quite different. In his interview, Alex referred to this event as his "greatest discussion." He continued:

I think I sounded like a lawyer. I felt good about myself when I expressed myself right then. You know, I pulled out the best of Alex. I didn't pull out the class clown Alex. I pulled out the real Alex. (interview, April 16, 2014)

Roman did not describe the zoo talk as his greatest discussion, and when I asked him to describe a discussion that did not go well, he asked to skip that question. The debate event stood out as a strong, positive discussion experience for Alex, but Roman did not consider this discussion his most successful. In fact, Alex's unsanctioned comment during the debate changed the course of Roman's participation in the group discussion, as noted when he
abruptly stopped speaking in mid-sentence, and interrupted his progression toward demonstrating mastery of the lesson.

**Making racist comments.** The final way that peers silenced one another during unsanctioned talk happened when students made racist comments during peer-only groups. Students made racist comments during a few isolated incidents; nevertheless, students' learning was interrupted by this form of unsanctioned talk. One particular conversation happened during the social studies lesson in which Laura asked students to discuss the *pros* and *cons* of immigration and create a flipbook documenting their thoughts. Students formed small groups and dispersed throughout the classroom. Two groups sat at the kidney-shaped table in the middle of the room. Roman and his partner sat near Mia, Briana, and Rosa, who were together. The two groups talked primarily among themselves at first, but eventually they began to talk between groups. As they worked on the *cons* side of the flip books, students initially began with text-based reasons such as language barriers and difficulties in school. Their discussion was inclusive and focused. For example, Rosa said she was born in Mexico, and Mia and Roman were born in a nearby city. Mia added a personal story about her dad being afraid to hold her when she was an infant. At this point, Roman suggested adding two more *cons*. The conversation quickly turned:

Briana: I know another bad one because when you go places you have to wait in line because they’re too slow.

Mia: On Black Friday, my dad said the same thing. Just like a damn Mexican.

Briana: Why are you talking like that? (field notes, April 9, 2014)

At this point Roman and Rosa, both Hispanic, stopped participating in the discussion. They
both looked down for a few moments. Neither student responded to Mia's comment. Instead of continuing to work with the larger group, Roman asked Laura for help with the cons. During the whole group discussion that followed the small group pros and cons talk, none of the students mentioned the racist comment. Also, in Mia, Rosa, and Briana's final product, they described the cons using the following text, "It is very crowded and there is not enough room where you live at because of so many people. When you [go] places you will have to wait in long lines" (artifact, April 9, 2014). The racist nature of Mia's comments and the silenced voices of the Hispanic group members were not represented in their flipbook, yet Mia's unsanctioned comment clearly silenced Rosa and Roman and influenced the nature of their participation in the immigration discussion. The discrepancy between the talk and the product suggests that work students gave Laura did not always reflect the true nature of their discussions. The students’ written text represented information from their texts, yet it did not demonstrate their unsanctioned talk. Once again, students appeared to be participating in discussions appropriately, but closer observation revealed that unsanctioned talk influenced the nature of their conversations and interrupted learning for some students.

Even when topics are focused and expected behaviors well-established, students may still engage in bullying, bragging, and making racist comments. These examples of unsanctioned comments were purposefully selected to illustrate the complexities of text-based discussions, especially in peer-only groups, rather than to be admonishments for Laura and her students. Overall, unsanctioned talk occurring without the teacher's knowledge has the potential to silence students and interrupt their learning. Diamond addressed this issue with me directly, and Jai hinted at it in her interview; however, to my knowledge, Layla,
Rosa, and Roman never mentioned these issues. Yet, all of these students were silenced by their peers through unsanctioned talk. From a sociocultural perspective, the nature of this silence becomes particularly troubling because, as seen in the first two themes in this study, students can successfully participate in dialogic text-based discussions, yet unsanctioned talk interrupts learning.

**How Do Students Exhibit Identity through Discussion in their Fifth Grade Language Arts Classroom?**

The fourth theme explains how students explored their personal identities during text-based discussions. Specifically, students considered their identities related to gender, race, and socio-economic status. In the following sections, I explain how students exhibited identity through text-based discussions as I describe this theme and related subthemes.

**Theme 4: Students Explored their Personal Identities in Text-Based Discussions**

The importance of personal identities provides crucial insight into the larger question of how students exhibit identity through text-based discussions. Students' personal identities and related ideological beliefs were a vital part of their participation in text-based discussions. Students brought their perceptions of gender, race, and SES into the classroom community and explored these aspects of their identities through group talk (see Figure 4.2).
Gender. Students discussed gender in single- and mixed-sex groups, and Laura frequently encouraged students to think about gender roles in texts. An exemplar occasion occurred when Laura asked the whole class, "How would the Statue of Liberty be different if it had been of a man?" (field notes, April 9, 2014). Diamond said, "[The Statue of Liberty] would wear pants and her hair would be cut" (field notes, April 9, 2014). Layla agreed saying, "I think I would change it like Diamond said, but the crown and the dress would be changed to [red, white, and blue]" (field notes, April 9, 2014). At this point, Alex jumped in and said, "I would make it a combined female and male like girl hair" (field notes, April 9, 2014). Because most of the students laughed at Alex's comment, Laura interceded and restated his ideas as follows:

Laura: You wouldn't be able to tell if it was a male or a female.
Alex: Yeah.

Laura: It could stand for women and for men.

Alex: Yeah. (field notes, April 9, 2014)

In this situation, Alex showed a deep understanding that American symbols should represent all of its citizens. However, in other conversations, Alex exhibited an opposing perspective as seen during a whole class discussion about segregating schools by gender (see Figure 4.3 for sample texts). Alex believed children should be separated because "boys are used to how boys feel" (field notes, April 23, 2014). Alex argued that separate experiences would allow boys to opportunities to experience events for themselves, which would allow boys and girls "to relate to each other" (field notes, April 23, 2014).

Later, during a peer-only group, Alex, Julio, and Roman discussed an article related to gender equity in education. At this time, the three boys had an extended conversation in which they explored their gender identities. Alex maintained that girls and boys should be separated because it would be "fun" (transcription, April 23, 2014), and Roman and Julio disagreed. For Roman and Julio, going to school was closely linked with marriage and family, and finding a wife was important. Alex never even considered the possibility of a wife in this discussion. He asked, "What are you talking about? Who are you supposed to meet?" (transcription, April 23, 2014). Roman and Julio's comments stressed the importance of being able to work with girls. In class, Roman in particular, would often work near and talk to girls, as part of his normal learning. Julio argued that separating boys and girls was "not going to be fun," and they both worried that boys would become too violent without girls present (transcription, April 23, 2014). Interestingly, both Roman and Julio, who would
eventually like wives, thought "it would be disrespectful to hit a girl" (transcription, April 23, 2014). However, Alex was adamant that it would be appropriate to hit a girl back. He separated himself from Roman and Julio by claiming, "Y’all can be all nice if y’all want, but I'm going to be stinky. I’m gonna be real mean…If a girl hits you, it's self defense" (transcription, April 23, 2014). Eventually, Julio said, "Yeah, you're probably not going to end up having a wife!" (transcription, April 23, 2014). Their conversation continued several minutes after this point, at which time Roman and Julio were adamant that they have separate responses for Laura because they wanted it to be clear that they did not want boys and girls to be educated separately. Julio told Alex, "Wait, put what you think, then put ours. That way you can put both of our opinions" (transcription, April 23, 2014). All three boys used their perceptions of gender and their own identities as a way to anchor their participation in the discussion. At the same time, they demonstrated an exploration of their thoughts about gender identity based upon a peer's alternate perspectives (i.e., Roman and Julio compared girls to cats; called themselves "big men").
These students' perceptions of gender and their participation in discussions about texts provided a way for them to explore their personal identities. Alex seemed to struggle with balancing the belief that women and men should be treated equally with a desire to have some separation from girls. On the other hand, Roman and Julio wanted contact with females at school and home, indicating different perceptions about gender. However, the boys did entertain Alex's perspective by comparing girls to cats and boys to dogs later in the discussion. All three boys explored their perceptions of gender through their discussion, yet they maintained their original beliefs. The boys' discussion suggests students' original perceptions of gender may be difficult to change even after participating in talk through which they explored gender identity.

**Race.** Issues of race were frequently discussed in this study. Sometimes Laura initiated these conversations with open-ended questions, such as when she asked the book
club group reading *Zora and Me* (Bond & Simon, 2010), "Is it hypocritical to talk about race at the kitchen table, but be friendly to everyone out on the street?" (field notes, April 29, 2014). Or asked them, "What does it mean to be White? What does it mean to be Black?" (field notes, April 28, 2014). These questions sparked interest from the students, but they seemed to have difficulty articulating answers to these complex questions. However, when Laura asked a small group of students reading *Star in the Forest* (Resau, 2012), "Why does it say here, 'Every once in a while you do see a brown skinned model?' What do most models look like?" (transcription, February 25, 2014). Students were able to engage in a discussion and articulate their ideas as described in the following excerpt:

Nikki: Like usually in most magazines, you may only see like non-colored models.

Laura: Okay, so one type of beautiful. By non-colored, you would say somebody with light skin.

Nikki: Yeah.

Laura: What did you want to add, Diamond?

Diamond: Like you hardly see like no offense but. Well you hardly see, no offense, Mrs. Carter, but like Julio's color, my color, Jai's color, Briana's, Roman's. (transcription, February 25, 2014)

In the above excerpt, both Nikki and Diamond use their perceptions of race as a way of exploring their thoughts about racial identity. Initially, Nikki commented about "non-colored" models. She identified the models in terms of characteristics they did not have instead of ones that they do. Even though Nikki identified as White, her language suggested some separation between her and the models. Diamond, on the other hand, connected the lack of Black and Hispanic models in mainstream magazines to the other students. She
named five students at the table, including her, when describing how racial minorities were not represented as models. By asking the students what they thought was beautiful, Laura opened the talk back up to encourage students to explore their own racial identities. Interestingly, Diamond and Nikki thought Laura represented beauty, who then reminded students there are "different ways to show beauty." This discussion illustrates the openness with which Laura and her students discussed issues of race in class. Students were not confrontational with one another when Laura was present; rather, they approached these conversations with an apparently sincere desire to explore this aspect of identity.

Talk about racial identity sometimes became intense, as when students explored their racial identities as part of their participation in a peer-only meeting of the Bud, Not Buddy book club. Nikki, Diamond, Alex, Mia, and Layla had a discussion about whether or not Bud, the main character, should have gotten into the car with a White stranger. Excerpts from this extended discussion are included below:

Alex: It's natural instinct. If somebody's Black, and I'm not trying to be racist or nothing, but if somebody's a Black man, and a White little kid and somebody give it to him and somebody gives him a red pop, in my opinion, the first instinct is to run away because the man might be a crazy dude…A Black person's first instinct I think is to run away.

Mia: Yeah.

Alex: So, it's really Bud's fault because he should have run away and get out of there because he said, "I'll give you the bottle, and you can go about your business."

Nikki: I'm not Black, but I understand where you're coming from.

Alex: Yeah, I can see. I'm not trying to be racist or nothing, but a Black person would have taken off.
Layla: I think who knows? The guy may not have food inside, he may be trapping him, he could be a guy from the home who wants to take him back. He could be a guy from the home.

Alex: …and he knew about me, but he's a White dude, though. He's a White man telling a guy that, well he told Buddy, I'll give you a red pop and a sandwich.

Nikki: There's a White person here.

Layla: Nikki! (transcription, March 25, 2014)

In the previous excerpt, students shared their perspectives about race and revealed their own racial identities in the process. All of the students viewed taking food or getting in the car with a strange man as dangerous. However, Alex and Mia view the danger as stemming from racial identity whereas Layla thought the man might be dangerous because he could be an authority figure from Bud's orphanage. She did not associate the danger with racial profiling or racial harassment like Alex and Mia did. Also, Layla seemed shocked when Nikki told Alex, "There's a White person here" (transcription, March 25, 2014). The two girls briefly talked about how White they were, with Nikki saying, "I'm full White" (transcription, March 25, 2014). Layla replied, "Yeah, I'm all White. I'm not even a little bit not White" (transcription, March 25, 2014). Nikki appeared to be trying to understand what Alex was saying and to see it from his perspective, but when she clearly felt the need to assert her White identity and remind Alex that she was sitting there in the group. Layla appeared to feel uncomfortable with this strand in the conversation. In fact, she never used the word Black at all, and she only used White when speaking quietly to Nikki.

Alex explored his identity as a Black male to discuss the characters' motivations and to think about what the experience of a having a White man pull up next to a Black male in
the middle of the night and tell him to get inside for a snack might actually be like. In Alex's own words, he "[wasn’t] trying to be racist or nothing" (transcription, March 25, 2014). Rather, he was sharing his perceptive of race and exploring what decisions he might make in a similar situation. His comment was much like Diamond's "No offense" in the excerpt about models earlier in this section. Both students tempered comments that might assert their racial identities. However, Nikki and Layla did not make similar comments when exploring their White identities.

Much like when students explored gender identity, discussions of race did not dramatically change students' perspectives. For example, Nikki listened to Alex's comments, yet she still commented that she was "full White" (transcription, March 25, 2014). Nevertheless, these conversations about race were significant because they allowed students to explore their racial identities and find ways to articulate their thoughts about race. Laura's students consistently engaged in discussions about race, which provided many opportunities for students to explore their racial identities and listen as others did the same.

**Socio-economic status.** Students did not discuss SES as often as gender and race, yet they did engage in talk that explored their socio-economic identities. One way that students explored their socio-economic identities was to define separation between themselves and others, usually people outside of the class (e.g., characters in books, political leaders). Laura's students often referred to "rich people" in ways that clearly suggested they did not share that identity. When discussing *Zora and Me* (Simon & Bond, 2011), Alex said, "A lot of rich people get away with stuff." He also mentioned that "rich people can pay money at court, but poor people can’t" (field notes, April 29, 2014). In this text, the rich person was White, and
the poor people were Black. Julio also brought up "rich people" when he and Alex were discussing immigration. Julio and Alex participated in the following exchange:

Julio: Ooo, if they a good thing is like you know how the rich people work in construction. So a lot of people work.

Alex: So more workers.

Julio: Yeah, so more workers, and if they get deported, nobody's going to be able to work. Cause all the rich people are the bosses. (transcription, April 9, 2014)

Alex's and Julio's comments demonstrate how socio-economic and racial identities are sometimes related. Julio's comment about "rich people" had racial undertones, just as Alex's did in the Zora and Me book club (transcription, April 9, 2014). Julio perceived "rich people" as those working in construction and also people in danger of being deported. Both boys equated money with status, as well as racial relationships. Alex's racial identity as a Black male informed his understanding of how SES influenced the interactions of the characters in the text, as well as his observations about the judicial system. Julio's comments about SES were directly related to his racial identity as a Hispanic male. He clearly viewed construction as a good job and saw the deportation of workers as a threat to those in power. Race and SES were closely related in the students' talk about texts.

In addition to race and SES, students also discussed families and SES. Laura asked students to think about the relationship between family and money as part of their social studies unit on family. She wrote family, education, love, and money on the board then asked students to rank them in order of importance. Alex quickly said, "I'm going for the money, not for the love" (field notes, April 28, 2014). Laura encouraged students to think of what was important to them and not consider how other students might order these concepts. After
a couple of minutes, students began to share their responses. Julio believed the concepts were already in order, and he placed family first and money last. Jai ordered the list as: family, love, money, and education. She did not elaborate, and others students did not comment. However, Alex caused uproar in the class when he said, "I have education, money, love, and family" (field notes, April 28, 2014). Students told him family should come first. Alex replied, "In my future, money comes first." He argued that you need education in order to get money, and he continued, "A lot of time these days, families don’t care about their families. You don't have time to talk to your mom and dad when you're trying to make money. They might try to get in your life" (field notes, April 28, 2014). In response to Alex, Layla said, "I put money last because mostly family means the most to you because if you didn’t have a family you wouldn't be here" (field notes, April 28, 2014). After other students shared their thoughts about the importance of family, Alex jokingly said, "I'm about to cry" and said he would change his list (field notes, April 28, 2014).

The class' conversation about family and money demonstrates how students understood the place of money in their own lives. Most students in the class believed money was not as much of a priority as family, love, and education. However, Alex clearly thought money was more important. As described earlier, he was quick to mention the power of being "rich," in the Zora and Me book club excerpt. Given these examples and others, the desire to have money was an important part of Alex's identity, and his comments in discussion were influenced by this part of his identity. Similarly, Julio's placement of family first and money supports his comments throughout the study about the value he places on the family unit. Julio's comments about "rich people" and his acknowledgment that money is
important are connected to ways to provide for a family, which were different from Alex's desire to earn money for material gain. Regardless of how students perceived money, they explored their personal identities through talk that asked them to consider issues related to SES.

Sometimes students' talk about SES was directly related to their own experiences, and they shared their perspectives of poverty with one another as part of their participation in discussion. One illustrative event occurred during a peer-only discussion of *Bud, Not Buddy* (Curtis, 1999) when Nikki shared with the group that her cousin received $300 for her birthday, yet Nikki did not have enough food to eat at home as described in the following transcription:

Alex: That joker's rich.

Briana: I only got $100 on my birthday.

Nikki: And I got up and told her that she needed to be happy because people like me. If you go in my house and check my cabinet, there's nothing but beans. And I don't eat beans.

Layla: You have beans?

Nikki: I have to go to my aunt's to eat there, so she needs to be thankful cause she has a bike, and she has TVs, and video games and stuff like that. She needs to be happy on what she gets because there are some people like me who can't get stuff like that.

Diamond: Your cousin is rich.

Nikki: She's a little brat. She needs to be happy with what she's got.

Alex: Preach it, girl! Preach it! (transcription, March 26, 2014)

In this excerpt, Nikki shared her experiences with her cousin that she views as "rich" and described her own struggles with poverty. The students in the book club supported Nikki as
she expressed frustration at her cousin's getting $300 for her birthday. As Nikki's voice grew louder and shook with anger, she shared with the group that she did not have enough food to eat at home. Nikki’s comments created separation between herself and her cousin, and interestingly, other students in the group joined Nikki in distancing themselves from her "rich" cousin. Both Alex and Diamond commented Nikki’s cousin was rich, and Briana compared her own birthday money to Nikki’s cousin's and found it to be lacking, as evidenced by her use of the word "only" and her tone when speaking (transcription, March 26, 2014). Only Layla, who is friends with Nikki, did not make a statement that created separation between herself and Nikki’s cousin; rather, her comment focused on Nikki’s lack of food at home. She seemed surprised by this revelation, and asked, "You have beans?" (transcript, March 26, 2014). Alex encouraged Nikki with an emphatic, "Preach it, girl! Preach it!" as she neared the end of her talk (transcription, March 26, 2014).

This discussion illustrates how students joined their collective socio-economic identities against Nikki’s cousin and saw her as distinct from themselves. Throughout this excerpt the students united against Nikki's cousin and explored their personal identities related to SES. These students viewed "rich" people as spoiled and separate from themselves, and their discussion of the text led them to a real conversation about a classmate's intimate relationship with poverty.

Overall, as students' explored their socio-economic identities they appeared to experience less identity conflict compared to other types of identity (i.e., gender, race). As they explored their identities related to SES, students' conflicts were usually with those outside of the group (e.g., book characters, politicians), instead of within the group as during
discussions of race and gender. This difference may have been because students discussed race in multi-racial groups and demonstrated differing perspectives of gender; whereas, the instances of poverty in the community and school were high. During text-based discussions, students positioned themselves as separate from the "rich" people in texts (Zora and Me book club) and real life (i.e., Nikki's cousin). Additionally, most students valued family, love, and education over money. Even when Alex placed money at the top of his list, other students' convinced him to change his mind. Over the course of the study, when students shared their personal experiences related to poverty, their classmates often nodded in support or made comments similar to when Alex said "Preach it, girl! Preach it!" (transcription, March 26, 2014). Students' actions and comments demonstrated unity as they separated themselves from "rich" people and supported one another's perspectives when discussing their socio-economic identities.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 included the findings for this study and answered the research questions about what happens during text-based discussions and how students exhibit identity during their conversations about texts. I concluded that student talk became more dialogic when the teacher incorporated texts about social issues and scaffolded student talk. Additionally, students created opportunities to co-construct meaning by assuming assertive stances, incorporating media references into their talk, and pressing one another for more information. Unsanctioned talk was also a factor in students' conversations about texts. Finally, personal identities influenced their participation in text-based discussions. In Chapter 5, I discuss these findings in relation to existing research and implications for practice and future research.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

"I am a part of all that I have met" (Tennyson, 1883).

Introduction to the Chapter

The purpose of the present study was to investigate text-based discussions in a fifth grade language arts classroom. My interest in discussion was two-fold. First, research suggests that classroom discussions continue to operate at the recitation end of the continuum (Alexander, 2006). Second, while most students experience limited opportunities to engage in text-based discussions, traditionally marginalized—racially diverse, low SES, and lower-tracked—students experience significantly fewer dialogic interactions than their higher-tracked peers (Applebee et al., 2003; Gritter, 2012). I was particularly interested in investigating how a teacher can encourage opportunities for dialogic talk, especially in the context of a racially diverse, lower-tracked classroom. As a result, I designed an instrumental case study investigating text-based discussions in Laura's fifth grade classroom.

This study includes five chapters. The statement of the problem and significance of the study are the foundation of Chapter 1. A review of literature related to the text-based discussion practices is included in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and describes the qualities of the case. Each of the four themes resulting from data analysis is described in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, I summarize the present research study and situate the findings within existing research on discussions in language arts classrooms. Also, I discuss the implications of the findings on policy, practice, and research and close with my final thoughts about the study.
Summary of Methodology

Case study methodology allowed me to capture the nuances of interpersonal communication in a naturalistic environment. For this study, the case was bound to Laura and her students over a period of approximately three months. I purposefully selected Laura as the teacher participant because of her dedication to planning dialogic opportunities for her students using a variety of linguistic and visual texts. Laura's students were part of a racially diverse, lower-tracked classroom in a Title I school. Throughout the study, I gathered data sources consistent with qualitative research (i.e., field notes, artifacts, interviews, audio recordings). All data were analyzed using constant comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and eventually collapsed into four themes which answer the two guiding research questions:

1) In a racially diverse, lower-tracked fifth grade classroom, what happens when a teacher and her students participate in text-based discussions?
2) How do students exhibit identity through discussion in their fifth grade language arts classroom?

Summary of Findings

All data were collapsed into four themes, which I summarize below. The first theme focuses on how the teacher's choices influenced students’ discussions. The remaining three themes explain how students co-constructed meaning, engaged in unsanctioned talk, and explored their identities related to race, gender, and SES.
**Theme 1: The Classroom Teacher's Intentional Pedagogical Decisions Increased Dialogic Talk**

Laura's approach to scaffolding and selection of texts about social issues created opportunities for students to actively participate in text-based discussions. Laura scaffolded students' talk by either eliciting a personal response or redirecting their attention to the text. Importantly, when Laura's participation was also decentered (i.e., responsibility of community work was equally shared; Lave & Wenger, 1991), students' conversations showed more dialogic qualities compared to other scaffolding events. Laura purposefully selected texts that would generate discussions, and students' conversations exhibited more dialogic qualities when they read texts about social issues (e.g., racism, poverty). Moreover, students made sense of global issues and personal trauma through discussions related to texts about social issues.

**Theme 2: Students Created their own Opportunities to Co-construct Meaning in Discussions**

The students in Laura's classroom created their own opportunities to co-construct meaning during text-based discussions. Sometimes, students assumed assertive stances as part of the meaning construction process. During these times, students challenged a peer, an expert classmate, or their teacher. Also, students frequently incorporated media references into their talk as part of the meaning making process. Media references were used to build background knowledge, support ideas, and refocus conversations. Finally, students engaged in pressing discourse (e.g., asking follow-up questions, asking for clarification) which resulted in opportunities to co-construct meaning.
Theme 3. During Peer-Only Text-Based Discussions in this Classroom, Unsanctioned Talk Interrupted Students' Learning

Students' learning was interrupted by unsanctioned talk. Students engaged in talk that was not aligned with Laura's expectations for discussions when students encountered difficulty with a text at either the decoding or conceptual levels. Also, students silenced their peers through unsanctioned talk by bullying, bragging, and making racist comments.

Theme 4. Students Explored their Personal Identities in Text-Based Discussions

Laura's students openly explored complex identity issues in whole and small group settings as part of their participation in text-based discussions. At these times, students explored their personal identities related to gender, race, and SES.

Discussion

The findings from this study support existing research that highlights the importance of encouraging dialogic talk during literacy instruction (e.g., Aukerman, 2007; McIntyre et al., 2006; Wiseman, 2011). When students in Laura's classroom showed evidence of dialogic behaviors during discussions, they were actively engaged and co-constructed meaning with their peers. In addition, I observed that Laura's students freely explored their personal relationships with poverty, racism, and gender issues as part of their text-based discussions. During these conversations, students considered their perspectives related to race, gender, and socio-economic status. For example, Nikki and Layla discussed their percentage of whiteness as part of a peer-only conversation about racial tension in Bud, Not Buddy (Curtis, 1999). Observing students engage in talk that explores identity constructs affords researchers
and educators the opportunity to understand how children perceive themselves and their communities.

Additionally, the findings from this study suggest students engage in unsanctioned talk during peer-only discussions. In particular, Laura's students were more likely to demonstrate unsanctioned talk when the text or concepts were difficult for them to understand. Even when a teacher has the intent to encourage discussions, students may engage in silencing behaviors such as bullying or making a racist comment. The unintended consequences of providing students the opportunity to control conversations were the silencing and isolation of others demonstrated through social positioning (e.g., Christianakis, 2010; Moller, 2004). In particular, students in Laura's classroom bullied Diamond who continued to participate in discussions despite feeling alienated by her classmates. Laura also observed that students bullied Diamond, yet she was unable to completely stop these behaviors.

Researchers have recognized that children may engage in undesirable behavior during classroom discussions (e.g., Elizabeth et al., 2012; Lensmire, 1994, 2000; Snell, 2013), yet the field has not adequately addressed how to help teachers prevent bullying and unsanctioned talk. As a research community literacy scholars should evaluate ways to help teachers address unsanctioned talk that is harmful. Laura was aware that students engaged in bullying behaviors toward Diamond in whole group discussions and intervened when she observed bulling. However, Laura did not understand the extent that bullying occurred during peer-only discussions. Further research is necessary to understand why bullying occurs
during discussions and how teachers and students can co-create a context for learning that enhances interactions without isolating some students.

This study connects to literacy research that acknowledges ways identities influence participation in classroom discussions and illustrates challenges associated with unsanctioned talk. For example, Laura's instructional decisions and text selections yielded increased dialogic talk with her students, which validate existing findings on classroom discussion practices. However, students engaged in social positioning along with bullying and other silencing behaviors. In the following sections, I return to the themes evident in the literature— influences of teachers, students, and texts—and discuss the current findings in relation to extant research.

**Connecting Findings to Previous Research**

The findings from this study support all three major categories of existing research on discussions— influences of teachers, students, and texts. Additionally, this study supports extant research investigating how students exhibit identity during classroom discourse. In the following sections, I discuss the findings from the present study in relation to the themes of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

**Influences of Teachers**

Overwhelmingly, researchers agree that teachers influence the nature of classroom talk. In this study and others about classroom discussion (e.g., Almasi et al., 2001; Aukerman, 2007, 2012; McIntyre et al., 2006), students' conversations were more dialogic when their teacher supported talk rather than directed it in an I-R-E format (Mehan, 1979, 1982; Cazden, 1988). The current findings support Kucan and her colleagues (2011) who
suggested discussions become more dialogic when teachers implement contingent discourse by responding to students and adapting practices as discussions unfold, much like practices exhibited during instructional conversations (Goldenberg & Patthey-Chavez, 1995). I agree that the concept of instructional conversations correlates with contingent discourse. In the present study, Laura practiced contingent discourse by attending to students' needs as they became evident then relinquishing authority back to the students. Also, when students made media references and refocused conversations as part of their meaning making process, Laura did not appear to view these connections as disruptions. Rather, she adopted a stance consistent with contingent discourse and accepted students' contributions as part of the discussions, while redirecting students back to the text as needed (Kucan et al., 2011). This finding supports existing assertions about contingent discourse practices and suggests teachers should adapt instruction to the needs of students during discussions (Goldenberg & Patthey-Chavez, 1995; Kucan et al., 2011).

Researchers suggest that teachers should use discussion protocols to improve talk practices (e.g., Beck et al., 1996; Chinn et al., 2001; Palincsar & Brown, 1984), yet Laura did not implement discussion guides or formats in conversations about texts. However, she did loosely follow accountable talk procedures (Michael et al., 2008) and was knowledgeable about this approach to discussion, as evidenced by her comments to me, her instructional posters, and her actions. Laura established expectations and provided time for students to discuss texts (Michael et al., 2008), but she rarely provided explicit modeling for how peer-only discussions should occur. I agree with Michaels and colleagues (2008) that students also need modeling for discussion practices. Further, I argue that some of the unsanctioned talk
events could have been eliminated had more modeling occurred. Laura provided a classroom culture with established norms for interacting (McIntyre et al., 2006; Sipe, 1999), but explicit, procedural instructions for discussions were not a common practice. The findings suggest that the classroom environment, as well as Laura's expectations and scaffolding, nurtured dialogic talk, yet students may also need continued procedural instructions for peer-only, small group discussions.

**Influences of Students**

The results from this study continue to support existing data by revealing ways that students negotiate social positions through their participation in classroom discussions. As they discussed texts in whole and small groups, sometimes students demonstrated peripheral participation as evidenced by physical distance from the group or monologic talk. Wenger (1988) suggested members of a community of practice may need to assume an assertive stance in order to gain entrée into the shared work of the community. My findings demonstrate that students changed their status and the nature of their talk by assuming an assertive stance. For example, Diamond challenged Alex by insisting they use the dictionary to look up the term *jagged*. After her assertive stance, Diamond and Alex co-constructed meaning. Prior to that point, Alex directed the conversation and related task, while Diamond remained an outsider in their partnership. During times when students asserted themselves in groups as part of their active participation, they also used their symbolic capital (Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006). Students exhibiting symbolic capital demonstrate behaviors that correspond with the group. In Diamond's case, she was not perceived as having symbolic capital, based upon my observations of group interactions, until she assumed an assertive stance.
In addition to accessing symbolic capital, other forms of social positioning were evident throughout the study. Collins (2011) and Moller (2004) observed that students may be treated as lower-status group members based upon how their peers perceive their academic abilities. The present study extends their work and also makes connections to studies addressing unsanctioned talk (i.e., Elizabeth et al., 2012; Lensmire, 1994, 2000; Maybin, 2013). The results from the current study suggest that students who are perceived as having less valued social positions are also students who are bullied by their peers through unsanctioned talk. In this study, Diamond was bullied and often subjected to diminished status through social positioning with her peers. For example, students teased her, rolled their eyes at her contributions to group discussions, and did not seek her out as a group member. Diamond also had to assert herself more often against peers of expert status when compared to other students in the class.

A third layer in the social positioning that I observed in this study is the formation of friendship groups (i.e., Christianakis, 2010; Lensmire, 1994, 2000). Like Christianakis and Lensmire, I observed that social relationships influenced group dynamics. For example, Jai, Layla, and Nikki formed one friendship group, and Mia, Rosa, and Briana formed another. However, this study extends Christianakis' and Lensmire's assertions because I observed that even within friendship groups, students silenced one another, as when Mia made a racist comment toward Rosa.

Despite all of the negotiations over social positions, students frequently engaged in opportunities to co-construct meaning. Whether attending to how students make meaning in authentic contexts (Heath, 1983) or share resources on a "cognitive worktable" (Almasi et al.,
scholars agree that students co-construct meaning through talk about texts, and the findings from this study support existing research. In particular, this study corresponds with prior research explaining ways students use popular media references to make sense of texts (e.g., Chi, 2012; Wiseman, 2012). Additionally, I observed students' media references also refocused their conversations, which led to further opportunities for meaning making.

In this study, students took ownership of the "culture of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 95) by deciding how their conversations would progress and exhibited behaviors aligned with "talking within" a practice rather than talking about one (Lave & Wenger, p. 1991, 109). Part of students' practices involved engaging in pressing discourse (McElhone, 2012; Wolf et al., 2005). Pressing one another for more information reflects the qualities of accountable talk and the real-world structure of conversations (Michaels et al., 2008). Prior studies emphasized the importance of pressing discourse (McElhone, 2012; Wolf et al., 2005), and findings from the present study offer additional support to existing research by suggesting that students pressed one another to respond more deeply to texts as part of the meaning making process.

**Influences of Texts**

The importance of text selection on discussion is well-documented in literacy research (e.g., Almasi et al., 1996; Goatley et al., 1995; Pantaleo, 2007), and the current findings support claims that text selection influences the quality of student talk. In Laura's classroom, students were more likely to engage in dialogic talk when discussing texts about social issues, including visual images representing social issues (e.g., picture of students picketing for racial segregation). Notably, when texts were decontextualized or not related to
social issues, students most often engaged in monologic talk, which supports prior research on texts and participation in group talk (e.g., Almasi et al., 1996; Raphael & McMahon, 1994).

The current findings also support research that demonstrates how students discuss trauma in text-based discussions (e.g., Dutro, 2009, 2010; Henry, 1998). Henry (1998) found that talk about texts may elicit revelations about personal trauma, and Ma'ayan (2010) observed that a student's personal history with trauma was excluded from the language arts curriculum. In the present study, Laura allowed students to discuss traumatic events (e.g., domestic violence, death, war) as part of their formal school practices (e.g., Dutro, 2009). Sometimes students did not want to engage in further discussion after sharing personal trauma, as when Jai described hiding in a closet while her parents argued. Jai shared her testimony of trauma, and the other class members were witnesses (e.g., Dutro, 2009).

Notably, during a discussion about families and domestic violence, Nikki, whose home life is troubled, refrained from participating in the conversation. Later, Laura reflected upon this experience and told me that she wished she could have found a way to involve Nikki in the discussion. In the second example, Laura was a witness to Nikki's trauma based upon prior knowledge, but Nikki refrained from sharing her testimony of trauma during the discussion on families (e.g., Dutro, 2009). Laura noticed that Nikki was silent, but she could not find a way to help her participate. Current research on text-based discussions does not adequately address how teachers should approach talk about trauma in an elementary classroom. Laura addressed this challenge in her interview when she said, "Topics that are very difficult can sometimes be brushed under the rug or nerve wracking for people to teach. I know that, even
in conversation, those kinds of topics can be taboo or somewhat harder for people to discuss” (interview, May 5, 2014). While these findings leave many unanswered questions, they do suggest that texts about social issues may create opportunities for students to discuss trauma. Moreover, classroom talk presents opportunities for students to discuss their sociocultural experiences in more ways than teachers may be prepared to address.

Identity and Talk

In this study, students' explorations of their personal identities—identities of gender, race, and socio-economic status—through discussions were related to all three major influences in classroom discussions—teachers, students, and texts. During my observations, discussions related to identity rarely occurred when students read texts about other topics (e.g., grasshoppers, *Titanic*). Texts that students find culturally relevant tend to yield dialogic discussions (Dutro et al., 2008; Medina, 2010), and the majority of times that students explored their identities through talk were during discussions of texts about social issues. Current findings suggest that students' explorations of their identities through talk were related to their perceptions of gender (Alvermann, 1996; Christianakis, 2010; Clarke, 2006; Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006; Henry, 1998; McCarthey, 1998), race or ethnicity (Broughton, 2002; Christianakis, 2010; Dutro et al., 2008; Egan-Robertson, 1998; Henry, 1998; Hollingworth, 2009; Medina, 2010; McCarthey, 1998), and social class (Clarke, 2006; Henry, 1998; McCarthey, 1998; Jones, 2013). As part of their discussions, students navigated cultural conflicts by considering their classmates' perspectives of identity-sensitive events in texts. For example, Alex, a Black male, and Nikki, a White female discussed racial profiling as part of their book club for *Bud, Not Buddy* (Curtis, 1999). Both students perceived an
event in the text as being dangerous for Bud, but they approached the issue from perspectives aligned with their racial identities. Together, along with other group members, Nikki and Alex explored their own identities through the discussion. In addition to the influences of texts and students, Laura influenced students' abilities to explore their personal identities by relinquishing authority to them and encouraging students to direct their conversations and explore multiple ways of knowing (e.g., Aukerman, 2007).

**Implications for Policy**

The Speaking and Listening standards of the CCSS (NGA & CCSO, 2010) require that students participate in complex discussions, yet standardized assessments, including those aligned with the CCSS do not provide opportunities for students to demonstrate proficiency in discussions. In the midst of the current testing era, the absence of discussion as part of the national assessment culture is problematic, especially given the body of research that suggests discussion influences most literacy constructs (i.e., vocabulary, comprehension, writing, oral language). Laura believed that the CCSS encouraged discussion and provided her with the context to make texts "relate to [students'] lives and make it real to them" (interview, May 5, 2015), yet her students' assessments mandated by her district and state aligned with older policies that did not emphasize classroom talk. Perhaps, policymakers should revisit standardized literacy assessments and consider more flexible options that reflect all of the required standards, including those aligned with classroom discussions. By doing so, students, like Laura's, who consistently fail standardized assessments, yet are able to sustain dialogic conversations, may shed their "at-risk of failure" status.
Implications for Practice

Laura provided the context for dialogic instruction by scaffolding her students' learning and selecting texts about social issues. Scaffolding students' learning is a common practice in language arts classrooms, yet when Laura's scaffolding moves involved decentering, she demonstrated how teachers can support students without dominating their conversations. Teachers interested in scaffolding students' talk but who have concerns about balancing classroom equity may find a decentered approach to be a practical solution because they can support students as needed while maintaining participatory status in the conversation.

Teachers may avoid texts about social issues such as racism and poverty for many reasons, yet students' conversations become more dialogic when issues of cultural conflict arise (e.g., Medina, 2010). In this study, cultural conflicts arose when students read texts about social issues. At these times, students explored their personal identities and often discussed opposing cultural perspectives. Students engaged in lively discussions about gender, families, trauma, race, and poverty. They supported their talk with personal references, media references, and textual references, and they continued to build meaning together over time, even referring back to previous conversations several weeks later. Therefore, it is important that teachers introduce students to texts that about social issues, so students may have opportunities to practice substantive engagement (e.g., Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991) and engage in discussions centered around texts and cultural issues (e.g., Medina, 2010), which may provide traditionally marginalized students an entrée into academic talk.
Language arts teachers should be mindful of students' decoding and comprehension needs with planning small group activities. The present findings suggest that students may begin unsanctioned talk because of difficulty with a text, so teachers should take steps to ensure that students are reading texts at their independent reading levels during peer-only discussions. One solution is to group students heterogeneously. In this study, groups selected by Laura were flexibly grouped, but student-selected groups were often homogenous. Most likely, Roman and Baltazar's learning would not have been interrupted by decoding problems if another group member had been able to pronounce Tuskegee or agriculture.

Finally, students' social positioning informed their participation in small group conversations. Teachers may assume that students are not engaging in bullying behaviors when working with self-selected peer groups, but the findings from this study indicate that friendship groups (i.e., Christianakis, 2010; Lensmire, 1994, 2000) are not immune to silencing behaviors (e.g., bullying, practicing racism). The concerns about unsanctioned talk do not mean that peer-only discussions should not happen; rather, small group discussions may be more positive and focused on the topic if students have a sense of social accountability. For example, Briana stopped Mia's racist comments, but no one reported the incident to Laura so that she could prevent further occurrences. By implementing social accountability expectations, teachers can help students avoid pockets of silence caused by bullying and other negative comments.

**Implications for Research**

The present study answered two questions: 1) In a racially diverse, lower-tracked fifth grade classroom, what happens when a teacher and her students participate in text-based
discussions? 2) How do students exhibit identity through discussion in their fifth grade language arts classroom? Yet, the findings raised many new questions about how students engage in text-based discussions. In particular, issues of unsanctioned talk, trauma, and identity warrant further study. Future studies should consider the following questions:

- What pedagogical choices prevent unsanctioned talk in peer-only groups?
- How can teachers prevent bullying during text-based discussions?
- What support structures do teachers need to facilitate discussions related to trauma?
- What happens when students reflect upon their identity exploration experiences in discussions?

Concluding Thoughts

Laura's students were smart, capable children who demonstrated complex thinking and engaged in dialogic conversations as part of their literacy learning. From my initial visit, I knew unique and powerful events were unfolding in Laura's classroom, and this case had the potential to extend existing research on text-based discussions. During an informal interview, Laura shared with me that she knew her classroom was imperfect, but she hoped others might learn from her participation in my research study. Laura's dedication to creating opportunities for discussions, as well as her pedagogical choices, yielded dialogic events in whole and small group settings. Moreover, the findings related to this study demonstrate that she supported dialogic talk by scaffolding students and selecting texts about social issues. Also, findings indicated that students created their own opportunities to co-construct meaning. As Laura noted in her reflections and interviews, students faced some challenges
when discussing texts, and I observed these challenges in the form of unsanctioned talk spurred by social issues—bullying, bragging, making racist comments—or difficulty with texts. The students also explored their personal identities related to gender, race, and socioeconomic status, illustrating how students may consider their cultural and ideological beliefs through talk.

Overall, this study demonstrates what happened when one teacher and her students participated in text-based discussions in a fifth grade classroom. The results add to existing research that supports the importance of dialogic talk, as well prior studies that investigated how teachers, students, and texts interact during discussions. Additionally, the present study contributes to the growing body of literacy research that explores identity and talk. The current findings have implications for policy, practice, and research.
REFERENCES


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Perspectives on talk and learning (pp. 99-114). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.


Hulan, N. (2010). What the students will say while the teacher is away: An investigation into student-led and teacher-led discussion within guided reading groups. *Literacy Teaching and Learning, 14,* 41-64.


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APPENDICES
Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

From: Deb Paxton, IRB Administrator
North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board

Date: January 8, 2014

Title: Discussion Practices in one Elementary Language Arts Classroom

IRB#: 3695

Dear Ms. Pendleton,

The project listed above has been reviewed by the NC State Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research, and is approved for one year. **This protocol will expire on December 11, 2014 and will need continuing review before that date.**

NOTE:

1. You must use the attached consent forms which have the approval and expiration dates of your study.

2. This board complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.

3. Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

4. If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem form on the IRB website.

5. Your approval for this study lasts for one year from the review date. If your study extends beyond that time, including data analysis, you must obtain continuing review from the IRB.

Sincerely,

Deb Paxton, NC State IRB
## Appendix B: Book Club Selections

**Trade Books Used in Small Group Instruction**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Lexile</th>
<th>CCSS Band</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Bud Not Buddy</em></td>
<td>Curtis</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Star in the Forest</em></td>
<td>Resau</td>
<td>780</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Runaway Twin</em></td>
<td>Kehret</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Killer Species: Menace from the Deep</em></td>
<td>Spradlin</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Zora and Me</em></td>
<td>Bond &amp; Simon</td>
<td>860</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Teacher Interview Protocol

Project Description: Thank you for meeting with me today. My name is Melissa Pendleton, and I will be asking you questions related to literacy practices in your classroom. I would like to audiotape this interview. Is that alright with you? Your participation is voluntary. If at any time you are uncomfortable with any of the questions, you may skip them. You may also stop the interview at any time.

1. Could you please take a moment to describe each of the focal students?

2. Tell me about your background in education.

3. How would you describe yourself?

4. In what ways, if any, do you think you are similar to your students?

5. In what ways, if any, do you think you are different from your students?

6. Please describe your philosophy of education.

7. I've noticed that you introduce topics related to race, gender, and religion during discussions. Describe your goals for these types of discussions.

8. Could you describe your expectations for student talk in discussion? What is your role in these discussions?

9. What qualities do you believe make a meaningful classroom discussion?

10. Describe a time you think your students had a meaningful classroom discussion.

11. Describe a time your students appeared to struggle with discussion. What were the qualities of that discussion?

12. How do you decide to group your students for small group work? 12b. I noticed that your students often work in single gender groups. Could you talk a little bit about that?

13. Describe how you view your role during whole and small group discussions.

14. Describe how you view your students' roles during whole and small group discussions.

15. Did implementing the Common Core State Standards change any of your classroom discussion practices? If so, how?

16. In your reflection from the Bud, Not Buddy discussion, you commented on bullying. Could you talk about times you have noticed bullying occur during discussion?

17. Is there anything else you would like me to know?
Appendix D: Student Interview Protocol

Project Description: Thank you for meeting with me today. My name is Melissa Pendleton, and I will be asking you questions related to literacy practices in your classroom that happen during your language arts block. I would like to audiotape this interview. Is that all right with you? Your participation is voluntary. If at any time you are uncomfortable with any of the questions, you may skip them. You may also stop the interview at any time.

1. Describe what happens during your language arts block in class.
2. How often do you talk about what you read or wrote with your whole class?
3. Describe those discussions.
4. How often do you talk about books or writing in small groups?
5. Describe those discussions.
6. Do you like working in small groups? If so, what do you like about it? If not, what do you not like about it?
7. How would you describe yourself as a student?
8. What kinds of activities do you do in class that improve your learning?
9. How do these activities relate to discussion?
10. What do you think you are supposed to do when your class is having a group discussion?
11. How do you know what you are supposed to do?
12. What do you think you are supposed to do when you are having a small group discussion?
13. How do you know what you are supposed to do?
14. Do you think it's important for people to listen to each other during classroom discussions? If so, why?
15. Describe a time you were part of a great discussion in class.
16. Describe a time you were part of a discussion in class that did not go well.
Appendix E: Transcript Samples

Monologic Transcript Sample from Small Group with Laura on March 17, 2014

Laura: Baltazar, can you read the directions to me?
Baltazar reads the directions aloud.
Laura: Excellent. And before we're ready to do that find the box that says check the words you know. I'm going to describe a word, and you check next to the box you know. This word would be a type of flip where you put your legs down first, then you flip your legs over. And it almost looks like ahm like a wheel in the way that it goes around.
Diamond: You just gave us the answer.
Laura: Did you know it?
Laura: Good. Cartwheel. Yeah. I wanted to make sure you knew it was like a wheel where your first hands go down, then it's like a wheel.
A teacher comes in with cookies for the class.
Laura: Alright, let's try to find the next word. Baltazar, this is going to be all you. The next word is going to be the color of blue. So something that is going to be the color of blue.
Diamond: I found it.
Laura: What's the answer dear?
Baltazar: Bluish.
Laura: Bluish. So, what's the root word in bluish?
Long pause.
Baltazar: Blue.
Laura: Right. Even though you know blue is spelled b-l-u-e and the e is not there. Right. So to add this ending, you had to get rid of the e, but still the root word is blue. Alright, for you, Diamond, you can put a check mark by it. For you, which word means the way your face would look if you were in pain?
Laura: Right. Wincing. Excellent. So put a checkmark by wincing. Also, on the pain thing, Baltazar, can you find a word that would mean that it's kind of pulsating or really hurting?
Baltazar: Throbbing.
Laura: Excellent. Throbbing. Put a checkmark by throbbing. What word means that you like a lot of attention. All eyes on you.
Diamond: Limlight. Limlight.
Laura: Look at that again.
Diamond: Limelight.
Laura: Yes, thank you. Limelight. Please go ahead and put a checkmark by limelight. Which word describes that athletic event or sporting event where there are somersaults, cartwheels, uneven bars.
Dialogic Transcript Sample from Peer Discussion on April 1, 2014

Jai: Why do we have all the branches?
Layla: They need them to help the government to provide money for jobs.
Jai: Why don't they just have one big government?
Layla: A lot of people approve this stuff, and they need more people to approve the laws.
Jai: Why don't they just put all these people in one branch?
Layla: That could work, but we also need an executive branch and a judicial branch, if we're using just one.
Jai: That wouldn't be so bad.
Layla: Sometime they can contact each other over the computer.
Jai: He wonders about what happens if they have computer problems.
Layla says the president's mail will be protected.
Jai says he doesn't get a day off work.
Layla says he does sometimes.
Layla: I'm pretty sure for good reason, they need three branches, not just one.
Jai: Why don't they just do one for the whole country?
Layla: Good point, but everything's already in place.
Layla mentions it would be a waste of money.
Jai: Yeah, but you waste more money if you put everybody in three places.
Layla mentions that there are lots of people involved like landlords, electricity company, etc.
Jai: What law would you make?
Layla I would make a law that [long pause] I don't know. I don't really know.
Jai: What something that you really don't want to do or want them to do in the state? What would you do?
Layla: Hmm...I would say [long pause] maybe students could have maybe the older students or the public schools could move from that place and stay there like those schools they have movies about it like you have to move into a school. I think those schools should allow you...
Jai: To be home
Layla: My cousin goes there, and she's never able to visit because she's busy. So I would say they should have the freedom to go visit their family whenever they want except on a school day actually they should be able to visit whenever they want.
Jai: Mine would be for kids to go to home schools because it will cost less money, and they can use their money to help support the state.
Layla: I've actually asked my mom if I could be homeschooled instead of going to school. It's less money.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action</th>
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<td>1/8/14</td>
<td>I emailed Dr. E requesting a time to meet to request permission to conduct my dissertation research.</td>
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<td>1/13/14</td>
<td>I left a message with Dr. E following up on my previous email.</td>
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<td>1/16/14</td>
<td>I sent a follow up email to Dr. E.</td>
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<td>1/18/14</td>
<td>I received email confirmation from Dr. E that I have permission to do my dissertation research in the district. I emailed Mrs. Bell requesting permission to conduct the research at her school.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/21/14</td>
<td>I received email confirmation from Mrs. Bell that I have permission to conduct my dissertation research at his school. I emailed Laura the teacher recruitment letter. She replied back that she would like to meet Thursday, 1/23/14 at 3:00, and she would like to participate in the study.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/23/14</td>
<td>I met with Laura and explained the study to her. I gave her the consent forms for the students. She asked me to come next Tuesday and Thursday.</td>
<td>Laura's signed informed consent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/6/14</td>
<td>I read the assent script to all consented children, even those age 11 and over. I observed (#1) Laura teach about drawing conclusions from 1:10-2:40.</td>
<td>Student consent forms; list of questions from Jai, worksheet from Mia, picture of sentence starters</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/7/14</td>
<td>Peer debriefing (#1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/11/14</td>
<td>I observed (#2) a whole group lesson and 3 small group sessions from 1:10-2:45.</td>
<td>Pictures of posters from students Nikki and Alex. Audio recorded group session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/14/14</td>
<td>Peer debriefing (#2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/18/14</td>
<td>I observed (#3) a SS unit during which students make flip books about the mountains and the coast. I had an Audio recorded</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
informal conversation with Laura. I observed a *Runaway Twin* discussion and a lesson on pronouns and antecedents. 11:30-12:00 (SS); 1:20-2:45 (ELA); 12:30-12:45 Member Checking

<table>
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<tr>
<th>2/19/14</th>
<th>I observed (#4) ELA from 1:20-2:45. Today students discussed a photo representing desegregation.</th>
<th>Layla &amp; Jai making flip books; pictures of flip books from Layla &amp; Jai and Roman &amp; Baltazar; audio recorded Mia &amp; Rosa working on the computer; member checking notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2/24/14</td>
<td>I observed (#5) SS from 11:30-12:10 today. Students were planning a persuasive writing piece inviting people to visit their selected state. I did member checking with Laura from 12:30-12:40. We selected four members of the focal group. I observed ELA from 1:10-2:25. Students learned new vocabulary and began reading their new novel.</td>
<td>picture of the board, students' sentences (Nikki, Layla, Jai, Diamond, Mia, &amp; Laura)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/25/14</td>
<td>I observed (#6) ELA from 1:15-2:45 today. Students did a diagram as a whole group, and one small group did too. The <em>Star in the Forest</em> group met today.</td>
<td>audio recorded small groups and Roman &amp; Baltazar</td>
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<td>3/10/14</td>
<td>I met with Laura to discuss observations and request a copy of her lesson plans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/17/14</td>
<td>I observed (#7) ELA from 1:15-2:45 today. Students went over their vocabulary words and selected a text</td>
<td>audio recorded two</td>
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<td>Date</td>
<td>Observation Details</td>
<td>Audio Recorded</td>
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<td>3/19/14</td>
<td>I observed (#8) ELA from 1:15-2:35 today. Students did a test prep passage, worked on a worksheet, and discussed <em>Bud, Not Buddy</em>.</td>
<td>small group and novel group</td>
</tr>
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<td>3/20/14</td>
<td>I observed (#9) ELA from 1:15-2:30 today. Students read <em>Gymnast</em> aloud, read <em>Bud</em> and did dessert pass, read together, and played <em>Marooned</em>.</td>
<td>small group, Alex &amp; Julio on the computer, collected work samples from Briana, Diamond, Alex, Mia, and Laura</td>
</tr>
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<td>3/24/14</td>
<td>I observed (#10) ELA from 1:20-2:50 today. Students worked with a partner on a reading passage. They did literature circles with a novel, and made a character foldable with the portrait of a character and a letter inside.</td>
<td>small group (Nikki, Layla, &amp; Jai), took notes on Diamond &amp; Mia; Alex &amp; Julio; Bud group; recorded many students working together and talking through ideas on their foldable project; took pictures of students' finished work samples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Details</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/25/14</td>
<td>I observed (#11) SS from 11:40-12:10 and ELA from 1:20-2:25 today. I did member checking with Laura. Today this did a preamble activity, City Blues, and literature circles.</td>
<td>products and the directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/25/14</td>
<td>Peer debriefing (#3)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3/26/14</td>
<td>I observed (#12) SS from 11:40-12:10 and ELA from 1:20-2:25 today. I did member checking with Laura. Today they did the preamble song, George Washington Carver, and did literature circles.</td>
<td>audio recorded small groups: Nikki, Layla, Briana, Diamond, Alex, Mia, Roman, Baltazar; took pictures of the board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/27/14</td>
<td>I observed (#13) SS from 11:35-12:10. Students created their own class constitutions.</td>
<td>audio recorded Roman &amp; Baltazar; took pictures of constitutions for Roman &amp; Baltazar; took pictures of the board for Roman &amp; Baltazar; Layla, &amp; Jai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/28/14</td>
<td>Peer debriefing (#4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/31/14</td>
<td>I observed (#14) ELA from 1:15-2:35. Students did a vocabulary rotation, did a worksheet, selected <em>Killer Species</em>, and did a vocabulary game.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/1/14</td>
<td>I observed (#15) SS from 11:30-12:00. Students read about and discussed the three branches of government.</td>
<td>listened to Nikki &amp; Alex and Layla &amp; Jai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/2/14</td>
<td>I observed (#16) ELA from 1:25-2:50. Students did a passage about sheepdogs, worked on character traits, and read <em>Killer Species</em>.</td>
<td>audio recorded Layla &amp; Jai took pictures of thoughts about Emmett from Layla, Jai, Mia,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Observation Details</td>
<td>Audio Recorded Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/3/14</td>
<td>I observed (#17) SS from 11:30-12:10. Students made a foldable of the powers of state and federal government.</td>
<td>Alex and Laura audio recorded Nikki and Alex; listened to Layla &amp; Jai and Briana, Mia, Rosa, Roman, and Laura; took pictures of work from L/J, N/A, J/B/R, and picture of board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/7/14</td>
<td>I observed (#18) ELA from 1:25-2:50. Students did a vocabulary word sort, read <em>Killer Species</em>, did vocabulary crossword, and played a vocabulary game.</td>
<td>Julio, Roman, Baltazar, &amp; Laura; took pictures of Nikki, Jai, Layla, Mia, Julio, &amp; Laura's thoughts about genetic engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/8/14</td>
<td>I observed (#19) ELA from 1:25-2:35. Students did a Pizza passage; small group worked on Titanic map; <em>Killer Species</em> talked genetic engineering</td>
<td>Audio recorded Alex &amp; Julio; copied pros and cons from Nikki, Jai, &amp; Layla and Alex &amp; Julio and Roman &amp; Briana and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/9/14</td>
<td>I observed (#20) SS from 11:30-12:10. Students talked immigration and the Statue of Liberty.</td>
<td>Alex, and Laura audio recorded vanished promises and missed potential. For the missing audio recordings, see further details in the document.</td>
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<td>Date</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/10/14</td>
<td>I observed (#21) ELA from 1:25-2:45. Students debated animal captivity. Small group with worksheet on note taking. Killer Species did &quot;unbeknownst.&quot;</td>
<td>audio recorded Nikki &amp; Diamond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/16/14</td>
<td>I interviewed the focal group today.</td>
<td>audio recorded interviews with Nikki, Jai, Diamond, Briana, Alex, &amp; Roman</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/17/14</td>
<td>Peer Debriefing (#5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/23/14</td>
<td>I observed (#22) SS from 9:30-10:15. Students discussed religion and gender in schools. They read a debate and made a flip book describing their opinions.</td>
<td>audio recorded Alex, Roman, &amp; Julio; photographed flip books from Nikki, Jai, Layla &amp; Laura &amp; Alex, Julio, &amp; Roman; typed Reflection #1 from Laura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/24/14</td>
<td>I observed (#23) ELA from 8:15-9:45. Students discussed a zoo map passage and worked in their groups: Zora and Me, workbook, and popcorn workbook.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/28/14</td>
<td>I observed (#24) ELA from 8:15-9:40 and SS from 9:40-10:00. Students did a vocabulary connections activity and worked in groups: Zora families, workbook, and online game</td>
<td>audio recorded Nikki, Briana, &amp; Mia photographed Wordle; collected typed Reflection #2 from Laura; photographed all center boards</td>
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<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/29/14</td>
<td>I observed (#25) ELA from 8:15-9:45 and SS from 9:45-10:00. Students did a whole class passage about kudzu. They did a group worksheet about cause and effect. Zora group talked about racism. Whole group talk about abuse.</td>
<td>photographed work samples about Zora: Jai, Diamond, Alex, Mia, &amp; Laura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/1/14</td>
<td>I observed (#26) SS from 9:15-10:00. Students reviewed what they discussed earlier about families, read the text, and compared US families with those in other countries.</td>
<td>audio recorded Jai &amp; Mia</td>
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<td>5/5/14</td>
<td>I conducted formal interview with Laura 10:45-11:30</td>
<td>audio recorded Laura</td>
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<tr>
<td>5/7/14</td>
<td>Peer debriefing (#6)</td>
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<td>5/8/14</td>
<td>Peer debriefing (#7)</td>
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<td>5/9/14</td>
<td>Peer debriefing (#8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5/14/14</td>
<td>Peer debriefing (#9)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6/6/14</td>
<td>Peer debriefing (#10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6/18/14</td>
<td>Peer debriefing (#11)</td>
<td></td>
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