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AMY RENE DALTON

(Under the Direction of Julie G. Maudlin)

ABSTRACT

This study explores the experiences of four White teachers teaching in a high-minority school in Macon, Georgia. Emily, Deanna, Richard, and I have crossed racial boundaries to establish successful teaching careers as White teachers working with Black students. Using a curriculum of place (Casemore, 2008; Kincheloe & Pinar, 1991; Whitlock, 2007) and the combined methodologies of personal~passionate~participatory inquiry (He & Phillion, 2008) and portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) I explore these experiences. The key research issues are: why do these teachers remain at this school and why are they successful when other White teachers are not.

This inquiry draws upon several bodies of literature: the social construction of race (Apple, 2004; Frankenberg, 1993; Tatum, 2007), Whiteness (Apple, 2004; Frankenberg, 1993; Mills, 1997), White Privilege (McIntosh, 1988/1998), race's impact on education (Howard, 2006; Kunjufu, 2002; McLaren, 2007), characteristics of high poverty schools (Kozol, 1992; Kozol, 2005), teacher attrition (Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll, 2003), and culturally relevant pedagogy (Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2002; Gay, 2010; Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2010; Perry, 2000).

Six utterances emerged from the research. White teachers who crossed the racial boundaries and established successful teaching careers chose to stay in that assignment because of a feeling of belonging and their role at Ocmulgee. To be a successful White teacher of Black students a teacher must develop meaningful relationships with students. These successful teachers relinquish their place as members of the ruling social class and become part of the children's culture rather than expecting the children to reflect their culture. All four participants worked to maintain high expectations for student performance in regards to behavior and academic success that were reflective of culturally relevant teaching practices. Developing relationships with students of a different race is easier to negotiate than the relationships of trust with their parents. The teachers in the study did not consider the race of their students as an important factor when thinking about their job at Ocmulgee Elementary School. This utterance is of particular importance since race is the primary focus of my inquiry. Teachers at Ocmulgee, and beyond, need to work to ensure that they are addressing the issue of race in productive ways so that racial problems are not perpetuated.

The implications of this study extend beyond the walls of Ocmulgee Elementary School. All teachers regardless of their teaching assignment need to engage in conversations about race with their students, consider how the curriculum of place affects their experiences, build meaningful relationships with their students, and hold high expectations for all students.

INDEX WORDS: Curriculum of place, Personal~Passionate~Participatory inquiry, Portraiture, Social construction of race, Whiteness, White privilege, High minority schools, Culturally relevant pedagogy

SPEAKING THE UNUTTERABLE: WHITE TEACHERS AND BLACK CHILDREN

by

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B. A., University of Tennessee, 2000

M. S., University of Tennessee, 2001

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

2011

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December 2011

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to those who in my childhood worked to ensure that I had a strong foundation to ensure future success. Those individuals made sure that I had a way to church and was surrounded with strong, positive role models. Throughout the dissertation process I have constantly reminded myself of the strong Christian Faith in which I was raised. Most importantly the words of Paul in Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Without this affirmation of faith and this reassurance I am not sure that I would have made it through this difficult journey.

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I have to say a special thank you to the members of both instrumental groups in which I am a part, the Middle Georgia Concert Band and the Mabel White Celebration Orchestra. Thank you for your understanding for the rehearsals and practice time that I had to miss in order to finish writing a paper or read a book. Thank you for also understanding that the opportunities that I had to play have been a wonderful time of release for me and I appreciate the fact that I was allowed to continue even when I was not able to participate 100%.

I wish to thank my family for understanding my need to stay in Georgia during my long weekends and holidays. I understand that it has been hard for you to understand my need to stay away and miss so many important family milestones.

I also have to say thank you to the students, faculty and community of *Ocmulgee Elementary School* without you this could not be possible. To the students, thank you for all that you have taught me about life. To the faculty thank you for working with me and serving as my family over the past ten and a half years. I especially want to thank those of you who have taken the time to listen to me talk about my research over the past few years. And to the community thank you for embracing me and accepting me into your community as one of your teachers.

I know that I would not have made it through this journey without the friendships that developed during the classes and our many trips to Statesboro. The "complicated conversations" that have kept us all on track and allowed us to refocus our efforts have become a critical part of my being. I look forward to continuing these friendships after our time at Georgia Southern has drawn to an end.

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PROLOGUE: Acknowledging the Unutterable

I spent the week before school attending to every last detail in order to make sure that everything was perfect for the first day of school. The night before school began there was little sleep because of the anticipation and excitement about the new adventure that I was about to begin. A bit of fear was also present. All of my teacher preparation and training was geared towards teaching White students in a rural setting. Now, only months later, I found myself standing in the doorway of an urban school comprised mostly of Black, underprivileged students. The motivational phrases in my head kept telling me not to worry; that there really was no difference. After all they were all children and they just wanted an education. The day started off fairly well. The expected road bumps that a new teacher often encounters arose, but every minor crisis was faced and conquered and a sense of normalcy resumed. As the days turned into weeks, I addressed each of these hurdles while attending to lesson plans, mounds of papers to be graded, the duty schedules, professional learning requirements, faculty meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and never-ending mountains of paperwork.

As I became comfortable in my new setting, I failed to acknowledge the unutterable differences that existed between my students and me. The issue was not the culture of poverty that defined my students existence—I grew up in an area called Poor Valley; an aptly named location with both geographical and economic significance. The unutterable difference between my students and me was based on racial tensions that I had never before had to acknowledge or address. All of these tensions were brought to the surface through an encounter with one of my five-year-old students, a few years later.

That day began like most every day. My paraprofessional met the students in the classroom while I orchestrated another airing of the school's morning news show. By the time I

finished these responsibilities, my students were at PE enjoying their daily specials class. Within twenty minutes they would be back in my classroom ready for instruction and demanding my undivided attention. These brief moments were used to prepare myself for the day ahead. The class returned and we began our day by promptly beginning our morning routine: calendar, phonics, and Writer's Workshop. My class demonstrated challenging behavior. A few of my students resisted being challenged and completing work about which they felt insecure. My paraprofessional and I tried to alleviate these concerns by providing a safe environment where students were free to take risks. However this stance did not always eliminate potential problems. Five-year-old Roderick (pseudonym) was one of the students with whom I had struggled most. I had experienced a similar resistance the year before teaching his older brother in third grade. This day, during Writer's Workshop, the students were asked to work on their personal narrative so the class began drawing the pictures that we would later work collaboratively to narrate. That day Roderick resisted participation in this activity. He began running around the room knocking things off the shelves and throwing them in the floor. This rampage left a trail of books and manipulatives in his wake. When he realized that the class was unfazed by this activity he crawled under the work table and began kicking and hitting it. I tried various strategies to calm him and restore order to my classroom, but each of my attempts seemed to fuel his temper tantrum. When kicking and hitting were no longer enough, he looked at me, smiled and began yelling "shut up White bitch" over and over. The other children had looks of shock on their faces. They could not believe what was happening in their classroom. Then Roderick took both of his shoes off, put one in his hand and drew his arm back preparing for the launch. The shoe grazed my shoulder. Before he could re-arm himself, I kicked the other shoe out of his reach. The looks on the other students' faces intensified.

No longer armed with his projectile shoes, I was able to coerce him out from under the table and out into the hallway away from the other students, all while he repeated his mantra of "shut up White bitch." We proceeded up the long hallway towards the office. After a brief conference with the principal, Roderick's parents were called to the school to pick him up and discuss the event. He was being suspended for disrupting the class, using profanity, and throwing shoes. I returned to my classroom to restore order and resume instruction. The rest of my class was sitting there in disbelief when I returned. The students quickly stated that they would never do anything like that. When Roderick's mother arrived I was called back to the office to take part in a conference about the morning's events. The mother's reaction was a mixture of denial, dismissiveness and blaming. When the events were relayed she immediately denied that her child would ever behave as described. The principal quickly confirmed the details of the encounter. His mother finally accepted the fact that he may have used the racial epithets, however she refused to see the significance with the shoe throwing. "Why are you so upset about him throwing a shoe? I am sure that he didn't mean to hit anyone with it." After establishing the seriousness of children hurling objects toward other people in the classroom the conversation turned to addressing a possible source of motivation for this behavior. Contributing factors such as his age were considered; Roderick is the youngest child in the class, which is significant in Kindergarten. The mother refused to discuss these possibilities. Her last line of defense was that the entire encounter was the fault of "that White teacher."

That encounter changed the way that I viewed myself as a teacher. I had always credited myself with an holistic approach to teaching the foundational skills upon which all other learning would be built. I considered the religious, economic, and cultural factors that impacted the instructional choices I made while teaching but race had not been as clear of an issue, probably

because I was the only White person in the classroom. Now that the issue of race had been brought to the surface by an angry five-year-old, I could no longer ignore this siren call. The racial dissonance surrounding my teaching career could no longer be ignored. Questions began to swirl in my head. After rebounding from the initial shock of hearing this impressionable five-year-old deal with his explosive anger using racial epithets, I began to question why a five-year-old would use such language.

I have had upset children yell at me to "shut up" before and I have even been called disrespectful names. However, this was my first encounter with a five-year-old pitting my racial identity against me. How did this five-year-old become socialized to use such strong language? Since this was his first year in school I was fairly certain that the roots could not be traced to experiences within the school setting. The conference with Roderick's mother added to the racial dissonance that I was experiencing. Her claim that the root of the entire problem was the fault of "that White teacher" caused me to question my effectiveness as a teacher in a school with such a high minority population.

Other such instances happened through the years I spent teaching in a minority school. I continued to question whether or not I could really make a difference teaching in a school with a high population of students from a race other than my own. Am I still seen as an outsider? Am I perhaps a missionary type? Are my efforts even beneficial to my students? These questions led me to think about career decisions. Should I stay the course or move on to a different path? As I reflected upon experiences as an outsider in an urban school trying to teach young learners I find a whole new venue for inquiry. I have overcome many of the insecurities that emerged during these encounters. I have discovered that despite the racial and cultural differences I can be

successful as a teacher of minority students. This study seeks to explore how White teachers teaching in schools where they are the racial minority have answered these questions.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to explore how four White teachers implement culturally responsive teaching practices and found ways to be successful while teaching at a minority school. As the populations of public schools grow more diverse, teachers must find ways of addressing these needs within the classroom. Further, it will explore the characteristics of these teachers who contribute to their ability to continue to teach in this school despite the cultural dissonance between themselves and their students. The theoretical framework of a curriculum of place is the lens through which the teachers' experiences will be analyzed. Further, the combination of personal~passionate~participatory inquiry and portraiture will provide a means of retelling these experiences in a narrative form. It is the intent of this study to provide an outlet for these teachers so that they can tell their stories and identify their motivation for implementing their passion for teaching with children of a different race.

Context of Study

The South

Morris and Monroe (2009) describe the importance of exploring the all important context of the South as a research setting; "most contemporary educational and social science studies ignore the South as a critical racial, cultural, political and economic backdrop in Black education" (p. 21). It is within this unique setting that individuals make sense of their identities. Salient factors about the South add to its importance as a context. All too often theorists fall into the trap of believing in one South. Bennett (1991) offers a distinction noting that, "when we talk about the South as place, we are not referring to one South, but many. Because of the diversity of southern geography and consequent economic situations, several distinct cultural contexts are

evident" (p. 101). These different interpretations of the South are clearly evident to me as I reflect upon my life. Citizens of both places that I have referred to as home call themselves Southerners and fully believe that they live in the South. However, there are stark differences in the two "Souths" that define my existence. Kincheloe and Pinar (1991) explain the importance of understanding our roots and the significance of location. They posit that our understanding of place helps to focus our interpretation of the individual and the social forces that shape his or her being (Kincheloe & Pinar, 1991). Without a consideration of place, events lose their meaning.

In order to understand my story and the significance of my study one must understand the significance of the two places I have called home. The South of my childhood was East Tennessee.

East Tennessee was a South of small farms, isolated by valleys and ridges, a region that sent more of its sons to the Union than to the Confederacy in what Southerners still prefer to call the 'War Between the States.' The population was overwhelmingly White, chiefly English and Scotch-Irish....It was a region of so few Blacks that they were often a curiosity for isolated farm families, who came into contact with them only during their occasional visits to Knoxville. (Allison, 1991, p. 27-28)

While Allison (1991) is providing a context for the setting of the founding of the Farragut school in the early 1900s, her description holds true as a description of the rural area that I called home during my childhood. The fact that the region strongly supported the Union rather than the Confederacy comes as a shock to most individuals, even with the proliferation of historical markers throughout my hometown that supported this fact. During U.S. History classes, the discussion of the Civil War that covered the fact that East Tennessee chose to support the Union is often glossed over because no one wants to admit the fact that their southern roots are not as

solid as they had hoped. After we chose to forget this trivial bit of knowledge, our southern allegiances ran deep. Rebel flags and red-neck slang abound. The South of my upbringing was steeped in Appalachian culture. "Appalachians identify with place, with their rugged mountains, lush valleys and mountain streams. Their bond to the land is the glue that binds these people to each other and to past generations of Appalachians" (Bennett, 1991, p. 103). In the South of my childhood, it seemed as if the mountains and valleys had a magical power over all that lived there. In fact they still have a magical power that calls me home to them today. The mountains serve as a beacon, calling me back to the place of my upbringing and keeping me rooted in my Appalachian heritage. I often joke around and tell people that you can take a girl out of the mountains but you can never take the mountains out of the girl.

In the Appalachian setting, it seemed that everyone knew their neighbors. If someone came into the valley that wasn't known, it was not uncommon for someone to flag down the car to stop them and ask them who they were and where they were going. Ms. Bonnie was an elderly lady who lived down the road from my grandmother. On many occasions she would stop unfamiliar cars driving past her house and ask the drivers why they were driving on "her" road. They were not allowed to pass until a satisfactory answer was given.

In contrast to the Appalachian South of my childhood, I now call the Deep South of Macon, Georgia home. Morris and Monroe (2009) continue to posit the importance of Georgia in this discussion: "Georgia, in particular, provides an example of how social dynamics operate to place Black communities in a range of circumstances that influence Black students' academic outcomes" (p. 28). The Black communities of Georgia cover a range of settings, from urban to rural, as well as a range of socioeconomic statuses.

Macon, GA

Situated in the heart of Georgia, downtown Macon's streets are lined with majestic antebellum houses revealing the architectural and historical majesty of times past. As you stroll down the brick paved streets you can imagine Scarlett O'Hara sitting on the veranda sipping her Mint Julep. The historic Cannonball House sits as a reminder of the pardon Macon received during the Civil War as the city was spared the torch by General Sherman as he marched to the Savannah. It was the only house that received any damage during his destructive campaign towards Savannah; a cannonball still sits in the foyer as reminder. The Georgia Sports Hall of Fame, the Georgia Music Hall of Fame and the Harriet Tubman Museum sit on adjacent corners offering rich cultural and historical experiences to all that step through its doors. Steeples punctuate the skyline as a house of worship exists on almost every corner. Macon proudly boasts having the most churches per capita of any city in the nation. Three institutions of higher learning serve as educational anchors to the community—Mercer University near downtown, Wesleyan College for women in north Macon, and Macon State College in west Macon. Downtown also serves as the satellite location for a branch of Georgia College and State University. Fifty-five schools are nestled in coves and openings spreading across the county. Forty-one of these schools are operated by Bibb County Public Schools; the other fifteen are private academies.

As you leave downtown, different scenes emerge depending on the direction that you travel. The outskirts of downtown are the neighborhoods filled with small middle class homes. They are quiet, clean neighborhoods. As you drive through these neighborhoods children can be found playing in the streets and neighbors stand in the yards and driveways talking to catch up on the day's events. Further north, near the county line, the houses grow in magnitude. The

sizes of the houses are reminiscent of the antebellum estates defining the historic downtown area. This is the predominantly White part of town where bankers, business owners, and other professional members of the community make their homes. The sizes of the churches in this area mirror the size of the houses. Traveling south, east, or west from down town reveals a different story. Neighborhoods that were once filled with middle class homes are now occupied by run-down, dilapidated houses. Well-maintained churches stand out in stark contrast to the run-down buildings. As you drive down the street, at any time of day or night, you will see people walking. Some head towards meaningful destinations while others' motives are not so noble. These areas are some of the ones that new arrivals to the city are advised to avoid after dark. The mall that once held the distinction of being the largest mall in the state now stands half empty as most of the stores have fled in a manner similar to White flight, to the new outdoor mall that opened in the North end of town. Throughout the fringes of town shopping centers stand empty and windows are boarded up. People drive by these boarded-up shopping centers and houses but dare not bring themselves to think about, or speak about what is taking place behind those walls.

An understanding of these dynamics is imperative to building a context and understanding for comprehending this study. In a city that that seems to have a church on every corner, it would seem that the religious values being taught in the houses of worship would have the power to make a positive impact on the face of race relations. However Lillian Smith (1949/1994) shares a different reality of the lessons she learned at church:

I had learned that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that we might have segregated churches in which it was my duty to worship each Sunday and on Wednesday at evening prayers. I had learned that white southerners are a hospitable,

courteous, tactful people who treat those of their own group with consideration and who as carefully segregate from all the richness of life 'for their own good and welfare' thirteen million people whose skin is colored a little differently from my own. (p. 28).

Manis (2004) describes the transition of the "unutterable" nature of Macon's race relations in the epilogue of his book, *Macon Black and White*:

The overall theme of this study [Macon over the past 100 years] has been a certain continuity that has characterized relations between White and Black Maconites as an "unutterable separation." As a century has come and gone this unutterability has changed its meaning from being unspeakably tragic during the early "nadir" years to being simply unspeakable, something too few citizens wish to discuss. Thus racial tensions are still the elephant in the room that African-American and White Maconites, when they are together, pretend not to notice. (Manis, 2004, p. 344)

Roche (1998) described Georgia's approach to addressing issues of race in regards to the school in the same manner.

The leaders of the massive resistance movement largely succeeded in silencing most southern opposition. Most newspaper editors or ministers would only call for moderation, unable to make a stronger stand for fear of retribution... 'Freedom of speech is not denied by law, it is now being denied by fear...Free discussion is curbed by fear of reprisals—social and economic.' (Roche, 1998, p. 40)

Today, fifty-seven years after the ruling in *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* the silence and "unutterable" status of race relations continues. This silence seems intensified when matters of education are injected into the conversation. Manis (2004) claims that "race and a persisting inability or unwillingness to talk about it remain a central factor in the social and political life of

Macon, particularly in public education and tensions between city and county governments" (Manis, 2004, p. 8). In order to create a strong context for the race relations and the state of education in Macon that needs to become open topics for discussion, I will highlight some of the key events that shaped Macon's past and its relationship to education, starting with the 1930's and continuing to the present.

The 1930's marked the beginning of interracial efforts to address the Jim Crow laws. During these efforts Whites and Blacks worked to challenge the fears about race mixing (Manis, 2004). Despite these efforts, many other factors stood in the way of significant progress. In 1934 Jesse O. Thomas, the Southern field secretary of the National Urban League described Macon as "one of the most backward cities in the whole South" (Manis, 2004, p. 110). The political atmosphere of Georgia further inhibited the interracial progress in Macon. Under the leadership of Governor Eugene Talmadge, Georgia joined other Southern states in adopting a policy of "massive resistance" towards any attempts at desegregation (Roche, 1998). The racial inequities were portrayed in the status of the schools for each race. Georgia had 473 White high schools and only 54 Black schools. In these White schools, ninety percent of the teachers were certified while less than fifty-five percent of the Black teachers held state teacher certification (Manis, 2004). Macon's approach to dealing with race relations always mirrored the state's approach.

The 1940's were consumed with World War II. An important race related event occurring in Macon during that time was a "naturalization" ceremony for the Ku Klux Klan held at the Macon City Auditorium in 1948 (Manis, 2004). The location of this ceremony reveals a lot about the leadership of Macon. An event such as this would not have occurred without support from those in power. Another key element during this decade was the ending of World War II and the homecoming of the soldiers. Men that had served in order to defend their country

from foreign enemies were not granted the same type of treatment when they returned home because of their race. Roche (1998) claims that the South experienced more change than any other region of the United States after the war: "Rapid change was fueled by the African American civil rights movement, which brought about a fundamental revolution in the South's social and political structure" (p. xi). The response to these changes would only be fueled in the coming years as Supreme Court rulings began to shape the direction of race relations.

All of these issues came to the forefront in May of 1954 when the Supreme Court ruled in the monumental case of *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education*. At this point, the southern way of ignoring problems and remaining silent would have to change...Or would they?

In the midst of a whirlwind of change, white southerners viewed school segregation as a critical symbol of southern distinctiveness. They clung to conservatism that resisted any challenge to the system of white supremacy, believing that change could undermine the entire structure of their society. (Roche, 1998, p. xii)

The movement for massive resistance was only strengthened by these decisions. State leaders devised a plan to preserve the current status of segregated schools. Their plan included eliminating public education and moving to a privatized system. The plan went so far as to declare that the governor would deny state funding to any school that allowed Black and White children to be educated in the same classroom (Manis, 2004; Roche, 1998). This plan was met with mixed reactions through the state. However, pertinent to this study and the context of Macon, it is important to note that the Bibb County School Superintendent Mark Smith cast a vote favoring the move during his tenure on the Georgia Commission on Education (Manis, 2004). After the ruling on *Brown II* calling for swift action in implementing the desegregation

called for in *Brown*, the state's massive resistance efforts grew. Governor Marvin Griffin stated that

We are not going to mix the races in the classrooms of our schools and colleges in Georgia. No matter how much the Supreme Court seeks to sugarcoat its bitter pill of tyranny, the people of Georgia and the South will not swallow it. Under no circumstances will we sacrifice the welfare and best interests of our children to satisfy such an unconstitutional decision of the Supreme Court. As long as I am governor, and as long as the state of Georgia operates its schools, that precept will stand. (Jurists order, 1954, p. 1)

So the resistance efforts toward desegregating schools were led by a top-down leadership beginning with the governor. Concern over this stance continued all the way to the White House. President Eisenhower worried about the Deep South's reaction to the *Brown* decision. He feared actions similar to the one planned by Georgia aimed at ending public education instead of integrating schools. Being removed from the setting of the South, he was able to objectively reflect upon the negative impact that the decision to close schools would have on children of both races (Roche, 1998). Despite the concerns emitting from the White House, Georgia continued with its plans to address its problem with mandated integration. Further attempts by the state sought to paralyze those wishing for integration. Threats were made that any mixed-race school would be ineligible for state funding. Furthermore, teachers found condoning, supporting, or teaching integrated classrooms would have their teaching certificates permanently revoked (Manis, 2004; Roche 1998).

In response to the growing tensions regarding integration following the rulings in *Brown* and *Brown II*, the state had to devise an action plan. Governor Vandiver created the Sibley

Commission to meet this need. The goal of this commission "was to ascertain what the citizens of Georgia wanted to do in face of the crisis" (Roche, 1998, p. xiv). The formation of the commission was initially a stall tactic to prolong the integration of public schools. Hearings were held throughout the state seeking the input of stakeholders, Black and White, regarding the crisis of possible integration of schools. By setting up a rigid format, the Sibley Commission only allowed witnesses two choices in presenting their solutions: "a defense of resistance and private schools to protect segregation or the adoption of new techniques that would secure segregation for most of Georgia without threatening public education" (Roche, 1998, p. xv). As this statewide effort to avoid integration was going on Macon was involved in its own pursuits. On June 6, 1961 Bowden Golf Course was desegregated. This action marked the first attempt at bringing the population together (Manis, 2004).

While the rest of the South was embattled over attempts to avoid integration, Macon's higher education scene made strides towards integration with the voluntary desegregation of Mercer University (Manis, 2004). The public schools continued to resist desegregation throughout the 1960s. Multiple failed attempts were made to desegregate the schools in 1954, 1955, 1961, and 1963 (Manis, 2004). Court authorities intervened in 1964 and issued an order that the schools be desegregated by that fall—sixteen black students were transferred as a result (Manis, 2004). Five years later another ruling by the US Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ordered that the schools be integrated by September of 1970. A few weeks after this ruling, another ruling was issued giving the Bibb County Schools two weeks to integrate. Over a long weekend 376 teachers were reassigned to positions at new schools in order to fulfill this court mandate. In response to the reactions of many unhappy parents, the compulsory school attendance laws for the county were suspended (Manis, 2004). On February 16, 1970 the elementary schools were

integrated. Manis (2004) reports that "transfers of an estimated 5,500 elementary school students took place with few incidents. Parents escorted some 500 students to their original schools. Among these parents was Mayor Thompson, who took his son, Johnny back to Neel Elementary School" (p. 254). Led by the mayor, whose outrageous race tactics earned him the nickname "Machine Gun Ronnie," many parents continued to resist these efforts. During the weeks after integration an increasing number of parents continued to take their children to their original schools. A protest effort almost closed Morgan Elementary School:

Mothers protested Black students being bussed there from a recently-closed Black school. Blocking school buses, the protesters implored other parents to withhold their children from their classes. That same day school officials evacuated students from Morgan and Neel schools after receiving bomb threats. (Manis, 2004, p. 255)

One particular point of significance to this current study is the location of the protest. Morgan Elementary School has experienced demographic shifts much like the school that is the focus of this inquiry. Prior to integration the school served White students from the surrounding neighborhood. Today the school is seventy-three percent Black, eleven percent White, and seventeen percent Hispanic, Asian and mixed races (Georgia Department of Education, 2010c). The Hispanic and Asian enrollment at the school is not necessarily reflective of the immediate neighborhood because Morgan houses the English as a Second Language program for its high school feeder zone. Similarly, Ocmulgee Elementary School (pseudonym), the focus of this inquiry, has experienced dramatic shifts in demographics as the population of the neighborhood has changed.

Even though the state's plan to privatize schools rather than integrate them failed, it spurred a growth in private schools. Manis (2004) refers to the fact that most of the private

schools, also referred to as "segregation academies" were "born in the context of the South's massive resistance against public school integration" (p. 310). In fact between 1959 and 1969 in response to Brown and Brown II, Macon's private school enrollment increased by two hundred percent. "Between October 1969 and July 1970 fifty-eight new private schools were opened in Georgia. In September 1970, seven months after Judge Bootle desegregated the county's public schools five new private schools opened their doors in Macon" (Manis, 2004, p. 313). Enrollment in these private academies in 2002 was between 15 and 20 percent of the student population in Macon, compared to six percent statewide. The number of private schools increased from eight in 1970 to 20 in 2002 (Manis, 2004). As of 2008 that number had dropped to 15. The City of Macon's website boasts that there are 15 private schools in operation, including Tatnall Square Academy which opened in 1969 and Stratford Academy which opened in 1960 (Private Schools, 2009). During the recent economic crisis several of the smaller private schools have struggled to maintain their needed enrollment numbers. As a result, a couple of the private schools in the area have closed. However, the presence of these private schools has continued to present a problem for Bibb County Public Schools.

Despite attempts to diversify both the makeup and the curriculum of the county's private schools, the drift of white students toward private education or homeschooling has resulted in a largely re-segregated Bibb County public school system.....These trends have hurt the public school system by diminishing its overall support and siphoning off students from wealthier families and stronger educational backgrounds. (Manis, 2004, p. 315)

This phenomenon of White flight from the public schools has led to a decrease in funding based on FTE counts and increased resentment towards the schools from those who are paying taxes to

support the schools while also paying tuition to keep their children out of the same schools their tax money is supporting. The effects of the White flight to the private academies and neighboring counties can be seen by viewing the school demographic. In 2010 40 public schools were operating as part of the Bibb County Public School District. Four of these schools had a predominantly White student enrollment and three had approximately a 50-50 ratio between White and non-White student enrollment. The remaining 33 schools had a student population that was over 50% non-White (Dallemand, 2011). According to census reports between 2005 and 2009 the population of Bibb County was 65.9% Black and 30.9% White (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Integration efforts across the South were executed on "White terms" (Applebome, 1997, p.170). These efforts contributed to feelings of discontent among the citizenry. In 1963 a group of concerned Black and White parents filed a petition arguing that integration still was not taking place in an appropriate manner in Bibb County. In 1978 the school district was placed under a federal court mandate to desegregate its schools. As a result, the system started offering majority-to-minority transfers that allowed a student whose race was represented in the majority population at his or her home school to transfer to a school where they were in the minority population. This agreement also created a lottery system for Alexander II Magnet School based on race. The outcome of the lottery ensured that the student population for the school is half Black and half White each year (these percentages vary some due to the inclusion of other minority students in today's student population) (Hubbard, 2007; Hubbard, 2006). According to Hubbard "many parents at Alexander II have said that having that school as an option kept them from going private" (Hubbard, 2007, p. 2). In 2006 White parents started challenging the desegregation order and the majority-to-minority transfer system. They cited the influx of

students based on the transfers had led to overcrowding in many schools requiring to many mobile classrooms in order to accommodate the student populations. In 2007, the federal monitoring of the Bibb County Public Schools and its adherence to the desegregation order was lifted as the system was declared unitary. Some plaintiffs requested that the order not be lifted because of the racial imbalance present at some schools in the district. Judge Wilbur D. Owens, Jr. freed the school district from responsibility in this imbalance by implying that they were a result of housing patterns not the drawing of school zones (Hubbard, 2007; Hubbard 2006).

Even with the 2007 ruling declaring Bibb County schools unified and the ending of majority-to-minority transfers in the 2008-2009 school year, there continues to be a great deal of disparity and racial tension among the schools within the district. Private schools still serve as the answer for many who wish to avoid possible race mixing in the school setting. Even though the city and most definitely the school system have been, and continue to be, deeply affected by the issue of race, it still carries on as an unutterable topic. As good Southerners we steer away from any public topic of conversation that could stir up controversy or raise tempers. Instead we act much like the ostrich who sticks his head in the sand so that he will not see the impending danger.

Justification

In order to fully understand the importance of this study, one must first see its relevance by examining the shifting demographics within U.S. society and its schools. Landsman (2001) explains that "in our twenty-five largest cities, students of color are in the majority in all but two" (p. ix). In the 2008 school year, the U.S. Department of Education (2009) reported 57.8% White, 16% Black, and 26.2% other minorities were enrolled in public schools. In the state of Georgia the student population was 45% White, 37% Black, and 17% other minorities (Georgia

Department of Education, 2010b). The student enrollment for the district where I work is 21% White, 73% Black, and 6% other minorities. The school where I work was 1% White, 98% Black and 1 % Multi-racial (Georgia Department of Education, 2010a). These statistics are particularly relevant to this study.

In contrast to this phenomenon in the population of students, the teaching staff remains relatively unchanged over the past few decades. Ladson-Billings (2001) states "thus while the K-12 student population is becoming increasingly diverse, the prospective teaching population is becoming increasingly monocultural, that is, White, middle class, and monolingual English" (p. 4). Gay (2002) proposes that many teachers differ greatly from the students they teach in most cultural areas—racial and ethnic identities, age, social class, background experiences, and residential location. Even when students have teachers of their same race there are often significant differences between their socioeconomic, cultural, and geographic backgrounds that must be addressed. Kunjufu (2002) further substantiates this assertion by stating that "the future of the African American population primarily lies in the hands of White female teachers" (p. 17). The statistics of teacher demographics furthers the assertion of these authors. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2009) 83.1% of public school teachers are White, 7% are Black, and 9.8% represent other minorities. According to the Georgia Professional Standards Commission report (Afolabi & Eads, 2009) White teachers constituted 74.6% of the Georgia teaching workforce in the 2008-2009 school year, while Black teachers constituted 22.9%. The teacher work force for the district where I work in is 56% White, 42% Black, and 2% other minorities. The school where I work inverts these numbers with 43% White and 57% Black (Georgia Department of Education, 2009). These numbers are important to consider in relationship to the makeup of the student population. When examining these numbers it is easy

to see Kunjufu's point that it is almost inevitable that Black students will have White teachers. Howard (2006) sums the situation up as follows:

Thus, at the present time in American public education we are faced with three simultaneous statistical realities: (1) our teacher force is mostly White, (2) our student population is highly diverse and growing in children of color, and (3) children of color are precisely the students most at risk of being caught on the negative end of the achievement gap. (p. 4)

Even when the percentages shift, the importance of recognizing the implications of these demographic differences between the student make-up and the teaching force is imperative.

Another justification for this project can be found by exploring the economic and cultural factors surrounding the research setting. My inquiry is centered on teachers working in schools with high-minority student populations. In the district where I work, that also equates to schools with high levels of poverty. An important statistic to consider in regard to the student population is the number of students eligible for free and reduced meals. This number indicates the level of poverty present in the school setting. In the state of Georgia 56% percent of the public school students are eligible for free and reduced meals. The district where I work has 77% of its students qualifying for free and reduced meals while the school serves 96% of its students free and reduced meals (Georgia Department of Education, 2010). These numbers could be slightly lower than the actual poverty level of the population being represented because some parents fail to apply due to issues of pride. These numbers do, however, reflect the stark reality of the high level of poverty that co-exists with the high minority population of these schools. There are many cultural and economic factors affecting students and teachers in this setting that do not impact teachers at more affluent schools. While our school is old, it is well maintained.

However, we do experience multiple deficits throughout our building—a leaky roof, peeling plaster, and moldy stage curtains due to years of roof leakage. Unlike more affluent schools, these high-minority schools do not have the financial backing of a strong Parent Teacher Organization and community resources. In fact a couple of years ago the building was designated as outdated and has been scheduled to be demolished and rebuilt as early as 2014. Part of these issues stem from the location of the school and the population that it serves.

As explained by Kunjufu (2002) there is a cultural mismatch between the home environment and the culture espoused in the school setting. Teachers who are engaged in border crossings must be careful to ensure that the norms and values that they are espousing in the classroom are not in direct opposition to those that the student is receiving from home. For example, in the home culture the children are often taught to fight anyone who challenges them, then to tell the teacher. In school, students are punished for this response to conflict. The appropriate response would be to tell the teacher and to refrain from fighting. Recognition of the different social registers and ways to address them is needed. Schultz (2008) posits that "the curriculum itself and the way it is taught are often driving forces responsible for gross inequities that advance the unjust socioeconomic stratification in this country" (p. 13). An area that is being overlooked in these schools is the difference in learning styles and learning opportunities present in these settings. Many students at lower income schools do not receive the same types of rich extra-curricular enrichment activities as would be provided in the typical middle-class family. This lack of enrichment is not an oversight on the part of the parents, but a result of limited resources. Schultz (2008) explains that:

Lower socioeconomic classes, especially Black children from public housing, are not given the choices and freedoms accorded to those in more affluent areas. The accepted prescription for success for my students was to follow the rules so that they could achieve a prescribed outcome, typically measured by their test scores, that destined them to remain in the same low-income environment and socioeconomic class. (p. 14)

The curriculum forced upon most students fails to consider their previous experiences, or lack thereof. Often every student, regardless of his or her background, is presented with the same "one size fits all" or perhaps more aptly "one size fits none" curriculum. Without the possession of what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as "cultural capital" (Apple, 1995) associated with these choices, freedoms, and experiences, students are powerless in their attempts to break out of the poverty cycle. This theory goes along with the point that Apple (2004a) makes when describing the hegemonic processes associated with schooling. Schools are highly political sites that work to perpetuate the status quo through the mandated and hidden curricula. The current status of these schools generally does not produce the rich dialogue and development of critical thinking skills that work to break this hegemonic cycle. Furthermore a lack of physical resources works to further stifle progress at many of these schools.

This inquiry also has justification as a contribution to the field of curriculum studies.

One characteristic of the field is the willingness to ask hard questions and to speak up for others whose voice may not be otherwise heard. While White, middle-class teachers cannot generally be viewed as an underrepresented population as a whole, the context that I am placing them in is one where it could be the case. Many times the only stories of these teachers who emerge are the ones lying on the extremes—the teacher who goes in and saves all the students or the one who leaves screaming after the first day. Rarely do the stories of the teachers who make this pursuit

their life's work without seeking glory and fame get shared, especially when they are teaching in a small school that no one has ever heard of before. As a researcher committed to social justice, it is my responsibility to share these stories and to share the voices of the participants in my research study. People from the outside could benefit from a glimpse of what goes on inside a school like Ocmulgee; they need to know what kinds of decisions and dilemmas the teachers are forced to deal with on a daily basis.

Purpose of the Study

When I began my teaching career, I expected to experience paradigm shifts from the transition of being a student to a professional. I never considered the other paradigm shifts that I would encounter. None of the experiences that I encountered during my teacher preparation courses, teaching internship, or Masters Degree prepared me for the world that I would have to navigate. In fairness to the university, part of this lack of preparedness was the result of my own choices. With thoughts that I would return to my rural home town to teach, I chose to participate in the rural teaching program. This choice led me to spend most of my pre-service teaching experiences in a school that was predominantly White. In the interest of providing a well-rounded experience, the education program did require that I have an experience in multiple types of schools. Unfortunately, the only criterion necessary to fulfill this requirement was a brief interaction that did not really portray an accurate reflection of these settings. The majority of my pre-teaching and internship experiences existed within the vacuum of an isolated rural school system.

Kunjufu (2002) explains that many other teachers experience a similar phenomenon. He states

Many White teachers grew up in rural areas or lived their entire lives in White neighborhoods. They attended a White university, worshipped in a White church, and shopped in White grocery stores. They did their student teaching in rural school districts and accepted teaching assignments in the inner city. (p. 18)

This description closely mirrors my own life history. Further, due to a lack of pertinent background information and experiences, Kunjufu (2002) explains that these White teachers are now ill-prepared to teach African-American children. The purpose of this study is to use "personal~passionate~participatory inquiry (He & Phillion, 2008) and portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) to explore how White teachers, such as myself, are able to share their passion and find ways to be successful while working in minority schools. Using a personal~passionate~participatory method of research will allow me to delve into this much needed area of inquiry by relating it to the concerns I see at the school since this inquiry method encourages researchers to study issues that they see as relevant to their own lives.

Key Research Issues

The key research issues for this inquiry delve into how White teachers cross racial barriers and establish successful teaching careers working in schools where they become the racial minority. When so many teachers use high-poverty schools with high minority populations as a mere stepping stone on their career path, what makes these White teachers have the desire to stay at the schools? Furthermore, what characteristics allow some of these White teachers who choose to remain at schools where they are in the minority to become successful while others falter? Also, how do these teachers who choose to stay break the silence and engage in dialogues about the unutterable truth regarding racial tensions that permeate the classroom and society at large?

Research Questions

The overarching research question is: How have four White teachers at Ocmulgee Elementary School crossed racial barriers to establish successful teaching careers? Additional questions include: What factors influence these teachers to remain in a teaching setting where they are in the racial minority? How do these White teachers respond to the cultural differences between their background and their teaching context? How did their background experiences prepare them for working in a minority school? How did these background experiences hinder their efforts to work in a minority school? How do these teachers overcome the cultural differences? Why do these teachers feel that they were successful when other White teachers have not been able to find success at the same school? Finally, why did these teachers choose to remain at this school when opportunities to transfer arose?

To address the area of sustainability a section of questions on culturally responsive teaching practices is also being included. Each of the participants selected exhibit characteristics of culturally responsive teachers. What are these teachers doing in their practice to bridge the gap between the culture of their students and themselves? How are they working to validate the identities of their students?

Autobiographical Roots

I grew up outside a rural town in the foothills of the East Tennessee Mountains. To outsiders this area is generally described as the middle of nowhere. Our house was five minutes down the road from "town." This town was the county seat for the rural county. Everything within the city limits is anchored between the Ford dealership on one end and the Chevrolet dealership on the other end. The highway through town widens to a four-lane as you pass the Ford dealership. Everything to be seen in town is situated on this one highway. There are a few

stores, restaurants, and gas stations there. Quaint sidewalks line the street securing easy access to the expanse of town. However, you better run your errands early, since at night it seems as though city leaders roll up the sidewalks. Everything except for the two fast food restaurants closes at eight throughout the week and at six on Sunday.

The population downtown would be considered sparse by an outsider. As a child I would have considered it over-populated to have neighbors living so close to each other. A couple of years ago when the farmer's cooperative caught fire, everyone within a five-mile radius of the store had to be evacuated. This area included most of the city limits and forced an estimated total of fifty people out of their homes. Part of the reason for the high number is that two of the four apartment complexes are located next door to the farmer's cooperative.

As a child I never experienced having pizza delivered to my house or drinking city water—these frivolous luxuries were not part of our lived realities. When I was in high school a pizza parlor did open up in town, however our house was still just outside of its delivery area. I lived about five miles outside of the town that I just described. It is a beautiful area situated in the valley between two mountains. You can be poor here and never even realize it. People always seemed to be able to get what they needed to in order to survive. The land is divided into small farms and homesteads. Gardens and cow pastures dot the land providing both sources of food and income for those who decide to toil the soil. When I lived there road signs designating the "official" name of roads were nonexistent. As such, neither was 9-1-1. In case of emergency one had to call the sheriff's office and wait for them to dispatch the call to the appropriate agency. Driving directions often resembled those of which comedians poke fun in their routines. They almost always referred you to a family homestead, a specific color of a house or other natural or man-made landmarks. My favorite of these landmarks was the "woman tree." It stood

high up on the top of a ridge. The tree was shaped like the profile of a woman wearing a dress. For years this tree stood as a landmark for giving directions.

My childhood home was situated at the end of a dead-end road. With the exception of the mailman and some hunters in the fall, people came up the road for one of two reasons—either they were looking for our family or they were lost. There was one other house on the road which my paternal grandparents owned. It sat empty most of my childhood. My parents divorced when I was four years old. My mom's house, where I was raised, sat right in the center of my dad's farm. The yard was big enough for a garden, which provided us with fresh vegetables in the summer. We always canned an assortment of vegetables, fruits, jams, and jellies to last us through the winter months. A five-strand barbed wire fence separated the yard from the cow pasture. The field was scattered with cedar thickets and huge boulders projecting one side out of the earth. A quick trek between the center strand of the barbed-wires and through the cedar thicket brought us to the barn and a small-pond. Much to my mother's chagrin my brothers and I spent most of our summertime waking hours here. With make-shift fishing poles fashioned from a stick, a piece of fishing line and a hook, we would spend hours trying to catch the fish my grandfather had stocked the pond with years before. When we tired of fishing we would play in the barn. There was an adrenaline rush from climbing into the loft of the barn, running to the other end of the barn, and jumping down into a pile of hay. Another source of attraction the barn provided was the calves. Almost every spring at least one cow would reject its new-born calf. These calves became our projects, and sometimes overgrown pets. We would mix up formula in a huge bottle and feed the young calves. Eventually we were faced with the harsh realities of life on a farm. Just like Fern in E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web*, we realized that our "pets" would soon end up in neat little white paper packages in the freezer. This process was traumatic at first

but eventually we were able to see that it was a part of reality and a means to keep food on the table, or rather in the freezer.

If we needed something that was not available in the stores in our small town, we would have to make a trip to a larger city. In our vernacular this trip was always called "going to town." It could be hard to distinguish which city a person was attempting to describe due to the common use of this generic term. The city with the most options was about thirty miles down the road. This city was a university town and seemed so different from my home, even though it was fairly close. I always loved going on these trips. Going to town [aka larger city] usually meant that we would get to eat out. Since these trips were infrequent, we rarely were afforded the luxury of restaurant dining.

Mine was a community marked by large pockets of poverty and very little ethnic or cultural diversity. Everyone in the community seemed to know my name and it seemed that at least half of the people were related to you in some way. The majority of both sides of my family lived within a five-mile radius of both of my grandparents' homes. Participation in church and family events were integral parts of my young life. Even though my parents were divorced, I was fully involved with events in both of their families. Despite the fact that I did not realize it at the time, my family, community, school, and church were socializing me and imparting strong moral and racial views into my understanding of life.

During my formative years, my encounters with people who were not White like me were limited to special shopping trips in town and vacations. Most of my experiences were created by living vicariously through stories from my family and by watching television. It was only when I went away to college that I actually interacted with a more diverse population. Ironically, even though I went to a university only thirty miles from my hometown, I was immediately ostracized

and identified as the outsider because of my strong back-woods accent and colloquialisms. I quickly learned how to adapt my language skills to meet the expectations of my new setting, only to transfer back to a more comfortable vernacular once I returned home. As I progressed through my undergraduate experience there was never really a question as to what I was going to study. Early in my childhood I had decided that I was going to be a teacher. Furthermore, I always planned to go back home and teach in the same school district that educated me. When the time came to interview for an internship program, I was naturally drawn to the Rural Teaching Program. I earned my Bachelor of Arts degree and immediately began my teaching internship in Oneida, TN. Oneida is a small, rural town situated on the Tennessee/Kentucky border. While it had more industry than the town in which I was raised, it retained the rural distinction through its isolation and geographic characteristics. During my time in Oneida, I worked in a school district with less than a thousand students in K-12. The school district's diversity consisted of two Hispanic children and two Asian children. The remainder of the school's population consisted of White children from a rural setting. At the end of that year I began interviewing for teaching positions. True to my personal goals, I centered my efforts on my hometown and other similar districts surrounding it. At a teacher recruitment fair at the university, I decided to interview with some other districts just to get some practice interviewing and to fill time before I could speak to the districts I was really interested in pursuing. One of those whim interviews was with a group from Macon, GA. Truth be known, I had never heard of Macon and had no intentions of learning anything else about it; I just needed some practice interviewing.

The end of the school year came I still did not have any job offers. I did have several messages from the people in Macon that I was choosing to ignore. Since I had been unsure

about my future plans, all of my resumes and applications included my mother's phone number as a permanent contact number. Finally, she called me to let me know that she had received several phone calls from a place called Macon. I ultimately decided to respond. I traveled to Macon to interview on Memorial Day weekend. Even though it was almost six hours from home, I enjoyed the experience. I discovered a city that seemed to be rich with historical and cultural experiences. During that trip I was offered and accepted a teaching position. I was told that I would be teaching at a high-poverty school with a high percentage of minority students. This was different from all of my previous life experiences but I felt that I could handle it. No one informed me of the "unutterable" racial tensions that plagued the city (Manis, 2004). Once I moved to Macon, the shroud covering these racial tensions began to dissipate. In the classroom I faced struggles of balancing the task of being a new teacher with that of being an outsider. I quickly learned that even though we were all speaking the same language, our meanings were often lost on each other. I also learned how many people felt about the prospects of a young White teacher coming into their neighborhood to teach. I was promptly faced with answering the personal question of how I would be able to establish my identity as a White teacher in a school population that was mostly Black.

My first year teaching felt like baptism by fire. I began the year teaching fourth grade, but as our third grade classes were overcrowded, a new third grade class had to be formed. As the newest teacher on the staff whose certification covered both primary and intermediate grades I was reassigned to the new class. Seven weeks into my first year teaching, I was moved out of the main building into a modular teaching unit behind the school to begin teaching third grade. My class roster included a sampling of all of the behavior and learning problems from the other classes that the other teachers had decided to jettison when the opportunity presented itself. As I

continued to negotiate my identity as a new teacher and a White teacher in an unfamiliar setting filled with students very different from me, I was also faced with a classroom full of students that had a history of academic and behavior problems who were also trying to get used to their second teacher and second set of rituals and routines for the year. Seven weeks later another staffing shift occurred and I was moved to another school to co-teach in a third grade classroom as a part of the Class Size Reduction Program; this time with an experienced Black teacher. This opportunity afforded me a chance to see how a Black teacher interacted with Black students. Since I was not present at the beginning of the year, I was never introduced to the parents or accepted as a full teacher by them, any of the other staff at the school, or the teacher with whom I was co-teaching. I began to feel like an overpaid teacher's assistant who ran copies, graded papers and covered classes when a substitute teacher was not available. The principal rode me hard and never actually attempted to learn anything about me or my teaching abilities. The week before the school year ended she walked up to me and explained that she thought that I might actually be a good teacher after all. Needless to say it was a rough year. After my first year of teaching, some deeper issues had become more evident to me—the racial undertones ever present in Macon. However, due to my negative experiences I was unable to work towards establishing my identity and role as a White teacher in that setting. I remained an outsider.

At the beginning of the 2002 school year, I transferred to the school where I currently teach. When I first arrived I was met with a sense of suspicion by many of the Black parents and students. Again, it was the feeling of "who is this White teacher and what can she offer our neighborhood children?" My principal and one other teacher knew the story of my first year of teaching. I did not share it with others until after I had established myself and proven that that experience was not truly reflective of my capacity as a teacher. Even now, many of my co-

workers remain unaware of these experiences which played such a big part in shaping who I am now as a teacher. As I have worked at my school to prove to my students and their parents that I do care about them and their success, their opinions about me have changed. I feel as if I am no longer seen as an outsider by the majority of the school population. I am an integral part of the school culture; however, those moments of racial tension do still occur. One of the most poignant racial experiences of my teaching career occurred moments after viewing Barack Obama's inauguration with my third grade students. A boy looked up at me and informed me that he did not have to do anything else that I asked of him and that I could not be his teacher anymore because we have a Black president. A flood of questions swirled through my mind at that moment. I began to wonder what life experiences and views would cause a child to make such a comment. Again I began to wonder about "unutterable truths" that defined race relation in this southern town.

Another underlying factor at that time was my enrollment in this degree program. My views of the world were expanded through the many readings and discussions in which I took part. I began to develop a critical view towards the overall structure of schooling in our society. This experience also made me start questioning the veiled agendas within our education system and my role in perpetuating these goals even when I was unaware. Another question that emerged was how the role of White privilege was affecting all of these interactions. I am not alone in this pursuit to negotiate my role as a White teacher in a school with a predominantly Black population. I ask this question not just for my own satisfaction but to offer hope to others who may find themselves in a similar situation.

As I think about my teaching experiences over the past ten years, two factors stand out as tantamount in framing any type of understanding; race and place. At times these two themes are

so intertwined that it is difficult to see where one ends and the other begins. Two places are important to understand my story. First of all, there is the place of my roots—a rural mountainous area of East Tennessee. Life in this community was mostly agricultural. The area was poverty-stricken but everyone seemed to find a way to survive. I remember judging wealth by the size of farmsteads and the type of clothes that kids wore to school. I had classmates whose families, like mine, struggled in their daily existence and others who never went without. My family fell somewhere in the bottom end of the middle-class. We always had clothes to wear and food on the table. However, my mom did work multiple jobs and relied heavily on the support of our extended family to keep our family afloat as a single mother. Family and a sense of community were paramount. No one ever talked about racial relations. Most of the culturally diverse exposure that I had was the images portrayed through television and other forms of media.

The second setting is where I chose to launch my teaching career. In contrast to the rural area where I was raised I found myself in a mid-sized city. Now I have ready access to almost any convenience that I can imagine around-the-clock. With these gains I have lost some elements of my rural upbringing. No longer do I have that strong sense of community. I knew my neighbors by name and face but that was the end of the relationship. Another new element was the introduction of racial tensions into my every day existence. Macon is a racially polarized southern city. While this fact is known to most individuals who have spent any amount of time in the city, it is generally considered a taboo discussion topic. Manis (2004) states that "an 'unutterable separation' has characterized black-white relations in Macon throughout the twentieth century and persists in different forms into this new millennium" (p. 6). In recruiting me to Macon, these unutterable facts were not revealed. To add more intrigue to

this context one must also consider the current make-up of the teaching force. Kunjufu (2002) and Ladson-Billings (2001) describe the fact that most of the white teachers now teaching black students never received any training pertinent to their teaching contexts. Despite the increased diversification of the student population, teachers continue to receive the same type of education directed towards the norm of society—the White, middle class.

When I began my teaching career, I found myself thrust into a teaching position for which my teacher preparation program did not train me, in a city that is deeply marked with an "unutterable separation." "Thus in a new century, race and a persisting inability or unwillingness to talk about it remains a central strong factor in the social and political life of Macon, particularly in public education and tensions between city and county governments" (Manis, 2004, p. 8). Racial tensions continue in Macon through present day.

Summary of the Study

My enrollment in this degree program forced me to address several unutterable tenets of my existence. When I started looking at these areas I found it to be much like an onion. Each unutterable statement that I faced and attempted to overcome revealed yet another layer. I have dealt with the conflicting worlds of my two "Souths." I am still trying to figure out exactly how many Macons I co-exist between in my everyday living. It seems as if every facet of my life takes me into a different realm of Macon's existence and being—each with its own set of "unutterable" truths. Then most important to my professional and educational career is the world of race and class. Each day as I enter my classroom I am faced with the reality that I am crossing racial borders and that I can no longer ignore these facts. This reality is definitely the easiest to see as you can quickly look around my classroom and see that I am usually the only White face in the room. This inquiry into how White teachers can be successful and establish a sense of

longevity teaching in a school where they become the racial minority emerged out of my attempts to pull back the layers of the onion and speak the unutterable truths surrounding me.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to develop a study which will help White teachers to negotiate their identities while working in minority schools it was necessary to review literature relevant to this topic.

I explored the social construction of race, Whiteness, and White privilege. Since this study was about White teachers working with minority students, I included an exploration on race's impact on education, the characteristics of schools with a high minority student population, teacher attrition, and culturally relevant practices. A review of exemplary studies pertinent to this study is also included.

Social Construction of Race

As one explores research about the construction of race, one notion quickly becomes clear; the concept of race has never been fixed. Pinar (1993) further explains the fluid nature of racial categories: "historically, those groups identified as 'people of color' have changed according to political circumstances" (p. 61). Apple (2004b) continues with this same point:

Race is not a stable category. What it means, how it is used, by whom, who is mobilized in public discourse, and its role in educational and more in general social policy—all of this is contingent and historical. Indeed, it would be misleading to talk of race as an 'it.' 'It' is not a thing, a reified object that can be measured as if it were a simple biological entity. Race is a *construction*, a set of full social *relationships*. (p. 75)

The concept of race is not as concrete a construction as society perceives it. It is continually changing and I contend will continue to do so as social, political, and economic conditions continue to change. According to these standards many individuals who now enjoy statuses of racial privilege would have previously been denied this status based on their heritage. Many

historical issues of race were enacted in response to societal changes or in order to gain power in regards to political conditions. According to Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman (2004)

Race is a complex, dynamic, and changing construct. Like gender, race is not a biological given, and the cultural weight it has been made to bear out is out of all proportion to any biological or morphological differences among groups of people. (p. 316)

Those in power situations have worked throughout U.S. history to define and redefine the social meanings of race as a reactionary tactic to changes in society any claims of biological differences were mere tools of propaganda. Tatum (2007) substantiates this point by positing that the racial distinctions that we make hold no biological validity. "Biologists tell us that the only truly meaningful racial categorization is that of 'human'" (Tatum, 2007, p. xiv). Based on these quotes the distinctions we call races have no biological basis. According to these premises the stark differences we try to identify between races stops skin deep. Throughout U.S. history there have been different meanings of Black and White based on political and social circumstances rather than biological differences. If race has no biological validity its origins must be rooted in social constructions.

One obstacle to considering the social construction of race is the denial that many individuals adopt. Pinar et al. (2004) state that: "the American identity is constructed partly by denial, by maintaining denial, by maintaining fictions. The American 'self' is not exclusively or even primarily European. That delusion represents a fantasy, a flight from historical and cultural reality" (p. 328-329). Just like the ostrich does not remove itself from danger when it buries its head in the sand and becomes oblivious to the impending threat, denying these realities does nothing to change our identity. Winant (2004) posits "yet a refusal to engage in 'race thinking'

amounts to a defense of the racial status quo, in which systematic racial inequality and, yes, discrimination as well, are omnipresent" (p. 8). Deciding not to talk about race does not alleviate the problem or make it go away, it actually serves to perpetuate the issue and make it worse. As concerned citizens dedicated to social justice, we need to explore the ways that society works to construct the concept of race.

As previously stated the concept of race is complex, and ever changing. As society has faced various trials and challenges, constructs of race have been adapted to fulfill these needs to advance the status quo of those in power. Frankenberg (1993) states:

I have found most useful those analyses that view race as a socially constructed rather than inherently meaningful category, one linked to relations of power and processes of struggle, and one whose meaning changes over time. Race, like gender, is "real" in the sense that it has real, though changing effects in the world and real, tangible, and complex impact on individuals' sense of self, experiences, and life chances. In asserting that race and racial difference are socially constructed, I do not minimize their social and political reality, but rather insist that their reality is, precisely, social and political rather than inherent or static. (p. 11)

Those individuals or groups in power use this malleability of racial constructs to maintain and strengthen their sense of power by marginalizing the one deemed a threat to their success. The concept of race is important in regard to identity and social roles. Ng (1993) links race with gender and class as relationships that dictate how people define themselves and their social roles. She explains that "relations of race, gender, and class converge, diverge, and change over time as people's relations to productive and reproductive activities change within a given society. These are real and concrete relations, not just abstract and imaginary categories" (Ng, 1993, p. 51).

Furthermore it is important to understand that while race helps assign us an identity it also serves to deny us an identity. "It [race] both makes the social world intelligible, and simultaneously renders it opaque and mysterious. Not only does it allocate resources, power and privilege; it also provides means for challenging that allocation" (Winant, 2004, p. 11). Race, while existing as an ever-changing construct, has been endowed with a great deal of power in maintaining the structure of society and controlling the distribution of goods and services.

A Reciprocal Relationship

As we explore the social construction of race it is imperative to acknowledge that it is not as one-sided a concept as most people would like to believe. Society attempts to create dichotomous distinctions of race based on external appearances. Attempts are made to place individuals into one category completely separate and distinct from every other group. Pinar et al. (2004) challenges this dichotomous position: "'White' does not exist apart from 'Black,' the two coexist, intermingle, and the repression of this knowledge deforms us all, especially those who are White" (p. 330). Fanon (in Pinar et al. 2004) said that "there can be no 'Black' without 'White' and vice versa" (p. 330). Thus instead of a dichotomous relationship, various races exist in a reciprocal manner. Just like so many concepts within our society, it is impossible to define the concepts of racial categories without relating them to one another. One race cannot exist alone, there must always be another group on which comparisons can be made. "European Americans and African Americans are two sides of the same cultural coin, two interrelated narratives in the American story. The former cannot hope to understand themselves unless they are knowledgeable and knowing of the latter, and vice versa" (Pinar, 1993, p. 63). Pinar (1993) further explains how interrelated we actually are in stating that we cannot begin to understand

ourselves without first understanding our relationships to those around us; those we have assigned the role of "Other" to.

The American self is not exclusively or even primarily a European American self.

Fundamentally, it is an African American self....to a still unacknowledged extent, the American nation was built by African Americans. African Americans' presence informs every element of American life. For European American students to understand who they are, they must understand that their existence is predicated upon, interrelated to, and constituted in fundamental ways by African Americans. (Pinar, 1993, p. 62)

Pinar makes this claim based on the premise that the presence of African-Americans has impacted every facet of American society. This line of dialogue could be expanded to consider the many different racial categories present in our country. Thus in looking at the interrelatedness of the races it is important to understand that they cannot exist apart from one another. Further in order for one to come into a deeper understanding of one's self he or she must first seek to understand the assigned role of the "Other."

Another important element to consider in this discussion of the social construction of race is the role of experience in its formation. Our life experiences determine the course of our identity. Giroux (2003) posits that "identities are neither fixed nor unified but are about an ongoing process of becoming. Identities are constructed through the differences and exclusions, mediated within disparate and often unequal relations of power" (142). Frankenberg (1993) continues this line of reasoning and states that "experience constructs identity....there is a direct relationship between 'experience' and 'worldview'" (p. 5). McLaren (2007) explains how dynamic relationships between groups help to create the experiences that lead to the social construction of race:

while the concept of race is a social construct and while it is also culturally variegated and historically contextual, racialized discourses and practices are nonetheless determinant over the experiences and choices of some groups over and against others. Race is lived and inscribed in the body and, in our society, people are conditioned to perceive and think within racialized categories. (p. 258)

Therefore the experiences created through society determine the racially inscribed roles that each individual will play within society. Apple (2004b) posits that racial identities have been the "constitutive building blocks of the structures of our daily lives, imagined and real communities, and cultural processes and products" (p. 81). In working with Australian children, Rizvi (1993) found that "children develop their ideas of 'race' within their everyday experiences and that these experiences are socially organized, determined by social processes that extend beyond the scope of everyday experience" (p. 126). Regardless of age, experience plays a monumental role in the social construction of racial identities.

Whiteness

A critical element missing in the social construction of race has been a serious introspection from the role of Whites about their place in society. Weiss, Proweller, and Centrie (2004) explain that "White' could only be defined in relation to the constructed other. It is by these very processes of othering that 'White' becomes the norm against which all other communities (of color) are judged (usually to be deviant)" (p. 132). A major problem in addressing the social construction of race is the failure to identify whiteness as separate category. Apple (2004b) states that "race as a category is usually applied to 'nonwhite' peoples. White people are usually not seen and named. They are centered as the human norm. 'Others' are raced; 'we' are just people" (p. 81). Popular culture is normed around the White, middle-class

male. Pinar et al. (2004) state that "all Americans can be understood as racialized beings; knowledge of who we have been, who we are, and who we will become is a story or text we construct" (p. 330). The problem with the concept of all Americans being racialized beings is that there is a large contingency that has often failed to consider this fact. Howard (2006) states that "Whites, for the most part, are not accustomed to seeing ourselves as racial beings" (p. 89). When we fail to identify ourselves as a racial group we have difficulty writing and interpreting our personal story and it becomes easier to alienate anyone who is not like us. Mills (1997) contends that "Whiteness is not really a color at all, but a set of power relations" (p. 127). In this regards, as Frankenberg (1993) states, "Whiteness' refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (p. 1). Since Whiteness is viewed as the basis of power relations for society it is often denied a place in serious conversations about race and culture. Whiteness is accepted as a fact of life and is not considered a topic worth discussing. Pinar et al. (2004) demand that we realize that "White is a 'difference,' an identity, a color" (p. 354). Since there can be no conversation about race without the inclusion of White, it must be recognized as a cultural, racial identifier that is filled with significance.

To speak of the 'the social construction of Whiteness' asserts that there are locations, discourses, and material relations to which the term 'Whiteness' applies....Whiteness refers to a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced and, moreover, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination. Naming 'Whiteness' displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance. (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 6)

To name Whiteness forces individuals to address the racial nature of being White. Mills (1997) describes the idea of a Racial Contract that mediates the relationships between races. "The

Racial Contract includes an epistemological contract, an epistemology of ignorance.

'Recognition is a form of agreement,' and by the terms of the Racial Contract, Whites have agreed not to recognize Blacks as equal persons" (Mills, 1997, p. 96-97). Through the action of omission or denial of rights and privileges Whites have tacitly continued the legacy of Whiteness. This idea is especially troublesome for many of us raised in the South that have been accustomed to ignore race unless addressing the other. Even the best intentioned individuals fall into the trap of failing to identify their Whiteness because of its ever-present nature. Marrs (1997) provides the following analogy to explain the phenomenon:

I had never been able to see—or really consider—the culture of Whites because I was always a part of it. A cultural analogy I've heard used in anthropology holds that when you are standing in a line trying to analyze it, it's very hard to do because you're a part of the line. When you step out of the line, however, you can look back in on it and see the dynamics that are affecting and shaping the actions of the people that are in the line. (p. 37)

The point that Marrs (1997) is making is that we are often so close to the situation that we are unable to clearly see what is going on around us. It is analogous to suggesting that one cannot see the forest for the trees. It is only after you are able to step back from a situation and look at all of the elements that are at play that you are able to see the dynamics that are at work. Whites need to take part in this introspection of their role in society so that they can see how their Whiteness is affecting their role in society and those around them.

White Privilege

The notion of White Privilege is another area of the White Identity that has gone unuttered. McIntosh (1988/1997) posits that "White Privilege is like an invisible weightless

knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks" (p. 291). According to this definition of White Privilege it is like an emergency preparedness kit that keeps its holders always at the ready for whatever situation they may face. Nieto (2006) explained the difficulty that many have in coming to terms with their own identity. She stated that many whites have difficulty "admitting that they have benefitted unfairly from their White skin" (Nieto, 2006, p. xvi). This denial is in part because the idea of White privilege goes against our Southern upbringing. Many individuals deny the fact that their White skin provides them with this toolkit of supplies and benefits. Wildman and Davis (1996) describe two salient features of privileged groups: "First, the characteristics of the privileged group define the societal norm. Second, privileged group members can rely on their privilege and avoid objecting to oppression. For both reasons, privilege is rarely seen by the holder of the privilege" (p. 315-316). Since society is centered on the norms and needs of middle-class White males most White individuals fail to realize the benefits that they inherit because of their skin color. Furthermore, once these benefits are pointed out it is often difficult to admit because it is a way of life—this is the way things have always been so these individuals do not see the true effects of White privilege. Howard (2006) refers to this phenomenon as a "luxury of ignorance" (p. 63). He states that: "Whites have for centuries maintained a view of reality that "makes sense" to us. Believing in our own legitimizing myths, we have been able to sustain a perception of our goodness, even in the face of the horrific destruction imposed on other people" (Howard, 2006, p. 63). Even when we fail to acknowledge its existence White privilege wields a heavy hand in deciding who has power and how events will play out. It is especially important for White teachers teaching in minority schools to realize how this is at work in the everyday happenings of the school.

Race and Racial Identity's Impact on Education

Since race is a social construct and White privilege plays a role in determining what is happening in schools it important to examine how perceptions of race and racial identity impact educational policies, curricular commitments and pedagogical practices. The process of education is a very political endeavor. "Schooling transmits and reinforces those ideologies that reflect the prevailing values and ethos of a capitalist, male-dominated, hierarchical, middle-class social structure" (McLaren, 2007, p. 231). Spring (2008) explains the role of racism in education in the following manner:

Violence and racism are a basic part of American history and of the history of the school. From colonial times to today, educators preached equality of opportunity and good citizenship while engaging in acts of religious intolerance, racial segregation, cultural genocide, and discrimination against immigrants and non-Whites. (p. 6)

Since the inception of public schooling, perceptions of race and racial identity have been impacting educational policies, curricular decisions and pedagogical practices. Apple (2004) posits that everything that is still being done in the name of education is based on the notions of "race betterment," fear of the other, and so on. And these concerns were themselves grounded in the gaze of Whiteness as the unacknowledged norm. Thus, issues of Whiteness lie at the very core of educational policy and practice" (p. 82). Most school curricula could be characterized as "Eurocentric." The study of other racial groups is generally limited to an isolated month once a year. "The 'Eurocentric' character of school curriculum functions not only to deny 'role models' to non-European-American students, it denies self-understanding to 'White' students as well" (Pinar et al., 2004, p. 328). In addition to eliminating role models to our non-European-American students our curricular practices have sanitized history to create a version that seems

more palatable to the dominant class. "Curriculum communicates that which we choose to remember about our past and that which we choose to believe about the present" (Pinar et al., 2004, p. 328).

The culturally biased misinformation that is being provided in the schools is detrimental for all members of society. "Just as African-Americans have been denied their civil rights in society generally, they have been denied access to their history and culture in school. Not only African-Americans have been denied, however. Institutional racism deforms White students as well" (Pinar et al., 2004, p. 329). The exclusion of dominated groups in the school curriculum harms individuals of all racial groups. Ideally, the curriculum needs to be rewritten to be representative of a more accurate portrayal of history instead of the hegemonic version that currently exists to purport the status quo and alienate dominated groups. Howard (2006) explains that ignorance is maintained and institutionalized through the structure and content of schooling: "Through our [White] filter of our particular truth, we have projected only a narrow wavelength of light, usually tinted to favor our own countenance" (p. 63). Pinar et al. (2004) reiterate this fact by stating that "it is impossible to understand curriculum without understanding the centrality of race in the construction of the American identity" (p. 317). Unfortunately the school systems that emerge from these racial identities do not yield equal results for all students.

We have created in the United States one set of public schools that gives some of its students access to a world of choice, power, and possibility, and a separate system of schools that dramatically narrows a child's options. Schools that work are largely for White, affluent, upper-or middle-class children, while schools that fail are reserved for children of color and poverty. (Ayers, 2004, p. 31)

Kunjufu (2002) describes some of the practices prevalent in today's schools that are counterproductive to the needs of minority students. Incongruencies between the school and home that Kunjufu (2002) focuses on include the arbitrary assignment of homework that is not reinforced in class; the assumption that all homes have identical resources available, and the difference in conflict resolution styles. When schools fail to embrace these cultural conflicts the instructional and emotional needs of the students are not met.

While individuals cannot change the injustices that have predicated their existence, there are strategies that can be employed that will help to stymie the continued reproduction of these inequalities. Howard (2006) offers the following practical advice:

White educators and leaders in the White community should take on the responsibility of undoing White ignorance, rather than relying on people from other racial groups to carry this burden. It is important for us to realize that we can make a significant contribution to the healing process when we reeducate our White students, colleagues, and family members regarding the realities of dominance. (p. 81)

Nieto (2006) posits that there is a need for "White teachers to recognize their complicity in creating and supporting the conditions in schools that lead to failure for so many students of color" (p. xv). White teachers can no longer assume the missionary role and presume to be successful. McLaren (2007) charges teachers to face their own culpability in maintaining the status quo through their teaching practices. Further, he challenges them to honestly own up to the roots and structure of inequality that permeate society.

When White educators acknowledge both our insecurity and our privilege when dealing with issues of race, and when we begin to question the influence of the dominance

paradigm in our work with students, we actually gain credibility with our colleagues and students from other racial and ethnic groups. (Howard, 2006, p. 74)

Just as the incorporation of a truly multicultural curriculum benefits all students—not just those who are currently being under or misrepresented, the questioning of the dominance paradigm by white educators will lead to benefits across racial groups.

Characteristics of Schools with High Poverty Populations

Authors like Jonathan Kozol have awakened us to the Savage Inequalities (1992) that many of our country's poorest students endure during their daily struggle to achieve an education. Thankfully every high-poverty school is not as bad as the ones that he described. Unfortunately, most are not as fortunate as the turn-around schools that former President Bush lauded from his home state of Texas either. These are real schools facing serious problems that work to impede the educational progress on a daily basis. The concerns of these students, and the adults working in these schools, are unknown to those on the outside but for the spokespeople like Kozol that seek to tell the stories of those without a voice. However it is important to understand the problems and concerns that these schools face since unlike many other schools, the prescribed curriculum is oftentimes not the first priority. Individuals outside of these settings have difficulty understanding these realities. Kozol (2005) describes multiple classes of students crammed into the same small space, students spending hours mastering the technique of forming the perfect line, mold growing on the walls, and buildings falling into disrepair as leaders turn their heads. Some of the things that he describes are reserved for the worst case scenario; unfortunately others are reality for many high-poverty, high-minority population schools. In 2007, 19.5% of elementary schools were classified as high poverty. In the state of Georgia 28.4% of elementary schools received this same classification. Schools were classified as high poverty if they had 75% or more of their students eligible for free or reduced meals (17%, 2010). Performance patterns on the National Assessment of Educational Progress assessment for fourth and eighth graders show that students from high-poverty schools score lower than their peers from low-poverty schools (17%, 2010). A life of poverty has a significant impact on the education process. Many times children from these situations are bombarded with "adult-type" scenarios at home that most other children do not have to face. Children from poverty are in a constant struggle to try to have their basic needs met. The parents are struggling to fulfill these needs. The cultures of the schools that students from poverty attend must accept and embrace these needs.

Before students can begin to learn the mountains of standards mandated by the state certain primordial needs must be met. They must first be made to feel safe. Empty stomachs must be filled, and feelings of mutual trust must be established within the learning community. Only once those basic criteria have been met can learning take place. This point is reiterated by my principal at almost every faculty meeting. She tells us that our students will not care how much we know until they know how much we care. In a high-poverty school this is a very telling statement. Building relationships with our students is a very important part of establishing trust and rapport needed for teaching and learning to occur. The students will test you to see if you are true to your word and if you are going to stay there for them. Only after they have determined that you are going to remain a constant for them will they put their trust in you.

After these needs are met high-poverty schools are faced with the struggles to meet their own needs. Most schools serving a high number of poverty students receive federal funding from Title I. However, this funding comes with strict guidelines as to how it can be spent. It is

not a magic bullet that magically cures all of the ailments of students from poverty, just as offering free and reduced meals cannot be seen as a solution to the problem. Machtinger (2007) states that "high poverty school districts receive an average of \$907 less per student; for a school of 400, that's more than \$350,000" (p. 3). The funding issues affect every aspect of the school. Parrett and Budge (2009) describe the budget as a moral document in a high-poverty school reflective of the school's beliefs. While federal regulations tied to programs such as Title I do offer assistance to schools serving a high population of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. These funds are intended to provide the extra materials needed to fill in the gaps. An important caveat to consider regarding these funds is that money only matters when it is invested in the right things. The monies added to a school treasury based on the number of low socioeconomic status students enrolled at the school will be inconsequential if not applied to appropriate pedagogical practices and materials. Even with the supplemental funding from Title I for serving poverty-stricken populations, these schools average out to receive less money per student than schools serving more affluent students. Another contributing factor to this phenomenon is that the more affluent schools have strong Parent-Teacher-Organizations that are able to provide some of the services and equipment not funded by school budgets.

Maintaining adequate resources is another problem facing many high-poverty schools. These resources include, but are not limited to proper facilities, teaching materials, and a highly-qualified workforce. Ayers (2004) describes the plight of teachers in high-poverty schools "most city teachers struggle mightily to do a good job in spite of inadequate resources and difficult circumstances—indeed, the structure of most city schools…works to turn teachers into clerks, and students into objects to fear and coerce" (p. 18). As will be discussed later, the turnover rate in high-poverty schools is higher than schools with more affluent student populations.

Matchinger (2007) posits "that high poverty schools have significantly fewer highly qualified teachers and lose them a greater rate over time....High poverty schools not only have teachers who are less experienced, but they have more teachers teaching out-of-licensure area" (p. 3). Students from high-poverty settings often lack a great deal of stability in their outside lives and need it in their school setting. Unfortunately, these schools seem to be among the most unstable in regards to staffing. In confirming the views of Kozol (1992, 2005), Machtinger (2007) also reports that a 2006 report by Building Educational Success Together reveals that the schools with the highest levels of needs have seen the least amount of investment in regards to school reconstruction. This point could reflect why so many of our high-poverty schools look like warehouses from the 1950s, or are older, and are riddled with structural concerns.

The characteristics that I have discussed are concerns facing many schools serving a high number of high-poverty students. All schools and populations of students are unique and will bring their own mix of concerns, confounding elements, and solutions to the mixture.

Teacher Attrition

Maintaining a quality workforce is one problem facing many high-poverty schools.

Kozol (2005) paints the following image of one such school:

The school was in a constant state of chaos because there had been a massive turnover of teachers. Of 50 members of the faculty in the preceding year, 28 had never taught before; and half of them were fired or did not return the following September. (p. 14).

Schools across the nation are faced with problems similar to the one that Kozol describes, though possibly on a slighter magnitude. Teacher retention is an epidemic problem facing the education system. For years, the failure to maintain a high-quality teaching force was blamed on the aging baby boomers and the graying of the teaching force. A closer analysis of teaching statistics has

revealed a different phenomenon affecting the teaching force. Ingersoll (2001; 2003) blames the staffing problems on a "revolving door" phenomenon where teachers are leaving their teaching jobs for reasons other than retirement. Boe, Cook, and Sunderland (2008) discuss three types of teacher turnovers, or passages through Ingersoll's revolving door—leavers, movers, and lateral movers. Ingersoll (2003) presents data that suggests "that after just five years, between 40 and 50% of all beginning teachers have left teaching" (p. 13). Attrition or choosing to leave the teaching profession is more likely to take place among teachers younger than 30 or older than 50. According to Ingersoll (2001), "the relative odds of young teachers departing are 171% higher than for middle-aged teachers" (p. 518). A factor adding to this statistic is that most new teachers are placed in inner-city, high-poverty schools in which they are ill-prepared to teach.

Movers, while remaining in the teaching profession, also possess a serious threat to the stability of school teaching staffs. This phenomenon is also referred to as migration as teachers move from one school to another to search for more suitable teaching climates. Ingersoll (2001) posits that migration from one school to another accounts for about half of teacher turnover. Another type of mover is the teacher who transfers from one teaching position to another, such as a special education teacher moving to a general education classroom or a regular classroom teacher adding gifted, media, or counseling endorsements to their certificate.

The percentage of leavers and movers differs when you look at school characteristics. Even within systems the teaching pool may seem disproportionate. Ingersoll (2003) states that "even in the same jurisdiction, the degree of staffing problems varies greatly among different types of schools, and sites ostensibly drawing from the same teacher supply pool can have significantly different staffing scenarios" (p. 8). There are multiple reasons for these differences. The first set of reasons is based on school characteristics. High-poverty schools have a more

difficult time recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers than do more affluent schools. Furthermore, smaller schools have higher attrition rates than larger schools. Brill and McCartney (2008) contend that low-income schools with high-minority populations are likely to experience more difficulty retaining high-quality teachers. Subsequently the loss of these teachers will also be more detrimental in these school settings because the teacher attrition and migration rates are more pronounced. Brill and McCartney (2008) describe this trend as a "self-propagating downward spiral" (p. 754). The cycle continues as staffing patterns continue to offer experienced teachers positions at more desirable schools while less experienced teachers fill teaching positions at impoverished, high-minority schools. The effects of migration seem to hit high-poverty schools hard as they are often viewed as gateways into more affluent schools.

Personnel issues present another set of factors that contribute to teacher attrition and migration. Ingersoll (2001) found that turnover rates were distinctly lower in schools with more administrative support and fewer discipline problems. These two areas seem to be intrinsically linked. Strong administration generally suggests fewer discipline issues. Absence of properly trained or supportive mentors has been cited as another reason for teacher turnover (Brill & McCartney, 2008). The ability to establish meaningful relationships with parents and the community can be the difference between a teacher choosing to stay at a particular school or electing to leave for another career opportunity (Brill & McCartney, 2008).

The consequences for the continued rate of teacher turnover are far-reaching.

Inconsistencies in teaching staffs set the stage for the grave scenes like the one described by Kozol at that beginning of this section. High rates of teacher turnover hinders community building and long-term planning processes within schools. When the "revolving door" is in place, the curriculum is not aligned and gaps appear in its implementation (Brill & McCartney,

2008). Unfortunately the most vulnerable members of the school society, the students, are the ones who receive the most egregious injuries in this process. Ingersoll (2003) provides the following analogy to frame the situation

recruiting more teachers will not solve the teacher crisis if 40 to 50% of such teachers then leave within five years. The image that comes to mind is a bucket rapidly losing water because of holes in the bottom. Pouring more water into the bucket will not be the answer if the holes are not patched. (p. 17)

Retaining quality teachers in all classrooms is a problem facing schools throughout the U.S. High-poverty schools serving minority populations struggle even more with this dilemma as many new teachers see these schools as mere stepping stones on their career paths.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The problem for those teachers remaining is how to provide a quality education for those students sitting in their classrooms. When most teachers walk through the door of their classroom, stepping across the threshold marks not only an entrance to a place of learning but also an entrance to a different culture. Sometimes the differences are clearly visible, other times they are not immediately discernible. Even when teachers and students are the same race, cultural differences still exist. Bennett (1991) emphasizes this point by stating that "it is possible for students to move through an entire teacher education program with only minimal understandings of socio-cultural aspects of the schools and the communities in which they will teach" (p.118). Teachers are often left alone standing in front of their classrooms with the challenge of figuring out ways to bridge this socio-cultural divide. All stakeholders in this process want what is best for the students. The challenge that they often face is a difference of opinion of what constitutes best. Gunderson (2006) states that

The difficulty is that there are significant cultural differences between teachers' and parents' views of what students should learn and how they should be taught...Teachers, parents, and other interested individuals all seem to want the best for children. The difficulty is agreeing on what constitutes the best. (p. xi)

All stakeholders must find ways to bridge these gaps in deciding which way is the best way to educate students in order to reach each child. Culturally responsive practices provide one avenue to begin this journey. By engaging in conversations with everyone involved, the learning community can begin to understand what is valued in each culture and incorporate those elements in to the learning environment. A question that quickly arises is how this concept spreads to teachers who have been out of teacher preparation programs and alone in the classroom for years. One problem with the concept of culturally responsive teaching is its failure to acknowledge that all teachers do not possess the understandings it espouses. On the other hand, Ladson-Billings (1995) describes culturally relevant pedagogy as implementing good teaching practices. Based on this understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy, even without the possession of the official terminology, teachers can engage in appropriate practices by learning about their students and utilizing this knowledge to guide instruction.

A culturally responsive pedagogy acknowledges the influences of race, culture and ethnicity in teaching and learning. This approach focuses on using the cultural experiences of different ethnic groups as tools for teaching these diverse students. People representing various culture groups must learn to work together to deal with common concerns (Gay, 2002). A culturally responsive pedagogy is one solution to this emerging concern. It is a genuine belief that students can succeed and reach the greatest potential given the right structure and scaffolding (Howard, 2001). Our schools are operated by the prevalent culture which is that of

White American culture. Typically schools expect students to conform to and celebrate the White American culture. Many of them function to marginalize the learning styles, histories, and strengths of other cultures (Hyland, 2005). However, the culturally responsive school must consider what the diverse students bring into the academic setting if they are to minimize misunderstandings (Harris-Murri, King, & Rostenberg, 2006). Culturally responsive educators understand the ways that schools perpetuate the discriminatory practice that takes place in society (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). Ladson-Billings (2001) explains

It [culturally responsive pedagogy] is based on three propositions about what contributes to success for all students, especially African American students. These propositions are:

- Successful teachers focus on students' academic achievement.
- Successful teachers develop students' cultural competence.
- Successful teachers foster students' sense of sociopolitical consciousness. (p. 144) Within the framework of a culturally responsive pedagogy attempts are made to level the playing field for all learners. According to Gay (2010) this approach can be called by several different names "including *culturally relevant, sensitive, centered, congruent, reflective, mediated, contextualized, synchronized,* and *responsive*" (p. 31). Regardless of the term used to name the approach, the overall aim is the same; culturally responsive, or relevant, teaching seeks to make learning meaningful to the students in the classroom.

In her landmark work *The Dreamkeepers* Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) describes salient qualities present in successful teachers of African American students. These qualities can be described by what Ladson-Billings refers to as culturally relevant teaching. She introduces the need for culturally relevant pedagogy by demonstrating the need for a different route of instruction for African American students. Ladson-Billings (2009) links this analogy with an

image from the Bible, "thus successful teachers, like the wise men of the Bible, travel a different route to ensure the growth and development of their students" (p. 17).

Cultural relevance as practiced in the school setting is not only about language. It includes all aspects of student culture in an attempt to overcome the negative effects of hegemony and the hidden curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 2009). "Culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 20). This approach to teaching helps students to build the requisite social knowledge to help individuals combat the process of hegemony. Howard (2006) uses the visual image of an academic triangle consisting of knowing my practice, knowing my self, and knowing my students. The corners of the triangle are anchored with rigor, relationships, and responsiveness. While he only aligns the intersection of self and students—responsiveness—as being the link to culturally responsive, or relevant, teaching his entire academic triangle provides a launching place to examine its three essential areas: conceptions of self and others; teacher and student relationships; and construction of knowledge.

Culturally Relevant Concepts of Self and Others

The first area to address in the realm of culturally relevant practices is the conception of self and others. Ladson-Billings (2009) identified several salient features of culturally relevant practices regarding the conceptions of self and others. First of all these teachers have a vision of themselves as artists. Teaching is the medium. Ladson-Billings (2009) states that

These teachers do not ignore scientific principles of pedagogy. However, they do not view teaching as a technical skill that requires minimal training and they do not believe

that as long as one follows a kind of recipe or prescription that one can predict outcomes. (p. 45)

These teachers reject the de-skilling of teachers who is taking place throughout our society. Teaching in a culturally relevant setting is more than simply following a prescribed curriculum guide and set of lesson plans. It is a process of ebb and flow as the teacher and student respond to one another. Culturally relevant teaching is much more fluid and emerges out of the needs of the students. Giroux (1988; 2003) cautions against the strict reliance on teacher-proof materials that seek to de-skill teachers. He says that teachers can "begin to rethink and reform the traditions and conditions that prevented teachers from assuming their full potential as active, reflective scholars and practitioners" (Giroux, 1988, p. 126). When teachers break free from the strict mandates of prescribed curricula and teach to the needs of the students, both students and teachers are liberated and true learning occurs. During my teaching career I have received many strange looks from colleagues and parents because I do not use the textbooks. I abandoned my reliance on them during my fourth year of teaching. At that time I realized that the materials in the prescribed textbooks were designed to be "one size fits all." However, most of my students' needs and interests were not being addressed through the textbooks. Even though I had not heard the phrase culturally relevant pedagogy, I had begun to implement it in my rebellion against canned instruction.

A second characteristic of culturally relevant practices is that teachers believe that all students can succeed (Ladson-Billings, 2009). These teachers see the possibility for success buried within each of their students. Schussler (2009) points out that students need to perceive "(a) that there are opportunities for them to succeed, (b) that flexible avenues exist through which learning can occur, and (c) that they are respected as learners because teachers convey the

belief that students are capable of learning" (p. 114). You would be hard-pressed to find a teacher who does not believe that all students can learn something. We espouse mantras that they each learn at their own pace and that each student is an individual working at his or her own level. The untold story of this practice is that we are also short-changing students when we do not take the time to know them as individuals. Delpit (2006) challenges that in order to know a child's true strengths a teacher needs to know about his or her life outside of school. "Children who may be gifted in real-life settings are often at a loss when asked to exhibit knowledge solely through decontextualized paper-and-pencil exercises....Not knowing students' strengths leads to our 'teaching down' to children from communities that are culturally different from that of the teachers in the school" (Delpit, 2006, p. 173). One's socio-economic setting, as well as geographic setting, will make a difference in some of the skills that they develop and when. I know that if I were to raise children in my current home they would develop a very different set of cognitive skills and understanding than I had, or those of my brothers' children. My nieces, nephews and I were raised in a very rural mountainous community. Important skills to acquire in this setting included being able to drive a tractor, heard cattle back into their fences, and grow and can vegetables. Currently I live in a mid-sized city. A different skill set is needed to navigate this setting. Children at the school where I work possess the ability to navigate the city bus system, and avoid the trappings of gang activity while living in a city setting. Two distinct knowledge sets are needed for survival in these two areas. The problem is that while the ability to actively participate in either of these settings requires a great deal of learning, the education system typically fails to appreciate these pearls of wisdom as valid knowledge sets. A great number of gifted students are not being served in the school in which I teach because they have never been identified. Because their cognitive processes differ from that of the teachers tasked

with making the recommendation they remain unrecognized. The more affluent elementary schools in the county have up to two full time teachers serving their gifted students. Our students are bused to another school and combined with students from all of the other schools in the zone to receive services once a week. Statistically speaking, based on the number of students present in each building, the number of students receiving services should be fairly representative if the identification and testing process was equitable. So, while we espouse achievement and success for every child in every classroom in every school as a vision for our district, we have to step back and ask ourselves if we really mean it. If that statement were true would the number of children receiving gifted services be more equitable across racial and socioeconomic lines? At the very least, gifted services would consider a percentage of the population.

A third characteristic of culturally relevant practices is that the teacher helps students to "make connections between their community, national, and global identities" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 38). These teachers break free from the hegemonic practices that seek to reproduce the status quo of middle class society while stripping students of their own identities. Apple (1995, 2004a) warns about the hegemonic practices prevalent in schools. "Rather than being places where culture and ideologies are imposed on students, schools are the sites where these things are produced. And like the workplace, they are produced in ways that are filled with contradiction and by a process that is itself based on contestation and struggle" (Apple, 1995, p. 23-24). Contrary to this practice, teachers with culturally relevant practices help students to embrace and celebrate their differences. They try to unmask the hidden curriculum while creating a cultural capital that is equitable for all students.

A final characteristic of culturally relevant practices is that the "teacher sees teaching as 'pulling knowledge out'—like 'mining'" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 38). This approach is contrary to the banking method described by Freire (1970/2007) wherein knowledge is deposited into students like money into a bank. Too often in our educational society we rely on this banking concept as a justifiable means of education. The teacher dispenses knowledge. It is now the students' responsibility to collect the knowledge and deposit into the correct receptacles for future withdrawals. Instead of this approach, the culturally relevant approach is more closely linked to the problem-posing approach posited by Freire (1970/2007). "Problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming" (Freire, 1970/2007, p. 84). This process encourages the mining process of pulling knowledge out. Individuals are finding themselves as they mine for new information and seek the answers for themselves instead of being passive recipients. Ayers (2009) calls for the same type of experience in pushing for the use of critical and probing questions:

There is no real contradiction between asking critical and probing questions of the world in front of our eyes and teaching academic skills. Posing powerful questions and pursuing them to their furthest limits does not have to be mere musing—a dreamy kind of waste of time—nor does it have to compete with or become a substitute for skill-building....We have to teach skills in light of something, why not in light of opening our eyes and looking critically at our shared world and then asking deep and authentic questions? (p. 73)

Again the best way to provide this sense of mining the students for knowledge is to provide them rich learning opportunities that cause them to learn through questioning. Learning experiences should not be about teachers standing before students and dispensing a set of factoids. In this

setting teachers shed of their role as "sage on the stage" and engage students in activities that result in their own construction of knowledge. This construction happens as students are led to ask questions and are allowed to seek for answers to their questions. Teachers should provide questions to students and provide them the routes to uncover the answers to those questions.

Teacher-Student Relationships in Culturally Relevant Classrooms

Another important relationship in the realm of culturally relevant classrooms is the social relationship between teacher and students. Navigating these relationships between often culturally or economically diverse groups of individuals is important in building bonds to foster meaningful learning communities. Teachers in culturally relevant classrooms engage in several practices to ensure that these relationships are meaningful. First of all, the relationships are fluid and humanely equitable. The interactions extend into the community (Ladson-Billings, 2009). In these classrooms the teacher is not seen as the expert with all of the power. A give-and-take relationship exists between the members of the classroom. Freire (1970/2007) describes the optimal relationship as follows: "education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students" (p. 72). The teacher must be willing to learn as much from the students as he or she is expecting the student to learn from them. In order for this relationship to become fluid and equitable as required it has to grow to a deeper level. Howard (2006) posits that

Without knowing us [teachers] and being authentically known by us, they [students] simply will not succeed. This is why White teachers who have not seriously engaged the journey toward cultural competence and authentic White identity cannot teach effectively in racially diverse schools. To be worthy of our students and to be effective with them,

transformationist White teachers are persistent and passionate in our efforts to create personal connections to that work" (p. 130).

Culturally responsive educators must be willing to let down their shields and open themselves up to their students. This requires building personal connections with students that transcend the boundaries of the school. It also means letting go of the reins of classroom control and letting the students have some of the power in the classroom.

A second salient feature about these relationships is that the teacher connects with all students, not just those who are similar to themselves (Ladson-Billings, 2009). In culturally responsive classrooms teachers build relationships with all students. Diversity is celebrated. Delpit (2006) suggests that

we begin with a perspective that demands finding a means to celebrate, not merely tolerate, diversity in our classrooms. Not only should teachers and students who share group membership delight in their own cultural and linguistic history, but all teachers must revel in the diversity of their students and that of the world outside the classroom community. (p. 67)

It is easy to bond with and build relationships with those who are like us. The challenges often arise when we attempt to bridge the gaps with those who differ from us. Culturally responsive teachers find ways to celebrate everyone's heritage while building strong relationships with them. Howard (2006) extends the need for this responsiveness by explaining that it "has to do with our capacity as teachers to know and connect with actual lived experience, personhood, and learning modalities of the students who are in our classroom" (p. 131). Not only are we to know who our students are within the four walls of our classroom, we also need to know who they are once they step outside of it.

A third feature of the teacher-student relationship is the fostering of a "community of learners" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 60). Students are encouraged to view their classrooms as a familial type setting where they look out for and help each other. The "teacher encourages students to learn collaboratively. Students are expected to teach each other and be responsible for each other" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 60). The type of cooperation fostered in this setting teaches that in order to be successful you have to get help from and be helpful to others around you. "Psychological safety is a hallmark of each of these classrooms. The students feel comfortable and supported. They realize that the biggest infraction they can commit is to work against the unity and cohesiveness of the group" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 79). These classrooms are true communities, safe-havens within the schools. Students feel free to participate in classroom discussions without fear of being teased when they make a mistake. In Perry's (2000) school, students were encouraged to hold an active role in all parts of the school community. The guiding pedagogy of the school held that "students should have more of a voice in the school" (Perry, 2000, p. 102). By giving students a voice in the decision making they were able to build a strong community. Through these settings strong bonds form that generally last throughout the school career.

Culturally Relevant Conceptions of Knowledge

Teachers who practice culturally relevant teaching practices have specific ways in which they view the conception of knowledge. First of all they hold that "culturally relevant teaching attempts to help students understand and participate in knowledge building" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 88). Knowledge is something that has to be constructed. Throughout the construction process it is revealed that each person possesses a different knowledge-set. Building upon the need to construct knowledge emerges the second culturally relevant conception of knowledge—

knowledge is not static. Culturally relevant teaching is cyclic; knowledge is continually being recreated, recycled, and shared (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Knowledge bases are always changing. As we gain experiences, our frame of reference and therefore, what we view as truth, changes. Freire (1970/2007) states that "knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention through the restless, the impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (p. 72). Knowledge is never created within a vacuum. This knowledge is not neutral or objective (Apple, 2004a; McLaren, 2007). "Knowledge is a social construct deeply rooted in a nexus of power relations" (McLaren, 2007, p. 196-197). What is valued as the official nexus of knowledge is controlled by those in power. Politics plays an important part in maintaining its power. However in culturally relevant classrooms, knowledge is viewed critically (Ladson-Billings, 2009). In these classrooms information is not accepted as the gospel-truth just because it is printed in a textbook or espoused from the lectern of a political figure. Individuals are taught to address each bit of knowledge with a critical eye in order to see the untold, and well as the official story.

A third feature is that each student is valued for the knowledge that he or she brings to the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Delpit (2006) states that the "teacher cannot be the only expert in the classroom. To deny students their own expert knowledge *is* to disempower them" (p. 32-33). Students possess a vast repository of knowledge about their own cultures and lives. Teachers need to draw upon these wellsprings of information and mine them for their richness. Perry's (2000) approach at his alternative high school valued the cultures and experiences of students—it was used as a "basis to explore their own and other peoples' cultures with a strong emphasis on language" (p. 175). Many discussions were had at the high school between the staff and students as to how to best include the culture and background of all of the stakeholders. All

viewpoints were considered. Too often in mainstream society and school settings diverse students are feared in the classroom because they are different. Instead they should be valued as resources. "Education, at its best, hones and develops the knowledge and skills each student already possesses, while at the same time adding new knowledge and skills to that base" (Delpit, 2006, p. 67-68). Each individual possesses a different schema of knowledge and experiences that creates a wealth of knowledge. It is up to the culturally relevant teacher to find ways to place value and wealth on these experiences while helping to build experiences that increase that individuals' cultural capital in the mainstream society.

Culturally relevant teaching draws on critical theorists to make knowledge more problematic. "Students are challenged to view education (and knowledge) as a vehicle for emancipation, to understand the significance of their cultures, and to recognize the power of language" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 102). Information garnered in the classroom should have applicability beyond the scope of a multiple choice test to be given at the end of the year. All learning is not quantifiable in the neat ways that educational reformers currently desire. The problematic knowledge called for here asks students to take the knowledge that they have gained to make inroads towards social changes. "Culturally relevant teaching is about questioning (and preparing students to question) the structural inequality, the racism, and the injustice that exists in society" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 140). The critical theorists who draw on this work align themselves with critical pedagogy. McLaren (2007) states that "critical pedagogy resonates with the sensibility of the Hebrew phrase of *tikkum olam*, which means "to heal, repair, and transform the world." It provides historical, cultural, political, and ethical direction for those in education who still dare to hope" (p. 186). Peter McLaren (2007) states that critical pedagogy "represents an approach to schooling that is committed to the imperatives of empowering students and

transforming the larger social order in the interests of justice and equality" "critical theorists are united in their objectives: to empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities and injustices" (McLaren, 2007, p. 186). By embracing this stance towards knowledge, culturally relevant teachers lead their students on a track towards becoming a more critical citizenry. The work of the teachers described by Mark Perry (2000) espouses these traits. "Acquiring the tools of critical thinking was crucial to implementing our curriculum. For us, the heart of critical thinking was learning how to think and then applying that knowledge in academic and practical settings. At its best, it was the teaching of how to think as opposed to what to think" (Perry, 2000, p. 175). Perry's (2000) example shows this work in practice in a school setting.

Culturally relevant teaching meets students were they are and helps them to develop the skills necessary to be successful.

By building bridges or a scaffolding that meets students where they are (intellectually and functionally), culturally relevant teaching helps them to be where they need to be where they need to be to participate fully and meaningfully in the construction of knowledge.

(Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 104)

The purpose of culturally relevant teaching is to help fill in the gaps in students' educational experiences. These skills go beyond the unrelated factoids that can be measured and quantified on a standardized exam. These skills are those that emerge out of conversations and interactions with the learning milieus. Delpit (2006) says that meaningful communication and contexts are the best mediums for teaching skills. However, she offers the caveat that skills alone are insufficient elements of a minority students' education. "If minority people are to effect the change which will allow them to truly progress we must insist on 'skills' within the context of

critical and creative thinking" (Delpit, 2006, p. 19). If students are not taught how to think critically and creatively what have they learned? There is much more at stake in the course of education than what can be measured on a standardized test. True learning is the ability to take the knowledge and skill learned and to extend it and apply it to other settings that occur in real life.

Finally, culturally relevant teaching values student diversity and individual differences.

They are considered when setting standards of excellence (Ladson-Billings, 2009). "Thus culturally relevant teaching recognizes the need for students to experience excellence without deceiving them about their own academic achievement" (p. 108). In these settings students' true academic performance is never sugar-coated. Teachers are honest and forthcoming about a student's true level of performance. However diversity is never seen as hindrance for success.

Delpit (2006) contends that

Students must be *taught* the codes needed to participate fully in the mainstream of American life, not by being forced to attend to hollow, inane, decontextualized subskills, but rather within the context of meaningful communicative endeavors; that they must be allowed the resource of the teacher's expert knowledge, while and that even while students are assisted in learning the culture of power, they must also be helped to learn about the arbitrariness of those codes and about the power relationships they represent. (p. 45)

Culturally relevant practices help to bridge the gap of cultural dissonance that teachers face when teaching students whose cultural background differ from their own. Ayers (2001) provides a good way to sum up the meaning of being a culturally relevant teacher:

A first step is becoming the student to your students; uncovering the fellow creatures who must be partners to the enterprise. Another is creating an environment for learning, a nurturing and challenging space in which to travel. And finally, the teacher must begin work on the intricate, many-tiered bridges that will fill up the space, connecting all the dreams, hopes, skills, experiences, and knowledge students bring to class with deeper and wider ways of knowing. Teaching requires a vast range of knowledge, ability, skill, judgment, and understanding—and it requires a thoughtful, caring person at its center. (p. 122)

In this passage the main points of a culturally relevant pedagogy are addressed. The students' views are considered, there is a mutual relationship between the teacher and student; nurturing learning environments are created; critical knowledge is valued; knowledge is seen as an everchanging construct; and students' prior knowledge is valued.

While implementing culturally relevant practices will help to alleviate many problems that teachers and students are facing in the classroom it is important to realize that they are not prescription for an immediate fix. Gay (2010) explains that "culturally responsive teaching alone cannot solve all the problems of improving the education of marginalized students of color" (p. 1). In order for these efforts to be beneficial additional steps are necessary. These attempts must include serious conversations about the issues of race and its many implications for the education process.

Exemplary Studies

"Resegregation and Educational Apartheid in Macon/Bibb County, Georgia"

Ashley Briandi (2010) examines the resegregation of the Bibb County Public Schools after integration. Using the theoretical framework of Critical Race Feminism, Briandi uses the

methodology of oral history to explore the experiences of five African American women who have had experiences with the Bibb County Public Schools. The data in the dissertation are divided into three sections—initial desegregation of the schools, desegregation and resistance era, and the post-segregation era. The five women recalled their experiences from the time that Bibb County Schools integrated in 1970 through the present. Two of the participants, Veda and Ruth, shared their experiences of being teachers throughout all three of these periods. Alethea and Merci shared experiences of being students during the initial desegregation of schools and then later returning to the same district to work as paraprofessionals and teachers. Alyiah shared experiences of being a student through these periods and then working as a professional at the University level. By pairing the oral histories of these women with factual information from the newspaper and other print sources, Briandi (2010) paints a portrait of what she sees as a school system in ruins that does not care for the students it serves. She identified the following as emerging themes—"place and choice, or the lack there of, and the seemingly unbreakable hold that those in power (White Maconites) have over the public educational system in which they are largely unwilling to allow their own children to participate" (Briandi, 2010, p. 216).

A major point in this research is that the White reaction to integration was "White flight" which led to the establishment of competing schools in Bibb County—one public system to serve the Black and poor students and a private system to serve the more affluent White community. According to her research, this has led to continued discrimination in the funding of schools and the assignment of teachers. According to Briandi (2010) "the public schools here are designed to produce either drop-outs or uneducated graduates, so that they have no choice but to stay in the projects" (p. 224-225). I offer the following examples as a rebuttal to this claim. This year Thelron Pleas from Bibb County's Central High School was named as a Gates Millennium

Scholar. He was chosen as one of 1,000 recipients of the award nationwide from more than 23,000 applicants (Grisamore, 2011). Pleas was also one of 22 students in Bibb County to receive the Peyton Anderson Foundation scholarship (Ramati, 2011). Pleas received these accolades despite his race, gender, socioeconomic status, and family instability. Instead of using these excuses as crutches he was determined to avail himself of the opportunities that were present in the public schools. At one point during his school career he attended Ocmulgee Elementary School, the focus of this inquiry.

Another example of success emerging from Bibb County Public Schools is Jadun McCarthy. Mr. McCarthy was just named as the Teacher of the Year for the state of Georgia. He is a product of Bibb County Public Schools, having attended both Jones Elementary School and Central High School (Castillo, 2001). After leaving Bibb County Public Schools as a student, McCarthy continued to pursue a law degree at the University of Georgia. "The night of his graduation from the University of Georgia School of Law, he realized that, instead of working in a system that locks up people, he would rather follow in the footsteps of the people who provided him the tools to be successful: his teachers" (Downey, 2011, p. 2). McCarthy holds high expectations for the students that he serves and believes in the power of a great teacher: "Every child deserves a great teacher. Children don't deserve okay or adequate teachers; every child that walks into a public school deserves a great teacher" (Downey, 2011, p. 1). In addition to being named as the state's Teacher of the Year out of a pool of 154 highly qualified teachers, McCarthy has also been appointed by the Governor to a 20-member committee to explore school funding in Georgia (Badertscher, 2011). He is the only classroom teacher serving on this committee.

Further examples of successful Black students emerging from Bibb County Public Schools are the Golden Eagle recipients. Each year the Macon Telegraph awards this distinction to twelve students who distinguish themselves academically while providing service to the community. The 1978 recipient in foreign language, William Renfroe, was a graduate from Central High School. He continued on to earn a degree from the University of Georgia in computer science and now works in the field as a database administrator. Colleen McMillar from Southwest High School received the award for Journalism in 1981. Currently she works as a journalist with the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Her accolades include being on the team that earned two Pulitzer Prizes for their coverage of Hurricane Katrina. In 1994, Cedric Tolliver from Central High School won the award in Social Science. He currently works as an assistant professor at the University of Houston. Westside High School's Tiffany Hodges received the Golden Eagle Award in 2001 for English and Literature. She is currently a second-year neurosurgery resident at Duke University (Catching up, 2011). These accomplishments reflect just a few of the many stories of successful Black students that have emerged from the Bibb County Public Schools.

A weakness in this research is that it was completed by someone with no connections to the school system that was being researched. The doors that Briandi (2010) described as being shut in regards to gaining access to data from the school system could have been related to her position as an outsider or the slant of her research. A favorite line of mine from the movie *Pollyanna* (Swift, 1960) says that "when you look for the bad in mankind expecting to find it, you surely will." The same holds true for any institution if you search just for examples that the school district is failing a population of students you are sure to find evidence that will support it. However, it could be seen as dangerous to only paint one side of the picture. This pitfall is the

reason that I have chosen to research an entity within this district using portraiture. The use of portraiture will allow the researcher to search for the positive attributes within the research setting. The methodology of portraiture acknowledges that in the search of goodness, negative features will be uncovered. I am acutely aware that the system, like any urban school district, has problems; many of them centered on the issues of race and funding. However, I know that if I delve into the research only looking for the negative aspects of the situation, that is surely all that I will ever find.

"Spectacular Things Happen Along the Way"

Brian Schultz's book *Spectacular Things Happen along the Way* (2008) chronicles his experiences teaching an exceptional group of fifth graders in Chicago's Cabrini Green. Starting with the interests of the students—a desire to improve the condition of their school—Schultz worked with his students to develop a democratic curriculum. By using a justice-oriented approach to teaching Schultz (2008) was able to take his students much further than what was prescribed the state-mandated curriculum.

Teachers teaching for social justice maintain a curricular stance rooted in and relevant to the lives of students. With a focus on critical, multi-cultural, antiracist, and antioppressive perspectives, teachers focus on meaningful hands-on, experiential, and participatory activity that seek to help students (and themselves) to critically think about social, political, and economic problems. Teachers and students learn alongside one another in culturally sensitive and culturally relevant spaces. Academic rigor is paramount because curriculum delivered within a social justice context has a tendency to move beyond the school structure. (Schultz, 2008, p. 127)

It is within this frame of a social justice oriented curriculum that Schultz's students were able to develop their critical thinking, research, and problem-solving skills while working on a topic that was truly meaningful to them. Too many educators view themselves as the "sage on the stage" whose sole purpose is to dispense information into empty vessels (students). It is only when educators are able to take more of the role of facilitator, as demonstrated in Schultz's class, that students are able to thrive and excel. While being dominated by the "sage," students do not have the room grow and think critically because they are simply passive recipients of information that they will obligingly regurgitate on assessments. Ownership of the information never takes place.

Schultz's (2008) study is relevant to this current inquiry in several ways. First of all, his reflections on teaching at Carr provide hope for others, like those involved in my study, that teachers can make a difference with their students regardless of their race. Furthermore the power of releasing control of the curriculum to student interests and concerns is powerful. I have been known to be one of those teachers who obligingly submits the uniform lesson plans that reflect that every teacher on the grade level will be teaching the same page from the textbook in exactly the same way at the exact same time. I have also frequently gone into my classroom with that lesson plan and tossed it to the side to teach the content in a way that was meaningful to my students. I believe that in talking more in-depth with each of my research participants I will find similar beliefs and behaviors as they work to do what they know is best for the students in their classroom.

"White Teacher"

Vivian Paley's *White Teacher* (1979/2000) is an autobiographical narrative sharing the accounts of a kindergarten teacher's experiences teaching in an integrated classroom. The narrative, written in 1979, chronicles some of the early experiences that Vivian Paley had

working with minority children. Her teaching context was a private school located in an integrated middle-class neighborhood. Most of the population was White. Sixty percent of the children were associated with the local private university. The Black children that attended the school were generally from outside of the neighborhood.

Through this text Paley (1979/2000) shares some of her successes and trials of being the "White teacher" working with minority students. The purpose of the account is to describe how Paley, the "White teacher" worked through her initial inhibitions towards working with culturally different students. The first step was to identify and work on accepting the differences in herself, such as being Jewish. The children in the book teach as much to the reader as the does the teacher.

After having a meeting between Black parents and teachers at the school where the parents expressed their concerns about the discrepancy between the way that Black students and White students were treated at the school, Paley began collecting her thoughts and interactions with her students in a journal. In her spare time she would analyze the ruminations to ask herself "am I fair to the Black children" (Paley, 1979/2000, p. xiv)? These writings served as the basis for her book. One finding that Paley (1979/2000) identifies in the preface of her book is that "My attempts to help Black children feel more comfortable in a White environment have made me more aware of the discomfort every child experiences as he realizes he is being judged by someone who does not know him" (p. xvii). Through the autobiographical experiences of Paley (1979/2000) readers are able to see how she navigates through the terrain of teaching in an integrated classroom in the 1970s. Even though the term culturally responsive pedagogy is never used by Paley (1979/2000) to describe what she was trying to do with her group of kindergartners. Some of her reflections indicate that she was working towards that goal:

In her microcosm—the classroom—she helps her kindergartners develop the intellectual and social tools necessary to face the world as it is and to move it toward what it should be. She nurtures them to be able to survive society's hardships and helps them to feel that change can occur—that children can live and grow together despite differences in race and social origin. (Comer & Poussaint, 1979/2000, p. viii)

Paley (1979/2000) recognized that in order to meet the needs of each of her students that they needed to be treated as individuals, with individual needs. Further she saw the importance of maintaining high expectations of achievement for each of her students while realizing that they may reach these goals via different avenues.

There are several accounts in Paley's (1979/2000) story that are very relevant to me and this research inquiry. First of all there is the obvious fact that both Paley and I work with Kindergartners. It is refreshing for me to read her accounts and laugh as I recall very similar occurrences in my classroom. Some of these similarities are not as humorous. In one account Paley (1979/2000) recalls an outburst of one of her students: "I was more interested in the other part of Steven's outburst. The idea of a Black child using "White" as a dirty word was new to me" (p. 13). This encounter is one that has played out in my own teaching experiences at several different occasions. One experience that is especially poignant from my last year teaching third grade comes to mind as my own version of Steven. He constantly threw up the word "White" and "cracker" as insults toward me and my authority in the classroom. As a third grader his attempts were more organized than Steven's. On several occasions this student tried to bring about mutiny by informing the entire class that they did not have to listen to "that 'White' lady" and telling them that any assignment that I gave was optional. Through all of his outbursts I pretended like it did not faze me; I just demanded respect and tried to guide him back to where

he needed to be. Another encounter similar to the story of Steven was shared in the opening of this inquiry as I shared the story of being referred to by a kindergarten student as "White bitch."

Another theme that Paley (1979/2000) discusses in her narrative that is relevant to me emerged in a conversation between Paley and her student teacher Janet. Janet tells Paley that These kids don't need you as much as my kids do. You tell me how much a sensitive Black teacher could accomplish here. Well, I'm telling you how much a sensitive White teacher could accomplish in a Black city school. (Paley, 1979/2000, p. 44)

I have mixed emotions about this statement from Paley's student teacher Janet. I do believe that the heart of her message is true. Children in inner-city schools need to have positive role models of varying racial and cultural backgrounds. Here is my caveat; they only need to be there if they are there for the right reason. It cannot be purely a missionary opportunity to show how good of a person the teacher is for working with this population of children. Unfortunately the schools that Janet described usually do suffer by not always getting the best of the teaching field. If a teacher is there just to say that they are teaching Black kids in a city school they need to keep moving. If they are there to truly work with the kids and have high expectations to push them forward to higher levels, then yes the school can use that kind of teacher. This message is at the heart of this research study—seeking to understand why White teachers choose to teach at a school with a high minority student population.

I was a little disappointed to learn the true details of Paley's classroom make-up. I had thought that it would be more like the class that Janet described. However, at the same time I appreciated the great amount of diversity reflected in her classroom. As I read I reflected back to my teaching experiences and thought about some similar incidences. Most of the children she described evoked memories of a specific child that has sat in my class at some point in time. In

three years of teaching. My experience was almost the opposite. I have had seven White children in the past ten years of teaching. Paley's writing reflected her experiences teaching in an upper-middle class college neighborhood in the 1970s. The historical and geographical setting of her account play a large role in the encounters that she faced and recalled. The stories that I will tell are situated in much differently in an inner-city area plagued with poverty. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997b) explains that a researcher's insight and perspectives are deeply impacted by their life experiences. Had either Paley or I found ourselves in a different era or setting we would most likely have had very different stories to tell.

Concluding Thoughts About Exemplary Studies

The three studies that I have chosen as exemplary studies to guide my research cross three decades, however, they all work to inform my current research. The work of Paley (1979/2000) and Schultz (2008) offer hope in regards to the power that a teacher can have in the lives of students. Both of these White teachers completed self-examinations and reacted upon them to develop curriculums that were culturally responsive to the students in their classrooms. Briandi's (2010) research helps provide a rich contextual background of Macon. Her work also serves as a catalyst for me to reveal other, more positive sides of the Bibb County Public Schools. Each of the studies was conducted using a qualitative design steeped in some form of narrative. Additionally, even though "personal~passionate~participatory" (He & Phillion, 2008) inquiry was not mentioned as a research methodology each of the researchers display the qualities of this methodology in their writing. They each wrote about a topic that was deeply personal. Their passion is revealed in their work. They were also participants in the research settings.

Future Directions

Race, class, and education are inseparable entities (Apple, 2004; Pinar et al, 2004). All elements of race and racial identity no matter how far removed from the classroom trickle down and find their way into the educational practice. As a White teacher of Black students I must be ever mindful of how my racial identity is reciprocal to that of the students with whom I work on a daily basis. There can be no concept of Black without White, or vice versa. White teachers must also open their eyes and become cognizant of the deleterious effects of White Privilege. Previous studies have explained all of these facts to us. Schultz (2008), Paley (1979/2000), Howard (2006), and McLaren (2007) all share their accounts of being a White teacher and working with Black students. None of them, however reveal the essence of the story that my participants have to tell. Ladson-Billings (2009) shares the characteristics of successful teachers of African-American students. But, who tells the personal stories of successful White teachers who choose to teach Black students for the majority of their careers? It seems that most of the studies feature teachers who spend a brief layover in these school settings between stops on their curriculum vita. I specifically inquired as to why the selected teachers choose to stay in this setting and what skills they developed to become successful in their journey.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this inquiry is a curriculum of place. Whitlock (2007) posits that:

if place is crucial to understanding the self and society, then it is central to curriculum studies that relate the individual and the social. A concept of place brings the particularistic into focus by linking the understanding of the individual to the social forces that flow through him or her. Place embodies the social and the particular. (p. 37) An understanding of place is critical to making sense of everyday occurrences. It is only when a thorough study of place is undertaken that the complexities are understood. Kincheloe and Pinar (1991) suggest that it is imperative for one to be aware of his or her history in order to understand his or her present circumstances. This awareness is deeply rooted in a cognizance of place. Kincheloe and Pinar (1991) define place as "that which brings the particularistic into focus" (p. 4). Understanding of place, and thus a curriculum of place helps one to make sense of events in light of one's context.

The understanding of place serves several important roles. First, a sense of place strengthens our understanding of the individuals and what forces led him or her to act in certain ways (Kincheloe & Pinar, 1991; Whitlock, 2007). Adams, Hoelscher, and Till (2001) expound upon this notion by explaining how

people's sense of place—attached vicariously to a movie theater, a town, a tree, a planet—reveals a great deal about the structure of these places in its various contexts.

Place, as a topic of investigation, highlights the weaving together of social relations and human-environment interactions. (p. xiv)

Indeed our understanding of each of these places is different based on their context. When thinking of the two "Souths" of my life, the concept of a movie theater evokes very different images. In the South of my childhood a trip to the movies would have required an hour drive so it was a totally different experience than my current South where I have multiple choices of movie theaters within minutes of my home.

Another important element of place is its paradoxical nature. The understanding of place that I am evoking here is more than just a geographical understanding of a location on a map. Adams et al. (2001) refer to the textures of place. This image of texture evokes for me the image of threads in a tapestry. One cannot merely consider only the threads visible in the final picture. Many other underlying threads are woven underneath to produce the image. Similarly, the texture of a place is where all of "the processes, structures, spaces, and histories that went into its making" intersect (Adams, Hoelscher, & Till, 2001, p. xiii). It is only by examining all of these threads of place that one can begin to see the whole picture. Casemore (2008) claims that "as place endures, it remembers" (p. 23). Nothing new can happen in a particular place without being influenced by what has already happened in that same place.

A third element of place that is important to consider is that the understanding of place is socially produced. Within this social production and construction of place, imagination plays a large role (Adams et al., 2001). Adams et al. (2001) assert that as separate groups create their own realities of place very different and often competing views will arise. Sack (2001) substantiates this notion of the social creation of place by asserting that "place requires human agents" (p. 233). According to Sack (2001) there can be no place without us and conversely we

cannot be without place. Additionally, we have the power to create the rules that govern those places we create.

In considering these qualities of place, I transition to the next element of place that is of great importance to understanding this study; a curriculum of place. More specifically a curriculum of place rooted in the South. The South has a very rich and storied history. Pinar (2004) explains that the history of the South has had great implications for every other region of the United States. Indeed it is the often unutterable skeletons lurking in the closets, and often sitting out in the open in most southern settings that create many uncomfortable moments for proper southerners. Pinar (2004) explains the need for a Curriculum of Southern Place in the following manner:

Why might studying the history of the South for southerners be more important that studying the history of say, the Midwest for Midwesterners? The reasons are two. One involves the southern history of slavery, segregation, violence and (relative) poverty....southerners retreated from the facts of their histories to fictions and fantasies. This phenomenon of denial and flight from reality involves, unsurprisingly, distortions in several spheres, distortions that undermine the South's efforts to develop culturally, even economically" (p. 95).

The history of the South is rich, but often its finer details are overlooked or skewed in educational settings. As good southerners, we fall back on what Whitlock (2007) refers to Mystery and Manners as a way of escaping these uncomfortable moments. Manners allow us to claim we have good working relationships with people of other races while continuing to engage in practices of institutionalized racism. Mystery refers to practices involving religion. As long

as what we are doing falls under one of these categories it must be alright—at least that is what we tell ourselves.

According to Kincheloe and Pinar (1991) "place becomes an important means of linking particularity to the social concerns of curriculum theory" (p. 21). Brian Casemore (2008) corroborates this paradigm in relation to the South by positing that

this is the crux of the problem of place in the American South. Though there is arguably a heightened phenomenological and conceptual relationship to place in the region, and thus and increased potential for linking particularity to social concerns, place-particular knowledge has historically fuelled the region's conservative localism and anti-intellectualism. (p. 12)

Understanding place in relation to the South is essential. However, understanding the South as a place may not be as simple as it sounds. Simple referents to the South make it sound as if the entire region below the Mason Dixon Line is one collective whole. As Whitlock (2007) eloquently explains "just as there is no one Southern dialect, there is also no singular Southern sensibility" (p. 1). Each place within the South has its own identity and being as created by the individuals that have called it home or presently call it home. Future residents will continue to shape the story of that place.

Now that we understand that each space within the greater place that we call the South is different, we will identify some similarities that prevail throughout the South. In general, the South is a region marked by a sense of nostalgia represented through story-telling (Casemore, 2008; Kincheloe & Pinar, 1991; Pinar, 2004; Whitlock, 2007). Southerners seem to possess an innate gene to weave a good story. "A sense of place takes on a special importance to Southerners. Similar 'details' are not seen as interchangeable; the Southerner is a locally

oriented entity with an emotional attachment to specific places" (Kincheloe & Pinar, 1991, p. 12). The details of the story are important to the Southerner relaying his or her story. The importance placed on specific details depends on the point of view of the individual telling the story. Therefore multiple people recounting the same encounter may choose to focus on different focal points based on what each identified as the most important event.

An underlying element of the Curriculum of Southern Place that helps to impact these renderings is the conscious and unconscious structures of racism that permeate every facet of society (Casemore, 2008; Kincheloe & Pinar, 1991; Pinar, 2004; Whitlock, 2007). Casemore (2008) reminds us that "our racist past is with us and is nearer to the surface of our everyday lives than the historical translation might suggest" (p. 29). Even today during a time when programs that support multicultural education and a different month dedicated to awareness of a different cultural group, our racist past still lingers. In Macon, as I am sure is true in other cities across the South, permanent markers of our race-scarred past are permanently emblazed in our historic buildings. Marble engravings in the historic Terminal Station located downtown still demarcate *Whites' Entrance* and *Coloreds' Entrance*.

This inquiry contributes to curriculum studies because it explores the lives of teachers actively engaged in teaching and seeks to explore their perspectives through a curriculum of place by engaging in a personal~passionate~participatory inquiry. By engaging in an exploration of the curriculum of place and why four White teachers teaching in a school with a high minority population have chosen to remain at their current school for so many years. I will be joining in what Pinar (2004) and Pinar et al (2004) refer to as a "complicated conversation" (p. 188; p. 848). According to Whitlock (2007) "part of the reason that curriculum is 'complicated' is that place is significant to it" (p. 43). The complicated conversation to which I will contribute will go

beyond typical conversations of place to include those features of place just described to include how social identities and constructs of place are formed. More specifically, I investigated how the identity of teachers at a small school are formed and shaped and how the place histories of these individuals influenced the meanings and experiences they have had while working at this school.

Inquiry Methods

This qualitative inquiry was completed using a personal~passionate~participatory inquiry method steeped in portraiture (He & Phillion, 2008; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). My unique position as both a researcher and a practitioner in my research setting has led me to design an inquiry project with a mixture of personal~passionate~participatory inquiry and portraiture. This project emerged as a result of my experiences as a teacher crossing racial boundaries and often feeling like I was the only one transversing this set of circumstances because the topic of race seemed to be taboo. Personal~passionate~participatory inquiry builds upon this desire for a reflection on experience. Researchers employing personal~passionate~participatory inquiry "focus on inquiring into participants' own perspectives on their own marginalization and ways that they have developed to succeed in their own terms, within mainstream societies" (Phillion & He, 2008, p. 269). The use of this methodology provided an avenue for me to explore how others have dealt with situations similar to my own.

Personal~passionate~participatory inquiry, as well as portraiture emerge from the experiences of both researchers and participants (He & Phillion, 2008; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). Both of these inquiry methods also seek to humanize research. My use of personal~passionate~participatory inquiry steeped in portraiture is reflected through the use of

interviews that allowed the participants to share their stories. Personal~passionate~participatory inquiry calls for a reflection on experience. Through the reflections the inquirer is challenged to identify the assumptions taking place between theory and practice (He & Phillion, 2008). The stories that the participants tell helped me to identify these gaps that exist between theory and practice. It also allows us to engage in personal and passionate conversations about these issues in the lives of the participants. This inquiry emerged out of an attempt to interpret my personal experiences as a White teacher teaching in a minority school. It is also an inquiry that sought to uncover some of the contradictions prevalent within the educational, political, and cultural arenas that I call home. Furthermore, through this inquiry I hope to provide an outlet to share my story, as well as those of my other participants with others who may find themselves in similar situations. Another important element of personal~passionate~participatory inquiry, as identified by Phillion and He (2008) is that:

researchers bring experience to inquiry, connect the personal with the political, and inquiry with life, and develop their inquiries grounded in theoretical foundations and research methodologies that foster participatory processes. The driving force, the passion that fuels the inquiry, is researcher and participant concerns. (p. 269)

Since I am conducting an inquiry into my own experiences, I feel that my research is closely aligned with these descriptions of personal~passionate~participatory inquiry. Portraiture is also a good fit for this research project. Portraiture goes against the current thrust of educational research that seems to only be interested in pointing fingers. As Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997a) explains:

Portraiture resists this tradition-laden effort to document failure. It is an intentionally generous and eclectic process that begins by searching for what is good and healthy and

assumes that the expression of goodness will always be laced with imperfections. The researcher who asks first "what is good here?" is likely to absorb a very different reality than the one who is on a mission to discover the source of failure. (p. 9)

It is this search for goodness within an institution and individuals that has drawn me to portraiture. "The portraitist believes that there are myriad ways in which goodness can be expressed" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997a, p. 9). It is the goal of portraiture to express the subjects', or actors', voices and their personal definitions of goodness.

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997d) defines the search for goodness as "an approach to inquiry that resist the more typical social science preoccupation with documenting pathology and suggesting remedies" (p. 141). Through this research, I would like to illuminate the positive characteristics of the teachers and the school. A quote attributed to Abraham Lincoln from the Disney movie *Pollyanna* (Swift, 1960) says: "when you look for the bad in mankind expecting to find it, you surely will." This quote exemplifies current educational research practices that seek to identify all of the problems and then prescribe a cure. Portraiture takes a different slant by taking the stance of Pollyanna and looking for the good in the situation. It is not the point that the search for goodness will portray a falsified image of perfection. "We assume that the latter qualities—of strength, health, and productivity—will always be imbued with flaws, weaknesses, and inconsistencies, and that he portraitist's inquiry must leave room for the full range of qualities to be revealed" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997d, p. 142). Portraiture attains these goals through its methodological stance. It is a research methodology that blends the aesthetic and empirical. In the blending of the aesthetic and empirical the portraitist's search for goodness becomes "a search for a generous, balanced, probing perspective. It is a search for the truth—or the complex and competing truths that combine to shape an authentic narrative" (LawrenceLightfoot, 1997d, p. 146). Thus portraiture is a personal~passionate~participatory research method that blends the aesthetic and empirical in an attempt to create an authentic story from the research setting.

A strong link between portraiture and personal~passionate~participatory inquiry is in the portraitist's attempt to "seek to capture insiders' views of what is important" (Lightfoot, 1983, p. 14). My application of portraiture as an insider rather than an outside researcher who will leave the school setting after the research ends positions me to merge these two methodologies to work to provide a portrait that reveals the insiders' views. It is also highly personal and participatory since I am one of the insiders within this setting. In this role, my voice as the researcher is highly visible:

She is seen not only in defining the focus and field of the inquiry, but also in navigating the relationships with the subjects, in witnessing and interpreting the action in tracing the emergent themes, and in creating the narrative. At each one of these stages, the self of the portraitist emerges as an instrument of inquiry, an eye on perspective-taking, an ear that discerns nuances, and a voice that speaks and offers insight. Indeed, the voice of the portraitist often helps us identify her place in the inquiry. (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997a, p. 13)

As a portraitist, I painted a picture of the school with my words. I was in a unique position of trying to describe the school as both an insider and as an objective researcher.

Blending Methodologies

At first glance the methodologies of personal~passionate~participatory inquiry and portraiture may seem to oppose each other. In their purest forms, they are indeed very different in that the researcher in personal~passionate~participatory inquiry is deeply involved in the

research process as an insider and active participant while the researcher in portraiture is an outsider who serves as researcher as observer who comes in to observe and record the happenings in the research setting. I chose to blend these two research methodologies to provide a unique perspective into the experiences at Ocmulgee Elementary School. Behar's (1996)

Vulnerable Observer painted a visual image that expressed why I feel so strongly that I need to blend these two methodologies:

In the midst of a massacre, in the face of torture, in the eye of a hurricane, in the aftermath of an earthquake, or even, say, when horror looms apparently more gently in memories that won't recede and so come pouring forth in the late-night quiet of a kitchen, as a storyteller opens her heart to a story listener, recounting hurts that cut deep and raw into the gullies of the self, do you, the observer, stay behind the lens of the camera, switch on the tape recorder, keep pen in hand? (p. 2).

As a researcher where is the line? Because I have been deeply entrenched in the daily happenings at Ocmulgee for the past ten years there is no way that I can separate myself from the research setting to become an outsider conducting research about the school. I am an active participant in the school setting. I have worked with each of the three participants in the study during the ten years that I have been at Ocmulgee. Since our school is so small most of the staff members have a very close relationship with each other that extends beyond the work day.

I feel passionate about using the elements of portraiture in this research project because of the potential that this methodology facilitates. First of all, I am drawn to the fact that it begins by searching for the good in a research setting. I am deeply dismayed by the plethora of research studies that seek to point out all of the things that we educators are doing wrong. There are many positive things going on within education that are overlooked. I did not intend to view

Ocmulgee, or the selected teachers through rose-colored glasses. We are far from perfect; but I wanted to start by looking for the good things that these White teachers are doing at Ocmulgee while choosing to work with students of a different race.

Participants

The study includes the narratives of four teachers—three participants chosen by the following methods and myself. Since I am interested in exploring the narrative accounts of White teachers who have undergone experiences similar to my own, I chose to create a portrait of four teachers from the school where I teach—three others and myself. These teachers were chosen based on the following criteria. First of all each of these individuals has been teaching at the school over ten years. Secondly, these teachers have been identified as successful teachers of racially different students. Finally, each of these participants, while perhaps unaware of the official terminology, has displayed characteristics of culturally responsive teaching. According to the principal at Ocmulgee Elementary School, each of the selected teachers displays a great deal of care about their students and holds them to high expectations with a faith that they will succeed. They treat everyone—adults and children—with dignity and respect. They are willing to share their knowledge with others. These teachers are constantly seeking professional development opportunities to improve their craft because "they see teaching as more than just employment; it is who they are, and they throw themselves into it with vigor" (J. Jackson, personal communication, August 26, 2011).

Participant Profiles

Deanna has taught at Ocmulgee Elementary School the longest of any of its existing staff members. Having taught there for over 25 years, she has been a witness and participant to many of the changes the school has faced. As a special education teacher she has worked with a

variety of students and cooperating teachers. The majority of her time at Ocmulgee was spent teaching a self-contained special education class. In this setting she would often teach the same children for up to three years. Now she is the resource teacher for the elementary grades. In this capacity she goes into the inclusion classrooms to co-teach with the regular education teachers.

Emily has spent her entire teaching career at Ocmulgee Elementary School. As a student teacher, she was assigned to Ocmulgee. Following her experience she was hired as a teacher for the next school year. She has remained on the staff for over a decade. Emily has taught both fourth and fifth grades at the school, rotating between them as needed. She is the fifth grade math teacher and the lead math teacher for the school. She has been very active on the school's leadership team for several years. Students look forward to being in her class because of the rich learning experiences she provides.

Richard came to teaching as a second career after spending many years in farming. For almost a decade he has been a stable figure in third grade at Ocmulgee Elementary School. He began his career at Ocmulgee as a part of the class-size reduction program, a former county initiative that paired beginning teachers with experienced teachers in a classroom to co-teach. After spending about a year co-teaching in third grade he took over a newly formed class in the middle of the year; a result of overcrowding in the other three classes. Each year many parents file requests for their third grader to be placed in his class.

Story Collection Methods

I collected stories through interviews conducted with the research participants. Since this research is personal~passionate~participatory the interviews were much less structured than a typical interview. An interview protocol based on the research questions for this inquiry served as the underlying guide for the interview sessions. However, the interviews were more

conversational in nature than a simple question and answer session. Since I have worked closely with the participants for ten years, it was hard not to respond and interject comments during the conversation. I used these relationships to delve into deeper conversations about the experiences of working at Ocmulgee as a White teacher teaching students of a different race.

Before taking part in the interview process, participants were asked to read a short article about culturally responsive teaching and to write a short response to the article. The article was being used to provide participants with a foundational understanding of the terms and concepts related to culturally responsive teaching as well as to provide an opportunity for participants to assess themselves in regards to culturally responsiveness.

In order to provide a more accurate record of the conversations these interviews were recorded. Anecdotal notes were compiled during each interview session. After the interviews were completed they were transcribed. When the information was transcribed pseudonyms were used to attempt to maintain the anonymity of the participants in the study (Seibold, 2000). Since the research is being conducted in a small school setting complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed. It is sometimes difficult to capture all of the nuances of spoken text with the written word in a typed transcription. Compromises may be made between the ideals of faithfulness to the original and the idea of readability and access in the final transcript (Nikander, 2008). These compromises are not made without heavy consideration of how they might affect the data. After careful transcribing, the interviews were returned to the interviewees for member-checks. This process added to the credibility in qualitative research. The interviewees made comments, added further details, and clarified any points of confusion in the data (Seibold, 2000; Whitehead, 2004). When the transcriptions were ready the process of the building the portrait began.

Building the Portrait

The artist, Basil Hallward, in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* explains that:

every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter. The sitter is merely the accident, the occasion. It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter who, on the colored canvas, reveals himself. (Wilde, 2003, p. 7)

Such is also true of the composition of the research portrait. The final product though reflective of the data collected through the research process is highly reflective of the portraitist's perspective. Davis (1997a) posits that "in implementing portraiture, the researcher is engaged in a discourse between two mutually informative aspects of the methodology: the process of data gathering and the process of shaping the final portrait" (p. 60). In composing the portrait, the portraitist is interested in searching for a convincing authentic story that conveys the message that the actors are trying to tell (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997a; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997f). In creating this story, the portraitist works to put "pieces together to create a logical coherence, but being careful not to impose a facile consistency or a simplistic logic that will misrepresent the complex reality we are documenting" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997f, p. 246). Three audiences are considered when composing the portrait: the actors who are being portrayed in the portrait, the

The portraitist constructs the aesthetic whole—weaves the tapestry—while attending to four dimensions: the first is conceptions, which refers to development of the overarching story; second is the structure, which refers to the sequencing and layering of emergent themes that scaffold the story: third is the form, which reflects the movement of the

readers who are being asked to believe the interpretation, and the portraitist. Lawrence-Lightfoot

(1997f) compares the process of composing the portrait to weaving a tapestry:

narrative, the spinning of the tale, and the last is cohesion, which speaks about the unity and integrity of the piece. (p. 247).

Each of these elements must be in place to ensure that the portrait portrays a complete picture. Phillion and He (2008) describe personal~passionate~participatory inquiry similarly:

Three key points make the work meaningful. First, data are presented in a life-like way; readers vicariously experience complexities, contradictions and dilemmas of people's lives. There is a sense of 'being there' and a sense of urgency for change....Second, researchers uncover hidden and untold stories of their participants to counter 'the official story.' This creates a sense that they know what they are confronting. The stories told challenge orthodoxy, awaken critical consciousness, and create possibilities for change....Third, the researchers demonstrate strong commitment to the plight of their participants and the injustice embed in larger society. (p. 271-272).

The merging of these two research methodologies facilitates a story based on an overarching theme while being shaped by emergent themes all the while working to give the participants a voice while telling their untold stories.

The complexity that arises in composing these portraitures is in making sure that the representation stays true to the meanings intended by the speakers. Further, it is essential to find ways to portray the emotions conveyed during the interactions. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) recognize these difficulties by positing "objective reality can never be captured. We know a thing only through its representations" (p. 7). It is my responsibility as the researcher to retell the participants' stories while maintaining the authentic emotional element. Drawing upon the rich Southern tradition found in both of my "Souths," I will rely on the art of the raconteur to build my portraits. Southerners have developed ways to relay rich stories that capture even the

most minute details of an event while tugging at the heartstrings. The variation that my portraits have from the rich history of the raconteur is that they will be addressing a topic considered unutterable by many Southerners. In my current home, it is under a guise of genteel politeness that we refrain from publicly discussing those topics that may cause discomfort. If they are spoken publicly it is generally a mere whisper.

Finding the overarching story and emergent themes

The methodologies of personal~passionate~participatory inquiry and portraiture lead to similar means of data analysis. During the interview process, portraitists listen for a story rather than simply listening to the story (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). This same type of listening is evident in the premise of personal~passionate~participatory inquiry research processes (Phillion & He, 2008). The analysis process begins by the researcher listening for the actors' stories and pursuing the emergent themes that arise from these encounters. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997e) posits that the portraitist brings an intellectual framework to the research setting. "The framework is usually the result of a review of the relevant literature, prior experience in similar settings, and a general knowledge of the field of inquiry. It also resonates with echoes of the researcher's autobiographical journey" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997e, p. 188). In the analysis process the researcher uses a triangulation process to interpret the multiple sources of data. The portraitist looks beyond the actors for multiple sources of information that will reveal the whole picture pertaining to the research site (Davis, 1997a). In creating this portraiture, reflections from participants about an article pertaining to culturally responsive teaching, interview transcripts, statistical data collected about the school, information from the literature review, and my personal observations were used as data sources for analysis.

During the analysis, attention is given to finding emergent themes. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997e) explains five modes of synthesis, convergence and contrast used to discover these emergent themes. The first step is to listen for repetitive refrains. These are phrases that reappear throughout the data, reflecting a commonly held view. The second mode is to identify resonant metaphors. These metaphors serve as a means for the actors to express their livedrealities (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997e). These metaphors link closely with the function of personal~passionate~participatory research to delve deeply into the lives of the participants to help readers "vicariously experience complexities, contradictions and dilemmas of people's lives" (Phillion & He, 2008, p. 271). The third mode of synthesis, convergence and contrast, is to examine the rituals of the institution to see the important organizational themes (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997e). The fourth step used in searching for emergent themes is the triangulation of data sources. The final mode of synthesis, convergence, and contrast involves constructing themes and revealing patterns that emerged through the triangulation of the data (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997e). The emerging themes identified through this synthesis, convergence and contrast will serve as the framework for composing the narrative for the portrait.

Voice

The voice employed in the telling of the stories is important in both

Personal~passionate~participatory inquiry and portraiture. In both methodologies the voice of
the researcher is paramount in setting the direction for the research. In portraiture voice is
portrayed in multiple ways: voice as witness, voice as interpretation, voice as preoccupation,
voice as autobiography, voice discerning other voices, and voice in dialogue. "Voice speaks
about stance and perspective, revealing the place from which the portraitist observes and records
the action, reflecting her angle of vision, allowing her to perceive patterns and see the strange in

the familiar" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997a, p. 13). The first use of voice is voice as a witness. Here it is evident that the researcher is an observer. This voice allows the researcher to be "sufficiently distanced from the action to be able to see the whole, as far enough away to depict patterns that actors in the setting might not notice because of their involvement in the scene" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997b, p. 87). Jenkins (2009) explains that it is the portraitist's responsibility "to directly acknowledge that she is observing, analyzing, and telling the research story. Therefore, her lens of viewing the world is inextricably bound to the research process" (p. 143). The second use of voice is voice as interpretation. Here the portraitist adds interpretation to make sense of the data (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997b). Voice as preoccupation is the third use of voice as described by Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997b). Closely linked to personal~passionate~participatory inquiry, this voice pertains to how the observations and text are shaped by the portraitist's prior experience. "Voice, here, refers to the lens through which she sees and records reality. This voice is more than interpretive description. It is the framework that defines—at least initially—what she sees and how she interprets it" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997b, p. 93). Voice as autobiography is the fourth use of voice in portraiture. Through this use of voice the researcher's history is revealed in the inquiry. Lawrence-Lightfoot explains:

Her perspective, her questions, and her insights are inevitably shaped by these profound developmental and autobiographical experiences. She must use the knowledge and wisdom drawn from these life experiences as resources for understanding, and as sources of connection and identification with the actors in the setting, but she must not let her autobiography obscure or overwhelm the inquiry. (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997b, p. 95)

Personal~passionate~participatory inquiry shares this use of autobiographical voice as it seeks to portray research that is personally related to the researcher (Phillion & He, 2008). Important to portraiture is the voice discerning voice. Just as the portraitist listens for a story, she must also listen for the actor's voice. This type of listening means that in addition to attending to what is said attention must be given to how it is said and the accompanying body language that helps to convey different meanings from the spoken words (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997b). Portraiture is participatory in nature.

The sixth use of voice, voice in dialogue, portrays this participatory nature. In this voice modality "the portraitist purposefully places herself in the middle of the action (in the field *and* in the text). She feels the symmetry of voice—hers and the actor's—as they both express their views and together define meaning-making" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997b, p. 103). These uses of voice shape the portrait and give it meaning.

Context

Another important element in the creation of the portrait is the essence of context. Context includes all of the spaces as well as people involved in the situation. In describing narrative Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain that "context is necessary for making sense of any person, event, or thing" (p. 32). Without sufficient understanding of the contextual setting the narrative loses its meaning. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997c) describes the context as the framework for interpreting the experiences of the actors. "The portraitist, then, believes that human experience has meaning in a particular social, cultural, and historical context—a context where relationships are real, where the actors are familiar with the setting, where activity has purpose, where nothing is contrived" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997c, p. 43). It is only by providing a clear description of the context that the portrait has meaning. This context must

and internal contexts of the actors and the research setting (Davis, 1997b; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997c). Another important element of the context is the context of the portraitist: "It is not only important for the portraitist to paint the contours and dimensions of the setting, it is also crucial that she sketch herself into the context" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997c, p. 50). Without these understandings of context the portrait loses it meaning.

Challenges of the Study

A major limitation to this study is that since it is qualitative in nature it will not be generalizable to broader populations. Since there were only four participants from the same school in the study the viewpoints shared were narrow in scope and will not be representative of all White teachers in the school represented or the district. This inquiry only seeks to portray a sampling of how the selected teachers developed their careers in one particular school. Other school settings may pose a completely different scenario leading to different conclusions and findings. A further limitation is that the schema of the researcher will determine the interpretation of the narrative accounts. By using a combined methodology of personal~passionate~participartory and portraiture my role as a researcher is very influential in shaping the direction of the narrative. My subjectivities, prior experiences, and theoretical framework will shape the final portrait. Another person's schema could yield a different story and interpretation. An example of this is evident in the exemplary studies cited in this study, such as Briandi (2010).

Significance

Several areas of social significance support this research project. The significance of my inquiry at the level of teachers is three-fold. First of all, this inquiry provides a way for teachers

teaching in minority schools to examine their experiences as compared to those in the study. Secondly, this inquiry can serve as a window into these experiences for teachers who do not teach in these schools. Many individuals outside of these settings have false impressions of the reality of teaching. These false impressions vary in degrees of misinterpretation on both ends of the spectrum. Finally for beginning teachers, this research can provide a sense of hope in letting them know that they are not alone in their struggles. As a new teacher I often felt like no one else understood the cultural dissonance that I was experiencing. I was cultured to believe that discussing race was to disrespect or marginalize another, so I suffered in an unutterable silence. This inquiry can help to change this paradigm for new teachers who now find themselves in a similar situation.

The significance for students and parents would be an opportunity to understand how the teacher perceives these experiences. For the district and community, this study can reveal phenomenon that many outside of the setting are unable to witness. The root of portraiture; searching for goodness, adds to this significance. Unfortunately negative images abound in regard to Bibb County Public Schools. Additionally, certain school names within the county conjure up negative images for many individuals. Based on their demographics, these schools have been lumped together and are often viewed by the community as possessing one set of negative attributes. Most people never take the opportunity to look beyond the façade to see the positive attributes these schools possess. This inquiry will help to highlight positive aspects of Bibb County Public Schools and Ocmulgee Elementary. By revealing these phenomena and speaking the unutterable, it could open the door for more conversations and training for teachers preparing to enter culturally diverse teaching settings. Ideally, increased conversations would emerge as significant across all levels because it addresses an area of research that is often

overlooked. In society's quest to be politically correct and to keep everyone happy, many controversial issues are skirted. The experiences of my adult life have constantly challenged this push not to discuss the racial issues permeating our society and schools systems. Apple (2004b) explains that

In the United States, race is present in every situation, every relationship, and every individual. This is the case not only for the way society is organized—spatially, culturally, in terms of stratification, and so on—but also for our perceptions and understandings of personal experience. (p. 75)

I have encountered many other teachers who relate that they have had similar experiences. With this proliferation of teachers finding themselves working in contexts that differ greatly from their historic origins, a study of this type is necessary. Therefore, we can no longer overlook the issues of race and power within our educational systems. Winant (2004) posits "Yet a refusal to engage in 'race thinking' amounts to a defense of the racial status quo, in which systematic racial inequality and, yes, discrimination as well, are omnipresent" (p. 8). Ignoring the racial tensions only perpetuates the situation and never provides a hope for change. As a body of professionals, and a society, we must find a way to speak what was once deemed "unutterable" (Manis, 2004). Only after we open these lines of communication and critical thinking will we be able to begin the process of combating the racial inequities that lead to the cultural dissonance that teachers continue to face in the classroom.

This inquiry project also holds a personal significance for me. As a teacher, and participant researcher, this inquiry will provide a way for me to interpret and explore the phenomenon occurring around me on a daily basis. I feel that is one of the goals of personal~passionate~participatory inquiry; providing teacher-researchers with an opportunity to

examine their own practices. Through this examination the professional dissonances that the teacher faces can be addressed. Right now, in addition to the cultural dissonance that I have been working through over the past ten years while working in a culturally different school, I have recently found myself facing a set of professional dissonances as I become more aware of the differences between my theory and practice.

Summary

By using the lens of curriculum of place, I will be able to examine the influence of the racial identities and backgrounds of my participants and myself on our teaching careers; the subject of the inquiry. A curriculum of place will allow the researcher to make connections between the location of the South and experiences of the participants. It also monitors how individuals react to the identity crisis that results when these issues are addresses. Further it encourages the discussion of those topics that many people consider unutterable. By using this critical framework to guide my questioning, I am able to get more to the heart of the matter of how racial issues have impacted these teachers and how race continues to play a role in their daily teaching careers. By using the methodologies of personal~passionate~participatory inquiry and portraiture, the participants voices will be heard in a more authentic manner. Rather than an author simply reporting findings from a study their words will be used to weave together a narrative that tells their story and shares their experiences.

Chapter 4

SPEAKING THE UNUTTERABLE

Ocmulgee Elementary School

The more specific context of this study is Ocmulgee Elementary School (pseudonym). As you drive south in Macon, one can still see the destruction left from the Mother's Day tornados that ravaged the area three years ago. Trees lay across the roofs of houses, some branches impale houses. Blue tarps serve as makeshift shingles. Abandoned houses occupy draw unwanted, incorrigible crowds. Although the road was widened about the same time as these destructive tornados, the economic improvement promised has yet to materialize. The blinking school zone light signals that you are nearing the school. Suddenly the residential neighborhood opens up to a very small strip-mall type shopping center isolated in the center of the community. There is a handful of churches, two restaurants, a fire station, a small grocery store, a drycleaner, a nail salon, a small boutique, a corner market, and a home security store. This is a retail area that most people never know exists. Individuals who know of its existence and reputation generally avoid the area. It certainly isn't a neighborhood you intentionally drive into to complete your Saturday afternoon errands.

A large open field is situated in front of the school building. Sitting back a hundred yards from the road is a short, squat, brick building with scruffy looking shrubbery in front of it. The building has the external appearance of an abandoned warehouse. Two metal doors serve as entrances on either side of the front of the building. There is no signage or lettering on the exterior of the building designating it as a school. Scars in the front lawn reveal the location where two majestic oak trees used to grow. On school days, a bicycle rack holds about a half-dozen bikes securely chained to the posts. The inadequate parking lot is filled to the brim with cars double parked because the population of the school staff is greater than the number of actual

parking spaces. A circular drive loops around the front of the school. During drop-off and dismissal times, this loop is lined with cars, as parents drop off and pick up their children.

While the exterior appearance does not resemble a school, the inside of the building tells a different story. Distinctly different from the décor of most schools, the lobby of the school is tiled with a beautiful brown ceramic tile that dates the school back to its opening in 1954. A large marble slab is placed strangely in a wall on the left side of the lobby showing signs of an earlier remodeling and someone's attempt to preserve at least one piece of the school's legacy by preserving the relic. Above the marble slab hangs six large oil paintings that reveal a significant piece of Ocmulgee's legacy. The first portrait is of the school's namesake. The next five portraits are of the first five of the seven principals that have served as leaders of Ocmulgee Elementary School. Large pieces of leather furniture provide an inviting place for parents, staff, and students to sit and talk. A beautiful mural of children reading under a tree provides a backdrop for the entrance into the office suite.

Off to the right of the lobby is the cavernous cafetorium—an attempt to merge a cafeteria and auditorium into one space. Rows of foldable tables with attached benches line the main floor providing a place for students and teachers to eat their meals. During assemblies these tables are folded up and moved to the hallways to make room for students to sit on the floor. For more formal assemblies, extra chairs are collected from classrooms and are lined up neatly into rows where the tables once sat. The walls of the cafetorium are painted in the school colors of blue and yellow. At the top of the longest wall, the school name and the year 1954 are prominently inscribed. The repairing of the plaster has become an almost annual event, since a chronic moisture and mildew problem resulting from a leaky roof prevents the plaster from adhering from the cement walls. Just below the name of the school is a large cutout of our

mascot, an owl. On the far wall is the rise of the stage. Scratched and weathered hardwood floors, long past their glory days cover the floor of the stage. After hanging with mold and mildew stains for many years, administrators finally accepted defeat and removed the rear curtains and opted instead to paint the wall that the drapes were intended to hide. The wings of the stage have become a place for storage over the years, since theatrical productions are a thing of the school's distant past.

Off of the lobby there is a long hallway going straight down from the school's entrance. Standing by the office, the hallway seems to go on forever. The beginning part of the hall has the same beautiful brown tile work on the floor as the lobby. The walls are covered with a distinct green ceramic tile unlike any other I have seen in an elementary school. Bulletin boards covered with instructional materials are scattered out down the hall in a variety of sizes, as well as the mandated number of fire extinguishers. The first classrooms on the primary hall belong to the support staff—the special education teacher, in-school suspension, and the literacy coach, followed by grade classrooms. There, in addition to bulletins boards, samples of student work explode around the door frames. Halfway down the hall there is evidence of an addition to the original building as the floor tiles transform to the institutional twelve-inch white tiles that one expects to find in an elementary school. Here the wall covering changes to the more traditional off-white cinder-block bricks one expects to find in a school. A breezeway opens up to reveal exit doors to either side of the hallway. There, exists the first grade classes and the now empty pre-kindergarten classroom. At the end of the straight part of this hallway are the three kindergarten classrooms. By looking in the door window of any of these classrooms you can find children actively engaged in learning. Desks are gathered together in groups allowing for more student interaction.

Around the turn in the hallway is the narthex. Benches line the walls of this oddly shaped space which was the result of the addition of the gymnasium, music room, and extra bathrooms. Framed student art-work, reminding everyone of the attempts of our former principal to bring positive African-American culture into the school, adorns the walls, adding to the ambiance of the space and making it a nice space for students to come and read.

Going the other way from the lobby one travels the short front hallway to find the media center and the back entrance to the office suite. The media center provides an aesthetic experience. The space is always decorated in an appealing way that draws individuals in and makes them take in the space with a sense of wonder and awe. When you first walk in you have to slowly look around to see what the new seasonal display holds. Everything is always anchored by a theme of literature. Hanging from the ceiling is a permanent display of butterflies and airplanes. The back of the room has balloons and stuffed characters from favorite books. Treasure chests hold mysterious caches of books for students to discover.

Past the entrance to the media center is the entrance to the elementary hallway. This hallway is also covered with the brown ceramic floor tile and green wall tiling found in the lobby and the beginning of the primary hall. To the left are the two computer labs. One computer lab is operated on a rotating schedule to allow students to work on a developmental program. The other lab is open for teachers to sign up and take their students in to work. A large glass window opens up into a conference room on the right side of the hallway. The classrooms on the right side of the hall have large windows facing into the hallway. These windows serve as a reminder of Ocmulgee's history and its existence before the last renovation when these classrooms were added into the courtyard area between the two arms of the school. Each time you near a classroom door, displays of student work spill out to cover the walls. On the left are the three

third grade classrooms. Past the back entrance to the book room are the three fifth grade classrooms. The three fourth grade classrooms are next on the left side of the hall. The science lab is on the left. A set of doors to the breezeway shoot off to the right. At this point the tile on the floor transitions back to the traditional twelve-inch white tiles found in the classrooms, signifying that students are occupying a space that was renovated after the original building failed to accommodate the neighborhood children. Each of these long hallways is home to fifteen classroom spaces. Currently only seventeen of these thirty classrooms are being used for homeroom classes. During school hours these classrooms become hubs of activity as students flood in and learning activities commence.

Built in 1954, the school is housed in a building that looks more like a warehouse than a place of education. When the school was initially opened it served Kindergarten through seventh grades and served an all White population reflective of the neighborhood of the 1950s. The building has been remodeled twice since its initial construction. These renovations included eliminating the large dormer windows that were in every classroom and installing air conditioning in each classroom. Due to changes in the neighborhood dynamic, the absence of these large windows is a mixed blessing; their absence reduces the amount of natural light that can filter into the classroom; on the other hand, although the smaller windows have served as an access point for multiple break-ins over the past five years. One can only imagine how much worse the damage would be if the large windows still existed. During the second renovation, the school was expanded to increase its capacity, add a gymnasium, music room, a new office suite and media center. The school now has 17 homeroom classrooms and serves students in Kindergarten through fifth grades. A third of the classrooms in the building sit empty or serve as office or storage spaces. At various times during the past ten years every available space within

the building was being used as a classroom. The declining enrollment has several causes. One cause for the decline was the transition of sixth grade to the middle schools in 2006. Another reason has been a shift in population in the community. Over the past few years it seems as if there has been a steady decrease in the population of the community surrounding our school.

One problem plaguing Ocmulgee Elementary is frequent bouts of vandalism. The playground, which was built through a joint effort with the neighborhood and charitable grants, has had every removable piece stolen. At its installation seven years ago, six beautiful wooden picnic tables encircled the space. One by one they disappeared as they were ripped from the chain and concrete foundations holding them in place. A truck bumper laid on the ground by the last remaining broken picnic table for several weeks before it was finally removed and discarded. Gang signs and profanity are frequently spray painted onto the remaining equipment and must be cleaned off to protect the innocence of elementary students. At the beginning of this school year, a fence was installed around the remaining pieces of the playground in an attempt to preserve it and to provide safety for students as they played each day. For the first several months of the year, a large portion of the playground remained off-limits to students as we waited on them to be restored to safe conditions. Another source of vandalism at the school involves frequent break-ins via the destruction. Large rocks and bricks from the neighborhood are thrown through the few windows that are not covered with a protective grate to gain entry into the school. This past May there were break-ins on three subsequent weekends by the same individual, appearing from the surveillance video to be a teenager. The first break-in deprived the students of ice cream for the rest of the year as the offender broke the top out of the ice cream box and took all of the ice cream. On the second and third attempts the offender was seen by video surveillance trying unsuccessfully to enter the computer labs. Each time we come back from a long weekend

or a holiday break it feels as if the first people in the building have to keep their eyes open to see if there is anything out of the ordinary, like a curtain swaying to the outside breeze, to indicate that one of these incidents has occurred again.

Over the years the demographics of the neighborhood changed, resulting in the population of the school being predominantly Black. Based on state data reporting, the school population is Black and White, with a small Hispanic student enrollment reported in 2006-2007and 2008-2009. I was able to find demographic data for the school for 1994 and then 2000-2001 through 2010-2011 school years, as shown in Figure 1. The descriptions of the school composition before those times are based on conversations with long-time teachers at the school, perusing old school yearbooks, and visiting the school's *facebook* page which is rich with old class pictures and other visual artifacts from the school's history. In October of 1994 the school served 483 students in Kindergarten through sixth grades. The student population was 59% Black and 41% White (B. Giroux, personal communication, June 8, 2011). By the 2000-2001 school year the Black student population had grown. The student population was 84% Black and 16% White (Georgia Department of Education. 2003). During the 2005-2006 school year the student population was 95% Black, 4% White and 1% multiracial (Georgia Department of Education, 2006). The 2005-2006 school year was the last year that sixth grade was served at the school. After the sixth graders were moved to the middle school there was a significant drop in student enrollment as one-seventh of the student population left. The school no longer qualified for an assistant principal due to this decrease in enrollment. According to the 2009-2010 school report card (Georgia Department of Education, 2010) the school was 98% Black, 1% White, and 1% multiracial. The number of White and Hispanic students is so small that most teachers can count them on their fingers and name each of these students. Today Ocmulgee

Elementary School is a small neighborhood school, serving approximately 380 students from the surrounding impoverished neighborhood.

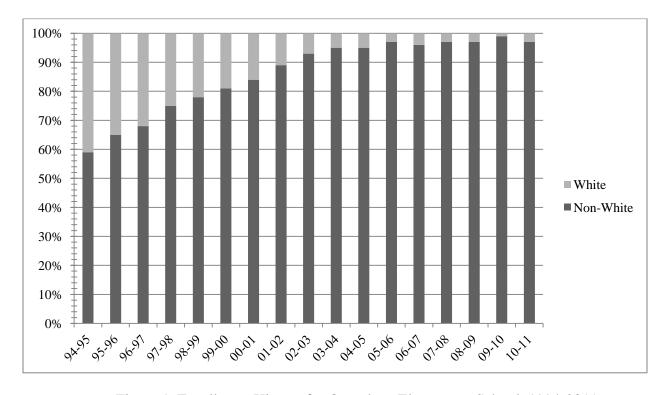


Figure 1. Enrollment History for Ocmulgee Elementary School, 1994-2011

Despite normal trends where teachers use inner-city schools as a launching point for their careers and then move to more affluent schools, over 80% of the staff has been at the school for over five years. During the 2010-2011 school year, there was a total of 51 faculty and staff members. Of this total, 39 were Black and 12 were White. Eight of these individuals will not return for the 2011-2012 school year—six positions were eliminated due to increased class sizes and other budgetary cuts, one individual decided that it was time for a change, and one cafeteria worker retired. Of those eight individuals who are leaving, four were White and three were Black. This number is significant because it significantly lowers the population of White staff members.

Despite an apparent lack of consistency in the teaching staff over time, there has been a contingency of teachers forming a consistent teaching force at the school. The focus of this study is to look at the White teachers who have chosen to remain at Ocmulgee Elementary School despite the changing demographics and changes in leadership. Four White teachers were chosen for this study because they have been at Ocmulgee over ten years. The stories of these teachers—Deanna, Emily, Richard and myself—follow.

Deanna

Deanna's classroom is located at the end of the elementary hall. She often jokes that she could die down there and no one would know it until she started rotting. Deanna makes this joke because her room is the only occupied room at the end of the hall. Several empty classrooms, some storage spaces, and a set of student bathrooms separate her from the rest of the elementary hallway. Generally no one travels down to her end of the hallway unless they are on a specific mission. Deanna's classroom is packed wall-to-wall with a plethora of resources reflecting her thirty-six years in the profession and twenty-five years at Ocmulgee Elementary School. Each year when the special education department releases funding for her to purchase new supplies for the year, other teachers eagerly suggest that she should either donate her "older" supplies to us or have a yard sale to make room for the new materials. Deanna serves several small groups of special education students in her room throughout the day. However most of the time she can be found co-teaching with other content area teachers in grades three through five in Math and Language Arts.

A self-described Air Force brat, Deanna grew up in a variety of places. She started school in Warner Robins, moved to Navado, CA, the Azores, and then back to Warner Robins. Deanna received a multicultural schooling experience as she traveled between these settings.

Her family eventually moved back to Warner Robins, GA where she would graduate from Warner Robins High School. According to Deanna a unique characteristic of that experience was the multicultural aspect of the schools she attended back during the time that most schools in Georgia were fighting to remain separate. Deanna told me that "Race was never an issue because some of my best friends were Black. I grew up with that. In high school in Warner Robins kids from the base came to Warner Robins High School, so we were already desegregated when all of that was going on here in Macon" (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011). Having basically two career choices; nurse or teacher; she chose to become a teacher attending Georgia Southern University where she became dually certified with a Special Education and General Education certificate. Before entering the education profession Deanna had a short career as a photographer for Olan Mills that began in college and carried over until she was able to obtain a full time teaching job. She also worked a part time job as a Keebler elf in the cookie factory during college.

Before beginning a career in Bibb County Schools, Deanna taught first grade for one year at a private school. When she entered Bibb County, she joined the Special Education Department. Her undergraduate education program at Georgia Southern University had prepared her for this transition. She taught at five different schools, two others in the immediate area around Ocmulgee, before transferring full-time to Ocmulgee in 1987. Deanna is one of the longest tenured teachers currently at Ocmulgee elementary school. As such she possesses a great deal of insight into the changes that the school has undergone during the past twenty-five years.

Deanna is proud of the work that she is doing at Ocmulgee. The first 22 years that she taught at Ocmulgee were spent teaching in a self-contained MID(Mildly-Intellectually Disabled, Class). This means that she taught students who scored below 70 on an IQ test. She generally

taught the same group of children for third through fifth grades. Students from all over our high school feeder zone would be bused to Ocmulgee to attend one of our self-contained special-education classes. According to Deanna, at one point there were nine such classes. In 2002 when I arrived at Ocmulgee, we had decreased to six self-contained classes—two MID, two EBD (Emotional Behavior Disorder), and two LD (Learning Disabled) classes. At one point, this high number of special education classes, and students it drew from around the district created a problem for Ocmulgee. Despite the fact that our test scores were higher than those of the schools around us in all areas and subgroups, including special education students, we were unable to make Adequate Yearly Progress because of the high number of special education students that we were serving. At that point we were so deep into Needs Improvement that we had to offer school choice to our students. Students were able to transfer to one of two other schools that had lower test scores than ours, but did not serve a large special education population because they were all already at our school.

About five years ago, the county decided to redesign the special education programs and move towards an inclusion program. Rather than serve the students with special needs in self-contained classrooms isolated from the general education population, they are now taught in regular education classrooms with a collaborative model between the regular education teacher and the special education teacher. This change in programming allowed the students that were previously served in special education centers, such as ours, to return to their home school. This change had several effects. First, it led to a perceived improvement in the school's achievement. As a result of this change and a continued dedication by the teachers at Ocmulgee, we have made Adequate Yearly Progress and have been named as a Title I School of Distinction for the past 8 years. We are the only school in our feeder-zone to accomplish this task. I do not feel that our

academic success has improved solely due to the change in the special education program. The major difference is that with the reduced numbers in that population it no longer counts as a subgroup in determining Adequate Yearly Progress. Other changes that have contributed to the increase in test scores have included the systematic implementation of other initiatives designed to improve student achievement.

Another result in the change in the special education program has been a shift in the roles of teachers working with special education students. Before shifting to the inclusion model, Deanna worked with one small group of MID students in her self-contained classroom. Now she is in and out of up to six different classrooms each day—a math and language arts class in third, fourth, and fifth grades. These changes have brought challenges and benefits to Deanna. One challenge is that she now has to work with students with various disabilities, whereas before she only worked with students identified as MID. She says that her biggest difficulty is working with EBD students because of their unpredictability. However she has noted that a benefit to this change is the ability to work with so many other students in the classes she visits. Even though her primary task is to assist the special education students, Deanna works with most of the students in each of the classes she co-teaches in each day.

Another monumental change that Deanna witnessed that those of us that have only been teaching since the 1990's or sooner did not realize is when the school started serving breakfast. According to Deanna there was a strong push for the school to serve both breakfast and lunch that was resisted by the fourth principal of the school. Deanna recalled "We did not start serving breakfast until like the very end of the 80's or the very first part of the 90's, because the principal at that time I can remember didn't particularly want breakfast" (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011). It wasn't until the fifth principal took over the helm of

Ocmulgee Elementary School that breakfast was served to the students. The idea of not serving both breakfast and lunch at the school seems foreign to us today because we understand that the hot meals served at school may be the only hot meals that some of our students receive due to the poverty status that hold.

Emily

Emily's classroom is the first door past the bookroom on the elementary hallway. As you walk in it is hard to miss the fact that this is a mathematics classroom. Rich displays of learning cover the walls. Anchor charts leave tracks of previous learning. Student work with commentary is proudly posted on the walls. In the far corner of the room a classroom library invites readers to pull books from the shelf and enter the world of reading. A red rocking chair sits by the carpet. Desks are neatly arranged in groups so that students can work collaboratively. Computers fill the wall by the doorway. If you walk by the room during instructional time you might get a chance to hear Emily singing a lesson to her students. The students always remember these silly little jingles. She believes that it is a way to make the learning last.

Emily has spent most of her life in the Macon area, with the exception of the years between the ages three and eight which she spent in Alabama. Her schooling experiences were varied. She attended a public school in Alabama for Kindergarten through the beginning of third grade. Upon moving back to Macon she continued in Bibb County Public Schools through sixth grade. Once she started middle school she transitioned into private schools. Emily never left Macon, or home, in her pursuit of higher education. Out of high school she earned her associates degree from Macon College. At that time Georgia College (prior to becoming Georgia College and State University) had a Macon Campus for its education program. So she enrolled.

teacher education program by the deadline. She found herself discouraged to teach when it required efforts that took her out of her comfort zone.

Emily's entire teaching career has been at Ocmulgee Elementary School. One of her last student teaching experiences was at Ocmulgee. After that experience she decided she liked the school and applied for a job. She has remained at Ocmulgee for 14 years. During that time she taught fifth grade for five years. Then there was a need for a strong teacher in fourth grade so she was moved. After five years in fourth grade she looped with her class back up to fifth grade, where she has remained. For the past three years the grade level has been departmentalized and Emily has served as the 5th grade Math teacher. Emily has been the grade level chair and a member of the school's leadership team for the past eleven years. She was the 2010-2011 Teacher of the Year for Ocmulgee Elementary School. She will jokingly tell you that she runs the school, and that the principal will agree with this statement. Emily is a passionate teacher and an effective leader. Many individuals go to her for official and unofficial advice on school matters—she is often appointed as a spokesperson for groups within the school when difficult questions need to be addressed.

Emily laughs when you ask if she is a successful teacher. She says that if you look at her—her private school background and her stature, short—that most would say that she wouldn't make it at a school like Ocmulgee. But she is indeed successful. Emily says that she measures her success by the way that her students respond to her. She thinks that others measure her effectiveness through her test scores. Jokingly she says that some would even say that she is a good teacher because she is buddies with the principal. In her opinion, her success goes back to the students. Emily feels like she has good relationships with the students. "I feel like the students genuinely like me, and when I see them being successful they want to do it for me"

(Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011). She feels like these strong relationships have an impact on her students' academic achievement.

Richard

You will find Richard's classroom midway down the elementary hallway. Richard is the third grade Science and Social Studies teacher. Remnants of past science experiments line the shelves of his classroom. Bulletin boards display pictures of students engaged in science experiments. Student work is proudly displayed on several walls. One of Richard's most prominent classroom features is a row of rain gutters in which grade level reading books are displayed. Displays of globes and maps reflect the Social Studies content being explored in the classroom. The student desks are grouped together for cooperative learning. A carpeted area serves as a meeting place for the morning meeting and group lessons.

Richard grew up on farms in Texas, Montana, and Alabama. He entered the teaching profession as a second career. Richard decided after raising his son, working as a coach and helping with summer intervention programs that he wanted to work with children in some way. His answer to that desire was to become a teacher. So in his forties, he attended the University of Alabama and earned his Bachelor's Degree becoming certified to teach. He began his teaching career at Ocmulgee Elementary School in the Class Size Reduction Program, which was a program designed to pair experienced mentor teachers with novice teacher in a co-teaching setting in grades K-3. Richard explained that he received a great deal of mentorship from his mentor teacher. She had been at Ocmulgee for thirteen years. He recalls that she taught him all of the little things that most new teachers have to figure out on their own.

Richard views himself as a successful teacher. His measuring stick for this success is that his students leave his classroom learning something. "Every day, I want them to learn

something. Some days it is not all the way true, but in the end they learn something" (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011). He says that the CRCT is one measure of this learning but that there are so many other ways to look at this learning. He looks at their daily progress and examines to see if students are making it from point A to point B.

Amy

Near the end of the primary hallway you will find my classroom. Outside the door is a bright red bulletin board bearing the word Kindergarten in bright colors mounted on yellow cardstock. The door is covered with fabric depicting the nostalgic characters from the Dick and Jane reading series. My room is quite different from the others described since I work with kindergarten students. Everything in my room is designed to be hands-on. Instead of desks, large kidney-shaped tables fill the space. A large carpeted area takes up a considerable amount of the classroom—as more instructional time takes place there, than with the students sitting at the tables. A big red rocking chair and easel are positioned beside the carpet. Vivid displays of student work and anchor charts cover the walls. A large pocket chart displays the learning station assignments for the day—computers, MP3 players, leapsters, listening centers, alphabet center, blocks, poetry, writing center, alphabet center, and reading center. Manipulatives spill out from bins on the shelves. Everything in this environment is hands-on and inviting for small children.

I am the final participant in this research study. Unlike the other female participants, I did not grow up in central Georgia. I was raised in a rural area of East Tennessee. I lived in the same house my entire childhood, the same house my mother continues to live in to this day. I attended a school system that had a very mono-cultural population. Race rarely seemed to be an issue in our school. However upon reflection, now, I realize it was just something we chose not

to speak about. At any given point there were at most five non-White students in the school—most of these students came from the Children's Home and were not there for long periods of time. I was taught to use phrases at an early age that I later found out had a very negative racial connotation. I am not sure how those who taught me those phrases intended them, but I have worked hard to eliminate them from my vernacular now that I understand the harm that they impart on others. The first real experience that I had in a multicultural setting was when I went to college. Even then it was a very controlled environment. Research (Gay, 2002; Kunjufu, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2001) suggests that most teacher education programs are predominantly White. So even while at a multi-cultural university such as the University of Tennessee I was in a very limited cultural environment. It was not until I moved to Macon that this experience would change.

Like Richard, I participated in the Class Size Reduction Program during part of my first year of teaching. My experiences in the program were at a different school and were not as positive as the one's that Richard experienced. However, I was able to gain several of the same benefits from the program, and from my year-long internship at the University of Tennessee that many first year teachers do not have. I came to Ocmulgee Elementary School my second year of teaching. I began my tenure at Ocmulgee teaching third grade. During my second year I became the grade level chair. I continued teaching third grade at Ocmulgee for seven years. In 2009, I moved to Kindergarten. I am currently in my third year of teaching Kindergarten. During the 2009 school year I became a National Board Certified Teacher. This year I am serving as grade level chair for Kindergarten and as a member of the school's leadership team.

My yardstick for measuring my success as a teacher is two-fold. The first criteria that I consider are the relationships that I build with my students and their families. As a kindergarten

teacher I understand the critical role that I play in laying the foundation for all of my students' future educational endeavors. I want to ensure that I build positive relationships with them that help them to build positive attitudes towards learning. Over the years I have discovered that even the most reluctant and struggling learner is eager to do so much more for you when they have a strong bond with their teacher. The second way that I measure my success is through my students' learning. This measure is a little trickier to define. I understand that not every child is on grade level. They do not all come to school with the same abilities and skill sets. My goal is to help my students move forward in their abilities. I desire for every child to be at or above grade level when they leave my classroom. Unfortunately, I know that this will not be reality for a few students. However, if they have tried their best and I have tried my best and they have made considerable progress I still feel that we have been successful.

Changes at Ocmulgee

Longevity at Ocmulgee Elementary School was a criteria for participation in this research project. Each of the participants was asked to reflect on their time at Ocmulgee and to think about how the school had changed during their tenures at the school.

Changing Student Demographics

Deanna had the greatest perspective on changes at Ocmulgee since she has been there for 25 years. She stated

When Ocmulgee first started, which I wasn't around for, my husband attended school here, this school was an upper, middle-class neighborhood. When I came the demographics of the student population was probably 60% White and 40% Black. And the teachers were probably split fifty-fifty or sixty-forty. It varied from year to year. (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011)

As we talked and Deanna recalled her past at Ocmulgee, she referred back to a file folder that she has kept throughout her teaching career. On the inside of the folder she has listed her teaching assignment from each year of her teaching career as well as monumental occurrences from each of these years. As Deanna smoothly moved her fingers over each stage of her career I could see her reliving significant moments from her teaching career in her mind. Even when she didn't speak them out loud, I could tell that something in our conversation or some mark on that folder had sparked a memory from her teacher past.

Emily also recounted changes in student demographics during our interview. Emily did not use percentages like Deanna to describe this phenomenon. I kept probing Emily about the changing race of her students to see what kinds of emotions I could evoke. She remained stoic as she responded in a rather matter of fact manner this stance let me know that talking about race made Emily feel uncomfortable. As she talked about the shifts that she has noticed in her class demographics she started fidgeting in her seat. The answers to these questions were much slower than Emily's general quick wit provides. I could tell that she was carefully contemplating each answer before it was spoken in order to provide the most politically correct response that she could muster. Once I reassured her that it was alright to just answer me without fear of judgment she regained her normal sense of wit and quickness in responding. Emily told me that

I know I used to average four or five White students in a class and now it is rare to have one [White student] in a grade level. I think my first year teaching I had four White students in my class and there were White students in the other two fifth grade classes as well. (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011)

This year there are four White students in the fifth grade (fifth grade has the highest number of White students of any grade level in the school this year).

I have noticed a similar pattern during my eleven years at Ocmulgee. I have never had more than two White children in my class in one year. The most diverse class I have taught at Ocmulgee was during my last year teaching third grade when I had three Hispanic students, one White student, and one bi-racial student for part of the school year.

Staffing Changes

A second area of change at Ocmulgee that evoked a great deal of emotions was changes in staffing. Each of the participants discussed these changes. Deanna and Emily expressed the most emotion in this area since they have experienced the greatest amount of change during their tenures at Ocmulgee.

Deanna has spent the past 25 years of her teaching career at Ocmulgee. She has worked under four of the seven principals that have led Ocmulgee Elementary School. When we started discussing changes in the staffing and leadership, Deanna referred back to her folder then closed her eyes to reflect back upon her time spent at the school. Deanna and one of the kindergarten teachers have been at Ocmulgee longer than any other staff members. She has worked for four of Ocmulgee Elementary School's seven principals. Deanna recalls that

over the past ten years there has been a dramatic shift in the school's staff. The teachers had become almost a predominantly Black faculty. There were very few Caucasian teachers. This shift didn't start happening until one of the principals started hiring predominantly Black teachers. Before then, it was pretty much even, or as equitable as possible. But after he [referring to the third principal she worked for at Ocmulgee] got here things started shifting....Because he was a rather unique individual some of the White teachers preferred not to stay and there was a pretty big exodus after his first year. (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011)

After this exodus described by Deanna many of the vacancies were filled with Black teachers. Emily described a similar response to the coming of this principal and the changes that resulted in his arrival.

During my first three years the staff was pretty much the same. At the end of my third year, they moved the principal to a new school and a lot of people left. Then we got a new principal and a lot of people were not fans of his. After his first year another big group left. Now we have some sense of consistency. Over the past nine years some have come and stayed. We generally have one or two a year that leave. (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011)

Just as in discussing the race of her students I could sense that she was still ill at ease with this discussion. This feeling of discomfort most likely had two sources. First, there is the continued stress of a true Southerner openly discussing race. Secondly, Emily probably felt a need to preserve the dignity and memory of the principal that was the impetus of these changes. He left a great legacy at Ocmulgee despite the mass exodus created by his arrival. Shortly after he left our school and retired he lost his battle with cancer.

I came in after the mass exodus described by both Deanna and Emily. The year that I came to Ocmulgee there were at least fifteen new teachers on the staff. At that time there were approximately 27 homeroom classes, with at least half of them being taught by teachers new to the building. It was definitely a time of rebuilding. Each Monday afternoon we had meetings for teachers new to Ocmulgee Elementary. I saw this approach as a way for the principal to ensure that he made sure that his new staff followed through in his micro-managing techniques. At the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year a new principal was assigned to Ocmulgee Elementary, the only major staffing changes that occurred that year was the moving of the sixth

grade teachers to the new middle school and the hiring of new office staff. Other than those changes there has been a great deal of stability since 2002, with only a couple of people leaving each year, with the exception of last year when several positions were eliminated.

Richard and I both came after the arrival of the new principal being described by Deanna and Emily—we were not privy to the massive changes in staffing that they were describing.

During the times that we have both been at Ocmulgee there have been two principals—the one described above, and the one that took his place once he was assigned to open the new middle school. The staff has been pretty stable since that time. There has been a consistent turnover of one to two staff members a year, generally the young White teacher new to the staff. But there has not been a mass exodus since the 2002-2003 school year.

Deanna continued to reminisce about the way things used to be about Ocmulgee compared to its current state:

The climate in the faculty has changed. It used to be, that the faculty tended to work more together, it was more cohesive. When we would have Christmas gatherings, we did lots of covered dish things, everybody participated and brought their spouse or significant other and had a good time. There wasn't a situation like we currently have were the Blacks sit at one table and the Whites sit at another. It was an honest mixture of a faculty. We even had a couple of gatherings at people's houses and just as many Blacks and Whites would show up, regardless of the host. You didn't have that clique. (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011)

Emily's description of racial relations among the staff at the school resonates with the same themes as that described by Deanna:

Our school has division. The White people are in a clique and the Black people are in a clique and it has always been that way. Because not that you don't, it's not like everybody doesn't get along, but when it's time to do stuff, you want to be around the people that you are comfortable with, so you end up dividing. And it's almost like you tend to take up for, I guess, side with, the people that are more like you. (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011)

These descriptions by Deanna and Emily should not be interpreted to mean that there is a total division in the staff of Ocmulgee along racial lines. However it does describe the current state of affairs where there are very distinct cliques based on race. There are some individuals that transcend these racial borders.

Changes in Parental Support

All four participants in this study cited that garnering strong parental support was one of the biggest challenges that they faced while teaching at Ocmulgee Elementary School. Early in Deanna's career she recalls that the school received a great deal of parental support. According to Deanna it was this strong parental support that led to Ocmulgee Elementary being one of the first schools in the district with air conditioning. The school's PTO paid to have the dormer windows closed up and air conditioning units installed throughout the building. The amount of parental support has experienced a significant decline. The community doesn't seem to appreciate the value of education as much anymore. Deanna stated

I think that it is the lack of community appreciating the importance of an education. I mean, you always have that handful of parents that are very much behind you. But our shift now is that when you talk to parents when you are having problems with a student, especially if it is related to behavior, it is what did the other child do to make Suzy do

this? Or what did you do? What did I do to make the child do it? Or what did so-and-so get? Did they get suspended? It has been very difficult to get parents to understand that we are talking just about their child and it doesn't make any difference—your child needs to learn how to follow the rules and behave. That has been the hardest shift. (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011)

Emily also states that one of the greatest challenges she has faced while teaching at Ocmulgee has been establishing relationships with parents. There have been some parents—mostly those for whom she has been the teacher of several of their children—that she has developed stronger relationships with, but for others the strong rapport has never developed. While student discipline would be listed as one Emily's strongest attributes if you polled her peers, building the corresponding rapport with parents is what she sees as one of her weakest attributes. She stated that

I think communicating with parents can be a challenge for me because they are just looking at it as they have one child that they send you and they fail to remember that you have twenty-something other children in the classroom and they want you to just go above and beyond. They expect you to do all of these things for their child and it can be difficult. (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011)

In relaying her difficult experiences with parents Emily recalled two different encounters where she was cursed out by parents during the middle of a school event that is very similar to a school carnival. Discussing these encounters brought up a whirl of varying emotions. During both of these encounters the parents felt like Emily had wronged their child and that profanity used in front of hundreds of school age children was the best way to address it. One of these experiences was particularly eye-opening moment for Emily.

In that incident, I had a parent come in and she just wanted to cuss me out in front of all of the kids. She was yelling at me because her child was special needs. She kept saying that I was allowing the other kids to talk about her child and laugh at him. She just caused this huge scene. (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011)

Discussing this event was especially emotional for Emily. It was not the first time that a parent was upset with her and she knew it would probably not be the last time. The fact that made this experience so revealing was that the next day that mother was murdered by her children's father while the three children slept in the next room. The very next week Emily found herself the only White person sitting in the middle of a crowded funeral for the parent that just publicly cursed her out at a school event. She felt very self-conscious knowing that others in attendance, as representatives from the school and friends of the deceased, were present at this encounter. Discussing another encounter where Emily was accosted by an irate mother at another occasion of this same event caused us both to burst out in laughter. Again Emily was cussed out publicly by a mother. She was upset because her oldest child was not able to participate in this event due to his behavior. This discussion caused us both to laugh because we each have had additional encounters with this parent. Two years ago she requested that her fifth grade child be moved to Emily's class and her Kindergarten student to be moved to my class. She spent the rest of the year criticizing our every move and declaring that we were unfit to teach. Our laughter was a means of responding to the frustration that we both experienced during that year.

Richard also noted a change in the amount of parental support. During this discussion a sense of urgency and passion came out in Richard's voice. He feels as if we are receiving a more diverse student population today. He feels that the parenting skills of today's students are more across the board. "We have everything from very strong parent support of what we are doing

here at school to other children where there's hardly no support at all" (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011). Richard experienced an eye-opening encounter regarding parental support early in his teaching career. Discussing this encounter proved to be emotional for Richard. As he spoke I saw him reliving the events in his head.

When I first came to Ocmulgee, my first year, I was in a Student Support Team (SST) meeting and a parent called me a racist. I just sat there speechless. At first I got upset, because I didn't feel like I was a racist. My principal kind of grabbed my arm a little bit and told me to calm down. Then he turned around and chewed out the parent for saying that because she didn't have anything to validate her claims. When it was all over, he told me to get used to it. (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011)

In describing the meeting Richard said that he could feel his blood pressure rising as his fists clenched. After the meeting was over we had a discussion and I was told that this was something I would have to get used to dealing with if I stayed at Ocmulgee. Unfortunately, the issue of race would come up from time to time. Talking about the meeting caused some of the same emotions and feelings to resurface as Richard relived the encounter.

As a kindergarten teacher who used to teach third grade, I have seen both sides of the lack of parental support. I receive more support now as a kindergarten teacher than I did four years ago as a third grade teacher. It seems that the parents are much more interested in supporting their younger children than they are in supporting the older ones. However, it seems as if there is still not enough support. At least half of my students come to class without their homework or the necessary supplies each day. I have also had to deal with similar incidents as the one that Emily and Richard described. One parent requested to have her child moved to my classroom because he was having behavior problems in the class where he was originally

assigned. When the behavior continued in my class, the mother decided that he problem was my fault. She was able to erase her memory of his prior behavior problems in the first class while deciding that it was a teacher issue. I was intrigued when I learned that she requested that her child be moved to my class. Just a few years earlier I had taught another child from this family in third grade, throughout this year the parent and I had similar encounters. Each time a problem arose, she immediately declared that the problem was with the school and the teacher.

White Teachers and Black Children

The next theme that emerged from the stories was the impact of being a White teacher of Black students. Deanna says that she doesn't really think about the fact that her race doesn't match her students' race. She just thinks of herself as being a teacher. She feels as if the students need to start understanding that we are all people and we need to learn to get along together. Deanna thinks that her military family background may have something to do with this feeling, since she was raised in a multicultural setting from such an early age. Deanna says that

I don't really even think about that [being a teacher at a school were her race doesn't match here students], I think of myself as just being a teacher. I feel like students need to understand that we are people we have to learn together. If we can't start getting some of these students and young people to understand this fact, we are going to be in worse trouble as a society. Race was never an issue when I was growing up; some of my best friends were Black. I grew up with that. In high school in Warner Robins, kids from the base came to Warner Robins High, so we were already desegregated when all of that was going on here in Macon. (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011)

Deanna does realize that not all White teachers can teach in these settings. Deanna reflected back on the White teachers who have left Ocmulgee over the past few years "Look at how many

White teachers in the last five years have only lasted a year, if they make it a year. It has not only been just female teachers who aren't making it, we have lost strong military background teachers as well" (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011).

Emily says that she has several ways of thinking of being a different race than her students. Again as in prior conversations about race, Emily is more reserved while talking about race. Even her word choices change during this conversation to a more formal tone, reflecting this internal tension. Emily reports that when she is in her classroom with her students it is not as obvious to her as when she is considering factors for the whole school.

It is obvious that I am a different ethnicity from my students, but I don't necessarily think about it that way. When I am there dealing with my students it is not as obvious as the things for the whole entire school. Where it's all about, you know, because the students are of color we need to education then on people of color, so you begin to notice how certain things are rated higher. You know, you get fussed at if you don't do the Black History Program correctly, whereas if it was the Christmas Program it probably wouldn't be as big of a deal. (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011)

She understands that since our student population is predominantly Black there is a need to educate them on their heritage. An observation that Emily makes about this point is that she notices that certain school events receive higher priority. In regards to reflecting on being a White teacher of Black students Emily says that it is challenging on one hand and not on the other. She often has to remind herself that to think about where the kids come from and what they know, and do is what they are taught at home.

You have to remember that you have to think about where the kids come from and what they know and do and what they are taught, and that you are different from that. But you

have to find a way to relate to them, so that you gain their respect. It is difficult because you have to think about their different situations, but yet it is not as hard now because I have been doing it so long. Now it is not something that I have to think about as much. I just know now that pretty much I am teaching predominantly Black students, I am prepared for that from day one. (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011)

She says it is important to remember that what they are taught at home is not necessarily the same as what we were taught by our parents. An example of this is that in this culture, parents teach children that if someone shows aggression towards them, they *must* fight back. We try to teach children to resolve conflicts with words at school and this is diametrically opposed to the message that they are getting from home. Emily believes that it is important as a teacher to understand that she is different from her students but to understand that there are always ways that she can relate to them. She has to work at it, but she always finds a way to gain their respect. With experience she has found that it has gotten easier.

Richard says that he has mixed feelings when thinking about being a White teacher among Black students. Richard laughed as he told me that "Sometimes I think that I am in over my head and other times I think it is a hoot. I am enjoying, sharing my experiences with them" (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011). The times that he feels overwhelmed are related to social encounters when he is unfamiliar or unsure of how to respond. He says that sometimes he doesn't understand the situation they are coming from and he is unsure how to reach his students when they bring a problem to him. "Maybe it is something I am just not experienced in" (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011). He says that he tries to get them to open up and talk to him about the situation. If he cannot address the concern he asks for additional help from outside resources such as the guidance counselor. Richard told me that

sometimes he felt like it was "a hoot" [entertaining] being the White teacher in a sea of Black students. He says that it also because of the things that the students bring in that are new to him. Sometimes they do and say things that just bring a smile or laugh to his face. "It is all about learning about their culture and life" (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011). Richard said it was important to consider the background of his students: "I have to try to understand that the issues they have might be coming from a different race. Maybe they differ culturally. I have to learn what makes them tick and what is important to them" (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011). In my view being a teacher in a school where my race doesn't match my students means that I have to work to ensure that I am not alienating my students.

When asked if Black teachers faced the same challenges as White teachers the answer from all of the participants replied yes and no. Deanna thinks that they do and don't face some of the same challenges of teaching as White teachers face. She says that her response is from her viewpoint as a special education teacher. Deanna said, "I think that some of them [regular education teachers—who in this case are predominantly Black] don't understand the special needs children and aren't as willing to develop some of the relationships" (personal communication, September 20, 2011). On the other hand she feels as if the Black teachers can respond to the students in a way that would be considered insulting if it originated from a White teacher. Deanna stated that "they can say and do some things that a lot of White teachers, it would just be under the bus for" (personal communication, September 20, 2011). This statement doesn't mean that Deanna wants to treat her students without the respect and dignity that they deserve, it is just that she has observed a discrepancy in the way that teachers can speak with students. She continued to reflect that based on her strong relationships with students that she

has been able to transcend this phenomenon in many areas in regards to speaking honestly with children in a way that will not offend them. "Even the [principal] will say that Emily and I with the older kids can say things that obviously some of these other White teachers can't even think of saying" (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011).

Emily has mixed reactions as to whether or not Black teachers face the same challenges that she does in the classroom. She feels that some teachers do share the challenges but not many. She recounted that this

comes back to the way you carry yourself and your confidence, and whether you have structure and good classroom management skills. Because I have seen people of color have problems in the classroom. Sometimes it comes with age, if you have been doing it for a while, the kids don't respect you [here Emily is referring to a teacher who never adapted her teaching practices to meet the needs of her current students]. It all depends on what you do. The kids have to feel like they can relate to you. If they can't relate to you at all there is a problem. There are some people, and it doesn't matter about their race, they just come in with this fantasy of what teaching is going to be and they think kids are just kids. These teachers don't make changes based on the needs of their students.

During her 14 years at Ocmulgee she has seen successful and unsuccessful teachers of both races. Factors that she credits to success or failure in the classroom were structure, good classroom management skills, and confidence. Some new teachers without experience come in and become an instant victim because they are lacking confidence. Sometimes teachers nearing retirement lack respect because they are not able to relate to the students. Emily, a TSS (Teacher-Support –Specialist), recounts working with a young Black teacher who was struggling

with classroom management. This new teacher had a fantasy view of what teaching was about. Her approach was that they were just kids and that they needed lots of chances. This teacher was at Ocmulgee in 2006-2007, and everyone that was there back then has stories to tell about walking by the class and trying to restore order, or of what they saw upon first walking up to the door. The story that Emily remembered was when a video camera was placed in the teacher's room to document the behavior, or lack of classroom management, that was occurring in the room.

We were watching the video of her class: students were running around the room and jumping off of the desks. When she was asked to talk about the video she couldn't see a problem with the student behavior. Her main response was that they were excited because it was Jersey Day. (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011)

Recounting this story caused a change in Emily's demeanor. Since this episode and the teacher's response were so unnatural, it has become a source of amusement. That group of children finally completed their tenure at Ocmulgee Elementary last May. Each time there was a discipline problem with someone from that grade level, it seemed as if it could be traced back to exposure to that first grade classroom.

In other instances Emily recalls that many Black teachers aren't going to face the same problems that White teachers face in the realm of parental support. Many of these problems emerge out of cultural misunderstandings. Emily believes that some of the problems that White teachers get from the students come from the parents. In some instances "the Black teachers are going to not have as many problems because they have more parental support. Because some of the problems White teachers get from the students come from their parents. Their parents teach them not to respect White people. I have felt that way before, not as much the students, [but]

parents want to have a problem with me because I am White" (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011). Emily feels that the Black teachers receive more support from parents than the White teachers because of an unspoken cultural bond.

Richard thinks that Black teachers would face some of the same challenges that he has but that they would also benefit from being the same race as their students if they used their experiences in a positive way. They could benefit by sharing the experiences of being Black with their students, something we as White teachers could not do. They could also possibly share experiences of growing up in the same situations and family dynamics.

I have a very unique experience to draw upon in thinking about the challenges that Black teachers may face. As a kindergarten teacher I am fortunate to have a paraprofessional to support my work in the classroom. My paraprofessional is Black. The students in my classroom do not understand the difference between our roles, with the exception that she leaves for an hour each day—to do lunch duty and take her lunch break. My students respect my paraprofessional as much as they do me. She has some benefits over me in that she is able to relate to some cultural things that I do not understand. Another benefit that she has is that she lives in the same community as the school. In that respect she knows many of the students and their families outside of the realm of the school. Another Black teacher on our grade level struggles and endures greater challenges than I do. She is unable to relate to her students because she fails to build relationships with her students or treats them like they are important. She does not meet the students where they are, she expects the students to meet her. As they are only five-years-old, that does not typically happen and she demonstrates the constant frustration of someone who fails to meet student needs.

Do Black Students Need Black Role Models as Teachers?

In order to get my participants to think deeper about the impact of role models as it relates to race, I asked them to think about the importance of students having role models of teachers like themselves. All of the participants feel that it is important for students to have role models like themselves, but it is also equally important for them to have other positive role models as well. Deanna feels that it is important for students to have positive role models from their own race. Deanna says that "In our day, and especially in this area with the poverty so high....I think that it is amazing and I think that they need to be able to see that it doesn't make any difference what color you are that if you do what you are supposed to do you can rise above it" (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011)

Emily sees the importance of students having role models like themselves. But she also believes that students need to understand that everyone in the world is not the same. She feels that a weakness of our school is that we are not teaching our students diversity.

People push diversity, diversity, diversity, but truly we are not being diverse. Because we're saying that they need to know about themselves and their culture [referring to the Black students] and we push that, but there are others things that they need to know as well. We need to teach others as well. We have some kids that are Hispanic in our school and not once have we ever done anything to [celebrate or learn about] Hispanic culture. We have White children in our school too. Not that we need to do White history facts, but I feel like we so much want to cater to the large population that we forget about the other students. (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011)

This was a topic about which Emily was very passionate. Like others, she feels that we are doing a disservice to our students by only addressing one culture. She feels that students need

exposure to a variety of cultural experiences; something that is not currently happening at Ocmulgee Elementary School.

Richard thinks that it is important for students to have role models of teachers like themselves. He feels as if in these situations students are more able to quickly relate to their teacher. He also thinks that students might be able to relate to a same race teacher because they are more like themselves. "They [students] can also see positive role models, because a lot of what they see on TV are the ones that have money and are not always good role models" (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011). On the other hand it is also important that students have positive role models of teachers who are not like them, such as White teachers. This example will allow them to see that it is a diverse society and that we all have to work together. "As teachers we can teach them that they can get along with other races. They need both examples" (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011). Richard concluded that students need both examples in their lives to be well rounded.

Conversations About Race

A large part of being a White teacher in a school with a Black student population is engaging in conversations about race. All of the participants indicated a need to discuss racial issues. However, different levels of engagement were present. For the most part each of the participants wanted to avoid this line of questioning. These differences were due to teacher comfort levels, student ages, and teacher content areas.

Deanna says that she has had conversations about race with her students. She wants her students to understand that the issues with slavery happened in the past. "First of all they need to understand what happened before happened for a reason. We need to start letting that go. I am sorry that some of your ancestors were slaves. I didn't have anything to do with it. We need to

understand that just because I am White and you are Black doesn't mean that I am the enemy" (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011). She also teaches her students about her family's Portuguese ancestry and the poverty associated with their immigration. "I tell my students that my family came over from Portugal, my father's parents never spoke English. It's not like my family has been here forever. They were probably just as poor when they came here as some of our current people are. But they persevered, and brought themselves up....I wish that there was a way that I could figure out that we could change the cycle of poverty to get them to understand that they are the only ones who can do it" (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011). Deanna wants her students to understand that many different people groups had a rough time in their immigration to the United States.

Emily admitted that she doesn't engage in many conversations about race with her students. She feels that a large part of that is due to the fact that she only teaches Math now. Emily said

the times that I can think that racial issues have really came up I can think when I used to teach social studies and I taught slavery and some racial issues would come up. I have had racial issues come up when students use the 'n' word. They would call each other that and not have a problem with it. I remember one time saying to them, if I said that you would have a problem with it. So why is it ok for you to say it? I actual said, you say this word casually to each other, but if so-and-so, who happens to be White, what if they didn't know if there was anything wrong with saying that word and that it could be derogatory. Then they hear you saying it to each other, then they are going to think that there is nothing wrong with it. So, if you have a problem with it, don't say it to each other. (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011)

Emily did say that while she doesn't plan to teach racial issues, she does address racial issues when they arise.

Richard said that he tries to have conversations about race with his students. However it is a topic he approaches very carefully. He wants his students to understand that while his skin color may be different, he is a person just like them. Richard continued "I want them to know that I respect them for who they are and that they should respect me for who I am. We are both here in America as Americans and we are both supposed to benefit the same amount" (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011). Richard was very passionate when describing his passion about getting students to understand that everyone needs to be treated equitable regardless of race.

As a kindergarten teacher, I find my opportunities to engage in conversations about race limited. I limit them in regards to content that is appropriate for my students. The content that is appropriate for a five-year-old is quite different than that for a fifth grader. The most important racial lesson that I think I need to teach my students is that regardless of race everyone needs to be treated fairly. Last year my students taught me a strong lesson about the way that they view race. Each month our school has a book of the month. During Black History Month our book was *Henry's Freedom Box*. After reading the book the different kindergarten classes were engaged in conversations about the book. One class had been formed as an overflow class. Over half of the students from that class had originally been in my class at the beginning of the year. In that class the conversation was "Ms. Dalton is White. Did she have slaves?" A totally different conversation about race took place in my class. After learning about the way that the White people in the book treated the Black slaves my students decided that I could not be White because I did not treat them that way. As my students were working in center time I overheard a

conversation they had discussing my race. They finally determined that I could not be White. I must be a Black person that was "light-skinded." This conversation led me to believe that my actions and treatment of them was counter to the lessons that they received of how White people treated Black people. Since I was out of the norm for White, a new paradigm of "light-skinded" was developing on my behalf.

Does Race Make a Difference in the Classroom?

All of my participants acknowledged that race made a difference in what happens in the classroom. Each of us implied that great efforts were made to build relationships with our students. Deanna recalls going to great lengths to understand what her students were talking about when she didn't understand them due to a cultural and racial difference. She tried, unsuccessfully to keep a straight face while relating the following stories. As she ended them we shared some moments of laughter at the various moments when we have ended up frustrated because of these types of misunderstandings with our students.

During her early years at Ocmulgee one of her students repeatedly asked her for a "case quarter." Everyone in the room except for she knew what the student was requesting. Since the child said quarter she found a quarter and gave it to her. She asked why they called it a case quarter and the child could not answer. It took her several days and finally going to another teacher to figure out that the child called any combination of twenty-five cents a quarter, but referred to a twenty-five cent piece as a case quarter. Her other experience was when her children requested a particular kind of candy.

The first year that I taught in Bibb County my kids came in and they kept talking about 'Ni-alators.' Where are the 'Ni-alators'? And I said, I don't have any 'Ni-alators,' trying

all the while to figure out what they were talking about. It took me months before I realized that they were referring to Now and Later Candy.

Deanna said that her students kept growing frustrated with her because she didn't understand what they wanting. She knew it was a type of candy, but couldn't figure out what kind of candy it was. Her students ended up having to bring it in to show her that what they wanted was "Now and Later" candy.

Emily said that because of her students' race that she tends to relate more to them than they do to her. This statement implies that she finds herself changing from her normal, outside personality, more to address the needs of her students. Since she has been immersed in Ocmulgee's culture—both within and outside the school walls—for the past fourteen years she is able to easily communicate with her students the same way that they talk to each other. At the same time she is quickly able to transfer back to a more formal language register when necessary. Emily feels as if she has to make more adjustments than her students because she is the odd person out as one of the only White people in the room. She said that

I try to make them more comfortable and relate to them. But I also try to teach them proper ways to do and say things, such as speaking correctly. Whereas sometimes I don't speak correctly and I other times I do. When they say 'foe' instead of 'four,' I try to correct them. Then based on that, they pick up on the things I say and repeat it. They will tell each other that a foe is an enemy in a war and that four is a number. It is all about your expectations. (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011)

Language and hair have been the two biggest obstacles I have faced in being a different race as my students. I often wonder if some of the language issues aren't also related from being from a different geographical area. Even though Tennessee is still the South, it isn't as deep in

the South as Macon, Georgia is. I remember the first time I had a child to tell me that they felt like they were going to "fall out." I asked them what they were going to fall out of. I did not realize that this meant that they thought they were going to faint. Other such colloquialisms have also brought me trouble. Hair has also been an issue for me. Finally, during my eleventh year I have figured out how to get those little hair barrettes to stay in the ends of braids. One time when a student came to me asking me to put a barrette back in her hair she looked up and said "Ms. Dalton don't you know how to do anything?" I stood there bewildered. I wanted to say, "Yes, but, it is totally different." How do you explain to a small child that such things are the same but so different when you have such difficulty articulating it and understanding it yourself?

How does your race affect your relationships with students?

It was hard for my participants to answer the question of how their race affects their relationships with students because they all feel like they have strong relationships with their students. Deanna thinks that her students don't really see her as a White teacher because she has been there so long. She is teaching many second or third generation students now. She does feel as if they see some of the teachers as "that White teacher." Those are the teachers who have trouble dealing with the kids.

Emily doesn't really feel like her race affects her relationships with her students. She works hard to build meaningful relationship with her students even before they get to fifth grade. She laughed as she recalled that last year one of her students told her that he thought that she was "a Black woman trapped in a White woman's body" (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011). The students don't generally see her as a White teacher due to the ways that she relates to them. Emily feels that she has a greater deal of latitude in dealing with her students because of the strong sense of rapport that she has established. Last year there was

another White female teacher on her grade level. It was her first year teaching. The same students who referred to Emily as the "Black woman trapped in a White woman's body" referred to the other teacher as the "Chicky White Teacher" (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011). They also frequently complained to Emily about the way that "that Chicky White Teacher" treated them. While they didn't view Emily as much in terms of her racial identity that was their description and complaint against the other White female teacher. The students told Emily that they appreciated the fact that she was strict and consistent with them. They resented the fact that the other teacher had lower expectations and treated them like babies.

Richard feels as if his students have strong relationships with him and look up to him. He has a special place as one of a few male teachers in the elementary school. He feels as if his students are very comfortable with him. A few years back I had a student that I was retaining in third grade. He was going to be placed in Richard's class for the second year in third grade. The parent never had an issue with Richard's race. The first thing that she saw was the fact that Richard was not a female teacher.

I develop strong relationships with all of my students. As a kindergarten teacher I recognize that it is imperative that these relationships be there. For many of my students, this experience is the first one that they have had away from home. It is critical that they feel like they can trust me. I have several students that even in the throes of a meltdown will cling to me for support and comfort. My students understand that even though I am nurturing, I am also going to hold them up to high expectations in regards to behavior and academics. I also try to build strong relationships with the parents. I have had several parents request that their children be moved to my class this year because of the way that they see me interact with the children.

Positive Aspects of Being a White Teacher

All four participants in this study responded similarly in respects to the positive aspects of being a White teacher at Ocmulgee Elementary School. They saw it as an opportunity to serve as a positive White role model for their students. Deanna said that the positive aspects of being a White teacher at our school is "just being able to relate to the children and for them to be able to understand that there are some good White people out there that truly care for them" (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011). Emily views her ability to serve as a positive White role model as one of the positive aspects of being a White teacher at Ocmulgee Elementary School. Emily stated "that the positive aspects of being a White teacher at our school is that the kids need to see someone different from them and know that I genuinely care about them" (personal communication, September 22, 2011). She feels that it is important that our students know that someone outside of their race genuinely cares about them and their success in school and life. Emily makes it a point to get to know the students before they come to her class. She is proud of the fact that most of the students on her hall—third through fourth grades—know her before they make it to her class. I contend that students throughout the building know her and look forward to being in her class.

Richard thinks that a positive aspect of being a White teacher at Ocmulgee is the ability to show our students diversity. It is powerful that we are able to show our students that "we may all live differently or were raised differently by that we can come together. It is an important message" (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011). He sees this truth an important life message that is working to prepare them for the beginnings of their work lives.

I see the positive aspects of being at Ocmulgee Elementary School as being able to set a positive role model for my students at an early age. When so much negativity abounds in

popular culture, we can be a light and beacon for change. I am also privileged to work with students throughout the building and not just the ones in my class. Another positive aspect is to be able to meet with others in the system and to tell them about the positive things that are happening at Ocmulgee Elementary School despite its location and demographics.

Negative Aspects of Being a White Teacher

The negative aspects of being a White teacher at Ocmulgee Elementary School seemed to be racial tensions. Emily feels that one of the negative aspects of teaching at Ocmulgee Elementary school has revolved around racial tensions. All three of the principals she has worked under have been Black. Emily recalls feeling like her first principal favored the Black teachers more than the White teachers. She also remembers a greater feeling of division in the school regarding teachers during that time. Emily also feels as if at times it seems as if the White teachers do not receive as much support from the administration as the Black teachers. "There have been times when I feel like I am not being discriminated against because I am one of the few White teachers in the school, but there are other times when you do feel like you are" (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011). Emily says that no one ever says that they are singling her out because of her race, but there are times when it feels that way. Emily also feels like a higher level of performance is expected from the White staff members:

It is almost like the White people tend to do more and then everybody just expects you to do it and nobody goes out and makes the other people do anything. When we do something the White teachers are going to be there and do the work. They are going to set it up, do the work and then clean up while all the other teachers sit around and do nothing except try to get to their food first. Is it a racial issue? You don't know, but you

tend to think so because here are the White people doing this and the Black people doing this. (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011)

What if?

It was difficult for my participants to think about how their teaching experiences would have been different if their race had matched that of the majority of their students. The majority of all of our careers has been spent at Ocmulgee Elementary School. With the exception of Deanna we have never really known any different. Each of them had a look of trepidation come across their faces when I asked them to think about themselves working in a different school. The answers I received to this question were very short and without many details. Even as I tried to push for deeper thinking about the subject, my participants struggled to find ways to move on to a different topic.

Deanna feels that some years her job would not have been nearly as stressful if her race had matched her students when she was dealing with parents. Overall, however, she feels that it wouldn't have made that big of a difference. Emily cannot imagine teaching in a setting where her race matched that of her students. She says that she has taught in the setting at Ocmulgee for so long that it is what she is used to now. She laughs as she says "If you put me in another school I would probably say something I shouldn't say. Not that I am saying inappropriate things, but you have to adjust to your surroundings" (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011). You have to be more direct with our students. Emily is afraid that if she transferred to a school with a different demographic that she would forget to change out of the mode that she has been working in for so long. Richard thinks that if he had been at a school with a different demographic he would have missed out on a lot of growth and talking with and working with

students of a different race. "I have had growth in learning with them about what life is about in different areas" (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011).

My student teaching internship was in a predominantly White school. Then I began my teaching career in Macon in two schools with similar demographics to Ocmulgee, before transferring to Ocmulgee. After being at Ocmulgee for the majority of my career it is hard to imagine how different my career would have been had I remained in Oneida. Like Richard said, I would have missed out on some valuable life lessons from my students. I feel as if I have learned as much from them as they have from me. Even now that I am teaching five and six-year-olds they continue to teach me about living and life.

Advice to New White Teachers

Reflecting on their experiences and what it took for them to be successful as White teachers of Black students the participants thought about what it a new teacher would need to be successful in a multiracial school. I also asked my participants to shift their viewpoint and think about the advice their students would give to a new White teacher. When speaking up for their students all of the participants say that their students would ask the same thing of a new White teacher. All four participants agree that students would want their teacher to get to know them.

Deanna says that she would tell new teachers to get to know your kids. "Establish communication and don't let every time you call a parent be negative" (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011). Even when you call for negative reasons make sure to include something positive. Also, do not call the parent when you are upset. I continued this line of thinking by asking Deanna to think about what her students would say to a new White teacher. Deanna says that she thinks her students would tell the teacher to accept them for who they are and not try to change them. "I think some Black students think that some White

teachers are trying to make them White" (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011).

Emily reflected back on her career and said that she would tell teachers preparing to teach at multiracial schools, such as Ocmulgee, to be strict.

You have to be mean, strict. You have to be stern. You can't show any fear. In our society a lot of people come in afraid. For our school, you see the statistics for our neighborhood, you have a reason to be afraid, but you can't come in afraid. You can't back down either. You have to create rules and stick with them. A lot of people want to come in, especially if they are a White teacher teaching primarily Black students, thinking that they are different from me but I really want them to like me. So, I come in with this 'I want to be their friend' mentality and it doesn't work at all. It is a downfall for a lot of people. You come into the school knowing that it is different, so you have to be able to adjust to the students that you are dealing with. (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011)

In order to be successful in this setting you must be stern and show no fear. She says that in our society many people come into this type of school afraid. These are the teachers who the students brag about running off. Emily understands that a lot of people look at the statistics surrounding our neighborhood—just about a month ago two high school students were gunned down while waiting on a school bus less than a block from our school—and see a reason to be afraid. However, once you step into that classroom, you must put that fear behind you if you desire to be successful. Emily says to be successful you have to acknowledge the differences, but you must also maintain a strict structure and keep the students accountable for their behavior.

Emily jokingly says that students would say that they need to be mean like me.

They would tell them to be mean, they would probably make up some stuff about giving us some candy or treats. I think they would mostly tell them to be more strict. To be more like me. They would tell them to learn stuff about them and to be able to relate to them. (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011)

Her students appreciate the fact that she is strict with them. Emily is known for her classroom management skills and her students appreciate it. They often bemoan the fact that the other fifth grade teacher's classes lack this sense of structure. Emily also says that she thinks that her students would tell their teachers to get to know more about them and learn what they are into. Her students love the fact that she wears her red converse sneakers to school. They call out "I like your Chucks" (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011)! A lot of teachers don't want to lower themselves to the same level as the students that way, but it helps to get into some of the things that they like, it lets them see you as a person.

Richard says that he would advice a new White teacher to be very patient and to understand that you are going to have good days and bad days.

Be very patient, know that you are going to have up and down days. Find someone that is positive in the work place that will mentor you and help you get through situations that you are unsure of or uncomfortable in. (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011)

He reflects on his time in the Class Size Reduction Program and the valuable mentorship his partner teacher provided him in crafting this response. Richard says that his students would tell a new White teacher that they want to get to know you. "Get to know me before you judge me" (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011)

My advice for a White teacher coming to a multiracial school would be to develop a strong classroom management system and stick to it. Say what you mean, and mean what you say. Most of all get to know your students as children and do not be afraid of them. Once you show the first signs of fear you have lost all respect and it is hard to get it back once it is gone. I feel as if my students would want their teacher to get to know them and to learn what they like and dislike. I also think that my students would want their teacher to be fair and consistent with them and treat them as individuals.

Improving Relationships between White teachers and Black Students

A couple of different themes emerged when the participants were asked how to strengthen relationships between White teachers and Black students. Deanna thinks that "we need more White teachers in predominantly Black area" (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011). She thinks that too many teacher candidates come into our school scared about what they are walking into, however when they leave they realize that they are just kids. Unfortunately, she realizes that often times they have not had broad enough of experiences to really understand what teaching is really about.

Emily understands that there is a great deal of power in building meaningful relationships with her students. She also thinks that it is important that students begin to understand that everybody is not like them. The most important thing that she thinks can be done to bridge the relationship between White teachers and Black students is for teachers to learn to relate to students. "Teachers need to relate to the students more, get to know them. When they see that you know more about them, what they like, what they don't like, and even their culture I think that is when they don't see you as their White teacher" (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011). At this point they see you simply as their teacher.

Richard says that more communication is needed to strengthen these relationships. They also need to get to know each other better. I feel that we need to make sure that both groups are working towards the same goal. Students need to understand that the teacher is on their side.

The ultimate goal is for the students to achieve, it is not about the teacher's success.

Why Do You Stay at Ocmulgee Elementary?

All four teachers in this study gave similar responses when asked why they chose to remain at Ocmulgee Elementary School. They all acknowledged a feeling that Ocmulgee is *their* school. A strong theme of ownership emerged. Deanna chose to transfer here from another school. When I asked Deanna why she has remained at Ocmulgee for the past 25 years it sent her into a deep sense of reflection. Deanna said that

It is still my school. It was a sense of ownership. I've seen the changes it has gone through. I like being here. Overall, I feel like I am making a difference with some of these children and I think that they need to have some teachers who genuinely care about them and see that it's not an 8 to 3:30 job where they can come in and do their job and walk out at the end of the day. (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011)

Deanna went on to reflect on the numerous student teachers she has mentored throughout her

teaching career. Some of them exhibited this dedication to the job and left lasting imprints on the school and students. Others came and went, leaving no impression of their time in the classroom.

In response to why she has chosen to remain at Ocmulgee all of these years Emily initially defaulted to her standard response of resisting change. At several points during our conversation she explained to me that she does not like change and will engage in passive practices to avoid change. "I have stay at Ocmulgee because I don't like change. I don't want to

interview. I like working here. I feel like now I have been here so long that the kids know me. I am a fixture" (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011). As we continued to discuss Ocmulgee Elementary School deeper meanings and connections were revealed. Emily discussed how much she enjoyed working at the school. She feels that after fourteen years she has become a fixture at the school. By the time that the kids get to her class most of them already know her and about her expectations.

Another reason that Emily gives for remaining at Ocmulgee Elementary is a strong feeling that her students need her. "I feel like the students here need me more than students on the other side of town" (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011). She feels that her students need to see a White role model that cares for them. Emily has come to know certain things to expect each year from her students. As a math teacher she expects certain gaps in knowledge each year and has developed a plan to fill in these holes for her students so that they will be ready to progress to grade appropriate instruction. She has decided that "I am going to have to teach that and go to their weakness and decide to work on it and bring it up. Because most of them don't have anybody at home that truly, genuinely cares about their education" (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011).

Richard says that he has remained at Ocmulgee because he hasn't finished his job yet. He says that his job is to "reach every student that comes my way and to teach them how important education is to their lives present and future" (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011). When I probed him as to whether or not he could fulfill this job at another school he grew increasingly uncomfortable. After taking a few moments to contemplate the question he said,

I would fight a transfer and say that it would be such a big change for me. I wouldn't want to leave my kids—I relate to them so well. Knowing the dynamics there [a more affluent school], they wouldn't benefit as much as my kids do. (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011)

After more thinking he told me that he "probably" could fulfill his job to reach every student in his class at another school, but he was comfortable with the climate and teaching staff at Ocmulgee. He also felt that the conditions probably wouldn't change if he moved to another school, so he might as well do it where he was comfortable.

Ocmulgee Elementary School is the third school that I have worked at during my teaching career. However, it is the first one where I felt like I belonged. Even though I have faced challenges here, it has always been a place of comfort and solace. During my time here I have developed strong bonds with staff members, the families, parents and community stakeholders. I am enjoying teaching siblings of former students. It is always a joy when my former students come back to see me and tell me what they are currently doing.

Why Have you Been Successful when Others Have Not?

All four teachers were asked why they thought that they were successful at Ocmulgee when other White teachers were not successful. One theme rang true in all of their answers—longevity. There were other variations in the responses.

Deanna attributes her success to two factors.

I think the fact that I have been here through the transition has definitely helped. I think it's kind of like a constant here when you get certain teachers and you know what they will and will not put up with. You may say that it is your reputation, and I don't mean that in a derogatory sense. The other factor is expectations. They just know that I don't

care what color you are. I asked you to do something, I expect you to do it. I am going to fuss at the Black kid just as much as the White kid if they are doing it wrong. (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011)

The first reason is the fact that she has been at Ocmulgee through the transitions. She feels as if she has been a constant. The students already know what she will and will not put up with before they get to her class. The second reason is that she builds relationships with her students regardless of their race and sets the same high expectations for behavior for all students.

Emily attributes her success at Ocmulgee to her longevity. Another reason for her success is her ability to build relationships with her students. By building strong relationships she feels as if her students no longer see her as "that White teacher", instead she becomes "my teacher" to her students. She feels as if those who were not successful were unable to build these relationships because they were too afraid of the students. These are the teachers who the students later brag about running off. Emily says "I have been successful because I try to relate to the students and I am not afraid to get on their level. For lack of better words I am ghetto. I am the Black woman trapped in the White woman's body" (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011). Emily knows how to speak fluently in both registers with her students. She can use the formal teacher voice and then slip into a comfortable conversational tone just as quickly. Her students understand that she is real with them, but that she means business.

Emily states that she doesn't believe that all White teachers can be successful at Ocmulgee Elementary School. As a member of the leadership team, Emily has frequently served on interview teams. She notes that often during the interview she can tell whether or not a new teacher will be able to make it at our school. She recalls one particular interviewee this summer that that was so nervous during the interview that she was breaking out and turning red. Emily

recalls thinking "if she is this scared of us sitting at this table, she is going to be afraid to come in a classroom in this school" (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011). She was one of those teachers who would have been "eaten alive" by the children.

Richard feels that his age is one thing that contributes to his success at Ocmulgee. He came into teaching in his 40s after raising his son. Another reason he thinks that he was successful when others were not is his willingness to bend. He feels that many of those who have been unsuccessful at Ocmulgee were "not able to bend with, or go with the cultural differences, they were too set with their ways to change" (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011) to meet the needs of the students. Richard also feels that he is successful now because he has been there for so long.

I attribute my success at Ocmulgee to my persistence. My start at Ocmulgee was a second chance to restart my teaching career after a harrowing first year of teaching. I have been here through several changes in curriculum and programs. I have been flexible through each of these changes. Another thing that I contribute to my success is my ability to build relationships with those around me. I have build relationships with the staff, parents, and community.

Culturally Responsive Practices

As a part of this inquiry I led the participants to reflect upon what they do in the classroom that aligns with what Gay (2010) and Ladson-Billings (2009) have identified as culturally relevant teaching practices. While the participants do not use the terms culturally relevant teaching, many of their practices align with these principles of validating students' cultural identity in the classroom; communicating with parents; acknowledging student differences and commonalities; educating students about their diverse world; ensuring equity and mutual respect among students; encouraging critical thinking; and challenging students to strive

for excellence. Building culturally responsive practices is a large part of the success of White teachers who are teaching Black students. The teachers in this study do implement each of these practices in various ways.

When I shifted the conversation to these culturally responsive practices Deanna's answers slowed down. Instead of relying on memories these questions caused her to think more about her teaching practice. She told me that "these are loaded questions. I don't like these questions" (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011)! Deanna said that she validates her students' cultural identity by talking about what is acceptable in one place and not acceptable in another. "I think that when we start talking about what is acceptable in one place and not acceptable in another place. Such as with the words that they use and that it's ok when you are at home but you need to stop and think about it" (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011). One way that she addresses this is with language and behavior, what might be appropriate at home could be deemed inappropriate at school.

In attempts to validate her students' cultural identities, Emily says that she tries to let students express themselves.

If they talk a certain way, I don't discourage them from being who they are. I try to teach them that they can still be who they are but there are more than one set of rules. For example your mom may teach you if someone hits you to hit them back. I tell them that I realize your mom told you that and it is fine that your mother told you that, but there is going to be a consequence if you do that at school. You need to understand that at school it is not tolerated there is a consequence for it, you don't try to totally change who they are. (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011)

Like Deanna, Emily's demeanor also changed when we started discussing the culturally responsive practices.

Richard says that he validates his students' cultural identity by getting know them. "I let them talk about and discuss with the class what is going on in their lives" (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011). Richard provides two main avenues for this discussion in his classroom—writer's workshop and morning meeting. "When we are doing writing workshop, they get to write about their life. We share everything that is going on" (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011). In the morning meeting they can talk about what is on their minds. Afterwards they visualize and share their thoughts for the day.

I validate my students' cultural identities by getting to know them as individuals.

Kindergartners are unique individuals who are just beginning to form their personalities. In the classroom I let them express themselves through art and telling their stories. I also let them share things as appropriate. The most important lesson to teach them is that them is that we are all different and unique and that is a good thing.

On-going communication with parents is another important part of a culturally responsive and successful classroom. All of the participants in the study expressed a desire to keep parents informed of what was going on in the classroom. They all reported that unfortunately they were not able to communicate as much with parents when it was positive as they desired. More of the phone calls that they made were due to when a problem was occurring. However, everyone tried to included something positive even when they called about a problem. Major means of communication included weekly paper folders, student agendas, and phone calls.

Deanna says that she tries to engage in ongoing communication with her parents. It is important to her that the communication not only be about negative occurrences. She tries to be

flexible to meet the demands of working parents. She said that she has seen positive outcomes from her efforts to communicate with parents:

When we've had parents when a child has had problems and they come back. The parent calls a couple of days later or I see them to let them know that we are seeing an improvement. We have to let the parents that do show up for conferences know that we are glad that they are interested in their child's education. And the ones who say I may not be able to get to school but please feel free to call me because of their job or other circumstances, but they do truly care and they are not upset when we call at kind of strange times because of their schedules. They are willing to understand, that sometimes it is difficult to call and they don't get bent out of shape when we do call at wired times. They actually appreciate it—just the fact that we reiterate to them that we appreciate that they come up here and support us. (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011)

Emily admits that communicating with parents is not as easy for her as communicating with her students. As we talked about this topic I could tell it was making her uncomfortable to talk about one of her weaknesses. One of Emily's character traits is to insert awkward laughs into difficult conversations. Individuals who do not know her might think that this laughter was inappropriate, I understand that it is one of her coping mechanisms. In regards to communicating with parents, Emily stated:

I try to be very polite. I definitely do not talk to my parents the same way that I talk to my students. I have a student voice and a parent voice. I have a different voice that comes out once I start talking to parents. I try to just, I mean you just speak different. I have some parents that I have taught multiple children in their family. I can cut up and

joke and play and have a good old time with them. Others I do not have that kind of relationship with. (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011).

Emily feels that communication is one area that could be improved. Most of her communication with parents is conducted by phone or with notes. She is sad to report that most of the time the communication is initiated because of a problem. However, she always tries to include something positive in the conversation.

Richard was more direct, and less emotional in discussing how he communicates with parents. He replied that he communicated with parents

by telephone, a lot of them are here, come to school everyday, we send home signed papers with communication on them. We communicate with some parents daily by using agendas. We write notes in the agendas whether it is negative or positive. (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011)

Richard used the pronoun we to describe his communication practices because he works on a departmentalized grade level that generally works together to communicate with parents.

My parents receive a daily communication about student behavior in the student agenda. We use a "smiley face" system that denotes the daily behavior on the behavior management system. I write notes as needed to accompany the appropriate "smiley" face. Phone calls, letters, and brief conferences during carpool are also used to keep the lines of communication open. It is in my opinion to the success of teaching that open lines of communication be maintained at all times.

Acknowledging student differences and commonalities is another important aspect of successful teaching. Deanna acknowledges student differences and commonalities from the angle of a special education teacher. As she responded I could hear the passion in her voice.

Special education students are often lumped into categories based on deficiencies. Deanna wants her students, and the teachers around her, to understand that her students have a lot to offer despite their disability. She feels that she deals with many more differences than most teachers because she works with a wider range of abilities and grade levels than a regular teacher. In this capacity she tries to get her students to understand that "there's always going to be things that they're going to do better than other things. And there are going to be things that they are good at, things they like, and that they need to try new things. But most importantly, no one is perfect and everyone needs help sometimes" (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011).

Emily says that she makes an effort to point out that everybody is different. She tries to talk to them about it and give real life examples that they can relate to. She teaches them that they don't have to like everybody but that they do have to get along with one another. Emily says that "Me and Mrs. So-and-so may not like each other but you don't know it because we have to get along because we work together. I try to teach them that in the real world you may have to work with people that you don't like" (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011). Emily tries to teach them about differences and commonalities among students by using real world examples.

I acknowledge student commonalities and differences as we get to know each other. Kindergarten is an exciting new place for children. It can also be a scary place for some who have never been away from the home before. My students enter a new world of making friends with people that are like them and different from them. We celebrate the fact that everyone is unique and that is what makes us so special. This theme is actually woven into the Science Standards for Kindergarten.

All of the participants in the study had difficulty responding to this question. While the curriculum and world scream diversity, it seems to be an area that we are struggling with actual implementation. Each respondent struggled in a different area. Deanna feels that this is a hard concept with special education students because so many of them are literal thinkers. However, she does try to expose them to new things, and diversity when possible. The easiest way she has been able to do this is through field trips to other places. She feels as if these experiences "give them a broader outlook and help them to relate" (Deanna, personal interview, September 20, 2011). I found it interesting that Deanna's stance on this issue involved exposing her students to other areas through activities such as field trips.

Emily addressed the issue of teaching students about the diverse world from a different angle. She feels that our school is lacking in its attempts to teach about diversity. "Teaching about diversity is lacking in some ways. Everything is centered around Black History. It is hard to relate sometimes, some things to a different culture" (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011). She feels that everything that we do as a school is centered around Black history. We fail to relate to any other culture represented at our school. Emily reflects to past times and says that we used to do a better job of talking about other cultures. "We used to do every year were you would pick a country and would purposefully study another culture so that you would understand more" (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011). After each class studied another culture they presented it to everyone else in the school at a huge festival. Now we are lacking that experience. It shows when someone different comes in the school and the students don't know how to respond to their accent. "Since the school as a whole doesn't diversify, I don't diversify myself. I don't know how to diversify. Because for me I am the

White teacher, the Black stuff is diverse, but it is not for them" (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011).

Richard leads his students into conversations about everything and anything. "We talk about what kind of life they want to lead when they get out into the real world when they are finished with school....What kind of job and family they want. I let them be aware of what is out there" (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011). Even though he leads his students to talk about their futures, the conversations never actually take up the topic of true diversity in the world. My class talks about diversity in the context of the school and the literature that we are exposed to within our four walls. True exposure to diversity is lacking. My students don't understand what it means to meet someone with a different accent, or someone that doesn't speak English, because those are not things that happen to them in their corner of the world.

The concept of building equity and mutual respect among students is a big deal for our school as a whole. All of the participants responded in similar ways by talking about the communities and bonds in their classrooms. Our school is part of a partnership with the Yale Institute of Child Development and the Comer Model. In this partnership we have participated in several trainings designed to work on building classroom communities. One thing to note in the responses is that there is a difference based on grade level and between special education and regular education.

One big way that Deanna works to ensure equity and mutual respect among students is by not singling out the students that she serves in the inclusion classrooms.

As an inclusion teacher, now it is a little easier because I make it a point when I am in a classroom not to just single out my students. I will correct other students, and praise

other students. I also ask some of the general education students to help. I try to foster that awareness that they are not like you, they might need a little more help, but at the same time they are like you. (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011).

By only working with her special needs students, she would isolate them and possibly cause ostracize her students. She works with the entire classroom population to make sure that they all realize that they need to work together and learn with and from each other.

Emily uses real life examples to foster respect and equity among her students. She says that it is something that you have to work at it.

You have to work and it and work at it. Kids can be mean. Some of them have a hard time with differences. You have to look at the kids you have from year to year, because some are better with it than others. It becomes situational, when you see it as a problem, you address it. I don't sit around and talk about everyone being different. When something happens, you promote it more. That is another instance when you relate to other things. (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011)

Kids can be mean sometimes and you must model this behavior if you expect it. Emily says that some of our students have difficulty with differences. She has learned that this is a situational problem that she addresses as it arises.

Richard works a lot with his students in cooperative groups. He puts a major emphasis on making these groups work smoothly by building a community within his classroom. The groups talk about what made them work or not work. Another element of Richard's classroom that promotes equity and respect is his morning meeting. He starts each day with a morning meeting where the expectations of the day are set and students have a time to share and reflect.

I want them to discuss and visualize how their day is going to be and how they want it to be. If it is something negative, they have to go to their desk and write it down. They don't want to do that, so it leads them to think about something positive. (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011)

On multiple occasions Richard has discussed how these morning meetings have changed the climate of his classroom. He says that he can always tell when he does not have the meeting in the morning.

As a kindergarten teacher building a strong sense of community is essential to our success. We tell our students from the beginning of the year that we are like a family, everyone has to treat each other with respect. We hold a morning meeting every day. During this time the expectations for the day are discussed. By setting and reviewing the expectations daily my students know exactly what is expected of them each day. They know how they are to treat each other. When one of them treats me in a disrespectful way, I ask them if they would want someone to treat their mother that way. When they say "no", I respond that they shouldn't treat me that way, because I am the momma of room 110. That response has solved a lot of respect problems. They are told to treat their classmates like family members.

Promoting students to think critically is a challenging part of being a culturally responsive teacher. Deanna says that she struggles with getting her students to think critically because she teaches special education students. Emily, Richard and I all try to challenge our students to engage in critical thinking skills.

Emily says that she tries to get her students to problem-solve. Emily became very passionate and animated when discussing her efforts to increase her students' ability to think critically. She wants to teach them to be thinkers in general—beyond her mathematics

curriculum. Emily says that when they ask her a question she will turn it around on them and make them answer it by providing possible solutions.

I want to help them to just problem-solve. I teach them to be thinkers in general, to work their own problems. When they ask me something, I turn it on them and make them answer it. I try to get them to see possible solutions instead of just depending on someone else to do it for them and having someone else to tell them what to do. (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011)

Emily wants her students to learn how to think for themselves instead of always depending on someone else to tell them what to do.

Richard says that he is constantly asking his students to probe deeper into their answers. He wants them to be able to think about how and why they came up with their responses instead of simply settling for the first answer. "I want them to think about his. How did they come up with their responses? Where did it come from? I don't even want their first answer to be their only answer" (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011). Richard encourages his students to use the principles of scientific inquiry, questioning and reasoning in all of their endeavors.

Even though I teach kindergartners I am constantly asking my students to think. The other kindergarten teachers scoff at me and tell me that I am asking too much of my children at times because I require them to problem-solve. I decided when I moved to kindergarten that I was going to require my students to engage in problem-solving and critical thinking. Thus far, I have not been disappointed. I pose problems to my students and ask them leading questions to make them figure out the answers. When students ask me questions, I use a technique similar to

the one that Emily described, though in a simpler nature, to guide my students to the answer. Even at five and six-years of age, my students can figure out the answers.

Each of the participants in the study explained that they challenged their students to achieve excellence by expecting excellence. When as teachers they set the bar high, they all saw that their students were able to rise to the expectation. Deanna said that she "expects her students to do their best" (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011). She doesn't lower her expectations because they have been diagnosed with special needs. When she taught a self-contained class she maintained a rigorous level of work for her students. Even though her students may not have reached the same level as their grade level peers, she ensured that they were continuously being propelled forward. Deanna says "I think that no matter what level our children are at we have got to push them. We can't say oh, I can't push them because they're special ed" (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011).

Emily has high expectations for student success and behavior in her classroom. She tells her students that they are smart and that she expects them to do their work. Emily always makes her students feel like they are the best and tells them that to be the best you have to act the best. She also likes to make things into a competition.

I just tell my students that they are smart and that they can do it, and that I expect them to do it. I also tell them that the kids in my class are the best and that to be the best you have to act the best. When I make things a competition, my kids are good at it. I do it more for my homeroom. That is why my homeroom always does better than the other two classes. I always get better responses from my students. It is all about the attitude I am putting forth. They see it as important to me, so they respond. (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011).

Her students have always outscored every other class in Accelerated Reader Points, canned food drives, and any other competition because of the emphasis and importance that she places on it.

Richard teaches his students to never be satisfied with less than their best. "I always ask my students when they finish an assignment if it was the best that they could do. Sometimes I say that anything less than your best is not an option" (Richard, personal communication, October 6, 2011). Richard, Deanna, and Emily all feel passionate about holding high expectations for their students. They feel that these high expectations are one way that they challenge their students to strive for excellence. Each of them demonstrated their passion for this area through their expressions and voices as they talked about how they individually worked to push their students to higher levels of performance.

In my class I have high expectation for my students from the beginning of the school year. I have a very structured organization for my classroom. There is a bookshelf just inside my door where students have to unpack their book bags in the morning. A bin is there for their agendas, homework folders, homework papers, and weekly paper folders. Starting on the second day of school I have my students unpacking their book bags and sorting out their folders and papers. My paraprofessional or I never unpack book bags or folders. Yet teachers in the upper grades have to do it all the time and question how my students are able to do this so early in the year. On the second day of school I stand there and show each child exactly what I want them to do. From that day forward I expect them to do it. Since I hold them to this high expectation they regularly meet my expected standard. The same expectations hold true for their daily work. My students know that if they hand an assignment in to me that they did not do their best work on that they will get it back to redo. Even though they are only five and six-years old, I have high expectations for them and hold them to a very high standard of excellence.

Teacher Reflective Essays

As an additional source of data, each participant was asked to write a reflective essay after reading the article *But That's Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy* by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995). The points that the teachers chose to illuminate from the articles were very similar to the themes that emerged during our conversations. When I first mentioned the idea of reading an article and writing a reflection, each of my participants gave me an unhappy glare. I reassured each of them that the article, wasn't that long, it was an easy read, and that they would find it relevant. Each of them came to me after reading the article to tell me how much they appreciated the fact that I asked them to read the article.

Deanna admitted in her reflection that she was not able to read the article until after our interview. She feels that this was a positive thing. She wrote that "it was nice to see that basically my beliefs and feelings closely resembled the teachers who had been selected [by Ladson-Billings] to exemplify culturally relevant teaching. While I may not have implemented all of the practices to the extent of these teachers, I found that I had the same underlying beliefs that they possessed" (Deanna, personal communication, October 10, 2011). Deanna continued to explore the importance of maintaining high expectations for student success even as a special education teacher. She expressed the importance of holding her students to high standards even though they were identified as "special needs." She wrote,

These students, whom others might have given up on or held to lower standards, because of their disability have proven to be successful members of society. When they were in my classroom, I did not cut them any slack because of their disability. I maintained high standards of success that that my students were able to rise to. While most of them were not at the same level as their grade level peers, I still expected that they complete and

perform at certain academic levels that pushed them to higher levels. (Deanna, personal communication, October 10, 2011)

Another theme that Deanna expressed in her written reflection centered on building relationships with her students. She shared that she felt that this ability to build relationships was a reason for her longevity and success at Ocmulgee Elementary School. She wrote that

former students of our school (even one's that were never in my class) will go out of their way to come up to me and tell me what they are doing with their life [when I encounter them in the community]. (Deanna, personal communication, October 10, 2011)

Emily responded that reading the article by Ladson-Billings helped her to answer the question about why she is successful in the classroom. Previously she has always told people that she couldn't really tell them what it was that she did differently that made her have such good classroom management. Emily wrote that

Ladson-Billings found during her research that 'sociolinguists have suggested that if students' home language is incorporated into the classroom, students are more likely to experience academic success.' She also discussed the correlation of a student's culture to their academic success. As I read this it was like a light bulb went off inside my head. I immediately realized this is exactly what I do in my classroom. (Emily, personal communication, October 10, 2011)

Emily uses many approaches to make her students feel more comfortable in her classroom. She uses a more familiar register of language, and allows her students to use this register as well.

Emily shares that she uses her students' love of music to assist in the learning process. She wrote that

In my Math classroom I play a multiplication CD that has facts about the songs that have been put to music that the students are familiar with. I also create my own songs to help the students learn math concepts. Many times I still hear them singing these songs long after we have moved on from that skill. (Emily, personal communication, October 10, 2011)

Emily continued in her reflection to write about her choice to teach at Ocmulgee:

Teaching at the low-income school where I am employed is most definitely by choice. I cannot see myself teaching anywhere else. The article helped me to see more clearly just what it is I am doing in the classroom that helps me to be a successful teacher. (Emily, personal communication, October 10, 2011)

Richard's written reflection was more concise. He wrote that after reading and reflecting on the article by Gloria Ladson-Billings, I have decided that any school, without taking into account the culture of every student, is depriving some of the students an integral part of their education. I have noticed the students that are allowed to embrace and have the teacher acknowledging their culture have a much better academic and social relationship. (Richard, personal communication, October 11, 2011)

Richard ended his reflection by writing "I am in my 11th year at my school and I never even think about teaching anywhere else. This is my school, these are my students, parents, and community. I know I am both wanted and needed" (Richard, personal communication, October 11, 2011).

CHAPTER 5

RELFECTIONS ON THE INQUIRY

Four White teachers teaching at Ocmulgee Elementary school participated in this study. They were chosen based on their longevity and success at the school. This study sought to explore how these White teachers crossed racial barriers and established successful teaching careers while working in a school where they become the racial minority. When so many teachers use high-poverty schools with a high-minority population as mere stepping stones on their career paths, what made these teachers choose to remain at this school? These teachers authored a reflective summary of an article and completed conversational interviews to reveal their choices and some of the practices that lead to their success.

The title of this dissertation is "Speaking the Unutterable." The term unutterable came from the book *Macon Black and White: An unutterable separation in the American century* by Andrew Manis (2004). This book chronicles race relations in Macon from 1900 up through its publication in 2004. In the book Manis describes the efforts to desegregate public areas in Macon, including the schools. While legally our schools have been declared unified and Bibb County Schools are no longer under federal monitoring to ensure desegregation (Hubbard 2006; Hubbard, 2007), its schools are still segregated. The segregation occurring now is no longer the results of laws or threats of violence—it is now the results of poverty and housing patterns—yet the effects remain the same. As a result of this racial segregation the unutterable silence that Manis (2004) describes still plagues our education system and society. Yes, people do talk about race. But the needed conversations are not taking place. The conversations that should happen are the ones that will propel us forward and offer solutions to the problem, instead of creating more strife and anger.

Instead of findings this study offers "utterances" for the reader to think about and then work towards speaking for themselves. These utterances were not always explicitly stated by my participants. However, as I read back through the stories contained in Chapter 4 and reflected deeper about the purpose of this inquiry I saw the importance of breaking the bond of polite Southernness that works to keep voices as these silent. After all, the title is to "Speak the Unutterable." In this spirit I will explore the six utterances that must be spoken after completing this research: (1) White teachers who crossed racial boundaries and established successful teaching careers chose to stay in that assignment because of a feeling of belonging and their role within the school; (2) to be a successful White teacher of Black students a teacher must develop meaningful relationships with his or her students; (3) these successful teachers relinquish their place as members of the ruling social class and become part of the children's culture rather than expecting the children to reflect their culture; (4) all four participants worked to maintain high expectations for student performance in regards to behavior and academic success that were reflective of culturally relevant teaching practices; (5) developing relationships with students of a different race is easier to negotiate than the relationships of trust with their parents, and (6) the teachers in the study did not consider the race of their students as an important factor when thinking about their job at Ocmulgee Elementary School.

In addition to discussing the six utterances, this chapter will explore the relevance of these utterances and this study in the context of Curriculum Studies. It will also explore the implications for this research for teachers beyond the walls of Ocmulgee Elementary School. Pinar (2004) explains that curriculum theory is "a form of autobiographical and theoretical truth-telling that articulates the educational experience of teachers and students as lived" (p. 25). The experiences of these teachers reflect this truth-telling as a form of curriculum studies of place

that can extend to other teachers in other settings. *Currere* is offered as a term to describe this process.

The method of *currere*—the Latin infinitive form of curriculum means to run the course, or, in the gerund form, the running of the course—provides a strategy for students of curriculum to study the relations between academic knowledge and life history in the interest of self-understanding and social reconstruction. (Pinar, 2004, p. 35)

Currere describes the meaning-making process that teachers are continually engaged in as they balance the series of mandates issued from policy-makers with their students' needs to find that place in the middle where the course is run. A further element of curriculum studies that must be considered is the teacher's role as an individual engaged with themselves, their students and colleagues "in the construction of a public sphere, a public sphere not yet born, a future that cannot be discerned in, or even thought from, the present" (Pinar, 2004, p. 37-38). This view of the teacher and student in co-construction of the public sphere relates closely to the curriculum of place. The participants are actively involved in the process of building meaning that cannot happen without an understanding of place and each individual's role within that place. Pinar (2004) also views the purpose of curriculum as currere to engage in psychoanalytic theory. "Psychoanalytic theory offers a model of translating private language into the public language and, thereby, enabling the re-symbolization of private and public meaning" (Pinar, 2004, p. 57). Kincheloe and Pinar (1991) continue this discussion in their book Curriculum as Social Psychoanalysis: The Significance of Place.

Curriculum theory, likewise, must possess a particularistic social theory, a grounded view of the world in which education takes place. Without such a perspective, curriculum theory operates in isolation, serving to trivialize knowledge, fragmenting it into bits and

pieces of memorizable waste, while obscuring the political effects of such a process. (Kincheloe & Pinar, 1991, p. 5)

Thus, we must always consider *currere* in the context of place to maintain meaning. In order to understand the autobiographical truth-telling that Pinar discussed the findings will be related back to this notion of *currere* and a curriculum of place.

The main purpose of this inquiry was to figure out why the four teachers being studied chose to remain at Ocmulgee Elementary for all of these years. Each of us has had the opportunity to transfer at some point in our career. I found it interesting that in some form or fashion each person articulated the same thought that they felt that they still had a job left to do at Ocmulgee. It also seemed that each individual felt as if Ocmulgee was their home and that they seemed to feel a certain sense of nostalgia or belonging to it. Kincheloe and Pinar (1991) describe this as a particularity of place. They say that "'Placelessness' might the great southern phobia be. Southerners are wary of individuals without place" (Kincheloe & Pinar, 1991, p. 13). Could it be that each of the participants in this study has a fear of leaving Ocmulgee because they are afraid of losing their place? White teachers who crossed racial boundaries and established successful teaching careers chose to stay in that assignment because of a feeling of belonging and their role in the school. The participants feel as if his or her place and role at Ocmulgee is a significant part of our teacher identities (Utterance 1). Deanna offered that she has remained at Ocmulgee because she views it as a mission. When I asked her about it she replied "It is still my school. It is ownership. I've seen the changes it has gone through. I like being here. I feel like overall we are making a difference with some of these children and I think they need to have some teachers who genuinely care about them. They need teachers who don't see teaching as an 8 to 3:30 job." Emily offered a similar response to why she has remained at Ocmulgee. "I like

working here. I feel like now I have been there so long. The kids know me. I am like a fixture. And I think that helps too, the fact that I have been there so long, the kids know me, my presence is out there. They come. They are prepared to have me—to have me as their teacher. I also feel like the students there need me more than students on the other side of town." Richard responded that he remained at Ocmulgee Elementary School because he had yet to finish his job. When I asked him to describe his job, he responded that it was "To reach every student that comes my way and to teach them how important education is to their lives present and future." I pressed him to find out why this task had to be accomplished at Ocmulgee. Richard told me "Maybe because I am comfortable with the climate and the teaching staff that I have around me. I don't think that it would change if I moved to another school, so I might as well do it here." To me these responses reveal the longing for a sense of place that Kincheloe and Pinar (1991) were referring to in their text. Without a sense of place we feel as if we might be less effective as teachers. Both Emily and Richard went back to this sense of place in their written reflections. Emily wrote "I cannot see myself teaching anywhere else." Richard wrote "I never even think about teaching anywhere else. This is my school." Both of these teachers have a very strong connection to the place of Ocmulgee Elementary School which they revealed in their writing.

Each participant was asked to reflect upon how their teaching career would have been different if their race had matched that of their students. This activity proved difficult for everyone since we have all been at Ocmulgee teaching students whose race differed from our own for so many years. I found it interesting that each participant had a look of trepidation come across their face when I shifted the focus of the question and asked them to imagine instead that tomorrow they would be transferred to another school with a majority White student population. I feel a similar feeling of trepidation at the thought of leaving Ocmulgee. I have no family in

Macon. During the time that I have taught at Ocmulgee, the faculty and community members have filled in the gap and became a pseudo-family for me. Times when I have been sick, when others would call their nearest relative, I have relied on the compassion of a co-worker to provide assistance as my nearest relative is a five and a half hour drive away. The people at Ocmulgee Elementary School have filled a gap for my distant family—they celebrate and mourn with me. Each teacher in this study, has developed an identity that is deeply ingrained within the significance of place that is Ocmulgee Elementary School. This response seemed to be a true embodiment of what Sack (2001) was describing:

Places cannot exist without us. But equally important, we cannot exist without places. They enable us and empower us by helping to organize reality. In so doing they have effects and thereby exhibit causal properties, in the same sense that the languages we speak enable us and effects on what we think and do. People and places are then mutually constitutive. We can say that 'we make' things happen, but still we need places to help us; and we can say 'places make' things happen, but of course they need us as agents. (p. 233)

As Sack (2001) described places and people are entwined in a reciprocal relationship. We cannot make meaning of our lives apart from a place. As teachers we have created our teacher selves within Ocmulgee Elementary School and now feel that it identifies who we are. Just as we would not be the same without our experiences at Ocmulgee Elementary School, Ocmulgee would not be the same without these four teachers. Indeed, the leadership would find others individuals to fill the teaching vacancies but the climate and "place" as Sack (2001) says would never be exactly the same with a different arrangement of people filling its classrooms.

Ocmulgee is the only school at which Emily and Richard have ever taught, the first school where

I found success, and the school where Deanna has taught for twenty-five years. It has a strong connection for all four participants. As I explore this utterance, it occurs to me that we did not come to Ocmulgee with this strong sense of place and connectedness to the school. One has to wonder why we were each drawn to the job and chose to stay even before we developed the sense of place. Deanna came to Ocmulgee at the beginning of her tenth year of teaching. I remember her saying that "I chose to transfer to Ocmulgee" (Deanna, personal communication, September 20, 2011). Deanna's position upon arriving at Ocmulgee was different from the rest of us. Since she was a self-contained Special Education teacher she had to teach at schools that housed those classes. Developing her initial sense of place was probably more difficult because while the Special Education program is a part of the school, it has always been separate as well. This separation occurs based on funding and other rules and regulations. Emily came to Ocmulgee as a student teacher while at Georgia College and State University. She never interviewed for a job. Based on her performance during student teaching and the recommendation of her supervising teacher she was offered a job. During our interview I recall Emily saying

I was lazy about it [applying for teacher education program] at first. I missed the deadline to join the program. That's okay, I will find something else to do. I was more discouraged when it took an effort on my part to go out and seek interviews or something like that—I was nervous or scared. So, I would just wait for something to fall in my lap, which it did. So, that helped and that is why I like staying in one spot because I don't like change. (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011)

Emily gives us her reason for remaining at Ocmulgee—she doesn't like change. Richard came to Bibb County to teach as a part of the Class Size Reduction Program. This program only

existed in a few schools throughout the county. Since he started his teaching job in January he was placed with an available mentor teacher for the program which happened to be at Ocmulgee. Although he did not verbalize this fact in our conversation, I believe that he remained at Ocmulgee even during the beginning years for the same reason as Emily—a dislike of change. I am basing this conclusion on my knowledge of Richard as a colleague—for seven years we taught together on the same grade level. The resistance to change served as the original reason to remain at Ocmulgee. After they established their places, each of the teachers remained there to fulfill their missions as they each cited in their interviews.

Currere plays an important role in the lives of these teachers. In this example, currere refers the construction of the social place that is the school. For these teachers the school is more than just a building it is a series of interrelationships between the people and activities. These interactions extend beyond the mandated standards prescribed by the state and include the "taught, experienced, embodied, hidden, tested, null, and outside curricula" (Schubert, 2008, p. 407). So often, educators and the media are inundated by focusing on the prescribed curriculum. The pressures of our test-driven society have focused exclusively on the tested curricula while working to exclude or nullify valuable subjects like the arts that are excluded from "the test." Items that are not tested are not given the same amount of emphasis as those that will be found on the test even in the high value academic areas like math and language arts. The sad part is that to the lives of our students, all seven types of curricula—taught, experienced, embodied, hidden, tested, null, and outside—are equally important in shaping their beings and their life experiences. The pastor at my church often says that as learning is concerned more is caught than taught. The curriculum of place and concept of *currere* embody this phrase. The teachers at Ocmulgee, or any other school where teachers have developed a sense of belonging, work

together with their students to construct meaning with their students while working through the different types of curriculum.

As I reflect upon the experiences shared in Chapter 4, one theme resonated through almost every encounter. All of the teachers shared that they worked tirelessly to develop meaningful relationships with their students (Utterance 2). Oftentimes they described encounters that extended beyond the classroom or school day. Emily talked about times that she went to the local park to watch her students play in baseball games. Going to students' ballgames follows Delpit's advice of knowing our students both inside and outside of schools (Delpit, 2006). Deanna talked about encountering students at the grocery story who proudly announced that she taught at their school. Deanna referred to the strength of these relationships in her written reflection by recalling the encounters with former Ocmulgee students. Emily also recalled the time that the two of us arrived at school at 7:00 am to participate in the walking school bus as a part of the Safe Routes to School Campaign. Children who were normally carriders were begging their parents to stop the cars and let them walk so that they could walk to school with us that morning. By the time we arrived at the school there we were the two White teachers with about twenty Black children trailing along happily behind us. I don't remember any other day that the children were so excited to walk to school. They were happy because they got to walk to school with the teachers. Only a couple of the children were in either one of our classes but they knew us as teachers at their school. Since our school is such a small school, it is easy to build strong relationships with many of the students in the building. Once you build a relationship with one child, it extends to all of his or her siblings and cousins. An added benefit of the neighborhood around our school is that most of the children are related to each other, therefore once you plant that seed of a strong foundational relationship the roots continue to

grow. The negative aspect of that same trait is that a bad experience spreads even faster. As culturally relevant educators we must be willing to build fluid and humanely equitable relationships with our students that extend beyond the boundaries of the classroom into the community (Ladson-Billings, 2009). It is only when these relationships prosper and thrive that we will be able to succeed as teachers where our race does not match that of our students.

The importance of building strong relationships with students is not limited to the place of Ocmulgee Elementary School. Throughout my time in the Curriculum Studies program I was continually challenged to question the status quo of education and schooling practices. I easily recognize that some teachers try to put up a wall of separation between their students and themselves. The teachers in this study demonstrated that the opposite is necessary in order to find success when working with students of diverse cultures. Regardless of their teaching assignment, teachers need to realize that they differ from their students and that they must work to develop meaningful relationships with their students. My principal frequently tells us "Your students will not care how much you know, until they know how much you care." This mantra is true regardless of the teacher or student's race. As White teachers in the South, the participants in my study have faced a greater sense of urgency in building strong relationships with their students, than other teachers may face, in order to overcome the power that the curriculum of place affects upon us. The negative effects of race relations in Macon and the South run deep. While the issue of race is often less unuttered, teachers are left to address the issue in their classroom. One of the most critical ways that this can be addressed is for teachers to break the hegemonic processes inherent in the schooling process and to begin to build strong relationships with their students. Kunjufu (2002) cautions teachers of all races to be careful when making assumptions about their students. A major premise of his book is that even when teachers and

students are of the same race they are often of differing socio-economic backgrounds and have different family norms. Even when my participants felt as if the Black teachers may have been able to relate easier to their Black students because of their shared race, it is always important to carefully negotiate this difference in socioeconomic status.

As I continued to reflect upon these stories, I found that one of the things that made the participants in this study different from the White teachers who were unsuccessful at Ocmulgee Elementary School is that we each made it a point to accept our students and their cultural identities within them rather than trying to impose our cultural identities on the students (Utterance 3). As White teachers, and members of the dominant social and socioeconomic class, it would be natural to attempt to fit our students into the mold of the middle class citizen. However, that is not the world from which our students originate or return to each day. As teachers we understand that our students are dual citizens. They must learn to navigate the world of academia while still possessing the schema to be successful at home. The teachers in my study appreciate the students for the experiences that they bring to the classroom, while working to teach them the skills they need to be successful. This approach seems to be a huge step in the right direction in the participants' acknowledgement of their "Whiteness" (Apple, 2004; Frankenberg, 1993; Howard, 2006; Mills, 1997; Pinar et al, 2004) By relinquishing the cultural power and allowing our students cultural identities to emerge we are "empowering them intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 20). When Deanna's students asked her for a "case quarter" she did not chastise them by saying "case quarter" was the incorrect terminology that we only called the twenty-five cent piece a quarter. She understood that it was a cultural practice to call any configuration totaling twenty-five cents a quarter. Similarly Emily allows her students to use informal registers of language when

appropriate, but also requires certain rules to be followed. Her students know that when they are saying the number four they need to enunciate and pronounce the "r" because "a foe is an enemy in a war, four is the number." Emily acknowledged in her written reflection that understanding that she engages in this practice was an awakening for her. She did not realize that engaging in this culturally relevant practice was one of the reasons that she was successful as a teacher at Ocmulgee Elementary School. Richard allows his students to express themselves in his classroom as well. His morning meeting and writing workshop are safe places where the students are free to express their true selves without fear of judgment or condemnation. A feature of teacher-student relationships in the culturally relevant classroom is a strong "community of learners" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 60). Each of the participants displays this type of community in their classrooms through the expectations that they set up for their students.

Building the community of learners is especially relevant within the curriculum of place. The place of these communities has multiple layers. The first layer is the classroom. In the classroom the community comes together bonded around the teacher. The teacher forms the leadership and helps the students to develop a strong sense of community where all individuals are on the same level, individual differences are valued as each person brings unique qualities to the group. The next layer of place in Ocmulgee Elementary School is that of the grade levels. Each grade level has its own unique personality. These personalities are shaped by two forces—the teachers and the students. At Ocmulgee there are three teachers in each grade level. A unique set of personalities blend together to form each of these teacher groups. The student personalities for each grade level vary greatly. Some grade levels are more casual, while others are much higher maintenance. Another factor about the students that cannot be overlooked is the

difference in each grade level that is attributed to age. We expect much different behavior from the five-year-olds in kindergarten than from the ten-year-olds in the fifth grade. The larger community is that of the school. Under the leadership of the principal, the smaller communities of grade levels and classes come together to make up the larger family of the school. Each school possesses its own unique personality. The uniqueness of Ocmulgee is that it has the feel of a small community school with close family ties. A greater sense of community is that of the actual community surrounding the school. This sense of place plays a greater role in impacting the education of the students at Ocmulgee Elementary School. Even though the teachers working at Ocmulgee do not live in this neighborhood, they must find a way to understand the complex relationships and interactions taking place within this neighborhood in order to develop the relationships in their classrooms. It is only through these understandings that teachers in any setting can engage in the process of *currere* and begin to build the link between academic knowledge and the life histories of their students in meaningful ways.

Another hallmark of culturally relevant teaching, maintaining high expectations for students, emerged as a theme in chapter 4. Many high-minority schools are plagued with teachers who hold low expectations for their students because of the poverty their students know as reality. These homes may not be culturally rich or possess what the teacher sees as the necessary supplies. Kunjufu (2008) states that: "middle-class teachers expect that all homes will have what they have in their homes. Not every African American [or poverty-stricken] household possesses an encyclopedia set, atlas, globe, extensive library, computer, color printer, and Internet access" (p. 5-6). In reality, we understand that our students do not possess most of these items. However, the lack of these resources is not an excuse for failure. Despite these trends, the teachers in this study worked to maintain high expectations for student performance

in regards to behavior and academic success that were reflective of culturally relevant teaching practices (Utterance 4). The teachers felt as if when they set their standards at a high level the students would achieve in a way that meets the expectation. If the standard was set low, the students would remain at the lower performance level. As a characteristic of culturally relevant practices, each of the teachers in this study believed that all of their students can succeed regardless of their backgrounds (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Perry, 2000; Schussler, 2009). Emily recalled using competitive means to get her students to perform at high levels in multiple arenas—canned food drives, returning papers, taking Accelerated Reading Tests, and performance on standardized tests. Even when she teaches math to every class on the grade level, the children in her homeroom own a greater sense of pride and will perform better for her. Deanna recalls that she has high performance expectations for her students even though they are identified as special needs. She said even though they may have some limitations I still have to hold them to a high standard and expect them to do work for themselves. Richard used the example of questioning his students about how they felt about the quality of their work to exemplify this practice. He said that he always wanted his students to be able to tell him that they were turning in their best work. Anything less than that isn't accepted. Each of us understands the power that our expectations—positive or negative—can have on our students. We are constantly trying to push our students to overcome the trends that define the neighborhood at large so that they will rise up to the potential that lives within them.

The hidden curriculum is important in regards to the curriculum of place in understanding this finding in regards to curriculum studies. Jackson (2009) explains the hidden curriculum's relationship to student difficulty:

Students are commonly scolded for coming into the room late or for making too much noise or for not listening to the teacher's directions or pushing in line. The teacher's wrath, in other words, is more frequently triggered by violations of institutional regulations and routines than by signs of his student's intellectual deficiencies. (p. 120)

The teachers in this study work with their students to impart the knowledge students need to understand the hidden curriculum. A significant sign of disrespect at Ocmulgee Elementary School is to not speak when spoken to by an adult. I understand as a Kindergarten teacher that I have to set an example for my students to model this behavior. As they enter my classroom each morning I greet them. I expect them to return the greeting. If students do not respond appropriately, I correct them and model the conversation. I am trying to model the desired behavior so that they will not have negative encounters with other adults in the building. My first year at the school other adults thought that I was rude because I did not always speak to them in the hallways. I had been taught not to interrupt others when they were speaking, instead I would simply wave or nod my head. They expected me to speak to them each time I saw them whether they were engaged in a conversation or not. I had not been introduced to the hidden curriculum that existed in my new setting and was being judged regardless of my understanding of the hidden protocols for acceptable behavior. An understanding of place is needed to understand and navigate the hidden curriculum because each place has a different hidden curriculum. The teachers in this study, and other teachers seeking to help their students succeed, work to reveal the secrets of the hidden curriculum so that their students are not punished for a lack of understanding.

A prevalent and surprising theme from the participants was that they found that developing relationships with students of a different race is easier to negotiate than the

relationships of trust with their parents (Utterance 5). It surprised me to realize that the most difficult aspect that all of the participants noted about teaching at Ocmulgee was negotiating relationships with parents, while the easiest thing that each of them found to do was to build relationships with students. Deanna recounted that when her classroom used to be located on the primary hall that she heard the young kids say things that she knew they had to be learning from home. This statement made me think about the reflections I shared in the prologue from my story about Roderick, when I began to question how a five-year-old could begin to think about the race of an individual at such an early age. The young children do not generally think in terms of race until an adult trains them to do so. However, the parents that we deal with have a greater amount of difficulty trusting some of the White teachers because of their prior experiences of oppression and marginalization in the South. Many of the parents that we encounter are victims of the same system that they feel they are now trying to protect their children from today. Unfortunately for us, the White teacher, often stands as the representative of the one that may have victimized them in the past. Or we may just be the one who is the most convenient target for venting their frustrations or anger at that moment. Gunderson (2006) explains this dilemma:

the difficulty is that there are significant cultural differences between teachers' and parents' views of what students should learn and how they should be taught. Teachers, parents, and other interested individuals all seem to want the best for children. The difficulty is agreeing on what constitutes the best. (p. xi)

This finding problematizes the concept of culturally responsive teaching. In order to address this concern, teachers must also practice what Li (2006) refers to as a culturally contested pedagogy.

A culturally contested pedagogy will help teachers and parents work together because it transcends some of the limitations of traditionally defined culturally responsive teaching

practices which are more teacher centered. Li (2006) continues to explain reasons for differing levels of parental involvement that may seem problematic for teachers:

Social class, however, is not the only variable that affects the degree of parental involvement. For immigrant and minority families, active involvement is also influenced by parents' educational background, their English proficiency, their knowledge of and familiarity with mainstream schooling, and their socioeconomic status. (p. 31)

The curriculum of place is strongly entwined in this finding. The negative reactions that some parents have towards the education system and the representation of "that White teacher" are responses generated out of their experiences from the place of the South and their educational, or lack of, experiences. Education in Macon since the time of integration has been tumultuous at best. Until just a few years ago the school system was bound under a federal court ruling to ensure desegregation. Each time a school is opened, closed or school zones are modified, emotions explode. Teachers have to come to terms with these facts and try to understand the viewpoint of the parents. The parents are acting out of a negative experienced curriculum that has impacted their lives. We must continually act in a process of negotiation to work through the experiences of the parent to ensure that they do not continue to impact the current school experiences of the child.

I was surprised as I looked through the stories that I did not find more discussions on race. Since the purpose of this study was to explore why these four White teachers have chosen to remain at Ocmulgee Elementary School teaching predominantly Black children for so long, I figured that more discussions about race and race relations would enter into the conversation. Surprisingly the teachers did not really think about race. Their answers did not center on race until I led them down that path. Even then they did not choose to stay there long. It did not

seem that they were avoiding the topic. These teachers were not ignoring the issue of race as suggested by Winant (2004) as a means of perpetuating the social ills of racism. Indeed issues of racism are addressed as needed. It was more like it did not seem to be an important factor for them. Teaching at Ocmulgee has become part of their life's work. The race of the students no longer matters. At some points during their careers the issue of race has reared its ugly head and caused some minor discomfort, but all in all, race is not a consideration for them when considering their job assignment leading to an under emphasis on racial education for social justice (Utterance 6). Even now as I reflect upon this study, I find myself in the same position as the other three participants. Maybe my five-year-old students had it right—I am "lightskinded." Race is a social construction who's concept has never been fixed (Apple, 2004; Pinar, 1993; Pinar et al, 2004). Tatum (2007) tells us that the only meaningful racial categorization is that of human. The negative side of this approach is that this noncommittal approach to the issue of race means that we are not doing an adequate job of addressing it in the classroom as educators. Four distinct answers emerged to the question of how the participants addressed issues of race in the classroom. Reasons from lack of time, content matter, student age and ability were cited as reasons for the different approaches. Apple (1993) explains that

At all levels of the educational system, aside from the growing conservative pressures to return to a Eurocentric curriculum, the dominant approach in dealing with the issue of race and culture is to either engage in 'mentioning' (the adding to the curriculum of a few 'representative' women and men of color by, usually briefly, discussing their contributions, but never seeing the world through their eyes) or by becoming a total relativist. (p. viii).

The overall approach to addressing issues of race at Ocmulgee mirror this process described by Apple. A Black History fact is announced daily as a part of the morning announcements and February is dedicated to putting together the requisite Black History Program for PTO. Beyond these two activities, meaningful engagement about issues of race are skirted. Another problematic point to this approach is the fact that the only emphasis is on Black Americans' achievements. While the numbers are indeed small, there are students of other races attending Ocmulgee Elementary School who would benefit from a more culturally diverse practice.

What I realized after reflecting back on the stories collected in Chapter 4 is that further discussions need to take place with all teachers about how to engage elementary students in appropriate and meaningful conversations about race. I know that this will never be able to take place until those of us in the South can break the bonds that prohibit us from talking about uncomfortable topics such as race and the past. It will only be once we can move forward and stop using mystery and manners (Whitlock, 2007) as excuses for the ways out of these taboo topics of conversations. Southerners need to break the bonds of silence and start speaking what has previously been unutterable so that we can move forward. Topics of race and oppression must be addressed so that the children of today can break free of this cycle. Students of all races are being miseducated when the topic of race is avoided, especially in a city as racially charged as Macon. Students need to understand why there are engravings in the marble of Terminal Station that say "Colors Only" and "Whites Only." Trying to explain these topics away using manners is no longer acceptable, adults must be willing to address these issues so that children can learn how to overcome these racial issues so as not to continue to perpetuate the same racial dissonance that has ruled the region for so long. Ayers (2004) describes how his five-year-old child faced him to take action against oppression in the form of graffiti on the subway. Ayers

(2004) continues to explain that "racism, sexism, and other forms of organized oppression are anti-education. For this reason alone teachers and educators must struggle for ways to understand, engage, with, and resist racism in their classroom and in the larger world" (p. 76). This battle against racism begins with educating students about racism. Ayers, Hunt and Quinn (1998) share a proposed vision for a school where students learn problem-posing and problem-solving skills by exploring their lived lives.

School must also become a place where the students' own experiences—especially painful experiences of devaluation and exclusion—are witnessed and responded to compassionately. Only by breaking the silence about their oppression can students begin to formulate questions they care about, situate themselves and their community historically, and hone their analytic abilities. (Ayers, Hunt, & Quinn, 1998, p. 211)

In order to break the current cycle of racial oppression and dissonance these issues must be faced head-on in the classroom. Our current method of ignoring race or addressing it only when it becomes an issue works to cripple students, and teachers, by not providing them with the critical reasoning skills to overcome the situation.

Another idea I discovered while reflecting upon the stories contained in Chapter 4 was that the success of these teachers was found in their ability to be flexible and their willingness to adapt in the face of adversity. Deanna has worked at Ocmulgee under four different principals, each with a different leadership and management style. Emily has worked under three different principals at Ocmulgee. Richard and I have both worked under two different principals. Each of us experienced many changes with the past two principals that we have worked under.

Additionally, all four of us have seen the school through being on the Needs Improvement List and receiving support from the State Department of Education. Many people left the school

during that time because of the increased demands and stress of testing and accountability. Race relations have also been a source of adversity during these years. Deanna and Emily cited that they have seen a change in the race relations of the staff during the years they have worked at Ocmulgee. Deanna said that at one time she felt that the staff was more of a cohesive unit than it is now. Emily acknowledged that she felt that the change occurred with our previous administrator. Richard and I have always worked under the current conditions which have been somewhat strained, but always at least somewhat tolerable. In all of our encounters at Ocmulgee we must always remember that race is a social construction and that the races exist in a reciprocal relationship (Apple, 2004; Pinar, 1993). Before enrolling in this program, I never thought much about the race relations that I was encountering in the work place. I knew that they were different from those I experienced in my outside world, but I never identify terms to describe it. I had never heard of McIntosh's (1988/1997) notion of "White Privilege" or thought about the ways that I benefited from the color of my skin. I feel quite certain that my co-workers remain unaware of the finer details of McIntosh's work. In examining the stories shared in Chapter 4, I must acknowledge that the answers provided by the three participants reflected a great deal of White privilege. I am not saying that they were acting in overtly racial ways, however their failure to address their White privilege continues to perpetuate the racial problems. They have been informed of the highlights of the concept through my work and by participation in this study. However as I have worked in a school where we became the minority things started to change for me. I know that I never lost my "White Privilege" as it were, but in a setting were you are one of only a handful of White individuals the tables have definitely turned. Parents begin to question your every move and motive based on the color of your skin.

It is also important to consider what was not uttered in the storied told in Chapter 4. Each of the participants addressed how they worked to push their students to ensure success. No one addressed the issue of failure among their Black students. Even the most successful teacher will experience times when they are unable to reach every student. In our school setting, this failure most often occurs with the students who are already most at risk. Another thing that I noticed that went unuttered was that none of the participants truly opened up and shared stories that were less than flattering about their own practice. I kept expecting certain stories from experiences that I am aware of to come out at certain times in the interview process. However, the participants carefully guarded this information.

I think that it is very powerful that in three different interview settings the three teachers I spoke with said that their students would all give the same advice to a new White teacher. They all emphasized the importance of getting to know the students as individuals. The teachers spoke candidly on behalf of the students and said that they felt the students were tired of being judged on stereotypical personas or previous reputations. Each one said that as students they felt that the teacher needed to learn about them before they passed judgment or made any type of rash decisions. Getting to know your students is a hallmark of culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2009). The implications behind this revelation are powerful. A couple of thoughts come to mind as I think about these implications. The first thought is based on the benefits and dangers of being in such a small community school. Since Ocmulgee is such a small school, it is easy for the teachers and students to get to know each other. It is not uncommon for teachers to get to know students well even when they are not in their classes. This is especially true for students with behavior problems, and students who are not Black (because they are so few in number). Everyone knows almost any child that has ever had a discipline referral and whose

class they are in immediately. Then teachers start looking out for them. Hopefully these relationships foster a climate where the teacher provides a positive role model for the student and tries to encourage them to stay out of trouble. However, with the wrong personalities this reputation can lead to trouble when a teacher has a preconceived notion of a child based on the name and what the teacher has heard. I have to confess that a retained child that is in my class this year had a reputation for causing trouble last year. I was upset when I found out he was to be in my class this year. Thankfully, I tried to ignore everything that everyone else tried to tell me about the child and his behavior—everything that I should expect him to do. He has had a great year, because I have expected him to be wonderful and do great things.

To further understand the implications of the stories collected in Chapter 4 one has to reflect upon them in light of the Curriculum of Place (Casemore, 2008; Kincheloe & Pinar, 2001; Pinar, 2004; Pinar et al, 2004; Whitlock, 2007). Everything that happens must be considered within this context of the South. Without this context meaning is lost, especially when one is considering race relations in a city like Macon (Manis, 2004). Even as we exist six decades beyond Brown vs. Board of Education the same social ills that plagued the education system back then still persist in today's schools. While they may no longer be state sanctioned, the curriculum of place and race still maintains a certain hegemonic control over the practices. Without understanding of these powers one cannot make sense out of the scenes taking place before them. The teachers in this study are often acting in rebellion to these hegemonic practices by counteracting the dominant culture to allow their students to be themselves, while maintaining high expectations for student success.

This study began for me as I sought to explore what could cause a five-year-old child to use such harsh racial words in a temper tantrum. His outburst led me to question whether I could

be effective as a White teacher teaching Black students. Even after I had been at the same school for over ten years, I continue to ask myself that question after one child's display of anger. Through this exploration I reaffirmed something that I already knew, that yes, I, and others like me, can be successful White teachers of Black students. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) refers to us as Dream Keepers. It is important to note that not every teacher can fulfill this role. Just as Ladson-Billings (2009) discovered, I too realize that there are salient features that are necessary to be a successful teacher of diverse students. One must work to get to know his or her students, build relationships, set high expectations, develop strong classroom management techniques, never give-up, validate students' identity, and be flexible. This list is by no means comprehensive. It, like our pedagogy, is an unfinished portrait. One must never stop learning. Our students and their needs are constantly changing, therefore our approaches to meeting them must also adapt.

The utterances of this inquiry have implications for others teachers of diverse students beyond the wall of Ocmulgee Elementary School. While the emphasis of this study was on White teachers teaching Black students I believe that many of the same premises apply to all teacher and student relationships. First of all, all teachers must consider their teaching context and consider how the underlying politics of the curriculum of place (Casemore, 2008; Kincheloe & Pinar, 1991; Whitlock, 2007) are working to shape their experiences with students, parents, the community and the curriculum. Kincheloe and Pinar (1991) tell us that place "brings the particularistic into focus" (p. 4). Only once teachers are able to interpret their teaching context in light of the particularities of place can they begin to meet the needs of everyone involved. Even when the issues of race and place are not as strong as they are in Macon they still must be addressed. The curriculum of place can never be ignored—they are both dependent upon and

resultant upon social interactions. A second point for all teachers to understand is that it is imperative to work to build meaningful relationships with students. One reason that the four teachers in this study were successful while teaching students of a different race and socioeconomic background was that they employed extraordinary measures to develop meaningful relationships with their students. All teacher and student interactions will benefit from teacher efforts to build these relationships. When teachers were asked to answer from their students' viewpoints each one of them felt that their students desired for teachers to get to know them better. When we get to know our students better and teach to their strengths behavior issues will become less of a concern. A third implication for all teachers is to hold high expectations for students in all regards. Regardless of student backgrounds teachers should maintain high standards. An important caveat in setting these standards that teachers must remember is to make sure that they are not expecting students to complete tasks outside of their means. Just because teachers have computers and Internet access at home does not mean that they can expect students to have the same access at home. Teachers need to be flexible in modifying assignments so that students can complete projects requiring these technologies at school. Standards should not be lowered, just altered so that students are not punished for a lack of resources. Ayers (2004) states that

The art of teaching begins with understanding learners and then goes on to create an environment that is complex enough and rich enough to nurture and challenge a wide range of interests, experiences, purposes, and aspirations. Teaching is about enabling others in some way, making them more powerful. (p. 26-27)

All teachers regardless of whether or not their race matches that of their students will have a day when they find themselves standing like myself at a crossroads questioning their

effectiveness. There are two possible responses; grow or run. Many people choose to run. They will apply for a transfer or any other means to escape the situation. These teachers generally apply for a transfer to a school that is reflective of their comfort zone. They generally do not look back, unless they happen to encounter one of their former students. Years later they might be able to look back and realize that the situation was not really as bad as they originally evaluated it to be. The other response is to grow. Growing is the tougher of the two options. It usually means standing up in the face of adversity and facing it head on. That is what I chose to do by exploring the issue of race and education. When you choose this option you become like the participants in my study who have developed a culturally relevant pedagogy. By opting to take the tougher route, I have discovered how a curriculum of place and culturally relevant teaching practices have helped four White teachers to speak the unutterable and maintain their passion while teaching children of a different race.

EPILOGUE

A strong sense of place emerged as a significant reason as to why each of the teachers in this inquiry remained at Ocmulgee Elementary School despite the cultural dissonance that they faced. Now that my study has been completed, I wanted an opportunity to go back to the participants to see how things had changed. Checking back in on the four participants three different stories emerge today.

Emily and Richard are continuing in their positions at Ocmulgee much the same as when the portrait was completed. Emily continues to excel in her daily teaching endeavors. She was recently named as Teacher of the Month. Her work to document and progress monitor students on RTI has brought special attention to the school from across the district. Richard continues to seek out and implement best practices to strengthen his third grade Social Studies and Science classroom.

The current stories of Deanna and I reveal different turns of events. After thirty-five years in education, Deanna has decided to retire mid-year. She quickly asserts when asked that her decision to leave is not based on factors rooted at Ocmulgee. Deanna's decision has a deeper basis in the county's Special Education Department which dictates how the special education programs at each school should operate. She says that all of the requirements and changes have removed the joy from her practice. Deanna is struggling with a sense of educational dissonance. She is unable to do what she knows is right for her children while meeting the requirements of the bureaucracy that is dictating her every move.

My story represents yet another twist in this research. Just as my students left for the Thanksgiving Holiday I learned that I had taught my last day at Ocmulgee Elementary School. I would be transferring to another school after the holiday. My transfer is based on health

concerns. Over the past few months, my doctors have discovered that conditions in 57 year-old Ocmulgee Elementary School have contributed to persistent respiratory illnesses. While I am looking forward to an opportunity to teach in a setting where I will not be plagued by constant allergy and asthma problems, I am burdened by the thought that I am losing my place. For the past ten years my professional identity has been rooted in the place of Ocmulgee Elementary School. Kincheloe and Pinar (1991) state that "Placelessness' might the great southern phobia be" (p. 13). Even though I already know my new teaching assignment I still feel as if I am without a place. As I write this epilogue, all of the materials from my classroom are sitting in a spare room of my house. Even after spending the past week in my new assignment, I know very little about my new school. At this moment I reflect back to something that Emily said during her interview. She said "I don't like change" (Emily, personal communication, September 22, 2011). As much as I realize the potential this new opportunity holds for me both professionally and personally, since I will be away from conditions that have kept me sick for so long, I am struggling with the thought of facing the unknown. Ocmulgee has been my home for so long that it seems impossible sitting here today that I could be as happy or effective at another school. This line of thinking gives me an opportunity to reflect back on the utterances mentioned in Chapter 5. As I wrote them I gave ways for them to be considered beyond the walls of Ocmulgee. Now I am in a position to take these utterances and apply them in my own practices at a new school. I will be teaching in a school that is 66% White, 29% Black, and 5% other races. My new class, which I will take over officially in January has 21 students—14 White, 6 Black, and 1 Indian. This demographic represents a drastic shift from what I have grown accustomed to over my tenure at Ocmulgee Elementary School. However, I understand that the

findings and Utterances that were discussed in Chapter 5 will continue to assist me in this endeavor.

Another characteristic of my new assignment that differs greatly from Ocmulgee is that it is a rural school. Its rural characteristics will give me an opportunity to go back and draw upon my initial teacher preparation in the Rural Teaching Program. Many individuals have questioned me about the culture shock of transferring from an inner-city school to a rural school, I have to laugh to myself as I tell them it isn't as big of a shock as they would expect. The rural features make me feel like I am back in the schools of my childhood.

My new assignment has opened up a world of new possibilities for me as a teacher. I look forward to being able to establish my "place" within this new setting. Today I feel like a lost ball in high weeds, because I am struggling to orientate myself to the new, much larger staff; the building; and the many well-established routines that keep the school running smoothly. I am hopeful that by the end of the school year I will have established myself and will be able to say that I have found my new place as a teacher. Right now, I still feel as if I am a teacher without a place.

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