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In The Struggle For New Meanings In The Education Of African American And Other Students Of Color

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Ford, Arlene

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In The Struggle For New Meanings In The Education

Of

African American And Other Students Of Color

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Arlene Jennifer Ford

2012

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

In The Struggle For New Meanings In The Education

Of

African American And Other Students Of Color

by

Arlene Jennifer Ford

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Thomas M. Philip, Co-Chair

Professor Ernest D. Morrell, Co-Chair

This study used the mixed qualitative methodologies of ethnography and a participatory action research inspired inquiry to challenge deficit meanings and assumptions through increasing learning. During the inquiry, a group of teachers and administrators at each of two school sites engaged in a process of learning about systemic inequality and its impact on students of color through reading and discussions of scholarly articles. The educators engaged new meaning negotiations about their students of color and their education. Findings are that providing appropriate spaces for educator learning and reflection is very important. At one school site where the inquiry included educators of color and white educators, the white educators initially shifted away from focusing on important issues raised by their colleagues of color. Issues of race and power created barriers to real conversations, created silences and

impeded learning. These barriers began to dissolve when one educator, with some support, took a stand and helped change the power imbalance in the group leading the group from contrived conversations to real conversations. Though sometimes contentious the real conversations led to increased learning even some evidence of transformational growth with potential for changes that could benefit the school's students of color.

At the other school location, despite relative harmonious shared meaning negotiations, changed minds did not result in the immediate changed actions of this relatively homogenous group of educators of color. The context of that school with more institutionalized deficit-oriented cultural processes created challenges to growth. Nevertheless, this group received some tools for change, building a foundation for future change.

The study initially identified some meanings at the two school sites. Findings indicated that (i) both white educators and educators of color held deficit meanings about students of color, and (ii) such educators also held resourced-oriented/asset-based meanings. Such positive meanings had the potential for forming the basis for building student learning. This study documented important learning processes that may be involved when power differentials exist within a group as they attempted to negotiate new meanings around education.

The dissertation of Arlene Jennifer Ford is approved.

Walter R. Allen

Gary L. Blasi

Thomas M. Philip, Committee Co-Chair

Ernest D. Morrell, Committee Co-Chair

Dedication:

I dedicate this paper to Lovinia Carr my beloved grandmother who lived to her 100th year. Mama you are not here physically but I know you are with me. You taught me first to dream, to work hard and do well whatever I am doing, to stay out of trouble, to have fun. You also taught me to love, by loving me unconditionally. These are the lessons I take with me in my work and in my play. Although I miss you, I know you are always with me because you are a big part of who I am.

Table of Contents

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VITA

2011   Teaching Assistant
Social and Cultural Foundations of Education
University of California, Los Angeles, CA

2008-2011   Graduate Student Researcher
Institute for Democracy, Education and Access (IDEA)
University of California, Los Angeles, CA

2007   M. A., Sociology and Education (Policy Focus)
Teacher's College at Columbia University
New York, N.Y.

1988-1995   Senior Corporate Associate
Weil Gotshal & Manges
New York, N.Y.

1987-1988   Corporate Associate
Stroock, Stroock & Lavan
New York, N.Y.

1987   J.D. Harvard Law School
Cambridge, Mass.

1986-1987   Law Student Associate
Harvard Legal Aid Bureau
Cambridge, Mass

1985   Teaching Fellow Sociology
Harvard University
Cambridge, Mass.

1984   B.S. Accounting
St John's University
Queens, N. Y.

PUBLICATIONS

Bertrand, M. & Ford, A. (To be published in 2013). "Planting the seeds": The influence of the Council on education policy and practice. In J. Conner & Ebby-Rosin, R. (Eds.), *Student voice in American educational policy*.

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Ford, A. (Accepted AERA presentation 2013). Negotiating Shared Meanings Around Education to Challenge the Effects of Poverty in the Struggle Toward A More Equitable Education.

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Making Education Matter: Youth, Teachers, Professors, and Community Organizers as Activist-Scholars. Presented at American Educational Research Association Annual Convention 2011. New Orleans, LA. [Presented with others in Symposium]

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"Behind the façade of objectively perceived joint action the set of meanings that sustains that joint action has a life the social scientists can ill afford to ignore"

Herbert Blumer

Chapter1: INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction.

American schools across very different contexts find it challenging to educate many students of color including African American students. Given the high rates at which many schools fail these children (Rogers, 2009), it is essential that we find new ways to approach their education. Understanding how educators make sense of, or frame students, their communities, and their education may be helpful in the search for new approaches to defining appropriate educational policies or otherwise finding solutions to local educational concerns. The meanings[1] educators assign to various aspects of these students' lives, and their education, may provide insights into educators' practices. This is because the meanings people have are intricately linked, are at the bottom of, and, as Herbert Blumer suggests in the above quote, can sustain our very actions including educational practices (Blumer, 1986, c1969).   For example, the meanings educators assign to the concept of who is responsible for the education of students' of color can affect greatly how education solutions are imagined (Diamond, 2004). If educators feel a sense of responsibility, they are more likely do all they can to educate these students. On the other hand, if educators believe that families are primarily responsible, educators may feel reduced or

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[1] *See defined terms and also later in the Literature Review for more on meanings.*

1

limited responsibility for these students' education. While both families and educators have responsibility for students' education, research has shown that when there is reduced responsibility on the part of educators, students' academic achievement can be negatively affected (Diamond, 2004).

Often, students of color are viewed with a deficit frame. This may limit their possibilities to obtain the education they need. Many educators have assigned negative labels or meanings to students of color such as 'low-skilled, 'lacking in educational aspirations,' and 'undisciplined' (Ferguson, 2001; P. Lipman, 1997; P. Lipman, 2003). An agglomeration of these meanings can lead to a perverse consensus: broad organizational meanings that give rise to policies that are not supportive, and potentially even destructive, of children's education (Ferguson, 2001; P. Lipman, 1997; P. Lipman, 2003). For example, the researchers in Diamond (2004), found that teachers beliefs about low-income and students' of color in some cases translated to a lack of responsibility for the students' learning.

The range of meanings that individual educators have may be connected, though not necessarily in a linear way, to organizational meanings about students of color. The meanings that emerge among educators can give rise to institutional policies or programs that can have either or both positive and negative consequences for students of color. These meanings at both the individual and organizational levels do not occur within a vacuum. Rather, the meanings held with respect to students of color occur within larger societal systems. According to Erickson "[e]conomy, history and the distribution of power within society provide what we do in face-to-face interaction with sets of constraints and enablements which we encounter as structures of local affordance" (Erickson, 2004). As a result, it is essential that we study the

interplay among meanings and interactions at the individual or group, organizational and larger societal levels.

A deep understanding of how individual meanings can agglomerate to give rise to organizational meanings and how organizational meanings can in turn affect individual meanings is important if we want to make positive change within schools. Further, comprehending how these may relate to larger societal systems is also helpful. It is essential that school reform and change concerned with the needs of children of color include (i) the macro-level views (larger social and cultural contexts) and (ii) the micro-processes within the local context of schools both at the individual and organizational level.

The Importance of Meanings and the Potential for Re-articulation.

A focus on meanings (see defined terms) can help with understanding the cultural processes that exist within schools and classrooms. Scholars have noted the connections between meanings and actions suggesting that meanings help to sustain the joint actions of people (Blumer, 1986, c1969). For socio-culturists, culture represents "a system of meanings" both in the present and everyday interactions and as they evolve over time (Nasir & Hand, 2006, p. 458). The meanings people have are therefore key to supporting culture. As a result, I argue that a focus on meanings is essential for understanding how cultural processes are sustained and in turn how these processes help to make meanings.

Some individual and organizational meanings exist within, and are supported by, larger societal meanings. When meanings, particularly organizational meanings, are supported by larger societal policies or systems, such meanings may seem like common sense. They may seem to be truth, to be the actual state of things. When meanings become generally accepted, they can become powerful and difficult to change (Hall, 1981; 2006). If meanings support cultural

processes that create barriers to learning and teaching, understanding how such meanings are placed locally within a school context is very important. As important is recognizing the potential spaces for the agency involved in attempting to rearticulate such meanings. Focusing on meanings is therefore important because of the limitations they may place on learning and learning environments. On the other hand, meanings also matter because of the great potential they have to create opportunities for learning for both educators and students.

Re-articulation of meanings can involve challenging taken for granted 'common sense' notions about race and class. This is because some socially constructed meanings have unspoken (tangible and intangible) rights and privileges associated with them, while other meanings have the very opposite associated with them—that is, the deprivation of rights and privileges. For students of color, all of the multiple level of meanings, relating to their academic ability, learning and even discipline, exist within a larger social and cultural context infused with inequality based at least in part on race, class or immigration status. As such the re-articulation of meanings may involve no less than the struggle over who gets access to resources and privileges in America.

An example of the Importance of Meanings.

In their discussion of culture, McDermott (1995) gave us some understanding of how the meanings made with respect to groups of people can matter. McDermott (1995) developed concept of looking at "culture as disability", to explain how the negative meanings we create, when we deem someone 'disabled' or as having 'deficits' outside what we consider 'normal,' can multiply the difficulties for those so identified. To illustrate, McDermott (1995) described a community on Martha's Vineyard, an island off the coast of Massachusetts, that was " privileged by a high rate (1 in every 155 persons) of genetically inherited deafness" (McDermott, 1995). The deaf were fully integrated into society and hearing people were thoroughly engaged in sign

4

communication. Accordingly, deaf persons "had the means to turn not hearing into … a strength" (Id). One result was that when hearing persons had writing and reading problems they sought the help of the deaf persons (p. 330).

A study inside deaf culture quoted by the authors found that "being able or unable to hear does not emerge as significant in itself; instead it takes on significance in the context of other sets of meaning to which the child has been exposed" (McDermott, 1995, p. 330 quoting Padden & Humphries, 1988, p. 22). Unfortunately, outside exposure did come to Martha's Vineyard and new meanings with differential power regarding deafness were created. According to McDermott (1995), outsiders who could not sign treated the deaf poorly. Deafness was named as a disability and subordinated to hearing. According to the researchers, the situation was made all the worse as outsiders pitied deaf people, and wrote articles in newspapers and scientific tracts calling for and suggesting remedies. This naming caused increasing difficulties for those who were deaf (p. 329). This story illustrated how the meanings, and the power attached to meanings that are created with respect to groups of people, can matter greatly. Meanings can determine whether groups of people are incorporated as full members into society or treated as "disabled" with negative impacts or are otherwise subordinated.

The meanings we make are intricately connected to the ideologies we hold or the frameworks we use to make sense of the world. For Hall (1981), "[h]ow we see ourselves and our social relations *matter,* because it enters into and informs our actions and practices" (Stuart Hall, 1981). Ideologies are often "not the product of individual consciousness or intention;" nor are they "isolated and separate concepts, but … the articulation of different elements into a distinctive set or chain of meanings" (p. 31), similar to the meaning created around deaf people both before and after the introduction of the outside world. Further, the same language can have

very different meanings depending on the ideological lens applied. For example, Hall (1981) notes that in liberal ideology 'freedom' is associated with individualism while in socialist ideology 'freedom' is associated with a collective condition dependent on "equality of condition" (Id). These differences can lead to very different results for different groups of people especially those in non-dominant groups.

According to Hall (1981), while individuals may make ideological statements, people " 'speak through' the ideologies which are active in our society and which provide us with the means of 'making sense' of social relations and our place in them" (p. 32). These ideologies become invisible, "taken for granted 'naturalized'… common sense." In addition, ideologies "'work' by constructing for their subjects … positions of identification and knowledge" (id). The notion that our individual actions are impacted by the active ideologies in society and seem naturalized helps us to understand the connections between local contexts and societal forces. In the Martha's Vineyard story, before outside exposure, the deaf and hearing were considered equally valuable members of the society. A meaning of deaf as normal or 'not disability' was part of the framework through which people operated and actions and inactions were based on this view. And then the outsiders came and brought with them a different, disparate, power laden frame.

Linking Meanings at the Micro and Macro Levels.

Most often, scholars either focus on the micro-processes in schools or on the more macro societal dynamics. A few scholars, however, have acknowledged the importance of addressing how the local context is intertwined with larger societal forces. For example, Cobb called for a relational perspective between practices in wider communities and classroom (Cobb, 2002). These scholars understood the importance of connecting what goes on inside schools to what is

6

taking place in the larger communities. Nasir & Hand (2006) also acknowledged the need to not lose "sight of the macro-dynamics behind the micro-processes and power and social structure in… interactions" at the local level (Nasir, 2006).   Further, they urged us to make sure "accounts of power and social structure … [are] considered within a treatment of local practices, for it is in these local contexts that broader forces, such as social structure and power distribution, play out" (p. 465). Further, in his discussion of mathematics educational discourses involving African Americans' academic ability, Martin (2009) challenges us to see how localized discourse—such as the scrawlings on a bathroom wall that denigrates an African American doctorate recipient in physics as "a nigger" – can be part of a larger societal discourse (Martin, 2009). For Martin, "[w]hat might appear as localized discourses and events are, in fact, smaller pieces of larger societal narratives and racial projects (Winant, 1994) that serve the purpose of constructing and reifying not only African American but also Latinos and Native Americans as intellectually and academically inferior no matter how significant their accomplishment" (p. 297).

These scholars have made important contributions to our understanding of how localized discourses and actions may relate to larger societal systems. Less discussed however, are models that help us understand how to make the connections between individuals and their organizations (such as between educators and schools) and also between organizations and larger societal systems (schools and society). While lauding the fact that many theorists have discussed the connection between structure and agency, Vaughan (2001) has noted that "strikingly absent is empirical work that specifically attempts to test the various possibilities about possible macro-micro connections that these theorists have made" (Vaughan, 2001). Some researchers have made such attempts.

Diamond (2004) made empirical connections between individuals (teachers) and their

organization (schools). Building on teacher expectation research, these scholars paid attention

"to the role of the school context in conditioning teachers' beliefs and actions" (p. 93). They

argued that "school micropolitical contexts" that is, what is going on in the school and

classrooms, "is influenced by the schools' race and class compositions through school-based

organizational habitus" (Id). Further, Diamond (2004) found that schools with low income and

minority students tend to have a lower sense of responsibility and those with socio economically

advantaged students have the highest sense of responsibility.   In addition, the researchers found

that in "predominantly low income and African American schools, teachers [also] emphasized

[students'] deficits" (p. 76). These deficit meanings about low-income students of color raised

the concern that the lowered sense of responsibility translated into teachers not working as hard

for the students and laying the blame for school's failure with the students.

In contrast to the primarily low-income schools, the researchers found that when large

percentage of "students are middle income, white or Asian," teachers emphasized students'

intellectual capacity and the teachers felt more accountable for their learning (Id). The

researchers however, believed that "deliberate actions can redirect a school's collective sense of

responsibility" (p. 77). The researchers found that in the "Adams" school, although the teachers

emphasized the deficits of the students, this emphasis was not coupled with a reduced sense of

responsibility. On the contrary, through the long-term deliberate actions of leaders, "teachers

exhibited a great deal of responsibility for student outcomes" (p. 90). According to the

researchers in the Adams school case, "school leaders created an organizational habitus that

mediated the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their sense of responsibility" (Id). The

school leaders in essence began the process of re-articulating the meanings around the students

and the educators' responsibility for educating them. Diamond (2004) provided a model for

understanding how organizational habitus (at the meso-level) can influence the individual beliefs and actions of teachers (at the micro-level) and in turn influence the educational opportunities of students. This example is very helpful. Diamond (1994) however left unanswered questions about variability in organizations. Diamond (1994) also left unanswered what connections may be made to larger societal structures.

Vaughan (2001), in her effort to make macro-micro connections between individual choices and decision-making and social structure, used,

> "a situated-action approach … built on the sociological understanding that a full theoretical explanation of the action of any social actor needs to take into account, to the greatest extent possible, the fact that individual activity, choices, and action occur within a multilayered social context that affects interpretation and meaning at the local level" (p. 29).

Vaughan was concerned with using the "micro level focus" but also encompassing "macro and meso level factors" to "examine the linkage between environment, organization and individual action and meaning" (Id). In her analysis, she was able to answer some of the questions left open by Diamond (2004). To help develop a 'theory of process' in making macro-micro links, Vaughan used the decision-making processes in three different contexts, a couple in a deteriorating relationship; managers and engineers at NASA: working with the space shuttle; and air traffic controllers. Similar to Diamond (2004), Vaughan (2001) found that institutionalized cultural beliefs influenced the decisions and interpretive process at the individual level and thereby reified the organization. Vaughan (2001) also found variations across the institutions and sometimes within institutions. She found that "the greater the degree of institutionalization" in an organization "the greater the cultural persistence" that is, the organizational culture, and hence "the greater the resistance to change" (p. 48). Importantly, Vaughan also found that the larger environment outside of the organization also influenced the cognitive process of individuals.

She proposed Bourdieu's habitus as the micro-level link that "connects individual behavior and social structure" (p. 49). Although not in the context of education, Vaughan provides rich understanding of how individuals within social contexts interact with organizational culture or habitus and makes some connections to larger society.

Notwithstanding Diamond (2004), and Vaughan (2001), the fact is we continue to "know little about how the tension between agency and structure of practice is managed by students and teachers" (Nasir, 2006). Further, although Vaughan provides empirical data to support a theoretical framework for connecting the individual level, organization and social structure, more empirical data is needed within the education realm.

Research Questions.

My research questions are: What are some of the key meanings that operate among teachers and administrators at two separate school sites (that serve low-income children of color who are primarily African American and Latino/a) that (i) may have potential for creating barriers to the education of students of color (ii) that positively illuminate assets of students and their communities? Would attempts to create an inquiry with the intent of illuminating systemic inequality and its connection to schools (including attempts to re-articulate some problematic meanings about children of color and their education), increase educators' learning or otherwise make a difference in educators' approach to their students' education? What would this re-articulation or change process look like? How would it be different at different school sites?

Overview of the Study.

The study consisted of two phases of research, taking place over the course of approximately one year. During the first phase I engaged in an ethnographic study at two

different school sites, each of which served primarily students of color (African American and Latino/a students) from low-income communities. During this phase, the two school sites were observed both inside and outside of the classrooms. The initial months of the ethnography was an intense period of collecting data to help me identify and examine some of the 'meanings' that educators held with respect to their students, students' community and education. During this time, I interviewed and observed (throughout the school contexts) teachers and administrators (including study participants). In addition, I also participated in focus groups with teachers and students. The second phase consisted of a participatory action research (PAR) inspired inquiry at each research site. At each site a group of five educators (both administrators and teachers) engaged in reading and discussing scholarly articles aimed at increasing learning about inequality as they related to students of color generally and also as they could be related to the specific schools. In addition, I encouraged each inquiry group to identify and begin to address a 'school problem.' I facilitated each group, sometimes redirecting conversations and asking critical questions such as: What does this (a particular reading or text) mean for your school? What is the mission of your school? What barriers do your students face? What assets do your students bring to school? The hope was to attempt to make some links between what went on at the school and larger societal concerns. Inquiry group meetings took place over the course of a semester and were mostly held on the campuses of the schools. In addition, to support the Inquiry, I met with individual educators for purposes of addressing issues (such as tensions and conflicts) that came up during the Inquiry groups and to support learning of the individuals and the group. As we engaged in discussions, the educators were encouraged to be active and the primary participants in the discussions.

Purpose/Rationale.

The purpose of this project was to attempt to (i) identify and make connections between the meanings the individual educators and their school organizations had with respect to students of color and larger contexts of systemic inequality, (ii) increase learning about the nature of inequality and (iii) attempt to challenge assumptions behind meanings and understand how some of those meanings may be rearticulated or changed in an effort to produce more positive results for these children. According to Hall (1981), "[o]ne of the ways in which ideological struggle takes place and ideologies are transformed is by articulating the elements differently, thereby producing a different meaning: breaking the chain in which they are currently fixed … through social practice and political struggle" (p. 31). Building on Hall's approach this project attempted to rearticulate and help produce some different new meanings by discussions that included articulating the elements of particular meanings and also by illuminating the play of inequality in specific contexts. Understanding cultural processes in schools and how they may relate to larger inequities has the potential for opening spaces for the re-articulation of the meanings that are created within schools that may inhibit the education of students of color. As Erickson (2004) noted, social structure can create both constraints and enablements. This project was interested in the cross section between the enablements that social structure can provide along with the agentive action of individuals and organizations. During the inquiry portion of the project, the participants engaged in discussions that in some cases challenged some of their assumptions. In some cases, these discussions appeared to open up channels for shared meanings about what the education of their students of color might mean within the specific contexts of each school. The Inquiry discussions presented moments of conflict and struggle as educators tried to make sense

12

of new information from readings, their own experiences, and the experiences of their colleagues.

This study also attempted to identify key meanings that existed within the schools. Further this study attempted to re-articulate some potentially problematic of meanings about students of color by explicating systemic inequality, identify some positive asset based or resource-oriented meanings that existed and also identify some of the learning processes that evolved during the inquiry process.

Some Defined Terms.

In this section I define three terms that are connected in an attempt to distinguish their use in this paper.   I draw on previous scholarship in defining these terms. After defining these terms I also explain the relationship between these terms as used in this paper.

Discourse.

The concept of discourse has been variously defined and described by a number of notable scholars and academicians. My intent here is not to be exhaustive but to rather to pull from a few of these scholars in an attempt to give a definition that is appropriate for purposes of this study. I start from the conventional definition and draw on the definitions from notable scholars Norman Fairclough, James Paul Gee and Danny Bernard Martin. Discourse may be most simply defined as written or spoken language use. The web dictionary defines discourse in part as "communication of thought by words; talk; conversation." However as Fairclough (2003) has noted, discourse also "signals a particular view of language in use as an element of social life which is closely interconnected with other elements" (p. 4). Somewhat similarly, Gee (2005) has defined Discourse (with capital D) to include ways of speaking that as they are related to ways of acting and knowing (J.P. Gee, 2005). For Fairclough (2003) discourse is then "a mode of action"

that is "always socially and historically situated in a dialectical relationship with other facets of 'the social'"… that is, its "social contexts" and "it is socially shaped but it is also socially shaping, or *constitutive*" (p.134). In this way Fairclough (1993, 2003) defines discourse as a "social practice." Further, Hall (2006) points to historical nature of the development of discourse explaining that language use sometimes consists of taken for granted statements or 'common sense' as a result of "long standing and historically elaborated discourses that accrete over the years" (p. 73).

The notion of discourse as social practice is both a local and societal phenomenon (Martin, 2009). Martin (2009) challenged us to see that localized discourse, such as the scrawlings on a bathroom wall denigrating an African American doctorate recipient in Physics as "a nigger" – can be part of a larger societal discourse (Martin, 2009). This story he argued is part of a larger story where the head of the Mathematics department at a major University said publicly in a discussion about diversifying the faculty that there were no truly great mathematicians other than one specified individual. Another part of the story was that University's historical and current practice of not hiring tenured Black faculty in Mathematics (having hired only one in its history). As discussed earlier Martin encouraged us to consider that "localized discourses" can be part of "larger societal narratives" that construct denigrating or negative identities for people of color regardless of their accomplishments (p. 297).

Language.

The web dictionary defines language in part as "Any system of formalized symbols, signs, sounds, gestures, or the like used or conceived as a means of communicating thought, emotion, etc." Like Fairclough (2003) I use here the term language conventionally "to mean verbal language, words." Fairclough has noted that language can be spoken of in this general

way or more specifically in terms of "English or Swahili" (p. 3). In this way I define language as a communication device. Language is however is intricately connected to the concept of discourse. Often these two terms are used in ways that conflate each other. When language use evolves into particular discourse, language can be powerful in many respects. As a result, from a sociocultural perspective, language is considered both a communication device and a mediator of culture (Nasir & Hand, 2006).

Meanings.

Meaning is defined conventionally in part as: what something is intended to be; its signification; its connotation (Web Dictionary). Although it might seem otherwise, things do not come with their own intrinsic meanings. Rather, meanings are socially constructed (Hall, 2006). That is, the meaning of a thing is created through social interactions (Hall, 2006; Blumer, 1986 c1969). Meanings incorporate current contexts and as well, historic contexts.

When they become generally accepted, meanings become powerful and difficult to change. One can therefore imagine that trying to call *chair* something else, like 'cat' or 'table' might be cause for a great deal of consternation, or even ridicule. Interestingly, even for something so seemingly uncontroversial, certain assumptions come with a chair. In general, it is assumed that one can sit on it, that it will hold the weight of the average person, that it is made of materials that are not harmful to those who sit on it, that if found in a public space like a library or the train station, anyone can sit on it. But even the definition of chair has changed in some ways with changes in societal processes and practices. For example, during segregation, one could not assume that anyone could sit on a chair in a public space such as a train station. This very inability to assume illuminates one way the meaning of chair has significantly changed.

Furthermore, the context can also change the meanings of things. Where a child gets his timeouts in "the chair" that chair then can become associated with punishment.

Meanings exist on multiple levels. First, there are the meanings that individuals hold. For example, if a person thinks girls should be associated with pink, then as a female that person might wear pink often. There are also meanings that may get transferred to the organizational level. For example, a meaning can become relevant for others as a person interacts with others, as in the classroom interactions between students and teachers. A person with some power or authority might suggest or require through a variety of cultural practice or processes, that the girls (for simplicity, in the all-girl classroom) wear pink. If somehow this 'girl equals pink' meaning gets transferred to the other teachers and throughout the school, most or all of the girls in the school might wear pink. A school-wide uniform policy requiring pink skirts might even be implemented. This policy now adopted at the organizational level would have an organizational meaning about girls being required to wear pink with assumptions about what happens if someone does not comply. Wearing pink uniform then becomes part of the culture of the school.

When there is a practice or policy, whether written or unwritten, the situation is a far different from when one individual wore pink. The impact on a potential student is very different. In the individual case, if that person insisted that her students wear pink without the weight of organizational policy behind her, a dissenting student would likely have recourse. If the organization is behind the policy or practice however, a dissenting student would have a much more difficult battle. Furthermore, when organizational meanings are supported by larger societal policies or systems, then these meanings may seem like common sense. They may seem

to be truth, to be the actual state of things, or factual reality--which is immutable. The battle to change what seems immutable, though not impossible, is a difficult battle.

Some individual and organizational meanings exist within, and are supported by, larger societal meanings. Consider the existence of a network of schools with a cultural practice or requirement that all girls wherever they are, wear pink uniforms to school. As an example, wearing pink uniforms or any kind of uniform seem relatively benign. However, if a cultural practice becomes school policy, and it has a more malignant effect on the students it is applied to, one can imagine the difficulty for such students. Moving from a practice of one individual to school-wide cultural practice or even school system-wide could be very harmful to the subjected students. For example, what if there is a policy, whether written or unspoken, that when certain students misbehave (like all children do at one point or other), these students are to be disciplined harshly? What if those certain students tend to be overwhelming, students of color? The point is, if groups of educators have meanings about certain groups of children, even if well meaning, if such meanings have malignant effects, the students' and even their education may suffer greatly.

The relationship between these terms.

In general people use language (such as words) as a tool to indicate what they mean.[2] For example, the word and letters *chair* is used to indicate the thing people sit on. When someone says "*chair*" people generally know what is meant. This meaning evolved over time and having been accepted, is now the taken-for-granted meaning for that piece of furniture. When language (through use and social action) evolves into particular discourses, these discourses can give rise

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[2] Artifacts or symbols (such as a flag or a stop sign) can also be used to indicate meaning.

to deeper more complex meanings about that thing, connecting it to meanings in local contexts but also to larger societal concerns.

Outline of this Dissertation.

Following this Statement of Problem, I discuss some literature relevant for setting the context of this study in the Literature Review including the theoretical framework upon which this study is based. In addition, I discuss how certain meanings have come about historically with respect to students of color, especially those of African descent (as an example), and how the meanings and deficit thinking may be intricately connected with systemic inequality as developed here in the United States. I also discuss attempts at education reform and how deficit thinking may have hampered such attempts. Next, I address methodology including the mechanics of the study. Finally I address in chapters four to seven the findings and conclusion of this study.

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework.

Choosing an appropriate theoretical framework was very important and intricately connected to

this study. It was important to use a framework that could illuminate the place of the meanings[3]

held by educators, including the constraints and enablement they may afford with respect to

crafting solutions such as policies or programs to address students' needs. For example, in

looking at meanings around the "failure" that often occurs in schools, a theoretical framework

can help to analyze the ramifications of how this "failure" is framed. Sociocultural theory, with

its focus on cultural processes, local and societal contexts and learning, provides a suitable

starting place for the framing of this study. For example, to say that "students underachieve" or

"students fail" at first glance might seem neutral. However, using various tenets of sociocultural

theory to analyze these terms can begin to explain how such terms can be problematic for the

students referred to as 'failures.' Using the sociocultural theoretical framework can help to tease

apart meanings by looking at how the cultural processes and the contexts within the school site

help to structure failure. Sociocultural theory can also help with the understanding that the

meaning of "student failure" is really a term that carries with it many invisible and faulty

assumptions. Such faulty assumptions might include that: (i) students are working in a level

playing field, (ii) students are being adequately supported, and (iii) students have limited

capacity to learn. British academic Stuart Hall (1981) used the concept of "ideology" to discuss

the way racial inequality is reproduced through assumptions and "common sense" notions about

people of color. For Hall, differences in ideology can explain the differences in meanings people

hold. As an example, Hall explained the different meanings associated with the word 'Freedom'

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[3] Meanings are defined in "Defined terms."

within different ideological discourses. Freedom, in liberal ideology he explained, is associated with individualism and the free market whereas in a socialist ideology freedom is associated with a collective, depending on equality of condition (Hall, 1981, p. 31).

Sociocultural theory also has potential for helping to understand how to begin engaging in a process of re-articulation of some problematic meanings. Hall (1981) talked about transforming meanings as follows:

> *"One of the ways in which ideological struggle takes place and ideologies are transformed is by articulating the elements differently, thereby producing a different meaning: breaking the chain in which they are currently fixed (e.g. 'democratic' = Free West) and establishing a new articulation (e.g. 'democratic' = deepening the democratic content of political life."*

This transformation or "breaking of the chain" as Hall (1981) called it occurs during a process of social interaction and political struggle. In this study I engage and build on Hall's concept of establishing a "different meaning" and engagement in social interaction and political struggle. As such, for purposes of this study, I use re-articulation to mean a process of engaging in group discussions and learning with the intention of (i) illuminating faulty assumptions behind problematic but commonly held or "common sense" meanings and (ii) reframing some of these meanings, by "articulating the elements differently" when appropriate and for deeper multilevel understandings toward "different meanings" about educating students of color. The learning theories within the socio-cultural framework can also help to identify and analyze when changes are taking place, what are the processes involved and, if and when, roles are shifting. Below I discuss sociolcultural theory and, as others have, I discuss how critical theory can add to this framework. As well, I will discuss the importance of illuminating meanings and their connections to culture and cultural processes and practices. Further, I will discuss the

importance of a focus on history and the historic evolution of some meanings surrounding

African Americans as examples of how meanings can evolve around people of color.

Sociocultural Theory and Critical Theory.[4]

For some time individual cognition has been the major focus of explaining how people

develop and learn (Nasir & Hand 2006; Scott 1998). Increasingly however, scholars have looked

to what is taking place in local contexts as people interact with each other, to explain cognitive

development and learning. Many scholars now look to culture as a means of studying human

activity. In contemporary western thinking, the origins of these cultural studies have been

credited to social pychologist G.H. Mead in the field of symbolic interactionism (as further

developed by others such as Herbert Blumer), and to soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, in the

field of socio-cultural studies. These approaches look at people's social life to help understand

human activity and meaning making. For example, socioculturists acknowledge that cognition

develops through social life. According to Scott (1998), "[c]entral to Vygotsky's sociocultural

approach is the claim that higher mental functioning in the individual derives from social life"

(Scott, 1998). Sociocultural theory focuses on cultural and social processes both at the local and

societal levels, and the use of tools and artifacts and on learning.

Culture at Multiple Levels. Sociocultural theories consider the local contexts, the social

and cultural processes and the practices that are implicated in day-to-day interactions among

people. They consider how "individual engagement in activity as being shaped by sociocultural

processes acting simultaneously on different planes of development, by the cultural tools and

forms that individuals employ to achieve their goals, and by their interactions with each other"

(Nasir & Hand, 2006, p. 463). Furthermore, sociocultural scholars have increasingly sought to

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[4] I owe a debt of gratitude to Nasir & Hand (2006) for their important work on sociocultural theory, culture and learning. This work was instrumental in assisting my understanding of this theory and I have quoted their work extensively.

understand how human activity and interactions between people are enabled or prevented not just by local cultural processes but also by larger societal forces (Id).

Culture as defined by socioculturalists is concerned with meanings, processes and practices that both seem to be carried with people across time and also that change from day-to-day, in local contexts as people engage with each other. This concept of culture is much broader than typically used. For example it signifies more than simply discussing the culture of people of different countries, regions, race or ethnic groups. Rather, culture from a sociocultural perspective "allows for a treatment of culture change and provides a lens through which the local production of culture in moments of classroom life can become apparent and be deconstructed" (Nasir & Hand, 2006, p. 450). This concept of culture can account for changes in spaces beyond the classroom, wherever there are groups of people engaging in action and interaction together.

Tools and Artifacts. A key tenet of sociocultural theory is that tools and artifacts are critical parts of learning. Tools are also important conveyors of culture and meanings. Sociocultural theory acknowledges that tools and artifacts become so intertwined with culture, learning and meanings that they are not really separable (Nasir & Hand, 2006). Tools and artifacts are the things people use to accomplish their goals (Nasir & Hand, 2006;). When powerful tool and artifacts are used, they can concretize meanings and assumptions behind them. When the meanings or the assumptions are false, powerful tools and artifacts can make them seem as though they are true.

Language (see defined terms), the words people use, and how they use it, are very important tools through which culture and meanings are mediated. Language is also important for the possibilities it presents for change and agentive action. Language is of particular importance because of its wide accessibility and use as both a communication device and a

mediator of culture (Id). Language (as described in defined terms), can evolve historically and become taken for granted (Hall, 2006, p. 73). Language can also be implicated when judgments are made about the way students speak. For example, some students may speak similarly to the way language is used in schools while others may speak Spanish or with a heavy accent, or use Ebonics or speak in other ways sometimes deemed inappropriate by the schooling process. This is important when students who speak in "school appropriate" manner are valued, even elevated over other students. James Paul Gee (2005, 2008) describes uses of discourse as ways of speaking and being, to explain that language carries more weight than simply a means of communication (J.P. Gee, 2005, 2008).

Tools may also consist of data about schools. Data like the tools mentioned here, can be used powerfully to negatively affect policies, programs or practices engaged in the education of students of color, even while claiming neutrality. For example, when data is used to show rates of "student failure" without contextualizing how the school, teachers and larger society play a role, the 'blame' and responsibility may be laid primarily with the students and their families, while allowing schools, educators and policy makers to abdicate their responsibility.

Artifacts may be concrete or symbolic. These may include books, smart boards, computers, journals and newspaper articles or may be ideational such as ideas about gender role. Artifacts can be used in ways that promote or disrupt meanings such as books that leave out images and the history of students of color. They can also promote deficit images of people of color without contextualizing events and occurrences. Newspapers are powerful artifacts that help to promote and keep meanings in play or can provide spaces for change. They are widely distributed and so have great impact. In the same way that tools and artifacts have been used to powerfully maintain or carve out deficit images of people of color they can also be used to

powerfully transform meanings and support learning (Nasir & Hand, 2006).

Learning.

In addition to the focus on culture (local and societal) and the use of tools and artifacts, sociocultural theory is an important framework to use for this study because it explicitly addresses learning. Learning theories are directly implicated in the attempts to rearticulate meanings, whether with respect to adults or children, educators or students. Although this study is primarily concerned with the learning of educators, the principles on learning discussed herein can also apply to children-students. For purposes of this study, the sociocultural learning theories provide understanding about the process of meaning making and the potential for rearticulating or changing meanings around the education of students of color. For sociocultural theorists, the idea that learning is a social process occurring as people interact with each other has become increasingly salient. Learning as a social process has been referred to in several different ways, as a transformation of participation (Rogoff&Toma, 1997) as involving a community of learners (M. W. Rogoff, 1996) or as occurring in a community of practice (Lave, 1991). These concepts have in common the recognition that learning occurs best when done in shared contexts. To understand how this learning takes place, it is important to note that learning as a social process requires more than just being in the same space. Scholars have found that "social interaction aids cognitive development when partners actually engage in shared thinking processes, not simply when individuals are in the presence of other people" (Rogoff & Toma, 1997, p. 471). In this participatory learning process learning is seen as "an ongoing transformation of roles" (Rogoff, 1994) and occurring when "people transform the roles that they play in the sociocultural activities in which they participate." (Rogoff & Toma, 1997, p. 474). Ideas are built in a shared endeavor rather than the "transmit and test" mode that is

believed to be common to classrooms across America (Rogoff & Toma, 1997, p.474). James

Paul Gee (2004) used the example of how poor and rich children learn to play complicated

pokeman games equally through participation and interaction, to distinguish this learning as a

process of participating as opposed to learning through direct instruction (James Paul Gee,

2004). One way that this social learning occurs is through what some scholars

"intersubjectivity." Intersubjectivity occurs for example, when one person takes the ideas of

another and builds on that idea. Rogoff & Toma (1997) argue for an intersubjective attitude that

encourages building on each other's ideas. Further explaining this concept they point out:

> Although intersubjectivity has been defined in various ways, it focuses attention on the
> ways that people involved in shared endeavors may come to a mutual understanding of a
> situation that allows joint involvement" (Rogoff & Toma, 1997, p. 472).

Another way that learning takes place in a community setting, is through the gradual inculcation

of 'newcomers' into the culture of the learning space as they move from the periphery to the

center and increase their participation (Rogoff, Matusov & White, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Even though the research has shown that learning may occur best in social process, schools in

America tend to be based on a "direct instruction" or "transmit and test" model. The result is

that both educators and students are most likely to be familiar with the use of the "transmit and

test" method in school settings. When efforts are made to use this social process of learning in

more formal settings such as schools, adults who are to participate as facilitators for children

(who are students) themselves engaged in learning. As the authors participating in such a

process pointed out,

> "Trying to understand the community of learners model from a background in the one-
> sided (either adult-run or children run) models requires a paradigm shift like that of
> learning how to function in another culture." (Rogoff, Matusov & White, 1996, p. 398).

Importantly, these authors found that the learning process in community of learners is similar for

both adults and children (Rogoff, Matusov & White, 1996). Furthermore, researchers have also

identified some processes that are involved in learning. They described shared thinking to include processes such as bridging between different understandings of a situation and structuring activties to engage in thinking together (Rogoff & Toma, 1997). Further, these scholars have noted that building on ideas, a participant can engage in " lead a shared inquiry, playing around with an idea together or closely following other people's lines of thought (p. 475).

Critical Theories.

Sociocultural theory, although it focuses on multiple levels of analysis, has been criticized for not focusing on the issues of race, power and privilege. Some sociocultural theorists have found critical theories to be supportive of their work because such theories explicitly address power, domination, privilege and subordinated status (Nasir & Hand, 2006). Critical theorists have found that differences in race, class, gender, living location, among other things, can significantly affect interactions, meaning making and learning (Ladson-Billings & Gomez, 2001; Lipman, 1997). As Lipman (1997) noted while referring to the critical sociology theories of Apple (1979, 1982) and Giroux (1983):

> "Critical studies in the sociology of education … demonstrate that schools are contested terrains, both influenced by, and contesting, dominant ideologies and relations of power in the school and broader society." (p.5)

The meanings people hold are often based on the information or knowledge they have access to and social location often determines that access. Some scholars have acknowledged that the social conditions of subordinated groups often construct the histories and experiences of such groups (Harding 1997; Prakash 1994). Such experiences have been said to "generate distinctive accounts of nature and social relations" (Harding 1997, p. 384). Further, these theorists acknowledge that people's histories, experiences, and daily interactions structure and provide

26

them with their understanding of the world. On one hand, people in similar locations can have similar meanings. For example, there is a "commonality of experiences that emerges from long-standing patterns of racial segregation in the United States" (Collins, 1997). On the other hand, because human activity is structured differently for different groups of people, the vision that different sets of people have can be very different and even "represent an inversion of the other" (Harding, 1990). Moreover, given the often great divergence of interests between the dominant and subordinated groups, it may not be surprising if in some cases the vision available to dominant groups possibly "will be both partial and perverse" (Id).

Many scholars have specifically identified race as a powerful indicator of, and an important lens of analysis for, what is going on in schools. Acknowledging the role of racial dynamics both "historically and currently," Apple (1996) has noted its impact on, among other things, "the construction of teaching" and "the state itself in the US" (p. 137). Quoting Omi & Winant (1994) he noted that "[c]oncepts of race structure both state and civil society" (id). Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) has argued that race is central and continues to be significant in explaining inequity in the U.S. (p. 51; see also Solorzano, 2002; Ladson-Billings 1994). Lynn & Adams (2002), citing legal luminary Derrick Bell and others, agreed that the issue of race is "endemic, perhaps even permanent, in U.S. society" (Lynn, 2002). Class and gender have been acknowledged as important and often intersecting with race. However, it has also been acknowledged that "as stand-alone variables they [class and gender] do not explain all of the educational achievement differences apparent between whites and students of color" (Ladson-Billings &Tate, 1995, p. 51). Further, "*the intercentricity of race and racism"* has been identified as a key element in analyzing school contexts (Yosso, 2005).

Critical theorists have sought to address the many common sense notions that hold meanings in opposition to the interests of people of color. Raising critical awareness has gained currency as a key element in producing counter hegemonic knowledge. Critical theorist Paulo Freire (2005) called for marginalized groups and their supporters to "acquire a critical awareness of oppression through … praxis" (Freire, 2005). Freire required both reflections and praxis to awaken consciousness. As a result, educators themselves need to become critically aware. They also are required to teach in ways that raise critical awareness in their students. In other words, Freire requires teachers to be in solidarity with students, assisting in their critical consciousness transformation. Freire argues that this solidarity cannot be a paternalistic effort but instead an effort that envisions students and families "as persons who have been unjustly dealt with, deprived of their voice, cheated in the sale of their labor" (p. 50).

Building on Existing Sociocultural Theory.

A focus on the meanings connected to cultural processes can help with understandings about how these cultural processes come about and how they are maintained. Further, although sociocultural theory focuses on social and cultural contexts, this theory does not always focus on the historical development of racial meanings. I argue for a focus on the meanings developed with respect to African Americans beginning with slavery because these are connected to racialized meanings about African Americans today. An understanding of the historical development of some meanings and related cultural processes can help to illuminate underlying assumptions behind the processes and meanings. I argue in this paper that sociocultural theory can benefit from (i) an explicit focus on 'meanings' and their circular connection to cultural processes and practices, both helping to sustain such processes while also being influenced by them, together with (ii) a central focus on the development of meanings from a historical

28

perspective. History is of particular importance as it frames social, cultural and economic

contexts. Below I discuss the importance of meanings and the historical evolution of meanings

with respect to African Americans and their education.

The Importance of Meanings and the Potential for Rearticulation.

A focus on meanings[5] can help with understanding the cultural processes that exist within

schools and classrooms. Blumer pointed out in the quote at the beginning of this paper,

meanings help to sustains that joint action and interactions (Blumer, 1986, c1969).

Socioculturists "articulate a view of culture not only as a system of meaning carried across

generations, but also as constantly being created and recreated in local contexts" (Nasir & Hand,

2006, p. 458). Although sociocultural theorists do not always explicitly focus on meanings they

also understand that meanings are intricately connected to culture. I argue that a focus on

meanings is essential for understanding how cultural processes are sustained and in turn how

these processes help to make meanings. It is important to understand how meanings relate to

culture. This relationship may be thought of as a circular and an ever-changing relationship. On

one hand, meanings may be thought of as a building block of culture. On the other hand, culture

may be seen as a web or system of meanings as well as the processes and practices that

implement meanings. Meanings can support culture. Culture and related processes in turn give

meanings life and thereby maintains and sustains them. Socioculturalists sometimes refer to

culture as a system of meanings that are both static and changing (Nasir & Hand, 2006).

If there are meanings supporting cultural processes that create barriers to learning and

teaching, understanding how such meanings are placed locally within a school context is very

important. As important is recognizing the potential spaces for the agency involved in

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[5] See "Defined Terms" for a definition of meanings.

attempting to rearticulate such meanings. Recognizing where there might be resistance and what form such resistance might take, would also be important. Sociocultural theory requires looking at the multiple layers of analysis with respect to students' development. Factors such as how these students may be reacting to the stimuli afforded by systems of inequality in ways that may make sense developmentally should be considered (Tatum, 1997). Further, sociocultural theorists would also suggest the importance of how common sense notions about students of color are situated within larger societal contexts. In addition, sociocultural theory is not always explicit about power. The complexity of micro-politics within schools, including who has what power, will come into play if, and when a concern is raised and change is sought and resisted. Furthermore, in order for a rearticulation of meanings to take place with respect to how to best educate students of color, it is imperative that considerations be given to the play of the complex and layered contexts of the systems of inequality within which these students and their communities exist. Sociocultural theory, augmented by critical theory, discussed more fully later, provides a framework for addressing these concerns. Critical theory helps to address the saliency of how inequality, whether based on race, class or other subordinated category, play out in students' lives on a daily basis. Although sociocultural theory is not always explicit about considering historical contexts, considering how history has structured the positions of students and their communities will be central.

When changes are suggested and resisted, part of the struggle for re-articulation may be over the way the questions or problems are formulated. This is because solutions will tend to follow along the lines of how a problem or question is articulated. For example, how one views the responsibility for students' education may depend on how the issue is raised. Consider the meaning behind the phrase "many students of color fail academically." While the statement

seems to be both neutral and true there is a lot more to this statement than might first meet the eye. A question may arise as to who is responsible? Whose failure is it? Is it a failure of the students or the students' parents? Is it a failure of the school? If the problem is *the students' failure*, then the solution is the students' because it is their failure (or their parents). Sociocultural theorists would however consider the social and cultural contexts in attempting to analyze this statement and the ensuing questions about "student failure." As a result, the context surrounding "this failure" would be considered. Considering the social, cultural (including economics) contexts, and focusing on the meanings held with respect to such failure may be bring to light implicit, unnamed and taken for granted assumptions about named failure of students of color. Furthermore, examining the historical contexts of how students of color have been framed will also give context as to how it came to be that some assumptions are made, including the role of large institutions over time. Addressing the social, cultural and historical contexts may provide some clarity as to why a reframing of the problem or statement about failure might be necessary or at least desirable.

If the failure is the students or their parents, or the result of the conditions of their neighborhood or their culture, then educators may deem their role in the solution as more limited than it ought to be. However, if the problem is framed to consider what the school and educators' roles, then the solutions can be dramatically different. Re-articulating (i) the meanings educators have with respect to students of color or (ii) how they frame the 'problem' of educating these students can change the direction of potential solutions.

Focusing on meanings is important both because of the limitations they may place on learning and learning environments and the great potential they have to create opportunities for learning for both educators and students. Re-articulations of meanings involve challenging taken

for granted 'common sense' notions about race and class. Some socially constructed meanings

have unspoken (tangible and intangible) rights and privileges associated with them, while other

meanings have the very opposite associated with them—that is, the deprivation of rights and

privileges. For children of color, all of the multiple level of meanings, relating to their academic

ability, learning and even discipline, among others things, exist within a larger social and cultural

context infused with inequality based at least in part on race, class or immigration status.

Certain meanings get privileged over others when power is at play. People with power

can help to privilege some meanings particularly when they have access to, and use powerful

cultural tools and artifacts. For example, those who have legitimacy and credibility can

powerfully direct and influence language and construct meanings (Hall, 1981). However, the

construction of meaning does not happen without a struggle. Because meanings are not fixed

and things do not come with intrinsic meanings, they can be contested (Id). They can change.

An example is the current gender and pink/blue color association. In America, most people

know that the color pink is associated with girls and blue with boys. Surprisingly, this has not

always been the case. According to Sharp & Wade (2008), before the 1950s, the opposite was

true. These researchers tell of an old advice column in a newspaper that argued

> "the generally accepted rule is pink for the boy and blue for the girl. The reason is pink
> being a more decided and stronger color is more suitable for the boy while blue which is
> more delicate is more appropriate for the girl" (Sharp, 2008).

Given the strength of connection of pink to girls and blue to boys today, it is difficult to imagine

that not so long ago the association was the complete opposite. What this means is that there is

room for re-articulation, such that old meanings that may be problematic can be replaced with

new meanings with potential for the creation of openings and increased possibilities for learning.

Considering and Centralizing History.

The critical theorists that are sometimes referred to as subalternists, build on Gramsci's identification of the ruling class as "realized in the State," point out that the ruling class's history (and not the subaltern's) is the history of the State (Gramsci, 1971). Because subaltern classes (or subordinated classes) are not in the ruling class, they are not unified with the State. The exclusion of the histories of the subaltern often means that the dominant group, of which the ruling class is a part, is the reference point in many things that matter, including but not limited to the "juridical and the political" (p. 52). For these reasons sociocultural theory can benefit from a focus on the historical contexts by addressing the excluded histories of subordinated groups.

Centralizing history can help with understanding how existing social and cultural contexts came about, including the role of larger systemic devices. For example, how economic contexts were created and certain groups of people were targeted. A focus on history may also help to illuminate the invisible systems that are currently in place and are taken for granted because they have been around for a long time (Hall, 1981; 2006). History is also important for understanding how meanings, even those that are not real or true, can evolve to seem like truth and therefore become difficult to change. Regardless of whether the focus is on meanings or cultural processes or practices, historical considerations are important for deepening understandings of how things came to be. Including a historical perspective can help to clarify that things don't just happen can illuminate the larger systems at play and can also give hope with the knowledge that because there has been some change in the past, more change can take place in the future. Understanding the historic can also heighten the need for finding spaces for agency.

Further, when analyses are ahistorical they can lose the significance of what went on before and how things became the way they are currently. A potential loss of perspective can limit the depth of analyses. For example, many children of color live and go to school in impoverished circumstances in inner cities (Anyon, 2005; Kozol, 2005; Rogers et. al 2009). Without historical understandings of cultural processes and practices at the highest levels—such as the federal and state governments that helped to create the conditions, the value judgments that are sometimes attached to being poor in America, may remain under the surface and not illuminated.

The meaning of education for African Americans has evolved significantly throughout American history. This evolution of meanings has been the result of enormous struggle. Interesting, Hull & Rose (1991) have pointed out that at each stage of evolution, meanings from previous periods continue to be associated with 'new' or evolved meanings. The result is, that history bears witness, in many respects, to how African Americans and their education are viewed currently. Below is a discussion of how the meanings associated with African Americans, including their schooling and education in America, have evolved historically and have set the frame for current contexts and existing meanings about them.

Meanings and Inequality in Society.

Denigrating and deficit meanings about African Americans today can be traced back to their beginnings with the institution of slavery in America. This can be seen as the beginning of systemic inequality in America. At the heart of the settlements in the Americas was the search for economic gain. Labor in the new America was first provided by indentured servants, at first primarily the poor from Europe (Johnson, Smith, & Team, 1998). However, indentured servants were obligated to work only for a set number of years (typically 4-7), in payment for their

34

passage to the new land (Johnson, et al., 1998). After their contract service was completed, they were free. This presented a labor problem for the planter class, which was then obligated to replenish the labor force. With the production of labor intense crops such as tobacco, the need for labor likewise intensified. For the planter class, this need justified a new form of slavery.

Interestingly, prior to the development of the slave trade, Europeans and Africans engaged in mutually beneficial trade (Johnson, et al., 1998). While a form of bondage existed in Africa, it was similar to the serfdom that existed in Europe and also had rules and regulations that protected those in bondage (Id). With the development of the transatlantic slave trade however, a new and more dehumanizing form of slavery began (Johnson, et al., 1998). To justify and maintain slavery, and thereby their workforce, the planter class deliberately constructed meanings about Africans that put in question their ability to access the same human rights as other people. The powerful cultural tool of language was used by those in the dominant class to help (together with the legal system) solidify meanings about Africans' as an inferior group of people. These meanings and ideas were not just spoken by some, they were repeated, they engaged cultural processes and most importantly, the most powerful cultural tools and societal institutions available were used and they were codified into law (Feagin, 2006). The result was that certain deficit meanings about Africans Americans became permanent parts of the common sense and language of the times. The institution of slavery legally stripped Africans of their human rights and deemed them to be property much as cattle or workhorses (Feagin, 2006). This stripping of rights of Africans inured substantial and enduring benefits to those in the planter class, most of whom were of European descent (Trent, 1998).

Even with the abolition of slavery after the Civil War, legal segregation ("Jim Crow") kept in place the many denigrating ideologies and descriptors about people of African heritage.

35

As a result, the meanings people in the dominant class held, and assumptions they made about people of color, did not change. However, meanings and cultural processes that are dehumanizing do not go unchallenged. The Civil Rights movement was a moment of great struggle over the rights of African Americans. With this movement, then existing meanings about African Americans were challenged using social movement engagement such as marching and sit-ins and the media. The result was that African Americans regained many human rights on paper. Unfortunately, many cultural processes and meanings connected to slavery and segregation remain to this day. The struggle for meaning re-articulation with respect to African Americans continues. Although there have been many changes with respect to the rights of African Americans, deficit ideas continue to persist both in larger society and, in schools (Feagin, 2006; Hull, Rose, Losey, & Castellano, 1991). Furthermore, institutionalized racism with respect to African Americans helped to set the frame and created the language for more broadly used subordination with respect to other peoples of color in America and others categories such as gender, language, immigration status, phenotype and sexual preferences. Unfortunately, many Americans do not make the connection between the lingering effects of slavery, institutionalized racism, and the meanings they hold about people of color and their actions. Nor do they focus on the underlying assumptions they hold with respect to negative meanings about people of color—relative to the positive meanings including entitlements about people who are white.

In the post civil rights era, the cultural practices and processes of whites lead to de facto segregation in urban ghettos replacing legal segregation as a vehicle of inequality (Feagin, 2006; G. Orfield, 1988, 2001). What is interesting to note is that the meanings about African Americans that were created during slavery, particularly ideas about their inferiority, did not

change even with the changing of the laws. These meaning continued to fuel inequitable

practices. The laws did not necessarily change minds or the meanings people held.

Paradoxically, alongside the laws prohibiting segregation and discrimination, new meanings with

respect to whiteness became more apparent. 'White' became and continues to be associated with

entitlements and at the same time 'Black' became and continues to be associated with the denial

of those entitlements (Massey, 1993). And while some re-articulations of meanings about people

of color such as "Black is Beautiful" were made, within dominant groups much of the race based

and deficit meanings about people of color versus Whites remained (Hall, 2006), and remains

today as the struggle for new meaning continues. For example, the movement of former slaves

around the country elicited practices in the form of segregation by many Whites, both at the

individual and institutional levels. These processes and practices denied African Americans

access to housing, schools, use of hotels and other basics (Massey, 1993). With the abolition of

slavery, starting in 1890 until the 1960s, African Americans (who were in the majority in the

South) left the South in increasing numbers to look for opportunities and in part to satisfy the

North's need for workers for its increasingly industrialized economy (Feagin, 2006; Massey,

1993). Massey (1993) reported "a series of well defined institutional practices, private behaviors

and public policies" that converged to contribute to the segregation of African Americans

(Massey, 1993). One example of these practices were the institutional 'redlining' practices

started by the federal government's Home Owners' Loan Corporation and continued by the

Federal Housing Administration (Massey, 1993). This had the result of simultaneously

encouraging Whites to move to the suburbs while keeping out African Americans. These

powerful processes and practices across American society (including at the highest governmental

levels) were supported by meanings about African Americans that associated denigrating and

deficit ideas about African Americans. More significant however, these meanings became associated with disentitlement, a denial of human rights that others in society were entitled to.

The many individual and institutional practices associated with urban segregation are less visible than the laws instituting slavery and the Jim Crow laws that existed during segregation. For example, the institutionalization of processes and practices such as denials of housing loans, or exclusionary covenants made inequality often invisible to the eye and as a result, difficult to change. The blatant "for whites only signs" were no longer present. Feagin (2006) noted that as part of America's development, many wealth-generating benefits, such as access to land and loans, were given to many citizens of European descent using various institutions and organizations. In addition to redlining, for example, repeated denials by lending institutions and real estate organizations created systems of inequality in areas such as extension of credit and ownership of real estate (Anyon, 2005; Feagin, 2006; Massey, 1993). These practices were not necessarily part of written policies but were instead assumed ways of doing business based on assumptions about who were entitled to such benefits and who were not. Connected to such assumptions were the system of meanings held about African Americans and their status of disentitlement.

While the force of slavery no longer exists and segregation has been abolished, inequality has remained rampant. This inequality continues to impact the daily lives of many people of color and with it their access to many benefits and privileges in society. Inequality has survived despite many organized movements challenging it as evidenced by the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement. Institutional practices with deficit views behind them continue today. These deficit meanings often support practices even in major institutions such as banking, carrying negative economic effects for people of color. For example, recently, in a case of reverse

'redlining,' a major bank was reported by the New York Times as "systematically singling out blacks…for high interest subprime mortgages" even for those qualified for better loans (Powell, 2009). The result was a disproportionate amount of foreclosures in those neighborhoods. Interestingly, indicating a connection between the meanings he held and his practices, a loan officer was reported as using denigrating terms, calling the African Americans targeted "mud people" and the loans the loans they sought "ghetto loans." The meanings developed in slavery and segregation, although not explicit as they were then, have carried over and become almost invisible. Terms like "mud people" and "ghetto" carry with them negative and deficit meanings. Unfortunately these meanings come not only as words, they have the potential, as in the loan case mentioned above, for having negative economic impact or limiting people's access to resources like homes, loans and even education.

The operation of hegemony can help us to understand how inequality is maintained without the use of force as in slavery, or the legal systems, as in legal segregation. Hegemony is defined in the dictionary as "predominant influence exercised by one nation over others" (Web Dictionary). Apple (2009) gives a more detailed definition of hegemony as "an organized assemblage of meanings and practices, the central, effective and dominant system of meanings, values and actions which are *lived*" (p.4). Apple (2009) further explains that hegemony "structures our consciousness" such that our actions, interactions become taken for granted common sense. Hegemony helps to maintain inequality in a way that is much less visible and hence more difficult to see, explain and therefore eliminate. With the operation of hegemony dominant groups are able to keep non-dominant groups such as African Americans and Latinos in a 'subordinated' status. Antonio Gramsci (1971), believed two major superstructures exist for controlling people's actions. He describes these as "civil society" or the realm of private life and

39

"political society" or the realm of the State. He distinguished between (i) the potential use of force to coerce by the State (for example, during slavery), and (ii) the use of civil society to produce hegemony, a more subtle almost invisible form of force (Gramsci, 1971). The basic idea of hegemony "is that man is led not only by force but by ideas as well" (Bates, 1975, p. 351). The consent of subordinated groups is obtained by the "diffusion and popularization" of the world-view of the dominant class. As Omi & Winant (1994) explains, "ruling groups elaborate and maintain a popular system of ideas and practices" which become "common sense" (p. 67). When these ideas or meanings and practices are adopted by subordinated groups, even when against the subordinated groups' interest, such groups give 'consent' to the way the dominant class rules. In America, many Whites gained enormous wealth from the free labor of African Americans (Feagin, 2006; Trent, 1998). This wealth translated into both political power and prestige. These Whites' position also gave them the access and means to distribute their worldviews. The wide distribution of these worldviews often obtains Gramsci's consent from many African Americans (Bates, 1975; Omi & Winant, 1994, pps. 65-69).

The power that dominant groups have is important. Power can be considered as the engine that makes hegemony work (M. Apple, 2009). Because of their power, dominant groups are able to institutionalize their individual beliefs and meanings (including false meanings) about African Americans, in ways that can diverge from African Americans interests. The concept of power and hegemony may also be related to internalized racism. Internalized racism is the acceptance by a subordinated group such as African Americans, of the negative meanings about themselves and their people and the resulting racial hierarchy that elevates dominant group such as Whites (Woodson, 1933). Internalized racism may also assist the process of hegemony and may help provide the consent that Gramsci discussed. According to Woodson (1933),

"When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions…You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no door he will cut one for his special benefit" (Woodson, 1933).

Hegemony, dominant group power and internalized racism may work together to produce, maintain and replicate inequalities. In America, the systems of inequalities that began with slavery and developed with legal and de facto segregation have been powerfully maintained by their oft-unquestioned inclusion in major institutions, in particular in schools. At the root of this inequality are the ways of thinking about people of color that have remained consistently negative even with change in laws. These ways of thinking continue to be reflected in governmental policies. For example, recently Arizona's Governor, Jan Brewer signed into law, SB1070 an undocumented immigration law to, among other things, allow police officers to stop people suspected of being "illegal immigrants" (Nill, 2011). The governor has stated that targeting illegal immigration is the main objective of the law. This law however, may be seen as part of a larger racial project where Latinos are increasingly associated with being criminals.

Meanings and Inequality in Schools.

Larger societal inequality has been reflected in schooling and education for African American since the adoption of slavery. For example, during slavery it was illegal for slaves to be taught to read and write (James D. Anderson, 1988; W.H. Watkins, 2001; William H. Watkins, Lewis, & Chu, 2001). Nevertheless, understanding the importance of education, many slaves risked life and limb to learn to read (Id). With the abolition of slavery, African Americans immediately, even with their limited resources, began the process of educating themselves. However, from the Civil War onward, the education of Blacks was central to, and intricately connected, to the development and the political unfolding of America (W.H. Watkins, 2001). Then, as now, the education of African Americans was extremely political. There were intense debates over the

41

best curriculum to educate African Americans. Booker T. Washington and others thought that an accomodationist view was more appropriate. WEB Dubois promoted a liberal education view. This debate was central to the access to equality and liberty to which African Americans aspired. At its core was whether African Americans would be educated to become equal or continue as subordinated members of society. As a result, the education of African Americans became entangled in the "complicated questions of nation building, regionalism, colonialism, labor economics and socio-moral development of an emergent and influential world power" (p. 41). The underlying understandings about (i) what activities from a practical standpoint African Americans would engage in on a daily basis to improve their conditions and (ii) what was needed to improve the conditions of the race as a group in the future were at stake. How would they feed their children in the short run and develop into full citizens over time? These were important issues with far reaching implications. It is therefore not surprising that the best-known minds and thinkers in the African American community disagreed. Furthermore, I would argue that at issue was the very definition of what it meant, and would mean going forward, to be African American.

It was thought that the accommodation viewpoint sought to educate African Americans to be laborers and workers. This was because, many saw this view as in keeping with the-then structure of society and one that promised to provide the orderly labor force many Whites saw as important for American nation building. Admittedly, this may not have been the goal of African Americans who sought to educate the former slaves and give them the ability to realistically find ways to develop skills to gain an income. The educational views of Dubois and Washington could have co-existed and could have provided the base for a healthy debate among educators for the greater good of the field of education. These views may even have merged as the economic-

freedom, equality and liberty of African Americans were all at stake. Those in control of the

resources to influence education however found that the accomodationist view served their labor

purposes (Anderson, 1989; J.D. Anderson, 1988; W.H. Watkins, 2001). Those in control of the

production were more interested in acquiring profits and were best served by a docile and

controlled work force more so than in liberty or equality for African Americans. As a result,

African Americans' efforts to educate themselves for equality and liberation were aggressively

and powerfully resisted by those in control (J.D. Anderson, 1988). According to Asa Hilliard,

> "the record is clear. The treatment of Africans was not a matter of negligence or
> accident. It was not benign. Massive and strategic attempts were made to   use
> educational structures to destroy "critical consciousness" (Freire, 1970), to
> alienate Africans from tradition and from each other, to teach African inferiority and
> European superiority" (Asa G. Hilliard, 2001).

Interestingly, the battle for equality and the battle for education have gone hand in hand. As

Watkins (2001) points out, "[f]ew would disagree that the status of black education serves as a

barometer of our people's plight" (p. 40). The historical education of African Americans to

become workers as opposed to critical thinkers suggested by a liberal education meant limited

education for African Americans. It also meant a limitation of the evolution of the meanings

about African Americans. It meant a continuation of the deficit thinking about African

Americans that began with slavery.

Deficit Thinking and Schooling.

> If the only representation you saw of us is in "Waiting for Superman" what would you
> think of us? What would you think of our communities? *(Los Angeles High School
> Student at AERA Conference).*

The above question was asked by a Roosevelt high school student during a presentation at the

annual American Educational Research Association conference held in 2011 (AERA 2011). The

student referred to *Waiting for Superman, a* recent film that portrayed her school as a "dropout

factory." After asking this question, the student went on to beseech the audience, "please do not judge us by the least of us but by the best of us!" She explained that the film spoke about her family, her friends and her community and further asked us how we would feel if we were described as "failures." The film *Waiting for Superman,* attempts to shed light on the failures of public schools to educate many students, especially those in low income and communities of color. While it was made with apparent good intentions, in some cases, the film leaves the impression that the students at the school and the people in the community are failures. In such cases, the film can be interpreted to give the impression that the victims, the very students schools should be helping, are really to blame for a school system's failures.

How does the "victim" morph into its opposite meaning to become the "blamed?" A way to understand this inversion of meanings is to understand that the meanings created historically about certain people impact the meanings that exist today. In America, being White has evolved in ways that means entitlement or privilege. These privileges form "an invisible package of unearned assets" of which many are unaware but take for granted (McIntosh, 1990). On the other hand, being other than White has often meant the opposite. Although some of the meanings about African Americans have changed since slavery and the "Jim Crow" period, many deficit views connected to the negative meanings about them that existed since those periods, including a meaning of disentitlement, remain. Deficit beliefs and meanings about people of color are supported in a number of ways and continue to evidence the belief of White superiority over African Americans and other people of color.

One way deficit meanings have been supported is by their reification through the use of so-called "scientific research" (Trent, 1998). Valencia & Solorzano (1997) for example, discussed several authors with a number of theories including neo-hereditarianism (p. 160) that

supported deficit thinking and suggested people of color had genes and intellect inferior to Whites (Valencia&Solorzano, 1997). These ideas are not new and are connected to ideas historically held. Notwithstanding many critiques of deficit theories, Valencia & Solorzano (1997) found that deficit thinking became part of and continues to pervade education. For example they discussed how deficit thinking helped to co-opt the term 'at risk' which was intended to show how standardization and heavy teacher workload put students at risk. The term is now used in a descriptive way that presumes some deficiency on the part of the students that according to Valencia & Solorazano (1997) is related to "cultural deprivation" and "culturally disadvantaged" (p. 196). As Valencia & Solorzano (1997) indicated, the problem with terms like "at risk" is that they locate problems within communities and children without contextualizing for the institutionalization of inequality that impacts these communities (p. 197). The term fails to indicate the many attributes, "strengths, competencies and promise of low-income children and parents" (Id).

Disentitlement and deficit meanings about African Americans have influenced education policy from very early on in U.S. history including the policy to not educate Blacks during slavery, to later educate them to become laborers. In 1896, the US Supreme Court decision, *Plessy v. Ferguson,* officially allowed the separation of public facilities, including schools, based on race (Trent, 1998). After the invalidation of *Plessy* by the 1954 B*rown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, and practices such as tracking and the special education laws, contributed to continue to segregated students on the basis of race (Trent, 1998). Deficit and disentitlement meanings are implicated in the ongoing inequality faced by African Americans and other people of color.

The practice of segregation has, throughout American history, been emblematic of racial and class inequality and has helped to support and to keep in place deficit meanings about people of color. Unfortunately, schooling in America, like housing, has historically been and continues to be segregated (Orfield & Lee, 2005; Orfield, 1988). Most African American and Latino students attend predominantly 'minority' schools (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Rogers, 2009). Highlighting the problem of segregation practices, these schools tend to be under-resourced with respect to the resources that matter to education, such as qualified teachers, class size, facilities and supplies, (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Rogers, 2009). Among the most egregious of these is the quality of instruction. At least one study has shown that about 40% of the variance in students' performance was accounted for by the quality of the teacher (Darling-Hammond, 2007, pg. 322). Unfortunately, research also shows that there is a greater likelihood that students of color, including African American students, will be taught by poorly trained teachers (Id). For example, in California, for the school year 2006-7, high schools serving predominantly minorities were seven times more likely to have a severe shortage of qualified teachers than majority White or Asian schools (Rogers, 2009, p. 12). These patterns or "systems" tend to perpetuate the unequal status of minority groups. Further, they also tend to help reinforce deficit notions about students of color.

While the 1954 B*rown* decision officially ended legal segregation by finding that a dual segregated school system was unconstitutional (Hallinan, 2001; G. Orfield, 1988; G. Orfield, & Lee, C. , 2005), efforts to desegregate schools, did not endure (G. Orfield, 2001). While some equality in education occurred during the height of desegregation efforts in the 1970s and 1980s**,** re-segregation began in the 1990s and continues today (Hallinan, 2001; G. Orfield, 1988, 2001). And, at least in part because the deficit meanings about people of color that have remained, even

when the laws have been changed, schools in America continue to be largely segregated and afflicted with deep inequalities based on race.

Even when students of color attend schools that are not segregated, there are other systems in schools that support inequality. For example, in-school tracking instituted in many schools, mirror the structural inequalities existing between some segregated schools (Oakes, 2005; Roscigno, 1999). In these spaces schools are often battlegrounds over access to educational resources. The social power relations of the different groups within schools often come into play to determine who gets what resources (P. Lipman, 1997). People of color, the disentitled, tend to be the losers in these battles. The research indicates that children of color are most likely to end up in lower educational tracks (Brint, 1998). This is particularly troublesome because researchers have found that tracking contributes to educational disparities (Roscigno, 1999). In her study of 25 schools, Oakes (2005) found that, except with respect to schools catering to the middle and upper class, tracking was correlated to race. Further, contrary to popular belief, Oakes found that the evidence did not show consistent benefit by any group of students from being in a homogenous group (Oakes, 2005). When students in lower tracks perform poorly the deficit beliefs about them become self-fulfilling prophesies.

Although many deficit ideas have been refuted, scholars find that deficit theories have continued to "influence educational policies and practices significantly" (Trent, 1998, p.281). For example, it has been argued that deficit thinking is at the root of many aspects of special education policies and practices in America (Trent, 1998). This is at least in part because school systems primarily used a norm referenced, deficit-based diagnostic model to make special education placements (Trent, 1998). The deficit-infused models disregard the social and cultural contexts within with students do their work. Trent (1998) noted that:

Students' academic and cognitive work is embedded in their past cultural heritage, at the same time that their cognition and practices are situated in mutually constructed meanings of the present classroom setting…[classroom] communities that develop their own routines, forge shared understanding about rules and rights, and organize participation and interactional structures.

One problem with norm-reference tests is that the model is usually not that of children of color but of the dominant culture. When students of color do not fit the model, negative assumptions about students of color can be reinforced. Differences are seen as bad or wrong as opposed to difference as good or additive to the classroom environment. Classrooms that use norm-based references can lead to students of color being considered low performing (Hull, et al., 1991). Further, the research shows that students of color are overrepresented in special education classes, as they were in lower level classes (Trent,1998; Oakes, 2005).

Research has shown that white pre-service teachers generally have negative stereotypical beliefs about African American children and their ability to learn (Sleeter, 2001). And, given the racial and class structure of larger American society there are few reasons to believe these will go away as teachers mature. As a result, when students of color are in mainstream classrooms, they often find themselves with teachers having negative, stereotypical deficit views about students of color and their communities. The research has also shown that teachers' perceptions have an impact on relations with students. In turn, these relations have an impact on the educational achievement of students (Dee, 2005; Roscigno, 1999; Sleeter, 2001). It has been found for example that when a teacher is of different race, children are more likely to be seen as disruptive and more likely to do poorly (Dee, 2005). Because African Americans and Latinos are more likely (67 and 89 percent), to be taught by Whites, there is a much larger impact on these groups (Dee, 2005, p. 7). On the other hand, in general, white students are with teachers of a different race only 6 percent of the time. In addition, the pool of teachers in the public schools

is overwhelmingly white, even as the student body becomes more diverse. The 2009 NCES Report, reported that in 2007, 56% of public school students were white, 21% Hispanic, 15% African American. In contrast in 2004, the teachers in public schools were reported to be 83% white and only 17% minority (NCES Report 2007). Although much of the research on teacher perception appears to focus on White pre-service teachers, teachers of color can also exhibit stereotypical deficit beliefs that can negatively impact students' educational opportunities (Garcia & Guerra, 2004).

Nonetheless, some teachers are able to move beyond stereotypical deficit meanings about low-income students of color and teach them effectively. Researchers have suggested that effective teachers are able to recognize the skills that children of color bring to school and are able to assess what technical skills the child may be missing and address that need (Delpit, 1995, p. 11-20; Gloria Ladson-Billings, 1994). Below, I discuss some efforts at reforms, some of which seemed to be hampered by deficit thinking and then some of which showed promise.

Reform Efforts and Deficit Thinking.

 The difficulties schools have with educating students of color have led to numerous efforts at reform. Unfortunately, deficit thinking has contributed to and challenged these efforts. According to Hull & Rose (1991) there have been some shifts in the deficit thinking in social reform movements. Hull & Rose (1991) have noted that these shifts have however, depended to some extent on what went on in previous years. The result is, deficit thinking remains central to much effort to reform schools. For example, they note that reform movements of the 1950s and 1960s shifted the discussion from meanings around depravity of character of the individuals to a society and economic conditions that produced youth who were "socially maladjusted" (Id). While the thought is that it is the society that produces the problem, the results are still that youth

are thought to be internally problematic. The theories behind these movements created meanings

about students that ranged from "socially maladjusted" to "immature learners" to "unwilling

learners" (p.312). Hull & Rose (1991) further noted that studies in linguistics, psychology, and

social psychology mostly focused on African Americans and were interpreted to show that

students lacked learning capability because of a number of environmental insufficiencies, among

them impoverished language and insufficient stimuli for the development of cognition. They

also noted that in the 1970s and 1980s, research on the effect of cultural differences and class

and race based resistance to socialization into the mainstream – have emerged and made

significant contributions to our understandings of how learning and communication occurs in the

classroom. Nonetheless, they also noted, the surprising

> ease with which older deficit-oriented explanations for failure can exist side by side with
> these newer theories, and, for that fact, can narrow the way such theories are represented
> and applied, turning differences into deficits, reducing the rich variability of human
> thought, language and motive (p.313).

What has been consistent with many approaches to education and reform that attempt to explain

the failure of schools is the tendency to see the problem as one that is located within the student

(whether moral behavior or cognitive capability) or in his or her family background instead of an

examination of how the schools are not responding to students' needs.

Notwithstanding deficit views they may hold, it is important to remember that many

educators exhibit caring for their students. Many are committed to teaching. Nonetheless, the

tendency of these same educators to see school failure as located within the student tends lead to

the belief that there is little they can do to educate some children (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). This

tendency is also not surprising.   One can probably imagine the difficulty of interacting with a

person who has a 'bad attitude or is 'really annoying' or is 'disruptive' or is 'messy' or really

'speaks poorly' or dresses in ways we think 'inappropriate. Building relationships with such

person can be challenging.   A teacher can have great difficulty when confronted with a student who he believes fits one the above descriptions.   Engaging with that student in a way that moves beyond the common sense assumptions about what is going on with that student can be extremely difficult. However, changes can and do occur, and it is imperative that we begin to understand under what circumstances these changes may occur.

Many teachers and other educators are well-intentioned, caring individuals. These same educators may be not be aware of the "deeper, hidden, or invisible dimensions of culture" (Garcia & Guerra, 2004) that influences their own identity, school policies and instructional practices. This understanding however, can provide an opening. The point is not to switch the blame to teachers when engaging in education reform efforts. Centering on teachers as the problem can detract from the "critical examination of systemic factors that perpetuate deficit thinking and reproduce educational inequities for students from non-dominant socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds" (Hull & Rose, 1991; see also Garcia & Guerra, 2004). The idea is not to cast aspersions, but to understand the larger context and to craft solutions with the larger contexts in mind. Individual prejudice should also be addressed, in the context of larger societal prejudices (Hull & Rose, 1991). Of critical importance is to figure out how to (i) move from the deficit assumptions that come when we see behavior that is different or we consider "bad," (ii) harness the care and commitment most teachers and educators have into effective teaching and education.

Schools are often "contested terrain" where there is jostling of different meanings about education that are connected to who's culture gets included and how and to whom resources are distributed. As a result, during reform efforts the change process can also depend on "the relative political power, influence, and resources of various social groups in the school and in the

community" (Lipman 1997, p. 5). If educators do not appropriately engage within larger contexts, the reform efforts can have the opposite effect intended. Efforts can lead to educators not seeking to make necessary changes. Educators can become less critical of their own work and can use the opportunity to confirm that the problem lies in the student and not in their practices when they find other teachers that have the same problems, sometimes even with the same students. For example, as Lipman (1997) found in one reform effort

> "Proceeding from dominant, largely unquestioned, assumptions of social
> and cultural deficiency, teachers directed their attention to those aspects of
> students' lives over which they had the least control rather than to educational experiences
> which were within their power to change." (Lipman, 1997, p. 18)

Educators often do bring limited understandings to explain what is going on with their students. When they do, they often reach back to common sense notions about student behavior that are imprinted with deficit thinking. Interestingly, this was the case for both White teachers and teachers of color (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). However, the commitment and concern (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Hull & Rose, 1991) that many educators have for teaching and their students can provide reformers with a point of entry for making necessary changes in schools.

Some Examples of Promising Reform Efforts; Potential of Forms of Resource-Oriented (or Asset-based) Thinking.

Recent work with teachers has provided some understandings as to what must be considered in attempting effective reforms. Some researchers have found that teacher self-reflection and community based experience are important. There are indications that when white teachers describe their own learning about teaching students of color they have suggested that community-based experiences is extremely important (Sleeter 2001, p. 96). In addition, the need for teachers to construct their knowledge, including knowledge of race in a new kind of space, has "gained currency in the teaching community" (Smith-Maddox & Solorzano, 2002). Smith-

Maddox & Solorzano (2002) provided such a space within the context of a teacher education course. The course centered race and challenged traditional paradigms, methods, texts and discourses on race. Among other things, the course exposed student teachers to literature focusing on racial ethnic groups, democratic education, racial and cultural identity and knowledge about race. They also studied a community of color to find assets and resources within that community. As a result, the course provided an alternative (resource-oriented, as opposed to deficit) approach to teacher education that can begin to disrupt deficit notions of African American and other minority groups in pre-service teacher training. Courses such as Smith-Maddox & Solorzano's and others are necessary because, as these two researchers pointed out, many teacher education programs use a cultural deficit model to explain educational inequity. The authors however acknowledged the difficulty of effecting change during one course. Chubbuck (2008) case study of a white novice urban teacher also gave some indication of the difficulty some white teachers may have to traverse on the road to engaging in socially just teaching. Discussing this difficulty, Sara their subject explained, doing justice must flow from just being in relationship to others (Chubbuck, 2008). To be in a relationship requires letting go of preconceptions and assumptions about people of color.

A Reform effort that included a collaborative process centered around inquiry or "asking critical questions" that challenged teachers' beliefs, has also shown promise (G. Ladson-Billings & Gomez, 2001). A key element of the intervention was building relationships of trust with the teachers. Typical of existing 'common sense' discourse often heard when discussing children of color, the K-2 teachers in the study started out blaming students and parents for students' lack of progress. Over time, the teachers admitted that the trend in the highly resourced school was to fail the students of color. Upon initially receiving this information however, the researchers

were appropriately cautious,

"we deliberately refrained from calling attention to the students' minority status or socioeconomic status. We believed that early in the process we needed to assure teachers that we were not judging them or suggesting that they were exhibiting aspects of racism or discrimination toward the children in their classrooms" (p. 3).

Using Linda Winfield's work on teacher belief about students of diverse cultures, Ladson-Billings & Gomez (2001) theorized that teachers who believed that students can improve will have an orientation that they can intervene to raise students' academic achievement. As a result, an assumption underlying the work of the researchers was that a major cause of children's academic failure is the failure of teachers to teach them. Another tenet of the researchers' intervention was the use of an asset model focusing on the children's strength while simultaneously encouraging teachers to take responsibility for educating the children (p. 7). The researchers accomplished this task by refocusing the discourse from one of blaming students to talking about the needs and strengths of their students. This effort to move from deficit meanings to resource-oriented or asset-based meanings about students is a key element of any reform efforts in the classroom, in schools and also when crafting and implementing policy. The project resulted in substantial gains in the testing results of the students. Still, this intervention leaves open the question of what similar interventions would look like in higher grades and at the school level? Also left open is what would the intervention look like if the educators were also of minority backgrounds.

In her study of an urban school restructuring, Lipman (1997) found that reform efforts involving teacher participation necessarily required personal and social change, in order for real change to occur. She found for example in one instant that all students discussed as "problems" were African American even though they were not so identified and but instead were referred to

with signifiers such as "at risk" (p. 19). Even as they participated in restructurings, she found that teachers adhered to meanings about African American students and families that blamed them for failures. As a result, Lipman (1997) theorized that it was necessary to challenge educators' belief and assumptions as part of the process of reform.

Understanding how to frame the problem is often a major step in understanding how to imagine solutions. Drawing on their work with professional development programs, Garcia & Guerra (2004) has proposed a five-concept framework for understanding how change may come about in schools that have inequity issues as follows:

> (a) deficit thinking permeates society; schools and teachers mirror these beliefs; (b) professional development in diversity is not just for White educators; (c) intercultural communication permeates every aspect of schooling; (d) cultural sensitivity and awareness do not automatically result in equity practices; and (e) professional development activities must systematically and explicitly link equity knowledge to classroom practices (p. 154).

Hull & Rose (1991) found that the larger context within which education occurs (including race and class inequalities) can push a minor difference or inappropriateness to balloon in a teacher's mind into a question of intellectual capability. This is highly problematic, particularly in cases where the teacher wants very much to help their students and the students very much want to learn. According to Hull & Rose (1991), to answer the question of how an annoying difference can be seen cognition inability in the mind of a teacher, it is necessary:

> to consider the broader educational and cultural context in which this teacher lives-the received language and frames of mind she works within. Put an-other way, we need to consider the ways our schools have historically judged mental ability from performance that is somehow problematic and the sanc-tioned paths of inference from behavior to cognition that emerge from such judgments. (p. 311).

To address this problem, Hull & Rose, have argued for the development of conceptual frameworks that assert "shared cognitive and linguistic competence while celebrating in a non-

55

hierarchical way the play of human difference" (p. 326). What Hull & Rose (1991) emphasized

is that the point is not to demonize teachers or students. Rather, they suggest instead the need to

understand how the social and cultural contexts often dictate how people see things, the

meanings people create or construct around themselves and the devastating impact negative

meanings can have on students and their education. And, what is most important is providing the

space for self-reflection to tease apart and reframe the problem, to see our role in the process and

to see how infinitely -- we are the solutions. Further, scholars have argued "for a paradigm shift

in what counts as schooling for youth in the United States" (Gutierrez, 2008). As a result,

several scholars have suggested ways to approach a resource-oriented pedagogy. For example,

Morrell (2008) have argued for a critical pedagogy that engages students as critical researchers

within their own communities. Building on discussions about the importance of culturally

relevant pedagogy, Django Paris' has proposed a theory of a culturally sustaining pedagogy. In

this he suggested that teaching should build on "the languages and literacies and other cultural

practices of communities marginalized by systemic inequalities to ensure the valuing and

maintenance of our multiethnic and multilingual society" (Paris, 2012). Similarly, Gutierrez

(2008) suggests an education that accounts for and builds on the literacy and expertise students'

gain from both informal and formal spaces.

McDermott & Varenne (1995) have proposed the basis for a new model of thinking

about students to replace deficit thinking or even theories that there is simply a difference (which

often contains holdovers of deficit thinking). They suggest a model of "culture as disability."

This is an acknowledgement that culture is disabling and therefore asks us to question the

assumptions we might make when we begin to think negatively, whether in terms of ability,

capacity or problems. An acknowledgement of students' contexts and the historical location is

important. However, it might be more helpful to adopt both a resource-oriented view and a solutions oriented stance that might work for all concerned. Once we wipe clean our vision, we might see that the answers are right in front of us, and they have been there all the time. Ultimately our job is to understand that "children need direction and guidance and adults should not give up on them" (paraphrased from Locke High school student presenting at AERA 2011).

Chapter 3: METHODS

The meanings that underlie established and recurrent joint action are themselves subject to pressure as well as to reinforcement, to incipient dissatisfaction as well as to indifference; they may be challenged as well as affirmed, allowed to slip along without concern as well as subjected to infusions of new vigor. Herbert Blumer

Introduction.

The research project used a qualitative case study method. Qualitative data helps to generate "categories for understanding human phenomena and the investigation of the interpretation of meaning that people give to events they experience" (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). While I reviewed some statistical data in order to gain a fuller understanding of the problem, numbers do not tell the whole story. Rather than a focus primarily on quantity and frequency of occurrences, qualitative studies are more focused on "the socially constructed nature of reality" (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). Part of what I am concerned with in my study is what the everyday reality is, as it is lived in the real lives of administrators, teachers and their students.

This study included two qualitative approaches: ethnography and aspects of PAR. Using a combination of approaches allowed me to craft a methodology that best fit this research project and best enabled me, as the researcher, to attempt to answer my research questions. Ethnography allows a participant-observer to observe both how people interact in everyday life within institutions and the patterns of life that emerge. PAR allows people (the subjects) to participate in the research and to problem solve with respect to issues of concerns that exist in their institutions.

Critical Ethnography.

Ethnographers spend time in the field assessing what people do and say as a way of ascertaining the meaning of their behaviors and beliefs. Ethnography is well suited for my study because assessing the viewpoints of educators -- including some of the key meanings they hold with respect to their students, students' communities and students' education -- is central to my study. Further, as Schensul et. al has provided, ethnography is different from other natural sciences because ethnographers attempt to discover what people do and why they do it <u>before</u> assigning meanings to their behaviors and beliefs (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). In an ethnographic study, the participant observer or researcher gains access to one or more organizations. While on location, the participant observer builds relationships in order to elicit material necessary to describe the behaviors and activities of the people studied (Whyte, 1989).

Ethnographers are required to use an "enlightened eye" and "a form of connoisseurship that goes beyond looking, allowing the scholar to make public, in a critical way, what has been seen" (Denzin, 1995). According to Schensul et al. (1999), ethnography "is a scientific approach to discovering and investigating social and cultural patterns and meaning in communities, institutions and other social settings" from the actors' point of view (p. 1; and Erikson 1986, p. 119-120; see also Geertz 1983). This project includes an ethnographic study to ascertain meanings held by educators about the education of their students and also included the "voices of those studied" (Denzin, 1995, p. 7). The experiences of the teachers and administrators as educators were central to this study. How these educators described their students and families and their students' education was very important.

Ethnography allows the researcher to bring a theoretical lens to help determine what is actually happening. Using the guiding theories of socio-cultural theory and critical theories of

education, I collected data to illuminate how the interactions and interpretative processes within

the schools help to create meanings within the specific context of each school. For Schensul et.

al. (1999), ethnographic research generates theory, and while it starts with a formative theory and

research model, the end result is a modification of the formative theory it begins with (p. 3).

"Ethnographic research is [also] applied," that is, it can be used to assess the situation and

improve it (Schensul et. al., 1999, p.1). This ethnography was also intended to be critical. In

this project, an ethnographic study was combined with a PAR-inspired study to attempt to solve

a problem within the school context. Some ethnographers have not always considered both the

agentive aspects of the education field alongside the structural components involved. Critical

ethnography tries to bring these components together. As Anderson (1989) pointed out,

"Critical ethnography in the field of education is the result of the following dialectic: On one hand, critical ethnography has grown out of dissatisfaction with social accounts of "structures" like class, patriarchy, and racism in which real human actors never appear. On the other hand, it has grown out of dissatisfaction with cultural accounts of human actors in which broad structural constraints like class, patriarchy, and racism never appear." (Anderson 1989, p. 253).

Participatory Action Research (PAR).

In PAR, the participants research their everyday lives and communities with an eye

toward finding potential solutions to one or more community concerns (Morrell, 2008).

Teachers, administrators, students, community members are all potential participants as

researchers in the PAR process. The PAR researcher is similar to participant observer (in

ethnography) who gains access to an organization to describe and analyze the behavior of those

studied (Whyte 1998, p. 368). In addition to investigating, PAR is concerned with creating

change. According the Whyte (1998), in PAR "the researcher combines participant observation

with explicitly recognized action objectives and a commitment to carry out the project with the

active participation in the research process by some members of the organization" (p. 369). An

underlying assumption in PAR is the idea that people have privileged knowledge about their own community or organization. As a result, rather than placing these persons as objects of research, they are the subjects, participants and collaborators in the research. For McIntyre (2000), there are three principles that guide most PAR projects:

> (1) the collective investigation of a problem, (2) the reliance on indigenous knowledge to better understand that problem, and (3) the desire to take individual and/or collective action to deal with the stated problem. These aims are achieved through collective investigation, education, and action throughout the process (McIntyre, 2000).

In this PAR project, as participant researcher engaged with teachers, administrators investigate a problem identified by the educators within their schools. The participants' knowledge was key to understanding, addressing and attempting to come up with solutions of the identified problem. According to Morrell (2008),

> "[by] assuming active and full participation in the research process, people have the opportunity to collect and analyze meaningful data themselves; even more, they possess the ability to utilize the information the collect and analyze mobilize, organize and implement individual or collective action" (p. 109).

Similar to ethnography, PAR allows for the introduction of a theoretical lens for critically examining problems. Sociocultural and critical theories provide the lens for understanding agentive actions and the role of structure. Such lens can also illuminate the differences in power relations that may impact the knowledge and discourse found in education as well as the potential barriers to solving practical problems. It was not a main component of this research study that participants complete implementation of their identified 'school problem.' What was important for purposes of this study was identifying together what was deemed a problem for the school and starting the process.

61

Unit of Analysis.

The units of analyses in this study were the "meanings" (see defined terms) or groups of meanings associated with descriptions with respect to students of color and their communities that may be found at the individual and organization level within schools. It might seem unusal to use 'meanings' as opposed to a more concrete concept such as a school site for example, as the unit of analysis. In this case however, a focus on meanings was important because this project was concerned with the meanings people held because of the potential meanings have to sustain actions. This project was also concerned with the possibility for making changes to the meanings with the hope that eventually actions will also change. This project was concerned with how meanings, with respect to students of color, may manifest at the individual level (with educators). It was also concerned with how one or more groups of these meanings may amalgamate into different or similar meanings at the organizational level. Of interest was what kinds of meanings come to light when reviewing school policies. Of further interest was whether there are connections with larger of the societal meanings about people of color. As sociocultural and critical theories suggest, the meanings held by individuals are not made within a vacuum but can be related to larger societal meanings, although not necessarily in a linear way. Power relations, history, culture and systems, among other things, can impact how we think about and make sense of things. I was concerned with questions such as: How were students defined? How was the school problem defined? Who were seen as responsible for the problem defined? Whose voices were included in making policies at this school? For example, was there a discourse around students that identified them as 'academicians', as 'disciplinary problems' as 'hard workers' or otherwise. I discuss below my positionality as it helped to situate my research.

62

Positionality of Researcher.

Austin is in 4th grade. He recently moved to California from Brooklyn, New York. He is

an avid and prolific reader. In Brooklyn, he was popular among his peers, and well-known for

running very fast and being a good soccer player. He was also a good student. In his new

classroom there are 33 students (compared to 16 in his old school). His current class is a

neighborhood school, where most of the student in his class grew up with each other. On the

first day of school I, his mother introduced myself to his new teacher and I asked for his help

with Austin's social adjustment at his new school. I told him we were new to the neighborhood

and the State. Several weeks later I made an appointment with the teacher to check in. Austin

was still getting good grades but, each time I asked him what he did at lunch-time, he said he ate

alone in the back of the lunch area. This had gone on for several weeks now. I was concerned.

He has always been a very social boy.

I met with the teacher to ask how things were going. To my surprise, he went on a tirade
complaining that my son was uncooperative because "when they played the name game "Austin
did not know the names of the other kids" "as soon as Austin completed his work, he would take
out a book and begin to read," " he did not seem to talk much with the other kids." All this was
said in a tone and voice that was very negative. I was shocked at the tone and disturbed as it
confirmed that my son needed help with adjusting to the new social context at school. And then,
the teacher asked, "is something going on at home, are you having home problems?"

I told the teacher that my son was doing very well at home, thank you. Next, I told him
that I was concerned, however, with what was happening with him in the classroom and at
school. I suggested that based on what he, the teacher just told me, Austin seemed to need the
help of his school adults to adjust to a very different new environment. I then asked what he the
teacher had done to help him adjust. He looked at me in surprise and said "Nothing." To which I
responded: " Well, Austin is in your classroom and you are his teacher, so what are you going to
do? Please come up with a plan and let's meet in two weeks to see how your strategies are
working."
(paraphrased from my personal diary—November 2007).

I tell this story because, I could not grasp how a teacher could take a child that was a new

student, an A student, not disruptive in class, who chose to read to deal with the fact that he knew

no one—and surmise that this was a bad child with problems at home. What were the meanings he carried with him about children like my son? And why? What would have happened to my son if I did not have the skills to calmly -- notwithstanding my anger and distress -- advocate on his part? What I have not mentioned is that we are African American. Our new neighborhood is White and affluent. While his old school was also majority White there was more diversity of class and thought. Later in the school year when Austin's teacher was now my 'good friend,' he admitted that he had never met "Blacks like us." He worked with "delinquents" before in a low-income setting. I wondered how many of those "delinquents" were so constructed because of the meanings and interactions this teacher and others like him had with them. The meanings we hold for people are so powerful. This and many others experiences have shaped who I am as a researcher.

I am a woman who identifies alternatively as African American or Caribbean American. I am deeply interested in the inequalities faced by children of color. I became interested in the education of these students several years ago when teaching Sunday school in a working class, primarily African American community in Brooklyn, New York. I have also become aware that inequality plays a significant role in our education system. As a result, I have come to believe that a necessary starting place for the reform of our educational system is a deep and multilayered understanding of systemic inequality and how it is manifested.

I am also an immigrant from the West Indies. I came to the United States like many others seeking opportunities after graduating from high school. The United States meant "Land of Opportunity." I also believed the educational system would be excellent for all. Now however, I have come to believe that there are at least two Americas—one for the privileged and one for the not so privileged. Nonetheless, and perhaps stubbornly, I still believe in the potential

the education system has to provide. There is no doubt my position as someone of African heritage influences my desire to help children of color, many of whom look like my children. On the other hand, as someone for whom the educational system worked, I am also in a position that is sometimes removed from those for whom the "system" has not and does not work. I am both an insider and an outsider.

According to Hammersley & Atkinson (1995), "[r]eflexivity… implies that the orientations of researchers will be shaped by their socio-historical locations, including the values and interests that these locations confer upon them" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Many researchers acknowledge that research is reflexive in nature. That is, it is impossible to disconnect the research from the researcher. As a result, I acknowledge that I too am shaped by culture. I too need to examine my thoughts for deficit thinking. Any accusation inadvertent or otherwise with respect to any educator in my study, I level first at myself.

My positionality likely affected my analyses. However, I used collaborative coding and a systematic system of data analysis including use of a computer software program, to analyze the data and help guard against potential bias as much as possible.

Overview of the Study.

This study included two phases of research, over the course of more than a year. The first phase consisted of an ethnographic study at two different school sites, each of which served primarily children of color (African American and Latino/a students) from low-income communities. During this phase, the two school sites were observed both inside and outside of the classrooms. Teachers and administrators (including study participants) were interviewed. In addition, students participated in some focus groups as part of their regular classes. The initial months of the ethnography were an intense period of data collection. I obtained data that help

me to understand how educators are making sense of their students, their education and community. This process allowed me to identify some general 'meanings' that educators hold with respect to their students and their community.

The second phase of the study consisted of a PAR-inspired project at each site. At each site, I organized an inquiry group of at five administrator and teachers.[6] At CompHS, the administrator an assistant principal was recommended by the principal. I met some of the other educators as I volunteered at the school and they recommended additional teachers. At CalabarHS, the executive director introduced me to the principal who participated in the inquiry and told her school about the project. I interviewed these teachers, explained that I was conducting a study at the school, asked for their participation and if they would be able to make the appropriate time commitment necessary. During the study, each inquiry group was asked to and they each defined a problem to be addressed by that group. An assignment of initial reading materials was made to provide some scaffolding for (i) creating a community of learners and researchers and (ii) learning about systemic inequality and its potential impacts on students of color. The Inquiry portion of the study took place over a semester. During that time the discussed the readings and brainstormed about their identified school problem and discuss potential solutions. The PAR-inspired portion of the study emphasized "collective investigation, education and action" (McIntyre 2000, p.128). The knowledge of the participants was central for building new meanings as they read and discussed the readings and also for examining and solving their identified school problem.

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[6] At each school site I initially had six participants but lost one each at both sites. At CompHS I lost one participant prior to the beginning of the Inquiry. At CalabarHS I lost one participant during the Inquiry and included herein in the findings sections.

66

Data Collection; Data Reduction.

Interviews. During the ethnographic study, I conducted semi-structured interviews of teachers and administrators. I used the interview protocol attached hereto as a guideline (Appendix B). These interviews focused on familiarizing myself with the school sites and assessing the goals of the school and examining how individuals interact with each other to make sense of their environment and make meaning about the education process. With respect to the PAR inquiry, I interviewed the inquiry participants at least twice, at the beginning and closer to the end of the inquiry. These interviews were also semi-structured but had a slightly different purpose -- that of getting the teachers to agree to be a part of a working inquiry group which required substantial time commitment but also had the potential of helping students at their school beyond the classroom. All of the interviews were audio-taped. All audio taped recordings were transcribed for ease of analysis.

Observations in the classroom. The ethnographic also included participant-observation in the classroom. I observed several classrooms both of inquiry participants and non-participants. I used the observation protocol (Appendix A) to look for interactions between teachers and students. For example, how they relate to each other and what kind of voice students were allowed to have in the classrooms was of interest. Special attention was given to determining the viewpoints and ways of making sense of the education process. During the first several months of the study I spent approximately two days weekly at each school.

Observations outside of the classroom. In addition, I spent time on each campus observing the informal spaces and non-classroom spaces of the school such as the hallways and the reception areas, and the library. I also attended numerous organizational meetings such as staff meetings, departmental or subject matter meetings and professional development meetings.

67

I used my ipad to write notes about my observations both in and out of the classroom as close as possible to real time. In addition, I attempted to write notes on a regular basis, at the end of each day to summarize the day.

PAR-Inspired Inquiry Meetings. At CompHS we had a total of seven meetings two of which were in the vein of organizational or addressing concerns. Because of the firings at the end of the previous school year, the educators seemed shaken and seemed to need a space for venting. In additions, it was unclear whether they still wanted to participate in the study. Five inquiry meetings were recorded and used as data for analysis for the findings herein. At CalabarHS there seven recorded meetings that were analyzed for purposes of the findings herein. During the Inquiry meetings the groups discussed assigned readings, identified a 'school problem' to research and attempt to address. They also brainstormed about research/information needed to address the identified problem and talked about potential solutions. The groups were provided with academic material that sought to discuss inequality and students of color. Some of which are mentioned in the findings section. Reading materials also focused on learning theory. For example we read and discussed materials that challenged them to be researchers within a 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991). They were also challenged to think about what systemic inequality and its potential impact on students of color. The participants were encouraged to engage in 'research' within their school to help illuminate their 'problem' to assist in finding potential solutions. These meetings were audio taped and transcribed for future analysis.

Artifacts; Possible Writings. Data included my field notes from my visits to each school. In addition, the educators occasionally wrote reflections on specific readings. I also reviewed school data about student performance and some data regarding various school policies. In

addition at one of the schools I participated in school accreditation meetings and listened to discussions of these meetings that included discussions about policies that needed changing.

R*ecordings/Transcription.* All audio-recorded interviews were transcribed by a secretarial/transcription service and was read against the tapes to check for accuracy.

Data Analysis.

In reviewing the data, I took into consideration both the context and the voices of those who participated in the research. In most cases I used the quotes of those in question as the basis for my analysis. I added interpretative commentary, attempted to show a range of evidence found, and I also attempted to revealed any unexpected evidence I found (Eisenhart in *Green et al*). According to Eisenhart, "[q]ualitative data are powerful. They evoke vivid images and recapture remarkable events. They make good stories; they make knowledgeable claims" (p. 567). However, as Eisenhart also pointed out, data "do not speak for themselves" (Id). Data require analysis and the writing of a story. Denzin (1995) points out that as researchers we largely study text to determine what is going on. To indicate how I went about analyzing the texts from the ethnography and the Inquiry, I have repeated the questions in italics below and before discussing how the data I collected will be reduced and analyzed to answer them.

I.   What are some of the key meanings that operate among teachers and administrators at two separate school sites (that serve low-income children of color who are primarily African American and Latino/a) that (i) may have potential for creating barriers to the education of students of color (ii) that positively illuminate assets of students and their communities ?

This question involved analyzing data from the ethnographic study, including transcriptions of interviews, field notes from observations and any artifacts such as flyers or materials about the school received as part of this process. This question also required analyzing the data from the inquiry for comparison purposes with that found in the ethnography. To ascertain prevailing

"meanings" within the school, I analyzed the data to find if there was consensus among the educators as to how they made sense of students and their communities.   Because of the large amount of data that I accumulated, and to help ensure validity, I engaged in collaborative coding (Smagorinsky, 2008). I engaged a coding partner who is familiar with education research and the qualitative software program, Atlas.ti to help me with coding the data.[7] I reviewed with her the codes to confirm they were relevant and related to answering my question. In general, the codes were generated from data accumulated in the study.   As the analysis progressed, I collapsed some of codes that were redundant and eliminated ones that become irrelevant to the research (Smagorinsky, 2008).

II.   *Would attempts to create an inquiry with the intent of illuminating systemic inequality and its connection to schools (including attempts to re-articulate some problematic meanings about children of color and their education), increase educators' learning or otherwise make a difference in educators' approach to their students' education?*

During the Inquiry when deficit or problematic terms or ways of speaking came up I sometimes attempted to direct the discussion toward re-articulation. In some of these cases the educators moved toward shared meanings. At other times there were unresolved conflicts. I looked for indications of learning and/or changes in individual's ways of speaking.   More importantly, I looked for changes in individual's roles within the group and within the school. I also looked at whether the 'school problem' chosen by each group involved attempts to address inequality. I also looked for indications that educators were talking about teaching or school policies in different ways or beginning to adopt some of their learning from the inquiry. Much of the data analyzed for this question was obtained during the PAR inquiry with particular focus on the end of the study. Observations and any interviews of teachers involved in the PAR inquiry toward the end of the study were also reviewed. I also compared data from the ethnography study

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[7] My coding partner was a fourth year undergraduate student familiar with education research. She had done education research for one of my education professors. She was very interested in education and is now enrolled in a doctorate program in education.

generally and beginning of the PAR study to data obtained at the end of the study to see if there are any noticeable differences in the way teachers are discussing the identified "problem."

III.   What would this re-articulation or change process look like?

The data analyzed for this question was obtained during the PAR inquiry. I also reviewed my notes from observations and transcripts of interviews of teachers involved in the PAR inquiry toward the end of the study. These were compared to data collected earlier in the study. In trying to ascertain what the change process looks like, I looked for intersubjectivity (Rogoff & Toma, 1997) and its use during the Inquiry sessions to see if and when educators were building on each other's ideas.   I found that this took place on a number of occasions at both sites. In addition, I also looked for moments of contestation (Hall, 2006: Lipman, 1997) that can indicate change points. Although there were moments of struggle among the educators, not all of these moments resulted in shared meanings. I also tried to be aware of the power dynamics that might be at play within the groups.

IV.   How would it be different at different school sites?

I reviewed data from each site to assess meanings about student and families. I also reviewed and analyzed the Inquiry process and attempted to compare the two sites to see if there are substantial differences or similarities that may be of interest. There were differences and similarities in language used in both sites. In some cases however even though the texts used were different the meanings were sometimes similar. Further, the context of each site led to very different processes in the inquiries**.**

Limitations of the Study.

This study took place over approximately one-year period. Although this period seemed like a long time at the beginning of the study it was actually not. As a result, time is a limitation of this study. Because this was not a longitudinal study, it is difficult to ascertain the long-term effects of learning at CalabarHS. Further it is difficult to ascertain if there was unidentified learning at CompHS. In addition, although my current hope is to continue working with these schools beyond this study, there is no guarantee this will occur and both sites seemed to have need for additional growth. Nevertheless, my hope is to continue to work to understand the meanings held by educators and to continue to help to provide opportunities to learn about the play of inequality and when possible to make attempts at re-articulations.

In addition, this study is limited in its scope. Two institutions were involved. A broader scope in terms of research sites would likely provide additional understandings about the processes of change and learning. In addition, as in any other study, my positionality no doubt presented some limitations for this study as well. For example, as I discussed earlier, there were moments during the study when I may have missed opportunities to support the learning of the educators I worked with. Further, as this study has meanings at its core, the meanings I bring from my own history and current context provide a frame for my understanding of what I saw in the study. No doubt my own partial understandings limit some of these analyses as I too am affected by inequality. Nevertheless, I did my best to be self-reflective and to consider the viewpoints of those with whom I engaged in this study.

The Schools and Related Context.

Selecting Site; Gaining Access to the Schools.[8] This Section discusses the schools sites and related contexts to help set the stage for the study. This project involves a qualitative study and as a result, the intention is not to produce randomly selected sample. Nevertheless, discussing the researcher's access to the sites and defining the populations and entities to be studied is central to the study.

I wanted to study schools that have significant amounts of 'minority' students, to help understand how educators were making sense of these students and how they were grappling with educating their students. I was particularly concerned with low-income students of color that are perceived to have low skills, high rates of poverty, and whose previous schools were considered low-resourced schools. The schools chosen herein satisfy these criteria. Understanding the context is particularly important because, this study attempts to understand the constraints and affordances that contexts have on teaching and learning. Researchers often discuss the constraints school context plays on students' learning (Rogers et al, 2009). Less discussed however, are the constraints and affordances that these contexts present for the learning and teaching of teachers and other educators (cite). For this study, the context of each school is important for understanding how learning may take place among teachers and how their teaching may evolve with respect to their students.

Comprehsive High School (CompHS).

First Entry. I first entered Comprehensive High School (CompHS) during the school year 2008-2009. I was asked by two different colleagues to speak to students at the school. One colleague asked me to speak to a group of Latina and African American female high school

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[8] Much of this data is corroborated by observations and interviews with educations as represented in my fieldnotes.

73

students during an advisory group. The teacher in this class was a young African American woman, Dawn.[9] Dawn was working with a group of graduate students of color to bring new ideas to her students in her advisory class. I wanted to learn more about schools and decided to volunteer at CompHS.

It turned out that Dawn's class was representative of CompHS in a number of respects. Similar in many respects to Dawn's class, CompHS is primarily Latino/a (approximately 63%), with a large minority of African Americans (36%). There is a small percentage 1% of Pacific Islander (COE School Report 2008; 2009-2010 Accountability Report). Similar to that first teacher, a majority of the teachers (60%) at the school are African American. 30% are white and 10% other including Africans and Latinos.[10] Similar to resource concerns that arose in Dawn's class, CompHS as a whole has the many resource concerns often found in schools that serves low-income students of color. These concerns include school-wide limited access to computers and computer support, copy machines, and professional development. They include students' limited access to adequately trained teachers, and emotional, academic and college counseling. In addition to resource issues, CompHS has several systems that can make the teaching and learning process challenging. One system involves the lack of opportunities for group work and collaboration among teachers. Teachers operate in isolation most often with their doors closed. The physical facility may contribute to this isolation. The facility is large and open with classrooms in low-lying mostly one-story buildings. The rooms have few or no windows, and are usually closed. In general the classrooms have a heavy metal doors that open to the outside and are kept shut.

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[9] Dawn became a member of the inquiry group. See later under *Participants* for a description of Dawn.

[10] The teacher percentages are based on the principal's estimates.

There seemed to be a heavy focus on testing at the school. This is evidenced both test preparation for standardized testing as well as additional and sometimes unplanned and unscheduled "diagnostic" testing by the district. Some teachers complain that the constant testing is highly disruptive of their teaching. The instability in leadership has also affected the school over the years. There have been 4 different principals in the past 7 years. Some teachers reported that they and the students have to adjust to very new and different policies each time there is a new leader. Existing policies of previous leaders are often changed even if they were working well. The current principal is in his 3rd year and is the second principal since I have been visiting the school.

CompHS has seen some improvement in testing results. The 2009-2010 accountability report saw an increase in Academic Performance Index (API) of 44 to 633 points from the previous year of 589. Nonetheless the average is still considerably lower that the State average of 728 reported for the same period. According to 2009-2010 the school has been in a federal intervention program improvement since 1998. According to the report, the school is at the highest stage, stage 5 of the PI program that has the deepest level of consequences and has been there since 2008. According to the Report, as of 2010 CompHS met 11 of it 22 goals. According to several teachers, CompHS has undergone several series of reform efforts with frequent changes in leadership. In terms of proficiency in English language arts for the past 3 years of 2007-8, 2008-9, and 2009-10, CompHs indicated proficiency or greater for 27 percent, 24 percent and 27 percent respectively. For Geometry the results for the same periods were one percent, one percent and five percent respectively.

Some Resource Concerns. Teachers indicate that the lack of resources and the challenging systems are integral to what they are able to do with their students in their

classrooms.[11] Some teachers say that they work beyond their scheduled work day to provide the

extra academic, life skills and emotional support some of their students need. They provide this

extra help without additional support from their school or district and without additional

remuneration. Teachers were concerned that they were not compensated adequately for the work

they do. This meant they sometimes have to take on other jobs in order to meet their personal

financial obligations. As evidence of the sometimes extreme pressures these educators often

endure, just prior to Summer vacation this school year, all but one of the six educators that

initially agreed to be part of the inquiry project for this study were summarily given pink slips by

their district. One of those did not get rehired.

  Communication/Professional Support. Every other week there is one-hour staff meeting

after school. This meeting appears to address mostly administrative matters. One meeting I

attended has a half hour professional development talk by one of the teachers. As well, on

alternate, every other week, one-hour departmental meeting scheduled. Again these cover mostly

administrative matters. As well there are daily announcements over school PA system during

advisory. These are usually announcements related to student activity. The principal sometimes

makes announcements as well. It is very difficult to hear clearly what is being said over this

system. Each teacher has an email address from the district. They also have mailboxes in the

administrative offices. I am told that these are not reliable ways of getting information to and

from the teachers.

  The Neighborhood. CompHS is located in a working class neighborhood that has

experienced several major demographic shifts over the past 5 decades. The neighborhood was

considered a suburb away from the central city. The first African Americans appeared in the

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[11] They indicated that these can limit the content of their discussions, the lessons they plan, lesson plan execution and how much time they have to focus on pertinent and important class materials.

previously white neighborhood in the 1960s. With white flight, by the 1980s the neighborhood

was mostly middle class African American families with some enclaves of low-income pockets.

Over time another demographic shift took place as many African Americans moved further out

to other suburbs making space for Latino/a families. Likewise, the demographic of schools in

the neighborhood have changed to reflect some of these shifts (Waldinger & Bozorgmehr, 1996;

CityWebsite; Interviews with Educators including Shelton). More recently, according to the

2010 Unites States Census reports the population of the neighborhood at a little over 100,000

with slightly more that 50% listed as Latino or Hispanic and 44 percent are listed as African

American. Reflecting the low-income status of the neighborhood, according to CompHS' 2009-

2010 school accountability report, 91percent of the students are considered low income

(compared to 56% in California state), qualifying them for the free or reduced meal subsidy that

goes to students whose families earn less than $40, 793 annually. In addition, 20 percent of the

parents (compared to 56% in the State) of the students at CompHS attended some college with

only 6 percent have a college degree (compared to 32% in the State). The average income has

been listed at $36, 000 annually with a majority of jobs available being blue-collar jobs. The

median price of a home was listed at $176,000.

 Project Inception and Some Initial Challenges*.* I began collecting data for this project

in Spring 2011. I talked to several teachers about being part of an inquiry group to involve

reading several scholarly articles that attempt to illuminate systemic concerns around the

education of students of color. I had a goal of obtaining about 4 individuals for my study. I was

able to secure the agreement of initially of six educators including a librarian/teacher, a teacher

who chaired his department and an assistant principal. I wanted the study to include at least one

person with administrative duties for the diversity of opinions and potential capacity that position might bring. All of these educators were of African heritage.

In early Spring, traversing numerous scheduling concerns I met individually with each educator on several occasions. In each case, we discussed the proposed project and I sought input from the individuals. Among other things, we discussed timing, frequency of meetings and the readings. Prior to the end of the semester two things occurred which impacted my going forward. First, despite numerous scheduling constraints and other concerns, we were able to meet as a group for an extended period. During this meeting, we agreed on a process for going forward including a proposed timetable that included touching base over the summer. This left me feeling very hopeful about the potential for the project. I had educators who seemed committed to the project despite their workload. The group seemed excited by the prospect of engaging in the Inquiry. They said they did not have a similar opportunity within the school to discuss larger school concerns.

The second thing that happened was potentially catastrophic. Toward the end of the school year, all of the educators except one were given pink slips by the district (Field Notes and Interviews). These teacher were among the approximately 1/3 of the staff of the school that was given pink slips. The teachers said this was also the first time these teachers had experienced this kind of mass layoff. The school district was experiencing tremendous budgetary constraints. The teachers said they felt betrayed, they had given much of themselves and gone beyond what was required in order to help their students (Interviews/Field Notes). As one of the teachers said in frustration "It is very demoralizing, I did everything right and yet I am being fired." This was devastating for these educators. It meant that they could not make major plans for the summer

months as they were not sure what funds they would have available and if they would find

another position. As a side effect, my well laid out study was also potentially in shambles.

Fortunately, many of the teachers and administrators were called back. However, this did

not take place until toward the end of the summer. Of those in my research group, all except one

(who was reassigned to another school) came back. At the beginning of the school year

however, the teachers and administrators in my study were still in a state of shock. They each

had experienced a very unsettled end of spring and reported that they were very anxious

throughout most of the summer (Field Notes). They felt uncertain about their commitment to the

school and to the field of education (Field Notes and Interviews). To add to their challenges, the

educators reported a chaotic beginning of the school year. They began school with no back to

school professional development or staff meeting and many scheduling problems. There were

students in classes without teachers, teachers in classes with no or few students and teachers in

classes with too many students. The district had required scheduling changes to eliminate

classes and to increase class sizes to address budgetary concerns. This was then reversed when

the district was successfully challenged. All this took place during the beginning of the school

year. When I attempted to reengage the educators for my project, all seemed to have lost interest

in the project. It seemed that the anxiety of having lost their jobs and regained it at the last

minute and the chaos at the beginning of school had an impact. The educators however were

interested in having a space to vent their frustrations. Understanding this need, I facilitated two

meetings (not taped) where this occurred. Not surprisingly, it took some work, time and effort to

reengage their interest in the inquiry project.

My Role in the CompHS Inquiry; Similarities and Differences to CalabarHS. At this

site, my role was similar to the role I played at CalabarHS. I acted as the facilitator of the inquiry

process; I coordinated the meeting times and places and provided the readings;[12] I helped to set the tone for the meetings as a place for learning. Here, as at CalabarHS, I was concerned about increasing understandings about the role of inequality in schools generally and at CompHS in particular. I hoped the readings and discussions would help illuminate for the educators how they may become or expand their roles as agents of change with respect to the inequalities at their school. Also similar to the other school site, I used questions to guide the discussions. Here, to help maintain the focus of the conversations, I also occasionally redirected the conversations toward the readings or toward the teachers and education and strove to have the educators do most of the talking. My role in this and the CalabarHS Inquiry is based in part on Rogoff & Toma's (1997) suggestion to "lead and faciliate transformation of participation in activities but not control it or simply transmit information" (475).

Notwithstanding the similarity with respect to my role in the facilitation of the inquiry, there were some significant differences in this space. One difference that might be significant is that all of the educators in this inquiry group were African Americans. Interestingly, the educators had diverse backgrounds and experiences, as discussed in more detail under each person's name below. However, the fact that they were all African American may arguably mean that they had some affinity with the students of color. With its history of slavery and inequality, it is hard to imagine an African American living in America not having had some interaction with racism. Nevertheless, of the group, only Janice said she grew up in a working class southern Californian neighborhood, similar to and not very far from the school.

The other educators indicated they had experiences quite unlike those of many of their students when they were growing up. For example, Marcia came from a Nigerian background

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[12] For example, here as was also the case at the other school site, educators sometimes seemed to want a space for venting because of some of the challenges they faced. At those times I tried to provide the opportunity after the session if appropriate.

and her family strove to obtain middle class status. Donovan came from a middle class

background living in a mostly white neighborhood northern California. Dawn came from a

middleclass background in southern California and attended primarily white schools. Shelton

grew up near CompHS neighborhood and went to school close by. However, he lived in the area

when the neighborhood was a largely white middle class neighborhood. Nonetheless, this group

exhibited a keen awareness of the needs of their students. And, despite varied backgrounds, each

educator expressed different ways in which they individually attempted to make connections

with their African American and Latino students. For example, each of the teachers' identified

specific groups of students or ways of connecting with students. Each developed specific clubs

that later became advisory groups aimed at addressing students' needs. The educators' attempts

to connect with students' lives, created potential affordances for such educators' learning.

Further, as educators within the public school system in a low-income community of color, the

educators themselves seemed to endure some race and poverty related oppression.   For example,

it seemed that there were many parallels between some of the poor teaching conditions the

educators endured and the learning conditions of the students.

Another difference that was a potential affordance was the fact there seemed to be little

power imbalance in this group. Although in this group there was an assistant principal AP and a

department chair, the two in those positions did not appear to use their positions in ways that

made the others feel at a disadvantage. At CalabarHS there were concerns about the use of

power by the administrators.[13]

In addition to the foregoing difference that could be seen as potential affordances to

learning, there were also differences that might have the opposite effect. There were at least two

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[13] These concerns at the CalabarHS may have been related to that school's charter status and the lack of union as a buffer or protective force for teachers.

differences that had the potential for limiting the opportunity for individual and group learning within the group. First, perhaps understandably and unlike CalabarHS,[14] CompHS and its staff generally exhibited an apparent distrust for outsiders. I realized this upon my first contact with the school several years ago and experienced some evidence of this distrust throughout my contact the school.   It took more than two years of periodic and sustained contact with the school to gain 'entry' and standing before I felt comfortable asking about doing this inquiry project at CompHS.

Another major difference, perhaps related to the fact that CompHS is a comprehensive high school while CalabarHS is a charter, was a major occurrence toward the end of the school year and immediately prior to the commencement of the inquiry group. Notwithstanding a lot of planning[15] and initial organization of the inquiry group, and what seemed like a great deal of momentum, all but one of the educators (including the assistant principal in my group), were laid off or given 'pink slips'. These layoffs occurred within the context of statewide budgetary concerns. Large groups of teachers at CompHS were given pink slips by the school district. This was a huge blow to the educators. Although the teachers had been given pink slips before it was usually as novice teachers. The teachers in the group believed they had moved beyond getting pink slips. In addition, the scale of the layoffs was different from before. Needless to say, as a by-product of the layoffs, it also seemed that the inquiry project was in great jeopardy. Fortunately in the end most were rehired (one teacher was not). However this incident disturbed the educators greatly.

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[14] CalabarHS for example, exhibited openness to visitors and outsiders, by scheduling tours regularly, and seemed welcoming to researchers. CalabarHS is a new school by comparison to CompHS. CompHS had been the subject of numerous research projects and have also by several accounts had projects started and not completed.

[15] Based on discussions with these educators, we had already had a general agreement that we would meet twice monthly to discuss the readings and to engage in learning. And we had a first organizing meeting in June 2012, with official meetings to begin close to the beginning of school in September. In addition, I had started out with a sense of optimism due at least in part because I was able to get the agreement of six educators initially (one was not rehired) when my hope was to work with four educators.

The Participants at CompHS.

The Educators at CompHS; Choosing Marcia.[16]   In this subsection I describe the members of the CompHS Inquiry. In addition, I also discuss how I came to choose to focus on Marcia as the example for understanding the processes and learning that occurred in the CompHS Inquiry. The inquiry commenced with a group of five educators.

Dawn. I met Dawn when I first became involved with the CompHS during my first year as a doctoral student. I was asked by several of my (more senior) graduate student colleagues to present at one of the sessions of a program they were implementing for young high school women in Dawn's classroom. This was timely, as I had been looking for a school to volunteer in, to use as a space for learning about schools, and to practice developing my ethnography skills. I stayed on with Dawn after my colleagues left later in the school year. Dawn introduced me to other teachers including Marcia, the librarian and she also mentioned Janice. She has taught at the school for over eight years. She is well respected both by her students and other teachers. She has an advisory that is focused on putting out the school newspaper.

Dawn wore multiple hats within the school. In addition to having recently started the school newspaper, Dawn was also able to convince the school to offer a journalism class that she was now teaching. She was also recently asked to take a leadership role in a nascent magnet program within the school. The program was aimed at giving additional opportunities to students who excel academically. The program required work to develop. To supplement her income, Dawn also has a part time job teaching after school. As Dawn explained in her interview, this is a challenging year for her. She had her old obligations of teaching and working after school and now a new class and new leadership obligations with the magnet. Dawn did not always

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[16] Interestingly, another male teacher who originally signed up was not rehired in the school cuts. So we were left with 5 educators.

participate in the discussions during the inquiry. Nonetheless, she came to every meeting and it appeared that her presence was reassuring for the other members of the group.

Janice. Dawn had first told me about Janice. Janice is a first generation college graduate and she recently completed her masters' degree. Like Dawn and the other teachers in the group, she is also highly respected teacher and her students. In addition, her students come to her for both additional support and challenging work. Janice grew up in a neighborhood similar to the neighborhood where CompHS is located. She came to teach in this neighborhood so that she could help other students who may struggle like she did. She started a poetry club several years ago (which has become an advisory) in order to provide her students with a space to express themselves. She believed that as an oppressed people, there was a need for an outlet and she believed one such outlet is writing. Janice said she always wanted to teach. She has been at CompHS for eight years also. This was her first school.

In addition to teaching, she also considers herself an artist. She gives spoken word performances and performs rap music. Similar to the other teachers in the group, Janice believes teaching is a vocation and an act of love. She specifically wanted to work in a school like CompHS because she believed good teachers were hard to come by in "minority, poverty stricken environments." She wanted to be one of those hard to come by teachers. Janice's work is centered on her own students. She however seems to have the potential to move her work beyond her own classroom. Nonetheless, she exhibited some discomfort with engaging with the school's administration. On a couple of occasions when the question came up about speaking with the principal or asking the assistant principals for help, she demurred. Observations of her class showed a complex understanding of literature, good class management skills and diverse tools for engaging her students and teaching the material. She allows her students to speak and at

84

first glance sometimes her classroom may seem noisy, even chaotic. On closer inspection the students appear actively engaged and working together.

   Donovan. Like Janice and the other teachers in the study, Donovan has an advisory group that he developed before advisory became part of the regular school day at CompHS. He believed there was a need for male mentorship and several years ago started a young men's academy as an after school program. His advisory focuses on developing spirituality and leadership in his young men.   Donovan is also the chairperson of the English department and is well respected by his colleagues in this position. Based on observations, the young men in his advisory and the students in his other classes seem to hold him in high regard. In terms of his classroom teaching, he appeared to know the materials well. He appeared to use more traditional methods to teach his materials. For example, he tended to require more quiet working in his classrooms than the other teachers in the group.

   Donovan has also been at the school for eight years and previously taught at another school for two years. He said he has always taught 9th graders. Prior to teaching English he said he really did not know what wanted to do. He liked sports and coached football and then wanted to coach basketball. He tried and liked teaching English. When he first decided to come to the school he was a little wary. He thought the neighborhood looked like it might be 'rough'. Also, he said his friends were also skeptical about him working at such a 'bad' school. As a result, Donovan said he was uncertain whether he would stay for a long time at the school but wanted to try it. He said he has found contrary to his expectations and what he heard, a school with a sense of community. He believes the school, including the grounds, is an undiscovered gem in many ways. Donovan grew up in a mostly middle class white neighborhood in northern California. He said he was unfamiliar with some of the experiences and difficulties his students have had to

endure. For example, he was surprised by the daily exposure of some students to major crimes. He also said when he first came to the school he was surprised that his students called him white. He realized he needed to learn more about their culture so he could connect with them. He has tried to gain understanding about his students' lives.

Shelton. Shelton is an older gentleman. He recently accepted a position to become an AP at the school. He has been an educator for about 30 years and spent most of those years at CompHS. He is essentially the dean of students and has primary responsibility for school discipline and also for attendance. He addresses students who are tardy and he also gets referrals from teachers regarding behavioral issues. Shelton said he has taught a variety of subjects for many years. He first came to CompHS in 1978 when the principal at the time brought him here. At the time he was getting counseling credentials but his main interest was coaching. He was able to coach the football team and also the track team. He came at a time when the school was well known for sports and they won many titles. He said that this school was one of the top athletic schools, for football and track and field. He said he took the current administrative position to assist and impact young people's lives.

Shelton said he has seen the neighborhood and the school go through several major demographic shifts. Accordingly, he said the students and their needs have also changed. In addition, he said the access to resources at the school has decreased. For example, Shelton says the neighborhood used to be middle class (first white and then black) and the students did well on the standardized tests and they had access to sports scholarships. For some students who needed it, he also had the resources to provide additional academic support. He said he no longer has such resources.

As the assistant principal or AP for attendance, Shelton is in charge of a very important part of the school -- the school's access to funding. Keeping attendance both consistent and at a high level means the school gets the funding it is entitled to and needs to function. State funding, the primary source of funds for the school's operation is based on the daily attendance of students. Because he is in charge of discipline he spends a lot of time during his day in the detention hall. It was here that many come to see him to discuss some administrative matters when he is not in his office. Although Shelton missed two of the sessions due to last minute work obligations, he completed the readings and made time for follow-up discussions about them. We were able to have many casual conversations about the readings and about schooling while he was in the detention hall and elsewhere on campus. During these discussions he began to ask about non-punitive ways of disciplining students and asked for additional reading materials on discipline. I gave him several articles and talked to him about caring and supportive ways of disciplining. He seemed receptive and had many questions about how one would go implementing such policies. I also spent time talking to Shelton about taking a leadership role with the group in both the discussions and in supporting their work. He seemed reluctant. Notwithstanding his 30 years at the school, he was one of the ones given a pink slip.

Marcia. Marcia has been teaching since 2002. Marcia is well respected on Campus. This school was her first job. She began as an English teacher and stayed in this position for five years. She then became the librarian and now also has her own advisory class for young women. Marcia said that when she first started to work at CompHS she did not know if she wanted to be teacher in the classroom but she knew she wanted to work with children. She said when she interviewed she was hired on the spot. I volunteered, usually on a once weekly basis, in Marcia's advisory class for more than 2 years.

She is in the process of obtaining masters degree in administration as she wants to become an administrator. Shelton is her on-campus advisor with respect to obtaining this degree. Marcia recently married another teacher and also recently had a new baby. This year, she says, she has been working hard at balancing parenting, married life, working and getting her Masters degree. She indicated it has been a challenging time for her. She spoke about these as follows:

Marcia: What's going on? I'm doing well I guess. Have a lot going on, so I'm excited about starting the new master's program on Monday. So reading your stuff kind of got me back into the study mode. So that was good. And then my advisory class is good. I'm doing something a little different this year. I have the girls on 60-day like probation period... I just want them there if it's the right fit for them. So I feel like everybody has their fit somewhere and maybe not my class, but I'll still support you if you come in there on campus at other times. I'm happy about how that's going. [page 3, Transcript Third Inquiry].

…And library stuff, I'm trying to put my calendar together for the library. Trying to put my calendar together for my girls. So it's like a lot of stuff, plus being a mom and having a husband, all that stuff. So it's like a lot going on but starting to balance everything now at the beginning of the year makes the rest of the year easier. [page 3, Transcript First Inquiry].

In her advisory, Marcia attempted to cover a wide range of topics, such as community service, mentoring younger students at a nearby grade school, etiquette, awareness of body, and developing skills necessary for college-going. The young women in her advisory come from grades 10 through 12. During the last school year, Marcia had some concerns about the participation of the young women in her advisory group. Some of the young women had challenges participating with some elements of the program and she was determined to address those concerns. Her initial thought was to "weed" out those who were not "the right fit". This might not seem like the best way to help young women who might need her class. Nevertheless, Marcia was attempting to use the information she had while anticipating her own capacity given what she expected to be a challenging school year for herself.

Choosing Marcia. In choosing who to focus on for analysis of the CompHS inquiry, as in CalabarHS I wanted to choose someone who seemed (i) engaged in the Inquiry, for example someone who was engaged with the readings (ii) to be learning through their own questioning and from their colleagues as well, and (iii) to help the learning of the other members of the group. I considered focusing on one of three of the teachers for purposes of analysis. The learning of the other teacher and the AP was not initially clear to me. In addition, I wanted to choose someone whose learning or growth challenged my own learning in terms of understanding how best to facilitate the inquiry group.

I chose Marcia as the focal person because I struggled the most with understanding how Marcia was making sense of the some parts of the readings. There were at least two occasions when I was initially uncertain about her response to the reading materials. Referring back to my theoretical framework helped. As well, I had to be patient, thoughtful and self reflective in both responding to and analyzing her comments. In addition, there seemed to be some learning on her part and she seemed to contribute to the group's learning. I believed I learned as a result of interacting with her in the inquiry.

Calabar High School (CalabarHS).

First Entry. CalabarHS is a small charter school. I first entered this school during the Fall of 2010 after meeting the executive director and founder. I accepted an invitation to go on a school tour. Outsider presence seemed to be a regular part of the school environment at CalabarHS. There are regular school tours throughout the school year, many given by the students. This appears to be a part of the Board's marketing strategy (Field Notes and Interviews). I met the principal and her second in charge early in 2011. After some time, I explained my project and asked about interest. When the principal expressed interest, I began

89

visiting the campus on a regular basis to observe classes and meet teachers and generally get to know the school more.

CalabarHS is located in a working class community located in a small city in Southern California. The school has enrolled about 450 students. There are about 28 teachers, the majority of whom are white. There are however some African American and some Hispanic teachers. The key administrative staff is white, including the principal and her assistant principal who acted as her right hand person. The computer/facilities person is Asian. The non-key positions such as security and cleaning are held by African Americans and Latinos.

The average class size at the school is about 25 students (Field Notes and Interviews). The student population is approximately 65% Latino/a, 30% African American and 5% Asian and white students. For those students who stay at the school for the 4 years, the school boasts a high graduation rate, with 95% of their graduates exceeding the admission requirements of UC/California State University schools (School website and Interviews; [Report]. The school, however, has an approximately 60%[17] graduation rate based on those entering in ninth grade. This is because many students transfer to local public high schools in 10 and 11th grade because of the "stringent" graduation requirements (Field Notes and Interviews). CalabarHS has a dual goal of preparing all students to be college-ready and with an emphasis on environmental matters.

Communication/Professional Support. There are weekly scheduled two-hour staff meeting/professional development. There also are weekly departmental meetings and grade level meetings. The principal spends a fair amount of time making sure the teachers who need to meet have common open periods for these meetings as well as other prep periods. In addition,

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[17] Based on average entering 9th grade class size and average graduating 12th grade class size.

there are scheduled professional development days throughout the school year. Professional development has included going to visit other schools. Recently, several teachers and administrators visited a large charter school in an attempt to find out ways to address some of the concerns at CalabarHS. Prior to the start of school this year, there was three weeks of professional development. This included hiring outside consultants to cover a variety of matters including grading rubrics.

The schools' administration attempts to involve the staff in much of the activities such as planning for and development of answers for The *Western Association of Schools and Colleges* (*WASC*) accreditation responses. There is constant questioning and trying to improve things like the schedule. Annual changes are apparently de-rigor. Each teacher has an email address and there is constant communication and response over this email system. I was given an email address and added to teacher group emailings during the research project.

The Neighborhood. Calabar High School is located in a small working class neighborhood that has experienced recent demographic shifts. According to the neighborhood's website, between the 1980s and 2000 the population of whites decreased from approximately 77% approximately 21%. At the same time the population of Latinos/as has increased substantially to more than 52%. During this time, the population of the blacks increased from 7.6 percent to 12.1 percent. More recent demographic information form the 2010 United States Census show a decrease in the black population to 10.1 percent and lists the Hispanic population at 61 percent and non-Hispanic white population at 16.2 percent. The student population at CalabarHS reflects some of these demographic shifts, particularly those relating to the Latino/a populations. The median household income listed for 200-2009 was $46, 459 annually. According the city's website 51percent of the population works in managerial or sale and office

occupations. The median price of a home was listed at $234,000. CalabarHS was located in a smaller, a little more affluent neighborhood than CompHS.

Project Inception and Initial Challenges. I started this project in the Spring 2011. I spoke with the principal and several teachers about the possibility of an inquiry project and similar to CompHS asked for input. I planned to start the inquiry portion of this project in the Fall of 2011. In the meantime I spent a lot of time at the school. I interviewed teachers I observed classes and I attended numerous school wide events including graduation. During the Summer months there was a brief Summer school part of which I also attended. I attended about two of the three weeks of pre-school professional development. Given the busy-ness of the teachers it was uncertain if they would have time to take on this project. The teachers had a lot on their plates. They each served on various committees and so adding a new project would be challenging and I would need to be flexible. As well, one teacher who I had developed a relationship with and who had agreed to be part of the project left the school over the Summer. Nonetheless, at one session just before school was to begin, I was able to put together a group of individuals for the project. Similar to CompHS, I again hoped for 4 participants. Instead I was fortunate to have with six initially. The principal, her second in charge and four others joined the group, two who provided services and classroom support and two classroom teachers. I lost one educator who left the school in the middle of the inquiry.[18]

My Role in the CalabarHS Inquiry.   In the inquiry sessions I acted as the group's facilitator. I coordinated the meeting times and places and provided the readings. I helped to set the tone for the meetings as a place for learning. A primary goal of the discussions was to

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[18] This educator of color seemed to leave because of conflict with the school administration. She seemed to identify with the students' needs and circumstances. She spoke of experiencing a great deal of stress in the effort to provide services for the students who were not always on track as required by the school's goal.

increase learning about the role of inequality in schools generally and at CalabarHS in particular. I hoped the readings and discussions would help illuminate for the educators how they may be able to be agents of change with respect to inequality existing on their campus. In general, I asked questions to start and to help continue the discussions. Furthermore, as the facilitator I occasionally redirected the conversations toward the reading or toward the teachers and education. During the sessions, the educators did most of the talking. Nevertheless, I sometimes found it appropriate to suggest alternative explanations or use questions to help facilitate the discussions.

An issue of concern that was important to address were the differences in the positionality of the administrators and the teachers. I also had to be mindful that the administrators had obligations and responsibility beyond the educators in the Inquiry. I tried to address these concerns by speaking openly about the need for keeping what we discussed in the meetings among those in the group and by encouraging openness. Nonetheless, it was also important to keep the differences in mind throughout the inquiry. The differences positions can sometimes highlight the play of power and privilege. For example, although the principal prided herself on an open environment, the teachers did not all believe they could safely say whatever they wanted to. This indicated how her position of power may make her unaware of the positions of those in lower less privileged positions. For example, one of the teachers, Bella, in private discussions explained her sometimes reticence to speak at the beginning of the study, as concerned about keeping her job. Bella explained the result was that she spent a lot of time thinking about how to say things so as not to cause the administrators to be uncomfortable with her. Notwithstanding the principal thinking the space was open, Bella said initially she did not say as much as she would have liked. I tried to support this by speaking in private about

concerns and trying to ask appropriate questions. Toward the end of the study, however said Bella said felt more secure and more willing to speak up in the group sessions.

The Participants of the CalabarHS Inquiry; Choosing Kate.

CalabarHS and its Teachers. There is an atmosphere of busy-ness at the school and as one teacher deemed it -- an air of attempts at efficiency. And an atmosphere of constant change to address current concerns. Unlike CompHS, there are a number of opportunities for group work and collaboration at CalabarHS. Similar to some of the teachers at CompHS, there is a sense that each teacher works very hard at teaching, professional development, administrative work, advising students as mentors, toward senior thesis and otherwise. Unlike CompHS, it appears that most teachers are on board with working very hard toward a goal of helping the students become college ready. Many teachers keep their classroom open so that students can come in during their prep periods or lunch-time to talk about a variety of issues.

In this subsection I describe the members of the CalabarHS Inquiry. In addition, I also discuss how I came to choose to focus on Kate as the example for understanding the processes and learning that occurred in the Inquiry. The inquiry commenced with a group of six educators. Three were of color and three were white.

Melanie.[19] After the third session, Melanie, left the school to go on disability leave. This felt like a loss for the group and the school. Melanie was the dean of discipline. Importantly, Melanie said she was interested in the group because of several concerns she had with how the school addressed the needs of many students of color. She was interested in issues of identity for students, said she identified as a Chicana, and identified with many of the students. She believed that the way CalabarHS treated some students was not supportive of their identities and that this

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[19] Melanie left the school during the inquiry but was a part of the story so I left the description here.

in turn was not supportive of the education of these students. Melanie said she struggled with identity throughout her education and believes this struggle contributed to her struggles with schooling. As a result, she wanted to support students with similar concerns. As the person in charge of discipline, Melanie wanted to address 'discipline' in supportive, non-punitive ways. She believed that as a result of her approach, she found herself in a major conflict with Donna, the second highest-ranking administrator at the school. She believed this conflict contributed to an inability to properly do her job. According to Melanie, Donna's view was that if the students could not manage at the school, they were not a good fit and should leave the school. Further, Melanie also later said she struggled to gain the confidence to speak up about her concerns in the group. Nevertheless, she did raise her concerns with me in private discussions. This gave me the opportunity to begin to support her outside of the group and also helped to convince me of the importance of having regular contact with the educators outside of the group. Melanie's leaving meant that issues of concern could potentially be left unspoken. As a result, I hoped one or more of the other educators would be able to discuss concerns Melanie might have raised.

Donna. Donna is white and comes from a corporate background. She has a degree in counseling and works full time as the person in charge of student affairs. Toward the end of the study she was given the title of assistant principal. Prior to this, although her title was student affairs director she was also involved in a number of other key roles. Donna's job includes determining the final graduation list, helping students find scholarships, determining what happens to students who do not do well academically at the school. She is proud of the students who get into college and of the rate of acceptances of those who graduate to elite Universities. As part of her job she take students on tours of colleges. Like many of the educators on campus, she seems to put in many extra hours and appears to work very hard. In addition, Donna

attended and participated with the principal in many of the important conversations on campus such as some teacher reviews, salary discussions and hiring and firing of teachers and staff. On one occasion, a teacher expressed dismay that Donna was part of her review. Donna is often in the company of the principal. One teacher referred to them as "the twins". The principal appears hold Donna in high regard. As an indication of their relations, when I attempted to meet with Jane, the principal for the first time, she suggested and assumed that the meeting should include Donna. I was initially confused by this assumption. I just wanted to introduce myself to the principal and get permission to start observing the school. I did not understand Donna's role on campus. Donna and Jane's offices are also directly in front of each other. [Of the group members, she exhibits a noticeable strong personality, voicing her opinions in strong ways when she speaks.] In my conversations with Donna, she expresses certainty and confidence that using a corporate model in running the school is important for the school to be competitive. Donna believes the school is doing great and she says she spends a lot of effort to find opportunities for the students who excel at CalabarHS. As well, she expresses belief that the students who are not doing well are simply not good fits for the school.

   Jane. Jane is the principal of the school. Prior to coming to Calabar she was an instructor for outdoor activities camp and so came to the school as an uncertified teacher and has been at the school from close to the school's inception. She recently completed an Ed. D in education. She has the confidence of the executive director of the charter school. Jane is very proud of her school and all it has accomplished. Since she first arrived, the school has apparently obtained more internal systems and become more established. The buildings including classroom spaces have increased and become better. The campus has improved greatly including access to technology and other resources. The school has won many financial grants

and other awards for efforts at focusing on being a 'green' or environmentally focused school. The school has a regular schedule for giving tours. Students are trained to and give tours frequently to various members of the larger community. Also local media is often on the campus. Nonetheless, many students leave in 11th and 12th grade. Jane explained this by saying that the curriculum gets hard and the students do not want to do the work. She believed there is not much she can do about that. She believed that students choose to leave because they can go elsewhere and graduate easier. She said many of the students simply do not want to do the senior thesis. She has also expressed belief that many students do not make good use of the resources at the school. Jane was proud of the high rate of college acceptances for the students who do stay on in 12th grade and graduate.

Diane. Diane is an African American teacher who is highly regarded for her work by the administration and her colleagues. She has worked at a number of different schools prior to this one. Diane worked on many projects at the school. She played several important roles on campus. She coached a sports team. She led her grade level teachers. She was in charge of planning the Senior Thesis. She organized career day. She also has participated in the planning of Intercession (a month long research program the school engages in to engage the students in researching their community). Although Diane took on a lot of responsibility, she nonetheless expressed feeling underappreciated for all the work she did. For example, she was concerned that an important position she was qualified for went to someone much less experienced and much less involved. She was also concerned that the school atmosphere was not supportive of African American students and that this has contributed to the decline in the numbers of such students. As well, she was also concerned that the school data shows African American students do not do as well as other students. When she raised this concern on two separate occasions in

97

my presence, the principal seemed to respond with a mixture of unconcern and/or disbelief. As a result, although she is a well-regarded teacher, at least initially, she did not seem to have the ear of the principal, despite the apparent legitimacy of her concern, and there seemed to be some tension in the relationship between her and the principal. Diane said she was raised and attended schools in predominantly white neighborhoods and feels that she has endured much racism as a result. She felt she had to work very hard to prove she could get good grades. As a result, Diane believes she identifies with the challenges some African American students endure. She believes part of her role as a teacher is to empower and challenge her students.

     Bella. Bella is a Hispanic young woman who is also a highly regarded teacher. In private discussions, Bella expressed some similar concerns as Melanie did. Bella has talked about wanting to educate her students in ways that were authentic to them. Bella has several younger siblings who are still in school and recently due to a family illness had to take on more responsibility for members of her family. Some of her siblings are doing well and others are not. She is very involved in helping to support her siblings and brings this perspective to her understanding about schooling. With respect to the Inquiry, she said that she was not always sure about how to communicate her concerns in the group. She also felt that she was relatively new to teaching and to the campus. At first she seemed tentative about raising controversial issues. She says that although she has confidence about the level of her work the inquiry has challenged her to constantly think and rethink what she is doing. She does have some students who are failing (although a lower rate than many of the other teachers). She has accepted my challenge to figure out how to support these students as soon as she identifies them, to work to get the number of failures down to zero.

Kate. Kate was hired initially to teach in and lead the school's support center for failing

students (the "ED Center"). This is her second year at CalabarHS. She has had interests in both

education and psychology. She has training in both psychology and counseling. She is not

teacher certified. Kate is white, she said she grew up poor and currently lives in an affluent

community. She talked about her lifelong interest in both psychology and education in part as

follows:

> All right, so my name is [Kate]. Originally and really a lifelong intention to be in the field
> of psychology which is the path that I was on, and still am on until just a year and a half
> ago when I started at [CalabarHS]…So I have a BA in psychology from [UC University]
> and then I worked, sort of ironically to me, for four years in the Department of Education
> as an administrative assistant and then a student affairs officer for a doctoral program in
> leadership…Always had been interested in education at the same time. Had one of those
> in elementary school, wanted to be a second grade teacher…And then ended up going to
> [local college] for my master's in counseling psychology, and then continued on and got
> my license to be licensed marriage and family therapist. [Pg 1 Transcript First Session]

Kate works full time as the director of the ED Center and toward the end of the study she was

asked to take charge of Focus-Teams (discussed later). In addition, Kate maintains a part-time

practice in family counseling. Students who have failed more than 4 classes are sent to the ED

Center for one period each day as an intervention to help them move forward with their work.

The ED Center is a small room that fits Kate's desk with space that fits 5 students comfortably.

She has up to 9 students at a time in her room. While observing and volunteering in the ED

Center, I notice that she attempts to know the students and to give each student individual

attention. She seems to know a lot about each student both in terms of personal concerns and

their work. She seems to work with students on their specific subjects that are currently

challenging. She says that her work means that she has to keep on top of where each student is

in each class, so she can help them effectively. Kate's efforts with her students seem to have

gained her the respect of her colleagues, the administration and many of her students. She also

helps students by observing them in their classroom settings. According to Kate, often her

students can do the work but have challenges with organization. For example, she said her

students often forget their textbooks or homework or when they have tests coming up. As a

result, Kate's says her work with her students include addressing such life skills.

As mentioned earlier, in addition to her work in the ED Center, Midway through our study Kate

was given the additional job of being in charge of leading Focus-Teams of grade level teachers

and other educators if necessary. These teams are to discuss and provide intervention to students

who are not doing very well, but who do not qualify for the ED Center. At first Kate, is

apprehensive about leading the Focus-Teams. Although she thought it was a good idea, she had

no model for how to accomplish this job. Further, she was concerned that the Focus-Teams job

was potentially too big for one person. Her concerns that the job was a big one were not

unfounded. During my discussions with several teachers they indicated that there is a high

failure rate among theirs and other students at CalabarHS. Nonetheless, Kate developed and

began to implement a plan for meeting with teams during weekly grade level meetings where she

engaged the other teachers in discussions about the progress and potential solutions of specific

students. These sessions allowed teachers to share ideas about how they address student needs.

    Choosing Kate. In choosing who to focus on for analysis I wanted to choose someone

who seemed (i) engaged in the Inquiry, for example someone who was engaged with the

readings (ii to be learning through her own questioning and from her colleagues as well, and (iii)

seemed to help the learning of the other members of the group. I considered focusing one of the

three teachers for purposes of analysis. The growth of the two administrators was not initially as

clear to me.

As a result of the group sessions, casual conversations and in particularly individual discussions with other teachers, I began to understand the placement of the different members of the group in the school in terms of respect, power and hierarchy.   For example, I came to understand position in the organization of each teacher in the group as respected educators. As well, I began to understand Kate's amicable relationship with both the administrators and the teachers. I also identified that Diane was having difficulty in getting her concerns about African American students heard and addressed. I began to realize Bella was experiencing tentativeness in addressing some of her concerns. I was able to make sure to meet with each of these there to try to address the concerns they had, to encourage them to bring up their concerns within the group and to go over ways they may speak up in the groups. For example, I recognized Kate's position made her a potential good candidate for bringing concerns on behalf of students to be heard by both administrators and teachers. This was especially important as Melanie mentioned concerns she had and after she left. As a result, I pointed out to Kate her potential for helping the group grow and, as I did with others encouraged her to be assertive. She took interest in accepting this role and did begin to take a leadership role in the group. Furthermore, although I spent time with each member of the group in between the sessions and especially with the teachers (I spent time with Bella and Diane) because I volunteered in Kate's room we had more time together for discussions. This weekly opportunity to spend time with Kate perhaps allowed me to see her struggle to learn, as well as her growth, more closely and clearly.

Findings Chapter 4: MEANINGS

In this initial findings chapter I address my first research question - to identify some of

the key meanings that operate among educators with respect to their students of color at the two

school sites in this study. This chapter 4 focuses on meanings relating to how students and their

families are described by educators within the context of their school. Prior to the discussion of

some meanings found at the research sites, I discuss an example of discourse used in broader

society around the education of students of color. In the chapters that follow, I document in part

the complex inquiry process (sometimes referred to as the "Inquiry") at each school including i)

the discussions of the educators as they engage in the process of learning about inequality, ii)

some deficit or resource oriented meanings that arose, and iii) some attempts at re-articulation of

some deficit meanings.

An Example of Current Societal Discourse & Related Meanings in Education.

Education has been a continuing topic of conversation in everyday American discourse in the

general public and even at the highest levels of government. Throughout the process of seeking

my doctoral degree in education, I have found it easy to engage just about anyone in

conversations about education[20]. Everyone it seems has an opinion, sometimes very strong.

This is perhaps because most people go through some formal schooling and have some

knowledge of the educational process. Interestingly, when I have had discussions about

education with a variety of people, there were some common sense notions that were often given

as explanation for educational woes. One often given common sense is that low-income students

of color and their parents or families "do not value education." This argument is made

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[20] I found this to be the case with people who were considered materially poor, wealthy and middle-income, with white, black, Latino people, with social workers, small business people and officers in large corporations, with lawyers, with friends and people I just met as well.

notwithstanding the general fact that people in America across racial and socio-economic lines send their children to school and likely assign some value to formal education. As discussed later, this 'do not value education" explanation also showed up in both school sites.

The current President of the United States and previous Presidents have had education as a major policy concern on their agenda. For example, in President George H.W. Bush' administration education was considered so important that he referred to himself as *The Education President* (Giroux, 1989)**.** Years later, his son, as the 43rd President produced the much-discussed *No Child Left Behind Federal* statute. The current President, Barack Obama has also discussed education at length. He has described education equality as the "civil rights issue of our time," and like presidents before him "called for a renewed effort to eliminate the achievement gap between African-American students and others" (Cooper, 2011). Further, the current Obama administration has enacted a major education policy called *Race to the Top,* asking States to compete for funds to address educational disparities (Dillon, 2009). The title of the current President's major education policy *Race to the Top* alludes to the criticism of the *No Child Left Behind* statute, that it encourages states to race to the bottom, lowering education standards in order to meet the mandates of that statute.

If one focuses solely on the name of the *No Child Left Behind* statute, the notion that 'no child' should be 'left behind' is laudable. The concept of leaving no child behind can indicate a concern with helping those students who need the most help. Certainly, the concept of 'behind' signals the need for academic learning and growth which is important for all children whether materially poor or well off, white, black, brown or otherwise. Indeed '*No child left behind'* is deemed to be warranted because many students when they enter school are believed to be "so far behind." This notion of being 'behind' seems both a neutral and realistic way of looking at an

enduring problem in education. Indeed the inequality of resources in schools has been shown to

contribute to differences in educational outcomes (Rogers et al, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2007).

However, the concept of 'left behind,' even though laudable and seemingly neutral, can mask

problematic meanings. This concept can hold the idea that students of color, particularly those in

low-income communities, in being 'behind' are not on par with their White colleagues in terms

of academic capability. This term can be seen as deficit-oriented because it can denote that there

is something essentially wrong with (and it also stigmatizes) students, their communities and

their cultural practices. This is not to ignore the fact that students come to school with varying

degrees of skill and knowledge of particular subjects. What is important is i) to recognize that all

students come with some knowledge, ii) not to stigmatize the lack of particular knowledge, or iii)

not to equate variation in knowledge, with lack of capability.

The phrase 'far behind' can also signify the use by schools of dominant norms to

reference students from non-dominant cultures, without considering these students' day-to-day

experiences in, and related knowledge about, their homes and communities, their histories or

their heritage. Using dominant norms to reference students of diverse backgrounds assumes

inaccurately a 'one size fits all education.' It is for this reason that scholars have called for

"pedagogical practices situated in critical analyses of the role of urban schools in social

inequality" (Morrell, 2008). Furthermore some scholars have also called for pedagogy that

provides a new stance and terminology (paraphrasing Paris, 2012) to enable the preservation of

our multicultural and pluralistic society. For example, Gutierrez (2008) reminded us that

learning is both vertical and horizontal[21] and that knowledge includes information obtained in

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[21] Gutierrez (2008) explains vertical and horizontal as follows: "Briefly, traditional notions
of development generally define change along a vertical dimension, moving, for example, from immaturity and
incompetence to maturity and competence (Engeström,1996). A more expansive view of development also is

informal learning spaces.

When children arrive at school they generally arrive with complex knowledge they obtained in the informal learning spaces at home and in their communities, even in their play. Such knowledge can support reading and writing even if students have not yet mastered the academic skill of attaching sounds to symbols, one part of learning to read. In her book *Other People's Children* Lisa Delpit talked about the unrecognized fluency that many African American children have. She asked, how many teachers "know that their black students are prolific and fluent writers of rap songs" or "realize the verbal creativity and fluency black kids express everyday on playgrounds of America" (p. 17). She also wondered *if* teachers heard the rap songs or games these students know - "would they [such teachers] relate them [such songs or games] to language fluency" (Id). In addition to recognizing the knowledge students bring, low-income and students of color often have some identifiable differences in academic skills (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Gomez, 2001) that cannot be ignored. How educators address these differences is very important. The meanings educators' hold with respect to these students can help determine how they go about finding solutions, how and whether they build on students' existing knowledge and ultimately how much success they have in supporting such students' education.

The two phrases mentioned earlier, parents "do not value education" and students are "far behind" interestingly are two common sense notions that came up at both Inquiry sites in this study. These phrases can carry negative meanings about students and their capabilities. Ultimately such language and their related meanings can be problematic. This is because such language and meanings may be related to day-to-day educational practices of teachers and other

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concerned with the horizontal forms of expertise that develop within and across an individual's practices" (p. 149).

105

educators and, may even affect educational policies to the detriment of low income and students of color and their families and communities.

Discourse, Language & Meanings at CompHS and CalabarHS.

Introduction. Ascertaining the meanings that operate within a local space is important for understanding the practices and processes within that space. Importantly, sociocultural theorists acknowledge that meanings are not just those that may be carried across generations and local contexts, they are also constantly being created and recreated in specific local contexts (Nasir & Hand, 2006, p. 458). In sociocultural theory tools and artifacts are i) important conveyors of culture and meanings, ii) things people use to accomplish their goals, and iii) critical parts of learning (Nasir & Hand, 2006). As a result, I use the sociocultural analytic tools of language for identifying both resource-oriented and deficit-oriented language[22] and discourse at CompHS and at CalabarHS. Further I engage the sociocultural theoretical framework to analyze the associated meanings including engagment of the sociocultural artifacts of ideation (such as the deficit oriented thinking or resource-oriented thinking). Furthermore I also engage the lens of critical theory including CRT and standpoint theory to illuminate the potential relevance of race and social location. When looking at the tool of language, a series of different phrases or words can be used that have similar meanings or can form part of a similar discourse. Negative descriptions of students of color have evolved over the years (Hull & Rose, 1991). Nonetheless even as some terms or descriptions have evolved to be more positive or neutral sounding, new descriptions often hold on to some negative meanings (Valencia & Solorzano, 1997; Trent, 1998; Hull & Rose, 1991). For example, as Hull & Rose (1991) reminded us, while terms describing low-income students of color have evolved from "socially maladjusted" to

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[22] See Defined terms for definition of language and discourse.

"unwilling learners" for instance, there was still, in the evolution of such terms, a tendency to locate the problem in the student or the student's family background. Clearly, deficit oriented thinking has remained central and have made reform efforts challenging.

Upon reviewing the data in this study, similar to Hull & Rose (1991), and the discussion above, I found language that seemed to locate the problems of educating the students either within the students or within their families. For purposes of this study I focused not on specific predetermined language but on language with similar meanings. For example, as discussed in more detail below the term '*behind*' can be considered part of a group of language terms or discourse with the similar meaning that 'students are not capable.' Educators like most people do not always use language precisely. As a result, to determine whether language was used in a deficit-oriented way, I looked for use of language by educators that sought to either blame students or their families or assign some inherent defect in them individually or as a group (Hull & Rose, 1991; Valencia), without such educators also accepting some responsibility for educating students. I also looked for whether educators appeared to adopt a solution-oriented stance. The intent was not to absolve students and families from responsibility for students' learning. Rather the intent is to acknowledge the need for educators to accept and not reduce their responsibility for educating their students of color. Further, when educating low-income and students of color, it is imperative that inequality and its effects be considered and accounted for (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Gomez, 2001).

In addition to finding language with deficit meanings I also found evolving asset based meanings that provided hope with respect to the education of students of color. One such asset was that some of the same educators exhibiting deficit-oriented language were also educators who seemed committed to the education of their students. Further, some of these educators were

open to learning to improve their teaching and their students' learning. Many seemed open to

change for the benefit of their students. This is a significant finding because of the great

potential this presents for changing deficit meanings.

Deficit-Oriented Meanings.

The point of identifying meanings in the paper is not to chastise or point fingers at

educators. Rather the point is to help figure out how to begin a process of re-articulation and

begin to understand what is involved in a process of change. In the end the findings seemed to

confirm that inequality might well affect us all. The findings showed that educators of color and

White educators both exhibited deficit oriented meanings. I found language and discourse that

may be categorized in two groupings of deficit-oriented meanings that (i) students and their

families or communities are to blame and (ii) that students are not capable.[23]

Students and their Families Are to Blame: "For Not Valuing Education". Similar to

meanings discussed by some researchers (Hull & Rose, 1991; Valencia & Solorzano, 1997), at

both schools, a discourse evolved with meanings suggesting 'student and families were to blame'

for the ills in education. One of the ways this discourse showed up was either faulting the

families or the students for not valuing education. Some of the language that was used as part of

this discourse was similar to language I encountered in informal discussions with a range of

individuals. For example, one educator said,

> "…I mean, when I first started working here, we had kids [who] were getting into places
> like U of M and didn't go because their families wanted them to stay home and help them
> take care of the family. Their parents talked about it. Like when we were talking about
> the value of it, that was what I was seeing from here is that you need to go to work, take
> care of the family. That's [education] not important. [Female Educator of Color
> CalabarHS]

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[23] Most of the quotes in this chapter (and except where indicated) are from the ethnographic portion of the study, that is they are from interviews, observations, casual conversations and focus groups and other than the taped inquiry sessions with each group. The following two chapter are primarily based on taped inquiry sessions.

Later in the inquiry this same idea came up again as follows,

> "but the parents of these kids don't see education as a value because they didn't value education themselves. Some of them do but a lot of them don't, so the kids may or may not get it while they're there. So it's changing the mindset of people, the community, to recognize that education is a value. [Female Educator of Color CalabarHS]

Some educators at CompHS also echoed the sentiment of families not valuing education. For example, echoing a larger societal discourse, one administrator saw the issue as residing within the community. In other words he saw the problem of not valuing education as a kind of community character flaw. This administrator spoke about the need for the community to see education as important and for supporting their students. While one of the statements from the quote immediately above allowed that some parents do value education, the main idea of both statements was that parents or families did not value education. In the first statement there appeared to be a jump in logic from the idea that a student did not go to a particular University to a judgment about the students or their families not valuing education. This statement did not seem to allow for other reasonable explanations such as the potential economic pressures (as an example) that might play into such a decision. Further, from a socio-cultural perspective, the jump in logic may result from the educator's meanings that were connected dominant ideas about the character of people who reside in low-income communities of color. In the second statement, even as the educator allowed that some parents see the value of education, the main argument was about parents in the students' communities not valuing education and the need to change the mindset of "the community." Furthermore, researchers have acknowledged that for some time, "defects in intellect and character" have been used to explain student failure (Hull & Rose, 1991, p. 315; Also see Ferguson, 2001; Nasir & Hand, 2006). The reference to the

"community" not valuing education at both research sites seemed to imply character defect in the students' community. In addition, the statement by the CalabarHS educator also seemed to abdicate responsibility for some students as she stated that some kids will 'get it' while some will not. Although the educator suggested changing the mindset of the community - this is not a realistic solution as it is not within her reasonable sphere of influence as a teacher.

Students and Families are to blame-"Students Not Motivated". Related to the discourse of students, their families or their communities not valuing education is the notion that students themselves are to be blamed either because they are not motivated, they do not want to do the work or do not develop the necessary skills get the work done. For example, one teacher noted,

> **"…** they just don't have the work habits. And it's interesting, because I feel like more than anything, … like they're not working, and it's, I just have to think, it's they don't think it matters. It doesn't feel important**."** (Female White Educator at CalabarHS)

At CompHS, in informal discussions with educators they sometimes talked about the lack of motivation of the students essentially saying that students '*simply don't care about school'* (paraphrasing). During the Inquiry one teacher echoed this sentiment and implied that the students were not motivated as follows,

> "I think it's everything. I think it's the kid, because the kid has to be motivated. The kid has to be – granted, not every kid is jumping for joy to get to school, but at least the kid needs to see some type of relevance for why you're coming to school. Where at least you're carrying a backpack to school for God's sake. [Female, Educator of Color at CompHS]

Interestingly, prior to this statement, this educator's colleague had discussed the notion that the school and the district sometimes had in a number of ways signaled to students the unimportance of schooling. These ways included constant change in school leadership, and resulting change in school policies. This educator acquiesced but then seemed to focus much of her comments on blaming the students, notwithstanding the major structural concerns they identified. At

110

CalabarHS another educator directly blamed the lack of motivation on the part of the students. She said ,

> "I keep coming up against the reason for leavings [that is students leaving the school before graduation] and the reason for some of this failure is they're not motivated. They don't want to try." (Female, White Educator at CalabarHS)

In the above comments, the educators make some references that may be factually correct. For example, students, can have poor "work habits," they do not always like school or bring a "backpack to school" and certainly many students leave before graduating. In the above statements however, in some cases, the educators seemed to equate 'apples and oranges'. For example, in one instant the lack of skill that teachers can address "work habits" led to a judgment about being students not caring about school, "they don't think it matters." There did not seem to be recognition on the part of the teacher that these work habits can indeed be taught and that teaching such habits was within the purview of that same teacher's influence. In the other instant, carrying a backpack seemed to be equated with being motivated or with doing well in school. In this case the educator had just been discussion with colleagues information regarding serious structural issues how the school itself might help to structure failure. Despite this the focus was on the students' not carrying a backpack to school. Another teacher signaled the negative meanings she held as she kept "coming up against the reason" that students just don't want to try. Similar to the discussions above about valuing education these statements blaming students for low educational outcomes appeared to make judgments about their character. And while the students and families do have obligations for participating and engaging in students' education, researchers have found that when educators focus on blaming students and families, this blaming can sometimes act as a proxy for abdicating responsibility (Diamond, 2004). On the other hand, educators taking responsibility can have a positive impact on students'

educational outcome (Diamond, 2004). The educators (at both schools) above seem to locate the problem in the students' character, a familiar deficit-oriented ways of characterizing low-income and students of color (Hull & Rose, 1991).

  Students are Not Capable: ***Students Behind.*** The second set of meanings that appeared in the language and discourse at the school was "the students are not capable." One of the ways this showed up is similar to the broader discourse around students being 'behind.' Educators in both schools expressed concerns that their students of color came to school 'far behind.' This discussion of 'behind' was not always had in a way that may be considered as deficit-oriented. That is because, some teachers spoke of students being behind in the context of how important it was for them as educators to help students catch up. This way of speaking indicated the educators had meanings about students' education that included such educators assuming they could positively impact students' learning. In order to address developing students' academic skills teachers must assess students' skills. Furthermore, standardized testing is currently a large part of schooling exists and educators must acknowledge and address whether students have the requisite knowledge and skills to master these tests. This is important because the test results are often used to provide (or potentially limit) access to opportunities and other resources. On the other hand however, sometimes educators spoke about students being behind in the context of blaming for education concerns. For example, at CompHS one female educator of color at CompHS pointed out in the context of explaining why it is difficult to educate students. *"On top of the fact that the students are already behind when we get them"*. This educator seemed to see the task of educating the students as primarily within the sphere of the students' influence rather than also within the sphere of educators as well. A similar discourse was also found at CalabarHS as a white female educator explained the difficulty of educating students of color as

being *"because of where they're at when they come to us. If they're already behind and we have so much remediation to do."* As discussed earlier the notion of being behind can be associated with the lack of capability and the use of dominant norms to reference student from non-dominant cultures (see the discussion earlier under "An Example of Current Societal Discourse & Related Meanings in Education").

Students are not capable: Students are Undisciplined. At CompHS several educators seemed to discuss student incapability in the context of students' capacity to be disciplined. For example, one older female educator of color had only honors or AP classes. She talked about many students not being disciplined enough to get their work done. There was a sense that only few students were disciplined enough and so were worth her efforts in terms of trying to educate them. This teacher's understanding seemed inflexible in terms of understanding that some students may not have had the opportunity to learn and that she had the potential to help these students. Ladson-Billings (1994) acknowledged that many teachers can differentiate students in this way and suggested that successful teachers instead see how all their students can be successful. Connected to this talk about students are the considerable resources the school assigns to discipline at the school. Shelton is one of the two assistant principals at the school and in that role is the dean of discipline. He spends a good part of his day (most often first thing in the morning, lunch time and immediately after school) in the large detention hall where students are 'disciplined' daily mostly for the seemingly minor infractions of coming to school late or arriving late to class. Each time I visit the detention hall there are usually a substantial number of students there and Shelton says they are there for being late. Shelton is also in charge of attendance and he has two full time assistants helping with his work.

113

Further, it seemed that sometimes the meanings educators had, led them to use discipline when other ways of addressing the problem might be more appropriate. For example, on one occasion as I waited in the reception area to interview the principal a student came in looking very upset. I observed as he explained that he got into trouble and was sent to the principal's office because he was being asked to take a standardized test. He explained that he was not able to do any of the test. He said because he did not understand the material on the test. And so he was frustrated and put his head on the desk. The proctor however insisted that he do the test and when he explained he did not know how, he was sent to the office for his refusal, as punishment. The student was very upset that he did not know the material on which he was being tested. The principal saw the student before our meeting and the student was sent to one of the assistant principal's office where he was made to complete the test.

From a socio-cultural perspective, it seemed that the student mentioned above, in his refusal to take the test, was breaking the school norm of taking tests. The proctor adhered to the cultural practice of disciplining the student for noncompliance with this norm. The principal and the assistant principal, authority figures in the school - all worked together to reinforce this norm by participating in moving the student to compliance. It seemed that the meanings held by these educators with respect to the student, at least in this instant, was focused on their view that the child was disobedient. As a result, the educators sought to discipline the student and direct his compliance. The meanings the educators held seemed to direct their attention away from the child's apparent distress, need for comforting and need for teaching. The focus on testing and compliance rather than on the well being and learning of the student is highly problematic. The educators' actions seemed to help create a structure that supported failure in the school because they were focused away from providing academic support. Further, the actions of the educators

114

seemed to fit in with a discourse within the school about the need to discipline students. From a socio-cultural perspective, this is an example of how the meanings held can direct the actions and interactions of educators and can also redirect attention from providing educational support for students. From a critical analytical point of view, the power and influence of the dominant views were at play here, even thought the key parties to this particular story were of color. In this story it seemed that the individuals who were members of a subordinated groups (the African American educators) were giving what Gramsci (1971) terms 'consent' to the dominant cultural views often held about African American boys of having the character flaw of needing to be disciplined (Ferguson, 2001). Except for the proctor who was not at the scene, the participants were all African American, the student and the adult educators. Nonetheless, discipline was used even though it was potentially damaging to the student, it left unaddressed major concerns about the student's education and it was against the interest of African Americans generally to focus on disciplining rather than on student learning.

The Importance of Meanings-An Example of School Policy and Deficit Meanings. For illustration purposes I use here an example of CalabarHS's school policy and some related deficit language to help discuss the importance of meanings. Although I use CalabarHS, CompHS also has school policies such as the discipline policy mentioned above that appeared to be associated with deficit meanings about students. Sociocultural theory focuses on cultural processes, local and societal (Nasir & Hand, 2006) and can help us understand how the processes within a school site structure and maintain meanings within that site. Sociocultural and critical theoretical frameworks can help us understand how the meanings around students' capability such as "students are lazy,"[24] can be connected to larger concerns of what the school deems to be the

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[24] It is important to note that similar levels of failure also occurred at CompHS, even if the failure looked different. The focus on CalabarHS is for purposes of illustration of the benefit of using sociocultural theory to help illuminate the issues.

failures of the students. Further using sociocultural and critical frameworks can help with understanding how meanings around such terms evolve and are maintained at a particular school site.

At CalabarHS (as at CompHS) many teachers have students who are not passing their classes.[25] As a result, this reform-oriented school has attempted to address these 'failures.' Not surprisingly, an important tool the school uses to assess students is testing. Based on their apparent beliefs about testing as a teaching tool, the school has implemented the test 'retake' policy to help students. There seemed to be an assumption that retaking the tests will teach students materials they did not know. Generally, the policy allowed teachers to provide students the option to take again or retake failed tests. Teachers had some flexibility in how they implement this policy. In day-to-day practice, some teachers allowed students to take as many retakes as they like, other teachers limited the number and/or the timing of retakes. Some students did these retakes and many other students declined the option.

A key tenet of sociocultural theory is that tools and artifacts are critical parts of learning and are also important conveyors of culture and meanings. Further, when powerful tool and artifacts are used, they can concretize meanings and assumptions behind them and can make false assumptions seem as though they are true (Nasir & Hand, 2006; Wertch). Testing could be considered an important tool in schools giving one opportunity to assess how students are learning. This tool together with the norms and meanings held by teachers about learning and their students gave rise to the retake policy. This was an important policy within the local site of CalabarHS. There was much discussion about it. Some teachers believed it was an effective learning tool. Others believed it was ineffective and still others believe it was the implementation of the policy that was a problem. As a critical policy within the school site an important question

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[25] The percentages vary per classroom/teacher. Failures of 20-50% were self-reported in one on one discussions with teachers.

116

that might be asked is how does it impact learning? What meanings does this policy convey and what assumptions are behind it. In answering these questions it appeared that the retake policy had the unfortunate result of re-inscribing failure within the school.

I first became aware of the policy when the principal together with the classroom teacher[26] questioned some students in a class setting about why they were not doing well.[27] The educators seemed to question the students in ways that seemed to lead them to particular answers. Students were asked questions like (paraphrasing) - *Aren't we providing you with support? Do you not have the option to retake the tests? Then why aren't you doing them?* It seemed from the context of the conversation that the students could only conclude they were at fault. And indeed more than one student responded out loud (again paraphrasing) – *probably because we are lazy* to the last question.   The implication was that the students were adequately supported and so it was their fault that they were not doing well. Interestingly, it was the students who were calling themselves names. Indeed the educators did not call the students 'lazy' in my presence.   Nonetheless, the context of the discussions seemed highly unequal and stacked against the students. Lipman (1997) advises us to account different power positions when reform policies are made. She reminds us that during reform efforts the change process can also depend on "the relative political power, influence, and resources of various social groups in the school and in the community (Lipman, 1997, p 5). The differences in power relation between the teacher and principal on one hand and students on the other were not addressed or accounted for. As a result, the spaces seemed to be difficult ones for students to be expected to speak freely or for the truth of the situation to be understood. When these students

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[26] An African American male teacher.
[27] This was the first of several such encounters.

117

'confirmed' their own laziness they were internalizing (Woodson, 1933) or giving 'consent' to faulty dominant views about themselves and their fellow students (Gramsci, 1971).

In an attempt to further understand the retake policy, it seemed appropriate to ask students about the policy in a context that was less intimidating, perhaps without the presence of the principal or subject matter teachers. The intent was also to consider and attempt to flatten some of the power differentials that may inhibit student responses. As a result, during separate focus groups[28] with some students who were 'failing' several classes, I asked these students to help me understand what was going on, including the benefit of retakes.[29] Interestingly indicating the power of dominant deficit views of people of color, some students (this was the case in more than one focus groups) initially used similar language about being lazy as others did in front of the principal and their subject matter teacher. With further discussion however, students added some complication to what was taking place. Students talked about materials they did not understand and being ill at ease in terms of speaking out in the classroom. With respect to classes they were currently struggling with, the students said that doing the 'retakes' was not helpful because they simply continued to fail. They had not learned the material to begin with.

Rather than help, the retake policy seemed to reinforce some students' sense that they were not capable of doing the work, but that the work indeed was 'too hard' and they themselves were failures. As a result, some student said they stopped taking 'retakes.' Further, once they were deemed to fail a class, students' workload increased greatly. That is because to keep up they had to go to 'adult school' to take over failed classes. The students' reaction of not wanting to do 'retakes' can be seen as an understandable reaction, at least developmentally, to a system

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[28] In Kate's classroom.
[29] These focus groups occurred with students who's trust I had gained over some time. They were asked outside the presence of the principal or the main teacher of the subject matters the students were 'failing'.

that is unsupportive (See Tatum, 1997) and arguably supported inequality. The retake policy and its implementation of testing seemed to decrease students' sense of efficacy and may contribute to their dis-identification with learning or achieving academic success. Researchers have found that other school policies and processes such as tracking support students' dis-identification with learning (Oakes, 2005; Diamond, 2004). Further, socio-cultural theory acknowledges that tools and artifacts become so intertwined with culture, learning and meanings that they are not really separable (Nasir & Hand, 2006). Because powerful tools can concretize meanings and the assumptions behind them, the use of the tests as part of the policy seemed to help concretize meanings around students as 'failures.'

Language is an important socio-cultural tool (Nasir & Hand, 2006). It can consist of taken for granted statements that Hall (2006) has identified as a resulting "historically elaborated discourses" that have accreted over years and years withstanding the test of time and become "common sense" knowledge that people do not question but rather generally agree to (S. Hall, 1982). The language of 'lazy' formed a part of deficit discourse often surrounding students of color (Hull & Rose, 1991). As such the term 'lazy,' can carry more than just communication, it carried with it more weight as James Paul Gee (2004) has suggested. The use of the term 'lazy' as part of deficit discourse seemed to indicate a way of (students) being that teachers can point to, but believe they could not affect because they had no control over such ways of being. Further, the use of term 'lazy' as part of a discourse with meanings about lack of student capability seemed to have the effect of inhibiting student learning. The cultural processes related to the school retake policy at CalabarHS may well be seen part of processes existing at the school that unwittingly helped to structure and maintain student failure and in so doing helped to maintain inequality. Students of color go to school in an environment where many dominant

119

idea and assumptions are made, often to their detriment. Lipman (1997) found dominant ideas

and assumptions operating in school contexts with low-income communities of color as follow:

> "Proceeding from dominant, largely unquestioned, assumptions of social
> and cultural deficiency, teachers directed their attention to those aspects of
> students' lives over which they had the least control rather than to educational experiences
> which were within their power to change" (Lipman, 1997, p. 18).

Unfortunately when educators focus attention away from spaces where they have control, student

learning can suffer and in the process larger problematic cultural and societal meanings can be

kept in place, again to the detriment of their students of color.

As discussed before, sociocultural theorists asks us to look at what is taking place in local

contexts as people interact with each other to help explain cognitive development and learning

(Nasir & Hand, 2006; Toma & Rogoff, 1997). Considering this, the retake policy seemed to

require additional investigating. Follow-up focus group discussions revealed rather than the

assumption that the students were lazy, it seemed that there were some questions about the

adequate preparation of students (both prior to and during current classes). The retake policy

also seemed to be based on assumptions that students were previously prepared within a level

playing field. Such assumption can have dire consequences for both teaching and learning of

students of color. It became apparent that at least in some cases, students had not had access to

the preparatory materials to enable them to access materials currently being taught. From a

critical theoretical perspective, accounting for how race and class have played roles in under-

preparing low-income students becomes relevant. This is because research has shown that

students of color tend to attend under-resourced schools. Further, research has also suggested

that such under-resourcing has impacted the learning of low income and students of color

(Rogers et al, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2007). At CalabarHS it seemed that not accounting for

these preparedness differences made it difficult for the students to learn. Despite the school's

mission of providing an education for student often not well served by public schools, the school struggled to implement helpful policies. The retake policy seemed connected to faulty assumptions and deficit meanings about students being lazy. From a sociocultural perspective, it seemed rather than help the students, the retake policy and surrounding processes, increased the difficulties for many students. From a critical theoretical perspective, this policy embedded deficit dominant ideas against the interests of the students but obtained the consent of some of the studentsin many respects. Yet, some students did contest the policy by either not participating or limiting their participation. Unfortunately their contestation did not necessarily help the students and the educators did not recognize the contestation as information of the faultiness of the policy. The retake policy seemed to set students up to fail rather than support or help them to learn. Sociocultural and critical theoretical frameworks can help us understand and raise questions about assumptions connected to such a policy. Further, these theories can help with understanding how the retake policy can have the opposite of its intended effect, re-inscribing rather than decreasing 'failure'.

This finding, that the retake policy appeared to be having the opposite of it intended effect, is an indicator of the challenge in understanding how to recognize and do what is necessary to support low income and students of color who have not been served well by the educational system. The challenge may be to tease apart the many meanings and assumptions made with respect to educational policies. Further, as the student population is primarily low-income African American and Latino students, the challenge is also to consider the play of inequality in terms of the students' access to learning. For example, Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) have argued that race continues to be a significant explanation for the inequity in the U.S.

As a result, it seems that in addition to considering different the different meanings people bring, along with other potential forms of inequality, race must also be considered.

Evolving Asset Based Meanings.

It is important to identify resources and assets within the school environment both in terms of educators as well as students. These can provide essential launching points for improving students' learning.

Teachers Expressing A Commitment to Educate Students. In analyzing the data I found language at both schools that indicated educators cared about their students and were committed to their students' education. These educators expressed their commitment in a number of ways. For example, teachers talked about validating their students and connecting with them. In her seminal book, *Successful Teachers of African American Children,* Ladson-Billings (1994) suggested that effective teachers demonstrate "a connectedness with all students" and that "teacher-student relationship is fluid, [and] humanely equitable" (Ladson-Billing, 1994). Similarly some of the educators saw the value in first making a connection with the students as an important part of engaging the students in their education. This is important for building good relationship and setting the basis for encouraging academic success. In addition, some of the educators also talked about showing their students that they cared about them. For example one educator echoed Ladson-Billings (1994) findings when she said,

> "[A] lot of the kids just need to know that someone is listening and someone is, I guess, acknowledging them as a human being, that they exist and they are in this crazy world. So yeah, do the coddling, what's going on that you know, ok, stop there. I love you so I'm going to do this. What's next? How do we get you from point A to point B? And we already established the fact that I care because I listened to you and I validated your feelings so then from there, where do we go now? What do we do? That's how I see it, the coddling and that's how I partner and also part professional." [Female Educator of Color at CalabarHS]

Further, part of this caring required an understanding of the context of their students' daily lives. For example one educator said,

> Their environment. It's a daily struggle. So when they come into my class, I have to be aware of that and not, and come from a place of love, a place of hope. Like this education could really change your life. It really could get you out of this harsh reality that you're facing right now and get you to a place of peace if that's what you choose.(Female Educator of Color @ CompHS)

This statement is complex because it seems to hold both deficit-oriented and resource oriented ideas. On one hand, there is an implication of judgment about the students' home as a place they can "choose" to leave in order to find "peace". On the other hand, there is a sense that this teacher is attempting to provide within her classroom a space of "hope" and "love" to support her students. Although this statement is perhaps messy in its delivery, there is a definitive focus on caring and loving which indicates a keen commitment on the part of the teacher to her students. Notwithstanding potential deficit overtones (implicitly describing the students community as "harsh reality") this educator's apparent commitment is a potential basis for building on and assisting her student learning.

Ladson-Billings (1994) also identified as an element of successful teacher of children of color, the notion that teaching was a way of giving back to the community. Several educators said they were motivated to teach as a way of giving back to the community. For example one teacher wanted to provide students with support she did not receive as a student. She said

> "So [in school] I was neglected. I was looked as at you're not very smart. And my teacher was just mean to me, and I was the only black girl in the school. So I was like, I'm going to be a teacher and I wanted to teach in the same school district I grew up in because I wanted to be there for those kids like me who didn't have any teachers to go to if they felt like someone was treating them unfairly or things like that. So when I first started teaching, that's where I lived. I went back to my old school district and I taught." (Female Educator of Color @ CalabarHS)

In the three previous quotes, (including the one with some deficit oriented ideas), teachers were

beginning to make statements that could be identified as spaces to be capitalized on for developing teachers' skills and students' learning. For example, in one instant the educator talked about showing students she cared first then demanding work from. In the quote immediately above, the educator spoke of her a deep commitment to providing support she did not receive as a student. These are very important and potential sources of hope for reform and re-articulations.

   Resource Oriented Views of Students' and their Skills. Educators also had some resource-oriented ideas about their students' knowledge and capacity for learning. They were able to recognize some resources the students brought when they came to school. For example they saw their students' knowledge of new technology, such as technology related social media, video gaming and other computer related skills as potential. After one educator talked about the students social learning through "technology, through social media, through all of those things" (Female of Color @ CompHS). In describing a disconnect between students and education, another found that the social learning through such technology was an asset as follows:

> "They are growing wiser. Kids, they have that wisdom they get through their social learning, (unintelligible) and learn a lot. They're getting that daily social learning." (Male Educator of Color @ CompHS)[30]

Another educator also gave an example of her students showing their ability to gain taught academic skills as follows:

> "For example, in my class, I don't know how it happened but I snuck an essay on them and they knocked it out. And I timed them on it, and they just did it in like 40 minutes and it's five paragraphs and it's good. Like all of them, all of my students." (Female Educator of Color @ CompHS)

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[30] From the Inquiry.

Even as they acknowledge differences in academic skills that many students come with, the

educators also acknowledge that teaching can provide these skills and that students will learn

when taught. Another educator at CalabarHS, echoing this notion said,

> Because the students can learn the vocabulary that we expect them to learn. They just
> have to be taught it and it just has to be recognized that most of our students are going to
> be, are going to have vocabulary lower than what we would want them to. So we just
> have to go about the whole process in that way. When I was in high school, I never
> understood Shakespeare. And I went to college and I had a professor who stopped every
> four or five sentences and went through it and we discussed what all these different
> words meant, and all of a sudden I understood Shakespeare. And you have to do that in
> some of these classes. (Female - White Educator @ CalabarHS)

In addition to acknowledging capacity to learn, some educators also acknowledge that students'

life experiences are important. For example one said, "[t]hey bring life experiences and at times

a willingness to learn new things" (Female Educator of Color @ CalabarHS). Further, another

educator similarly said,

> "They [bring their] experience and background knowledge. The situations my students
> have experienced allow them to be insightful, empathetic individuals. It is my job to tap
> into their experience and guide them into making sense of the world." (Female Educator
> of Color @ CalabarHS)

What is interesting is when asked and sometimes on their own, educators were able to identify

assets or resources in their students of color. This identification of the assets has potential for

building academic learning. Scholars have indicated that identification of assets in students

(rather than a focus on deficits) shows promise for educator learning and student learning

(Smith-Maddox & Solorzano, 2002; Ladson-Billing & Gomez, 2001). These asset based

meanings, together with the expressed or implied commitment on the part of educators, may

provide possibilities for improving the education for students' of color. The point of this

discussion about evolving asset-based meanings is that even though in both spaces I identified

language with deficit-oriented meanings there was some good news as well. There was language

125

among these same educators that could be capitalized on for purposes of improving teacher and most importantly for improving students' learning. The meanings educators had about commitment to teaching and students' curiousity to learn provided possibility for shared meanings making between educators and students around teaching and learning. This intersection seemed to have potential for promoting learning identified by some theorists (Toma & Rogoff, 1997).

  Discussion.

  Deficit Meanings; Making Macro, Micro and Meso Connections. The finding of deficit meanings at the schools where students are low-income African American or Latino/a is perhaps not unusual.   Other researchers have found deficit meanings in schools with respect to such students (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Gomez, 2001; Sleeter, 2001; Hull & Rose, 1991). Often when deficit meanings are discussed the focus is with respect to white educators having deficit ideas (see Sleeter, 2001, for example). In this study however both white and educators of color exhibited deficit meanings and assumptions. The operation of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971; Apple, 2009) can help explain how this is possible. As Omi & Winant (1994) explained, "ruling groups elaborate and maintain a popular system of ideas and practices" helping them to become taken for granted "common sense" (p. 67; see also Hall, 1981). When white educators exhibit deficit ideas, they, as members of the dominant group help to diffuse and popularize the world-views of their dominant class. On the other hand, subordinated groups are affected by hegemony when deficit ideas, meanings or practices are adopted by such groups even when against the subordinated groups' interest, as such groups give 'consent' to the way the dominant class rules (Gramsci, 1971; Bates, 1975; Apple, 2009). When the educators of color at

CompHS and CalabarHS adopt and exhibit deficit ideas to the detriment of their own and other subordinated groups, they were unwittingly giving this 'consent.'

It is important to understand that hegemony operates in, and benefits from, America's historical context. As discussed earlier in the Literature Review many whites gained enormous wealth (that translated to political power and prestige), from the free labor of African Americans, obtained through legally enforced enslavement (Feagin, 2006; Trent, 1998). The positions whites' gained gave them the access and means to distribute their world-views that became in many cases accepted truth, and in also turn often obtained Gramsci's "consent" (Gramsci, 1971; Bates, 1975; Omi & Winant, 1994, pps. 65-69, Feagin, 2006) from many African Americans. Even with improvements in language and conditions of people of color in America, history a certain weight of permanence that makes it difficult to change things completely. One form of inequality has replaced another form. Consider for example that America's history of slavery was replaced by de-facto and legal segregation. Also consider that segregation was in turn replaced by urbanization and ghettoization. The point is that is that given America's history and the tenacity of systemic inequality, it is not surprising that educators at CompHS and CalabarHS, like other people in America, have deficit ideas about people of color. These educators too are affected by the weight of history. Nevertheless, the fact that changes have been made is also proof of the possibilities for continuing to contest deficit ideas and meanings.

In the continuing effort to understand the play of inequality, scholars have cited the importance of making connections between the individual actions of people and broader society. For example, Nasir & Hand (2006) acknowledged the need to not lose "sight of the macro-dynamics behind the micro-processes and power and social structure in… interactions" at the local level (Nasir, 2006). It is also important to understand the interactions of the meso-level of

school organizations both with individual actions and interactions (micro-processes) and with larger society (macro-dynamics). Vaughan (2001) provided a theory of process for understanding this macro-meso-micro connection, in a non-school context.

Similar to Vaughan (2001) the larger environment outside both CalabarHS and CompHS affected the actions and interactions of educators with respect to their students. The findings that educators at both schools had deficit meanings about their students of color (similar to those in broader society) indicated some connections between such individuals' deficit meanings and their actions and interactions on one hand, and the deficit meanings held in larger society about African Americans and other people of color. Hall (1981) explained this phenomenon noting that people " 'speak through' the ideologies which are active in our society and which provide us with the means of 'making sense' of social relations and our place in them" (p. 32). It is perhaps because these ideologies become invisible, "taken for granted 'naturalized'… common sense" that the educators at CompHS and CalabarHS seemed, unaware of the deficit nature of some of their comments and assumptions. The notion that our individual actions are impacted by the active ideologies in society, and seem naturalized, helps us to make some connections between individual actions and larger societal forces.

At both CompHS and CalabarHS, larger societal concerns of race and class seemed to seep into the school supporting deficit-oriented policies such as the discipline policy at CompHS and the retake policy at CalabarHS. These policies were both affected by the larger context outside schools with dominant and deficit assumptions and meanings about the character of low-income students' of color. Building on teacher expectation research, the scholars in Diamond (2004) paid attention "to the role of the school context in conditioning teachers' beliefs and actions" (p. 93).

Similar to Diamond (2004), this study showed that an organizational culture is affected by larger societal concerns of race and class. The school policies were enacted and implemented by the individual actions of school officials and school personnel some of whom who seemed to have some deficit ideas and meanings about their students of color. The school policies themselves helped to maintain the deficit ideas of students of color that exist in larger society. The school policies were supported by the individual actions of educators (such as the proctor and principal who participated in disciplining the student who did not want to take a standardized test he was not prepared for) and in turn also helped to condition the educators' response to the students (such as when the teacher principal questions who did not want to take the retake tests.

Asset based Ideas; Raising Consciousness.   The findings of asset based or resource-oriented meanings at both CalabarHS and CompHS such as teacher commitment to their students indicated potential for changing the organizational cultures toward students' learning. The researchers in Diamond (2004) found that in one of the schools they studied the leaders were able to work with educators to increase their sense of responsibility for student learning notwithstanding some deficit beliefs about the students. Diamond (2004) indicated that changes in organizational culture can form a barrier between negative societal influences and can help redirect individual teacher's actions toward positively supporting student learning. The educators at both CompHS and CalabarHS were also able to identify assets in their students of color. Identifying student assets is promising because some researchers have found that a focus on student assets can support student learning. For example, Ladson-billings & Gomez (2001) found that focusing on students' strengths while encouraging educators to take responsibility for students' learning was important in moving educators toward teaching their students well. In

129

addition, Smith-Maddox & Solarzano (2002) found among others things that a focus on finding assets within communities of color seemed promising.

Identifying assets within both educators and students is only the beginning. Given the findings that deficit meanings were held by educators of color (members of subordinated groups) and white educators (members of the dominant group) it is important to address the hegemonic forces in both of these groups. With the idea of addressing these forces in mind, theorist Paulo Freire (2005) has called for marginalized groups *and* their supporters to "acquire a critical awareness of oppression through … praxis" (p. 51). Freire required both reflections and praxis to awaken consciousness. While identifying assets was a good beginning, the hope was that the Inquiries would begin the necessary process of raising awareness of the conditions of students of color and the need to challenge school related inequalities.

In this chapter 4, I focused on meanings that were related to descriptions of students and families. Attempting to identify some meanings was an important part of this study particularly for helping to understand the practices and processes within each school. The meanings identified were by no means all the meanings that existed in each school site. Standpoint theorists suggest, that problematic or deficit meanings may well be the result of partial understandings of the play of inequality (See Harding, 1997). Locating meanings at the sites was only the beginning of the story. An inquiry process of engaging with educators to illuminate understandings about inequality and to attempt to rearticulate problematic meanings seemed necessary. The idea was to provide an opportunity for learning both for the educators and for myself as a researcher. In the Inquiry, discussed in the next two chapters, there were moments of agreement and shared meaning making. There were moments of learning and growth. There were moments when I hoped for growth and learning but was uncertain whether they were taking

place and how to stimulate or support growth and learning. There were also moments of tension and struggle as individuals with differing backgrounds, experiences and as a result different meanings, attempted to negotiate shared meanings about their students and their families, about the relevance of various aspects of inequality and ultimately about teaching and learning. The goal of the Inquiry was to provide as space for learning about inequality and to the extent that deficit meanings come up, to attempt to rearticulate them, to talk about how inequality might be located in their school, for the educators to consider how they might be located within inequality and whether they could do anything either individually or a group or both about inequality. I also hoped that I would learn about the processes involved in learning and transformation and how I, or another researcher, might support such learning.

Findings Chapter 5:
LEARNING AND RE-ARTICULATION AT CALABAR
Using Kate As Example

Introduction.

In general I organized this chapter by first discussing my attempts at supporting each

session. I then discuss briefly educators attempt at learning and include a series of selected

quotes from the sessions showing these attempts at learning. Finally, I attempt to identify and

analyze the related learning processes that seemed to evolve from the portions of such sessions.

Working Towards Shared Meanings of Role of "Teacher."

Providing Support; Some Initial Reflections. Prior to beginning the first session we met

as a group to organize the timing of the meetings and address other concerns. In addition, I

checked in with each member of the group to see if there were individual concerns and to

continue to build relationships with each of them. With each member I attempted to discuss the

importance of trying to understand the larger context of education within which CalabarHS

resided. For example, Kate and I had discussions about inequality and how we might each play a

role. As part of that discussion, we spoke about "White Privilege." Each educator was asked to

write reflections on the readings prior to coming to class. In her writing Kate reflected on some

of the issues raised in these discussions. She (Kate) wrote in part,

> Kate: Personally, I must consider how "White Privilege," for instance, may affect
> my perspective with each topic and discussion. Issues of class will be
> enmeshed in every discussion we have, and even though I have in my history
> the experience of being a child on welfare at one time, this does not enable
> me to fully understand the experience of poor children of other ethnicities.
> One might say I have not "walked in their shoes," but I think, perhaps more
> accurate, "I have not lived in their skin."

Kate's use of the term "White Privilege" which we had discussed showed a willingness to 'try on' and self reflect about how this notion might apply to her, even though she could have interpreted this notion as a negative criticism. Further, in her statement Kate exhibited receptiveness to increasing her learning about low-income students of color. From those perspectives, Kate's reflection appeared to be a promising beginning for learning about students of color and the issues that might concern them.

In general, during the Inquiry, Kate and the other educators seemed to come to each session having read the assigned readings, ready to discuss the articles and interested in understanding the key points in the readings. In addition, in many cases Kate, (as the others) tried to relate the readings to what was happening at her school.

Educators' Discussion: Struggling Toward Shared Meanings - Part 1. During the first CalabarHS Inquiry session, the educators discussed the role of teachers and what it meant to educate students with care. As they discussed the readings they began negotiating meanings around what "teacher" meant for them and their school, versus for example being a "parent." Bella, discussing the first reading,[31] introduced and expanded on the idea that one can be a parent sometimes but that *"you've got to look at yourself as educational political leader"* teaching with a purpose *"that fulfills society."* Her initial comments elicited comments from the principal Jane who focused primarily on the idea of the parent/teacher distinction. Bella tried again and reaised the issue of teacher as "political leader" and her comment elicited both a pause in the conversation (or silence) and with a little prompting on my part comments from several educators including Kate as follows,

Kate: …But I found myself also a little bit angry with him and I guess defensive, really, because we do – there are similarities between our roles as parents and as teachers. And I struggled with this term "coddle" because we do coddle, and if it's done with

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[31] The first reading consisted of excerpts from Paulo Freire's *Teachers as Cultural Workers*.

the right intention, it can serve a good purpose. I don't think that should be our sole purpose. That's not our primary role. And we don't want to enable. If we are looking at people as whole individuals and we're also concerned about character building and these things, we're going to be doing a little of that. Also, his comment about love and that teachers have to love teaching and they have to love their students and that parents don't have to love their kids – I mean, that to me was really kind of ridiculous. [Pg. 11, Transcript First Session]

Diane: But… It's not a prerequisite.

Melanie: But I think the family role is such an individual – I think families have shifted over time. You know what I'm saying? It's not this community where people are really supporting each other and taking care of each other. So the family becomes an individual entity, right, versus the role of teachers, you know you are serving a larger community and there's more accountability. You know what I'm saying? So I just think because of that, there is more accountability [of] teachers…[page 11-12, Transcript First Session].

Kate: I agree. But where it also led me is to start thinking about unions, teachers' union, because I have in my private practice a teacher who is in LAUSD and she clearly does not love teaching. She did not get into teaching because she loved teaching. It was a stable job with good benefits. And she's protected in that job. I also had the unfortunate experience, or my daughter did, of having her third grade teacher who was inadequate and yet she was protected. [page 12, Transcript First Session].

After the above, Kate continued to struggle with defining "teacher" for herself. In response, her colleagues shared their thoughts adding to what they thought the role of a teacher entailed. For example, Jane talked about the need to build relationships, Donna talked about setting a high bar, and Diane talked about the need to empower students and 'running a tight ship.' Except for Diane's (the African American teacher's) allusion to empowering students, the conversations focused primarily on Kate concerns about coddling and the parent/teacher distinction.[32] In so doing, the conversations shifted away from Bella's and Melanie's comments seeking to expand the definition of teacher.

   Learning Processes (Shifting Topics; Limiting Conversation). In the above set of quotes, Kate engaged in the shifting topics on two occasions. The first shifting occurred after

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[32] Interestingly, even as the language Kate's uses shows concern for wanting to be an effective teacher, balancing teaching and coddling, she also seemed to have some built in, potentially deficit assumptions as she talked about "character building." The notion that students of color lack character is an often-used deficit oriented description.

Bella's attempt at expanding the role of teachers to "political leader." Kate had responded next but she did not pick up this topic but rather focused instead on her own struggle with the notion of "coddling" and her thought that some coddling is necessary. When Melanie responded and again attempted to refocus the conversation to a larger role for teachers Kate again does not take up this point but rather made an even more noticeable shift in the conversation to a seemingly very different topic – teachers' unions. Interestingly, this shift in the conversation caused a lull or break in the conversation of the group. Although Kate had responded, "I agree." It is unclear what she agreed to, because she switched the topic.

As the Inquiry began, from a sociocultural perspective it appeared that the group members were bringing different meanings to the discussions. For example, Bella and Kate showed they had different meanings about with it meant to be a teacher. Moreover, from a critical theoretical standpoint, the different power locations within the group became immediately apparent. When Kate initially shifted the topic away from discussing teachers as "political leader" her move could be seen as a power move. She seemed to confirm this by her second move to a safer topic when Melanie tried to pick up on Bella's comment. Kate seemed, whether intentional or not, to be avoiding a potentially challenging topic of addressing inequality. The two educators who tried to expand the position of teacher in this instance are of color and Kate is white. The two educators of color, based on previous conversations, seemed aware of some of the race and class related concerns at the school and hoped to bring these into Inquiry discussions.[33] But they are also educators of color working within a white run organization that appeared to have some dominant culture notions about the education of students of color (as Kate's possibly deficit oriented reference to character building may indicate). Both power moves of shifting topics had the impact of limiting the conversation and

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[33] These issues came up in private discussions with these educators.

135

also the potential for learning within the group. It might be significant to note that Kate's response was preceded by Jane, the principal and a person in a key power position in at least two respects. Jane was both a member of the dominant class and also organizationally she was the head of the school. It might be that Jane had already set the context for not picking up on Bella's and Melanie's ideas.The result of that that there is some tentativeness about picking up each other's ideas as the exchanged their ideas about what they thought the role of a teacher entailed. These conversations indicated a lack of coming to shared meanings. Engaging with each other's ideas is important because scholars have found that "social interaction aids cognitive development when partners actually engage in shared thinking processes, not simply when individuals are in the presence of other people" (Rogoff & Toma, 1997, p. 471). The shifts by Kate made may indicate a difficulty in attempting a process of re-articulation and coming to shared ideas, especially when there are differences in power locations whether because of race, class and organizational structure or otherwise. Her move indicated that ideas will not always be taken up and addressed. This shift also indicated the potential need for providing facilitation support to redirect the conversation (Rogoff & Toma, 1997). Importantly however, the shifting also indicated a need for providing support within the group to allow the voices of all the educators (including those of color) to be heard. This is especially important for those who try to raise important even difficult issues relating to race and class and other concerns of inequality.

Educators' Discussions Shared Meanings - Part 2.   After I redirected the conversation and others commented, Kate continued to consider how she might be thinking about her role as a teacher and her focus on "coddling" (and perhaps as a parent as well). The educators discussed the need to balance empathy and demanding work of their students.

Kate: I'm in agreement, and like you said, I agree with him, and even as a parent I don't see coddling as being – it shouldn't be happening very much. I mean you're not, it's not teaching. And both our roles are as facilitators, as coaches, as both as a teacher and a parent. This is what I need to be doing. If I am being too overprotective, that's not doing a very good job because as a teacher or as a parent I'm not allowing them to make the mistakes that we're going to teach them about the world. [page 15 , Transcript First Session]

Kate's continued to show her conflict over parenting and teaching as she responded to a

comment about parenting and said,

Kate: There's the parenting coming in. Because this is a student who lost her mother during her high school years and so we needed to fulfill part of that role. [page 18 Transcript First Session]

As Kate's struggle continued Melanie responded,

Melanie: I battle with this all the time, right? I think there definitely needs to be an understanding and I think a lot of us come from different experiences as well, and so the battle is always like, you know, yes are they making excuses, is this what they're used to doing, and can we also place ourselves, or can we place ourselves in their situation at that particular moment and knowing that sometimes, right, even all those things that they're dealing with can seem like it's the end of the world, right, so to even think about you know turning in a homework assignment or looking at an agenda, right, to be able to do all the work, like what does that look like in comparison to the reality that they're having to live in, right? … [page 16 , Transcript First Session]

Bella also commented in part,

Bella: …And I think that for me or what works, what I see working is a balance of both. Doing the coddling to a certain point, stopping there and asking what are the next steps. And you're right, a lot of times [they can do] better. . . [page 17 , Transcript First Session]

As the conversation continued, it continued to focus primarily on Kate's concern, even as

Melanie attempted to keep some focus on issues related to student diversity. Melanie attempted

to keep this focus when she referred to understanding the different experiences students bring

and what this might entail for education. Melanie attempted to engage in bridging Kate's

comments and her own understanding of how the broader context of students' lives may have

relevance to what goes on with students. Bella also attempted to show how she weighed both concerns.

Learning Processes (Contrived Conversation; Beginning to Show Evidence of Shared Thinking?). As the conversation continued, the primarily focus around Kate's concern about coddling and does not return to Bella's or Melanie's comments about teachers as political leaders the could have deepened the discussions. The moves made earlier by Kate, whether intentional or not, wrestled away from Melanie and Bella, the ability to have addressed, their concerns about what teaching students of color should involve. Even as Melanie and Bella continued their efforts, by acknowledging the different experiences of students and balancing of the two mentioned concerns, respectively, their concerns were not picked by the other educators. Kate's ruminating led to a limiting of the conversation and limiting of the learning that could have taken place at this moment. The movement of the discussion away from a more political notion of teacher meant that discussions around the inequalities students of color face could not be addressed.

The conversations referred to above are prime examples of the need for including critical theoretical analyses alongside socio-cultural analyses of learning. Without a critical theoretical analysis as to whether there are, and if so and what power moves are indicated, the real impact of the shifting topic move might well be missed. Without such analyses, it might seem that the educators are really supporting each other's learning and building on each other's comments and developing shared ideas openly and without restrictions. Notwithstanding unaddressed concerns, there is some evidence of building of shared ideas were occurring. Although Kate (and Jane) had avoided the topic they raised, both Melanie and Bella made efforts to directly address Kate's point. For example, Melanie started out commiserating with Kate's struggle and Bella directly

138

addressed how she dealt with the conflict that Kate seemed to have over whether and when to "coddle." In this way they gave initial indications of beginning to develop a community of learners in which some learning was taking place as part of a participation in a social process (Rogoff, Matusov & White, 1996). Further, Kate's ruminating resulted in her resolving some of her initial conflict with the author. This also indicated some learning on her part.

However, the learning that occurred was partial at best, as much has been left not discussed. Critical theorists would ask that the impact of race within the group along with other social locations, such as class and organizational structure be considered (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Harding, 1997). Critical analyses help us to explain how the concerns of one individual who happened to be White, can get elevated and overshadow not one, but two other individuals in the group (who happen to be of color) and essentially silences them. Interestingly, in later private discussions it became clear that the two educators of color were keenly aware and believed that, as people of color, their subordinated positions were tenous. Their subordinated positions impacted both their willingness to speak and what they were willing to say in the group. Lipman (1997, quoting Hargreaves, 1991), distinguished between collaborations that are spontaneous and voluntary versus *contrived collaborations* that are mandatory and regulated. Alluding to that term, I use my own term and refer to *contrived conversations*. Even though the educators of color joined the group voluntarily, their subordinated positions as people of color (deemed so within larger society) from the very beginning of the Inquiry began to regulate and make their conversations contrived and not spontaneous. This was an important connection between the play of larger societal inequality and the constraints that can result with respect to individual actions and interactions. What the educators of color had hoped would be a safe space

for addressing difficult issues of race and class became constrained as their efforts to raise issues were deflected.

Identifying Potential Educational Barriers @ CalabarHS.

Providing Support. After this first session I made an attempt to check in with each member of the group. In particular I also wanted to continue building relationships with each member. I also wanted to find out how the process went for the individuals and whether they had concerns, as a way to help to support their learning. This time, as throughout the Inquiry, I had varying degrees of success with getting time with different members of the group. Jane and Donna, the principal and assistant principal, were usually the most difficult to pin down, perhaps because of their leadership positions. The others were usually easier. The teachers could generally be found in their classrooms and prior to leaving the school Melanie generally made herself available. The idea was to provide individual support during these meetings while allowing the sessions to be mostly educator driven. In this way I also hoped the educators would develop new roles for themselves within the group and perhaps even within the school.

From these meetings I gained a lot of information. I found for example that Melanie was having some power struggles with the administration and also with how to bring up issues within the group. While that specific conversation that occurred in the group did not come up, it seemed that the power struggle Melanie was having with the administration had manifested in the group. Further, both Melanie and Bella indicated they struggled with finding the words to speak up in the group context. I discussed ways of talking about the concerns with Melanie and to some extent with Bella. Some additional information I gained was in terms of the apparent limitations on conversations I could have with the individual group members. For example, I realized I had some difficulty raising issues of inequality with Jane and Donna (the white

140

administrators). I also realized I could easily discuss addressing issues of race with Diane

(educator of color) if the issues were about African American but I could not as easily talk about

issues related to people of other races. These realizatisn spurred me to continue my efforts at

building relationships with the individuals. I also realized that Kate was open to a wide range of

discussions. I began to think about how to capitalize on this given her position as a white

educator who was respected by both the administration and the teachers. Race (and perhaps

class seemed to be impacting the conversations and interactions it the Inquiry group.

In an attempt to build on the discussions we had about the role of teachers, in some of

these discussions I tried to speak about issues of race, privilege and class. In addition, I also

began to seek thoughts from each educator about the barriers (to education) that existed within

the school. I wanted to help create/support spaces for such discussions within the group. I had

several such individual discussions with the educators including Kate. Further I had one such

discussion with Kate immediately prior to this session with a view to preparing her to be in a

position to discuss such issues within the group.

Educators' Discussion Identifying Barriers - Part 1. In response to a prompt I gave

them, the educators began to discuss whether students with non-English language background

should be educated differently from English speaking children. They addressed a number of

concerns including considering students' culture in their education. The educators showed they

understood some of the concerns such a student might have. An excerpt from the discussion

follows:

Diane: If they don't know a language, then it's learning the language. It's learning the
                content in the language that they are still learning. So that's the challenge I see. It could
                be an added opportunity because they have now another language to build off of, because
                they understand our language structure and are learning another one, so in some sense it's
                harder because there's an initial, wow.

141

Kate: I'm just imagining being young, like a first grader, and you speak only Spanish, the most common one, and yet the teacher is teaching all the different subjects to you, and how much information you're missing. You're really not learning much of anything because you can't understand. So when I was writing that for … student it's doubly challenged but it's even more than that. I think depending on what level they're at with language acquisition.

Bella: I'm trying to remember how it felt. Because I came to my first day of kindergarten without a single word of English, and I don't remember. I just remember having to come in earlier and get some ESL lessons and then joining the rest of the group around 9 o'clock and then dealing with that. I don't remember. I think I really stuck with math. I understood math. 2 + 2 in Spanish is the same thing in English and I think right now that's why I love it so much. I'm really good at it. And science. But I don't remember much. I wonder why?

Jane: Were there other kids who spoke a lot of Spanish too and maybe that was helpful?

Bella: There were probably I would say in every class about 10-15 out of 30.

Jane: That spoke Spanish? [page 5, Transcript Second Session]

Learning Processes (Some Contrived Conversations Continued; Shared Learning;

Sharing Experiences). In this part of the conversation the group appeared to be engaging in

some shared thinking. The educators began to show a willingness of some members of the group

to pick up each other's ideas and to support each other's learning. The conversation seemed to

be a safer space as Kate, was building on her colleagues comments, where before she had

engaged in shifting of topics. Based on the group's sharing of ideas and picking up on each

other's statements, it appeared that a potential for a shared context was evolving in the Inquiry

space. This is important because socio-cultural learning theorists suggest that learning when

people mutually engage shared context (Rogoff, Matusov & White, 1996; Rogoff & Toma,

1997). However, there is also some evidence that some elements of a contrived conversation

continued (versus real or spontaneous conversations). This is because inspite of my having

several conversations with Melanie prior to the meeting, she remained largely silent. Kate

however seemed to be making some changes as she attempted to imagine a non-English speaking student in an English speaking school. Kate's idea of imagining how a student might feel is an important way of looking at educational issues. Her statement created an opening for Bella to relate her own experience, when she was young and could not speak English. It is nevertheless uncertain whether Bella raised all the concerns she had as she said she did not remember much. Relating her experiences however can help educators who are unfamiliar with the lives of students from such contexts to begin to imagine the experiences themselves and attempt to see things from the standpoint of the students. Melanie's silence has meaning in this space. Her silence appears to indicate a shutting down of her voice, a subtle oppression as she felt compelled to not speak about issues that were important to her.

Educators' Discussion Identifying Barriers - Part 2. Up to this point the topics of discussion were not very controversial. This is might be due to some of the topic shifting and silencing that seemed to have occurred earlier in the discussions. With the hope of illuminating and starting to address inequality and perhaps moving beyond such silences, I asked the group to talk about some of the other barriers existing at CalabarHS that might be limiting to students' education.   No one responded initially. This is another space of silence. As I had spoken recently with Kate I gently asked if she wanted jump in.

Kate: I'm struggling because there are barriers but I can't articulate what they are right now. [page 11, Transcript Second Session]

Kate then continued,

Kate: I feel like technology is one. On both ends, because it's a tremendous help and tool and at the same time it's a huge distracter for our students. It's so interesting because, and I feel like we haven't caught up because technology is moving so fast that we don't know how

143

to utilize it in the best way. And they're ready to receive it but we don't know how to give it to them. So that's a challenge that I know.[34] [page 11, Transcript Second Session]

Jane: I feel like we need a lump of PD, just like try to figure out how to catch up with the technology so that it works right in terms of servicing.

Kate: And yet what's scary to me is that I guess in some ways again it's almost like the language thing. Like we're missing out on information, they're missing out on information because we're not speaking the same language.

Learning Processes (Silences; Steering Away from Controversy; Struggle). Some of

the members of the group had shown some promise earlier in terms of picking up on each other's

ideas and either agreeing or expanding on these ideas. This occurred however when either the

topics or the way they have been discussed, were not controversial. Here, in the face of

difficulty, Kate steered away from bringing up any of the potentially controversial issues we had

discussed immediately prior to this session, about race and class and adequately meeting

students' academic needs. Instead she took a pass and spoke legitimately, about a safer topic, the

impact of technology. This is not to say that technology is not an important issue. This is an

important area that can result in disconnects between educators and students. When I asked

about barriers however I was specifically going to a topic I had discussed with individual

members and incidentally had just had the conversation with Kate prior to the session. The idea

was that Kate would raise the issue.   When I raised the question the group was silent indicating

some struggling. And when I called on Kate, my calling on her may well have put her on the

spot. Interestingly Kate did indicate that she was struggling with trying to find a way to

articulate the concerns. She may well have been having difficulty finding the right words to

bring up some difficult issues within the Inquiry space. It is important to note that although Kate

did not speak about issues we had previously discussed, the Inquiry did provide a space for

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[34] We had talked about more salient issues of inequality but Kate seems to opt for safe.

trying. Given her statement about struggling, it was possible that she was making an effort that was not visible.

Race and class, power and privilege can be difficult and loaded terms to discuss. This perhaps explained the silence that occurred. Although Kate was the only one who admitted to struggling, it was likely that others, perhaps Melanie and Bella were also struggling to find a way to speak within the group. Further, considering ways to speak about race that does not offend and is productive and constructive can add to the difficulty of figuring how to speak about these issues. Researchers have acknowledged the importance of sensitivity to discussing these issues in their work (See Ladson-Billing & Gomez, 2001[35]). Further, critical theorists have noted that "schools are contested terrains" that are influenced by dominant ideas and meanings from larger society, and where such ideas are also contested (See Lipman, 1997).

From a critical theoretical the point of view the differences in the positions of the principal and assistant principal on one hand, and the other educators on the other, organizationally was one of power and subordination. Further the larger structures within society including social location differences of race and possibly class were also at play in this group. The two key administrators in the school (who were also members of this Inquiry group) were white. The other educators in the group, except for Kate who was white, were of color. The demographics with the group represented a microcosm of the larger school and in some respects also of the larger American society. Critical theorists have also indicated that, differences in race, class, gender, living location, among other things, can have a significant affect on interactions, meaning making and learning (G. Ladson-Billings, & Tate, W. F. , 1995;

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[35] In this article the authors did an intervention with white teachers who taught students of color. The authors were sensitive to the racial differences when working with the teachers toward finding academic solutions for their students.

145

P. Lipman, 1997). These differences within the Inquiry group at CalabarHS can, and seemed to be having, significant negative affects on the group's learning and interactions.

Educators Discussion Identifying Barriers - Part 3. Toward the end of the session as a more general way of addressing barriers, I reminded the group to think about a 'problem' or 'concern' to be addressed by the group.   Kate seemed to try again to address barriers and this time, she raised the essential question of why the school did not meet the needs of hers and some other students who were also not succeeding.

Kate: I don't know how to – I guess I'll just think out loud. So I'm always thinking, of course, of my own students and the [Focus-Teams] kids. And so it's like, if our system, whatever that is, isn't working for them, why isn't working for them? Are they not fitting into the system or are we not…? I don't know what's going on yet. And I feel like it's probably also very individual. I had I'm blanking on his name, with me today. And I don't mean a student. I mean our intern. So trying to think of how to create a system for tracking [Focus-Teams] kids … So it's intervention, take the kids who are failing, why are they failing, where do we need to intervene, are they special ed, do they have to get tested, figuring all that out. He's bringing, trying to say there should be a blueprint for this process. And I'm having a hard time because I look at each kid as an individual and like, well, it's not a one size fits all. So I'm struggling with that. [Page 20, Transcript Second Session]

Jane: We have a process. This is not really relevant to the group or your question, but … thinking about that a lot for the last couple days because we've been writing some WASC work and one of the things that came up is just reflecting on the growth we've made with our [Focus-Teams] classes and [ED Center] and everything. We called you the intervention specialist, just so you know, proudly. And the culture has changed a lot, having that system kind of operating. So I know, I don't know, I think it's the same vague question with the school. Like everything needs to be the end of the Julys, and I think that's where we struggle. I think we just try to move forward with x, y and z like in the classroom, differentiation versus do we just do this. Because you can only do one thing at a time, sometimes. So it's an important question. You can figure a question for education in general.

Bella: On my way to the bathroom, I ran into one of my female African-American students checking out tomorrow or the next day.

Me: Checking out? What does that mean?

Bella: She's going to [school in different neighborhood].

Diane: That means she has the same issue we want to tackle. Why are we losing our African-American students? When I first started working here, we had more and we kept more. Now we lose them quite often.

Jane: We have a different population now. I don't think we're losing   specifically African-American kids. We lost a white kid today. We lost a Latino kid last week. It's more like why can't we keep our kids period.

Jane continued,

Jane: Our demographics are a little different than when the school started. There was a point when we looked at that because it seemed like we were losing more African-American girls, and I think we've done a better job at creating a better community for them, where they feel – there's more, like people wanted to be part of big high school thing is I think why we lost a lot of those kids. Just from all those – because we had special groups meet and talk to the kids about why that was happening. And their input. It was really interesting.

Donna: We need more to apply. We're not getting…

Jane: I think the demographics have changed.

Diane: We can get kids from anywhere.

Donna: But they're not applying to our school.

Jane: I live in [this neighborhood] and I work [in this neighborhood] and I see the same trend in both my apartment complex as I have in the school, in demographics. Maybe it's not correct or whatever.

Kate' comments such as *"it's probably also very individual"* and *"take the kids who are failing"* and *"are they special ed"* may indicate deficit oriented ways of thinking about who has responsibility for students' learning because her comments seemed to focus the problem on the student. Nevertheless Kate is making an effort to talk about the problem and this effort is helping to create a space for learning. The principal's immediate and defensive response to

147

Kate's questions indicated some of the difficulty with attempting re-articulations. Further the

principal seemed to engage in some denial of the facts. Although principal mentioned a process

to address 'failure' these were not school wide aimed policies. Nonetheless she also expressed

frustration when she said *"you can do only one thing at a time, sometimes."* Addressing issues

in ways that keep openness to learning is important. And so even though it seemed that there

was some denial on the part of the principal, it also seemed important to proceed cautiously. As

Ladson-Billings & Gomez (2001) indicated in their study, sensitivity toward educators is

important. Interestingly, the principal acknowledge the existence of a school wide retention

issue when she said, *"it seems like the same vague question for the school."* Furthermore, even

Donna the white AP pointed out the need to have more African American students apply to the

school, indicating she was aware there were some concerns in this area. These discussion

indicated clashes between the different meanings and understandings the educators brought to

the Inquiry. The discussions also appeared to be affected by the group members' different social

location both within the school and within larger society.

The principal's denial of both Bella's and Diane's suggestion that African American

students find the school inhospitable was not new. Diane had raised the issue of African

American students before in a professional development context.[36] At that time, Jane was

reluctant to admit there was a concern with African American students and was challenged by

Diane. Jane used anecdotal information to help maintain her story and[37] to back her claim. And,

despite the concern of the one African American educator in the room, Jane claimed that the

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[36] In this professional development session, Diane raised the issue of low scores of African American students but received push back not only from Jane but also disbelief from one of her white colleagues who was also in a position of power. In addition to this concern, in interviews with the special education teachers, these teachers, upon being asked to, calculated the numbers, and found that African Americans constituted a disproportionately higher percentage of the special education population.

[37] This information is not exactly correct. Upon checking the statistics, I found that the number of students in the immediate area had decreased but based on the census figures only by a 2% shift downward of the African Americans from 12% in 2000 when the school started to 10% in 2010 (US Census 2000, 2010). This however did not necessarily explain the drop from approximately 30% of students at the school in 2001 when the school started to approximately 15% in 2010.

school had built a better community for these children. Donna acknowledged that more African Americans should apply to the school and Diane raised an important point that the school can and did pull from a larger pool than just the surrounding area. Jane nonetheless continued to insist that the change in demographics in the school's neighborhood is the reason for the decrease in African American students.

For socio-cultural theorists, meanings, processes and practices are connected. Particularly given her position as principal, the meanings Jane held with respect to African American and other students of color is crucial to such students' academic welfare. In this case Jane's meanings led to an unwillingness to admit there was a potential concern with respect to these students at her school, exhibiting a kind of colorblindness. As a white person who grew up in an affluent neighborhood, her experiences are very different from those of her students. Her position as a member of the dominant class allows her the privilege of being able to ignore the relevance of race because race does not affect her negatively the way it does people of color (McIntosh, 1990). And even though she currently lives near the school, her experiences continue to be formed by her whiteness and her privileged status. For Hall (1981), "[h]ow we see ourselves and our social relations *matter,* because it enters into and informs our actions and practices" (Stuart Hall, 1981). Unfortunately, because her position as the principal of CalabarHS, if Jane holds meanings about African Americans that lead her to ignore problems even in the face of factual evidence to the contrary, this can be devastating for the school's African American students. This means that problems the students are having could go unaddressed. Students may well react by simply leaving because they had not other recourse. This could help explain the 50 percent in the African American student population. Further, Jane's response to Diane and Bella showed the unevenness of their power relationships. She was

149

dismissive and did not give due consideration to Diane's and Bella's observations and questions. The point is not to cast aspersions but to recognize that Jane's 'color blindness' is problematic, but is not hers alone, that it has to be addressed, and that addressing it will likely be a difficult process. According to Hall (1981), ideologies are often "not the product of individual consciousness or intention;" nor are they "isolated and separate concepts, but … the articulation of different elements into a distinctive set or chain of meanings" (p. 31). The several opportunities that Jane had to address, but instead denied, the concerns for African American students at her school seemed part of a larger dominant discourse around colorblindness not only at her school but within larger American society.

Learning Processes (Trying Again and Raising Essential School Question; Contentiousness and Signs of Coming to Shared Meanings; Responding Defensively But Engagement). When Kate responded to my question she indicated growth. In trying again to discuss school barriers she overcame her struggle to find the words – that she indicated earlier she was struggling to find. This time she was successful raising an essential question in the school, by focusing the problem on her own students. She essentially took a stand in finding the words. Her stance did not go unnoticed. This starting from her own work is a good way to enter into difficult conversations. Her response sparked a heated conversation within the group and a defensive response from the principal. This conflict actually signaled that the group was beginning to engage with each other and beginning to negotiate, albeit in a contentious way, new perhaps shared meanings about teaching and educating students at CalabarHS that learning theorists indicate are signs of learning (Rogoff & Toma, 1997). The principal's denial was a concern as it created a continuing barrier to addressing, and had the potential to, maintain problematic issues at the school. The principal continued to be resistant. However the

discussions presented potential for learning and growth and change. This discussion again illuminated the need for critical analyses alongside analyses using sociocultural theories on learning. Further, the conflict resulting from the differences in meanings educators held and their social location seemed to open up potential spaces for growth toward new or shared meanings. This showed that conflict can be productive and should not necessarily be avoided. Although the principal's in the group created this resistance, her presence also had great potential for moving change forward.

Re-articulation of Some Common Sense Notions.

Providing Support. Given the contentious nature of the end of the last session (indicated immediately above), I felt it crucial to do follow-up with each individual and so I did. With each educator, I discussed among other things trying to be open and self-reflective in our discussions. I also tried to discuss with each educator what concerns they had about the session. I felt it was especially important to speak with Jane to make sure she was not feeling personally affronted. I found that Kate was open to more discussions and I had opportunity to see her more as I was assigned to her class for volunteering purposes.[38] Kate and I usually had several discussions prior to each session. I began to suggest to Kate that she could play a role in helping the group grow because of her unique position of being white, respected and in a position to gain a perspective from her students. She generally had small classes of approximately two to eight students. Diane's classroom was right next to Kate's and so I attempted to have frequent discussions as well but she was not as receptive to deepening our discussions. Melanie continued to express having difficulty with expressing herself in the group and most importantly she appeared to be having tremendous difficulty with the adminstration and especially Donna.

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[38] In my ongoing effort to maintain an insider-outsider perspective I wanted to volunteer at the school. Jane assigned me to Kate's classroom.

There seemed to be a big power struggle going on between her and Donna. Donna, who had the ear of the principal, seemed to be winning. In addition, to the meetings at the beginning of this session, to help support the members of the group, I decided to do an active listening exercise.[39]

Educators' Discussion - Re-articulation, Part 1. To address any outstanding issues in the group, I asked again about discussing a 'problem' to be addressed by the group. This time around, Kate seemed more ready to discuss the troubling topic of school failure even though it might be potentially controversial. This was interesting in light of the principal's vehement denials during the previous session. Kate's readiness may have been helped by our one-on-one discussions. In addition, her concern about her students and others who the school was failing seemed to have increased. She jumped in to talk about doing a research project to address the questions previously discussed. This time around there was ready agreement by all including Jane to pursue a project about the school retention and failure including African American students. Kate's positon as a white person, a member of the dominant class, must also not be overlooked. This was essential component in her belief that taking a stand would have an impact. This was also essential in her relative lack of concern about repercussions if she took a stand against the power structure. I had similar discussions with the educators of color and they were very concerned about the risks.

Learning Processes (Support of Educators; Quick Agreement After Contentious Session). The contentious nature of the previous meeting potentially opened space for learning and self-reflection. Supporting the educators seemed to be a key part of the learning process at this point. My follow-up conversations with individuals also served to address some of the

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[39] This involved listening while the other person spoke only. Each person had to chose someone not working in the same area.

lingering concerns educators had. As well, the active listening exercise just before the session

may also have helped. The individual meetings certainly helped to give the individuals the space

to vent about not being heard and to wonder about how to raise concerns in the Inquiry space.

There seemed to be some shared thinking and some growth or learning as Jane agreed to include

researching the data about demographics relating to African American students, reflecting part of

our earlier private discussion.

   Educator's Discussion - Re-articulation, Part 2. As we continued with our discussions

of the article for purposes of further illuminating how inequality may play out in schools, Diane

raised concerns about parents' not valuing education.

Diane: As I was reading it, I was wondering while these are the steps that they're taking in terms
of education as in longer days, smaller schools, things like that, while those things can
help, they still won't fix the greater issue here, but the parents of these kids don't see
education as a value because they didn't value education themselves. Some of them do
but a lot of them don't, so the kids may or may not get it while they're there. So it's
changing the mindset of people, the community, to recognize that education is a value.
This is how you actually get ahead. And you have the continuous cycle because my dad
didn't go to school, so why should I go to school? It works for him, he's still alive. He
lives in a house, he drives a car. They don't understand that there's more to life than just
living month to month and existing.

Me: Can I ask you a question? Do you think that that dad doesn't value education?

Diane: It's possible. Some of them don't, some of them do. I've run into people that I know who
don't value education. And they're the ones typically arguing with the teacher about – it's
the – they get upset at the teacher for what their kid did wrong because to them it shows
what kind of parent they are, they take it personally. . . So I don't know. But I know
there are some people that don't value education. Because they didn't like school, not
necessarily that they don't think education is important, but they didn't like school.

   After the initial exchange between myself and Diane I then explained that I took some

issue with the position that "parents do not value education" because I thought the issue was

more complex and then I asked the group to add some more complexity by talking about what

153

might be going on here. Of the group members other than Diane, only Kate did not engage in

this attempted re-articulation part of this discussion. An example of the responses is as follows:

Bella: Well, I just think back to my mom or my aunt and uncles. They might have seemed like
they don't value education, but it was more they didn't know the system. So how do you
help your kid if you had no idea that they have to take the courses? You just send your
kid and hopefully, like to parents, go do your thing with your teacher because they're the
experts. And for the teacher it might seem like you're just sending your kids so we can
babysit. So there's a disconnection of just knowing what the parent knows about the
school and the system and what the teacher knows about the parent and the system.

Jane: I thought there might be some insecurity too, because they don't know the system, it can
be really intimidating, sometimes it's not as simple as just I don't know, but it might also
make me uncomfortable because it's something I don't know about that my kids…

Other members of the group explained that the realities of parents might be different from

educators' reality. For example, they explained that the families' economic situations may mean

that sometimes the students may be needed to help with other children in the family or with the

finances in the home. They explained that some parents' bad experience or lack of experience

with the school system could lead them to feeling insecure about dealing with the school.

Interestingly, the educators also explained that for some parents education is a 'meal ticket' for

their students out of impoverished circumstances. In addition Bella, Donna, and Melanie drew

on the experiences of their families to add texture and help illuminate what might be going on

with families. These educators were able to show that in general parents did value education. I

then picked up on a point made by Melanie that the notion of "valuing" or "not valuing"

education and other "common sense" notions may in fact be found in families well off or poor. I

asked the group to make some distinctions about how the ways these terms are used including

with whom they are nusually associated. With whom do people usually associate these often-

negative "common sense" characteristics?

Kate rejoined the conversation after not saying much during the "valuing education discussion", she responded,

Kate: I guess it was an immediate response to that, in the news it's the folks on welfare. Those who are the folks who are popping babies who shouldn't be popping babies any more. [page 12, Transcript Third Session]

Diane: The majority of people on welfare aren't of color.

Kate: Right, so there's that association. Immediately. . [page 12, Transcript Third Session]

Kate further complicates the problem attempting to make connections to education she says,

Kate: Can I just add, I wanted to add this onto to the end of – 'it's the people on welfare'. Well the reason is, it comes down to education. Because those are the people who are also not educated. So then whose fault is it really? [bottom page 13, Transcript Third Session]

Diane introduction of the idea that parent's don't value education showed that educators of color also carried deficit meanings about some families of color. Her comments presented an opportunity for the group to attempt a re-articulation of some specific deficit language encountered in the school. Attempting a re-articulation was important because it was also language that seemed to be part of a larger societal discourse around low income and families of color. When given the opportunity, the members of the group were able to come up with some shared understandings that added complexity to this often repeated common sense. It was interesting to note that Diane recognized the possible unequal treatment of African Americans while simultaneously holding deficit meanings about at least some of her students' families. This holding of conflicting meanings showed that each of us, myself included, is subject to partial understandings of the play of inequality in schools and larger society. Interestingly, this information can in some respects be considered good news for future attempts at re-articulations. This is because it might indicate that even those with the most deficit-oriented meanings

155

potentially will also have some resource-oriented meanings that can be the starting place for beginning re-articulations.

From the discussions it seemed that the group was also able to recognize that this story was part of a larger story that is told about low-income people of color that is not necessarily true and is certainly more complex. Acknowledging the complexity of these stories is also important because these acknowledgments can allow educators to begin to account for students' realities in their educational practices and policies. For example, if students will need to 'help out' by working or doing many chores when they go home, providing the space at school for 'homework' might be necessary to help that student succeed academically. This attempt at re-articulation showed great promise, although it is not clear whether the individuals would keep the new understandings.

Learning Processes (Potential Re-articulation Toward Shared Meanings; Building on Each Other's Comments; Challenging Each Other; Moving Toward a Safer Space). With appropriate questioning, educators were able to come up with alternative explanations about, and a conclusion that, students' families do value education. This was an instant when with support, the educators engaged in shared meanings negotiation. In this process of learning they sometimes picked up each other's idea as they also built on each other's comments (Jane picking up on Bella's comment that parents might not know school system). They also engaged with each other by challenging each other's specific comments even though not always harmoniously (Diane' response to Kate that not all people on welfare are of color). It appeared that the Inquiry space was beginning to become a safer space for some to engage in *real conversations*, as opposed to *contrived conversations*. Two of the educators' of color were engaged in the discussion. Bella continued to speak and Diane also continued to speak. Providing the

156

continuing space to have the discussions, together with making efforts to address power

differentials in the group, seemed to increase the opportunities for bringing up difficult issues.

Kate's Shifting Role Within Group.

Providing Support. Between sessions, I had continued discussing school concerns with

Kate including her potential to take a leadership role in the group. There were several things that

had occurred as well. Melanie left the school after the last session. Because of this, scheduling

the group session became more difficult for a time because the school administrators had to fill

in for Melanie and also had to find someone to replace her. As well, the need for someone to

'step up,' that is to take a leadership role in terms of raising important issues seemed more urgent

to me with the loss of Melanie who seemed to understand many of the issues that were salient to

students of color, even though she had difficulty with speaking up in the group context. During

the longer than usual period between sessions I spent more time on campus and additional time

in Kate's classroom. One of the issues I discussed with several educators including Bella and

Kate was how to have courage to raise issues even though they were potentially difficult. In

separate conversations, it seemed that both Bella and Kate believed Melanie's leaving was

connected to a power struggle between Melanie and Donna. For Bella, the conversation about

courage seemed difficult. As mentioned earlier, as an educator of color she seemed keenly

aware of her subordinated status as it related to the power structure of the school organization.

Further her belief about Melanie being pushed out did not inspire confidence that speaking up

would have not consequences. The conversations about courage seemed to have a positive effect

on Kate. Although Kate seemed to miss some opportunities in earlier sessions, she began to take

on the power structure and also the role of helping to bridge the learning of her fellow

colleagues. As a result, this session marked a pivotal moment for Kate in this Inquiry. Kate

though tentatively, began to take a more firm leadership role in the group in terms of challenging certain statements made by power holders. The change also seemed to signal a change in the group. The sessions became even more spirited, more animated and more contentious.

Educators' Discussion - Kate (Takes a Leading Role). We began this session with a discussion about income inequality and tried to make some connections to schooling. We started this conversation by playing another game. This game involved asking the members of the group to take certain positions with respect to income (in)equality. One of the questions suggested that income equality is necessary to obtain education equality[40]. Kate began tentatively not wanting to take a stand either way in terms of whether income was connected to quality of education.] She stated initially "*I'm…insisting on being in the middle*" [page 7, Transcript Fourth Session]. However, as the discussions continued, Kate asked

Kate: "Really - how much more money do you really need to exist?"[page 9, Transcript Fourth Session].

When Donna[41] proposed that instead of limiting income, the middle class should be supported, Kate again took a contrary position and asked,

Kate: "What do you do with the lower class?"

When Donna said that income equality was not necessary to have better schools in places like Compton, a low-income neighborhood where schools were low performing and lacking in resources, Kate again pointedly disagreed.

Kate: I want to disagree with you to some extent. Because I think what happens, if we put more money – I do think there's a correlation, at least, if not more causation.

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[40] The suggestion was to cap income at $1million as a way to promote income equality and schooling equality.
[41] It was Donna with whom Melanie had conflict.

Interestingly, taking a stand did not go unnoticed. Nor did it come without opposition.

Kate: But here's the thing, here's the thing… [People talking over Kate as she tries to make a point][a lot of talking at once] [page 19, Transcript Fourth Session].

Kate continued to formulate her arguments as she tried to make sense of the larger impact

inequality in income.

Kate: The [affluent neighborhood] parents first of all have a level of expectation. We've already started educating our children from the womb. Education is valued, okay? [42]There are assumptions that are made. Our [affluent neighborhood] schools don't get – they get the same amount of money as the poor schools but what happens is, we [affluent parents] are asked to invest more money into our children's education. I was asked to give $1,000 per kid to raise a million dollars. [page 19, Transcript Fourth Session].

In the face of another argument by Donna that a school in Watts, another low-income,

minority community, is like a prison and but this is unconnected to economics because *"… it's a*

corporate model" [Id] Kate pointed our that the parents were not rioting because *"the parents*

are working." [Id]

Learning Processes (Challenging Power and Authority; Causing Conflict; Shifting

Role; Holding onto Deficit Meanings). Kate in this session took a bold stand in opposition to

Donna, the same individual with whom Melanie seemed to have had a conflict prior to leaving.

When she pointedly disagreed with Donna, Kate's stand does not go unnoticed. For a moment,

several people talked over her as she tried to make a point. Again, Kate's move is a marked

difference from previous discussions. What is important is that this is the first time in these

sessions that Kate used a strong voice and took a strong contrary position to Donna. In previous

individual conversations Kate had acknowledged that Donna had a lot of power within the

school. Kate also believed that some of Donna's ideas may not be oriented toward equality. She

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[42] Kate still has this notion that middle and upper income people value education more than low income,

also believed that because of their close relationship the principal was strongly influenced by Donna. As a result, opposing Donna in a strong way was pivotal. Socioculuralists have found that moments of learning are also moments of shifting roles or transformations of participation (See Rogoff & Toma, 1997; Sfard & Prusak). In this participatory process "people transform the roles they play in the socio-cultural activities in which they participate (Rogoff, 1994, p.   ). Kate stood up to Donna and created a shift in their interactions. This shift in interaction also signaled a shift their roles.

Although Kate made some bold moves, it was important to note that Kate was not suddenly enlightened on all matters. On the contrary, her understanding of the role of race and class and other forms of inequality was continuing to evolve. Throughout the Inquiry including evne right after this discussion, she made some negative assumptions as she said that poor parents "they don't necessarily know what good educations looks like". During the previous conversations about parents not valuing education but Kate had participated in the re-articulation discussion. It seemed that a re-articulation had not taken place for her as in the above discussions she talked about affluent folks valuing education—again implying that low-income people do not. This is interesting as it is important to consider what it means in these types of conversations when individuals do not speak. The existence of deficit oriented language even alongside attempts to learn how to help students of color is important to note. This knowledge however should not act as a deterrent to continuing learning efforts. Neither should it be a means for pointing fingers. Instead it should serve as a reminder of the complexity of the human condition and the need to continue working assiduously toward challenging inequality.

Kate pointedly challenged Donna in a least three separate statements when she said: "Really - how much more money do you really need to exist?"; "What do you do with the lower

160

class?"; "I want to disagree with you to some extent." In challenging Donna, Kate continued in a definitive way to shift her role in the group (and perhaps the school). By talking back to Donna she was also challenging the schools' power structure. This is because Donna was known within the school for being powerful and for wielding her power. Kate herself had acknowledged this power. Kate's challenge clearly caused conflict within the group as evidenced by everyone talking at once over each other – an unusual occurrence for this group. Interestingly, this very contentious conflict seemed to signal the creation of a space for working out disagreements and challenging assumptions toward negotiating some new meanings about low-income people of color. Individuals spoke up, some in support of, and some to disagree with, Kate. Further, the educators here were engaged in a process or real conversations albeit, heated.

Bringing Up Tough Questions About the School.

Providing Support. I continued to have discussions with Kate between sessions. Particular in light of her bring up difficult issues, I wanted to be sure to support and encourage her. One topic we discussed at length was the school's mission. I asked Kate what she thought the mission was and whether the practices mirrored what was written or spoken of as the school's mission. In addition, I tried to continue to speak with the other educators. I continued to have limited success with Donna, and to some extent with Jane.

Educators' Discussion-Addressing Tough Questions (School Mission), Part 1.

Continuing to take a lead, Kate tried to gain understandings to explain what contributed to students not having success. She admitted that she did not did not understand the problem.

Kate: And then, so who is it we need to sort of naturally retain and in my particular group of students it's like why is the form of education that we're offering them, why are they not taking it? Why is it not working for them, or whatever is happening? I don't know what's happening. [page 3, Transcript Sixth Session]

To pick up on Kate's question, I asked about the mission of the school. Jane responded ,

Jane: We've had lots of conversations about the mission over the years. Over the 10 years, really. But I think, I really think that where we're maybe different than some other charter schools is that our mission really is to serve more kids than the ones – like there are some not to be named schools nearby that clearly to everyone else seem to be creating some special breed of kid to put them through the program, and I think we're very honest about not doing that. And of course we're not there, we struggle with it. But I think – and you guys correct me if I'm wrong – I think we're all pretty clear that our mission is to try to reach more of those kids that wouldn't traditionally self-select to try and go through that program. I think that's, to me that's what makes it all special and worth it is that we're trying to go beyond just the kids that can hack it.

Kate: And I think what we get up against, too, is this lack of resources. Because I look at the ninth graders coming in and a good portion of them can't handle ninth grade English in the way that we would want them to handle ninth grade English. And we offer Lit Lab and I think we would do more for them if we – could we do more for them if we had this resource, if we had – could we do – like we do math enrichment, they have Algebra 1 and they have math enrichment. Can we also give them English enrichment and whatever… [page 6-8, Transcript Sixth Session]

Diane: We used to.

Kate: And it went away because of lack of resources, right?

Jane: More based on the bigger need which was more of them seemed to need math. It's really wasn't because of resources, it was choosing which place to put the priority because it seemed like SO many more of them –

Kate: But why would we choose? We have a population that still needs it. Wouldn't we…?

Jane: How many kids are failing English?

Kate: If you look at my kids…

Jane: I think more kids are passing ninth grade English than we've ever had in the history of [CalabarHS]. I'm not sure that trickles through the curriculum. It might be the (unintelligible) comes on later [people talking over each other]. I don't know that that's… [pages 6-9, Transcript Sixth Session

162

Learning Processes (Bringing up Tough Questions; Continuing to Stand up to Power).
In this conversation, Kate solidified her role and continued to ask tough questions about what education the school was providing to its students. This time she stood up to Jane the principal. Jane brought up the mission of trying to meet a range of students even as the students with the lowest grades were leaving the school. She seemed to ignore the fact that (based on her own school data) many of the students leaving were those same students she said she wanted to help. Yet those students' leaving might well indicate the school was somehow inhospitable to them or not meeting their needs. In this discussion, there were instances of conflict as the educators again talked over each other. Kate continued to question the principal and did not back down when principal seemed to push back. To help explain what might be happening, Kate looked to lack of resources to help 9th graders become more successful at the English classes. In this she acknowledged the role that school can play in supporting students' learning. Interestingly, as the discussion continued, Jane engaged in a conversation with Kate as opposed to simply denying her statements as she did earlier with the educators of color. In this conversation, Race again seemed to matter. Kate as a white educator seemed to have more luck in engaging the principal, herself a white individual, even though they do not immediately agree.

As Kate continued to challenge the principal, she was also continuing to stand up to and speaking back to power. In this way she also seemed to be helping to level the power structure within the group. Even though contentious, the educators appeared engaged in a process of negotiation. They exchanged very different meanings and understandings about education the students of color at their school. In so doing they may have opened potential space for future shared meaning making. Further Jane appeared to be listening and attending to Kate's comments. Although they did not come to agreement the engagement in meaning negotiation

163

about what schooling should look like for their students of color had potential for future understandings.

Educators' Discussion – Addressing Tough Questions (The School Mission), Part 2.

Kate continued to pursue the important issue of the school mission and how does this play out for teaching and learning. She asked,

Kate: Can I ask a question of the group because I'm feeling confused about some things, and especially coming off. It's really interesting to go through the WASC process, to do this, but thinking about our mission as a school, and I read our mission, and this issue of social justice, and I know that we're constantly teaching social justice and we're encouraging them to think about it and to do it. How much are we doing that with them and is that part of our mission?

Jane: What do you mean by (unintelligible)?

Kate: So if they're coming in – I'm confused about, are we – because what it feels to me right now and has felt is we're presenting them with an opportunity. And this is sort of the product. It's a college prep education and it's something that may not be available to you in these other surrounding schools. And so we're offering you something more. But it's kind of up to you to get it. And I know that we're working on that, but I just keep questioning how much? Is that our position? [page 17, Transcript Seventh Session].

Donna responded as follows,

Donna: What's embedded in the mission is that kids are going to graduate being able to reason critically, able to communicate and be collaborative and contributing. [page 17, Transcript Seventh Session]

And Kate tries to rephrase the question and is helped by Bella.

Kate: So my question is, and I have to struggle to articulate this.

Bella: Are we social justice because we offer this opportunity or do we go beyond that and do we teach what social justice means? Is that what you're saying?

Kate: And even more than that, do we consider their culture and what they're coming from and with, and then remediate whatever needs to be remediated to help them get the product, the opportunity that we're offering them. [page 17, Transcript Seventh Session].

164

Donna and Jane pointed to the wording of the school's mission as follows:

Donna: The mission says to inspire, equip, and empower and it's done in a rigorous college prep program. I think is the wording.

Jane: We've always had this like college prep, oh, (unintelligible), whatever. Kids should be able to think and reason and creatively contribute. Those things will get them through college hopefully so that they can be more impactful.

Donna: Look at the benchmarks. [page 18, Transcript Seventh Session].

The question raised by Kate began a long discussion mostly involving Jane and Donna the principal and her assistant principal as they seemed to defend the approach of their school. I pushed them further by questioning, asking what model seemed most likely to fit what they currently do and to consider whether there was appropriate flexibility in their program. Jane and Donna attempted to push back they disagreed that there was not sufficient flexibility. Kate then responded (and Bella also agreed) telling the group that her thinking has shifted.

Kate: No, it's just how we're thinking about it, I think. Because all this has shifted for me.

Bella: Me, too.

Kate: All this has shifted for me.

Jane: What?

Kate: My thinking about what we're doing

Bella: Social justice and what it means in my classroom.

Kate: Yeah. And to kind of going being sort of more traditionally minded about education. To just question… [page 19, Transcript Seventh Session].

When Jane suggested the school has much in the way of flexibility, Kate responded,

Kate: I sort of disagree. I think we try to be flexible and we, do we, build in flexibility after the fact. We don't, it's not that way upfront [page 20, Transcript Seventh Session].

Before this session, Kate and I had several discussions about the mission and what it was and whether the school lived up to it. I had also attempted this discussion with with others including Jane and Bella. As well, some of the teachers I had discussions with[43] had suggested they came to teach at CalabarHS because they believed it had a 'social justice' orientation. On the other hand, the school seemed to operate in a traditional meritocratic way. In general discussions with teachers I had been told of a number of occasions when suggestions were made to students that they might fit in better elsewhere. Further, in discussions with Donna, she confirmed she operated on a meritocratic system. As well there was high dropout rate and teachers have many student who were not passing their classes. At least two educators, (Melanie and a male Latino teacher) who left recently had said they were frustrated that the school did not support 'social justice' oriented policies, even though the administrators talked about doing so.

Learning Processes (Continued Questioning and Standing up to Power; Assisting others to Speak). Although not always in an agreeable way, the educators continued to engage with each other. Some shared thinking evolved among some members of the group, such as Kate and Bella. An air of contention remained as Kate continued to challenge the principal. However, the conversations seemed real and respectful. Kate indicated that she has been thinking about what education and meeting the needs of the students meant at CalabarHS. She also brought the question to the Inquiry group and found at least one of her colleagues (Bella) in agreement and also others (the principal and AP) in conflict with her evolving thoughts. Kate's continued stance seemed to support Bella's willingness to continue speaking. Kate's questioning challenged both Jane and Donna in their thinking about the school's mission. While both Jane

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[43] Some not members of the group.

and Donna focused on the words of the mission, Kate tried to draw them back to the school's practice.

Educators' Discussion – More Tough Question (Race) Part 3. As the conversations continued one of the reasoning Jane gave for not building in flexibility in her school program was - she did not know who her students would be and so did not know how to plan. And yet, her population of students has been fairly constant in terms of demographics and preparedness. Her students generally came from the same middle schools. As well, the results CalabarHS has had, has also been relatively constant. Kate jumped back into the conversation and attempted to start a conversation on the importance of race as she gave an example of students being treated differently using race. In addition, Kate brought up the issue of race and its potential impact. Donna denied race was relevant. The dialogue continued with Kate trying to give additional examples particularly of a student who reported getting stopped by the police often.   He thought this was because of his 'color'. Donna remained unconvinced. Nonetheless, although she does not reconsider, the hope is that the discussion provided material for Donna to think about and consider in the future.

Summary of Chapter 5.

Summary of Processes. These Inquiry sessions provided educators the opportunity to think and talk about the larger social systems that affect education as part of negotiating new meanings. The process included engaging the meanings each educator brought to education and the messy interaction of all their differing experiences. These discussions provided some openings for difficult discussions about the play of inequality including the role of race and class in everyday activities. Ultimately the discussions in the Inquiry provided space for each educator to learn, to take on newly negotiated meanings about teaching, their students of color

and education. The educators were also negotiating new roles for themselves with respect to the group and potentially their school. At the very beginning of these sessions, Bella and Melanie (educators of color) began to raise issues of inequality but others did not respond, they were initially silent. When Kate, a white teacher spoke initially, she avoided issues by shifting topics. Further when Kate had another opportunity to bring up these issue inequality, she again also initially steered away from the potentially controversial topics. These moves led to what I call *contrived conversations*, conversations that were incomplete and constrained because important concerns were left unspoken and related issues were left unaddressed.   However, the conversations gradually became real conversations as with support Kate began to shift her role. In private conversations Kate began to bring up some important concerns about inequality she indicated she would bring up in the group. However, initially she had trouble finding the words and addressed other issues instead. She then slowly began to bring up her concerns the school failure to address students' education by starting with her own students. She then challenged the assistant principal about her views on income inequality. She then challenged the principal about the school mission. Kate stood up the power structure at her school and in so doing created some space for learning and growth within her group. The conversations became contentious and difficult. There was denial and defensiveness and there was also pushing back. Ultimately, when Kate decided to take a stand and raise difficulties, she stood up to power and helped the learning of her group as she herself grew.

Discussion.

At the end of the CalabarHS Inquiry, it is apparent that Kate's meanings about teaching her students of color have changed dramatically. As they changed, her actions were also changing to reflect those meanings. Kate's transformation and actions indicate the relevance and

implications meanings have for supporting people's actions. Her change also has great potential for the students of color at CalabarHS. While Kate's change is situational, the circumstances surrounding her change provided some important lessons about the change process.

Hall (1981) used the concept of ideology to explain how racial inequality can be reproduced. He explained that depending on one's ideology, 'freedom' for example may mean individual freedom or may more democratically mean freedom for the collective. At the beginning of the CalabarHS Inquiry it seemed that 'teaching' had very different meanings for some of the educators of color on one hand, and the white educators, on the other. These differences in meanings are important because of the potential implications for the educators' actions and inactions. Some of the educators of color saw the need for a definition of teaching that involved being an "educational political leader" who was in solidarity with these students (Freire, 1970; 2005). The white educators seemed to have meanings of education for the students of color that were dissimilar to those held by some of the educators of color. These differences in educators' meanings about the education of students of color coupled with differences in power positions powerfully affected the interactions among the educators in the Inquiry. Moreover, there was potentially powerful impact on the education of the students of color at the school.

Furthermore, while meanings are impacted by a number of factors, theorists such as Apple (1996) and Ladson-Billing & Tate (1995), have acknowledged the role of race in constructing teaching (M. Apple, 1996). Race seemed to be a powerful indicator of schooling at CalabarHS. The school's demographics (and the Inquiry group as well) reflected a microcosm of the demographics of greater American society. The individuals in power positions (both in the group and in the school) were primarily white and the people of color at the school were

generally in subordinated positions. Further, theorists have also argued that race often constructs different experiences for different people and can "generate distinctive accounts" of life (Harding 1997; Prakash 1994). It appeared that some of the educators of color as members of the same race and subordinated class as their students had some understandings of the conditions and circumstances of their students of color. Unfortunately, during the Inquiry, being in subordinated positions in society and in the school limited the ability of the educators of color to gain traction for their concerns about their students of color. The individuals who were in power positions, who were able to have their accounts of teaching and education heard at the school, were members of dominant culture. Theorists have argued that those in dominant positions can have "interests" that are "perverse" to those in subordinated positions (Harding, 1997). At CalabarHS such "perverse interests" were indicated among other things by the shifting of topics away from the concerns of the educators of color and by the denials of the existence of a problem with African American students even in the face of substantial drop in enrollment of these students.

The Inquiry presented an opportunity to create conversations about the inequality that seemed to be replicated and proliferated throughout the school as indicated by school's high rate of failing students and of students leaving the school. However, the power positions and related micro-politics that were at play in the school showed up immediately in the Inquiry. On one hand, the educators of color struggled to negotiate a meaning of teaching that encouraged educators to take more responsibility for their students learning. On the other hand, the white educators shifted away from (and thereby dismissed) these educators' concerns. This shifting may not have been intentional and could have been because of their unfamiliarity with the experiences of the students.   Nevertheless, the differences in meanings about educating students

led to contrived, as opposed to real conversations early in the discussions in some cases, promoted silences in other cases and also seemed to contribute to the leaving of one of the educators of color.

In order for change to take place it seemed that a leveling of the power positions in the space was necessary. People in dominant groups in society obtain their dominant positions through the operation of systemic policies and historical events that included slavery, segregation and urbanization. However today, hegemonic influences help to maintain inequality between dominant and subordinated groups. Far from being just theoretical, these influences operate in the micro-political relationships between people, and as Apple (2009) suggested, "structure our consciousness." Gramsci (1971) described these influences as a subtle almost invisible form of force. At the beginning of the Inquiry when Kate (and Jane) shifted the topic of conversation from Bella's proposal to widening the definition of teacher to a focus on whether teaching is like parenting the hegemony that Gramsci discussed seemed to be in evidence. The shifting was almost invisible. The actors who did the shifting seemed to do it in an automatic unconscious or unintentional way. This shifting had a powerful impact on, and did not go unnoticed by, Bella (and Melanie, another educator of color). In fact, Bella and Melanie refused to provide the "consent" that hegemony requires as they attempted to assert their ideas. But the power held by those in the dominant culture (and others in organizationally powerful positions) can be difficult to contest. They have the weight of history and time and common sense behind them (Hall 1981; 2006). As well, often, much is at stake for people of color and others who are in subordinated positions. When those in power positions can determine ones life chances such whether one has a job or not, educators of color must worry about risking their livelihood if they stand up to power. This is no small concern. In the case of CalabarHS, this threat of job loss was not an

171

empty or idle threat. During the Inquiry, Melanie said she felt compelled to (and did) leave at least in part because of the power struggle she was engaged in with the assistant principal.

The Inquiry presented a process for the social interaction and political struggle that Hall (1981) suggested is needed for ideological transformation. Using her learning from the texts and the discussions, Kate began to question the school's responsibility, implicitly challenging the deficit notion that students were to blame for the school faiures. Indicating a connection between her changed meanings and actions, not only was she changing but she also began to put her changed ideas into practice. As Kate took a stand during the Inquiry, the ideological "chains" she held seemed to be "breaking" (Hall 1981, p. 31). It seems that her ideologies were being "transformed" (Hall 1981). Paulo Freire (2005) might say that her "consciousness" began to awaken to the reality of the education needed for her students of color. What was clear is that the meanings Kate attached to the same reality of educating students of color at CalabarHS began to change. With those changes Kate was also becoming a catalyst for change in the Inquiry group and importantly, potentially in the school, as well.

Kate's position as a member of the dominant group afforded her the privilege to step up and take a stand without some of the concerns of her colleagues of color. While Kate was in a subordinated position (organizationally) with respect to the principal, she also enjoyed good relationships with both the principal and the assistant principal, probably supported by their like membership in the dominant culture. It might also be important that Kate had other means of support as she had an independent practice outside of school, and so was not completely dependent on the school for her livelihood. Nevertheless, for Kate, if there was risk in standing up, the risk was smaller than for her colleagues of color. When Kate began to take a stand, there was to be a shift in power balance in the group, she began to take account of the distinctive

positions of some of the educators of color with respect to teaching at CalabarHS. As a result of her position as a member of the dominant class, she created openings for the different accounts of the education of students of color to be heard by the administrators. Because of her position, the similarly positioned administrators did not dismiss her questions or claims but rather engaged with her creating possibilities for learning and transformation within the group and potentially the school.

In conclusion making changes in a particular space is situational. The process can be a messy mélange of conflict, contentions and disagreements. However the potential is great and these challenges should not deter educators and others interested in reform from making the efforts. Nonetheless, there are some important concerns that must be addressed regardless of the situation or the context. Creating spaces for negotiating new meanings is important. An important aspect of creating such new spaces is identifying power imbalances that may exist. The power held by those in dominant positions can be substantial and can be difficult to contest (whether in a dominant culture–subordinated culture relationship, teacher-student relationship, or an administrator-employee relationship or otherwise). When attempting to address concerns of those in a subordinated status such as students of color, leveling power imbalances to allow for such concerns to be discussed and addressed is very important, and even essential, if real changes are to take place in our schools.

PostScript.

After the Inquiry sessions we met again several times to begin the study regarding the retention concerns, including looking at the school's data. At one of the first meetings to discuss the data, I summarized the data in front of us. It showed that a high percentage of students who left had very low grades. I suggested that perhaps there was an instruction issue. This was

because there was a great variability between the teachers success rate with students passing their classes. The principal pointedly disagreed that the problem resided within the school and its program. She instead believed that individual students were at fault and she wanted to go through each name of the students to explain specific reasons why each student left. At this point, I challenged the principal to take her blinders off and to address the mediocrity in her teaching staff. My challenge was not received well. After two weeks I returned to campus with a peace offering and met with the principal privately. We then set up another meeting. At this and coming meetings the educators put in place a schedule for teacher support. The principal advertised within the school and then elevated two teachers to become teaching coaches to the school's staff school. They agreed to a number of other teacher support activities.

Small Shift in relationship between Jane and Diane.

Jane and Diane seemed to have some challenges in their relationship. This may have been exasperated by the fact Jane had difficulty believing Diane' concern about race. On the other hand, Diane was also frustrated that her concerns were not heard and addressed. Further, Diane engaged in many activities at school and felt underappreciated by administration and her colleagues. After our sessions, I observed several moments when Jane reached out and affirmed Diane publicly. For example, in all the eight or so years Diane was as the school she was never (she had complained to me several weeks before), until right after the Inquiry, given the "hat" that was worn by the favored teacher of the week. After the Inquiry, Jane also on several occasions publicly acknowledged work Diane had done. This was a practice she used often with other teachers but had not with Diane before.

174

Findings Chapter 6:
LEARNING AND RE-ARTICULATION AT COMPHS
Using Marcia, As Example.

Introduction.

I also organized this chapter in a manner similar to chapter 5. In addition, unlike in

chapter 5, in this chapter, because I struggled with supporting the learning of the educators at this

site, I also attempt to identify some potential opportunities I may have missed to support or

deepen the educators' learning.

Working Towards Meaning of "Teacher" within the Context of CalabarHS.

Providing Support; Limitations on Providing Support. Much of the support I provided

initially was related to providing the space for the educators to talk about what had happened to

them in the spring and over the summer before beginning the Inquiry portion of the study. The

wholesale firings and limited and last minute re-hiring by their school district seemed to have a

devastating impact on these CompHS educators. I organized two sessions primarily to provide

educators the space for discussions. I also used the meetings to explore whether to continue with

the Inquiry at this site and to organize the meetings once the group decided we were to go

forward. One impact of the firings on the study was - the educators also wanted to cut back on

the amount of time they had previously agreed to, engaged in the Inquiry.

As discussed in '**Chapter 3 –Methods'** I had spent a lot of time at CompHS gaining

entry and getting to know the school including many of the educators over the past 3 years.

Nevertheless, I felt unprepared for the impact on the educators of the school district firings. I

had several concerns. In light of how devastated and hopeless the educators seemed, I was

concerned about whether it would have been better for them not do the Inquiry. I was concerned

about adding another challenge to the challenges they were already facing. Further, while I understood the need for venting, I also wanted the Inquiry to be a space for learning and growth. Importantly, I was uncertain as to how to i) balance the empathy I felt, ii) incorporate the educators' recent experiences, and iii) capture the educators' frustrations to inspire hope and action.

In the end I asked the educators if they wanted to continue and they agreed to. I thought (and hoped) the study might be helpful for them. Nevertheless, there were some limitations on my ability to provide support to this group. This was because throughout the Inquiry, I struggled with how to support their learning during the Inquiry, including incorporating their recent experiences. Compared to my other school site, I felt less adept and agile in the Inquiry at this school site. In general in this session and throughout the Inquiry most of the educators seemed to come ready to discuss and engage in coming to understandings about the readings.[44] As at my CalabarHS, the Inquiry discussions focused primarily on the educators' input.

Educators' Discussion about Teachers - Part 1.   In this first session, the educators discussed various aspects of what it meant to be a teacher, including the distinction between parent and teacher and the need for evaluations to be humanistic. Shelton started the discussion, saying among other things that he reflected on the teacher/student role. Marcia picked up on Shelton's reference to reflection, and then talked about the author's admonition that teachers have to love teaching. She then moved on to talk about evaluation saying, in part,

Marcia:	Talking about the evaluation of students and when he kind of related that or juxtaposed that to punishment, so he was stating how you have to evaluate not just your students but the teachers have to be evaluated but it's looked at as punitive because it's not used in a supportive way. It's kind of a punishment; where you get evaluated it's either you're a good teacher or a bad teacher. The same things with grades for students. Either you're an A student, you have your all-star students, or you're the F students or the

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[44] In this session there were two readings from *Paulo Freire's "Teachers as Cultural Workers"*

failing students or not the honors. Honors vs. the regular students. But I don't know what his suggestion would be as far as grading. Like how do you grade? [pages 5-6, Transcript First Inquiry]

I asked for comments from the others and Donovan responded to Marcia's by talking about how he used the common assessments as a teaching tool. This response began a dialogue between Marcia and Donovan about the use and effectiveness of such a tool. Shelton then returned the conversation to Marcia's question raised earlier about evaluation,

Shelton: The writer in this reading seems to present a challenge to thinking about a different way than systematically following the structure of design, to involve everyone without the political pressures and troubles that we go through to try and get them more involved, without the traditional evaluation. I don't think that was his intent was to do, to look at other methods of trying to get more people involved without the stigmatism that caused the assessment. So he leaves you kind of vague, which direction do we go? Do we follow the politic view, the direction that's given to get to the end result or do we look for another method to reach that?

Me: Any thoughts?

Janice: Yeah. I think his approach is exactly what [Shelton] was saying. In this country it's capitalism. The capitalism mandates certain ways of thinking that are inherent in the system. And that's played over in education and in healthcare and in every aspect of our lives . . . It seems as though it's kind of holistic, it's more humanitarian the way that he is presenting a teacher's role in the education system . . . It can't always be about numbers. It has to be about the person. And that's really hard for people in this country to swallow is that we're dealing with humans, not products. And I think that's what he kind of presented.

Dawn: I like the part on page 3, when he talks about illiteracy prevents the relationship between language, thought and reality. And I starred that because I like the reality to that, because yes, we need to let students know that education is a whole mind body soul thing, not just it's a test. [page 7, Transcript First Inquiry]

In this discussion the educators began to delve into the issue of what the education for the their students should look like. They challenged the idea that education should be primarily about testing. They noted that the author was not specific but they also noted that he was challenging educators' to use an approach that was more humanistic. Janice already began to made some

connections between schooling and larger society as she referred to the impact of capitalism on education. She also agreed with author's view of a humanistic form of education. In this way Janice (and others) were alluding to Lipman's (1997) notion that schools are contested terrain with competing meanings within the school, even from larger society. Larger societal meanings seemed to come in conflict with what the author stated and the educators seemed to agree was necessary for education.

The meanings these educators brought to the Inquiry seem unlike some of the meanings brought by some of the white teachers in CalabarHS. Unlike initially at CalabarHS, the discussions seemed to start out as real conversation as opposed to contrived conversations. Sociocultural theorist can help us to understand how these teachers' experiences as a group can provide a very different first conversation than the first conversation at CalabarHS. From a sociocultural perspective it seemed that the experiences of the educators of color at CompHS apparently have some commonalities with each other and perhaps their students, such they understood the need for a more humanizing (Harding, 1997). This commonality is not necessarily just because they are all Black. It is more complex because these teachers come from a variety of backgrounds and have had very different experiences. Rather, the commonalities seem to have come from a combination of being people in subordinated status in society and working with students whose status at their school was also subordinated. They seemed to be educators who came to some understanding that they had to work against the system to some degree in their efforts to educate their students. For example, in some discussions outside of the Inquiry the educators talked about the school seeming to be organized to disrupt education and they nonetheless had to teach despite this. It is important to note that CompHS educators are

devoid of deficit thinking. However, the tension that existed within the CalabarHS Inquiry does not seem to be present here.

Learning Processes (Shared Thinking; Supporting each other's Learning; Focus on the text). As they began the Inquiry the educators exhibited attempts at moving toward shared thinking. For example, Marcia picked up on Shelton's reference to reflection. Moreover, when Shelton referred to author's discussion on evaluation in the text we were discussing, Marcia refocused her attention to discussing the challenge for both teachers and students to have evaluations that were supportive and not punitive. The educators engaged with each other and began to support each other in their learning as they seemed to negotiate shared meanings around what it meant to be a "teacher". When they went off topic, Shelton took some leadership in the conversation and returned refocused the conversation. They made specific references to the text and they also seemed to build on each other's comments. As they negotiated the meaning of teacher or teaching the educators seemed to be including some complex notions about inequality. For example, Janice referred to the impact on education and other social systems of capitalism. The apparent equality in terms of power positions in the group seemed to created an immediate access to real conversations with a potential for creating shared meanings.

Educators' Discussion about Teachers - Part 2. After Dawn spoke, Marcia seemed to take issue with previous comments about the humanitarian view that others believed the author was espousing. Marcia further raised an important point about what teachers should have to put up with and when they should take a stand. This is a poignant issue for these educators at this moment given the recent firings in their school and district. She began to question what the author really meant and wondered if he wanted teachers to accept poor working conditions. In

179

this way the educators alluded to the challenges of teaching and balancing their own needs and

the needs of their students. Marcia's concern elicited supportive comments from her colleagues.

Marcia: If he thinks that, why in the next sentence, which is what a lot of people, you must
             dare so that we can continue to teach for an all time under conditions that we know well,
             no salaries, not with respect, with the risk of becoming prey, criticism. Why is he so
             accepting of that? Ok, yes, this is something we need to accept as educators, but he's so,
             like he's so rah rah, he's so ok let's fight this injustice, let's fight this, but as teachers we
             just have to accept that we're not going to get respect, we're not going to get great
             salaries, and … Everything else he says, like all throughout, I was like yeah yeah yeah,
             but then with that I was just kind of like, doing the same thing as the powers that be.
             [page 9, Transcript First Inquiry]

Janice responded in part,

Janice :   And I think he's saying that because he knows where the true power lies. He's an
             advocate for true democracy and for humanity it seems, and so it seems like the same
             thing. Most teachers, it's a breed of people, we're a breed of people. Not everybody, even
             some of us on this campus are not really the chosen ones. And so I feel like it's kind of
             like you're stuck in the between . . . Then on page 6 he says the teaching task also
             requires a capacity to fight for freedom without which the teaching task becomes
             meaningless. I think that's our goal at the end of the day is to create free minds. Through
             English, through math, through history, through science, through whatever it is that we're
             teaching.

Donovan: Because if you think about it, our kids live it, and they're stuck in it, and I think
             he's probably saying if you're going to do something, you've got to be willing to go and
             be in it for their sake. And kind of deal with it until you can be that change agent. And
             just to kind of go to where he was talking about I think the big push for the powers that
             be might be to use us as their surrogate parents. The more and more we act as surrogate
             parents, then to be seen as parents, and then that kind of pacifies us, how are you going to
             walk out on the kids, but when he was saying well the parents don't get this right. And I
             was thinking, well maybe the parents should strike.

Shelton: Who says they don't?

Donovan: Maybe that's the problem. Maybe parents don't strike in terms of, we don't want,
             we're going to turn off the TV, we're going to not listen to certain music, we're going on
             strike as a family, because how do you put the parents in the position where feel like they
             have no say and then move us into that same category. You don't have any say either.
             That's what I'm kind of getting with this. Oh, we are, we're the ones here, and he's
             saying you have to deal with these conditions, but don't be caught up in that whole

180

> thinking that you're really hurting the kids by going on strike because someone has to do it.

Janice : It would really be bettering, it's bettering the situation if teachers were to go on strike, like the people at the grocery stores have gone on strike. It's fighting for what they demand, at the end of the day, the value of human worth goes up. So it's all reciprocity, it's all symbiotic. But in that moment in time it may not seem as such. [pages 9-10, Transcript First Inquiry]

In challenging the author Marcia may have brought different meanings (from her colleagues) to interpreting the text. Nonetheless, she raised important questions about addressing teachers' working conditions. This was a significant issue for these educators and many others in 'urban' schools (Rogers et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2007). Her comments elicited responses from her colleagues as they made efforts towards mutual understandings. Further, Janice seemed to expand on the group's understanding as she referred to the author's call to fight for freedom and she echoed the call for making efforts at consciousness raising, as some critical theorists require, or to "create free minds" (Freire, 2005; Morrell, 2008). In the end, Marcia does not say more on this topic and it is unclear whether she accepts this attempts at shared meaning. Nonetheless, she sparked her colleagues' engagement. Ultimately her colleagues conclude that striking is better not only for the profession and but implicitly better for the students as well, because as Janice noted, the "value of human worth goes up."

After this discussion the educator brought up some resource-oriented ideas. These included their understanding of the need to build relationships and connect with students even when they were warned not to get close to students. They also talked about the need to be considered as professionals so they can be taken seriously when they attempt to fight the injustices of resource inequalities. Some of these ideas are discussed in more detail in chapter 4. Among other things the educators talked about the notion of having understanding of their students. As well they talked about students potential, for example Janice referred to her students

as having "a million dollars worth of a brain." As the discussion continued, the educators further discussed what the author meant when he asked about teaching and learning including the notion that both students and teachers are to learn. Interestingly Marcia made the very important point that learning occurs over time, even over a long time when she talked about being exposed to the concept of 'epistemology' in seventh grade, a term she didn't then, but now understood.

Learning Processes (Negotiating Meanings through Questioning, Disagreeing and Sharing Information; Bridging). In the previous quotes, the educators seemed to continue their efforts to develop some shared meanings about what it meant to be a teacher. When Marcia pointedly disagreed with the author, first Janice and then Donavan made moves to bridge their understandings with Marcia's. This bridging of different understandings is a process that researchers have identified in shared endeavors (Rogoff & Toma, 1997). For example, responding to Marcia's concern, Janice built on her comments about working conditions and then proceeded to discuss by way of explanation what Janice termed an "in the between" space traversing the poor working conditions of teachers and students' needs. By this she suggested the need to balance these issues. Donovan building on Janice's comments, and referring back to Marcia's initial question acknowledged that students have less power than teachers and need their help. Even though he admitted that teachers are expected to put up with a lot, he also implied there were limits.

Missed Opportunity? This discussion might well represent a moment of missed opportunity on my part. Given the discussion about striking, this was a potentially good place to make connections between the educators' new learning and the recent firings. This could have also been a good place to ask about potential other alternatives actions the educators could

182

currently take. This was also a potentially good place to talk about how the educators could go about raising consciousness in the future.

Systemic Concerns.

Educators' Discussion (Counterstory). In a discussion about the demographics and culture of the school the educators talked about some of the challenges with educating their students. They discussed concerns about shifting demographics as well as shifts in culture at their school and surrounding neighborhood. Some of the language they used could be seen as deficit-oriented. For example, the educators talked about students being de-sensitized by television watching they believed parents used as babysitters. The educators also talked about some parents being afraid of their students, implying a lack of parental control of their students. Nonetheless, Shelton used the discussion about culture and demographics as an opportunity to refer back to the reading to help understand how to address the demographic and cultural changes. Interestingly, as they spoke, a counter-story seemed to be evolving - about teachers at the school being capable. They said,

Shelton: I think the title we just read, *Teachers as Cultural Workers*, I think that kind of
               says it all for us. Because we deal with a lot of different cultures. And we have to really
               touch on everything that comes to us. And for some way, as you were just stating before,
               what is learning, how do we teach learning, how do we actually teach? Everything comes
               at us differently, everybody accepts and receives information differently. So we have to
               find different avenues or ways to touch either form, verbally, even physical. Physical
               meaning, they physically walk through a motion and return to teach them. But whatever
               method it takes, we have to find that method for that particular situation to get our point
               across to them that we're trying to teach. So you have to be very, very talented and very
               aware of some of the things that you have to present to get your lesson across. [a lot of
               talking over each other for the next several comments; generally agreeing with each
               other]

Me: And do you think we have a lot of that talent here at this school?

Shelton   The teachers here? I think so. I truly do.

Me: Most of them, some of them?

Dawn: To reach the kids?

Shelton: We have a lot of teachers who can do it.

Me: You think of a lot of teachers who can?

Shelton: I think we have a lot of teachers who can. I know we have some who don't choose
                to do it, but I think we have quite a few who can actually do it.

Me: How many do you think can and do?

Shelton: How many?

A: I mean, just an estimate, 1/3, 1/2.

Shelton: Percentage wise?

Marcia: Maybe go by last year's numbers. I've never seen some of these teachers   in
                action and I don't know. Everybody has a skill. Everybody's good at something.
                And you can reach… [page 23, Transcript First Inquiry]

After the above, Dawn joined in the discussion and reiterated her belief that it was important to

go beyond teaching, saying "*in this community you really need to show the student that you*

care." [page 24, Transcript First Inquiry]. With this statement Dawn both built on ideas of her

colleagues and again evoked the resource-oriented idea of teachers connecting with students to

develop relationships with the students in ways that will engage them and showed the students

they cared. Implicit in this discussion is notion that students have the capacity to learn as well as

the acknowledgement that some teachers were not doing this.

In the quotes above, some resource-oriented concepts evolved as Shelton suggested, contrary to an often-told story about this school (and similar 'urban' schools) that it is a 'bad' school, that many of the teachers in the school, were capable teachers. Unfortunately, it also seemed that many that were believed to be capable did not extend themselves (either because of lack of opportunity or support).[45] From a research perspective, this was good news. This seemed like a vast untapped resource and it would be interesting to know if it is possible to tap into this reservoir and how. Further, Shelton's suggestion of the potential of teacher support and leadership is not unfounded. Educational researchers have found appropriate teacher support and leadership to be effective in terms of increasing student achievement (See Ladson-Billings & Gomez, 2001; Diamond, 2004).

Learning Processes (Connecting the Text; Telling a Counterstory). In the above quotes from the Inquiry discussions, as the educators have done before, Shelton made specific connections between the text they read and the circumstances at their school. Here he seemed to exhibit another kind of shared thinking that scholars have identified (Rogoff & Toma, 1997). He indicated he had engaged shared thinking with the author through reading and was now also relating his knowledge to his current context. As part of the discussion the educators also seemed to tell a counter-story about their school. They seemed to challenge and speak back to a dominant discourse around their school and school like theirs that teachers and students were bad. This is an important potential resource. There is potential here for creating a space for encouraging educators and building learning amongst them toward assisting students.

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[45] So the researcher nerd in me is doing a cartwheel—because if these educators (believed to be some of the best on the campus) thought there are many others who would be 'good' 'effective' teachers – then the possibilities for change is enormous and figuring out how to uncover this potential--very promising.

185

Learning Concerns.

Providing Support. In between sessions, as at the other school site, I attempted to check in with each educators. Shelton is often difficult to locate unless he is in the school's detention hall. The teachers are in usually in their classrooms and I am able to have some conversations. I did not have to do as much relationship building as at my other research site but wanted to try to address any concerns regarding the sessions and also I wanted to identify someone who would take a leadership role with respect to the group. There was also less of a power location concern within this group however there was some reluctance with engaging with the administrators. It seemed that leadership amongst the group might help.

Because I recently met Shelton, the assistant principal, I made an effort to, and did meet with him more often. Our discussions ranged from talking about inequality in general to discussing the place of discipline in school, to providing leadership and support to the other members in the group. For example, we spoke about whether and how he could support the teachers in their efforts. Since his main job seemed to be as dean of discipline we also talked about alternate ways to approach discipline, not punishment but as providing support to students. In addition to Shelton I attempted to speak with each of the other educators to i) identify a concern at the school that they think they could work on together, ii) encourage them to figure out ways to challenge and work with their administrators, and iii) to find specific ways support each other in their work.

Educator Discussion - Learning (is Culturally Relevant) - Part 1. Janice started this conversation by stating that defining 'learning is social' depended on the goal of teaching. She implied by an example she gave that the testing and standards based schooling was a deterrent to students' learning. Janice said,

Janice: I think it depends on, see there's a goal at the end of the year, at the end of the day, when you're a public school teacher. And that goal is API scores. CST. So there was this one teacher that I met when I was in Atlanta and he used to be a public school teacher and got out of it and started his own home school, African-centered school at home for students. And he said, if you're a public school teacher, either you are basically, I'm going to misquote him, but he's basically saying either you are working for the man or you are not – you can't be both. You can't be a revolutionary and working for the man. You're playing a role. You're basically a messenger.

Marcia joined in the conversation to talk about her belief that it was possible to address

culturally relevant issues and still cover standards but that it would take time. She said,

Marcia: I think [there's] a way to connect culturally plus teach the standards but that takes, ok, bring a group of teachers in and like right when the school year ends at the beginning of the summer and they have to make you work until the end of the summer and you have to pay them or whatever you have to do to align that curriculum with the standards and not base the curriculum off of the textbook and the material that's in the textbook. And there's a way to do that but it takes time. So you can teach the standards, and like the seniors that were coming in last year and all of them acting like they didn't know how to do a bibliography, you can do a research paper on Latino culture or African culture, get your sources, cite it in the end of the paper. You're learning a standard. You know what I'm saying? You don't have to teach necessarily the material that's in the book for you to be aligned with the standards. But it takes time, it takes effort, and it takes everybody being on board to say, okay, this is what we're going to do for our students.

Janice: Which is seems like this is the main thing that we struggle with personally at [CompHS], is not necessarily coming together because, especially with our department, like we can come together and we can get along and we can get things. It's just as far as like being consistent with it and seeing things all the way through. I think that's where like the ball just drops somewhere and I know that's systematic. That starts from the District all the way over here. Something happens where like this … something is just piled on top of that and now we can't even get back to where we're going to get to.

Me: What are the somethings that are piled on top?

Marcia: They'll say, this test is, did you know you ought to do this essay contest. Now you have this thing you're to hold. That's why I really did jump out of the class because that was just too much for me. Oh now, this is going to be self-testing. We're going to pull out your students. It's going to be 10 every day out of this period. They didn't get to finish. It's going into next month. And these are kids that are missing out and we have to catch them up every time they come on. You really don't want to move forward because you know you have to catch up the whole class. And then okay, here comes this ILAP and this CST and they won't make it like the same time each year. It's like jumping around and moving around so it's hard for you to have a calendar and plan out your

187

lessons and get through what you're trying to cover in a consistent, efficient time. So you're always behind, trying to play catch up, and so I didn't want to feel like that any more.

Dawn: I told the students yesterday, I don't think I've taught you anything in the past two weeks. It's frustrating.

Marcia: It's frustrating. [page 13, Transcript Second Inquiry]

When Marcia suggested that standards and culturally relevant could coincide, she both challenged Janice's comment and brought up a potential solution to the focus on testing that the school seemed to require. The educators identified some systemic barriers to working together while continuing a counter-story about their school, when they suggest that their department worked well together. The discussion about institutional barriers highlighted the importance of organizational structures and meanings that support the work of the educators at schools. The organizational meanings of the schools seemed to give rise to school policies that were disruptive of students' learning and teaching. These meanings seemed connected to larger policies that focused on testing and concerns other than the development of students. However, research has shown that notwithstanding societal inequality and deficit discourse about low-income or children of color, organizations can create policies and engage in practices that can challenge teachers to take increased responsibility for their students' learning (Diamond, 2004). Researchers have found that the more rigid the organizational structure however, the more difficult it is to make change (Vaughan, 2001). It seemed that the organizational structure at CompHS was indeed rigid, much more so than at CalabarHS for example. This discussion also highlighted another important difference between the two research sites that is related to organizational structure. At CalabarHS, the principal and her powerful AP were involved in the Inquiry and if there were re-articulations or other agreements evolved out of this project, they were able, if they agreed, to implement policy. However, at CompHS, it was still unclear

188

whether the AP, Shelton was willing or able to, and if so, how he would exercise power to implement any such agreement at that site.

Learning Processes (Challenging each other; Bridging). When Janice questioned what the goal of education was as a way of addressing learning as a social endeavor, Marcia challenged her on that point. She did so in a way that was not contentious. Marcia picked up on Janice's point and then and engaged in some bridging processes. She bridged Janice's comments about the seemingly incompatible goals of education by suggesting ways it was possible. For example she said they needed to have everyone on board. Responding Janice seemed to agree with Marcia as Janice suggested that the idea of everyone being on board an issue of concern. Rather she thought the institutional barriers were of concern.   In this discussion, the educators continued their counterstory as they suggested that their department was able to work well together to get things done.

Another Missed Opportunity? This discussion seemed to evoke a sense of powerlessness among some of the educators. This was an area of learning for me. What was missing from the discussion was questioning about what, if anything, these educators could do differently to address their identified concerns at the school. This was another point where I could possibly have asked more critical questions to challenge the educators' learning. Here the educators talked about cultural relevancy and even spoke about some systemic concerns that inhibited learning at the school and possibly providing barriers implementing such work. Asking how the educators could possibly overcome some of these barriers and seeking to deepen the conversation about 'culturally relevant' (See Paris, 2012) for including students' voices (Morrell, 2008), may have helped better support the educators' learning.

189

Educators' Discussion - Learning (Resourced-Oriented and Deficit Ideas; Attempted Re-articulation) – Part 3.   Continuing the discussion about learning the educators expressed many frustrations of teaching including students being "behind." In talking about their concerns, the educators, expressed some resource oriented and deficit oriented ideas about their students (some of these are discussed in chapter 4). As an example of a resource-oriented idea, Donovan acknowledged that he learned from his students and that he believed his students gained much wisdom from their access to technology and social media. This characterization of his students as being wise and a source of his own learning was again part of the counter-story about these 'urban' youth not often heard and is a potential space for building learning.

Later in the discussion Dawn suggested that education was in the hands of the students that students living in "crappy conditions" should want to leave their situations to become better. Implicit in this discussion was a potentially deficit idea about students and their communities being only "crappy". The notion that students may not want to leave because their "crappy" conditions was their home did not seem acceptable to the educators. Janice also agreed with this notion of leaving. She talked about telling her students that they should want to be their best selves and that if they were not in a place where they can be their best selves they should want to leave. This notion of having to leave home to become "better" and to become educated is complex and appeared to have deficit meanings about the students' communities.

I challenged the educators to consider whether the students might not want to leave their homes and instead should be given tools to contribute to their communities and perhaps even to change what might be problematic. Janice responded to this challenge by saying that she understood. Nonetheless, she also was unmoved as she said that in order to change one's community one must first leave to become educated. This is a difficult issue. It seemed that in

this instant Janice had adopted some of the larger discourse around low income and communities of color and that little good can come from the communities, or the homes of the students, and their families. For some students being told to leave their communities can be interpreted as a denial of their identity. Nevertheless, Janice attempted to address my challenge and the attempt at re-articulation when she said in part,

Janice: …And I think that's what – not to denigrate the students and the environment because when we do that, we denigrate ourselves. I'm a product of the same environment. But it's just recognizing like it's – and it's like this on purpose – it's like, you're living like this because somebody wants you to live like this. So you don't have to live like this…

Learning Process (Making Some Concessions; Continuing Counterstory alongside deficit meanings). The educators seemed opened to consider some new meanings around some of their deficit ideas. They seemed to make some concessions but ultimately they also did seem to hold onto much of their ideas. This seemed to require additional discussion. They however also continued their counterstory telling. This time the educators talked about their students' knowledge. These resource-oriented ideas also existed alongside deficit oriented ideas as well.

More on the Role of Teachers.

Providing Support. Given the earlier discussions about systemic concerns at the school I wondered whether Shelton, the AP would be able to provide some leadership and support as an AP at the school. So far that has not been the case. He seemed to have made his way through the organization by not making waves and did not seem inclined to change. One of the other educators had sought his assistance and said he seemed reluctant. As a result, I sought him out again and spoke with him on several occasions about the possibilities of providing leadership. He did not seem willing. He said he was very busy. Nonetheless, on one occasion he did ask for readings about discipline that took a supportive approach. I continued to speak with each other

educator about building relationships with the administration, but there was reluctance. The educators seemed to bring different seemingly conflicting meanings about their students. On one hand the educators exhibited commitment and concern for their students. On the other hand, they also held some deficit ideas about students and their communities. Using a critical theoretical lens, it seem that the educators including Shelton were aware of their subordinated positions with respect to the organizational structure of the school especially in relation to the operation of the school district. It is likely that their subordinated position in society as people of color helped to make this awareness even more keen. As an administrator Shelton was not immune as indicated by both the many changes in leadership at the school over the past several years. Further he was one of the educators who was initially given a 'pink slip.'

Educators' Discussion – Role of Teacher and Learning about Poverty. In this session[46] the educators discussed at length the reading about the governmental and other policies that contributed to the development of poverty in some low-income communities of color including their own. In addition, we discussed the connections to the low-resourced schools many students of color attend including CompHS. As the discussions continued more deficit and resource oriented ideas came up, including references to students' community as a "ghetto." There was little discussion about what is good there is about the communities the students live in and what resources or assets might exist as spaces to build on for purposes of learning and growth. Nonetheless, they looked to author's idea of the potential for a social movement. Interestingly Janice saw a role for teachers as potential organizers to create a social movement. Further, again there is an underlying counter-story, she suggested that the students were capable and need consistent support. She made the assessment that it is necessary to "change students' minds" by

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46 Marcia is not present at this session.

192

helping them to understand how inequality affects them. As they discussed the governmental policies that helped to support poverty, it became clear that Donovan was learning some new information. With this, he adopted Janice's earlier statement that teachers must help "change minds" of their students. Even though Donovan appeared initially surprised at some of the discussions, he seemed open to learning and readily agreed with Janice's statement.

   Learning Processes (Making Connections; Jointly Theorizing). As the educators read these texts, they pondered their role as educators and concluded it was important to reveal to and discover with students – 'what is going on.' They made some specific connections to the texts they were reading and what they believed they needed to do at their school to have an impact. These statements about the need to "change minds" and "heighten awareness" in their students are important. In this way the educators again showed some understanding that education for their students of color is more that just teaching a set of facts or passing tests (Morrell, 2008). They exhibited the process of jointly theorizing, or "playing around with and idea" (Rogofff & Toma, 1997) about how they could affect the education of students caught up in the throes of inequality. According to Nasir & Hand (2006) "learning…is deeply embedded in the joint work of individuals and at they negotiate and manage their participation" (p.463). the educators seemed to be working together as they support each other's learning and also continuing to negotiate the meaning of teaching within their school.

   Educators' Discussion – Role of Teacher; Learning Through Disagreement and Support.[47] Responding to the question of what is the banking method, Dawn answered among other things that it seemed like in "banking" method there was no critical thinking. Donovan explained that in "banking", the teacher assumed he knew everything and the students simply

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[47] In this session, we discussed portions of *Paulo Freire's, Pedagogy of the Oppressed.*

had to listen. Donovan also pointed out that banking education involved rote-learning and

memorization of materials. Marcia however picked up on Donovan's comment and took issue

with the author. Giving some examples she suggested that some rote learning or memorization

was necessary to learn the basics in education. Marcia then concluded in part that, "So you need

a little bit of that and you need a little bit of this, and you need to combine it so that we can all do

well and be fruitful." I agreed with Marcia and suggested that author did not seem to argue with

obtaining the basics in education. Marcia disagreed, remaining largely unmoved, she said

Marcia: I thought he was. Because everything was negative. When I was taking notes, it's
               not necessarily, you know, taking notes all day. And it was like everything was bad, like
               all that is bad. I don't think it's necessarily all bad. You can't just have that be the
               majority – that can't be all that you do. But you do need some of that.

The other educators, in this case, Janice, and attempted to expand on Marcia's understanding as

she explained her own understanding of the reading. Janice said in part,

Janice.   I think the main thing that he's saying, the banking education or the banking
               process, it's not reciprocity. It's not learning from your students. It's students learning
               from you period. And that just aggravates the humanness. The whole idea is just to
               realize that we are as one, as beings on this earth, and we need to learn from each other.
               And the way to do that is to be cognitive. And as he says, liberating education consists of
               acts of cognition, not transferrals of information. So it's not just about me teaching you a
               concept and you knowing that A + B = whatever. But it's about do you actually
               understand that? Can you apply that? Why does that relate to your life? And what can
               you, now that you know that, teach me as the teacher? What can I learn from you now.
               And that makes the world go round…

Marcia, still not ready to accept the explanations continued to resist and responded,

Marcia: I think that there's a lot of people, you know, that are saying, yeah, we want the
               kids to be critical thinkers, but no they're saying that but they just want students to agree
               with them or with their point of view. If you're really trying to teach a child how to be a
               critical thinker, you'd give the child this point of view, you'd give the child this point of
               view… But now, you're just giving them your same opinion. You're not teaching them.

194

As the discussion continued, Marcia spoke more of her understanding of the readings. Her

statements drew Dawn and Donovan into the conversation.

Marcia:	But I think as educators, educators are, say for instance, as high school teachers you're an expert in this field like if you're an English teacher you're an expert in this field, like you're a math teacher, just like at university level you have teachers who are experts in certain fields but it's more specific the field that they're experts in right? So when a student gets to your classroom to wherever, I think it's the teacher's responsibility to initiate the conversation, engage the students in that conversation, facilitate, and then also be a part of that conversation or whatever is going on in the learning process. So I really did have a problem with this because I just don't think that teachers think that they're going to come in and pour the knowledge into your brain and you're going to just go away with their knowledge. I don't agree with this. I don't agree with this at all because I've never seen education from that standpoint at all…

Dawn:	I had the same question. When I first read it, I was taken aback too, and I wrote, who says … But when I think about it, [Ms. Thompson], my 11th grade English teacher, that's who she was. She really was like, I'm the expert, I've been teaching for 20 years. I know what I'm doing … We may not be that way, … somebody like [Mr. Lewis], he may think that way. He may think he knows all and he's going to give these kids this information. There may be some cultural biases that go along with it that will make a teacher feel as though they are that high and mighty to impart only the information, but I think within our generation, I don't think we think that way.

Donovan and Janice also gave additional examples and responding to them, Marcia seemed to

acquiesce and said,

Marcia:	Maybe that's why they're so confused. Because everyone's coming at them with a different approach and they don't know like – but I think they have to learn that because in college you're going to have to deal with different professors that are going to have different requirements and whatever. Like right now they're a little bit confused. Well this person wants this, and this person this is more important, and this person it's this test, and this person it's their notebook, this person it's this essay. So they're kind of confused. And I've only been around one person that ever, a teacher that thought like they were the wisest person on earth. Like there's only one teacher I've ever been around in life that acted like that. I've never ever met another person that's ever done, that they're smarter than any other teacher. You can do that to kids because if you've been teaching something for 15 years or 20 years and studying it all through college, like you should be an expert in whatever that field is, but that's not – you shouldn't belittle other people and make other people feel badly. But I've never been around another person in life that's ever done that. [pages 5-7, Transcript Fourth Inquiry]

Interestingly, this is the second time that Marcia's disagreement with the author seemed to indicate she may be bringing some different meanings from her colleagues. In fact in this case, she argued she did not know of teachers who used the banking method. Sociocultural theorists would argue - that Marcia could bring different meanings to the reading of the text from some of her colleagues and me because of her experiences. If that was the case, Marcia's disagreement with the author showed her attempt to make sense of how the reading related to her experiences. Interestingly the author would likely be encouraged by Marcia's challenging of the text. Also interesting is the discussion about the two teachers who were given as examples of models of banking methods. Ms. Thompson is African American and Mr. Lewis is white. Even though they do not say identify the race of these teachers, the way their actions are described, there seems to be a harsher description of Mr. Lewis and there was an allusion to cultural differences. The point here is that Ms. Thompson's action may be as problematic for students and as a result, she should not be given a 'pass' because she is African American.

Learning Processes. (Disagreement; Explanation by Colleagues; Some Concessions). In this discussion Marcia started out by disagreeing with what she believed the author was saying. Dawn responded by bridging Marcia's statement saying in part "I had the same question" then went one to explain her own understanding. Again shared thinking does not require complete agreement but rather efforts to come to mutual understandings as is indicated by Dawn's respond. The educators were continuing to engage in processes of shared meaning 'negotiation'. Her colleagues provided additional information from their own different experiences and understanding to help support Marcia's learning and the author's thesis.

As a result of her colleagues' support, in her last statement that essentially ends this part of the discussion, Marcia appeared to make some concessions. By admitting that students might

196

be confused with the different methods that their different teachers use, she seemed to come to agree with the notion that enough teachers participate in banking education for there to be concern. Her learning seemed to increase beyond what she expressed as her own experience. In that case, her learning came not from simply reading the material but also as the discussion proceeded and with some back and forth discussion, in a process of social interaction.

Educators' Discussion – Teacher and Relevance of Race . Next the educators responded to Dawn's request for an explanation of Friere's problem-posing concept. In their responses there were some more deficit ideas evolved about parents as discussed in Chapter 4. They talked about whether race mattered in educating their students. After some discussion, the educators seemed to conclude that being an educator of color was not sufficient to make connections with and teach students of color.

Marcia: It's different because students, they prejudge you when you walk through the door, just like some teachers prejudge when they walk through the door the students. I'm Nigerian American. I don't speak necessarily with an accent, but Ms. [Aidoo] or whoever, they speak with an accent, and they get a totally different reaction from a student versus okay Mr. [Kent], Mr. [Clark], they have totally different engagements.

Me: Are they black? White?

Marcia: They're white. So it's different. Like they have different experiences. And her reaction was different than how some teachers may react here.

Janice: I remember when I was up on the hill, I think you [Marcia] had just moved out [of] there and got in the library, but there was this one male black teacher and he wore these glasses and he was kind of chubby, and he was only here for maybe like the first month. He was like a nerd. Big black guy, wore glasses, I don't remember his name, but the kids gave him hell. Every day. And he looks just like the kids. But they couldn't – it's the energy.

Donovan: When I first started teaching, I thought, okay, I was black like you but I came straight from [Northern California city] which is more white, and they [the students] told me I was white. They would tell me I wasn't black. I had to adjust. It's a cultural thing, culture basically. And I had so much to learn from them. Basically, all right, be about it.

Let me learn from you too so I can relate to you better. [pages 19-22, Transcript Fourth Inquiry]

Learning Process (Challenging Own Assumptions About Race). Their ongoing negotiation of the definition of 'Teacher' the educators initially say that race mattered implying that students of color needed teachers of color. After some discussion they came to agree that race both mattered and sometimes may not matter in everyday interactions with students and by implication, in students' learning. They brought examples from their own experience that indicated that as educators, being of color was not enough. This is important learning. So far, these educators of color have indicated that they too have deficit ideas about students of color. This is part of the challenge of education and reform efforts. The point is to figure out how to have discussions about these issues in ways that are meaningful and to address concerns that may effect students in ways that can be beneficial for their learning. Using a sociocularal analysis together with a critical analysis can help with understanding how different people of the same race can bring different meanings to a context and how race can matter in very different ways. While the status of being in a subordinated position can help educators of color related to students of color, other location issues may take precedent in everyday interactions with students. This can explain how an African American like Donovan for example while from a mostly white neighborhood can both have difficulty with relating to his students from a low-income community but then finds ways to connect with them.

Missed Opportunity? This discussion presented a potential opportunity to discuss how people of color can also hold ideas that are deficit-oriented particularly given the educator's realization that being of color was not enough to provide students of color with an appropriate education. This was another point of learning and potential opportunity I missed.

Educators' Discussion - Proposal of a Group Project. In previous sessions the group

discussed a potential group project to increase or otherwise address school spirit. In this session,

Marcia suggested another possibility for a group project,

Marcia: Just an idea because I remember [Janice] bringing up in the last meeting
                 something about if you are part of education system, you can't be…

Janice: [on] both sides.

Marcia: Yes. I don't remember the exact words, I don't want to misword you but saying
                 you're part of the educational system and you teach (____) and the oppression thing,
                 whatever. I don't know how I feel about oppression. But I was thinking that we could do
                 a cultural curriculum and each of us take a grade level and kind of based on the standards
                 create a curriculum that's for children of color – not just African-American but African-
                 American, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, like everything that reflects our school
                 currently and teach to that. Teach our standards to that. So yes, there are some things that
                 you can bring in as supplement but then I think we could teach from novels but hit every
                 standard, or teach using movie clips, using commercials, using whatever, different media,
                 different genres and make a curriculum for our students that maybe you guys could use in
                 the classrooms next year that is culturally relevant.

Dawn: I think that's a great idea. I was telling - now I remember you were talking about
                 it. Yes, because you were saying to create a syllabus and having those culturally relevant
                 materials outside of what the district is saying teach them by these stories in the book.
                 Yes.

Marcia: And I think you could reference the stories in the book but I mean kind of like
                 that was playing based on, what are those called, assessments and quarterly assessments,
                 kind of like using that, using the standards, or whatever. Make sure you hit the power
                 standards twice throughout the whole curriculum. You kind of give it through all the
                 standards before me. Like having that in a reasonable pace and plan. So putting together,
                 like we're looking at the calendar of different things that occur over the year, like off
                 days, everything, like mapping things out and giving time. Okay, maybe two weeks or
                 three weeks just in case you need to catch up here or catch up there. You have days that
                 you can do that. So I was thinking that that would be a good idea.

Dawn: My only, not necessarily concern, is for the project – do we want to help the entire
                 school? Is that what your goal is? Like to have – because that wouldn't help our English
                 department and our students. But how do we fizzle that out to those teachers who really
                 need that help, you know what I mean?

Marcia: I was thinking that that is something that's doable. If we do this as a project, next
                 year, boom. You guys can implement that on the spot. And that touches every student 9th

through 12th grade. That's the entire school, but not necessarily another department. You guys do the Magnet[48], so if you can somehow incorporate that curriculum into your Magnet curriculum and maybe have some ideas that you could shoot to the math teachers or to the science teachers. I don't know if that's like double work or if you would be able to kind of do everything to get it right with your curriculum. (unintelligible) 10th grade or 11th grade, whatever you want to do. And do that whatever math correlates with that level for the Magnet, from a math kind of science perspective, it's a Math-Science Magnet, right? So I mean, if that's the case, maybe either research project on African-American inventors or scientists, something like that, and it's a paper.

Janice: I think that's great. That's something we've talked about before, just creating a curriculum that actually is relevant. I think that's great. I think we can add in another component to it which would be to come to include like a socioeconomic piece to it, too. Like include writings from authors. Some authors who have overcome the economic barriers too, because the cultural pieces are always great. But then there's an economic piece. [pages 22-27, Transcript Fourth Inquiry]

Learning Processes (Shared Thinking; Following Other's Line of Thought). In this discussion Marcia referred back to a line of thought Janice had introduced earlier (about working within and against the system for the benefit of the students) to introduce an alternative idea for a group project. In this way the educators seemed to be applying their learning. They discussed in some detail and agreed to take on a project proposed by Marcia. Marcia had, in that conversation proposed that there should be a way to *"connect culturally plus teach the standards."* Marcia's specific reference to comments made by Janice as the genesis of her idea evidenced shared thinking and learning with her colleagues and her willingness to act on that knowledge. There are indications of learning on Marcia's part however she does not seem to have changed dramatically as a result of the Inquiry process. Nonetheless her willingness to take on a big project is encouraging.

Educators' Discussion – Showing Continuing Openness To Learning. In our final session we discussed an article entitled "Culture as Disability" with the thesis that culture had a way of disabling people, making what they are a problem. Donovan read the following quote

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[48] She is referring to a magnet program begun by the school recently. Janice and Dawn are involved in this magnet.

from the article *"Human psychology may well provide the keyboard but it's society which plays the tune."* He explained that he believed this quote encompassed the main idea of the article as follows,

Donovan: And then, so what I was getting from this is that maybe each society when they play that tune or they play that keyboard think – because we're used to this, this is the way everybody should play the keyboard. You keep hitting that flat note so you're "disabled" because you don't play like us.

Donovan: I think for African-Americans in terms of education, every difference is negative.

Me: Is it negative? Or do we see it as that?

Donovan: I think we see that as negative.

Further Janice made two important points (i) that education has been tainted in its view of students of color and she felt the readings provided some alternative ways of looking at education and (ii) building on an earlier point by Marcia that there was still an obligation to hold people accountable. Marcia like the others continued to try to understand the reading as she talked about how disability is relative to particular society as follows,

Marcia: Disability is relative to that society or that culture, kind of like what he was talking about in that society of the blind, where everyone was blind. But he had one eye. To us, in this culture that would be abnormal for him to have one eye. But he went to the blind society and he was very different from people who were in that society because he could see. So our culture and our society to not be able to read is a disability. The norm is, you see here, you can walk, this is the norm. Anything that is other than that is not normal, it's a disability. You're hindered. You can't navigate through life.

This session ended with a summary by Shelton and agreement by Donovan that everyone brought something to the table, he said

Shelton: This is just an observation from the reading, is that what I kind of got, the picture I was getting from the reading was the author was trying to get across that no matter what you bring to the table, everybody brings something to contribute. No matter how you

come to the table, people at the table should be open to receive and not judge so rapidly. And that's kind of like the gist of what I was getting that he was presenting. That if everyone has something to contribute, then although there are different cultures within a culture, the table was open and it should be open for everyone.

Me: That is a fantastic summary.

Donovan: And when that happens, it's like with Martha's Vineyard, the whole – everybody is strengthened. [page 13-15; Transcript Fifth Inquiry]

Learning Processes (Shared Thinking; Learning from Text). As the sessions ended the educators continued to show an interest in learning. They continued to engage in shared thinking processes and learning from the texts we read as well as from each other's experiences. In this session the educators analyzed the readings and seemed to come to some common conclusions about what the authors was trying to say. They alluded to the important concern for students who do not fit within dominant views espoused in education. As Donovan poignantly described it, being considered: *"disabled because you don't play like us."* There were indications of potential learning on the part of Marcia as she associated not being able to read with potentially being considered disabled. Implicit in her comment is the notion that if students of color were not able to read could be problematic. There were indications that others learned as well. For example, Janice's summary of what the readings have meant for her was an indication of her learning and a continued willingness to come to shared meanings about the readings.

Summary of Chapter 6 Findings.

Learning of Marcia and the CompHS Inquiry Group. Socio-culturalists indicate that learning is both about taking on new knowledge structures and about personal transformation or changing one's role (Nasir & Hand, 2006). There was evidence that this CompHS Inquiry group took on new knowledge. However, there was no clear evidence of transformation of changing roles. In this Inquiry Marcia was alternately that of learner, teacher and active

202

participant/associate. In instances where she disagreed with or found the language of the readings to be contrary to her experience discussions with her colleagues sometimes helped to move toward shared understandings or meanings. As part of her learning, Marcia exercised the cultural practice of disagreeing and questioning what she read. These moments seemed to help create spaces for her colleagues to support her learning. As well, her comments about the readings provided learning for her colleagues or were the basis of building blocks for providing additional information. In addition, the CompHS group too exhibited learning as they discussed the various readings. Further evidence of their learning was the subsequent complexity of their discussions including those in relation to their potential curriculum project. For example, they focused on the requirement to address standards realizing they did not have to necessarily follow the playbook that the district had given them. In discussing a potential culturally relevant curriculum, Janice incorporated some of her learning about the development of low-income communities and discussed the importance of including analyses about the economic status of people of color beyond just a focus on culture. The discussion showed the group was willing to come to common understandings and to use what they learned to address the larger concerns of their school. The willingness of Marcia and the group to take on a major project that could have school wide impact also indicated some intention to shift their roles within the school. The educators previously seemed primarily focused on their work in the classroom (or with their own students) and had expressed some unwillingness to engage on a broader basis. In taking on new learning the group exhibited a number of learning processes that theorists have identified as indicators of learning (Toma & Rogoff, 1997). They showed they learned from the texts we read and discussed.   They challenged each other by questioning and disagreeing. They shared information and bridged each other's comments toward seeking new meanings. They sometimes

also followed each other's line of thought and even made partial concessions when before they had disagreed and they engaged in jointly theorizing. All of these learning processes supported their engagement in shared thinking processes and coming toward new shared meanings about their students' education and teaching. Within the discussions of this Inquiry group, a counterstory evolved that challenged commonly heard stories about this and similar schools. Educators talked positively about their school, their fellow educators and the students.

Nonetheless, in terms of significant change, unlike with Kate at CalabarHS, Marcia's role does not seem to shift dramatically within the group or within the school. Neither does she seem to personally change dramatically. Furthermore the level of growth within the group was uncertain. There was evidence that additional learning and discussion was important for this group. There was however a major concern at this point with respect the curriculum project the group proposed. The group had not discussed how they would address the continuity issues within the school that the group had identified in implementing their project. Although there did not appear to be evidence of transformative change among the group, the Inquiry seemed to provide learning in the form of scaffolding for potential future discussions and work.

Discussion.

At the end of the CompHS Inquiry, it was apparent that Marcia had gained new knowledge during the CompHS Inquiry and that other members of the CompHS group learned as well. It also seemed apparent however, that there had not been dramatic or transformative change in Marcia or in the CompHS group. Interestingly, although there were some disagreements, the CompHs Inquiry did not have the tensions that were present in the CalabarHS Inquiry. They seemed to come more readily to some shared understandings than the CalabarHS group. The members of the CompHS group are all black and as discussed earlier, theorists have

204

argued that race often constructs or generates "distinctive accounts" of life (Harding 1997; Prakash 1994).

It is possible that the CompHS group was able to readily come to shared meanings about the schooling and education of their students of color at least in part because (i) they shared some common experiences as members of the same race, (ii) they were members of a subordinated group in society, and (iii) they had similar positions of power in the school. Even though the assistant principal had a title that organizationally put him in a position of authority, he did not have or did not exercise this power with respect to the other members in the group. It is also likely that the CompHS group had some shared experiences with many of their students who were also members of a subordinated group (Harding, 1997). Despite having increased their learning and having come to some shared meanings however, the educators were reluctant to step far outside of their existing roles. The lack of transformation in this CompHS Inquiry suggested that learning or 'changing minds' does not necessarily lead to immediate 'change in actions.'

At CompHS, it seemed that the commonality of subordinated status the educators had with some of their student should have led them to both recognize and address some issues of inequality their students of color faced. Further, there were no clear members of the dominant class in positions of power to resist needed changes. This was because the school administration, like the staff, was largely black. Indeed, some of the CompHS educators seemed to have a keen understanding of, and commitment and desire to, address many of the concerns of inequality their students of color faced. These seemed to indicate an environment for not only learning but also transformative change. This was however not the case; forces that were almost invisible were at play.

Omi & Winant (1994) have suggested that the ruling class uses the force of hegemony by elaborating and maintaining a system of ideas together with practices (see also Gramsci, 1981). These then become 'common sense' and help maintain the ruling class' dominant status and keep the subordinated in their place. Although the CompHS group members were all black and seemed to be in similar power positions, issues of race and power greatly affected this group and the school. The families of most students at CompHS were in subordinated statuses in at least two respects. CompHS served primarily students from families that were both low-income and of color. These subordinated statuses can translate to reduced power to challenge policies and practices that are against their interests. Moreover, the organizational status of the district office afforded it a position of power that allowed it to powerfully implement policies. Hegemonic forces seemed tightly structured into the policies and practices at CompHS through the implementation and enforcement by the district office. These forces were evidenced for example, by district policies such as frequent changes in school leadership, a focus on testing and discipline, and the firing of educators or giving of 'pink slips' as budget management.

The pull of hegemony through the school district's policies and practices seemed strongly intertwined in the structure of the school. This force was almost invisible difficult to see, difficult to name and difficult to challenge in order to overcome to move toward transformation. The ideas such as the 'need' to discipline students (even when other processes might be more appropriate) and to test (given low test scores at the school) seemed to make sense. Theorists have argued that the consent of subordinated groups is often obtained by popularization of the world-view of the dominant class through a system of ideas and practices (Omi & Winant, 1994; Bates, 1975). The operation of policies that are against the interests of subordinated groups 'give' consent to the dominant group's ideas and policies (Omi & Winant, 1994; Bates, 1975;

206

Gramsci, 1971). The focus on testing and discipline to the detriment of student learning and development is against the interests of people of color. Even though the school policies and practices operated at CompHS to take the focus away from student development and learning, the administrators and many of the other educators at the school supported or complied with such policies.

In addition, even when learning has occurred, the context within which the change occurred might present challenges or create barriers to move toward changing actions. Vaughan (2001) found that with respect to change in organizations, "the greater the degree of institutionalization" in an organization, the greater "the cultural persistence" and "the greater the resistance to change" (p. 48). As such, another possible challenge to changing actions at CompHS was the degree of institutionalization of particular cultures at the school. The testing and discipline policies seemed to be very ingrained in the culture of CompHS.

In conclusion again, attempting to make changes in a particular space is situational. Even when there is agreement among educators and there are changes in their thinking, this does not mean that there will be action. Hegemonic forces and institutionalization of a particular culture can create barriers to changes in action. Nonetheless, this does not mean that changes should not be attempted. This is because the potential for benefitting students of color is great. These barriers present information about the possible necessity of additional support for the process of change. In addition, change takes time. These barriers might also indicate the need for additional time for the change process to occur. Changed minds can evolve into changed actions over time as people learn and relearn and practice even making small steps toward taking action. Furthermore, although there did not seem to be transformative change, the members of CompHS had begun to take some small steps toward turning 'changed minds' into 'changed actions.' At

the end of the Inquiry they began a small project to work on increasing the school spirit at CompHS as they believed moral was very low as the school. Even a small beginning can present hope for future action.

My Own Learning. The learning I obtained from this Inquiry was substantial. I learned that I sometimes had difficulty recognizing deficit-oriented ideas in African American educators. This Inquiry has increased my comfort level with identifying.

Differences in Result. The differences in result at CompHS versus CalabarHS may be explained by the differences in context and by my support of the Inquiry process. The school structure at CompHS was more rigid and less susceptible to change than at CalabarHS. One indicator of this rigidity was this CompHS Inquiry lacked the involvement of an administrator in a power position. Although Shelton was an assistant principal and had been at the school for close to three decades, he did not have or did not choose to wield the potential power that could come with that position. As well the recent firings in the district seemed to have had a devastating impact on the educators and it also dampened their enthusiasm to participate in the study. In addition, my lack of agility with supporting the learning of the educators as discussed above was also potentially a factor.

Postscript.

The group decided to implement first the school spirit project. The decided to embark on the culturally relevant curriculum project later. After some effort the school spirit project began. The group encountered several barriers and were unable or did not seek the help of the AP or the principal. Interestingly two separate incidents occurred causing the temporary absence of two of the group members on the school campus. One of the members continued the spirit project, which is ongoing.

Further post-script.

This year the school district has been taken over by the state. It is as yet unclear what this will mean for the school and the teachers. All of the teachers are back on campus and at least two of the teachers are making plans to move on.

Chapter 7: CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS.

Locating Meanings at the CompHS and CalabarHS.

In chapter 4, I discussed some of the meanings I found at the research sites as they related to students and their communities.

Deficit Oriented Meanings - White and Educators of Color; School Policies. At both CalabarHS and CompHS, most students were low-income and of color. When the educators (both of color and white) talked about such students and families, they often used deficit-oriented language. Such language seemed to carry deficit meanings that placed the blame for negative education outcomes with students or their families. These meanings included faulty 'common sense' notions that students and families did not value education or that students were not motivated. Educators also implied that students were not capable, either because the work was too hard for them or because they were undisciplined. These deficits oriented meanings seemed to blame students and families for lack of school success. When educators used deficit language they sometimes appeared to make jumps in logic about students. As an example, one educator associated students not carrying backpacks with the students' lack of motivation. This educator concluded that the students did not see the value of education even amidst a discussion of the many school structures that created barriers to student learning at her school. This is relevant because researchers have found that when educators focus on blaming students and families, this blaming can sometimes act as a proxy for abdicating responsibility to teaching students (Diamond, 2004). The educators (at both schools in this study) seemed to locate the problem of education in the students' character, a familiar deficit-oriented way of characterizing low-income

and students of color that seemed connected to some larger dominant societal meanings about these students (Hull & Rose, 1991).

Furthermore, deficit-oriented meanings held by educators seemed connected to some school policies. For example, a test retake policy at CalabarHS seemed to help re-inscribe failure. A discipline policy at CompHS punished students for minor offenses when other solutions seemed more appropriate, diverting attention away from student learning. The discipline policy at CompHS so focused attention on students discipline and away from learning that when a student was in distress because he did not know the material on a standardized test and could not do the test, he was sent to the principal's office as punishment. The principal instead of understanding and addressing the students' lack of knowledge insisted that the student take the test. This not only compounded the student's distress but it also left unanswered the question of how to address the student's lack of knowledge.

These findings of deficit meanings are not unusual. Other researchers have found that educators adhere to deficit beliefs about students of color even in the context of reforms (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Gomez, 2001; Lipman, 1997; Hull & Rose, 1991). However, the finding that both educators of color and white educators carried these deficit meanings was interesting because deficit assumptions are often associated with white teachers (see for example Sleeter, 2001). This finding indicates the need to address these concerns with all teachers. Further, the finding of the phenomenon of the connection between deficit meanings and assumptions and school policies showed the importance of attempting to address deficit meanings among educators and the potential for improving student learning.

Asset Based/Resource-Oriented Meanings. Most interesting however is the finding of evolving assets and resources within the school sites. At both sites I found evolving assets

within the educators themselves (both white and of color). Teachers at both schools expressed a deep commitment to educating their students. Some teachers expressed understanding that connecting with and showing care for their students was essential to their students' education. They talked about the commitment and capability of their fellow teachers. These educators implied that, with support, their colleagues could improve in their teaching. Further, the educators in the Inquiry expressed interest in finding ways to share what they had learned during the Inquiry with their fellow educators. I also observed at both schools educators participating with engagement and interest during some of their professional development opportunities. These findings are promising as they indicate some of the qualities researchers have found in capable teachers of students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

In addition, at CompHS and CalabarHS the educators (of color and white) were able to identify resources or assets within their students of color. For example, they identified as assets students' abilities to negotiate new technology. They sometimes identified instances where students performed well. Educators also acknowledged that students brought with them a willingness to learn new things. Some educators also admitted that students' experiences were important sources for learning. The identification of these assets provided a great potential for improving teaching and ultimately students' academic learning. Scholars have indicated that identification of assets in students (rather than a focus on deficits) is promising for teaching and for student learning (Smith-Maddox & Solorzano, 2002; Ladson-Billing & Gomez, 2001). Finally, at CompHS, the identification of evolving assets related to teachers' commitment (and the need for support) and the potential students have provided not only a promising intersection for academic success but also a rich counter-story about that 'urban' school (and similar 'urban' schools) not often heard.

Discussion.

Deficit Meanings held by Educators of Color and White . As stated above, the finding
of deficit meanings at the schools where students are low-income African American or Latino/a
is perhaps not unusual. Other researchers have found deficit meanings in schools with respect to
such students (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Gomez, 2001; Sleeter, 2001; Hull &
Rose, 1991). Often when deficit meanings are discussed the focus is with respect to white
educators having deficit ideas (see Sleeter, 2001, for example). However the finding that both
white and educators of color exhibited deficit meanings and assumptions bears some discussion.
The operation of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971; Apple, 2009) helps explain this phenomenon.
When white educators exhibit deficit ideas, they, as members of the dominant or ruling group
help to diffuse and popularize the world-views of their dominant class (see Omi & Winant,
1994). On the other hand, subordinated groups are also affected by hegemony. When the
educators of color at CompHS and CalabarHS adopt and exhibit deficit ideas to the detriment of
their own and other subordinated groups, they were unwittingly give hegemonic 'consent' to the
dominant class's popularized ideas about students of color (Gramsci, 1971; Bates, 1975; Apple,
2009).

Hegemony operates in, and benefits from, America's historical context. Whites' gained
dominant positions in America, at least in part through exploitation during slavery. Their
positioning translated to power, wealth and the means to distribute their world-views that have
become in many cases 'accepted truth. This popularizing has been instrumental in obtaining
Gramsci's "consent" from subordinated groups such as African Americans (Gramsci, 1971;
Bates, 1975; Omi & Winant, 1994, pps. 65-69, Feagin, 2006). As discussed earlier, throughout
America's history the grip of systemic inequality has been tenacious, moving from slavery to

segregation to urbanization and ghettoization. This history has brought with it a weight or sense of permanence that made change difficult. It might therefore not be surprising that educators at CompHS and CalabarHS, like other people in America, have deficit ideas about people of color. Nevertheless, the changes that have been made serve as proof of the possibilities for continuing to contest deficit ideas and meanings.

Macro, Micro and Meso Connections. The findings that educators at both schools had deficit meanings about their students of color (similar to those in broader society) also indicated some connections between such individuals' deficit meanings and the deficit meanings held in larger society. Hall (1981) explained this phenomenon noting that people " 'speak through' the ideologies which are active in our society and which provide us with the means of 'making sense' of social relations and our place in them" (p. 32). Because these ideologies become invisible, "taken for granted 'naturalized'… common sense" (Hall, p. 32) it seemed that the educators at CompHS and CalabarHS were even unaware of the deficit nature of some of their comments and assumptions. The notion that our individual actions are impacted by the active ideologies in society and seem naturalized helps us to make some connections between individual actions and larger societal forces.

Furthermore, the school and its policies played key roles in replicating inequality by helping to keep in place the societal common sense with deficit assumptions. At both CompHS and CalabarHS, larger societal concerns of race and class seemed to seep into the school supporting deficit-oriented policies such as the discipline policy at CompHS and the retake policy at CalabarHS. These policies were both affected by the larger context outside schools with dominant and deficit assumptions and meanings about low-income students' of color character.   However, the school policies were enacted and implemented by the individual

214

actions of school officials and school personnel some of whom themselves seemed to have some deficit ideas and meanings about their students of color. Further, the school policies were supported by the individual actions of educators (such as the proctor and principal who participated in disciplining the student who did not want to take a standardized test he was not prepared for). School policies also seemed to help condition educators' response to the students (such as when the teacher and principal questioned who did not want to take the retake tests in leadings ways such that students "admitted" they must be "lazy").

Asset based Ideas; Raising Consciousness. Interestingly, because the schools played roles in replicating inequality, they are also uniquely positioned to help disrupt the "chains" (Hall, 1981) of inequality as was indicated in Diamond (1994). The findings of asset based or resource-oriented meanings at both CalabarHS and CompHS such as teachers' commitment to their students indicated potential for moving the organizational cultures toward a focus on students' learning. Identifying student assets is promising because some researchers have found that a focus on student assets can support student learning. For example, Ladson-billings & Gomez (2001) found that focusing on students' strengths while encouraging educators to take responsibility for students' learning was important in moving educators toward teaching their students well. In addition, Smith-Maddox & Solarzano (2002) found among others things that a focus on finding assets within communities of color seemed promising.

Identifying assets within educators and students was however only the beginning. Providing the space to challenge hegemonic forces is also important especially given the findings that deficit meanings were held by both educators of color (members of subordinated groups) and white educators (members of the dominant group). With the idea of addressing these forces in mind, theorist Paulo Freire (2005) has called for marginalized groups *and* their supporters to

215

"acquire a critical awareness of oppression through … praxis" (p. 51). Freire suggested a need for both reflections and praxis to awaken consciousness. The Inquiries attempted to provide such space.

Learning, Growth and the Change Process at the Research Sites.

In chapters 5 and 6, I discuss the Inquiry process as it related to CalabarHS and CompHS, respectively. In general, the educators used the Inquiry to negotiate meanings around various aspects of Teaching and Learning, (including related challenges and barriers) at their particular sites. The learning and growth at the sites differed in many respects. Nevertheless, the Inquiry generally provided the opportunity to discuss inequality and the larger systems that affect education as part of negotiating new meanings. The process included engaging the meanings each educator brought to education and the complicated interaction of all their differing experiences. Ultimately, the discussions in the Inquiry provided space for each educator to learn and to take on newly negotiated meanings about teaching their students of color.

Learning and Growth at CalabarHS. At CalabarHS, Kate and her colleagues learned from the texts we read, learned from each other's experiences, participated in re-articulations of some deficit terms and negotiated new meanings for some terms used in education. At CalabarHS, Kate exhibited evidence of transformational growth taking the following steps:

Kate starts out avoiding issues.
She then begins to question, reflecting on discussions and new knowledge.
She initially has trouble bringing up questions and concerns in the group.
She exhibited avoidance by talking about non-controversial issues.
Kate then begins to bring her concerns to group, using her own students as example.
She challenges the AP questioning AP about views on inequality.
She challenges the principal, questioning the school mission.

Kate began tentatively and eventually took on a strong leadership role in this Inquiry. She raised difficult issues about the school's failure to address the needs of its students and opened the space to begin discussions generally about students who were not succeeding and aboutAfrican American students, in particular. She raised questions about the school mission, such as whether it was social justice oriented or a meritocracy. In this way she transformed her role within the group (and potentially the school) as she challenged her colleagues in power positions, the principal and the assistant principal.

Giving credence to Freire's (2005) call for reflection and praxis to raise awareness, Kate's growth seemed to be a result of a reflecting on the readings and discussions in the group. It may be also be due in part to the support and encouragement I provided her outside of the group to take on a leadership role in the group. Although I encouraged other teachers, Kate seemed most willing. Kate's transformation seemed to promote growth in others in her group as well. For example, when discussing the school mission, she said "*Because all this has shifted for me*" and Bella also agreed, saying, *"Me, too."* Further, Bella continued to speak up often in support of Kate's comments. In addition, Jane, the principal seemed to undergo some growth during the Inquiry when she agreed to research African American students at the school where before she vehemently denied a problem existed. Further there was additional growth in the principal that was evidenced post-Inquiry by her changing policies with the intent to support student learning. Kate's stepping up did not relieve her of deficit ideas, however she seemed to be increasingly self-reflective. Nonetheless, Kate's growth and the group's growth indicate the benefit of taking a team or collaborative approach to education.

Learning and Growth at CompHS. At CompHS, Marcia and her colleagues learned from the texts we read, learned from each other, participated in re-articulations of some deficit

terms and negotiated some terms around education, such as what it meant to be a "teacher". Although Marcia and her colleagues seemed to learn during the Inquiry process neither she nor her colleagues seemed to have transformed their role either within the group or within the school. Two things potentially contributed to this lack of transformation, (i) the context of the school and (ii) the possibly need for additional support.

In addition, the school context of CompHS played a big role in determining these educators' access and openness to learning. To begin with, it seemed that the educators at CompHS were already working against the grain of the school in many respects. The school and its administration were focused on providing the students with testing skills. There also seemed to be a rigid culture of discipline. Moreover the structure of the school seemed to be more impervious to change. The school district seemed to control many of the activities at the school and provided many interruptions to the work of teachers and the learning of students. The inquiry educators, however, seemed interested in providing learning support to their students beyond test-taking skills and disciplining students. However, unlike at CalabarHS the principal at CompHS was not interested in participating in this project, or in even having conversations about inequality issues. Further, institutional support of teachers seemed to be a concern at the school. Importantly, the firings at the end of the previous school year caused a great deal of frustration among the educators. These firings had a dampening effect with respect to the group's enthusiasm to do the Inquiry project.

Upon analyzing the data I wondered whether I was as adept at recognizing deficit language in these educators and whether it would have made a difference in the study. I also wondered about this group's need for additional support. These may have been affected by my recognition of i) the need to show these educators empathy given the recent firings, ii) the fact

218

these educators were considered the 'good teachers' on campus, and, iii) the fact these educators were all black educators. On the other hand, it has become apparent that the context of the school, the rigid institutionalization of discipline and testing culture, and the lack of administrative support for these educators, point to, at a minimum, the need for a heavy dosage of support for changes to take place at this location.

Examples of Negotiating Shared New Meanings About Teaching and Learning. The educators in some cases negotiated shared meanings about what it meant to be a teacher of their students of color. For example, at both sites, the educators negotiated meanings around what "teacher" meant compared to being a "parent." As part of these negotiations, the educators struggled with balancing their obligations to themselves and to their students. For example, at CompHS, the educators wondered if they were required to *"fight … injustice[on students' behalf], … but as teachers we just have to accept that we're not going to get respect, we're not going to get great salaries."*

At both sites some educators seemed concerned about the need to balance empathy toward their students with demanding work of their students. Educators also discussed the need to provide humanistic evaluation and an education that moved beyond testing to providing human development. Further, the educators at CompHS suggested that culturally relevant curriculum and standards based curriculum could coincide together. They also sought to distinguish their teaching from the banking method. Ultimately, the educators seemed to conclude that being a teacher of students of color was a complex role that required a balancing of these many considerations.

At CalabarHS attempts were made to negotiate a meaning of teacher that was included a responsibility to broader society. This attempt had the potential for deeper discussion about race

219

and class. It was suggested that the role of teacher *"as educational political leader"* teaching with a purpose *"that fulfills society."* This definition did not take however, and there was a shift in topic giving rise to a missed opportunity to discuss issues of race and class and inequality. Ultimately, the shift indicated the need to address issues of power and subordination, race and class during the Inquiry. Some educators of were unwilling to address these issues because of their awareness of the tenuous nature of their subordinated positions. Others, some of the white administrators had meanings connected to dominant deficit oriented 'common sense' ideas that seemed to lead them to have a kind of colorblindness when issues of race and class were presented. Interestingly, the learning processes played out in very different ways at the two school sites. The differences may be instructive for purposes of learning how to go about education reform in different school sites.

Learning and Change Processes at CompHS. From the very beginning of the study, the Inquiry group at CompHS made attempts at having an intersubjective attitude of trying to come to mutual understandings of their readings (Rogoff & Toma, 1997) and the application of those readings to their school sites. They showed this by their engagement in shared thinking processes. For example, in the first session, Shelton opened up the conversation but Marcia picked up on his reference to "reflection."   She then moved on to another idea, evaluation. Shelton then commented on evaluations and elicited comments from Janice who, in responding, directly referenced his comments. The members of the group did not always agree or have the same meanings. However, researchers have acknowledged that coming to mutual understandings does not require identical meanings (Rogofff & Toma, 1997I). When there were disagreements or they brought different meanings and understandings, the educators sometimes engaged in bridging processes. That is, the educators attempted to bridge their different

understandings to move toward mutual agreement.   For example, in one case when Marcia

disagreed with the author, Dawn bridged the Marcia's statement by saying "*I had the same*

question. When I first read it, I was taken aback too, and I wrote, 'who say' … But when I think

about it… " Dawn then went on to give an alternate explanation. They also exhibited the

learning process of jointly theorizing, or "playing around with an idea" (Rogofff & Toma, 1997).

For example, after discussing the readings about governmental policies that contributed to the

development of poor neighborhoods, Janice concluded that one needed to "change minds."

Donovan adopted and talked about "changing minds" as well.   In such statements, Janice and

Donovan echoed Paulo Freire's (2005) concept of consciousness raising. Interestingly, in this

Inquiry group, the ideas seemed to flow with minimal discord. This seemed to result in part

from the similar power locations of the educators both in terms of larger society and also within

the school structure.

     Learning and Change Process at CalabarHS. During the CalabarHS Inquiry there were

some moments of engaging in some shared thinking and group learning exhibiting the processes

discussed above under CompHS. However, there were some additional process moves at

CalabarHS that were indicative of the differences in race and power location within the group.

Some of these moves had the impact of initially limiting the scope of conversations and the

possibilities for learning around issues of inequality. At the very beginning of the study there

were indications of tentativeness with respect to building a shared endeavor for learning. This

occurred when the educators did not immediately pick up on each other's ideas and instead

shifted the topic on two occasions in the same discussion, thereby limiting the scope of the

conversation. The shift essentially took the conversation away from a potentially contentious but

important topic about the role of teachers as "political leaders." Silence also showed up as a

learning process move. This occurred when the subject of the conversation was again potentially controversial, the individuals who had spoken to me in private about bringing up issues in the group context remained silent, leaving the issues of inequality unaddressed. To break the silence, the educators steered the conversation away from controversial topics and towards discussing a legitimate but safe topic of concern. Identifying these processes is important for understanding how to address needed change. Understanding these processes is of particular importance when engaging in a process of re-articulating meanings related to inequality including those related to race and class.

Eventually, when Kate took a stand and brought up difficult issues around educating students, she created visible and audible conflict as her stance led to a heated debate. She provoked a response of defensiveness and denial from the principal of the school. These responses had the potential for limiting conversations and pursuing solutions. Interestingly, the contentiousness provided Kate with opportunities both to challenge some of her colleagues' assumptions and to learn. When she took a stand she also gave the opportunity for others with similar understandings to speak up and break their silence. The group also exhibited willingness to grow together as they quickly agreed to issues that were contentious in the following session. In this Inquiry group, issues of power location and race were constantly at play and being negotiated, indicating the difficulty of learning about inequality and attempting re-articulations of problematic meanings.

Prior to Kate taking a stand, the processes of avoidance included silence, shifting topics and steering away to less controversial issues. Engaging in change processes included taking a stand (against the power structure) and asking tough questions (in cordial respectful manners). Significantly, the Inquiry included supporting the individual members of the Inquiry in one-on-

222

one sessions to encourage them to speak, to find the right words to speak, and to have courage to speak such words.

Discussion.

Discussion about CalabarHS. As discussed earlier, at the end of the CalabarHS Inquiry, it is apparent that Kate's meanings about teaching her students of color have changed dramatically. As they changed, her actions were also changing to reflect those meanings. Kate's transformation and actions indicate the relevance and implications meanings have for supporting people's actions. Her change also has great potential for the students of color at CalabarHS. While Kate's change is situational, the circumstances surrounding her change provided some important lessons about the change process and what real reform entails.

Because the school's demographics (and the Inquiry group as well) reflected a microcosm of the demographics of greater American society issues of race and power became immediately apparent in the CalabarHS Inquiry. The individuals in power positions (both in the group and in the school) were primarily white and the people of color at the school were generally in subordinated positions. Nevertheless, getting to a point where these issues could be discussed openly, safely and in a constructive and collaborative manner was a struggle throughout the CalabarHS Inquiry. On one hand, it appeared that sharing the same race and subordinated status as some of their students, led some educators of color to understandings about as their students learning conditions (Harding 1997; Prakash 1994). This is because similarities in race and subordinated status often lead to some "distinctive accounts of life" (Harding 1997; Prakash 1994). Unfortunately however, these educators' subordinated status (both in society and in the school) severely limited their ability to gain the necessary traction to have heard and addressed their concerns about their students of color. On the other hand, the

223

individuals who were in power positions, who were able to have their accounts of teaching and education heard at the school, were members of dominant culture. Their "interests" seemed as scholars have suggested to be "perverse" to those in subordinated positions (Harding, 1997). Such "perverse interests" were indicated, among other things, by the shifting of topics away from the concerns of the educators of color and even the denials of the existence of a problem with African American students even in the face of substantial drop in enrollment of such students.

The differences in meanings and interests of the educators provided severe barriers to the Inquiry process. For example, even if unintentional, the shifting of conversation led to contrived, as opposed to real conversations early in the discussions. In some cases, this also promoted silences in the discussions. In another case it seemed the struggle between dominant and subordinated groups contributed to the leaving of one of the educators of color. In order for change to take place it seemed that a shift in the power in the space was necessary. This was not an easy proposition.

The invisible force of hegemonic influences (Gramsci, 1971) that help to maintain inequality between dominant and subordinated groups even in spaces like a school must be identified and addressed. Far from being theoretical, hegemonic influences operate in the micro-political relationships between people, and as Apple (2009) suggested, "structure our consciousness." These forces were present at the beginning of the Inquiry when the white educators shifted the topic of conversation from the topics suggested by educators of color that could have led to deepening discussions about inequality and the conditions of the students of color at the school. The barely visible shifting had a powerful impact on the educators of color. Initially, the educators of colors refusing to provide the "consent" that hegemony requires as they attempted to assert their ideas. Because the dominant culture has the weight of history and time

and common sense behind them (Hall 1981; 2006), their power can be difficult to contest. Speaking up can hold great risk for people of color. One real risk is loss of job. This threat of job loss was not theoretical as during the Inquiry, one of the educators of color said she felt compelled to (and did) leave at least in part because of the power struggle she was engaged in with the school administration.

Nevertheless, a need shift in power began to take place when one educator took a stand and began "breaking" the ideological "chains" she previously held (Hall 1981, p. 31). Her position as a member of the dominant group afforded this educator the privilege to step up and take a stand without some of the risks her colleagues of color would endure. While she was in a subordinated position (organizationally with respect to the principal), this educator also enjoyed good relationships with both the school's administrators. As a result of her position as a member of the dominant class, this educator helped to create openings for the different accounts of the education of students of color to be heard by the administrators. Rather than dismiss or ignore her concerns, the administrators engaged with her creating possibilities for learning and transformation within the group and potentially the school.

Discussion about CompHS. At the end of the CompHS Inquiry, it was apparent that the members of the groups had gained new knowledge during the CompHS Inquiry. Interestingly this group seemed to come more readily to some shared understandings than the CalabarHS group. This was possibly at least in part because they shared some commonalities of interest from being all part of the same race, all being black (Harding, 1997). Despite having increased their learning and having come to some shared meanings however, it was apparent that there had not been dramatic or transformative change in the CompHS group however. The lack of

225

transformation in this CompHS Inquiry suggested that learning or 'changing minds' does not necessarily lead to immediate 'change in actions.'

At CompHS, similar to the some of the educators of color at CalabarHS it seemed that the commonality of subordinated status the educators had with some of their students may have led them to both recognize and attempt to address some issues of inequality their students of color faced. As well, the school administration was also largely black it seemed that there was opportunity for transformative change. Nonetheless, even though there were no visible dominant authority figures, there were invisible hegemonic structures in place at CompHS, in some ways making transformation even more difficult.

There were several elements in play. The families of most students at CompHS were in subordinated statuses in at least two respects - being low-income and of color. These subordinated statuses can translate to powerlessness in a number of respects including having reduced power to challenge policies and practices that are against these families' interests. Most importantly the educators at CompHS seemed to exhibit powerlessness as well. The recent school firings seemed to punctuate this powerlessness. As well, the organizational status of the district office afforded it a position of authority that allowed it to powerfully implement policies, even those against the interests of students and their families and educators in the school. As well, hegemonic forces seemed tightly structured into the policies and practices at CompHS through the implementation and enforcement by the district office, which was in a position of authority organizationally. Hegemonic forces were evidenced for example, by district policies such as frequent changes in school leadership, focusing on testing and discipline, and firing of educators or giving of 'pink slips' as budget management. The strong culture of testing and discipline at the school also made it even more impervious to change. The result was that as

226

Vaughan (2001) suggested, even though learning had occurred, the great "degree of institutionalization" (Vaughan 2001) of the culture of testing, discipline and district control presented many challenges toward changing actions.

   Implications for Reformers. What does this all mean for administrators and other educators who might want to engage in an Inquiry that challenges deficit meanings and assumptions and help to create spaces for improving education? This study has indicated not only that change is situational but that the process can be can be complicated involving conflict, contentions and disagreements. While this might provide serious challenges for reformers and especially for administrators (who are interested in change but who also have to run their organizations), the potential for school improvement make the effort worthwhile. This study further indicated the importance of providing spaces for both joint learning and reflection by educators. Because educators will adhere to deficit assumptions and meanings even as they engage in restructurings (Lipman, 1997; Ladson-Billings & Gomez, 2001), it is essential for administrators and reformers to provide spaces to sensitively challenge educators' assumptions and beliefs.

   The Inquiries indicate that learning and cordial agreement, or changing minds, does not necessarily lead to changed actions. Hegemonic forces and institutionalization of a particular culture can create barriers to changes in action. These can signal the need for additional support at the site. However, changed minds might well build a platform for later changes, as change is often a function of time. Furthermore, although there did not seem to be transformative change, the members of CompHS had begun to take some small steps toward turning 'changed minds' into 'changed actions.' At the end of the Inquiry they began a small project to work on increasing the school spirit at CompHS as they believed moral was very low as the school. Even

227

a small beginning can present hope for future action. Changed minds can evolve into changed actions over time as people learn and relearn and practice even making small steps toward taking action.

The Inquiries also showed that a lack of discord does not necessarily entail learning or movement forward. A lack of discord might signal there are silences because of unevenness of power in the group (as in CalabarHS), or it might signal an imposing school structure that hides issues such that they are not readily visible (as in CompHS). The power held by those in dominant positions can be substantial and can be difficult to contest (whether in a dominant culture–subordinated culture relationship, teacher-student relationship, or an administrator-employee relationship or otherwise). When attempting to address concerns of those in a subordinated status such as students of color, leveling power imbalances to allow for such concerns to be discussed and addressed is very important, and even essential, if real changes are to take place in our schools.

Further, educators should not be afraid of contentions because disagreements and contentions can create openings for real discussions as opposed to contrived and meaningless conversations. It might be necessary at least initially to engage a third party to help begin the process. It might be particularly beneficial to include a third party where there are issues of power and subordination, to help identify the issues and create a safe space for speaking.

Implications for Learning. Learning as a social process has been championed by several scholars. This kind of learning has been described in several ways, including as a transformation of participation (Rogoff & Toma, 1997), as involving a community of learners (Rogoff, Matusov & White, 1996) or as occurring in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Further, scholars have found that "social interaction aids cognitive development when

228

partners actually engage in shared thinking processes, not simply when individuals are in the presence of other people" (Rogoff & Toma, 1997, p. 471). However, learning is also deeply embedded in America's history of inequality. Both CompHS and CalabarHS Inquiries showed that differences in experiences provide different meanings that need to be negotiated to promote the shared thinking and social interaction that scholars have found to aid cognition.

This study adds to the literature on learning by providing an example of how learning can be inhibited when learning spaces do not account for differences in power positions or for the existence of hegemonic forces. Accounting for issues of power and subordination, race and class are important considerations in learning. Differences in power can create silences that inhibit the shared thinking processes and social interactions that scholars have found to aid cognitive development. Furthermore, not accounting for and addressing power differentials can also lead to contrived conversations that give the appearance of working out issues when in fact issues remain unaddressed. At CalabarHS, learning began only once a the power imbalance in the group began to be disrupted. This disruption led to breaking of silences and although contentious, real conversations and learning began. The implications for student learning are great particularly for students of color. When power differentials exist in classroom spaces and are not identified and addressed, the silences can be even deeper. Classrooms begin with an apparent power differential as the teacher is usually an authority figure over the student, and this is overlayed with the power differential between adult and child. When the power differentials that exist in society between dominant and subordinated groups, are added to the equation, with differences in meanings and the potential perversity of interests between dominant and suborbdinated groups, the potential for lost educational opportunities can deepened even furhter and students of color can suffer greatly. Even when there are ready agreements among similarly

minded groups of educators in subordinated groups, there might be limiting hegemonic forces at play. For example, At CompHS, the existence of almost invisible hegemonic forces severely limit the learning of the educators who although they learned from the text, did not move on to transfomrational growth. Further, also it must also be acknowledged that in America not all groups of people are allowed to prosper with the same kinds of resources. The paucity of inputs can make a difference in students' learning (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Rogers et al. 2009).

This study also identified some learning processes that people use, such as shifting the topics and steering away from controversial issues which can constrain learning. Further it also identified some of the processes that might lead to openning spaces for learning. These include taking a stand (against the power structure or dominant ideas), asking tough questions (cordially and respectfully), and causing contentiousness (with a purpose) in discussions. Accounting for power differentials particularly with respect to those in subordinated positions through active focused support of individual group members is also very important.

Open Questions. This study was an attempt to move from theory to practice. It aimed to add empirical evidence of some of the change processes involved in school reform by studying two 'urban' high schools with very different administrations but similar student populations. Where the studies discussed in the Literature Review included an intervention with K-2 students (Ladson-Billings & Gomez, 2001), a study of junior high school restructuring (Lipman, 1997) and a professional development across several elementary schools (Garcia & Guerra, 2004), this study focused on work in two high schools. Further, while studies involving teacher belief and assumptions (including the studies referred to above) often focus on white educators, this study focused on educators of color as well as white educators.

Nevertheless, this research leaves open many unanswered questions. For example, at the

CompHS school site with mostly African American educators, there did not seem to be transformational change. Since change is also a function of time it is possible that change could possibly take place in the future, nevertheless, given the rigid institutionalization there is a question of what kinds of supports would best enable change to take hold at this location. At CalabarHS where the administration was mostly white, there remained open questions about what it additional support might help to continue the learning process going forward to incease the learning of all members of the group and to expand learning to the rest of the school's educators.

Implications for Sociocultural and Critical Theories and the Relevance of Meanings.

In chapter 2, I argued for use of a sociocultural theoretical framework focused on social and cultural contexts, that also includes a focus on the historical development of racial meanings as well as the inclusion of a critical theoretical focus to account for issues of race and power. With respect to the focus on culture, I also argued for a focus on the meanings connected to cultural processes to help with understanding how these processes come about and how they are maintained. At CalabarHS, the Inquiry presented an opportunity for the reform-minded educators to discuss cultural processes within the school, including those leading to high rates of their students of color leaving before graduation and high rates of teachers failing students. In addition, the Inquiry presented an opportunity to discuss the approximately 50% decline in enrollment of African American students over the past decade, notwithstanding only a 2% decline in the current area and the wide geographic area from which the school is able to draw. Despite these opportunities, the competing meanings held by the educators constrained, and sometimes led to, what I consider *contrived conversations*. Such *contrived conversations* often skirted the 'elephants' of race and class in the room. A focus on the relevance of race (through

critical race theory) as the historical context of race can help with understanding the persistence

of inequality can be important especially for people of color. For example, with respect to

African Americans, understanding how meanings developed from the time of slavery, evolving

over time and can be connected to current racialized meanings about African Americans today is

important. Such understanding can help explain the reluctance to discuss race and class in the

CalabarHS Inquiry. Such understandings can also help to explain how Jane (the white principal

from an affluent background) can afford to be "colorblind" and deny a potential inhospitable

environment at the school even in light of: the decrease in numbers of African students; the

lower scores of African American students; and the higher percentages of those students in

special education classes. Understanding the historical development of some meanings and

related cultural processes can also help to illuminate and therefore question, underlying

assumptions behind the processes and meanings at the school. For example, such understanding

can help to illuminate the deficit assumptions behind a test retaking policy that essentially

absolved teachers from responsibility for teaching some of their students. A focus on meanings

as developed through history can assist with debunking ahistorical meanings that leads some

people to make statements like "parents do not value education" or "student are behind" without

contextualizing how these terms have developed over time. Furthermore, history can also

provide contextualization needed to understand the relationship between poverty and schooling

and the historical development of poverty in communities. History can also help with

understanding problematic assumptions and moral judgments about those who live in poverty.

Sociocultural theory was an important theoretical framework for this study because of its

emphasis on culture and cultural processes and because of its learning theories. The emphasis on

culture allowed for a focus in this study on the meanings related to culture and cultural

232

processes. Sociocultural theoretical framework focuses on multiple levels of analysis, but it has been criticized for not focusing on the issues of race, power and privilege. Some scholars have argued for an inclusion of critical theory to address these concerns (Nasir & Hand, 2006). I agree and included critical analyses as part of the framework for this study. Issues of social location, race and power were central to the discussions and learning in the Inquiries at CalabarHS and CompHS. For example, the reality of the white principal at CalabarHS, even though she lived in the same neighborhood as the school, was very different from her students and their families. Critical theories help us to understand that human activity is structured differently for different groups of people, and the vision that sets of people have can vary greatly and even "represent an inversion of the other" (Harding, 1990). The principal lived, but did not participate in, the community. As a result, her interests diverged greatly from those of her primarily low-income students of color existing within the subordinated class. As a white woman in America with an affluent background, she enjoys the benefits of the dominant class (McIntosh, 1990). It is therefore not be surprising if in some cases the vision available to her, her mostly white staff, and other members of the dominant class possibly "will be both partial and perverse" (Harding, 1990) to the interests of the students of color.

Furthermore, without critical analyses the subtle power moves made by people in power positions might well be missed. For example, without a critical race theoretical analysis for example, when educators in the dominant class shifted topics away from the concerns of educators of color it might not have come to light that a power move had been made which had the effect of silencing the educators of color. It might seem like there was agreement when people in subordinated positions were instead being silenced. Contrived conversations may be mistaken for real conversations. However, by themselves, the critical theories used herein were

not adequate for this study because they did not include theories on learning and the focus on culture that were important aspects of this study. Both theoretical frameworks, socio-cultural and critical theory can benefit from each other in studies similar to this study.

Implications for Ethnography and PAR.

In this study I use Ethnography to help assess the viewpoints of educators -- including some of the key meanings they held with respect to their students, students' communities and students' education. Ethnography is an important methodology for this study. This is because ethnographers attempt to discover what people do and why they do it (Schensul, et al., 1999) before assigning meaning to what is taking place. Similarly, in this study I attempted to assess the meanings educators assigned to their beliefs, actions and interactions. In this study, gaining access to the two sites was very important. I wanted to gain access that allowed me to become a participant observer and researcher at the sites. The idea was to gain the kind of access that would allow me to be closer to an insider status while keeping on my "hat" of researcher. As a participant observer, I worked at building relationships in order to elicit material necessary to describe the behaviors and activities of the people studied (Whyte, 1989).

Because "[e]thnographic research is [also] applied," it can be used to assess the situation and improve it (Schensul et. al., 1999, p.1). I argue that ethnographic research intended to improve rather than solely assess be combined with other methodologies. As a result, this study combined ethnography with a PAR-inspired study to attempt to both assess and set the stage for solving a problem within each school context. I used a PAR-inspired inquiry because, in PAR, the participants research their everyday lives and communities with an eye toward finding potential solutions to one or more community concerns (Morrell, 2008). PAR is also explicit about active participation and support of some members of the organization. As a result, PAR

234

provides additional tools for this study interested in change. Providing facilitation support

during the Inquiry process was a key element part of this study. The active participation of the

educators was very important. The educators did most of the talking during the Inquiry.

Nonetheless, my support was a key element of this study. My role included administrative

duties, such as setting meeting times and locations, and redirecting conversations during the

Inquiry process. Importantly however, during the PAR Inquiry, I provided individual support to

educators outside the inquiry space to help support their participation during the Inquiry

discussions. In providing such support, I encouraged individuals to find ways to speak about the

issue they were concerned about. Moreover, at the CalabarHS site, I was particularly mindful of

power differentials in the Inquiry space and attempted to address those differences to try to

prevent or address potential silencing of individuals within the group. Differences in support at

the different schools may have impacted the result of the Inquiry. Moreover, this notion of

providing support, particularly when there are power differentials is an important understanding

for PAR studies. A powerful take away from this study is using PAR and Ethnography, there is

potential for providing 'tools for change' that members of an organization can use going

forward. For example, providing the Inquiry space at CalabarHS where openings occurred to

discuss difficult questions about the school's mission and the potential for issues of race related

to African American students had potential for changes at the school. At CompHS even without

transformational change the educators were taking small steps toward putting some of their

learning into practice, indicating that the seeds of change had taken root.

Implications for Researchers.

During CalabarHS Inquiry, I learned how to be flexible about the questions to ask, I

learned that there is a need to have courage to challenge educators to see what was in front of

235

them. I learned to ask questions calmly even when angered by statements that were highly

deficit in nature. I learned to be quiet and let the educators speak. I learned the importance of

working directly with individuals and developing relationships with each educator.

I went to CompHS with the express idea that I would also find spaces for growth as I did

with CalabarHS. Nevertheless, I did not always readily recognize deficit-oriented ideas in the

African American educators at CompHS. I had a great desire to show empathy to this group as

they were demoralized by recent firings. As a result, I did not go through the Inquiry process at

CompHS with as much dexterity as I did CalabarHS. Although we had important discussions,

raising the level of discussions to challenge deficit-oriented ways of thinking was not as facile

for me in the CompHS Inquiry. The result was that the Inquiry provided me with a great deal of

learning about recognizing the deficit-oriented language across different sites.

The implication is that researchers must be mindful that they apply the standards across

sites and people of color and whites in neutral ways. As a researcher, it is always important to be

reflective about one's potential to 'side with' those from similar backgrounds to overcome

potential bias. In these cases, it is important as well to keep in mind one's theoretical framework

and to use it across spaces. Focusing on two schools instead of one was enormously helpful in

cross checking the application of standards across sites. Having two sites as opposed to one was

a very important part of the project for increasing my own learning and understandings about and

for complicating the findings herein.

Limitations of the Study.

This project was not intended to be a longitudinal study and as a result, cataloging change

was sometimes difficult as change is often a function of time. Nevertheless, this study provided

spaces for learning and helped to begin identifying some of the processes involved in attempts at

re-articulations of meanings for possible positive impact on the learning of students of color. Further, this project also helped identify some important ways that educators made sense of their students including some asset based/resource oriented meanings about students that can help form the basis of learning. This study also provided the space for learning and growth at both school sites. Even when transformational growth did not seem to occur at one of the sites, it appeared that the group learned some tools for change as they began to engage together in small school change project at the end of the project.

Last Words. The Importance of this and Similar Projects. Recommendation.

Why is this work important? Many attempts have been made to reform schools but reform continues to be needed. This study has attempted to give some attention to the processes that would be required to accomplish change at the local level of the schools where teachers and students do their work. From this study I recommend that schools serving students of color provide spaces: i) to allow educators to reflect on their practice, ii) to increase learning about the play of inequality, and iii) to authentically and sensitively challenge educators' deficit assumptions and meanings about their low-income and students of color. In addition, attempts should be made to identify policies and practices that might be based on deficit assumptions, either in the actual policy or its implementation. Such spaces are necessary regardless of the demographic make up of the educators at the school. This is because the tenacious grip of inequality implicates both educators of color and educators who are white. An inquiry process can be messy, difficult and even contentious. Nonetheless, it should be attempted because of the great potential for improving learning both for educators and importantly for students. Because of the difficulty of address issues of race, power and subordination, including a third party who

understands the play of inequality including the possibilities of power imbalances among educators -- might be important for starting this process.

This work is important for beginning to help understand the processes that change might entail on the local school level where teachers and other educators do their work with students. This study also helped to begin understanding some of the struggles people have in learning and when and how to support their learning. Further studies similar to this project are needed. Projects similar to this Inquiry in a variety of spaces is important because different contexts will bring different challenges in learning, as this study indicates. This is because people bring different experiences and ways of thinking and ultimately different meanings to every situation.

Finally, when addressing the education for students of color in America, a simple act of changing one policy for another is inadequate. This is because education is tied up in America's enduring systems of inequality, with the weight of history, 'common sense' and common practices behind it. Simply putting in place new policies will not ensure that such policies will work as intended. People bring their misconceptions, assumptions and deficit-oriented meanings to bear on the interpretation and implementation of even the most well-intended policy. In so doing, they sometimes can cause a perverse effect -supporting the very opposite of the intentions of the policy. This must be acknowledged and addressed. This study is but only one small step toward what it will take to make real change happen in the education of African American and other students of color.

Research Questions. The research questions that I proposed to address are: What are some of the key meanings that operate among teachers and administrators at two separate school sites (that serve low-income children of color who are primarily African American and Latino/a) that (i) may have potential for creating barriers to the education of students of color (ii) that positively illuminate assets of students and their communities?

Would attempts to create a community of practice and illuminate systemic inequality and its connection to schools help to (i) re-articulate some of the meanings about children of color and their education and (ii) make a difference in educators' approach to their education? If so, how?

What would this re-articulation or change process look like? How would it be different at different school sites?

School:
Date and Time:
Class/Grade/Teacher:
Available Lesson Plan:

Materials Used:
Engaging/Rigorous
Connects to student's lives
Addresses issues in community
Addresses issues of inequality

Students:
Participation in Class

Engaged/Seem to Understand
Interaction w/ Teacher and other Adults in Class
Interaction Btw Students
Particular Discourse or language use

Teacher:

Mastery of the Subject Matter

Connection/Rapport w Students, Their Lives, Communities/Interactions with Students and others in the Classroom

Classroom Room Management/Discipline

Particular Discourse or language use

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Draft-- Form of Protocol – Interviewing Teacher/Administrator

Research Questions. The research questions that I proposed to address are: What are some of the key meanings that operate among teachers and administrators at two separate school sites (that serve low-income children of color who are primarily African American and Latino/a) that (i) may have potential for creating barriers to the education of students of color (ii) that positively illuminate assets of students and their communities?

Would attempts to create a community of practice and illuminate systemic inequality and its connection to schools help to (i) re-articulate some of the meanings about children of color and their education and (ii) make a difference in educators' approach to their education? If so, how?

What would this re-articulation or change process look like? How would it be different at different school sites?

Introduction: Set forth below are some questions designed to help me begin to understand how your schools works. I am particularly interested in what works best and what some of the concerns you have as well. I am putting together a group of teachers/administrator to help address one or more concerns you may have here at the school.

Introductory Questions:

1. Please tell me about yourself where did you grow up, go to school?

2. What moved you to become an educator? How long have you been a teacher and how long teaching at this school?

3. Do you have a philosophy of education? If so what is it?

The School, Teachers and Administrators

1. Please tell me about your school? How does it work? What is its mission/goals? How do you go about accomplishing the goals?

2. How do teachers get along with each other? With administration?

3. As a teacher are you supported by administrator? Do you feel you have what you need to do your work of teaching? As an administrator do you thing you are able to get your job

done? Are you supported by administration above you in your work? [district office or board of directors/executive director?]

4. Tell me about the student body? Are there specific barriers in schools that that prohibit the academic performance of African American students [or support their school failure]?

Students and their community.

1. Please tell me about the students here? Please describe them as best you can? How are they doing and what are some of the assets they bring that you are able to use in their education?

2. What are some of things that make it challenging to educate the students here?

3. [if not already covered] Please tell me about the community/ies from whichc the students come? How do they view education? How do they support their children's education?

Systemic concerns: Some additional questions if not already addressed above.

1. Are there systemic factors at this school that make educating your students easier than if you were elsewhere?

2. Are there systemic factors at the school that present barriers or make it difficult to educate your students?

3. Are there systemic factors outside the school that make educating students easy? Difficult?

Identifying issues at the school to address in a PAR study.

1. Please describe one of your students whom you would describe as a pleasure to teach and please tell me why you think so.
2. Please describe one of your most challenging students to educate and why that student is so challenging to teach?

3. Please identify for me an issue at this school that you/other teachers/administration finds challenging here? Please describe?

4. Who do you believe is primarily responsible for causing the problem? Who's fault is it? What do you think would solve it? If given the chance would you be willing to work on this problem?

5. Any additional comments?

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