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**The Dissertation Committee for Michelle Fowler-Amato Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:**

**Teachers and Students Developing Critical Language Awareness  
Through an Exploration of Everyday Language Practices**

**Committee:**

---

Randy Bomer, Supervisor

---

Ramón Martínez

---

Diane Schallert

---

Allison Skerrett

---

Melissa Mosley Wetzel

**Teachers and Students Developing Critical Language Awareness  
Through an Exploration of Everyday Language Practices**

**by**

**Michelle Fowler-Amato, B.A.; M.A.**

**Dissertation**

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## Dedication

See, these words motivate me to move mountains.  
They cast light in the shadows that hang  
darkness over my valley,  
I construct these cathedrals of conscious thought.  
I dare you, yes, I dare you to...  
just...  
Move me...  
Flow through this thicket of thought and caress  
purpose.  
Feel me...  
I am hidden in plain view. Waiting for you to stop  
trying to use your eyes to catch a glimpse of  
vision. See me...a rarity. Like daylight accented by the moon. I have so many stories for  
you to stroll through.

-Shanitra Harris

To Shanitra and all of the students and teachers who I have learned with and from over the years, so many who were “hidden in plain view.” It is my hope that this study is my first of many collaborative projects with practicing teachers who also wish to “see” their students and who are eager to stroll through their stories in an effort to make teaching and learning meaningful for all involved.

## **Acknowledgements**

There are so many people who have supported me on this journey. Nine years ago, feeling frustrated by how I was encouraged to lead my department in our work with readers and writers, I decided to attend a Heart of Texas Writing Project workshop facilitated by Randy Bomer. While participating in this workshop, I had a glimpse of how it might be different for students and for teachers in urban settings. Upon taking Randy's Teaching Secondary Readers course a year later, it became clear to me that I needed to dedicate myself to pursuing the question of how we might re-think teaching and learning in urban schools, and my continued work with Randy and with the faculty in The School of Education at the University of Texas at Austin would support me in this pursuit. Thank you, Randy, for creating opportunities to put all that I was learning into place in my role as a teacher consultant for the Heart of Texas Writing Project, to grow as a scholar through researching and writing with you, and to understand what it means to participate in this community of literacy scholars at the University of Texas and beyond.

Through my work with Melissa Mosley Wetzel, I first began to think about the multiple language and literacy practices in which our students engage both inside and outside of the classroom. I continued to pursue this interest through my participation in Allison Skerrett's Adolescent Literacy course as well as through assisting her in a research study, an experience in which I had the opportunity to learn from students about their reading and writing lives inside and outside of the classroom and explore what a curriculum built on students' everyday literacy practices might look like. This led me to consider how we might rethink language study in secondary language arts classes, as well, exploring the many language practices that students engage in across their lifeworlds. As I designed my dissertation study, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to

assist Ramón Martínez in his Community Literacy course, a space in which we thought together about what might be gained through the collection and exploration of our students' language. In addition, I reflected on my experiences collecting language in a language notebook as a student in Diane Schallert's Psycholinguistics course, calling on the research and theory we were exploring to make sense of what we collected. I drew on all of these experiences as I designed and facilitated this dissertation study. Thank you for supporting me in my growth as a scholar and as a person. I also want to acknowledge the support I have received from the rest of the Language and Literacy Department during my time at the University of Texas at Austin. My work with Jim Hoffman, Beth Maloch, Nancy Roser, and Jo Worthy has played a part in preparing me what is next. And special thanks to Detra Price-Dennis, who has continued to support me from a distance.

I have so much appreciation for my friends and colleagues who I have come to know through my participation in the Heart of Texas Writing Project as well as through my graduate studies. We have thought together about how to make things better for students and for teachers, and we have supported each other in our work when the work seemed bigger than us. Katie, Kathy, Katrina, Caron, Molly, Ann, Deb, Amber, Michiko (and so many more), you have become lifelong friends, and you all inspire me to be a better teacher and researcher each and every day.

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Mattie, Sophia, Garrett, and Beth, I treasure my time spent in our professional learning community and in your classrooms. Thank you for all you do to make the world a better place! Because of the work done in your classrooms, I have hope!

# **Teachers and Students Developing Critical Language Awareness Through an Exploration of Everyday Language Practices**

Michelle Fowler-Amato, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

Supervisor: Randy Bomer

In this design-based dissertation study, I drew on critical curriculum theory (Freire, 2007; Freire & Macedo, 2011; Giroux, 1985) and a theory of culturally sustaining pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014) to explore what critical language study looked like in practice as well as how teachers and students responded to this instructional approach. Making use of qualitative research methods (Patton, 2002) and an embedded multiple-case design (Yin, 2014), I engaged in iterative analysis (Reinking & Bradley, 2008), making modifications as the participants worked toward the goal of further developing their critical language awareness. These included pedagogical modifications such as 1) strategies for engaging in “collaborative knowledge building,” (Wells, 2001) 2) strategies for developing disciplinary understandings, 3) strategies for maintaining inquiry as stance, as well as a methodological modification, 4) strategies for supporting the teacher/researcher collaboration. In addition, I engaged in retrospective analysis (Gravemeijer & Cobb, 2006), exploring data collected across the entire investigation in an effort to revisit and revitalize pedagogical theory.

Results showed that many of the participants developed new understandings about language, began to recognize the expansiveness of their linguistic toolkits, came to legitimize variation and language shift as well as try on critical identities. The following

four assertions emerged from retrospective analysis: 1) The participating teachers and students struggled to maintain inquiry as stance while working toward the goal of further developing their own critical language awareness. 2) There were opportunities for a greater transformation when the participating teachers and students interacted with supportive, reflective collaborators. 3) There were opportunities for greater transformation when the participating teachers and students named their own language practices. 4) The teachers' and students' participation in the professional learning community as well as in the units of study seemed to incite emerging critical identities.

This study contributes to the literature on what critical language study looks like in practice in secondary language arts classrooms as well as in teacher education. In addition, it serves as an example of the potential of design-based research to support teachers in putting critical curriculum theory and a theory of culturally sustaining pedagogy into practice.

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# **Chapter 1: Introduction-Design-based Research as a Tool to Support Teachers in the Implementation of Critical and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in Language Arts Classes**

## **INTRODUCTION**

My final years in the classroom were spent at a high school that was fighting to keep its doors open. Although once known for its successful football program, winning numerous state championships over the years, the school had faced continual challenges since the late 1990s and was eventually named “academically unacceptable.” Unfortunately, during this time, a young woman was murdered by her ex-boyfriend during the school day. So, in addition to failing academically, this high school also became known as a space that was “unsafe.” The community, the district, the faculty, and the students were all in agreement that things needed to change. Despite this shared desire, morale gradually dropped, turnover consistently increased, and test scores continued to plummet. Therefore, it is not a surprise that when I accepted a teaching and coaching position at this “academically unacceptable” high school that was now associated with scholastic failure and violence rather than state championships, that there was a push to relive the glory days, re-claiming the status and pride of years before through the process of high school redesign.

Unfortunately, as is common in urban schools, initiatives made in an effort to transform practices and policies are often decided upon without the true participation of teachers, students, and members of the community, those who are impacted most by these news ways of doing school (Macedo, 2011). While this feeling of disempowerment has

often led teachers to leave the profession and students to drop out prior to graduation, many remain but feel trapped, not heard, not seen, and not valued, passively participating in a system that seems disconnected from their day-to-day lives.

These feelings were not foreign to me or to my students. In reflecting on this, I find myself thinking back to one of the days that I was required to implement a district-created lesson, following a number of fights that seemed to be the result of racial tension between two groups of students who attended our school. These lessons would be taught throughout the following week to ensure that this experience was not repeated. Ironically, these lessons focused on value, encouraging students and teachers to share what mattered most to them and to reflect on how the fights that were taking place might put what we all value most at risk. As I implemented this district-created plan, it was clear that my students were not interested in engaging. Upon recognizing this, I asked them why they were resistant and was informed, “Miss, they don’t really care what I think anyhow, so why does it matter?” In truth, the students were on to something. Though this plan was so much better than most of scripted programs handed to us by the district, as it included space for us to think together as if we might be part of a solution to a problem that seemed to matter a great deal to all of us, we were not included in the creation of the plan, and there was no discussion regarding how we would go about sharing the thinking that came out of these conversations. This was something being done to us, rather than with us.

Recognizing the need for our students to come to know that their voices do, in fact, matter, and believing in the importance of both teachers and students participating in

the conversation regarding how to bring about change within schools and communities, our English department invited our students to join us in our fight to be heard. Within and across classes, we engaged in written and oral conversation about our experiences at this school, inquiring into the concerns of the student body and the faculty, working together to come up with potential solutions. Each English class collaborated on a statement of change and picked a representative to share these words with the administration, various district representatives, school board members, as well as the media. Though this unit of study officially came to a close once our words were voiced, it is my hope that it lived on in various ways for the participating teachers and students, as it did for me. It was this experience that led me to consider what might be possible when students and teachers take on new roles as they negotiate what it means to teach and to learn, particularly within spaces that consistently fail to make room for who they are, what they think, and what they bring with them to school each and every day. I made the choice to pursue a doctoral program in an effort to re-think what teaching and learning might look like in secondary language arts classrooms. This dissertation study aims to do just that.

In 2010, I was asked to facilitate a study group for teacher consultants at my National Writing Project site who wanted to think more about how we might better support multilingual writers in our classrooms. Prior to beginning our work, the teachers shared what they hoped to get out of participating in this professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, Brandsford, Berliner, Cochran-Smith, McDonald, Zeichner, 2005; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2007). One teacher wrote,

I am hoping to think about real, meaningful ways that multilingual learners adapt to language in the classroom. I want to consider my role as a White teacher in a classroom of non-White students, thinking about language with them. I want to think about how to be careful about my teaching and learning-encouraging thoughtfulness about language and helping students learn while being aware of issues of power, culture, race, gender...I want to honor their languages and choices about language while still expanding their understanding of language. (Written reflection, November 11, 2011)

All of the participating teachers worked at schools with large numbers of students who were classified as English learners. However, most of these teachers felt that the professional development experiences provided for them within their schools failed to prepare them to support these students in their growth as multilingual individuals, sustaining their heritage and community language practices (Paris & Alim, 2014) while simultaneously teaching them English. They found that these experiences overlooked the complexities of language, language learning as well as the role that students' and teachers' language played within the classroom. In addition, they voiced frustration that there seemed to be limited opportunities to share their experiences with other teachers, working together in order to consider how they might design instruction that is more relevant. The participating teachers wanted their lessons to be meaningful for them as well as for their students. One teacher wrote,

I am new to teaching, and I don't want my fire put out by feeling defeated with all the restrictions and pressures to 'succeed' (pass a test). I've been furious for weeks now. Hurting, furious, worried. And, I want to make good change. It can be small, it can have faults, but it has to be positive, and it has to be born of active work. (Written reflection, November 16, 2011)

Our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) became a space of "active work," (written reflection, November 16, 2011) one in which we aimed to support each other in creating positive change within our classrooms. We read, thought, and wrote together, reflecting on how we might better honor and sustain our students' languages and identities. And we

shared what we were doing in our own work with students as a result of the thinking we were doing within our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), reflecting with like-minded teachers who were also committed to creating classroom communities that honored linguistic and cultural diversity.

We began our work in the classroom simply by looking for ways to create space within the curriculum to think and talk about language and language use as well as by explicitly inviting students to make choices regarding the use of different languages and dialects within the reading and writing workshop (Van Sluys, 2005). Although additional students chose to code-switch within their writing, and a few made choices to participate in dual language book clubs, there seemed to be a bit of resistance to these changes that we were attempting to implement. During one visit, specifically, I noticed that students in an eighth grade language arts class were primarily code-switching in their writing when using profanity. During this visit, I watched one student who made this choice eagerly raise his hand to share his writing. As he read, he seemed to anticipate the laughter from his peers who understood Spanish. They did not fail him. While it was clear that the writer saw this as an opportunity to entertain his audience, I believe that there was more to his response than we initially understood. I began to wonder if he and others taking up this practice were skeptical about the invitation that they had received, encouraging them to make decisions about language use in this classroom context. I began to question if the students who resisted in this way, as well as in other ways, might have been unconvinced by the sincerity of our request, as it contrasted significantly with messages that they had received regarding language use throughout their histories of schooling.

Though a limited number of students made decisions to read and write in languages and dialects that contrasted with those seemingly valued in schools, students

seemed eager to participate in conversations about language and language use, as well as share their thinking through writing, reflecting on the relationship between language and identity as well as language and positioning. Mattie, a teacher participant in this professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) and in this dissertation study, shared that one student wrote that learning a new language was like “being born all over again,” (field notes, April 14, 2012) living a life in which you are expected to “forget your past” (field notes, April 14, 2012). Another student, accepting the invitation to write in her native language, shared the pride that she had regarding her ability to speak in Spanish. “Yo me siento orgullosa de saber hablar Español” (field notes, April 14, 2012). The conversations we had and the student writing that grew out of this initiative allowed us to know these students better while informing us how much we did not know about their language histories, their perspectives on language, as well as their understandings regarding the choices they made when they spoke as well as when they wrote.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In his 2010 presidential address to the Literacy Research Association, David Reinking (2010) defined research as “a path to a better world.” In addition to being theoretically and methodologically sound, research must strengthen people’s wellbeing. Reinking questioned how often research in the field of literacy education has been successful in accomplishing this pursuit, voicing the need to re-think the metaphors that have informed how we do our work: that of the laboratory and the lens. He claimed that experimental research, which typically asks, ‘What is best?’ often fails to look closely enough at various factors that impact the success and failure of these practices.

Naturalistic research, on the other hand, which tends to ask, ‘What is?’ is often unsuccessful in providing a plan of action to re-think and re-construct what is better understood as a result of the research process.

Reinking believes that both approaches to research have had limited success in influencing practice. In response to this, he recommended that we might look for new metaphors, those that will help us in locating the three pieces that Ellen Lagemann (1997) has argued must be included in all research processes, if we are to close the gap between research and practice: problem-finding, problem-solving, and translational research (Reinking, 2010). Reinking (2010) suggested that the metaphor of engineering might accomplish this, explaining that engineers construct definitive goals in an effort to improve the world. Within this discipline, there is a focus on the different factors that play a role in the success and failure of interventions put into place within a variety of contexts. Engineers typically take on a pragmatic stance, focusing on what works to achieve a goal in a particular context as well as across contexts. As a result, there is recognition that there are many possible solutions to problems, and, therefore, it might be appropriate to draw on the expertise and practices of those in other disciplines as well as the data that is most relevant in order to solve the problem. Maybe most importantly, within the discipline of engineering, there is not an expectation that transformation is immediate. Rather, it takes place through trial and error.

While presenting his talk, Reinking (2010) voiced, “Engineering is an action word.” As it was my hope to build on the “active work” (written reflection, November 16, 2011) of the participants in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith &

Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) who continued to think with me, reflecting on how they might modify their practices in order to learn more about and better support students in their growth as language users, I, too, recognized the value that a metaphor of engineering offered us. For this reason, I drew on design-based research methods (Design-Based Research Collective, 2003) and the other methodologies that live within this realm, sometimes referred to as design based research, (Hoadley, 2002) design research, (Oh & Reeves, 2010) development research, (Conceição, Sherry & Gibson, 2004; Oh & Reeves, 2010), and design experiments (Brown, 1992). Like the Design-Based Research Collective, in this study, I make use of the terminology of “design-based research methods” in order to differentiate this work from that of traditional experimental designs. As a result, I also use the Design-Based Research Collective’s language of “innovation” in contrast to the more commonly used “intervention” (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012; Brown, 1992; Reinking & Bradley, 2004, 2008). Cobb, Confrey, diSessa, Lehrer, and Schauble (2003) explain, “Unlike evaluation research, design-based research views a successful innovation as a joint product of the designed intervention and the context” (p. 7). Because the intervention put into place in this study was designed with the context in mind, we believe that the term “innovation” was more useful in planning for, implementing, and sharing our findings.

In thinking through the design of the innovation we put into place in this study and the roles that the researcher and participating teachers took on in participating in this work, I draw on the work of Engeström (2011) who critiques the ways that researchers and teacher participants have often worked together while conducting design-based

research in the field of education. Engeström explains that, too often, the researcher takes on the role of creator of the intervention, and the teacher is responsible for putting the researcher's intervention into place. This is problematic because design-based research, which has continued to be dictated by the researcher, seems to have grown out of the same linear methodology associated with experimental research, often overlooking the participants' agency (Engeström, 2011). "The linear view ignores what we know of interventions as contested terrains, full of resistance, reinterpretation, and surprises from the actors below" (p. 601). Engeström's thinking is supported by Braha and Reich's (2003) argument that the design process is "iterative," "exploratory," and "chaotic" (Razzouk & Shute, 2012). These moments of "resistance," "reinterpretation," and "surprise" (Engeström, 2011) were important details that helped us think through the potential success or failure of our own innovation.

Rather than approaching this work with the intent of perfecting a particular practice presented as an intervention, interventions must begin with a problem that is characterized by the participants, and rather than being set in advance, interventions should be negotiated, with the intent of the participants developing agency, eventually leading the process (Engeström, 2011). As a result, instead of maintaining control of all variables, a researcher's work should, instead, be focused on "provoking and sustaining an expansive transformation process led and owned by the practitioners" (Engeström, p. 606).

It was important to me that my collaborators and I see our innovations as "open-ended" and "continuously co-configured" (Engeström, 2011, p. 602). As a result, within

this study, we planned a co-constructed innovation: a professional learning community in which the teachers and researcher thought together about language followed by the implementation of a unit of study that was put into place in the classrooms of the participating teachers.

Though I do not explicitly draw on all elements of Reinking & Bradley's (2008) methodological framework for designing, conducting, and recounting formative and design experiments, it was influential in the design of my study and has impacted how I have chosen to communicate what we learned. As a result, throughout this dissertation, I will address 1) the pedagogical goal we chose to investigate, why the goal is valued as important, as well as what previous theory and empirical work speak to accomplishing the goal instructionally 2) the innovation, consistent with a guiding theory, that we believed might have the potential to achieve the pedagogical goal 3) the factors that enhanced and inhibited the effectiveness, efficiency, and appeal of the innovation in regard to achieving the pedagogical goal 4) the modifications made in order to achieve the pedagogical goal as well as 5) the ways in which teaching and learning were transformed as a result of the innovation.

### **Goal of the study**

Reinking & Bradley (2008) suggest that a researcher engaging in design-based research methods or related methodologies state the goals that the study aims to achieve, a justification for the importance of these goals as well as the theoretical framework and related literature that will inform the intervention put into place. This study was designed

to further develop the participating teachers' and students' critical language awareness through an inquiry-based exploration of everyday language practices.

### **Justification of pedagogical goal**

In her introduction to Fecho's *Is This English: Race, Language, and Culture in the Classroom*, Ladson-Billings (2004) describes the "institutional depression" that she has noticed upon spending time in urban schools throughout the country. She writes, "It is tired, lethargic, apathetic, self-destructive, and trapped in a cycle of insignificance" (p. xi).

In reflecting on why students might feel "angry," "apathetic," or perceive that their education has been "insignificant," (p. xi) I can't help but consider how narrowly literacy and language have been viewed within our schools. The New London Group (1996) describes this in more detail, stating, "Literacy pedagogy has been a carefully restricted project-restricted to formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed forms of language," (p. 61) seemingly benefitting mainstream society while marginalizing so many others.

In his forward to Scott et al.'s (2009) *Affirming Students' Right to Their Own Language: Bridging Language Policies and Pedagogical Practices*, Bloom highlights the many locations in which language is defined in the United States. In focusing, specifically, on language as seen by social institutions, Bloom writes,

The primary definition of language in these social institutions in the U.S. is race. That is, varieties of English are aligned with different races and organized hierarchically. Those varieties of English associated with White, Northern, middle- and upper-class communities are perceived as better than those varieties of English associated with groups such as African Americans, Mexicans, and other Latino communities, Southerners, and people from working class backgrounds (p. xiii).

Bloom goes on to explain that even when teachers voice recognition of the role that “non-standard” varieties of English play in the lives of their students, most continue to focus on providing students with access to “the money language” (Bloom, p. xiii). Bloom writes,

It is important to examine and perhaps challenge the dichotomous framing of languages in school (and sometimes home) as either providing access or denying access. To define language as simply a technical skill, as only a vehicle for communication, is to isolate language from history and meaning. (p. xiii)

When we use language, we align ourselves with particular communities, adopting not only their methods of communication but their histories, as well. Bloom writes, “Moving across communities and their histories can be problematic. Not all communities are compatible with each other. Some communities encroach on others, exploiting them for their own benefit or forcing a redefinition” (p. xiv). Bloom concludes his forward by pointing out how, despite this, we rarely take the time to question, “how our definitions of language define what it means for us to be human beings in the world” (p. xv).

It was my belief that inviting both teachers and students to experience an inquiry-based approach to critical language study would allow them to consider this question that has so often been overlooked as they notice and name their own language practices as well as the language practices of their social worlds, in hope of developing what Alim (2005) refers to as an understanding of the “the interconnectedness of language with the larger sociopolitical and sociohistorical phenomena that help to maintain unequal power relations in a still segregated society” (p. 2005).

Through exploring patterns in language (Wolfram, 1995), noticing how language varies according to context (Wolfram, 1995; NCTE, 1994), recognizing attitudes and ideologies about language (NCTE, 1974; NCTE, 1994), considering the role that audience plays in the choices made about language use in both speech and writing (NCTE, 1994), examining the role that language plays in how we communicate (NCTE, 1994), troubling what it means to be “correct,” (Alim & Smitherman, 2012; NCTE, 1994) and problematizing the relationship between social inequalities and language (Alim & Smitherman, 2012), it was my hope that teachers and students would further understand the complexity of language, how it was used, and how it could be used against speakers of languages other than the Dominant American English, (Alim, 2005) terminology that I will use throughout the findings and discussion of this dissertation instead of the more commonly use “Standard American English.”

Alim (2005) argues that engaging students in this kind of work might allow them not only to develop an awareness of their own communicative tools but also create an opportunity for them to consider how they can use their voices to create change for themselves and for others. In addition to developing a better understanding of their students’ everyday language practices, their “ways with words,” (Heath, 1983) it was my hope that engaging teachers in this work had the potential to challenge their beliefs about language diversity, which would, hopefully, impact the ways in which they engaged with students as well as designed a language curriculum.

### **Research questions**

In working toward the goal of further developing the participating teachers’ and students’ critical language awareness, the following research questions informed my data collection and analysis:

1. What might a curriculum aimed at further developing teachers' and students' critical language awareness look like in practice?
2. How did the participating teachers and students respond to this instructional approach?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In his 2011 plenary address to the Literacy Research Association, Donaldo Macedo challenged educational researchers in the field of language and literacy studies to expand our understandings of what it means to engage in research, summoning us to “provide a space where submerged voices can emerge,” the voices of teachers and students “under siege” (Macedo, 2011). Drawing primarily on the work of Giroux (1985), Freire (2007), Freire and Macedo (1987), Fairclough (2001) and Gee (2012), my study was situated within a critical and culturally sustaining framework. I will begin by addressing how the ideas of these scholars informed the design of my study. I will then move into a discussion of my own beliefs and understandings about language, demonstrating how my thinking as well as the pedagogical practices that the participating teachers and I implemented in this study were informed by critical and culturally sustaining perspectives on language and literacy.

### **Curriculum through a critical lens**

Having spent the last fifteen years working in public schools, primarily urban public schools that serve students of color, many of whom speak languages other than English as well as varieties of English that are not always valued in these spaces, I have both witnessed and experienced oppression, my own as well as that of my students. Like other teachers “under siege,” (Macedo, 2011) I have been handed a scripted curriculum, I have been ordered to teach to a test, I have internalized that my expertise paired with my

knowledge of who my students are and what they know is not enough. At times, this silencing meant that I, too, took on the role of oppressor, making curricular choices that overlooked the knowledge of my students, failing to recognize the “hidden curriculum” (Apple, 2004) or “hidden agenda” (Fairclough, 2001) that positions particular cultural resources as more valuable than others, cultural resources that were often different than those my students brought with them to the classroom. Giroux’s (1985) call for the repositioning of teachers as transformative intellectuals and Freire’s (1970) critical curriculum theory provide insight regarding what it might mean to “enter into communion” (p. 61) with teachers and students who experience oppression within public education in order to re-think how teaching and learning manifests in secondary language arts classes.

### ***Teachers as transformative intellectuals***

Giroux (1985) writes, “Schools are not neutral sites and teachers cannot assume the posture of being neutral either” (p. 379). Teachers embody what it means to be “transformative intellectuals” (p. 49) when they commit themselves to enacting pedagogies that prepare all students to be “active, critical citizens” (p. 379), dedicated to overcoming the oppression that has limited who they and others might become. Giroux refers to this work as “making the pedagogical more political and the political more pedagogical” (p. 379). When teachers take on this identity, re-claiming how time is spent in their classrooms, students and teachers engage in dialogue, questioning what counts as knowledge, with the goal of creating a more just world. Freire’s (2007) call for a problem-posing pedagogy, dialogue and praxis, as well as the journey toward conscientization lays a foundation for how we might go about transforming what teaching

and learning look like in secondary language arts classrooms, specifically in re-thinking how language study is approached.

### ***Problem-posing pedagogy***

A problem-posing pedagogy requires that we re-think the traditional relationship of teacher and student. Rather than being positioned as a “container” or “receptacle” (Freire, 2007, p. 73) into which the teacher will deposit knowledge, students are seen as “co-investigators,” working together with teachers in an effort to “unveil reality” (p. 83). Through participating in a problem-posing pedagogy, teachers and students come to see their world as “a reality in process,” (p. 83) one that has the potential to become something else if acted upon.

### ***Dialogue and praxis***

Freire (2007) writes, “To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world, in its turn, reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*” (p. 88). This process takes place when individuals come together to make sense of the world. Through the sharing of ideas, namers of the world participate in an act of “creation,” which eventually leads to “recreation” (p. 89). Freire writes that dialogue cannot exist if those in conversation fail to have love for the world, faith in humankind, humility, as well as hope. In addition, those who engage in dialogue must engage in critical thinking. Freire defines this as, “thinking, which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved” (p. 92). Authentic praxis can only take place if critical reflection is paired with action. And it is only through praxis that individuals will progress to conscientization, or what Freire refers to as the move toward humanization.

### ***Conscientization***

Freire (2007) writes that education should focus on the students' "realities," through the investigation of their "thematic universe" (p. 96), providing individuals with opportunities to make sense of the "limit-situations," (p. 102) that impact their lives, rather than internalizing a "theme of silence," (p. 106) that is common when limit-situations feel unbeatable. The investigation of students' thematic universe and reflection on the limit situations that impact their lives leads to dialogue about the ways these generative themes play out in students' communities and in the world. Conscientization, however, only takes place once a decision has been made to take action, in an effort to reclaim humanity, rejecting "the status of *objects* to assume the status of historical *Subjects*" (p. 160), developing a true awareness of the world, one's role within it, and one's ability to make change.

### **Culturally sustaining pedagogy**

Building on the work of Ladson-Billing (1995) and other scholars who made efforts to reposition the linguistic, cultural and literate practices of working class communities in response to deficit approaches to teaching and learning, Paris (2012) and Paris and Alim (2014) argue the need to implement a culturally sustaining pedagogy, one that "seeks to perpetuate and foster-to sustain-linguistic, literate and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (Paris, 2012, p. 93). Ladson-Billings (2014) explains that instead of focusing on one racial or ethnic group, culturally sustaining pedagogy, "points to the shifts of identity that now move us toward a hybridity, fluidity, and complexity never before considered in schools and classrooms" (p. 82). Specifying how this stance and framework extends previous conceptualizations of asset pedagogies, Alim & Paris explain, 1) Rather than measuring students against White, middle class norms, a culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to "explore, honor, extend, and, at times,

problematize heritage and community practices” (p. 86). 2) Rather than drawing on “overdeterministic links between race and language and literacy and cultural practices,” (p. 90) a culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to make sense of the ways that youth are enacting race, ethnicity, language, literacy and cultural practices in conventional and new ways and 3) Rather than overlooking how youth practices can be “simultaneously progressive and oppressive,” (p. 93) a culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to teach critical reflexivity through the inclusion of and reflection on these practices.

### **Critical language awareness**

Drawing on the key ideas taken in up in Freire’s critical curriculum theory as well as Paris (2012) and Paris & Alim’s (2014) call for a culturally sustaining pedagogy, Freire & Macedo (1987) focus, specifically, on the repositioning of language education. They write,

Educators must develop an emancipatory literacy program informed by a radical pedagogy so that the students’ language will cease to provide its speakers the experience of subordination and, moreover, may be brandished as a weapon of resistance to the dominance of the Standard English. (p. 154)

Many scholars argue that this can happen through revising our pedagogies, aiming to further develop students’ critical language awareness, creating an opportunity for students to name and notice their own language practices and the language practices of their social worlds, discussing how these practices connect with the larger sociopolitical and sociohistorical landscape that perpetuates unequal power relations within society (Alim, 2005, 2007; Alim & Smitherman, 2012; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009; Paris, 2011).

### **Language as a social practice**

Although there are a number of different ways to approach language study in educational contexts as well as within research, Fairclough (2001) voices the need for

critical language study, taking the stance that language is socially determined and should be studied as so. Fairclough expands on the discourse view of language by making the following claims: 1) “Language is a part of society, and not somehow external to it,” 2) “Language is a social process,” 3) “Language is a socially conditioned process, conditioned, that is, by other (non-linguistic) parts of society” (pp. 18-19). Fairclough’s beliefs align with my own perspectives on literacy and language. Rather than seeing literacy as a set of prescribed skills, placed in opposition to illiteracy, I align myself with scholars in New Literacy Studies who, instead, view literacy as a set of practices situated within particular social settings and relations (Barton, 1994; Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 2012; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Scribner & Cole, 1981). It is my belief that we engage in these practices in order to define the world to ourselves and to others (Barton, 1994), and our feelings and values regarding the literacy practices in which we engage influence what we do, how we think, as well as the ways in which we are positioned and the ways in which we position others (Gee, 2012; Street, 1984).

Like “literacy,” the term “language” is also confounded. This word is often used to refer, specifically, to the grammar and structure of a language (Gee, 2012). In actuality, knowing a language means so much more. Gee (2012) argues that it is quite possible to use a language even if a speaker’s knowledge of the grammar of that language is limited. In addition, one can know the grammar of a language but fail to act in a way that supports what is being spoken. He explains, “In socially situated language use, one must simultaneously say the ‘right’ thing, do the ‘right’ thing and in such saying and doing also express the ‘right’ beliefs, values, and attitudes” (p.148). If students are to journey toward conscientization, it is necessary for them to come to understand the complexities of language in practice, in order to counter what Gee refers to as the “master myths” (p. 93) that lead to oppression.

Though institutions, like education, are built on particular Discourses (Gee, 2012) that have led to oppression, both students and teachers need opportunities to develop hope, once again, through their engagement in the praxis, reflecting on what they notice within their own lives as well as within the world, taking action, and in doing so, revising and reclaiming the Discourses that have seemed to limit who they, as well as others, can become. Freire (1997) writes,

Hope is an ontological need. Hopelessness is but hope that has lost its bearings, and becomes a distortion of that ontological need. When it becomes a program, hopelessness paralyzes us, immobilizes us. We succumb to fatalism, and then it becomes impossible to muster the strength we absolutely need for a fierce struggle that will re-create the world (p. 8).

A critical and culturally sustaining approach to teaching and learning and, more specifically, a critical and culturally sustaining approach to language study are pathways to hope, as they create space for teachers, students, and researchers to question and confront the world as we know it in order to create a culture of productive diversity (New London Group, 1996) both inside and outside of the classroom.

## **OVERVIEW OF DISSERTATION**

In this chapter, I told the story that led to the design of this dissertation study. In addition, I discussed my reasoning for drawing on design-based research methods, the pedagogical goal that the participating teachers and I aimed to achieve through the design of our “continuously co-configured” (Engström, 2011, p. 602) innovation, as well as justification for the goal that we chose to pursue. I concluded this chapter by presenting the critical and culturally sustaining theoretical framework that informed my analysis.

In chapter two of this dissertation, I review the literature that demonstrates, along with the justification of the pedagogical goal, the value of planning for, implementing

and reporting on the design of an inquiry-based approach to critical language study as a means of further developing teachers' and students' critical language awareness.

In chapter three, I highlight the methodology on which I drew, the contexts and participants, as well as the data sources I collected to better understand if we were successful in accomplishing the pedagogical goal. In addition, I discuss my approach to analysis in this study and conclude with a discussion of my own positionality.

In chapters four and five, I present the findings that grew out of iterative analysis, discussing the factors that enhanced and inhibited success as well as the modifications that we found necessary to implement in an effort to accomplish our goal.

In chapter six, I embed comparative analysis as I make four assertions in response to retrospective analysis, address what the participating teachers learned as they inquired into language with their students, and discuss the success of the pedagogical goal, as well as implications for teacher education, language arts education, and future research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, I review the empirical literature that supported us in the design of our co-constructed innovation, which was created with the goal of further developing the participating teachers' and students' critical language awareness through an inquiry-based exploration of everyday language practices.

In this literature review, I begin by exploring the literature on the role that language study has played in secondary education, focusing in on three common approaches and arguing the need for inquiry-based critical language study as a method of further developing students' critical language awareness. I conclude by drawing on the literature to discuss how we might prepare teachers to facilitate this work in their own classrooms, engaging them in practices that will further develop their critical language awareness, as well.

### **LANGUAGE STUDY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CLASSROOM**

Despite the groundbreaking work of scholars like Heath (1983), Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992), Lee (2001) and Gutiérrez (2008), who have argued that students' everyday language practices are resources that should be recognized and drawn on in academic settings, policies that influence classroom practices often fail to acknowledge this. Paris (2012) wrote,

English-only policies; narrow decontextualized language and literacy programs and policies in poor communities of color; and even one state's explicit ban on studying the histories, literature, and struggles of particular ethnic groups (see Arizona House Bill 2281) are examples of the return to ever-more explicit deficit perspectives, policies and pedagogies. (p. 95)

Although the Common Core State Standards' College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices &

Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) communicate recognition of the need to be able to understand different languages, varieties, and registers in order to communicate in a pluralistic society, stating that students should have “knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading and listening,” (CCRA.L.3) there is an expectation that students “demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking” (CCRA.L.1). This suggests that particular language practices are valued and should, therefore, be drawn on when speaking and writing in schools.

In 2003, NCTE voiced concern with the intolerance for language diversity within our schools, which seemed to be reinforced by No Child Left Behind, under the guise of providing each and every student with equal educational opportunities. In response to this, NCTE thought it necessary to revisit and reaffirm CCCC’s 1974 resolution on Students’ Right to Their Own Language. The CCCC executive committee rejected the idea that there is one standard American dialect and recommended that teachers must participate in professional development that provides them with tools to create classroom spaces in which diversity is valued and students are able to draw upon and make use of their entire linguistic repertoire (Kinloch, 2005; Scott, Straker & Katz, 2009; Smitherman & Villanueva, 2003).

### **Grammar study tradition**

Unfortunately, language study, when it plays a role within language arts education, has continued to take one of three forms that Wolfram (1998) illustrates in his chapter, “Dialect Awareness and the Study of Language.” It may live within the grammar study tradition, which he describes as a form of instruction that includes exercises asking

students to identify and classify parts of speech as well as the role that these parts of speech play within the structure of sentences, written in what is commonly referred to as “Written Standard English” (Speicher & Bielanski, 2000, p. 149). Although this approach to instruction is probably the most common of the three that will be discussed, experimental studies conducted over the past fifty years have repeatedly demonstrated that the teaching of formal grammar has little impact on the quality of students’ writing and students’ ability to write without error (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones & Schoerr, 1963; Ellie, Barham, Lamb & Wyllie, 1976; Hillocks & Smith, 2003). And though popular opinion would suggest that there is, in fact, a “Standard English” that we must strive to achieve in both spoken and written communication, linguists argue that there is not one true form of correctness (Davila, 2012; Wolfram, 1994; Speicher & Bielanski, 2000). Rather, all dialects are equal in linguistic terms (Adger, Wolfram, and Christian, 2007; Baugh, 1983; Labov, 1970), each exhibiting lexical, phonological, grammatical, morphological, semantic and pragmatic features that deviate in some way from other dialects of the same language (Speicher & Bielanski, 2000).

In considering how a language becomes known as the “standard,” Alim and Smitherman (2012) state, “It is the language and communicative norms of those in power, in any society, that tend to be labeled as ‘standard,’ ‘official,’ ‘normal,’ ‘appropriate,’ and so on” (p. 171), making an argument that “Standard English” is, in fact, a socially constructed concept that has been introduced and maintained by those in positions of power whose standard language ideology (Lippi-Green, 1997; Speicher & Bielanski, 2000) has influenced practices and policies put into place by educational institutions. In addition, linguists detail a variety of differences between speech and writing, including but not limited to the medium (auditory vs. visual), how it is acquired (naturally vs. taught/learned), how it is planned for (unplanned vs. planned/revised), as

well as the timeframe in which it occupies space (short-lived vs. permanent) (Lippi-Green, 1997; Milroy & Milroy, 1991). Though prescriptivists refute these claims, they have failed to produce a definition of a spoken standard that addresses everyday speech (Speicher & Biekanski, 2000).

### **Language usage tradition**

Wolfram (1995) also discusses the language usage tradition, which often takes the form of contrastive analysis. This instructional approach typically focuses on the ways that “Standard English” compares to “non-standard” varieties of English and is the basis of Wheeler and Sword’s (2004, 2006, 2010) work in which they encourage teachers to build on students’ existing knowledge in order to teach what is sometimes referred to as “academic English,” a term contested by critical scholars (Alim & Smitherman, 2012). Although a number of scholars and researchers have encouraged the use of this approach over the years (Anderson-Janniere, 2001; Palacas, 2004; Rickford, 1999b; Smith, 2001), Kirkland and Jackson (2009) voice concern that this method of instruction has the potential to fail students if teachers disregard the relationship of language, identity, and power, using this method as a way to “scaffold (up) to AE,” (p. 137), categorizing African American language (AAL) and all other home languages and dialects that are positioned as starting points, as well as those who speak these languages and dialects, as “inferior” (p. 137). Kirkland and Jackson (2009) base these claims on their study in which they found that students’ attitudes about language did not change after engaging in six months of contrastive analysis. Rather, students “retained and sometimes reinforced” (p. 140) negative perceptions of AAL.

## **The associative tradition of language study**

Wolfram (1995) refers to the third instructional approach to language study within language arts education as “the associative tradition of language study,” making note of the conventions of language commonly used within particular genres as well as the study of “expressive language registers,” (p. 168) ways that language is used within literary genres to depict characters and the communities in which these characters participate (p. 168). Wolfram explains that while the associative tradition of language study, unlike the grammar study tradition and the language usage tradition, does not seek to eliminate variation, it does involve studying language that often appears in the form of “eye dialect” (p. 169), which he defines as “conventionalized spelling differences that indicate social and regional dialects” (p. 169), written in an effort to provide the effect of dialect for the reader, rather than presenting this dialect in an a systematic way. In addition to the fact that the models presented within literature are inaccurate representations, Hartwell (1985) argues that the associative language tradition is likely to have little effect on students’ language use within their own writing, as this kind of growth necessitates that students “struggle with and through language toward meaning” (p. 124).

## **DEVELOPING STUDENTS’ LANGUAGE AWARENESS**

Reflecting on these three approaches to language instruction, which either exclude variation and/or misrepresent it, Wolfram (1995) argues for the need to implement a curriculum on language variation as an object of study. He writes,

Myths about language variation, the linguistic status of dialect structures, and the socioeducational implications of dialect divergence are deeply rooted in language arts education. And they need to be confronted as honestly as any other unjustified set of beliefs in other disciplines...At the very least, then, a language arts curriculum should assume responsibility for replacing the established mythology about language differences with factual information. (p. 170)

The myths that Wolfram refers to have regularly led to language discrimination in our schools as well as in society (Lippi-Green, 1997; Zuidema, 2005). In order to confront these myths, Wolfram (1995) argues that it is necessary for students to explore how language varieties have developed, how they are maintained, and the role that they have served throughout the history of American English in students' K-12 education, so students come to understand that dialect difference does not signal a deficiency.

To address these concerns, Wolfram proposes the implementation of a language awareness program, voicing support of NCTE's (1994) resolution, which called for the appointment of a committee to determine how best to incorporate language awareness into teacher education as well as into classroom instruction, defining what these practices might look like. This resolution states,

Language awareness includes examining how language varies in a range of social and cultural settings; examining how people's attitudes vary towards language across culture, class, gender, and generation; examining how oral and written language affects listeners and readers; examining how 'correctness' in language reflects social-political-economic values; examining how the structure of language works from a descriptive perspective; and examining how first and second languages are acquired.

Wolfram (1995) recommends that students explore patterns of language, attitudes about language, and the role that language plays in the ways that we communicate through the process of scientific inquiry. He writes, "Students can hypothesize about certain forms of language and then check them out on the basis of actual usage pattern," (p. 172) which contrasts with the more traditional approach, commonly seen within our schools, in which students are being taught a fixed set of rules, legitimizing many of the common myths that have led to widespread linguisticism (Lippi-Green, 1997; Zuidema, 2005).

Andrews (2010) argues that rather than teaching a "fixed code" to students, suggesting that there is one correct way to speak and to write in all circumstances,

language exploration should aim to develop students' metalinguistic awareness. He writes,

As students become more aware of the totality of language (the whole elephant, that is, not just the trunk, tusk or leg) and how its use varies, normally and legitimately, from setting to setting, they will become more sensitive to the communication demands in each context and will become more competent in using language confidently and efficiently. (p. 13)

In order to work with students to develop their language awareness, Andrews (2010) suggests that teachers and students explore “real language as it is used by real people for real purposes,” (p.19), that the focus is on meaning, that there is a recognition that language production is developmental, that multiple elements of language are studied in an effort to explore the ways that language works, and that the study of language is “student centered and inquiry oriented” (Andrews, 2010, p. 21).

Through creating space within the curriculum for students to notice and name their own language practices in addition to the language of their social worlds, (Alim & Smitherman, 2012) teachers can engage students in both “metacognitive instructional conversations” (Lee, 2007; Martinez, 2010), reflecting on the choices they make as language users across interactions as well as “metalinguistic conversations” (Martinez, 2010) positioning students as experts of their own language practices while assisting them in making connections between the practices they currently make use of and those that are often being asked of them in academic settings.

### **INQUIRY-BASED APPROACHES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING**

In discussing the role of inquiry in teaching and learning, Wells (1995) writes,

I propose that the most effective learning takes place when the learner, faced with a question or problem arising from an inquiry to which he or she is committed is helped to master the relevant cultural resources in order to construct a solution. (p. 233)

It is important to note that inquiry work in the classroom is not identical to a student-generated curriculum (Wells, 2002; Wilhelm, 2007). Wilhelm (2007) writes, “To qualify as inquiry, a project must build upon and apply disciplinary understanding” (p. 13). The questions that students pose come from their participation in planned activities in which they are engaged (Wells, 2002) and the teacher acts as a co-collaborator, apprenticing and guiding students in their development of disciplinary understandings (Wilhelm, 2006).

Wells (1995) describes characteristics of successful student inquiry, voicing that inquiry must begin with “intense engagement” (p. 241), allowing students to develop interest and to pose authentic questions, related to the topic that the class is taking up. The students must see these questions as meaningful, so the desire is there to persevere until they are satisfied with what they have come to know. He explains that inquiry topics do not always begin as problem statements. They may start out as wonderings or noticings that become questions to be explored through inquiry as a result of focused observation (Wells, 1995). Drawing on the work of Dewey (1938), Short argues in an interview that she believes these questions grow out of tensions that are significant in the lives of learners engaging in this work (Garcia, 2011). Similarly, the questions that are posed influence how the learner proceeds with the inquiry work (Wells, 1995; Wells, 2002). Students with interest in understanding a particular phenomenon will read and research with this goal in mind, asking questions and critically evaluating what they find, making space to share their thinking with their peers as well as with knowledgeable experts (Meyer & Sawyer, 2006; Wells, 1995, 2001, 2002; Wilhelm, 2007) while

engaging in the process of inquiry, participating in what Wells (2001) refers to as “collaborative knowledge building” (p. 10).

Meyer and Sawyer (2006) write that engaging in the process of inquiry “postpones the rush to conclusions and encourages divergent thinking,” (p. 49) allowing learners not only to demarcate problems but also to consider the role that these problems play in their own lives as well as in the lives of others (Meyer & Sawyer, 2006). Even more importantly, engaging in inquiry has the potential to lead individuals to act on what they have learned in an effort to create positive change (Freire, 2007; Meyer & Sawyer, 2006). This approach to learning something new mirrors the way that individuals learn outside of the classroom (Wilhelm, 2006). Short believes that in order to transform teaching, we must provide opportunities for students to engage in “processes that are natural to learning,” (Garcia, 2011, p. 129). This can be accomplished through embracing inquiry as stance (Garcia, 2011, p. 129).

After engaging in an inquiry process, it is important for students to present what they have learned through sharing their thinking with an audience, as the audience might offer perspectives that students had not initially considered. But more than this, preparing for a presentation, of some sort, requires students to organize themselves and clarify what they have come to know (Wells, 1995).

In addition to discussing the characteristics of successful student inquiry work in the classroom, Wells (1995) presents a model of an inquiry-oriented curriculum, based on his observations in classrooms in which this approach to teaching and learning was valued. In an effort to engage students in the process early on, Wells recommends that care be put into the “launching of the theme” (p. 243) prior to participating in a research process involving observation, experimentation, and interviewing. As students participate in the inquiry process, they will return to this evidence in an effort to make sense of it

during the interpretation phase of this process, considering whether or not they need to revise their question and/or plan for further research as well as to determine when an answer has grown out of this work, and they feel ready to share what they have learned with an audience. The last stage of the process is reflection. Wells (1995) explains that it is important that the students have opportunities to reflect not only on what they have learned, keeping in mind what questions were answered, what new questions grew out of this work, as well as how the different inquiry projects supported each other and added to the class' understanding about the topic being explored. In addition, students need opportunities to reflect on the inquiry process in which they participated, thinking deeply about the ways that they worked together and considering what it means to engage in practices associated with a particular discipline in order to come to new understandings. Through engaging in this reflection, students can develop metacognitive awareness, allowing them to internalize the process of engaging in inquiry, so this becomes an approach to learning rather than just an isolated project on which the students are working.

### **Inquiry into language**

Many scholars argue that language study in the classroom must be informed by the work of linguists, focusing, specifically, on the questions that sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists ask about language and language use as well as the methods they engage in to come to new understandings (Bomer, 2011; Goodman, 2003; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009; Wolfram, 1995). Goodman (2003) writes,

The study of language is always changing. New questions are being formulated. New knowledge is discovered and being considered, and the field is filled with debate and controversy. It is within this spirit of open-ended scientific inquiry into language issues that teachers and students become interested in and excited about exploring questions and ideas about language and expanding their knowledge use and its forms. (p. 19)

Students might inquire into language in an effort to explore language use, language processes, language variation, language history and development, language form, as well as the power and politics of language (Goodman, 2003), and language study can live in different places within the curriculum. Teachers can begin to invite students to think more deeply about language and language use through critical moment teaching (Goodman, 2003), strategy lessons (Andrews, 2010; Brown, 2009; Goodman, 2003), as well as through the implementation of theme cycles or units of study (Bomer, 2011; Goodman, 2003) that grow out of topics that come up within the classroom or that might simply be introduced because the teacher believes that the class would benefit from taking time to explore specific language topics (Goodman, 2003).

Goodman (2003) describes the process of inquiring into language as “recursive” (p. 33) and “interrelated,” (p. 33) rather than linear. Like Wells (1995), Goodman suggests that teachers begin with what she refers to as planned language study, organizing activities and creating a learning environment that will invite students to think and wonder in ways that will prepare them to eventually pursue personal inquiry topics. Students might be given an opportunity to talk about and reflect on what they have experienced, re-evaluating their initial perspectives in order to consider what they are now thinking. During this time, students will pose questions and draw on what they have learned to discuss what they might come to find as they further explore this issue. Goodman claims it is a time “to wander” (p. 32) and “to wonder,” (p. 32) through reading, writing, thinking, doodling, and daydreaming. After conducting the inquiry,

students prepare for presentations in which they will voice what they have learned through engaging in the process of inquiry. Goodman writes, “As students name what they are thinking about, share it with others, and receive response, they broaden their thinking and use of language” (p. 32).

Within his chapter, “Making More of Grammar: Studying Language Like Linguists,” Bomer (2011) suggests a number of topics for language study that might be taken up in a secondary language arts class, such as code-switching, dialects, contrasts among different languages’ patterns and rules, contrasts among different writing systems, contrasts between oral and written language, language and power, early language and literacy learning, how people learn new languages and literacies, language and the Internet, sounding right and sounding wrong, as well as everyday metaphor and interpretation. Bomer describes how he envisions this work in the classroom.

An inquiry into language should proceed with respect for the intelligence and appropriateness of all language forms within their communities of use. It should be based on empirical observation of people actually using language, with special attention to everyday speech in students’ communities outside school. It’s an investigation that seeks difference-that tries to understand how people accomplish things with language, how their choices about how to say things reflect specific functions. The question isn’t whether things are being said right or wrong but how language is functioning for a particular individual within a specific language group. (p. 275)

Respect for the intelligence and appropriateness of all language forms requires the design and implementation of a curriculum that recognizes what Alim (2007) refers to as the “cultural linguistic reality” (p. 17) of the participating students’ lives or what Kinloch (2005) references as the importance of “doing language,” (p. 97). Alim & Smitherman (2012) propose that teachers introduce students to the ethnography of communication, providing them with tools to study their own language as well as the language of their social worlds in order to develop an awareness of sociolinguistic variation in order to

problematize the relationship between linguistic diversity and social inequalities. This instructional approach seeks to honor linguistic pluralism (Paris, 2009), recognizing the many “Englishes” (Kirkland, 2010) young people speak, positioning them and other languages spoken by the students as worthy of study.

Though Goodman (2003) and Andrews (2010) both make claims that students are likely to become better language users as a result of inquiring into language, which will lead them to increase their understanding regarding the complexity of language as well as the ways that language works, Alim (2004) and Fairclough (2001) argue that our goal should not be merely to build on students’ language practices in an effort to introduce them to the communicative norms of those in power. Rather, we might redefine “better language users” as those who are “rhetorically astute and agile,” (Guerra, 2012), those who are able to make informed choices about how best to communicate, considering their audience, their context, and their purpose, preparing students to participate in a multilingual society and a globalized economy (Bomer, 2011).

### **CRITICAL LANGUAGE STUDY**

Though both Goodman (2003) and Bomer (2011) discuss the implementation of theme studies or personal inquiry work around the topic of language and power, inquiry-based approaches to language study have sometimes focused, primarily, on sociolinguistic variation. Although sociolinguistics has often been seen as an approach to language study that challenges linguistic proper, a branch of language study in which language is positioned as “a potential, a system, an abstract competence” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 5) rather than a practice, Fairclough (2001) argues that sociolinguistics has its roots in positivist conceptions of social science and is limited because of this. He writes,

Sociolinguistic variation in a particular society tends to be seen in terms of sets of facts to be observed and described using methods analogous to those of natural science. Sociolinguistics is strong on “what?” questions (what are the facts of variation?) but weak on “why?” and “how?” questions (why are the facts as they are?; how-in terms of the development of social relationships of power-was the existing sociolinguistic order brought into being?; how is it sustained?; and how might it be changed to the advantage of those who are dominated by it?). (p. 6)

Alim and Smitherman (2012) discuss the importance of teaching a critical linguistic perspective in our schools, voicing that many have been successful in presenting a curriculum that addresses variation but continue to struggle in demonstrating the relationship between linguistic variation and social inequalities, sharing with students that “the game’s been rigged” (p. 192) and thinking with them about “how they can work to change it” (p. 192).

By asking different questions we can begin to think differently-that is critically-about the relationships between language, racism, education, and power in society. By asking different kinds of questions, we can stop silently legitimizing “standard English” and tacitly standardizing “Whiteness.” (p. 191)

Though many argue for the need for a critical linguistic approach to language study, also referred to as “critical language awareness” or a “critical language pedagogy,” there are a limited number of empirical studies that describe what this might look like as well as the effectiveness of this approach. Most recently, Godley and Loretto (2013), Godley and Escher (2012), and Chisholm and Godley (2011) discuss data collected during a three-year partnership between a university and an urban high school working together to design and implement inquiry-based language and grammar instruction. These studies detail the practices of the teacher facilitating inquiry-based instruction, the moves made by students participating in inquiry-based small group discussion, and the perspectives of students regarding language use in the classroom after participating in this three day unit of study.

In the most recent study, Godley and Loretto (2013) examined the ways that a teacher created space for students' counter-narratives during a three-day inquiry-based unit on language variation, identity, and power. This teacher provided opportunities for explicit conversation about racism, racial identity, and social class while students shared counter-narratives about language. This re-positioned students' experiences and perspectives as "official academic knowledge" (p. 325) Though some have argued that it can be difficult for a White teacher who does not identify as a speaker of AAVE, to create a space in which the participating students, who identify as speakers of AAVE, feel comfortable voicing counter-narratives about language, race, and identity in the classroom, Godley and Loretto (2013) comment that "it is both possible and relevant to students' academic development" (p. 326).

In describing Mrs. Allen's practices, Godley and Loretto point out that she did not push the students to search for solutions or come to a consensus. Through asking questions, encouraging her students to further develop their thinking, and through sharing her own counter-narratives that contrasted with master narratives commonly voiced about language and language use, Ms. Allen created a classroom space that allowed for "multiple points of view, tensions, hybrid identities," (p. 325). In contrast to the scholarship that suggests that students need explicit instruction in code-switching, the participating students' counter-narratives suggested that they made deliberate choices regarding when they chose to code-switch between what some refer to as "SE" and AAVE. In addition, many of the participating students viewed "SE" as a part of their identities, rather than simply an expectation required of them within academic settings.

While Godley and Loretto (2013) voiced that students benefitted from participating in Mrs. Allen's critical language pedagogy, they believe that a three-day unit might not have been enough time to ensure that the conversations in which the

students engaged had lasting effects. In addition, they note that within these conversations, there was little differentiation between patterns of grammar, vocabulary, or style. Referencing the work of Brown (2006), Godley and Loretto (2013) write,

We believe that when students learn a sociolinguistic meta-language for the distinct facets of language variation-including terms like dialects, registers, grammar, accent, and slang-they can better untangle linguistic discrimination based on age, economic status, or race from issues of formality, politeness, and professionalism. (p. 325)

Rather than using specific terminology, students often discussed race and language in “general, abstract ways,” (p. 325). In addition to taking the time to introduce students to sociolinguistic meta-language, teachers engaging in critical conversations about language, race, and identity with students might make efforts to ask questions, ensuring that students specify their use of deictic markers, so the master narratives that are being confronted are clear for all participating in the conversation (Godley & Loretto, 2013).

Chisholm and Godley’s (2011) study focused on one small group discussion that took place in the classroom described in Godley and Loretto’s (2013) study. During this small group discussion, three students who self-identified as African-American shared their thinking in response to five questions, posed by their teacher, in which they were asked to consider the relationships between variation, identity and power. Following this discussion, Chisholm and Godley shared transcripts with two of the student participants, asking them follow up questions and inviting them to share their thinking about the purposes of the unit in which they participated. In analyzing the data, the researchers, referencing the work of Wells (1999) believed that the participating students accomplished the learning goals of this unit of study because they engaged in “high-quality, co-constructed collective argumentation through an inquiry-based discussion of language variation, identity, and power” (p.459). Within this conversation, students

questioned dominant beliefs and voiced new understandings about sociolinguistic concepts through their negotiation of evidence. However, the researchers noted that although students developed further awareness of their own prejudice, there was also evidence that some students continued to internalize beliefs that AAVE was inferior to other varieties of English. As a result, the researchers recommend sequencing language instruction, beginning with opportunities for students to notice and name their own language practices, moving toward the exploration of language and discrimination in American society.

Godley and Escher's (2012) study reported on students' thinking, as seen in written responses, regarding student language use within English language arts classes. After participating in the three-day unit of language variation, identity, and power, students were asked to respond to a prompt: "Based on what you learned from our discussion about language in the film *American Tongues*, what kind of language and dialect(s) do you think students should speak in English class?" Within this study, 45% of the students voiced that AAVE should be used in class, 35% voiced that both AAVE and SE should be used in class, and 20% argued that only SE should be used in class. Students justified their positions based on (1) their fear of the ways that others might position them (2) their desire to communicate effectively (3) their desire to be seen as respectful as well as (4) their understanding of the relationship between language choice and both individual and group identity. Godley and Escher suggest that spaces need to be created within English language arts classes to discuss different perspectives on language use, and the researchers argue that teachers need to explicitly share their expectations about spoken language use in the classroom, considering when students will have opportunities to practice the use of SE and when they might, instead, speak in what the researchers defined as "spontaneous, comfortable ways" (p. 712). In addition,

conversations about language use should come out of the exploration of “authentic examples of language use or scenarios” (p. 711).

The unit of study discussed in Godley and Loretto (2013), Chisholm and Godley (2011) and Godley and Escher (2012) was designed after reviewing the implementation of the unit highlighted in Godley and Minnici’s (2008) study. Students participating in this unit of study were provided with opportunities to consider and discuss language ideologies present in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, engage in conversations about language variation in response to *American Tongues*, attend a talk presented by an African-American doctoral student who shared his experience with code-switching, discussing the relationship between language and power, and experience contrastive analysis, working with the class to compare AAVE to academic English.

Godley and Minnici (2008) found that participating in the unit gave the students an opportunity to reflect on their linguistic experiences as well as on the messages they were sent in schools and in society about language use, challenging dominant language ideologies that impacted students’ lives on a daily basis. After participating in the unit, only 17% of students felt that people should speak the privileged dialects of English at all times, compared to 46% of the students who voiced that this was important prior to participating in this unit of study.

Fecho (2000) and Fecho et al. (2006) describe the design and implementation of critical language pedagogy in Fecho’s urban secondary English class, detailing the curriculum, itself, as well as exploring the experience of three participating students and Fecho, himself, who taught this unit of study in addition to acting as the researcher. It was Fecho’s hope that through engaging in critical inquiry, his students would examine the language around them and begin to think about how this language impacted their individual lives.

The intent was to neither teach mainstream codes nor dialects directly, but instead to create academic situations in which students could look at the way language transacted with their lives and the lives of others and then speculate what future encounters with language might hold in store. (p. 191)

To encourage students to participate in this thinking process, Fecho designed three inquiry projects. Early in the year, students looked at three texts, focusing on what each said about language and how it was used. The next inquiry project required students to write an autobiographical inquiry into language. As their final project, students designed their own investigations about language, examining topics such as code-switching, slang, and profanity. After coming up with a question, students collected data and reported on what they found.

Although Fecho designed these projects, the students picked areas of inquiry that were meaningful to them. They took on the role of researcher, asking the questions, collecting and analyzing the data, and reporting conclusions. These inquiry projects led to student-directed discussion in the classroom regarding the ways that language impacted the students' everyday lives.

Looking closely at his students' experiences participating in this unit of critical language study, Fecho (2000) reflected on his own surprise at the diversity of student perspectives in his class regarding language and language use. Through implementing this unit of study, Fecho came to the conclusion, "Sustaining multiple perspectives and not pushing for consensus should be the goal of an inquiry classroom" (p. 390). Fecho found that when students engaged in conversations with those who shared different perspectives and authentically investigated language use, they had opportunities to "extend, deepen, and complicate" (p. 388) their initial understandings of language and language in practice in addition to growing as learners, as a result of participating in an inquiry-oriented curriculum. For example, many students developed understandings,

sharing that they did, in fact, have access to mainstream power codes but consistently found themselves weighing the “advantages and costs” (p. 387) of these choices in language use. Fecho voices the importance of taking the time to “venture across cultural and personal boundaries in the classroom” (p. 390). Through inquiring into language, Fecho’s students grew to take ownership of their language choices, seeing language as “a system of possibility over which they had some control” (p. 392).

### **PREPARING TEACHERS TO FACILITATE LANGUAGE STUDY**

In 2005, the Conference on English Education held a leadership and policy summit in an effort to think through how we might restructure English education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in order to better prepare pre-service teachers and support practicing teachers in meeting the needs of their students (Miller & Fox, 2006). One inquiry group, specifically, focused on what teachers need to know in order to support linguistically and culturally diverse groups of students, addressing how we might prepare pre-service and in-service teachers to develop intercultural competence, putting culturally relevant pedagogies (Ladson Billings, 1994, 1995) into practice in our work with young people.

In addition, this group considered what pre-service and practicing teachers need to know about language and language learning as well as what they should understand about language variation and dialect. They voiced,

It is not enough simply to ‘teach’ the mainstream power codes; teachers must also foster ongoing and critical examinations with their students of how particular codes came into power, why linguistic apartheid exists, and how even their own dialectical and slang patterns are often appropriated by the dominant culture. (Miller & Fox, 2006, p. 345)

Unfortunately, teachers are often at a loss regarding how to do this, as this approach to language study is not something that many teachers have seen or experienced in practice. In addition, not all teacher education programs offer classes that focus on linguistic

diversity. Often, “dialect differences” might be one topic addressed within courses like Introduction to Linguistics or the History of American English, that serve purposes beyond preparing students to teach in linguistically and culturally complex classrooms and worlds (Smitherman & Villanueva, 2003).

Recognizing that language arts educators have often avoided teaching the structures of languages, as well as looking at language in practice or have approached the teaching of English grammar through a prescriptive lens, NCTE (1994) argues the need for teachers to further develop their own language awareness the same ways that they encourage students to do so. This is important, not only so teachers will have the tools they need to work with students to further develop their critical language awareness, but also because engaging in this exploration of language in practice might push back on internalized negative beliefs about stigmatized dialects and language that have the power to influence the ways in which teachers position students (Bowie & Bond, 1994), limiting them in understanding the linguistic tools that students are drawing on both inside and outside of the classroom (Alim, 2004; Godley & Minnici, 2006).

Speaking, specifically, about teacher response to Black language speakers, Alim & Smitherman (2012) write, “Despite the vitality of Black language, teachers continue hearing what’s not said and missing what is” (p. 175). If we are to prepare teachers to lead students in studying language in ways that sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists do, as many researchers are now recommending, (Bomer, 2011; Godley & Minnici, 2006; Sweetland, 2006; Wolfram & Christian, 2006) we might provide them with opportunities to inquire into their own language stories (Goodman, 2006) and language histories (Okawa, 2003), study variation in their own language use, (Wilson, 2001; Krauthamer, 1999) engaging teachers in a data-based study of language in practice, as well as exploring the language of their students and the communities in which they

live and teach (Goodman, 2006). In addition to preparing teachers to facilitate language study in their classrooms, Goodman (2006) argues,

Engaging in language inquiry helps teachers tease out linguistic complexities, revise and refine their own beliefs, and inform their own teaching with a greater awareness of how language matters in everyday life and learning. (p. 156)

These practices prepare teachers to implement a critical, (Freire, 2007) and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014), valuing students' repertoires of practice, (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2005) recognizing that their inclusion in the curriculum will better prepare students to live in a pluralistic society.

## **CONCLUSION**

In chapter two, I presented the literature we drew on in preparing to design an innovation aimed at further developing the participating teachers' and students' critical language awareness. This literature review began with a discussion of language study in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, highlighting three common approaches to language study in secondary language arts classrooms: the grammar study tradition, the language usage tradition, and the associative tradition of language study. In response to the limitations of these approaches, I drew on literature that discusses the potential of inquiry-based critical language study, highlighting recent empirical studies that describe what teachers and students learned as a result of participating in this experience. I concluded this literature review with a section on what teachers need to know about language and language use and how best to prepare them to facilitate language study in in their classrooms.

In chapter three, I will discuss the methodology on which I drew to design this study, the contexts and participants, and the data sources I collected. I will then clarify my approach to analysis and reflect on my own positionality.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Within this chapter, I discuss the design of the study I implemented. Crotty (1998) writes, “Justification of our choice and particular use of methodology and methods is something that reaches into the assumptions about reality that we bring to our work” (p. 2). As a result, I will begin by uncovering my epistemological stance, followed by a discussion of the methodologies that I drew on, describing my choice to make use of design-based research methods (The Design-Based Research Collective, 2003) as well as the use of an embedded multiple case design (Yin, 2014) to analyze my data, looking closely at two teachers’ participation in a professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) and their implementation of a unit of study designed to further develop their own as well as their students’ critical language awareness.

I will then describe (a) the selection of the participants and the research sites in which the study was conducted (b) how the innovation was conceived and put into place as well as (c) how data was collected and analyzed to ensure that my results were credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I will conclude this chapter by reflecting on my own positionality, making note of some of the possible limitations of this study.

## **Philosophical foundations**

In her preface to *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology*, Mertens (2010) discusses how she came to understand that “researchers’ views of the world (i.e., their chosen paradigms) underlie their choices of research approaches” (p. xvii). She explains,

It is not simply a choice of method: Should I use quantitative or qualitative approaches to research, or should I mix the methods? Researchers make methodological choices based on their assumptions about reality and the nature of knowledge that are either implicitly present or explicitly acknowledged. (p. xvii)

I do not believe that there is one truth. Rather, it is my perspective that we make meaning as we interact with people and with the world. As a result, I recognize that there are multiple realities from which we might learn, as people and as researchers. This being said, it cannot be ignored that social and historical influences impact how and what individuals come to know, leading many to privilege particular realities. Therefore, I believe that it is not enough to simply value multiple perspectives. We must take on a critical lens, considering whether or not the meanings that we make are influenced by or maintain the thinking of oppressive systems and social structures. Once we have come to recognize that a particular way of thinking is likely to lead to further oppression, I believe that it is our responsibility to take what we have come to know and act on this in an effort to create positive change, in hope of working toward a society that is more just.

Mertens (2010) explains that as qualitative researchers increase their efforts to recognize and bring attention to oppressed and silenced voices, the center of the discourse, which was once situated, primarily, within a constructivist paradigm is shifting. She goes on to explain that paradigms might best be seen as “starting points for thought,” (p. 44) voicing the need to think through the tensions when identifying one’s

work as fitting within a particular paradigm, as this is likely to result in improved approaches to conducting research. My epistemological and ontological stances have led me to design a study that integrates three research paradigms: the constructivist paradigm, the transformative paradigm, and the pragmatic paradigm (Mertins, 2010). I will discuss how each of these paradigms has informed my study.

### ***The constructivist paradigm***

I drew on the constructivist paradigm (Mertins, 2010) in establishing a professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) in which we came together to further develop our own critical language awareness in an effort to collaborate on a unit of study that we put into place multiple classrooms, with the goal of further developing our own as well as our students' critical language awareness. The professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) was a space in which the teacher participants and I, the researcher, learned through our interactions with each other as we inquired into language and what language study might look like in secondary language arts classrooms. When implementing a unit of study within their own classrooms, the participating teachers aimed to create a learning community of their own, providing their students with a chance to further develop their own critical language awareness through “collaborative knowledge building” (Wells, 2001) with their teacher and classmates.

### ***The transformative paradigm***

I drew on the transformative paradigm (Mertins, 2010) because it was my goal to implement an approach to research as well as to introduce pedagogical practices in an effort to make space for voices that are often silenced in our schools. It was my hope that this study would lead the student and teacher participants to develop an understanding that “knowledge is ‘historically and socially situated,’” (Mertins, 2010, p. 11) and that through our work together, we would make knowledge of our own, engaging in social inquiry, which has the potential to lead to social action.

### ***The pragmatic paradigm***

By choosing to implement design-based research methods (Design-Based Research Collective, 2003), I drew on the pragmatic paradigm (Mertins, 2010). During the course of this study, which was influenced by my values and my beliefs in educating for democracy (Dewey, 1938), we implemented an innovation, situated in theories of language and language instruction as well as critical and culturally sustaining pedagogies, discussed in detail in chapters one and two, in hope of seeking “consequential validity” (Messick, 1992), results that provide us with information regarding “how, when, and why” (Cobb et al., 2003) the innovation was successful or unsuccessful in further developing the participating teachers’ and students’ critical language awareness, focusing, specifically, on what factors enhanced or inhibited success, how our innovation might be modified to work more effectively, as well as how the instructional environment changed as a result of the implementation.

## **Research design**

In their article, “What is Design Thinking and Why is it Important?” Razzouk & Shute (2012) comment, “Knowledge is used to produce work, and work is evaluated to produce knowledge” (p. 330). Because it was my desire to build on the work of a pre-existing community of teachers who had been feeling dissatisfied with the state of education and interested in thinking together regarding how they might try something new that aligned with the beliefs they had about what teaching, learning, and language study should look like in the classroom, I believed that design-based research (The Design Based Research Collective, 2003) would serve us well, allowing us to build on the understandings that came out of our professional learning community’s (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) prior work, described in chapter one, trying something new and reflecting on the data collected in order to notice and name “how, when, and why” (Cobb et al., 2003) our innovation worked, modifying our plan as we proceeded through each innovation.

Design-based research (Hoadley, 2002) is a methodology “designed by and for educators that seeks to increase the impact, transfer, and translation of education research into improved practice” (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012). Reviewing the research published since Brown’s (1992) reconceptualization of design experiments, Anderson & Shattuck (2012) explained that design-based research in the field of education has typically (1) been conducted in spaces in which teaching and learning is happening, (2) discussed the process of putting a type of intervention into place, (3) made use of mixed methods, (4)

incorporated multiple iterations, (5) required practitioners and researchers to work together, and (4) highlighted the development of design principles.

In discussing why the field of education needs design-based research methods, The Design-Based Research Collective (2003) writes, “The design of innovations enables us to create learning conditions that learning theory suggests are productive, but that are not commonly practiced or are not well understood,” (p. 5). In addition, Cobb et al. (2003) describe the importance of looking closely at the implementation of theory-based practices in order to truly understand what is taking place. They write, “What works is underpinned by a concern for ‘how, when, and why’ (Cobb et al., 2003) it works and a detailed specification of what ‘it’ is (p. 13). Through implementing this study, we were able to develop a better understanding of “how, when, and why” (Cobb et al., 2003) a co-constructed inquiry-based approach to critical language study worked in an effort to further develop teachers’ and students’ critical language awareness.

In working toward the goal of further developing the participating teachers’ and students’ critical language awareness, the following research questions informed my data collection and analysis.

1. What might a curriculum aimed at further developing teachers and students’ critical language awareness look like in practice?
2. How did the teachers and students respond to this instructional approach?

Data was analyzed through the use of an embedded multiple-case design (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (in depth) and within a real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 16). Because researchers engaging in design-based research methods (Design-Based Research Collective, 2003) play close attention to the social context in thinking through the factors that enhance or inhibit the success of an innovation (Reinking & Bradley, 2008), an embedded multiple-case design allowed me to look closely at how each innovation progressed in a particular context, stopping and reviewing the data collected from multiple sources, within each unit of analysis, making note of what was implemented and what was modified.

We drew on what we learned from our ongoing iterative analysis in modifying each innovation in progress. In addition, this iterative analysis informed what we put into place in future iterations of the innovation. In this dissertation, I look at two individual case as well as across cases, making note of convergent and divergent evidence in order to recommend what would most likely be effective during future iterations, making assertions that might be useful to the development of local theory (Gravemeijer & Cobb, 2006).

## **METHODS**

### **The contexts**

In this section, I describe the different spaces in which I collected data as well as the choices I made in selecting participants. All names used in this study are pseudonyms. This study was conducted in five different settings (four classrooms in the Del Campo School District as well as a classroom at a local university where the teachers and I met as we engaged in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007).

While it is my belief that the curriculum we developed and implemented is one that all students would benefit from participating in, it was important to me to first implement this curriculum in under-resourced schools, in hope of beginning to transform practices in these spaces. When interventions are put into place in under-resourced schools, students are typically seen as having a deficit. And the interventions, themselves, often overlook students' existing knowledge. In these circumstances, teachers often play the role of "depositors" and students take on the part of "depositories" (Freire, 2007, p. 72). Our goal in this innovation was not to standardize students' language or teach them something that they were "lacking." Rather, it was our hope to design curriculum that honored variation, students' repertoires of practice (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003), encouraging them to notice and name the tools in their linguistic toolkit, those that they made use of in the many spaces and places in which they spent time.

Often, interventions put into place in under-resourced schools are prescribed and even scripted. Instead, I collaborated with the participating teachers in order to design a more inclusive and relevant approach to language study, one that was tailored to the

individual students and teachers who participated in each classroom context. This study aimed to determine whether or not our efforts led students and teachers to further develop their critical language awareness. As discussed in chapter one, in an effort to differentiate our work from that of a more traditional experimental study, we draw on language used by the Design-Based Research Collective (2003), implementing an “innovation” in contrast to the more typically used, “intervention” (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012; Brown, 1992; Reinking & Bradley, 2004, 2008).

Olivera Middle School and Del Campo High School are two of the fifteen schools within the Del Campo district. During the 2011-2012 school year, when we initially began this work, Olivera Middle School served 906 students and Del Campo High School served 2,406 students. 86.8% of the students who attended school in this district were considered to be economically disadvantaged and 68.7% of the students were considered to be at risk. In addition to providing further information on the diversity in the district, Table 3.1 shows the population breakdown for both schools as well as for the district, as a whole.

Table 3.1: Ethnicity, Olivera M.S. & Del Campo H.S. (2011-2012)

<b>Ethnicity and Race</b>	<b>% at Olivera Middle School</b>	<b>% at Del Campo High School</b>	<b>% in District</b>
African American	5.7%	13.2%	10.4%
Hispanic	87.3%	78%	81.5%
White	6.2%	6.6%	6.3%
American Indian	.1%	.1%	.2%
Asian	.1 %	.6%	.6%
Two or More Races	.6 %	1.5%	1%

Table 3.2 provides information on federal student categories, broken down according to school and district.

Table 3.2: Federal Student Categories, Olivera M.S. & Del Campo H.S. (2011-2012)

<b>Student Category</b>	<b>% at Olivera Middle School</b>	<b>% at Del Campo High School</b>	<b>% in District</b>
Economically Disadvantaged	88.1%	79.5%	86.8%
Limited English Proficient	24.1%	8.5%	31.9%
At Risk	60.7%	71.6%	68.7%

### **The participants**

This study grew out of the interests of a group of teachers participating in the Del Campo School district who wanted to learn more about language and language use in order to transform teaching and learning in their classrooms. In the year teachers were recruited to participate in this study, 49.4% of the teachers in this district had between one to five years of experience. Three of the four teachers who participated in in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) fit that description. This dissertation study focuses on the work of one of these three teachers as well as the fourth teacher in our professional learning community, who was beginning her sixth year in the classroom while this study was being implemented. Though 81.5% of the students within this district were identified as Hispanic and 10.4% were identified as African American, 63.6 % of the teachers who

worked in this district were identified as White. The four teachers who participated in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), and the two teachers whose work I focus on in this dissertation study, also self-identified as White and monolingual, although through this work, they familiarized themselves with their linguistic repertoires of practice (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003), recognizing the many ways they use language. Though it would have been my preference to have more diverse representation in our professional learning community, in this study, I focused, instead, on working with teachers who voiced interest in thinking together and co-constructing an innovation in response to a problem that they had identified. It was not my intention to perfect our innovation. Rather, I was interested in “provoking and sustaining an expansive transformation process led and owned by the practitioners” (Engeström, p. 606), telling the story of the efforts we made as we aimed to make a needed change.

Due to demographic shifts, teachers must be prepared to meet the needs of large groups of students from different cultural, ethnic, linguistic, racial, and social class backgrounds than their own (Wang, 2013). Paris and Alim (2014) argue that access to power now requires familiarity with “multiple ways of speaking and being” (p. 89). As a result, teachers and students need opportunities to treat language as an object of study, further developing their metacommunicative (Alim, 2004) and their metalinguistic (Andrews, 2010; Martínez, 2010) awareness.

### *The teachers*

**Mattie.** During the year that this research study was implemented, Mattie was beginning her sixth year as an eighth grade language arts teacher at Olivera Middle School. I came to know her through our work in the local chapter of the National Writing Project. Throughout her teaching career, Mattie had been an active member in this community of teachers, and her teaching practice was informed by her membership in this community. Mattie facilitated a reading and writing workshop (Atwell, 1986; Bomer, 1995, 2011; Rief, 1992) in her classroom.

Prior to this study, Mattie and I worked together to lead a professional learning community, (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) focused on supporting multilingual writers, for our local chapter of the National Writing Project, which led us to engage in conversations about language and language instruction and to plan a teacher research project that Mattie put into place in her classes. It was through this work that Mattie began creating a space in her language arts classes to talk to students about their use of language and what their language meant to them. In addition, she increased opportunities for her students to make use of their native language in the reading, writing, and speaking that they were doing in their language arts classes.

**Sophia.** Sophia was beginning her second year as a tenth grade teacher at Del Campo High School during the year of the study. Prior to teaching at Del Campo High School, she taught two years in an urban high school in another southwestern city. Sophia completed her undergraduate degree at the university in which I worked. I served as her facilitator during her internship and student teaching experience, and we remained in touch during her first two years in the classroom, often engaging in conversations about urban education and the need to re-think traditional practices in order to better serve our

students. During the year of the study, Sophia participated in the local chapter of the National Writing Project's summer institute for teachers.

**Garrett.** Though Garrett's experience participating in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) and implementing a unit of study in his classroom in an effort to further develop his own as well as his students' critical language awareness is not explored in this dissertation study, I chose to introduce him as he is referenced quite a bit in Sophia's case because of the collaborative partnership that the two of them formed supported her in implementing inquiry-based critical language study as well as transforming teaching and learning in her classroom. During the year of the study, Garrett was beginning his second semester as a teacher at Del Campo High School, where he also worked as student teacher. During the year of the study, he joined Sophia on the tenth grade English team. Prior to this, Garrett served as an intern in Mattie's classroom at Olivera Middle School. I had an opportunity to meet Garrett through a colleague of mine, who suggested that he would likely be interested in participating in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007). In addition to joining us in these endeavors, Garrett spent the first part of the summer in which we met as a learning community participating in our local chapter of the National Writing Project's summer institute for teachers with Sophia.

### **The schools**

Reinking & Bradley (2008) suggest that the first iteration of a formative or design experiment should be conducted in a typical classroom, one in which success and failure of the innovation is not guaranteed. During the year of the study, Mattie was a teacher at Olivera Middle School, and Sophia was a teacher at Del Campo High School. Although

Olivera Middle School and Del Campo High School are secondary schools within the same district and serve a very similar population of students, the environment in which the participating teachers worked was quite different. As mentioned above, a number of the teachers in the language arts department at Olivera Middle School were active members of the local chapter of the National Writing Project. Overall, they shared a vision about what it meant to work with readers and writers, and they supported each other in fulfilling this vision, even though, like most other teachers who work in under-resourced schools, the teachers at Olivera Middle School seemed to feel pressure to implement interventions that, sometimes, distracted from the authentic reading, writing, and thinking that students were doing in their language arts classes or that sent a message that was contradictory to the type of classroom environment the teachers worked to create. While the teachers at Olivera Middle School did not always feel supported by their administrative team and district personnel, the language arts department at Olivera Middle School, as a whole, was fairly well respected and, therefore, experienced a bit more freedom in decision-making than many under-resourced urban schools. During the year of the study, a number of Mattie's colleagues chose to move to new schools. As a result, Mattie did not experience the kind of collaboration to which she was accustomed.

Sophia, who worked at Del Campo High School the year of this study, did not experience the kind of autonomy that the teachers of Olivera Middle School seemed to have much of the time. This trust, allowing the language arts teachers at Olivera Middle School to make many instructional decisions, was probably afforded to them due to the

history of the strength of their department, both in the ways that they had worked together as well as in the successes they had experienced.

The comradery and shared philosophical beliefs that had been present within the Olivera Middle School language arts department were definitely not present in the Del Campo High School language arts department at this time. Rather, this department consistently experienced quite a bit of turnover. As a result, the teachers in the language arts department had very different perspectives on what it meant to work with readers, writers, and language users. Despite differences in philosophy, it was expected that grade level teams plan together and present similar lessons each day. Although grade level teams were expected to collaborate, it was not uncommon for the instructional team at Del Campo High School to co-opt these plans, requiring that teachers implement various scripted interventions, providing them with little time to make connections, noting how these interventions related to the work that the class had been doing prior to the new plan.

In reflecting on Reinking & Bradley's (2008) suggestion regarding choosing an appropriate context, particularly for the first iteration, I made a conscious decision to conduct the first iteration of this design-based study at Olivera Middle School in Mattie's classroom because of our history of doing this kind of work together. In addition, because Mattie experienced a bit more autonomy than Sophia currently did and was very comfortable in her role of working with readers and writers, based on her six years of experience, I believed that this would allow us to focus intensively on the planning and implementation of the very first innovation, which served as an experience that we drew on in planning for future iterations.

### Phases of data collection

Data was collected over the course of six phases. Drawing on Reinking & Bradley's (2008) framework, I titled these phases: phase 1: recruiting participants; phase 2: understanding the contexts; phase 3: gathering baseline data; phase 4: implementing the innovation; phase 5: assessing the innovation; and phase 6: consolidating findings. The data corpus for the study can be seen in table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Data Corpus

Classroom Observations	106 hours
Professional Learning Community Meetings	21 hours
Planning/Reflection Meetings	62 hours
Teacher Reflection Journals	59 entries
Teacher Interviews	12
Student Interviews	34
Teacher/Student Language Notebooks	51
Pre-Study/Post-Study Writing	48
Inquiry Projects	14
Photos	192

### ***Phase 1: Recruiting***

In order to find the appropriate site and participants for this study, from August 2012-April 2013, I visited with a number of middle school and high school language arts and ESL teachers in three different districts, discussing what it would mean to participate in this study. I met with the teachers who chose to participate in the study at their schools during the spring of 2013. At this meeting, in addition to getting to know the participants who I had not yet met and sharing a bit about my own experience, I discussed the timeline of the study.

Because it was my intention to plan for and implement an innovation with the goal of further developing teachers' and their students' critical language awareness, it was important for me to define what it meant to do this work. I shared with teachers that this would include opportunities for the teachers and their students to explore patterns in language (Wolfram, 1995), notice how language varies (Wolfram, 1995; NCTE, 1994), recognize attitudes and ideologies about language (NCTE, 1974; NCTE, 1994), consider the role that audience plays in the choices made about language use in both speech and writing (NCTE, 1994), examine the role that language plays in how we communicate (NCTE, 1994), trouble what it means to be "correct," (Alim & Smitherman, 2012; NCTE, 1994) and problematize the relationship between social inequalities and language (Alim & Smitherman, 2012).

Reinking & Bradley (2008) explained that while the way an intervention is put into place in a classroom must always be negotiated between the teacher and the researcher, it is important for a researcher to define what the intervention is through communicating the essential elements with potential participating teachers prior to beginning this work.

The essential elements in this study, which were based on key aspects of the theoretical framework and the related literature included: (1) the use of an inquiry-based instructional approach (2) a focus on the participants' everyday language practices (3) a transformative teaching and learning experience led by the participants. The essential elements also served as the embedded units of analysis in the two cases I will explore in chapters four and five.

***Phase 2: Understanding the context***

Throughout the months of May and June of 2013, I visited the participating teachers' classrooms once a week in order to develop an understanding of the ways that language came up in classroom conversations as well as to distinguish what language study looked like in each of the participating teachers' classrooms. I was particularly interested in developing a better understanding of the various contexts in which we would be implementing a unit of study that would grow out of our time spent together in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), recognizing, however, that though the unit of study would involve the teachers with whom I visited, it would be put into place during a new school year with different groups of students. As a result, I also visited each class, in which the research study would be facilitated a couple of weeks prior to the beginning of the study to collect data that helped me better understand the classroom culture and context. While visiting these classrooms, I took observational notes and used a camera to document artifacts that related to language and language study (books in various languages, posters, departmental policies, student writing etc.), some of which served as baseline data.

### ***Phase 3: Gathering baseline data***

**In the professional learning community.** After visiting classrooms from May to June of 2013, I invited the participants in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) to share a meal and get to know one another prior to participating in the first focus group interview. The focus group interview was audio and video recorded and provided the teachers with an opportunity to discuss what language study currently looked like in their classrooms. In addition, teachers were asked questions that would allow for them to demonstrate their critical language awareness prior to participating in the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007). Students were also invited to share their thinking about language and language use through engaging in writing in response to open-ended questions. This data was compared to the writing they did at the conclusion of the study as well as the responses they made in their post-study interviews. In addition, I looked for evidence of the participating teachers' development of critical language awareness in reviewing the data collected during collaborative planning sessions, engaging first in open coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and, later, coding, specifically, for examples of the development of critical language awareness, looking for themes that came up in theories in which this work is situated as well as in the literature that served to justify the exploration of the pedagogical goals we hoped to learn more about. In addition, I returned to the baseline data collected prior to the beginning of the unit of study in an effort to determine the impact of the innovation put into place.

**In the classroom.** In the spring of 2014, the participating students were also asked to share their thinking through writing, in response to questions, co-constructed by the researcher and the participating teachers, created in an effort to better understand the

students' critical language awareness prior to and at the conclusion of the study. In addition, focal students were chosen and interviewed early in the unit of study to determine their critical language awareness prior to participating in the innovation. I also returned to the baseline data collected prior to the implementation of the innovation in order to consider the impact of the innovation.

#### ***Phase 4: Implementing the innovation***

**Essential elements.** As mentioned above, the innovation that was put into place to further develop teachers' and students' critical language awareness included the essential elements of (1) the inquiry-based instructional approach, (2) a focus on everyday language practices, and (3) a transformative teaching and learning experience led by the participants. The essential elements served as embedded units of analysis in each case presented in this dissertation. They were chosen because they were key ideas highlighted in the theoretical framework and the literature that I drew on in this study.

**Planning for the innovation: In the professional learning community.** Although I was responsible for initiating the innovation in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), it was important to me that the participating teachers and I negotiated how we would use our time in this space, as I saw this as a learning experience that should build on the participating teachers' knowledge of their students and their practices. In addition, the research on professional learning communities has consistently shown that in order for professional learning communities to be successful, teachers must be empowered to make decisions and take on leadership roles (Bolam et al., 2005; Englert & Tarrant, 1995;

Supovitz, 2002). As a result, prior to beginning this work, the teacher participants shared what they hoped they would get out of this experience and how this group might best support them in further developing their own critical language awareness, preparing them to do similar work with their students. These kinds of discussions took place throughout our time together to ensure that the participants found the conversations in which we engaged and activities in which we participated meaningful.

Typically, meetings were planned so that we would have time to share our thinking in response to readings about language and/or the implementation of inquiry-based critical language instruction, discuss language samples that group members collected in their language notebooks, and converse about teachers' findings as the group engaged in personal inquiry projects about aspects of language that the teachers chose to explore. Later in the process, much of our time was spent planning for the innovation that would be put into place in each of the teachers' classrooms during the following school year.

**Planning for the innovation: In the classroom.** After participating in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), the participating teachers met for two three-hour sessions to begin planning for the innovation that would be put into place in each of their classrooms. At this meeting, the group drew on what they learned through their participation in the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) as well as what they knew of their students to outline the components that would likely be a part of the innovation. This outline included: (1) An

introduction to language and language study (2) Exploring our language histories (3) Inquiring into our own language practices (4) Inquiring into the language of our social worlds (4) Planning for, carrying out, and presenting our own inquiry projects.

The participating teachers agreed to schedule times to collaborate with the researcher to continue planning this unit of study, prior to putting it into place in the classroom, to ensure that we individualized each unit of study to meet the needs of the participants. In finalizing plans, the participating teachers drew on the outline the group created, keeping in mind the essential elements of the innovation.

In addition, each of the participating teachers committed to meeting weekly while the unit was being put into place in order to ensure that there was time to reflect on how the unit was progressing, making modifications to the plan, focusing, specifically, on the goal of creating an innovation that would further develop their students' critical language awareness. The participating teachers also agreed to engage in informal conversations following each lesson, allowing the teacher and researcher to make daily adjustments to the plans, if necessary. Because scheduling meeting times proved to be a challenge during the first iteration of the study, during the second iteration of the study, Sophia reflected on the implementation of the unit of study in a journal, as well. In addition, she committed to meeting with the researcher three times a week, following the class that she taught.

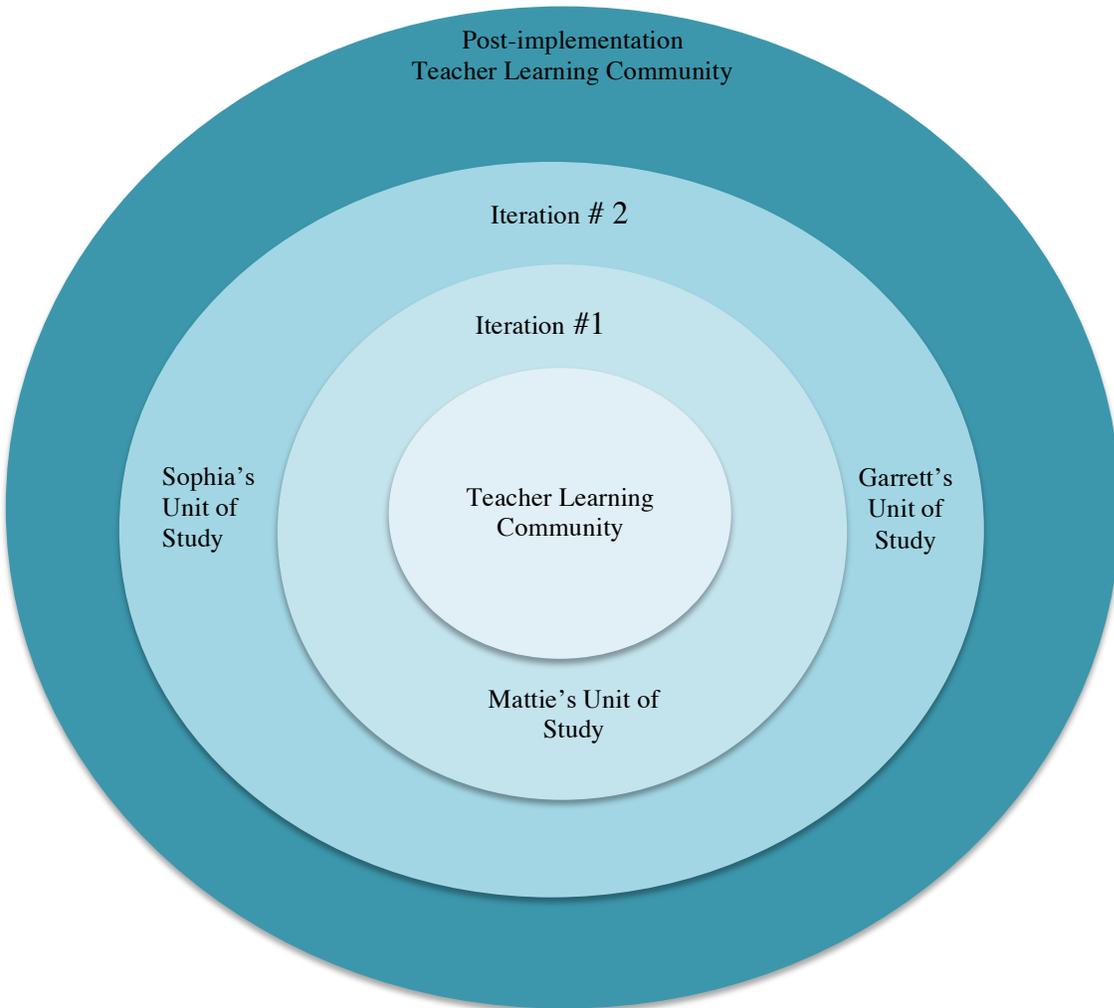
**Facilitating the innovation: In the professional learning community.** Our teacher learning community met once a week from June-August of 2013. During our time together, we read pieces about language and the implementation of inquiry-based critical

language study, inquired into our own language practices as well as the language of our social worlds, began collecting data on a topic of interest that came up for each of the teachers through the thinking we were doing together, and started planning a unit of study that would be put into place during the spring of 2014. Prior to the implementation of the innovation in each classroom, I met periodically with the teachers, continuing to read about and plan for an inquiry-based approach to critical language study. The whole group met two additional times: once prior to the implementation of the innovation in Mattie's classroom and once after the implementation of the innovation in Sophia's classroom, participating in a final focus group interview after all of the teachers in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) implemented the innovation in their classrooms. This was important to me, not only for the collection of data, but also because I believed that participating in this study would benefit the teachers. As a result, I thought it was important that they have an opportunity to reflect on their experiences implementing their unit of study and learning from the experiences of others, as it was our hope that this work and approach to language study would live on in their teaching.

**Facilitating the innovation: In the classroom.** As described above, the student innovation was put into place in the spring of 2014. The first iteration took place in Mattie's classroom. During the second iteration, Sophia drew on the work that Mattie had done and revisited the modifications that Mattie put into place when planning for and implementing her study. These modifications consisted of 1) strategies for "collaborative knowledge building and 2) strategies for developing disciplinary understandings. The

choices we made in the second iteration of the study were influenced by “how, when, and why” (Cobb et al., 2003) the innovation was working or failing to work during the previous iteration. In addition to personalizing the modifications that Mattie found to be necessary, iterative analysis led us to make one additional pedagogical modification in Sophia’s classroom as well as a methodological modification 3) strategies for maintaining inquiry as stance and 4) strategies to support teacher/researcher collaborations. At the conclusion of both iterations, we looked, specifically, at what factors enhanced or inhibited success, how our innovations might be modified to work more effectively, as well as what transformations had taken place as a result of the implementation of this innovation. Figure 3.3 is a representation of teacher/student learning as a result of participating in the innovation, demonstrating how we took the understandings gained in the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) into the first iteration of the study, and then the understandings gained from the professional learning community and the first iteration of the study into the second iteration of the study. At the conclusion of the study, all of the participants in the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) came back together again to share what they had learned through implementing a study in an effort to develop their own as well as their students’ critical language awareness, which led to a growth of everyone’s understandings.

Figure 3.1: Teacher/Student Learning Through Participation in the Innovation



***Phase 5: Assessing the innovation***

**In the professional learning community.** After implementing their units of study with their students, the teachers participated in an interview to share their personal experiences in the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999;

Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) as well as in the classroom during the implementation of their units of study, reflecting on the process as well as “how, when, and why” (Cobb et al., 2003) the innovation worked or failed to work. In these interviews, the participating teachers considered what factors enhanced or inhibited success, how our innovation might have been modified to work more effectively, as well as how the instructional environment transformed as a result of the implementation of this innovation. In addition, the participating teachers responded through writing to the same open-ended questions that they were asked to complete prior to participating in this research study to show whether or not their critical language awareness continued to develop.

In June of 2014, I invited the teachers who participated in the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) to participate in one last focus group interview, as well, allowing us to share our experiences and learn from the experiences of the other participants, reflecting on our work and how each of them have built on this or might continue to build on this in the future. The focus group interview was audio and videotaped. This phase of research was in response to Reinking & Bradley’s (2008) call for researchers who conduct design based research to consider whether or not the innovation was successful once the researcher was no longer there in a supportive role. I also made efforts to return to contextual data collected prior to the start of our professional learning community and the implementation of the each of the units of study as well as the data collected within the collaborative planning sessions in order to see how the participating teachers drew on

their experiences participating in the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), looking closely for evidence of an increased understanding of critical language awareness in order to better understand the impact of the innovation.

**In the classroom.** Although it was my goal to look at the class, in general, rather than specific students, I invited five focal students from both Sophia and Mattie's classes to participate in interviews. In addition, the entire class of students engaged in writing in response to the open-ended questions that we invited them to think about on the first day of the study, demonstrating how their critical language awareness had developed. I drew on contextual data collected prior to each unit of study as well as on artifacts and field notes to better understand if there was growth in the students' critical language awareness as a result of participating in the innovation.

### ***Phase 6: Consolidating findings***

After engaging in iterative analysis while Mattie and Sophia implemented the innovation in their classrooms, I participated in a process of open coding, searching for conceptual categories that emerged in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and then returned to the data to participate in axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), once themes began to emerge. I categorized the codes according to the three embedded units of analysis that would support me in discussing each case.

I began the process of retrospective analysis, (Gravemeijer & Cobb, 2006) looking across cases, reviewing the entire dataset first, searching for conjectures and refutations (Gravemeijer & Cobb, 2006), and later, returning to the data, to explore the

sequence of conjectures and refutations in more detail. This process prepared me to make assertions regarding what we learned about inquiry-based critical language study across two iterations of this study, critically challenging patterns and searching for alternative explanations across cases (Marshall & Rosmann, 2011).

### *Iterative cycles*

When a researcher draws on design-based research methods, there is an expectation that the design of the study will be both adaptive and iterative. Reinking & Bradley (2008) write,

A researcher using this approach begins with the assumption that the intervention that is implemented at the beginning of the investigation may be substantially different by the end of the investigation, because the main goal of the research is to adapt the intervention to make it work better in response to the inherent variability within classrooms. (p. 20)

I had initially, planned to look closely at the micro-cycles (Reinking & Bradley, 2008) that the group had pre-determined, reflecting on the data collected with the participating teachers and making adjustments in an effort to accomplish our goal. In reflecting on their process of data collection, Reinking & Watkins (2000) write,

We imagined that data collection and modifications to the intervention would proceed through well-defined cycles. In practice, we found the process to be more fluid, even at times ad hoc because adaptations were often based on the intuitive demands of the moment rather than on extensive reflection upon the accumulated data. (p. 399)

This, too, was our experience in implementing this work in the classroom. As a result, I came to understand the importance of look closely at the daily micro-cycles in addition to planning for a review of data based on pre-determined embedded units of analysis.

In analyzing the data, I drew on qualitative research methods (Patton, 1990), attending, specifically, to the data that was useful in answering my research questions as

well as the data that allowed us to determine the success of our pedagogical goals, looking, specifically, at what factors enhanced or inhibited success, how our innovation might be modified to work more effectively, the unanticipated effects the innovation produced, as well as how the instructional environment changed as a result of the implementation of this innovation. I made use of constant-comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), drawing on the data, in order to make informed decisions regarding how and when to make modifications to the innovation.

I began by engaging in open coding, searching for conceptual categories that emerged in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Later, I returned to the data to engage in axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) once themes and trends began to emerge, eventually categorizing the codes across the embedded units of analysis. Examples of some of the codes can be found in Table 3.4, at the conclusion of this section.

I drew on observational notes and artifacts to think back on the daily micro-cycles with the participating teachers in order to make modifications to our plans and drew on coded data in order to reflect on what we learned throughout each embedded unit of analysis.

At the completion of each iteration, I returned to the data, looking closely at each macro-cycle, as well, in order to re-think the innovation and its relationship to future iterations in addition to what has already been put into place during the course of this study (Gravemeijer & Cobb, 2013).

**In the professional learning community.** Because our professional learning community was negotiated between all participants, I did not pre-determine the micro-cycles. Rather, I reflected on the data with the participating teachers, making adjustments, as needed, on a weekly basis. At the end of the summer of 2013, I returned to the data

collected in the professional learning community, focusing on the individual teachers' experiences during the weekly sessions, each serving as a different embedded unit of analysis. This supported me in determining the ways in which participating in the teacher learning community led each teacher to further develop their critical language awareness and how this might have impacted the individual teachers' abilities to plan for and implement a unit of study in their classrooms to further develop their students' critical language awareness.

**In the classroom.** In choosing to look at my data through an embedded multiple case study design (Yin, 2014), I made choices regarding how each case was bounded. Though the participating teachers and I worked together to define micro-cycles, looking at the data collected during each of the components of the unit of study (1) An introduction to language and language study (2) Exploring our language histories (3) Inquiring into own language practices (4) Inquiring into the language of our social worlds (4) Planning for, carrying out, and presenting our own inquiry projects, I made a choice to return to the data collected during each of the iterations in an effort to focus on each of the teachers and their students' experiences with the essential elements, as my original intention with this work was to link theory to practice. These included 1) an inquiry-based approach to instruction 2) a focus on everyday language practices 3) a transformative teaching and learning experience.

Multiple data sources, discussed below, were collected and analyzed as a means of thinking through each embedded unit of analysis. I looked across these data sources in

order to corroborate findings, recognizing that data triangulation increased the construct validity of each case (Yin, 2014).

Table 3.4: Examples of Codes Categorized in Embedded Units of Analysis

Inquiry-based Instructional Approach	Everyday Language Practices	Transformative Process Led by the Participants
Assumptions	Code-switching	Teacher as Student/Student as Teacher
Language Loss	“Proper” English	Critical Identities
Language Discrimination	Intentionality	Resistance
Consensus	“Ghetto” Language	New Perspectives
Struggle to Stay with an Idea	Language to Talk About Language	Disciplinary knowledge

### *Sources of data*

**Student participants.** Although many of the participating teachers implemented our co-constructed innovation in all of their classes, I made a choice to collect data in one of each of these teacher’s classes (four classes total) in order to understand how this innovation worked or failed to work across a variety of contexts. In this dissertation, I focus in on two four cases across two iterations of this study. The students in each of these classes had choices regarding the role they wanted to play in the research study. Those who wished to participate only in the classroom component of the study were asked to sign consent forms, allowing me to collect work, observe, as well as audio and videotape classroom interactions. Students who wished to be interviewed also signed

consent forms. Students were not recruited, but, rather, invited to participate in this study, due to the fact that they were assigned to the participating teacher's class in which this research study was being conducted.

**Interviews.** Interviews were conducted during three phases of the research study (phase 3, phase 4 and phase 5) in order to better understand the participants' perspectives and developing understandings of language, critical language study, as well as their experiences participating in the innovation. During the course of this study, in addition to conducting traditional pre-study and post-study interviews with each of the teachers and five students in each of their classes, I also conducted focus group interviews and informal conversational interviews (Patton, 2002).

Prior to participating in the professional learning community, the participating teachers came together for a focus group interview. The questions for this interview were determined in advance. However, these questions led participants to engage in further conversation. At the conclusion of the study, the teachers participated in an interview with the researcher as well as a focus group interview with participants in the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007).

As discussed in my epistemological statement, it is my belief that we make meaning through our interactions with others. As a result, a "socially oriented" (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, p. 149) approach to interviewing seemed appropriate in addition to planning for individual interviews at the completion of the study and informal conversational interviews throughout the implementation of each innovation. Because our time together began with the interview process, I thought it would be advantageous to share our thinking in the context of this community at the conclusion of the study, as well, in order to better understand the potential long-term influence of the innovation.

Students who agreed to be interviewed participated in one prior to the unit of study that the teachers put into place within their classrooms as well as one interview at the completion of the unit of study. Questions were pre-planned. However, I followed each focal student's lead, as they responded to questions, sharing their views on language, language study, and the experience of participating in the unit. I also provided the students with an opportunity to expand on the writing that we asked them to do prior to participating in the unit of study, so I was able to better understand how their thinking had developed. Throughout each unit of study, I informally interviewed these students, as well, as I spent time within their classrooms. Although I planned for possible questions (through the creation of an "informal group discussion" protocol, the questions I asked throughout the unit of study tended to be "spontaneous and serendipitous," (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 144), guided by what I was noticing during my classroom observations as well as by the research questions that framed this study.

**Field notes.** Throughout the research process, I took on the role of participant observer. Marshall & Rossman (2010) explain, "Observation entails the systematic noticing and recording of events, behaviors, and artifacts (objects) in the social setting" (p. 139). These noticings were documented within my jottings, which I expanded into field notes. Marshall & Rossman describe field notes as "detailed, nonjudgmental (as much as possible), concrete descriptions of what has been observed" (p. 139). As I spent time in the various spaces with the participating teachers and students, I documented what I noticed, always recognizing that field notes were based only my own interpretation of an event or interaction. To address this, I began taking notes in two columns: one, specifically, for data and the other for my personal responses as I interacted with teachers, students, and the environment. I later added a third column, as I returned to these field notes to engage in coding. I believed that it was particularly

important to separate the data I was collecting from what I was thinking about as I responded to this data to ensure that I was thinking as both a researcher and as a teacher, as I took on both of these roles at different times throughout the study.

Because I played a participatory role in the classroom as well as in the professional learning community and collaborative planning teams, I made it a practice to return to my “jottings” (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995, p. 19) in my notebook and expand upon them, making use of various recording devices to document the experience, creating field notes, as I revisited the interactions captured through audio recording and/or video recording.

Due to the fact that I recognized the importance of being able to recall what I was thinking and feeling as well as what “emerging analytic insights” (Marshall & Rossman, p. 140) I had, alongside what Marshall & Rossman (2010) describe as “non-judgmental concrete description” (p. 139), I made it a practice to add to my notes immediately following each lesson and planning session.

It is important to recognize that my field notes served a purpose beyond data that was eventually collected to make arguments within this dissertation. As I worked closely with the teacher participants on the implementation of this design-based study, we routinely drew on these field notes when making decisions about how to proceed with the innovation that we put into place within each classroom. An example of my coded field notes can be found in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5: Example of Coded Field Notes

Data	My Responses	Codes
Sophia shares that she read this with her	Last week, Sophia voiced that she felt she had limited	Linguistic Discrimination

Table 3.5 (continued)

<p>students. She says, “This idea that schools, in general, might be attacking their forms of expression and like this micro-aggression that they feel for speaking English with an accent or preferring to write in Spanish or even this idea, like, say, they are in America now, but what if they move back to Mexico, and they’re not fluent in Spanish anymore, and they have to go into a Spanish as a second language class, the forms of aggression on that, as well.”</p>	<p>experience to discuss language variation. This week, she uses what she learned from her students as a means of contributing to the group.</p> <p>Which academic texts might work in our work with students?</p>	<p>Language Loss</p> <p>Teacher as Student/Student as Teacher</p>
<p>I ask how the students responded to Anzaldúa’s piece.</p>		
<p>She explained that she read this in classes with ELL students and they were interested. She wasn’t sure that it would have gone over as well if she used it in her more academic classes.</p> <p>She also shares that some students, who heard about this discussion, came in over lunch to discuss it.</p>	<p>Why does Sophia feels that this wouldn’t have gone over well with her more “academic” students? Is this accurate? Her perspective?</p> <p>Culture of intolerance?</p> <p>Yes!! Students skipping lunch to engage in these conversations...demonstrates the importance of what we will be doing!</p>	<p>Curriculum based on the “Cultural-Linguistic Reality” of students’ lives</p>

**Audio recording.** Throughout this study, I made use of two audio recorders. I carried one recorder with me in an effort to capture the words of the participating teachers and students as they inquired into language and shared their thinking during interviews. In addition, I shared another with the participating teachers and students, so I had the chance to review what they were experiencing while inquiring into language, as well.

An audio recorder was also be used to capture the conversation that took place when the professional learning community and the collaborative planning teams met, allowing me to revisit these conversations and expand on the “jottings” (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995, p. 19) made in my notebook. Because modifications were often made as a result of informal conversations that the participating teachers had with me and with their colleagues, I made it a practice to carry an audio recorder at all times while I was in the field, allowing me to more easily capture spontaneous conversation that demonstrated how the innovation progressed.

**Video recording.** I also to drew on two Xacti cameras to record the professional learning community meetings (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) as well as the classes in which the innovation was being implemented. Within the classroom, I set up one camera on the side of the class, aimed at the participating students. The other camera was set up in the back of the classroom, aimed at the area in which the teachers tended to present mini-lessons and facilitate share

sessions. Video was sometimes drawn on to revisit a particular lesson in order to reflect on it in and make modifications.

**Artifacts.** As I spent time in the field, I collected various artifacts produced by and used by participants in this study. During phase two of the research process, I collected documents I came across in the field (assignments, student work, hand-outs etc.) that provided me with background information that was relevant to this study or suggested something about the beliefs of the participants or those in power within the context in which the innovation was being implemented. In addition, during this phase, I also collected and analyzed photographs that I took to capture something that students or teachers displayed on their walls that I found to be relevant to the study. During phase three, I collected the teacher and student writing, which was used as baseline data. During phase four, I collected the participants' language notebooks (as these were products in which the participants documented their thinking while engaging in the innovation. In addition, the language notebooks included language samples collected while inquiring into their own language practices, the language of their social worlds, and the samples that they collected while working their personal inquiry topics. I also took photographs to document the thinking on paper that the participants were doing (noticings, beliefs, language stories, language histories etc.) that did not live in their notebooks.

In the second iteration of the study, one of our modifications (strategies to support the teacher/researcher collaboration) led Sophia to reflect on her experiences facilitating this work through writing in a journal. Ivey & Broadus (2007) write, "Reflective writing

was particularly helpful when we were trying to determine the effectiveness of instructional approaches” (p. 525). This became another data source that I drew on in iterative and retrospective analysis

As is the case in writing field notes and reviewing video, it was important to recognize that my interpretation of these artifacts might differ from those creating or making use of the artifacts. As a result, I made an effort to member-check, throughout each innovation as well as during retrospective analysis, asking the participating teachers and students their perspectives on the artifacts that were used as data for the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

### ***Retrospective analysis***

In addition to analyzing data during the implementation of each innovation, first engaging in open coding and then returning to the data to code, making use of the emerging themes and categorizing these codes into one of the three embedded units of analysis, I engaged in retrospective analysis. I did this at the conclusion of each individual innovation, looking across the embedded units of analysis in each case to learn from the data collected during the innovation, as a whole, considering, once again, what factors enhanced or inhibited success, how each innovation could be modified to work more effectively, paying close attention to examples of transformation. I also looked across cases, reviewing the entire data set, first searching for conjectures and refutations, and later, returning to the data to make assertions about the relationship between theory and practice (Gravemeijer & Cobb, 2006). It was through this work that I came to see how the data collected during the implementation of the innovation might contribute to the development of local theory (Gravemeijer & Cobb, 2006).

## **Trustworthiness**

Marshall and Rossman (2011) comment,

As the researcher discovers categories and patterns in the data, he should engage in critically challenging the very patterns that seem so apparent. He should search for other plausible explanations for these data and linkages among them. Alternative explanations *always* exist, and the researcher must identify and describe them and then demonstrate how the explanation that he offers is the most plausible. (p. 220-221)

As a researcher, I engaged in this practice, looking for counter examples to ensure that the claims I was making were credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### ***Credibility and dependability***

One way that I made efforts to challenge the credibility and dependability of my findings was through the collaborative nature of my study. As I have discussed throughout this dissertation, the data that I collected was not only owned by me, it was also owned by the participating teachers and has been used both as evidence to make claims in the writing that I do but also to reflect on the effectiveness of our innovation.

As is evident in my design, I engaged in triangulation (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), collecting and analyzing data from multiple sources as well as through multiple methods in an effort to ensure that patterns existed prior to making claims about what we learned through engaging in the research process. Similarly, I made an effort to be present consistently throughout our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) as well as in the classrooms when the units of study were being implemented across both iterations, collecting data throughout each of these experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

### ***Transferability***

In discussing whether or not the results of a design-based study can be generalized, Reinking & Bradley (2008) reference the work of Cronbach (1975) who argues, “When we give proper weight to local conditions, any generalization is a working hypothesis, not a conclusion” (p. 125). Because the goal of this study was to inform both teachers and researchers how theory transfers to practice, I engaged in “rich data analysis” and provided “thick descriptions” (Reinking & Bradley, 2008, p. 41), so teachers and researchers interested in putting similar innovations into place would have enough information to determine whether or not our work is applicable to the context in which they find themselves.

This being said, in effort to achieve reliability, and to think through how context played a role within the innovation that we put into place, I included opportunities for replication within the design of this research. Throughout this study, I had opportunities to collect data from the implementation of four different units of study, two that are discussed in this dissertation, looking at the impact that the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) and each prior iteration had on the development of the participating teachers’ and students’ critical language awareness, allowing them to plan for and implement a unit of study that would serve the same purpose as the one in which they participated.

### ***Confirmability***

In an effort to be as objective as possible, I aimed to be transparent, reflecting on my background and my beliefs, considering, throughout the process, how my experiences might have impacted the way in which I interpreted the data that I collected. In addition to triangulating data and making use of member-checking, I looked for examples within

my data that countered my findings to ensure that the claims I made were supported (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

### **Researcher Role in the Classroom**

In describing the work of researchers who implement design-based research methods, Reinking & Bradley (2008) comment,

A researcher must inevitably work closely with teachers to implement instructional activities aimed at accomplishing a specific goal and bringing about positive change, which complicates the ethical, methodological, and logistical issues associated with this approach. (p. 79)

In my role, as a participant observer, it was important that I consider how my participation factored into the success or failure of our innovation, just as other contextual factors likely influenced the results. Referencing the work of Babbab-Ritland (2003), Reinking & Bradley (2008) suggest that we might “broaden the framework” (p. 80) of design-based research by increasing researcher presence in early studies and limiting researcher presence in later studies. This is something that I kept in mind when moving across the various contexts in which the innovations were implemented.

### **Researcher Reflexivity**

I am a White, English speaker. Though I speak only one named language, I have come to recognize the many tools I have in my linguistic toolkit as a result of the thinking I have done during my graduate studies and, more so, the experiences I have had working with students and teachers during the implementation of this innovation. Most of my teaching career was spent in spaces with speakers of diverse languages and dialects, many of whom did not experience the kind of education that I believed they deserved, as, too often, teaching and learning tended to be disconnected from their lives. These

identities and experiences have influenced how I see the world, how I view public education, and, therefore, have influenced my research design as well as the way I interpreted data. In recognition of the impact of the perspectives I carry with me, upon concluding my field notes each day, I made an effort to self-reflect, noting the assumptions and emotions that likely influenced how I interpreted the data.

### **LIMITATIONS**

It is my hope that the discussion and the description of my research design clarified the boundaries of this study. Although the flexibility of the methodology that I have chosen to employ can be seen as an advantage, the fact that design-based methods are lacking in “full methodological clarity” (Reinking & Bradley, 2008, p. 78), might lead to issues that limit what was learned throughout the process. Similarly, the active role that I took on when conducting this design-based study had the potential to influence the innovation itself as well as limit what I was able to see. The Design-Based Research Collective (2003) refers to this as negotiating the “dual intellectual roles of advocate and critic” (p. 7). In response to this, I made it a practice to analyze and reflect on data throughout the research process in an effort to consider how the role that I was taking on might have limited what I saw. In addition, I continued to re-visit the audio recorded and video recorded innovation as an observer, rather than as a participant.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

In chapter three, I discussed my the methodology on which I drew, the contexts and participants, as well as the data sources I collected in order to better understand if we were successful in achieving our pedagogical goal. In addition, I discussed my approach to analysis and concluded with a discussion of my positionality.

In chapter four, I will present findings from the first iteration of this study, highlighting the factors that enhanced and inhibited success, focusing, specifically, on the modifications made in an effort to accomplish our goal of further developing our own as well as our students' critical language awareness.

## **Chapter 4: The First Iteration-“The start of a new thing...the one who shows people it is OK to”**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In chapters four and five, I present the results of the iterative data analysis that led to modifications throughout the course of the study in an effort to accomplish the goal of further developing the participating teachers’ and students’ critical language awareness through an exploration of everyday language practices. Through an embedded multiple case study design, I address the following questions:

1. What might a curriculum aimed at further developing teachers’ and students’ critical language awareness look like in practice?
2. How do teachers and students respond to this instructional approach?

The case presented in chapter four explores Mattie’s experiences in the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) and highlights how she drew on what she learned in designing and implementing a six-week unit of study that grew out of the “collaborative knowledge building” (Wells, 2001, p. 10) we engaged in while participating in this professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007).

Initially, we worked together in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) to define an iterative cycle, based on the choices we made as we engaged in collaborative planning with the goal of further developing our own as well as our students’ critical language awareness. The participating teachers decided that each unit of study would include 1) an introduction to language study, 2) an exploration of our language histories, 3) an inquiry

into our own language practices, 4) an inquiry into the language practices of our social worlds, and 5) a personal inquiry project. As a result, we made efforts to look closely at the data collected during each of these micro-cycles (Gravemeijer & Cobb, 2006), engaging in constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to determine what factors were enhancing the innovation and what factors were inhibiting it, in an effort to make modifications in the remaining micro-cycles (Gravemeijer & Cobb, 2006) within the unit as well as in the units of the study that would be put into place at a later date. However, similar to what Reinking & Watson (2000) experienced, we found that because this inquiry-based approach to critical language study was a counter-cultural practice in the schools in which the teachers worked, and new to us, as well, it became necessary to make daily modifications to the curriculum “based on intuitive demands of the moment” (p. 399) in addition to looking carefully at the data collected during each of the micro-cycles (Gravemeijer & Cobb, 2006), pre-determined by the participating teachers.

Because design-based research requires that theory “must do real work,” (Cobb et al. 2003, p. 10) impacting the design of the study, the essential elements, incorporated into the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) as well as within each of the units of study, were chosen because they were key aspects of the theoretical framework and related literature. These included: an inquiry-based instructional approach (Meyer & Sawyer, 2006; Wells, 1995, 2001, 2002), a focus on the participants’ everyday language practices (Alim, 2005; Alim, 2007; Alim & Smitherman, 2012; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009), and a transformative teaching and learning experience led by the participants (Freire, 2007; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux, 1985). For this reason, I present the findings through focusing on how Mattie and her students responded to the incorporation of each of the essential elements, noting the significant modifications made, influenced by Mattie’s work in the

professional learning community and in her classroom, that proved to be critical in our efforts to pursue our goal of further developing the teachers’ and students’ critical language awareness.

The modifications discussed in detail in Mattie’s case are categorized as 1) strategies for engaging in “collaborative knowledge building,” (Wells, 1995) and 2) strategies for developing disciplinary understandings. These modifications were revisited in future iterations, as well, in an effort to accomplish the goal of further developing the participants’ critical language awareness.

Table 4.1: Modification 1-Collaborative Knowledge Building

<b>Strategies for Engaging in Collaborative Knowledge Building</b>
Charting and returning to our thinking on wall charts and in language notebooks
The use of mentor texts
The gathering of accessible texts that invite response and inquiry
Learning with supportive collaborators
New participation structures
Coaching on listening and building on the ideas of others

Table 4.2: Modification 2: Disciplinary Understandings

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Strategies for Developing Disciplinary Understandings</b></p>
<p>Teaching socio-linguistic meta-language</p>
<p>Support and modeling in language collection/analysis</p>
<p>Reflection on artifacts that send messages about language and language use in communities</p>

**MATTIE’S PARTICIPATION IN THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY**

As discussed in chapter three, Mattie and I had been thinking together about how we might better understand and build on students’ language practices in the language arts classroom for two years prior to the beginning of the study. Very early in her teaching career, Mattie was fortunate to have met a colleague who encouraged her to spend the summer after her first year in the classroom participating in an institute hosted by a National Writing Project site. Mattie learned what it meant to be a teacher through her participation in this community. As a result, it had always been a part of Mattie’s practice to engage in professional reading and to reflect on her students’ responses to her teaching practices in an effort to become more effective in her classroom. Although she had found a home in this community and in the department in which she worked, over the course of the study, like many young, early-career teachers, Mattie began questioning the choices that she had made over the past five years, particularly as colleagues left her department and her school. This led Mattie to consider whether or not she wished to dedicate herself to teaching in an urban school as well as whether or not she would return to the Midwest,

where she was originally from. It struck me that Mattie was ready for something new in her life but didn't seem to know what it was. Sometimes, Mattie's personal journey seemed counter to the journey that we were on together, as a second job at the gym, a yoga teacher training that required Mattie to be out of the classroom for a week during the unit of study she was putting into place through her participation in this research project, the highs and lows of online dating, and her new position on her campus leadership team occupied much of Mattie's time. At times, this seemed to make it difficult for her to dedicate herself to the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) and the development of the unit of study in her classroom. Despite this, in the end, both journeys seemed to merge and lead down one path.

### **Mattie's pre-study perspectives**

Prior to participating in the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) and implementing critical language study in one of her classes, Mattie voiced recognition of the relationship between language and identity.

The way I speak defines me as a person. I am my own person with my own thoughts and ideas, so language is a way for me to filter through situations in life and represent myself. (written reflection, June 11, 2013)

Despite this, Mattie believed that it was important for individuals to know how to "adapt"(written reflection, June 11, 2013) their language in response to the expectations within the different spaces in which they spent time throughout their lives, sharing the importance of her students understanding this, as well, arguing, "It's a way to have some power in the situation" (written reflection, June 11, 2013). Prior to our work together, Mattie shared that she believed most of her students had awareness that different

language practices are “appropriate” (interview, June 3, 2013) in different contexts. She explained that her students would tell her, “I can say this in this teacher’s classroom and it will be OK, but if I said it in this math classroom, I would probably get a referral” (interview, June 3, 2013), demonstrating that language use is socially situated (Gee, 2012, p. 13). She explained, however, that though many of her students had defined ideas about when they chose to draw on different named languages as well as how their word choice was impacted by context, many struggled in understanding what the tone of their voices communicated (interview, June 3, 2013).

In thinking about what our work in the classroom might accomplish, Mattie often discussed her desire for her students to recognize that language use is intentional (interview, June 3, 2013; June 11, 2014; field notes, June 18, 2014; July 16, 2014). Just as she taught her students to be conscious of the choices they made as readers and writers, it was her hope that she and her students would spend more time engaging in metalinguistic conversations (Andrews 2010, Martínez, 2010), thinking about how their own language use was purposeful.

### **An inquiry-based instructional approach**

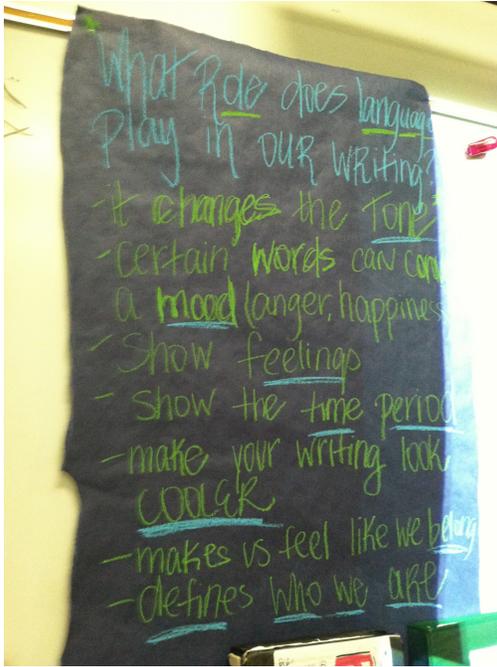
#### ***Inquiring into language as a community***

Because Mattie had been part of the original professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) that led to my dissertation study, was a teacher leader in the National Writing Project site in which we all participated, and had served as a cooperating teacher for two of the participants in the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) during their pre-service teacher education program, the

participating teachers in this study valued Mattie's experiences and regularly looked to her to share these with the group.

Mattie often demonstrated what it meant to take on an inquiry stance in her teaching life, drawing on the ways that she engaged in mentored inquiry (Bomer, 2011) to explore a new genre or habits that supported a reading and writing life in her reading and writing workshop, as ways to invite her students to study language, sharing what this has looked like in her classroom over the past couple of years. During our pre-study interview, she explained how simply inquiring into language with her students had opened up possibilities for them as readers and writers in her classroom, telling the group, "I feel like you have to have conversations like that in order for students to feel like they can take risks with their language" (interview, June 3, 2013). Afterwards, she showed us a list that her class had recently created as they thought together about the role that language played in the poetry they were reading and writing, demonstrating how inquiring into language in poetry had allowed for her students to engage in important conversations about how language can communicate authors' and characters' feelings about a subject, set a mood and tone, suggest a time period, and allow for the reader to feel connected to a text (interview, June 3, 2013).

Figure 4.1: Charting Pre-Study Noticings



This seemed to be useful to those in the community, such as Sophia, who, like many teachers, initially struggled to visualize how we might link language theory to practice, voicing, “I am curious what we mean when we say language study per se. It seems like a very broad term to me” (interview, June 3, 2013).

We often drew on the tools Mattie used when engaging in mentored inquiry (Bomer, 2011) with her students to inquire into language and language use in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007). For example, when asked to create a language map to document her language practices in the different spaces and places in which she spent time, Mattie requested mentor texts (field notes, June 11, 2013), which later proved to be important resources in all three iterations of this study when leading students through a

process of inquiring into language. In addition, upon recognizing that our professional learning community's (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) developing understandings grew out of the discussions we had when reading about language or looking closely at language in practice, we came to see that we needed a way to capture how our thinking was developing over time, so we began to chart our noticings throughout our experience, just as we saw Mattie's students do in the example she shared with us during the pre-study interview, returning to these noticings to specify our understandings, as well as to add and delete as our thinking developed. Our noticings consisted of things like "Linguistic identity is connected to personal identity," "Language can oppress," "Language can unify," "Purpose impacts how we use language" etc. (field notes, June 11, 2013-September 21, 2013). Returning to these noticings, over time, allowed us to "postpone the rush to conclusions" (Meyer & Sawyer, 2006, p. 49).

### ***Personal inquiry project***

As we read about language and discussed language samples, Mattie often voiced interest in the connection between language and identity, language ownership, and particularly the relationship between language practices and the communities in which we participated. Coming to see that language use was socially situated, (Gee, 2012) she brought in examples of her own language and the language of others that seemed to stray from what might be expected, thinking with the group about why this might be the case. Noticing that some of the choices language users made often seemed to be based on how the speaker wanted others to see them, Mattie reflected on how language can be used "to construct ourselves as social beings" (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 63). Although Mattie seemed

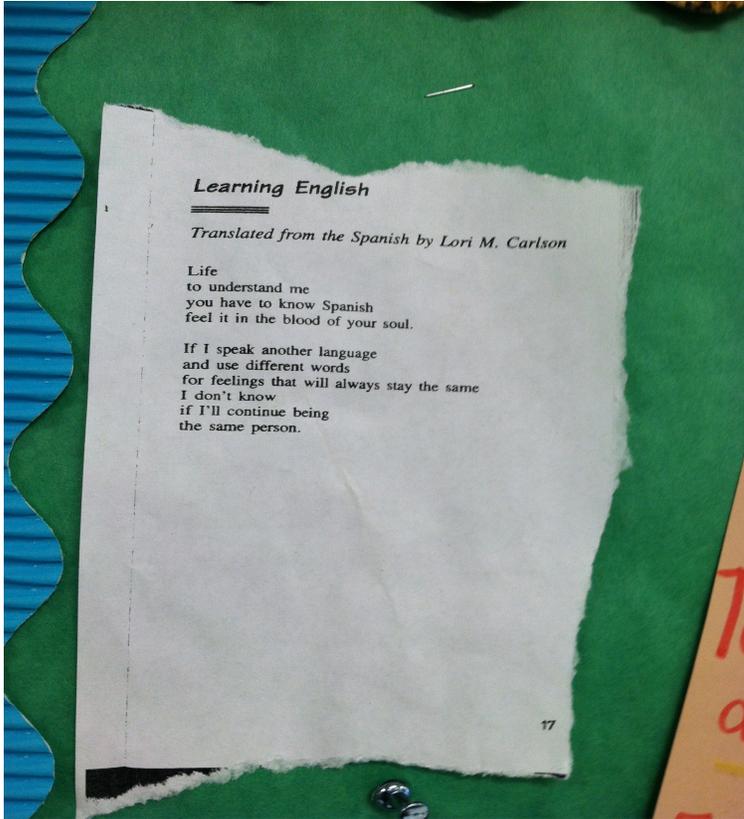
drawn to particular noticings, continuing to collect language samples that allowed her to better understand the relationship between language and identity, the language practices we use and the communities in which we participated, as well as thinking more about who has the “right” to engage in particular language practices, she initially struggled to define the question she was hoping to pursue in planning for a personal inquiry project. After thinking with the group, she eventually decided to focus in on two of our group’s noticings, how language was used to exclude and how it was used to include, voicing “The reason why it makes me excited to do this is that I don’t even think some students are aware of that” (field notes, September 21, 2013). As was the goal of our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), Mattie believed that developing an understanding of these noticings about language use might allow her to support her students in understanding this, as well.

### **A focus on everyday language practices**

#### ***Language mapping***

During our first learning community meeting, I shared a poem with the group that I noticed Mattie had posted outside the door of her classroom as I was observing her class prior to the beginning of our work together.

Figure 4.2: “Learning English”: Posted Outside Mattie’s Classroom



This poem was a translation of Luis Alberto Ambroggio’s “Aprender el ingles,” appearing in the anthology, *Cool Salsa: Bilingual Poems on Growing Up Latino in the United States*. In her translation of this piece, Lori Carlson (1994) writes, “To understand me, you have to know Spanish, feel it in the blood of your soul.” I explained to the group that one thing we will do throughout our time together is to “notice and name” (Johnston, 2004) how we learn and how we use language, so we can better understand the choices we make as language users.

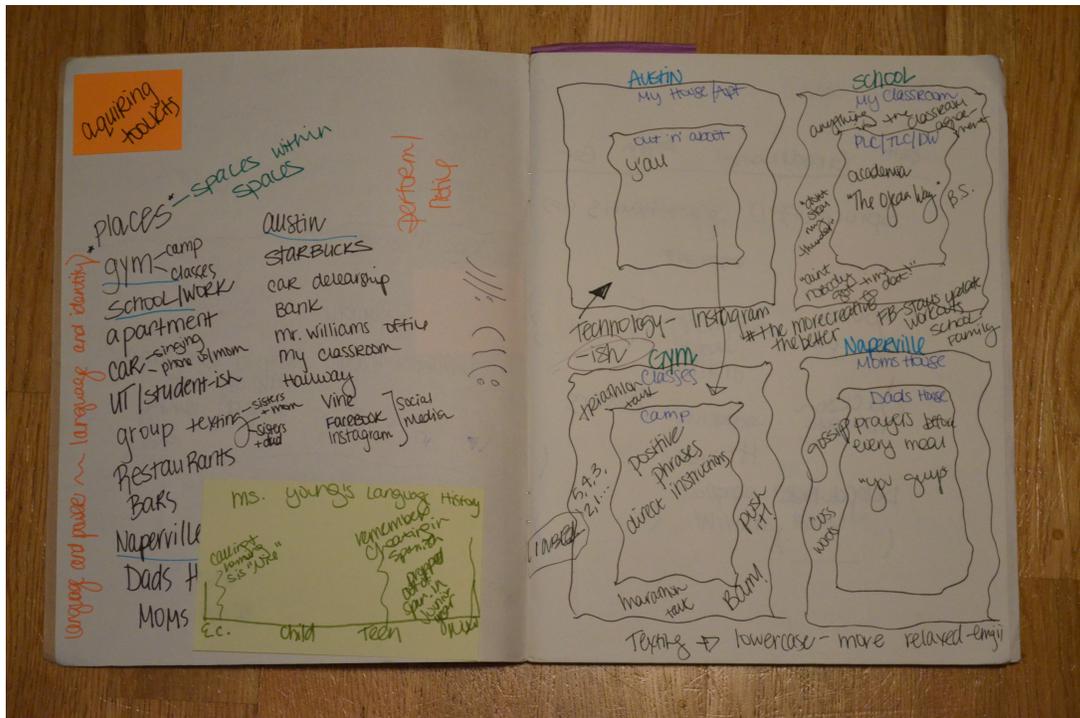
At the first meeting of our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), Ramón Martínez visited with the participating teachers, introducing them to Gumperz's (1972) notion of "linguistic repertoires," (p. 20-21), "the totality of linguistic resources, (i.e., including invariant forms and variables) available to members of particular communities" (p. 20). Gumperz (1972) wrote, "The concept of repertoire allows us to capture these distinctions and, thus, uniquely describe the speech behavior of a population" (p. 21). Creating an opportunity for the participating teachers to make note of the distinctions Gumperz referred to, Ramón shared video clips of individuals using language, asking the participating teachers to consider what's in each language user's "linguistic toolkit?" (field notes, June 11, 2013). Initially, the teachers seemed hesitant to share their thinking. Like the students in Godley and Loretto's (2013) study, it is possible that the teachers participating in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) had not yet developed sociolinguistic meta-language, vocabulary that they might have drawn on to discuss "distinct facets of language variation-including terms like dialects, registers, grammar, accent, and slang" (Godley & Loretto, 2013, p. 325). Instead, they relied on somewhat vague description to share what they noticed. After watching a clip of a man engaging in what Ramón later defined as the register, "Academese," as this individual discussed his participation in a graduate program, Mattie responded, "It was very educational and research-based type of conversation. Like very formal English to use. It sounded research. Academia, yeah" (field notes, June 11, 2013). In addition, she compared the different ways that the

individuals featured in the video clips used language with different audiences. “It sounds more formal than when she talked with her kids. It sounded more bossy,” (field notes, June 11, 2013). She also pointed out how the speakers’ use of named languages differed from the ways she had heard these languages spoken at Olivera Middle School, making claims such as, “She doesn’t sound like the students I teach” (field notes, June 11, 2013), and in doing so, voicing recognition that language users make use of different dialects and variations of languages.

As Mattie and the others described what they observed, Ramón continued to apprentice (Wilhelm, 2006) these teachers, providing language for what they were noticing, as demonstrated in his naming of “Academese,” sharing with them that these named languages, dialects of language, hybrid language practices and registers made up our everyday language practices and inviting them to create a language map, considering how they used language in the different spaces and places in which they spend time. He told the participating teachers,

Just map out the spaces first, then think about how you talk differently in these spaces. Think about how you shift voices for different audiences, how you styleshift, how you code-switch. Think about your entire linguistic repertoire. (field notes, June 11, 2013)

Figure: 4.3: Mattie's Language Map



As Mattie continued to add to her language map and shared her thinking with the group, she noticed that she picked up new words, phrases, and practices from those she spent time with. “Hearing it over and over again, and then you say it,” (field notes, June 11, 2013) developing an understanding that the more you communicate with others, the more likely you are to acquire new tools in your linguistic toolkit. Though Mattie initially suggested that there were “appropriate” and “inappropriate” ways to speak in particular spaces (field notes, June 3, 2013), through mapping her language, she began to see that language use might not be as simplistic as that, voicing, “I found within spaces, I talk differently,” (field notes, June 11, 2013), sharing examples that suggested a recognition that the styleshifting she did was situational (Alim, 2004), based on the role she was

taking on, the audience she was communicating with, as well as the purposes she had for communicating within a particular space. She also realized that she learned and made use of new “ways with words” (Heath, 1983) as she continued to grow and develop as an individual participating in different communities, sharing examples of how the vocabulary that she used at school and at the gym had become more consistent over the past couple of years, as she determined the kind of “social being” (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 64) that she wished to construct in these spaces. In taking on these identities, she had gained membership in particular “speech communities” (Gumperz, 1972), and through participating in these communities, she developed beliefs similar to many of the other participants as well as a shared discourse and vocabulary.

### *Collecting language*

In addition to noticing her own language use through the creation of a language map, one way that Mattie and the other participants learned about language was through collecting authentic language samples (Godley & Escher, 2012). While participating in the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), the group collected their own language, the language of their social worlds, language that assisted the participants in determining if their noticings were accurate, as well as language samples that supported the participating teachers in pursuing their personal inquiry projects. As they shared each language sample, they provided the group with information about audience, context, and communicated why they were drawn to what they collected. As a group, we engaged in “collaborative knowledge building” (Wells, 2010, p.10) to draw conclusions, discussing what each sample taught us about language and language use.



Paris & Alim, 2014). Rather, Mattie saw that she drew on a repertoire of practices (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003) to accomplish different purposes and to present herself in particular ways to specific audiences. Through collecting her own language and thinking through the choices she made in this circumstance, she was able to see that language users sometimes make choices that contrast with a particular speech community's shared knowledge of "communicative constraints and options governing a significant number of social situations" (Gumperz, 1972), choices that differ from the normalized expectations of how an individual might use language. Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) write,

There are regularities in the way that cultural groups participate in the everyday practices of their communities. However, the relatively stable characteristics of these communities are in constant tension with the emergent goals and practices participants construct, which stretch and change over time and with other constraints. (p. 21)

As she collected the language of her social worlds, Mattie often focused on these moments of tension, bringing in examples in which language users made choices that surprised her because their goals and practices seemed outside of normative expectations. For example, during one meeting of our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), Mattie shared a language sample in which a trainer at the women's gym that she attended made a choice to post a message to his trainees saying, "I'm gonna mess you up, motherfuckers" (field notes, July 16, 2013). As a group, we decided to name this language practice, "locker room talk" (field notes, July 16, 2013). In sharing her thinking about the choice made by this trainer, Mattie argued that this "locker room talk," which seemed to serve the purpose of motivating his trainees was "not really appropriate" (field notes, July 16, 2013) based on audience or context. She explained to us, "It is a very family oriented

gym. We don't really cater towards the meathead personality" (field notes, July 16, 2013), voicing her recognition that language is not only tied to the language user's identity, but the identity of the audience might be considered in making choices about language use.

During another meeting of our "professional learning community," (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) Mattie shared a language sample in which a trainer at her gym was using a different trainer's motivational phrases during class. Mattie explained that she brought this language sample to share with the group because she was bothered by the appropriation of the other trainer's language. However, she was not sure why. This created an opportunity for us to problematize linguistic ownership, considering whether these social understandings were constant or evolving, and questioning who got to make those rules (field notes, June 25, 2013), a conversation that is particularly necessary for teachers to participate in as research continues to highlight young people engaging in linguistic and cultural practices that disrupt conventional understandings of linguistic and cultural ownership (Alim & Reyes, 2011; Alim & Paris, 2014; Paris, 2009, 2011). Paris & Alim (2014) argue, "As youth continue to inhabit a world where cultural and linguistic recombinations flow with purpose, we need pedagogies that speak to this new reality" (p. 92). In order to put these pedagogies into place, teachers need to develop understandings allowing them to embrace a "more dynamic" (Ladson-Billings, 2014) view of both culture and language.

### **A transformative teaching and learning experience led by the participants**

#### ***Rhetorical decision-making***

One of the pieces we read that seemed to have a significant impact on Mattie during our learning community experience was Guerra's (2012) working paper, "From

Code-Segregation to Code-Switching to Code-Meshing: Finding Deliverance from Deficit Thinking Through Language Awareness and Performance.” In this paper, Guerra wrote,

It is not up to us, as educators, to tell our students how they should deploy their linguistic and semiotic resources, it is up to each of them to decide which of those resources they choose to invoke based in the rhetorical and discursive situation.  
(p. 12)

Guerra argues that in order to prepare our students to make these decisions, we can, however, support them in developing “a self-reflective and critical meta-awareness of how language works” (p. 12), inviting them to consider whether to challenge the world or adapt to it, based on the rhetorical situations in which they find themselves. This piece as well as the language samples that Mattie collected allowed her to think about the times language users might choose not to “adapt” their language, challenging her own dichotomous thinking in which she initially positioned language use as “appropriate” or “inappropriate,” suggesting that space, alone, could be used to determine the language practices in which an individual “should” engage. Flores and Rosa (2015) explain that though it is often seen as an additive approach to education, in addition to marginalizing the language practices of students of color, “a discourse of appropriateness is premised on the false assumption that modifying the linguistic practices of racialized speaking subjects is key to eliminating racial hierarchies” (p. 155). As she challenged this discourse, Mattie made space in her classroom for cultural and linguistic fluidity, creating opportunities for her students to engage in rhetorical decision-making and enact the identities that suited their purposes.

In a later meeting of our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), while thinking about the negotiation of Dominant American English, Mattie began to consider the reasons why her

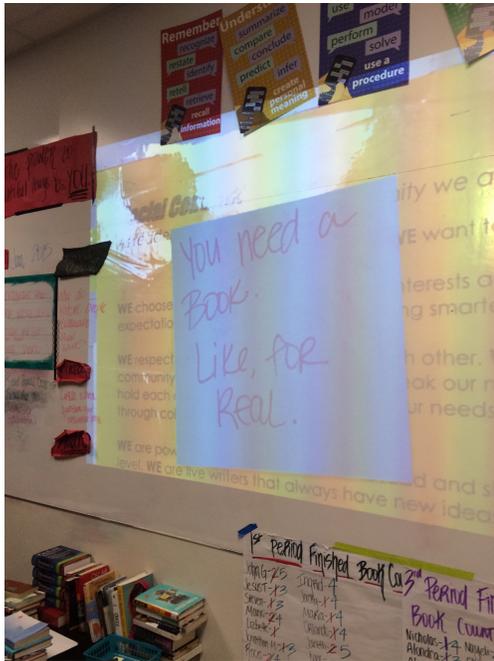
students might make decisions as users of language that contrasted with how they were typically taught to use language in both their speech and their writing at school. She shared, “I think a lot of times our students know they are breaking the rules or following them, and it is a choice they are making” (field notes, July 16, 2013). Although, at that time, Mattie voiced that her new understanding was still in process by asking the group, “Is that weird, though? I don’t know if it makes sense,” (field notes, July 16, 2013), she continued thinking out loud with the other participants,

Sometimes, an audience might not approve of your writing because of the language you are choosing, and you need to be able to adapt it for your audience, if you CHOOSE to, as a writer. (field notes, July 16, 2013)

She argued that there might be times in which speakers and writers “rebel against the system on purpose” (field notes, July 16, 2013), just as she demonstrated in a number of her own language samples.

One year after Mattie implemented her own language study in her classroom, I had the opportunity to visit her classroom and noticed a message written to her students, inviting them to participate in reading workshop, stating, “You need a book. Like, for Real” (field notes, January 12, 2015)

Figure 4.5: Mattie’s Message to her Students-Post Language Study



The language she used to communicate with her students, in this circumstance, contrasted with normative expectations about how an English teacher might typically give directions in a secondary language arts classroom, just as Mattie noted in her own language samples that allowed her to think closely about her language use in the social media sites in which she participated. This example demonstrated that Mattie had internalized the understanding that language is a “flexible social tool,” (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 63) one that is not owned by particular individuals or communities (Paris, 2009, 2011; Paris & Alim, 2014). It seems that, in this circumstance, Mattie was making a very conscious choice about the language she used, presenting herself as a teacher who understands her fourteen-year-old students, using vocabulary and syntax that is familiar to many of them, and common within this community in order to reach them and encourage their

participation. This way of using language might seem “inappropriate” to some, based on her role as a high school English teacher in the context of a class that she is teaching. However, through this decision, she demonstrated that she is able to make choices in order to accomplish particular purposes or present herself in particular ways. In this circumstance, Mattie’s students responded to her request and did not seem to label Mattie as inauthentic. However, in reflecting on the collection of her own language samples that allowed for conversation about appropriation, Mattie had developed an awareness that the appropriation of the language of a community in which you are not a part might not succeed in forming a connection if the relationship between the speaker and the audience and the history of that community has not been considered (Alim, 2004).

### *A community of changemakers*

After reading Alim’s (2011) Op Ed, “What if We Occupied Language?” and thinking about what it might mean to occupy language in the work we were doing, she shared,

It’s no longer about simply occupying a space. It’s about transforming a space. Not just going in and doing a six-week unit of study and then doing our next unit of study, but always addressing language in our classrooms, from the first day until the last day and almost making that space other areas of our school within time. (Field notes, July 9, 2013)

Mattie was a teacher who wanted to create change in her classroom and in her school. However, she found it challenging to do so without the support of other like-minded teachers who, like her, were committed to thinking about how to create meaningful curriculum that would support their students as readers, writers, and users of language. As mentioned earlier in this case study, the year in which Mattie implemented this study

was one of transition for her. In reflecting on what it was like for her at Olivera Middle School, she explained,

I don't feel like I had a PLC this year. To put it bluntly, I felt like this was one. Like another PLC to have, but one that was effective, and one where I felt that my voice was heard. That's been my battle the whole year, not being heard...Just a super hard year at Olivera for me. So this was my PLC, pretty much. (interview, June 11, 2014)

Though Mattie was appreciative of the role that our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) played in supporting her as an educator, she also recognized the benefits of working with a team of teachers at her school, who, like her, were working to create positive change, not only in their own classrooms, but in the school community. In reflecting on this unit, Mattie shared, "It would have been great to have Garrett and Sophia to talk through it," recognizing, "They have each other to bounce ideas off of. They have that support system" (interview, March, 19, 2014).

After a year of soul searching, Mattie decided that she would continue teaching in the same community. However, she decided to follow her eighth grade students to Del Campo High School with a colleague who she saw as a collaborator as well as to work with Garrett and Sophia, who served as her out of school "PLC" during the year she felt she did not have a supportive community to collaborate with at Olivera Middle School. Mattie believed that this was a space in which she could create change, working with colleagues who shared her commitment to transforming teaching and learning, to support her students as readers, writers, and users of language as they moved from middle school to high school.

## MATTIE'S FACILITATION OF A UNIT OF STUDY IN HER CLASSROOM

Mattie was the first participant in the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) to implement a unit of study in her classroom with the goal of further developing her own as well as her students' critical language awareness. After finding a seat at a table with their friends, piling on to the couch in the middle of the room, or claiming a spot on the rug, Mattie would ask for a volunteer to read the social contract to the group, prior to beginning the day's work. Each day, Mattie's class made the following commitment:

As readers and writers in this community, **We** agree that **We** respect ourselves, our teacher, and each other. **We** have a voice in this community. **We** speak our minds without judgment. **We** hold each other accountable for making our needs, ideas, and opinions known through collaboration and conversations....**We** hold each other (teacher/students) to these agreements and make it up to the community when any member acts outside of what we have agreed works for **US**. **We** are forgiving. **We** work together, because **We** live in this classroom together. (field notes, December 16, 2013-March 7, 2014)

The walls were filled with quotations that communicated diversity was valued in this space, such as E.E. Cummings,'

To be nobody but yourself in a world, which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else, means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight and never stop fighting.

On Mattie's desktop of her computer, she displayed an image of Eminem with his lyrics, borrowed from Winston Churchill, "You've got enemies? Good. That means you actually stood up for something," rousing participants in the classroom community to take a stand, as readers, writers, and users of language. Mixed in with the inspiring ideas of writers, musicians, and other artists were students' words that communicated similar messages, such as, "Don't let the world change you, you change the world." A bulletin board titled, "You know My Name, Not My Story" was filled with post-it notes sharing information

that we might not know about each of the students, before being trusted with their stories (field notes, December 16, 2013).

### **The pre-study perspectives of the community**

When I invited the students to participate in this study, the group did not initially seem enthusiastic about it. However, because they had trust in Mattie, and Mattie shared that this was a worthwhile opportunity for the community, the students were willing to open up to me and committed to joining us in this experience, even if it meant that Mattie would be sharing her space with another teacher and the students would lose some writing time, a part of their day that they valued (field notes, December 18, 2013). It wasn't until after the unit was over that they shared the following with me:

**Ari:** Yeah, I think personally, I wasn't really looking forward to doing the language unit. I was like...

**Katrina:** Yeah, me either. I thought it was going to be boring.

**Mari:** I thought we were going to talk about how we spell and all that. I thought we were going to do worksheets.

**Ari:** I thought it was going to be a grammar kind of deal where someone higher educated, more than Ms. Yates, I guess, someone who is in college right now, or taking courses right now...how they see it. (field notes, March 7, 2013)

Mattie was surprised by the students' responses, as she had made an effort, prior to this unit of study, to think with them about language in ways that she believed were meaningful, even though the topic had not been presented as a unit of study. In addition, the grammar study tradition (Wolfram, 1998) had not been a part of the curriculum the students experienced in her classroom (interview, March 7, 2014). However, the students' responses suggested a history of language instruction presented through worksheets, instruction that they saw as "boring," (field notes, March 7, 2014) and disconnected from their everyday lives. Ari's comment, which was made at the

conclusion of the unit of study, demonstrated that after our work together, she had come to understand the connection between language and power and recognized that that individuals have different beliefs and perspectives about language and language use. Teachers, too, were included in this. As a result, teachers' instructional choices might be influenced by their perspectives (Giroux, 1985).

We went into this work expecting that due to the ways that non-dominant languages and language practices have been positioned in our society and, therefore, our schools, the students, too, would voice multiple perspectives about language and language use (Fecho, 2000; 2004). As Wells (1995) recommended, Mattie began this work by "launching the theme" (p. 243), creating an opportunity for students to experience "intense engagement," (p. 241) sharing readings and artifacts with students in an effort to invite them to participate in conversations about language and language use, reflecting on their noticings and their beliefs, and ultimately choosing topics and posing questions that they wished to pursue through further inquiry. In all of the units of study, this period of "intense engagement" (p. 241) allowed students to treat language and language use as an object of study through doing some reflective writing and exploring common myths (Lippi-Green, 1997; Zuidema, 2005) about language and language use in an effort to better understand student perspectives prior to participating in the unit of study.

Before beginning the unit of study, Mattie and I worked together to come up with eight questions, building on a survey created by Chisholm and Godley (2011), which we invited the students to respond to through writing. Through inviting students to answer these questions, they were given the opportunity to consider what they noticed about their own as well as others' language use as well as consider whether or not they believed that

there were correct and incorrect ways to speak and to write. In addition, as they responded to these questions, students reflected on the responses of others when interacting with someone who uses different language practices than those in which they typically engage.

In teaching students what it meant to inquire into language, we drew on Rilke's (1934) invitation to "live the questions," (p. 13) planning a string of mini-lessons in order to think with students about the different ways we might do this. On the first day of the unit, students "lived the questions," (p. 13) reflecting on their past experiences with language. As students started to write, Mattie turned on her doc. cam and began writing with them. It was her practice to participate as a member of the learning community, to take on the role of "student among students" (Freire, 2007, p. 75), and in doing so, modeling for her students prior to inviting them to try something out as readers, writers, and users of language. Observing students look toward the doc cam to see what Mattie was writing, I became concerned that her writing might influence how her students' responded, as it was our goal to better understand the students' perspectives prior to this unit. When she took a break and invited the students to discuss their thinking with each other, I voiced my concern and asked what she thought about this. At this time, she made a decision to turn off the document camera, confident that students understood what we were asking of them, at this point.

Through their writing, a number of students demonstrated awareness that they engaged in styleshifting and code-switching prior to participating in this unit of study, focusing, specifically, on their use of "Spanglish" (written reflection, January 7, 2014).

Ten students voiced that they did not believe there were right and wrong ways to use language in writing and speech, making arguments, such as “Who’s to say whether or not the way you write and talk is wrong,” “There are phrases and ways people grow up around,” and “People from different areas say stuff differently,” (written reflection, January 7, 2014). Those who felt language use could be right or wrong, explained that this might be the case when the language used could not be understood by the speaker or writer’s intended audience, when the context in which the language was used was overlooked, and when language was used with the intention of harming others. Three students referenced bad words and phrases, one wrote that it was wrong to mix languages, and another referenced the importance of spelling words “correctly” (written reflection, January 7, 2014).

Though many argued against language being positioned as “right” or “wrong,” some of the students voiced recognition of linguistic discrimination and linguistic profiling (Baugh, 2000), sharing that, at times, they have noticed themselves and others positioning language practices different than their own as “weird,” “strange,” “crazy,” “ghetto” and “stupid” (written reflection, January 7, 2014). In addition, a number of students made assumptions about who might speak what languages, commenting, “Cholos use language to talk a certain way to each other. It’s like a form of language or code that only specific types of people understand,” and “Preppy, smart people tend to use very big words. They tend to always want to sound smart and make others feel dumb” (written reflection, January 7, 2014). Students reflected on their own language loss, as well, posing questions such as, “Why don’t I know Spanish, cause my Dad and

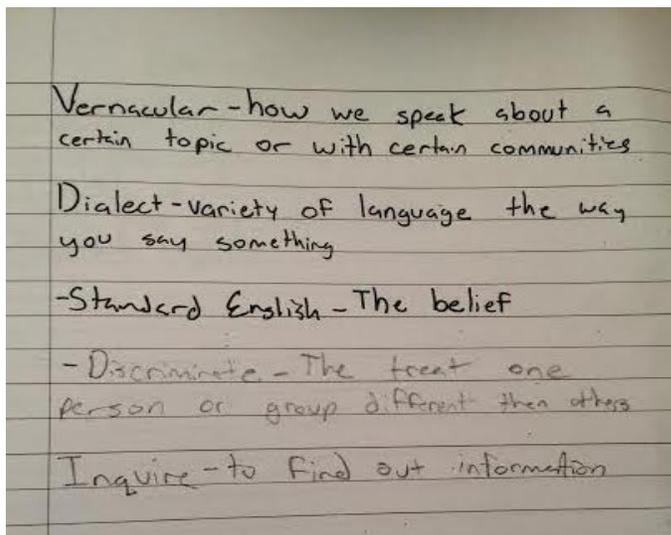
Mom speak Spanish & my friends?” (written reflection, January 7, 2014), and one student began thinking about language shift, writing, “I think there was one right and wrong way back in the day-in olden times-but now-a-days people and technology use their own idea of the right way” (written reflection, January 7, 2014).

Another way that students were taught to “live the questions” (Rilke, 1934) was through thinking together about others’ perspectives and ideas. Early in the unit, students shared their thinking and learned from the thinking of their peers, as they worked in small groups to respond to common language myths (Lippi-Green, 1997; Zuidema, 2005). Groups rotated through four stations, responding to the following statements written on chart paper: 1) Standard English is better than other varieties 2) Some languages and dialects don’t have grammatical rules 3) English must obey rules of grammar 4) English is not as good as it used to be and is getting worse (Lippi-Green, 1997; Zuidema, 2005). Prior to this experience, we did not tell the students that these were myths linguists had proven false. Initially, we were interested in seeing how the students would respond and what they would take away from their conversations with others. After sharing their thinking as they interacted with these myths and with each other, the class added the following noticings to their chart: 1) Language choice matters, 2) People use different languages and dialects with certain people, 3) People have expectations for who should use different languages, 4) There is a relationship between racism and language (field notes, January 8, 2014).



(interview, March 17, 2014). Similar to what was seen in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), we found that we needed to support the students through introducing them to sociolinguistic meta-language (Godley & Loretto, 2013) introducing them to language that they might draw on as they discussed what they were noticing when they observed and reflected on language in practice. Mattie decided to address this through inviting her students to create a space in their notebooks where they might record words that came up throughout this unit that were unfamiliar to them, looking them up in the dictionary, and then asking themselves or the community, “How do we word that?” (field notes, January 15, 2014) to ensure that the word made sense to them, allowing them to return to their language notebook in order to draw on it in their talk about what they noticed.

Figure 4.7: Introducing Sociolinguistic Meta-language



Unfortunately, this was not something that the class or individual students seemed to revisit on a regular basis in order for it to be helpful. In addition, while it made sense that the students would add to their lists as they came upon language during the course of this unit of study that they did not understand or wished to draw on in thinking through language samples, it was important that these definitions were accurate, providing the students with the language that allowed them to develop disciplinary understandings (Wilhelm, 2007). As a result, modifications were made in future iterations in an effort to better support students in the development of sociolinguistic meta-language.

### **An Inquiry-based instructional approach**

#### ***Inquiring into language as a community***

Although Sophia's high school students engaged in meaningful conversation in response to Anzaldúa's (1987) "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" when she shared this piece with them after reading it with our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), as discussed further in chapter five, Mattie felt that many of texts we read with this community might not be accessible to her students. While the ideas presented in these texts led to a growth in our understanding, we recognized that much of our learning was in response to the conversations we had as we explored these texts with the lens of we noticed about language and language use. As a result, in addition to incorporating parts of texts that we thought about in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), such as the work of Lippi-Green (1997) and Zuidema (2005), Mattie worked with Beth, another teacher in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et

al., 2007) prior to implementing this unit of study, to locate poetry, songs, young adult literature, and images that told a story about language and language use. These texts that Mattie invited her students to explore created opportunities for students to participate in conversations about what they noticed about language and language use, allowing the students to identify topics and pose questions, which they would further explore through reflecting on and collecting language samples of their own language, the language of their social worlds, and through planning for and carrying out their own inquiry projects.

Mattie used these texts to teach students that one way we might “live the questions” (Rilke, 1934) was through engaging in reading and research, inviting them to gather photocopies of each of the pieces we had chosen, cutting them out and gluing them into their language notebooks. Mattie’s students worked in small groups, deciding which pieces that they were interested in reading, and discussing what each of these pieces led them to notice about language and language use.

Ruby and Sonja, who were both identified by the school as Hispanic/Latina, chose to read an English translation of Luis Alberto Ambroggio’s, “Aprender el inglés,” the poem that appeared on Mattie’s door, featured in Carlson’s (1995), *Cool Salsa: Bilingual Poems on Growing Up Latino in the United States*. After reading “To understand me, you have to know Spanish, feel it in the blood of your soul,” Ruby responded, “You are already born into it,” (field notes, January 13, 2014) communicating that her native language was a part of who she was and where she came from, as it was the language that her family spoke. As Ruby and Sonja discussed the piece, reflecting on what they noticed about language and language use, Sonja made personal connections, sharing that her mother never wanted her to learn Spanish, voicing, “She wanted to keep things from me” (field notes, January 13, 2014). Sonja went on to explain that her mother was concerned that knowing Spanish would have made it more difficult to learn English (field notes,

January 13, 2014). This was one of the many times throughout this unit of study that Sonja reflected on the fact that her mother made a conscious choice to limit her access to learning the Spanish language. Writing about the impact that this had on her, Sonja commented, “People always think I speak Spanish and understand it, but I don't, especially when my last name is Morelia, a city in Mexico” (language notebook, February 10, 2014). Another day, she wrote about trying to learn Spanish through watching *El Chavo del Ocho*, reflecting on how understanding Spanish would have allowed her to communicate with her Tío and Grandma, who only spoke this language. Unfortunately, watching this popular show in Spanish led her to feel “confused and lost” (language notebook, January 16, 2014). It is possible that Sonja’s decision to explore how individuals and groups are discriminated against because of their language through her inquiry project was in an effort to make sense of her mother’s choice that seemed to weigh on Sonja throughout this unit.

Ari, who self-identified as Alaskan Native, and Patricia, who the school identified as Hispanic/Latina, chose to read Michelle M. Serros’ “Mi Problema,” featured in Otto Santa Ana’s *Tongue Tied: The Lives of Multilingual Children in Public Education*. They read, “My skin is brown, just like theirs, but now, I’m unworthy of the color ‘cause I don’t speak Spanish the way I should. Then they laugh and talk about mi problema in the language I stumble over,” and engaged in the following conversation:

**Ari:** I think they believe it is bad to act like a different culture if you are not that culture.

**Patricia:** What happens if you are adopted?

**Ari:** Then you are pushed into that culture. I think you would be entitled to do that new culture. If I were to go out and marry a Mexican, I would probably be brought up to their culture, but I'd still be able to do my culture. I'd be using that culture with my immediate family, but I'd probably teach my husband my culture, and he would teach me his. (field notes, January 13, 2014)

As Ari and Patricia responded to the texts, they engaged in a conversation not only about language but about culture, as well, focusing, specifically on cultural sharing across difference (Paris, 2012). After discussing the different cultural practices and language practices she had engaged in as a result of people she spent time with and the activities in which she participated, Ari came to see, "I'm part of several different cultures, which I believe is an acceptable thing" (field notes, January 13, 2014). As Ari and Patricia considered what "Mi Problema" led them to notice about language and language use, they began to think more about how often we make assumptions about how individuals should act and, therefore, speak, marking them, based on their race and ethnicity.

**Ari:** Some people, they stereotype about races. Black people like fried chicken. And, so, Asians are the smartest. White people, there's probably something about White people, and Mexicans...

**Patricia:** That thing, that thing...supposedly White people love Starbucks.

**Ari:** I know that I personally love Starbucks.

**Patricia:** But we're not White. (field notes, January 13, 2014)

Sharing their noticings in response to "Mi Problema," created an opportunity for Ari and Patricia to discuss stereotypes that exist about racial and ethnic groups, providing counter examples, recognizing that those who stereotype commonly overlook diversity within groups (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014) and, therefore, stereotypes are often limiting and inaccurate.

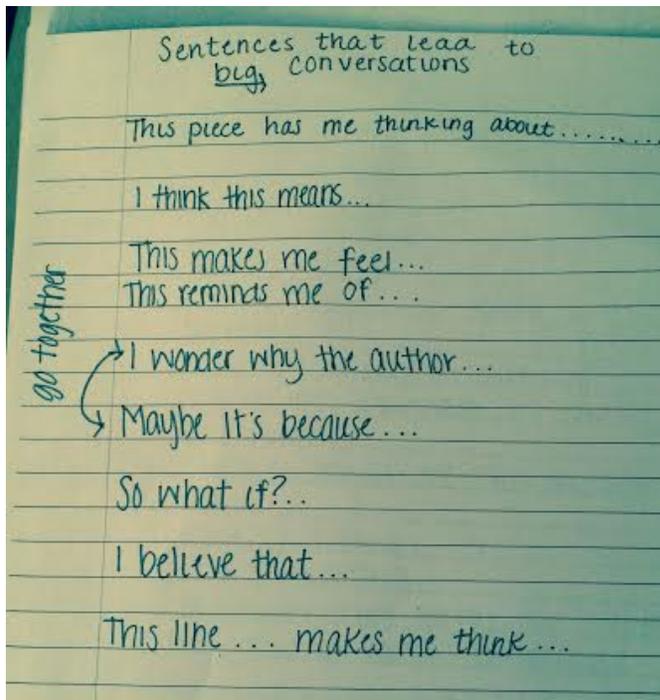
As students engaged in discussions with partners and small groups, Mattie found that she needed to make a modification to this unit of study, creating space to teach into

how students might more effectively build ideas together, as thinking often seemed to develop as a result of making sense of the artifacts and language samples together, considering what this told us about language and language use. Mattie shared with the class,

Every year, when I get eighth graders to talk, someone will say something in your group that is so profound, so amazingly awesome, so great, I can't even believe an eighth grade student said it, but then the people in her group are so focused on what they want to say, they don't even acknowledge that person... We have to ask questions like, "Why do you feel that way?" "Can you tell me more about that?" You have to ask questions like that to get them talking more." (field notes, January 13, 2014)

Mattie chose to make modifications through mixing up the roles that everyone took on within the classroom space as well as the physical arrangement in which they learned, inviting them to join in a large circle and engage in face-to-face conversation without teacher participation after exploring these texts in small groups. In addition, through her mini-lessons, Mattie led the community in thinking through ways they might share what they were noticing about language. The notebook entry below lists some methods that Mari, a student in Mattie's class, thought might be useful to discuss what she was noticing about the texts and language samples she explored, after participating in the mini-lessons Mattie facilitated. Mari focused on discussing what the data led her to think, what her interpretation was, as well as wonderings and beliefs that were connected to the language samples or artifacts she was exploring (field notes, January 14, 2014).

Figure 4.8: Sentences that Lead to Big Conversations



These modifications were taken up in future iterations of the research study as well as within Mattie’s class during the course of her unit of study.

After talking in small groups and doing some writing about what they noticed, Mattie would invite her students to “think as a community” (field notes, January 8, 2014) in a whole class share session, charting their noticings and beliefs. On the same day that Ari and Patricia engaged in the conversation about cultural variation, and therefore, language variation, coming to recognize how problematic it was to overlook the diversity that exists within racial and ethnic groups (Paris and Alim, 2014), Mattie led the class in the following conversation in an effort to add to the class’ noticings.

**Mattie:** Is there anything else from over the weekend or from your talk or from your reading today that needs to be added to this chart?

**Mari:** Your friends influence the language that you use.

**Mattie:** Do you guys agree with that? Your friends influence the language you use?

**Ari:** That's kind of what we were saying.

(Someone calls out, "The people you surround yourself with.")

**Mattie:** The people you surround yourself with?

(A number of students are in favor of stating the noticing this way, so Mattie documents their thinking on the chart).

**Ari:** I think some people get brought into different languages and cultures.

**Mattie:** Ari, can I ask you a personal question? Did people speak Spanish at your school in Alaska?

**Ari:** Yeah, there was a couple of them who did....

**Mattie:** (Repeating Ari's noticing) Sometimes, people get brought into certain languages.

**Mattie:** I can tell you, firsthand, I hadn't heard a lick of Spanish until I taught at Olivera. I went through 14 years without ever hearing Spanish in school.

**Jalisa:** What about in Spanish class?

**Mattie:** That doesn't count. I mean in natural conversation. So, how do you think I reacted my first year teaching? This young, blonde-haired, White teacher. How do you think I reacted to students speaking in Spanish in my classroom my first year?

**Pedro:** Oh, hell no.

(The class laughs.)

**Mattie:** Exactly. I'm not even kidding. Seriously, how do you think I reacted? I didn't allow Spanish in my classroom. Shame on me, right?

**Ari:** That's horrible!

**Nadia:** That's what I mean.

**Mattie:** That's horrible. I was scared because I thought they were talking about me. I didn't realize they were trying to communicate.

**Nadia:** Were you stereotyping the school or something? 'I'm gonna get jumped here!';

(The class laughs)

**Mattie:** No, I wasn't stereotyping. I was just...I don't know. But, now, look at me...

(The class laughs with Mattie)

**Pedro:** For real, right? (field notes, January 13, 2014)

The share session was an opportunity for the community to come together to document what they were learning as they inquired into language as well as to re-visit past noticings, determining whether or not we might reconsider initial hypotheses as we continued to collect data through "living the questions" (Rilke, 1934). During these share sessions, Mattie made efforts to position her students as co-investigators (Freire, 2007), working with them to "unveil reality" (Freire, 2007). She was careful to use the language that the group believed communicated the community's developing understandings. Recognizing that teachers are never really neutral (Giroux, 1985), Mattie was generally quick to state her mind and share her opinion. As a result, there was never really a question about Mattie's perspectives on language and language use, and, therefore, the students seemed to have an awareness of the noticings that she was likely to value and to question, which seemed to lead students to engage in particular discourses and ways of interacting in this space, ways that honored diversity, but potentially limited the inquiry process.

While it seemed to make sense to document the community's noticings, as it was made clear that these could and should be revised throughout our experience inquiring

into language, it seemed problematic to engage in collaborative work around the class' beliefs, particularly when there was a goal to reach consensus, as there was in Mattie's class. This instructional decision contrasted with Fecho's (2000) recommendation that "sustaining multiple perspectives and not pushing for consensus should be the goal of an inquiry classroom," (p. 390) and Godley and Loretto's (2013) claim that teachers should create a classroom space that allowed for "multiple points of view, tensions, hybrid identities" (p. 325). However, just as Mattie made it a practice to have students commit to the class compact each and every day, it seemed to make sense to her that the community would negotiate beliefs that they would live by, in this classroom space and out in the world. This is an example of one share session in which the classroom community negotiated what they believed.

**Mattie:** OK, let's record what we believe about language. These were our beliefs we made the first day of really doing this study...I want to see, after studying this for a few more days, talking about this, see if we have any more beliefs. We have noticings, but they are different than beliefs, right? Cause noticings, you might not agree with this. But these, we want to all believe in. So, one belief we had was that people shouldn't be judged by the native language that they used. Do we still believe this?

**Pedro:** Yes

**Mattie:** Ok, let's write it down, por favor.

(Students write).

**Mattie:** The next one is "Language is part of what makes you." Do we still agree with that?

**Arturo:** I agree (in a bit of an exasperated tone).

**Mattie:** Usually, your native language is part of your culture. Do we still agree with that?

**Arturo:** We agree with everything.

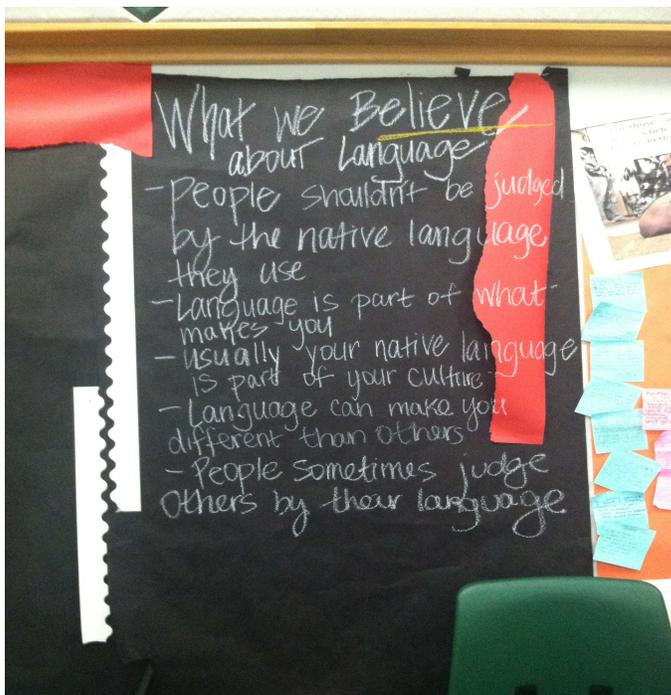
**Mattie:** Don't say that.

**Arturo:** OK, then I don't agree. (field notes, January 16, 2014)

While most of the students seemed very comfortable committing themselves to community beliefs, there was evidence of resistance, as well, particularly later in the unit of study. In this example, Arturo's choice to "agree with everything" (field notes, January 16, 2014) suggested some resistance to "thinking as a community" (field notes, January 8, 2014) about what he believed, committing to particular ways of seeing the world. When he responded with, "OK, then I don't agree," after being told not to say, "We agree with everything," (field notes, January 16, 2014) Mattie chose to move on, rather than explore this tension.

During the course of this unit of study, the group committed to the following beliefs about language:

Figure 4.9: Community Beliefs about Language



These beliefs focused on the relationship of language and identity, the relationship of language and culture, the diversity of language practices that individuals engage in, as well as the existence of linguistic discrimination (field notes, January 7, 2014-March 6, 2014). Modifications were made in future iterations to specify the differences between beliefs and noticings as well as to position beliefs as personal choices rather than community understandings in response to the iterative data analysis that took place as Mattie presented this unit of study.

### *Personal inquiry projects*

After being introduced to strategies that they might engage in an effort to inquire into language and language use, focusing, specifically, on their own language practices as well as the language practices of their social worlds, students had an opportunity to work in small groups, posing a question or exploring a topic of interest that they developed as a result of the noticings and beliefs they documented earlier in the unit of study. Mattie invited students to begin by looking back through their language notebooks, paying close attention to topics of interest as well as to the community's noticings and beliefs about language. As a class, they created a list of possible questions and topics to explore through planning for and facilitating personal inquiry projects, and students chose groups according to their interests (field notes, February 11, 2014).

Initially, we found that many of the groups posed very specific questions that would likely be hard to answer through this particular project. In addition, Mattie and I quickly learned it was necessary to confer with some of the groups, throughout this experience, reminding them that through this project, we were focusing, specifically, on language, as many developed interests in topics that were related to language (such as race, culture, discrimination etc.), losing sight of the relationship between these topics

and language. This was the case with the group who was initially interested in determining “Which race is discriminated against the most?” After participating in a conference, this group eventually decided to focus in on how individuals and groups are discriminated against because of the languages that they speak (field notes, February 18, 2014). Other groups made choices to explore profanity, language use in video games, language use in social media, code-switching and styleshifting as well as the assumptions made about language and language users.

Over the course of nine days, students were expected to “live the questions,” (Rilke, 1934), drawing on strategies for inquiry they had learned in class to explore the topic on which their group decided to focus. After reflecting on their personal experiences with their topic, sharing their thinking with each other, reading on and researching their topic, consulting experts, interviewing people about their topic, and collecting language samples that demonstrated what it looked like when people used language in ways that related to their topic, students were given four days to work together on the creation of a collaborative TED talk, a means of publication that seemed to make sense, as the students were simultaneously exploring the speech genre during their reading block. Each group came up with a plan that they would follow in order to be sure that they made good use of their time. While they worked, Mattie and I conferred with each of them in order to support them in thinking through their data and planning for their TED talks.

Initially, I was concerned that we did not give students quite enough time to engage in this work. In addition, it seemed that that the time they were given might not have been used as effectively as it might have. In response to this, our early conferences served as reminders of the different strategies that they might engage in to “live the questions” (Rilke, 1934). Although students were encouraged to collect data outside of

the classroom, many groups used their time in class for this. This meant that they collected language samples and interviewed individuals who they had access to during this block of time, which often proved to be limiting. In addition, the groups that used this time to research their topics and questions had significantly less time to think through their data together, a very important component of engaging in inquiry (Wells, 1995), reflecting on what they were noticing about language and what they might continue to collect in order to determine if their claims seemed to be accurate.

Mattie dedicated three days to the presentation of these collaborative TED talks. After exploring the genre, immersing themselves in a variety of TED talks in which the TED speakers took up topics about language, Mattie's students determined that, like those that they viewed, their TED talks would also focus on a topic connected to language, allow for the speakers to interact with the audience (connecting with them, asking them questions, making them laugh etc.), include real-world examples and transcripts highlighting language use (from the past and the present), provide facts, make use of images and video to communicate the message visually, and simplify big ideas to ensure that the audience learned something about the topic (field notes, February 12, 2014).

Prior to the presentation of the collaborative TED talks, Mattie had her students create a chart in their language notebooks on which they documented their noticings about language as well as their noticings about the presentations, as they took on the role of audience during each of the TED talks.

Jalisa, Katrina and Kami, all identified as Hispanic/Latina according to school records, chose to present on a topic that the students often discussed throughout this unit, the assumptions made about the language practices in which a language user might

engage. As “The Big Question” appeared on the screen, the following discussion took place.

**Jalisa:** Has anyone ever been somewhere and someone comes and talks to them, and, like, maybe you don’t speak Spanish, and you have to explain to them that you don’t speak Spanish?

**Class:** Yes.

**Jalisa:** Those are called language assumptions...Our question is, “Are language assumptions racist?”

**Katrina:** That’s the big question. (field notes, February 25, 2014)

Jalisa, Katrina, and Kami continued by sharing a clip of an X-factor episode that featured an African-American male singing a country song with a distinctive Southern accent. Similar to the responses of the audience featured on the video, the class responded with “What?” “Get out!” “Holy shit!” (field notes, February 25, 2014). Jalisa, Katrina, and Kali followed this up by sharing a few language samples, posts written in response to this video clip, focusing on the different perspectives of the writers, considering what that might inform us about these individuals’ ideologies. They invited the class to think through the following responses with them.

**Post 1:** Breaking stereotypes

**Post 2:** He’s truly white. Black people are just a myth created by the government.

**Post 3:** That is amazing. I thought he was gonna sing hip hop or something. (field notes, February 25, 2014)

After discussing a political cartoon that they believed addressed the assumptions that Americans make about who people are, what they do and, therefore, what languages they might speak, simply by looking at them, the group showed photos of individuals, asking the class, “What language do you think she speaks?” As their classmates shared their

assumptions, Jalissa, Katrina, and Kami provided information that demonstrated how our assumptions are often incorrect. The group concluded their presentation by sharing commentary from interviews they conducted in which they asked people if they have noticed themselves making assumptions about the language practices individuals might engage in and whether or not they think this practice is racist.

Although it was our intention that the participating students would see the value of local repertoires of practice (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003) as a result of participating in this study, like many of the groups, Jalisa, Katrina, and Kami chose only to share interview responses that they collected from their teachers. When asked about this choice, the class shared that they believed teachers would be more reliable sources. Although Jalisa, Katrina, and Kami maintained an inquiry stance throughout much of their presentation, as we encouraged them to do, and had created opportunities for their classmates to do so, as well, in contrast to some of the collaborative TED talks presented, the interview responses seemed to shut down their inquiry stance in this presentation. In sharing one teacher's response, Jalisa commented,

I interviewed Mr. Miller and asked if he thought language assumptions were racist. He said that it was part of life. Being racist is thinking that one race is greater than another. So, we think that, technically, it's not racist. We don't like that we stereotype people. But, it's just how life is (field notes, February 25, 2014).

In watching the students present collaborative TED talks on their topic of interest, it was clear that most of them were invested in what they chose to explore. Though we encouraged them to maintain an inquiry stance as they presented what they were noticing, many of the presenters seemed to take on the identity of "expert," presenting conclusions as truths, rather than seeing their work as in process. Though Mattie made space at the end of the presentations for conversation, it seemed necessary to have an opportunity to

speak back to what the students discussed throughout their presentation, as many of the students were in need of spending more time thinking with others about their noticings since some of them seemed counter to the beliefs and prior noticings that they documented throughout the unit.

In future iterations of the unit of study, additional efforts were made to model and support students in thinking through the data they collected. In addition, adjustments were made to the process in which the class looked at language samples, encouraging the students to pose questions for further inquiry, rather than state conclusions. The choice to present their noticings through roundtable presentations during future iterations supported the students in continuing to “live the questions,” (Rilke, 1934), as well.

### **A focus on everyday language practices**

#### *Language histories*

When asked how her work in this unit compared to what she had done in the past, Mattie shared,

Usually, the work that I’ve done with students is just honing in on the language they use at home. I just talked to them. I’ve never done inquiry projects on a certain topic...Usually it was just one week long because I didn’t know what to teach or what to do.” (interview, March 17, 2014)

Because, prior to participating in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), Mattie had taken up a discourse of appropriateness (Flores & Rosa, 2015) suggesting that there were “home languages” as well as languages and language practices “appropriate” for school and professional engagements, she was very comfortable engaging in conversations with students about their language histories and the ways they used language in the different spaces in which they spent time, as this was a way she had thought with her students

about language in the past. During this study, Mattie began this work by opening up her notebook and sharing a list of questions she planned to ask her mother that evening in order to better understand her own language history as well as her family's perspectives on language that were likely influenced by that history. After spending some time thinking of what they might ask and who they might talk to, Mattie stated,

Go around the room, and when I point at you, you will say your question. If you like the question that someone shared, write it down, there is nothing wrong with sharing. (field notes, January 13, 2014)

Students posed questions such as “How hard was it for you to understand me when I stopped speaking Spanish,” (field notes, January 13, 2014) “What languages did they teach you at your school and why,” (field notes, January 13, 2014) “Why do you think people judge people on their native language,” (field notes, January 13, 2014).

After students collected information about their language histories (Okawa, 2003) from family and friends who had known them throughout their lives, Mattie invited her students to create timelines in an effort to think through the “the evolution of their language” (language notebook, July 23, 2013). She then invited students to “write long” (field notes, January 16, 2014) about one of these experiences, just as the students had experienced other writers discussing their own language use in the pieces they had explored earlier in the unit of study. José, a student identified by the school as Hispanic/Latino, wrote about his role in helping his mother and aunt learn English. Pedro, also identified by the school as Hispanic/Latino, wrote about using words he heard his father say and experiencing confusion when he got in trouble for speaking these words. Mari, who self-identified as Spanish, wrote about the shame she felt because of her “horrible accent” (language notebook, January 16, 2014), shame that led her to make excuses so she could stay home from school, pursue speech therapy, and shame that

would ultimately cause a rift between Mari and her father because he believed that this shame meant that she was rejecting her heritage.

Mattie believed that providing students with opportunities to write their own language stories (Goodman, 2006) was a turning point in this unit in which the students started to really commit and value the work we were doing. Reflecting on her students' investment in their writing, Mattie shared, "I think they're going to have more ownership over this study now that we've done all the background knowledge" (field notes, January 16, 2014).

### *Language mapping*

The use of the language map and the collecting of language samples as tools to think about students' everyday language practices proved to be a little more challenging than creating timeline to represent their language histories (Okawa, 2003) and writing language stories (Goodman, 2006). Mattie introduced language maps through showing the students a number of examples, including her own, sharing the thinking behind the choices she made in engaging in this work. Through their language maps, students in Mattie's class documented the spaces in which they spent time and the people, with whom they interacted, making efforts to describe what they noticed about their language use.

Nadia, a student who the school identified as Hispanic/Latina, demonstrated her recognition that she spoke differently in different teachers' classes. In addition, she pointed out that there was a vocabulary that was specific to her cheer community, providing examples of some of these words and phrases. Nadia described her family as speakers of "Spanglish," (Martínez, 2010) but showed, on her map, that language is "a

flexible social tool” (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 63) demonstrating that she used language differently with her mom, her dad, and her sister.

Figure 4.10: Nadia’s Language Map



While this language map highlights some of Nadia’s initial noticings about her own language use, it seemed as if the language maps might have had a greater potential if they were used as tools the students could go back to, documenting what they learned about their language over time, adding examples to support or refute these noticings. In addition, in seeing them used, I believed that there might have been ways to teach into these language maps, making note of how students were describing what they noticed about their own language use and teaching or returning to the sociolinguistic meta-

language (Godley & Loretto, 2013) in response to this to ensure that the students were able to specify what they were learning, demonstrating disciplinary understandings.

### *Collecting language*

After reflecting on their language use through the creation of a language map, Mattie invited her students to collect speech and writing samples. When students failed to bring in their language samples after being asked to do so, Mattie invited them to think about their language use in three of the spaces they included on their language maps, calling on their memories to write down “specific examples” (field notes, January 23, 2014) in their notebooks, documenting how they used language in these spaces, and putting a star by a few of the examples of their language that they believed to be “really accurate representations” (field notes, January 23, 2014), those that “really stick out” (field notes, January 23, 2014). After introducing this to her students, Mattie made an effort to model what it might look like to chart a language sample, sharing an interaction she had with another teacher. However, rather than focusing on the language that was used, Mattie told the group, “I’m not gonna write out exactly what she said” (field notes, January 23, 2014). Instead, she put what happened into her own words, writing, “Ms. Smith talking to me in a motherly tone” (field notes, January 23, 2014). This seemed to confuse a few students. In fact, one student questioned why Mattie did not write exactly what was said as she charted her language. As Mattie conferred with students, this confusion was apparent, as well. In looking at how a student charted her own language, Mattie voiced, “I want you to think about what they really said. I summarized mine because I was in a rush” (field notes, January 23, 2014).

During this component of the unit as well as when they were working on their personal inquiry projects, students often talked about what they felt or thought about in

response to language samples, rather than focusing on “the facts of variation,” asking, “why are the facts as they are,” and “how-in terms of the development of social relationships of power-was the existing sociolinguistic order brought into being?” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 6).

It was clear to both Mattie and me that we needed to spend some time thinking about how we might better support students in the collection of language and in thinking through language samples. Unfortunately, during this time, Mattie was training to become a yoga teacher in addition to teaching language arts, which meant that she was out of her classroom for over a week and had limited availability to meet outside of class. In reflecting on the creation of the language maps and the collecting of language, Mattie shared that the challenges we experienced might have occurred because of the “chunks and breaks” (interview, March 17, 2014) in her schedule. However, despite the difficulties, she believed that teaching students to collect and learn from language in practice was meaningful. In reflecting on how we might better support students in this practice, she shared,

It’s an important thing to do for sure and shouldn’t be taken away. I think you have to train yourself to really listen. It’s a different type of listening to people. It’s listening to someone and realizing, “Oh, that is a true example of their language. I need to write this down.” That’s the stuff that’s missing. Kids in middle school have a hard enough time listening to their teachers, as it is, and listening to their friends, as it is. It’s almost the “all about me” type of attitude. For me, a 27 year old, who was interested in it, it was hard for me, this summer, when we did it. It’s almost like a lot of modeling. (interview, March 17, 2014)

We drew on the data collected in Mattie’s classroom as well as her personal reflections on the unit of study to make pedagogical modifications, focusing, specifically on the collection and exploration of everyday language practices.

In addition, data collected during this part of Mattie's unit of study led us to make methodological modifications in future iterations of this study, planning for consistent, uninterrupted planning times a few times a week, allowing us to return to data we collected, collaborating on modifications in the second iteration of this study. In order to ensure that we made good use of this time and that we were able to capture the teachers' experiences on the days that we did not meet, the teachers, participating in the second iteration of this study, began keeping reflective journals (Ivey & Broaddus, 2007) that served as additional data sources.

### **A transformative teaching and learning experience led by the participants**

#### *The post-study perspectives of the community*

Although the students, in general, seemed to come into this unit with a greater respect for language diversity than the other three classrooms in which these units of study were put into place, their written reflections following the unit of study suggested a growth in the class' critical language awareness. Most of the students discussed that they made choices about language based on context, considering their purpose, who their audience was, where they were, what time of day it was, as well as the genre and mode in which they were communicating, often providing examples that they came across when making their language maps and describing their own language in the spaces in which they spent time (NCTE, 1994; Wolfram, 1995). Unlike the writing they did prior to the study, a greater number of students focused on how, ultimately, language use should be positioned as a personal choice, voicing statements such as, "People should be able to speak freely. It is kind of like there are people who built an imaginary language barrier" (written reflection, March 7, 2014), recognizing that though individuals should, in fact, have choices about which languages and language practices to engage in, it is not

possible to have complete control over how others' perceive you as a result of your choices. Lippi-Green (1997) writes,

The degree of control we have over language is limited. We can choose to be polite or obtuse, to use forms of address which will flatter or insult, to use gender-neutral language or language that is inflammatory; we can consciously use vocabulary which is simple, or purposefully mislead with language. But there are many dimensions of language, which are not subject to conscious or direct control. Nevertheless, as speakers we are obsessed with the idea of control. (p. 5)

The project presented by Jalisa, Kaitlyn, and Kami pushed back on the idea of control, a perspective that Mattie had initially overlooked when she came to an understanding in our professional learning community regarding the freedom that individuals have to make choices about their language and language use. This was easy to overlook because of the privilege Mattie had in being positioned as a White speaker of Dominant American English. The opportunity to learn with her students provided Mattie and her students with an chance to develop new understandings about the relationship of language and social inequalities (Alim & Smitherman, 2012).

In the writing they did at the conclusion of the unit, Mattie's students also made it clear that they now understood that to label language as "right" or "wrong" was much too simplistic. One student wrote that language is not incorrect, "it's only the wrong audience," (written reflection, March 7, 2014) and then went on to state that, even so, "If you like it, you can speak the way you want," (written reflection, March 7, 2014) voicing recognition that a language user has many reasons for choosing what to communicate and how best to do this (NCTE, 1994). Another student, recognizing the attitudes and ideologies that individuals have in response to language (NCTE 1974, 1994) wrote, "People think there are wrong and right ways to speak. People don't like change or difference. So, instead of calling it language, they call it error" (written reflection, March 7, 2014). In addition to voicing that there are many ways to communicate (NCTE, 1994),

one student pointed out people's resistance to language shift, which was something that was discussed during this unit of study. A number of students pointed out that linguisticism is problematic because language is connected to identity, "There is no way to speak and talk. You have to be yourself" (written reflection, March 7, 2014).

One thing, however, that came out in the student writing that was not challenged during this unit of study was the use of the term, "ghetto language," (written reflection, March 7, 2014) which was, sometimes, used synonymously with "Black language," (written reflection, March 7, 2014). One student wrote, "I use a Ghetto or Black English way of speaking, unlike my more sophisticated way of talking with and communicating with teachers" (written reflection, March 7, 2014). Although we engaged in discussion, during this unit of study, about what Black Language or African American Vernacular English was, noting the complexity of this language, it was clear that although this student identified as a speaker of Black English and did not argue that it was "right" or "wrong," she positioned it as "less sophisticated" and "ghetto" as well as unfit for school (written reflection, March 7, 2014), demonstrating that she continued to take on a "discourse of appropriateness" (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

In reflecting on their experiences participating in this unit, Mari shared that focusing on language required "actually going out and finding it for ourselves" (interview, March 7, 2014). In discussing this process, Mari explained, "I feel we learned more than we did just talking about it" (interview, March 7, 2014). And in reflecting how she had grown as a result of participating in the unit, she commented, "We didn't know much of what really goes on" (interview, March 7, 2014) until the class started noticing and naming what happened when language users used language. She believed that treating language as an object of study had led her to recognize "how language affects us" (interview, March 7, 2014). Jalisa shared that she had been "paying attention to

language patterns” (Interview, 3/7/14) since participating in the unit of study (Wolfram, 1995). Like, Jalisa, many students shared how they could not help but notice language, particularly the areas they focused on in planning for and carrying out their inquiry projects (interview, March 7, 2014).

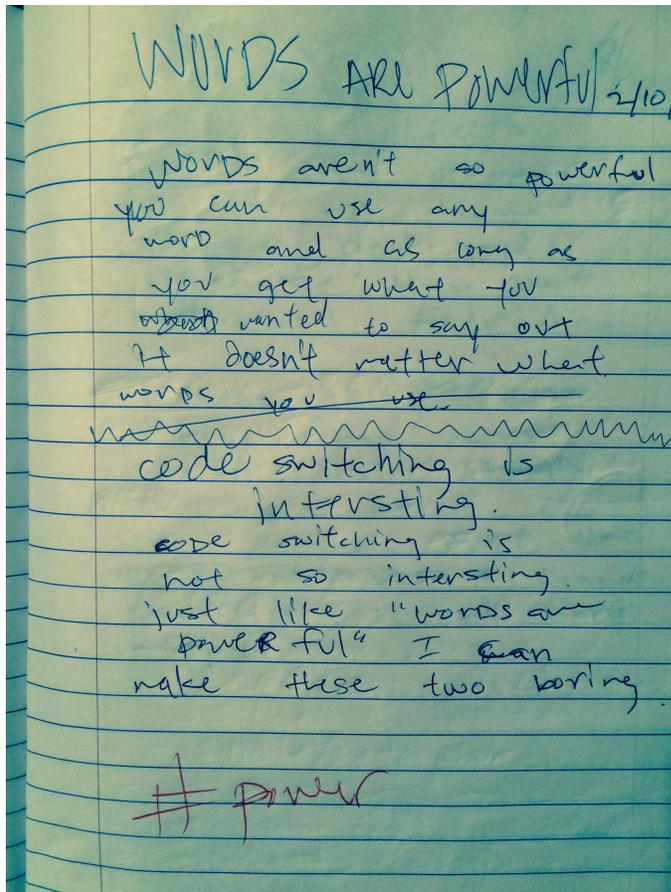
### ***Trying on critical identities***

In addition to better understanding the complexities of language and language use, there was evidence that many of the students in Mattie’s class began to take on critical identities. Three months after the study ended, Mattie shared with me.

I did not see it going this way at all, but the inquiry project made them feel so much more powerful. Ever since that project, we’ve gotten into, not really arguments, but they would ask me really, really tough questions. The conversations we had were unlike any conversations I had with students in the past. They just took on this...the inquiry project, in itself, the whole concept of ‘I’m going to research this thing,’ made them take a lot more ownership over their learning. (interview, June 3, 2014)

This was seen throughout the unit of study, as well. Although it was established that consensus be reached prior to documenting a belief about language on the class chart, at times, students independently made use of their language notebooks to question and challenge some of the statements that the class agreed to. In this entry, Nadia returned to two of the class’ noticings that focused on the power of words as well as the skill of code-switching, choosing to speak back to what the community charted.

Figure 4.11: Nadia's Notebook Entry



Although she didn't fully develop the arguments she was making or show evidence that she was drawing on language samples or other ways of "living the questions" (Rilke, 1934) in making these statements, I found it interesting that Nadia concluded this entry with "#power," (language notebook, February 10, 2014) almost to suggest her recognition that there is a power in questioning community norms.

During the course of this study, students began to think about what it might take to create change in their schools and in the world, seeing these spaces as, what Freire (2007) refers to, as "a reality in process" (p. 83). This conversation took place after Jalisa,

Kaitlyn, and Kami's presentation that focused on the assumptions made about languages individuals speak. As discussed previously, during this presentation, the group shared a video of an African American man, with a distinct Southern accent, singing a country song. The audience voiced surprise when the African American performer began to sing.

**Jalisa:** He is one of those people breaking stereotypes. He does something.

**Kaitlyn:** Different.

**Jalisa:** And it amazes so many people. It is actually a good thing.

**Mari:** He does something most people wouldn't do.

**Ari:** He's, like, a brave person.

**Mari:** He's the start of a new thing. He's the one who shows people it is OK to.

**Jalisa:** The breaker of status quo. (field notes, February 25, 2014)

In the writing that Mari does at the conclusion of the unit, she explained, "The way most people use language depends on their environment, where they are, who they're with, and what time of day it is" (written reflection, March 7, 2014). In reflecting on her own language use, however, she wrote, "The way I use language doesn't change. It doesn't matter who I'm around, where I am, the time that it is. None of that matters," (written reflection, March 7, 2014) arguing, "There is no law saying there is a right or wrong way to speak,"(written reflection, March 7, 2014). This understanding contrasts with the writing that she did prior to the unit of study in which she voiced recognition of the code-switching and styleshifting in which she engaged, supported by the language samples she collected and the language map that she made earlier in the unit of study.

In thinking back on Mari's written response after participating in this unit of study, I wondered if, like the singer the girls discuss above, Mari has committed to being "the start of a new thing," (field notes, February 25, 2014), "The one who shows people it

is OK to,” (field notes, February 25, 2014), choosing to take on a different identity than the girl who felt “ashamed” (language notebook, January 16, 2014) and attended speech therapy to get rid of her accent (language notebook, January 16, 2014), years earlier.

In a post-study interview, Mattie shared,

I think it’s cool for students to see you being a risk-taker and doing things you believe in. Isn’t that why they are in school? At the end of the day, they are in school to become smarter individuals for society, not for a state test...for life. (interview, June 7, 2014)

Through participating in this experience in Mattie’s class, many students began taking on the role of “risk-taker,” (interview, June 7, 2014) too. In fact, three months after the study, Mattie reported, “There are more kids speaking up” (interview, June 7, 2014). In an effort to try on this critical identity of “risk-taker” (interview, June 7, 2014) and changemaker, students sometimes rejected the norms and ways of being of the classroom community through their thinking, their writing, and their talk. Mattie recognized this and shared,

Sometimes, I’m like, “I don’t want to have to argue with you. I just want you to listen to me.” In the same sense, it’s cool that they feel safe in this environment that they can do that. (interview, June 7, 2014)

It seemed that Mattie’s students did not only feel safe, their agency demonstrated that they felt empowered as a result of this experience and their new understandings about language. In addition to better understanding the complexities of language, many of Mattie’s students recognized that language could be used as a “weapon of resistance” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 154) to create a more just world and were beginning to make sense of their own role in this.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In this case, I presented findings that came from iterative analysis of Mattie’s participation in the professional learning community as well as her implementation of a

unit of study in her classroom aimed to further develop her own as well as her students' critical language awareness. Through focusing on Mattie and her students' engagement in each of the essential elements of this study 1) an inquiry-based instructional approach, 2) a focus on everyday language practices, and 3) a transformative teaching and learning experience led by the participants, I presented the significant modifications made as Mattie and her students aimed to further develop their critical language awareness. These modifications included 1) strategies for engaging in "collaborative knowledge building," (Wells, 2001) and 2) strategies to develop disciplinary understandings.

In chapter five, I will present the findings from the second iteration of this study, detailing how we drew on the recommended modifications from the first iteration of the study as well as additional modifications growing out the second iteration, engaging in comparative analysis across both cases.

## **Chapter 5: The Second Iteration- “Don’t just assume. I’ll start talkin’ Japanese or something.”**

### **INTRODUCTION**

As stated in chapter four, through an embedded multiple case study design, I address the following questions:

1. What might a curriculum aimed at further developing teachers’ and students’ critical language awareness look like in practice?
2. How do teachers and students respond to this instructional approach?

In chapter five, I present the case of Sophia’s participation in the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) as well as her implementation of a 6-week unit of study aimed to further develop her own as well as her students’ critical language awareness. Sophia’s case is one of two units of study that functioned as the second iteration of this study. As we planned for this work in the classroom, we drew on data collected in the first iteration of this study to modify the 1) inquiry-based instructional approach, 2) a focus on our everyday language practices, and any choices made that might have limited the potential of creating 3) a transformative teaching and learning experience led by the participants with the goal of further developing our own as well as our students’ critical language awareness.

In addition to revisiting the modifications made in the first iteration of this study, 1) Strategies for engaging in “collaborative knowledge building,” (Wells, 1995) and 2) Strategies to develop disciplinary understandings, the work done in Sophia’s class led us

to make two additional modifications, 3) Strategies for maintaining inquiry as stance, as well as 4) Strategies for supporting the teacher/researcher collaboration.

Table 5.1: Modification 3-Maintaining Inquiry as Stance

<b>Strategies for Maintaining Inquiry as Stance</b>
Collaborative planning and reflection sessions
The use of genres that encourage problem-posing, rather than problem-solving
Charting and returning to our thinking on wall charts and in language notebooks
Teaching a process approach/Scaffolding the language inquiry project
Problematizing “teacher as learner,” and “learner as teacher”
Valuing multiple perspectives
Supporting the development of student-initiated affinity groups

Table 5.2: Modification 4-Supporting the Teacher/Researcher Collaboration

<b>Strategies for Supporting the Teacher/Researcher Collaboration</b>
Teaching reflection journal
Consistent planning and reflection meetings

## **SOPHIA'S PARTICIPATION IN THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY**

Upon walking into Sophia's classroom, prior to her participation in the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), the first thing I noticed were the posters that covered her wall. In contrast to those seen in Mattie's classroom that communicated messages such as "Don't let the world change you. You change the world," (field notes, December 16, 2013) Sophia's walls reminded her students of commonly confused homonyms, rules for punctuation, and examples of various parts of speech. Next to these posters hung Del Campo High School's non-negotiable writing guidelines, stressing that students should "avoid all texting language, slang..." "write in complete sentences at all times," and suggesting that "Third person voice is the most appropriate for academic writing," elaborating on this message by stating, "This means you should avoid using 'I' 'me' 'we' and 'you' pronouns" (field notes, May 7, 2013). In looking at Sophia's room, one might come to the conclusion that she was an English teacher who saw value in the grammar study tradition (Wolfram, 1998). However, in her post-study interview, Sophia shared, "I never cared about grammar as a student. As a teacher, whatever, I don't know" (interview, June 17, 2014). Despite this, traditional grammar instruction was a part of her practice because she was told to make it a part of her practice. Eager for support as she negotiated a new school in an urban environment, she looked to those in "power" for direction (field notes, May 28, 2013), unlike Mattie, who, with the support of her department and her National Writing Project site, actively fought against mandates that she believed failed to support her students. Unfortunately, Sophia's desire to please those

in power meant that she, sometimes, functioned as a “technician,” (Giroux, 1985) encouraged to “carry out dictates and objectives decided by experts far removed from the everyday realities of classroom life” (Giroux, 1985).

### **Sophia’s pre-study perspectives**

Prior to participating in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), Sophia shared that most of the conversations she had with students about language and language use were “informal” (interview, June 3, 2013) and “took place outside of the classroom” (interview, June 3, 2013). In the classroom, the grammar study tradition (Wolfram, 1998) was implemented instead of language study, in response to departmental and school-wide interventions. Throughout her teaching career, Sophia had tried explicitly teaching grammar rules, introducing her students to fill-in-the blank practice, sentence composing, paragraph correction, and revising and editing practice through posing multiple choice questions, similar to what her students were required to do on their state exam. She argued that because her students would find themselves in circumstances in which it was expected that they know how to use their “to, too, and twos correctly,” (interview, June 3, 2013) it was our responsibility, as their teachers, to instruct them in how to do this, voicing, “We have to be pragmatic and functional about it” (interview, June 3, 2013). In reflecting on the effectiveness of the practices she had tried out with her students, Sophia shared that although she and her department had “faithfully implemented all of the school’s interventions that were put into place each week, even

when they didn't make sense" (field notes, May 28, 2013), her students didn't seem to be learning what the interventions aimed to teach, later asserting,

Our students are masters at the grammar worksheet. They might not be able to define an adjective for you, but they can certainly find one in a sentence, but when it comes to talking about their own writing or applying the grammar rules, they are super confused, and they just don't ever do it. (interview, June 3, 2013)

When asked what she hoped to get out of participating in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), she voiced,

I would like to learn more about teaching syntax and patterns for using language cause I've got a lot of students who are just not conventional users of language...Talking about more sentence patterns, where we can put words together and connect meaning would be useful to them. (interview, June 3, 2013)

Like Mattie initially did, Sophia saw it as her job to prepare students to "adapt," (interview, June 3, 2013), teaching them tools that would allow them to present themselves as "conventional users of language" (June 3, 2013). Because this was a goal of Sophia's, and, therefore, proved to be personally significant to her (Wells, 2001), she inquired into it, exploring this not only in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), but independently, as well, just as we hoped our students would learn to do. In fact, Sophia decided to pursue this through a personal inquiry project she designed as part of the summer institute she was simultaneously attending through our National Writing Project site, as well. This work led her to consider what it might mean to teach "functional grammar" (NCTE, 2008) rather than prescriptive grammar, studying how language "is actually used by speakers and writers in real-world contexts" (NCTE, 2008), exploring instructional methods, such as craft study, sentence combining/revision aimed at meaning-making, in addition to an inquiry-based approach to language study.

## **An inquiry-based instructional approach**

### ***Inquiring into language as a community***

Prior to the first meeting of our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), in which we began thinking about linguistic repertoires of practice (Gumperz, 1972) in order to examine how each of us used language in the spaces and places in which we spent time, I invited the participating teachers to read Anzaldúa's (1987) "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," from her book, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Before sharing her response to this piece, Sophia voiced, that she felt she had "no real experience" (field notes, June 18, 2013).

Recognizing that we were engaging in this work with goal of further developing our own as well as our students' critical language awareness, Sophia decided to create space within her classroom, for the first time, to engage in dialogue with her students about the complexities of language use, as discussed by Anzaldúa, sharing this chapter with students in her academic classes in an effort to learn from the connections and disconnections they had with Anzaldúa's words. These conversations allowed Sophia to feel as if she could begin to name the world in a way that she initially felt unqualified to do, as a result of her perceptions about her experience and her own language use. Sophia shared with the group that students she shared this piece with voiced that linguistic terrorism is "a really real thing," (field notes, June 18, 2013) explaining that they felt their forms of expression were regularly "attacked" (field notes, June 18, 2013) in school. Reflecting on the term, "linguistic terrorism," (Anzaldúa, 1987) Sophia voiced,

We found it to be a little bit apt. This idea of taking something. And you never know when you're going to be punished because you speak Spanish, or when it's going to be OK. This fear of your identity being judged and harmed and hurt. (field notes, June 18, 2013)

This is something that Sophia continued to notice once she began inquiring into language and language use, both in the school in which she taught and in the world. Sophia shared that her students also discussed their fear and regret that came with the recognition that they were less comfortable speaking in Spanish than they were at one time in their lives, questioning why English was a required subject but Spanish was not (field notes, June 18, 2013).

Although many of the students that Sophia shared this piece with felt resentment about the positioning of their heritage and community practices, (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014) Sophia explained that other students she worked with seemed to take on the standard language ideology, (Lippi-Green, 1997) valuing Dominant American English over other languages.

**Sophia:** If you know Spanish, if you speak Spanish at school, that's not cool. There's a much higher price on being able to speak perfect English than there is on being perfect in Spanish.

**Mattie:** I wonder what changes between middle school and high school.

**Sophia:** I almost wonder if it's how the teachers talk to them.

**Mattie:** Oh, like the teachers don't allow it in the high school?

**Sophia:** I don't think they allow it. (field notes, June 18, 2013)

This led Sophia to reflect on the messages sent to students at Del Campo High School that might have influenced students' perspectives or the story that they told in this space, recognizing that, as a teacher, she could make a choice not to send these messages with the goal that her students would come to recognize the value of multilingualism and multiculturalism, celebrating cultural pluralism (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014) as Mattie shared that she did in her middle school classes.

During a professional learning community meeting, (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) Sophia shared a recent circumstance she witnessed in which a counselor admonished a group of students for speaking over her, failing to recognize that the students were attempting to translate the counselor's words into Spanish for those who were struggling to understand what was being said. This led her to recall how often she heard faculty at Del Campo share their thinking about their students' abilities as readers, writers, and users of language. "They just don't speak right. They just don't read right. They just don't write right" (field notes, June 23, 2013). The conversations that she had with students in response to Anzaldúa's (1987) chapter served as a reminder to her that language is connected to identity. Sophia explained that this was something that she had learned in her undergraduate teacher education program but had forgotten prior to reading Anzaldúa's chapter and thinking about it with her students and the participants in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) (field notes, June 18, 2013).

### ***Personal inquiry project***

That being said, within our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), Sophia continued to think back on the circumstances in which Del Campo students seemed to view their multilingualism as "a problem, not an asset" (field notes, September 21, 2013). Sophia shared that she noticed some of her students making efforts to hide the fact that they knew Spanish, even though she had heard them speak fluently other times. In addition, she discussed how often students voiced that English is a more difficult language to learn than Spanish, seemingly attaching a higher status to those who identified as speakers and writers of Dominant American English (field notes, June 25, 2013). In addition, Sophia

told stories in which students voiced negative responses to the use of African American Vernacular language as well as non-dominant varieties of English in the literature they were reading, calling it “weird” and “wrong” (field notes, September 21, 2013).

After doing quite a bit of reflection on how multilingualism was positioned by students and teachers at Del Campo High School, Sophia began to plan for a personal inquiry project with the goal of exploring individuals’ perceptions of their own multilingualism, speaking to students about their perspectives and some of what she noticed in reflecting on how the heritage and community practices (Paris, 2012; Paris and Alim, 2014) of her students were rarely embraced at Del Campo High School. In addition, in an effort to think about how this played out in the larger community, Sophia made efforts to attend a bilingual poetry reading, learning from the experiences of multilingual writers as they spoke about the role that their linguistic repertoires of practice (Gumperz, 1972) have played in their writing lives, recognizing that, like she experienced in her classroom, she will only truly “come to know” (Freire, 2007, p. 95) through dialoguing with the people about their view and ours” (Freire, 2007, p. 96).

### **A focus on everyday language practices**

#### ***Language mapping***

At the first meeting of our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), Sophia seemed to be listening closely to Ramón Martínez as he introduced the group to the concept of linguistic repertoires of practice (Gumperz, 1972), inviting them to notice and name (Johnston, 2004) the language practices of individuals featured on video clips prior to reflecting on their own language practices. She didn’t initially share her noticings when Ramón invited the group to do so. Closer to the end of the session, while watching a video clip in which

an individual left a message for his young child, Sophia spoke up, sharing that she believed this was an example of “Fatherese,” (field notes, June 11, 2013) building on Ramón’s use of the register “Motherese” (field notes, June 11, 2013). It seemed that she felt more confident to name what she was noticing, once she believed she had language to do so. Later, she shared how the same language user adjusted his tone when speaking about his child (field notes, June 11, 2013).

When Sophia first shared her thinking in response to the work she was doing on her language map, she focused, specifically, on how audience impacted her language use (NCTE, 1994) voicing, “I tend to speak differently with different groups of people. With my best friend, I might be sarcastic or silly, but the larger the group becomes, I get quieter” (field notes, June 11, 2013). However, through mapping her own language use, Sophia recognized that language is not fully bound by space or audience. In the examples that she shared, her purpose and the identity she wished to portray as well as the motivations of those who she was interacting with seemed to impact the choices she made as a language user (NCTE, 1994). Sophia explained,

At school, I noticed, even in my own classroom, there are different times of day when I will speak differently with the students. Like during class, I will be very academic. During lunchtime, when it’s time for interventions that kids don’t want to be at, I’m a lot sillier, a lot more goofy, to make them want to be there. Then, after school, the kids that show up tend to want more honest conversations about ‘Why am I struggling,’ and so forth, so even in the classroom, there are different ways of being. (field notes, June 11, 2013)

In describing the choices she made in mapping her language, Sophia explained, “I don’t have very many dialects, and I don’t speak another language, so there are just descriptors for how I speak” (field notes, June 18, 2013).



spent time, often categorizing what she noticed about her language practices as she interacted with different groups of people in each of these spaces. After collecting her language, Sophia shared, “When I first started to do it, I was kind of depressed. I was, like, I’m not going to have a list like this,” (field notes, June 18, 2013) referring to the way that Anzaldúa’s catalogued the many languages that she spoke and language practices in which she engaged, “but it made me realize I am intentional in my spaces, or even subconsciously acting different, and it was useful to identify those differences” (field notes, June 18, 2013).

### *Collecting language*

As Sophia often focused on individual and community perceptions of bilingualism in our community, it is not surprising that when she began collecting examples of the language practices of her social worlds that she located examples of language samples allowing the group to continue to think about societal messages regarding multilingualism. During one meeting of our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), Sophia shared a language sample that she collected while walking through the Denver airport. On her post-it, she wrote, “Hoy es siempre todavía” (field notes, July 9, 2013). Sophia shared that this quote “was in mosaic on the floor, and it wasn’t translated” (field notes, July 9, 2013). She went on to explain, “It was permanent, and in this location. It seems, maybe, that the city, itself, values its multicultural heritage” (field notes, July 9, 2013). Sophia shared that this led her to think about the messages sent within our own community about language and language use that communicate what it means to be multilingual in the spaces in which we all spent time.

In addition to helping her further understand her own inquiry question, the example that Sophia located while at the Denver airport led the group to consider that our inquiry into language might include exploring particular spaces to collect artifacts that include language or send messages about language use in an effort to think about what those messages might say about the space, itself, or the communities who live in this space (field notes, July 9, 2013). This became a way of inquiring into language during some of the units of study put into place with students, including the one that Sophia implemented in her classroom.

### **A transformative teaching and learning experience led by the participants**

Prior to participating in the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) Sophia shared how her first year teaching at Del Campo High School had been more difficult than her prior two years, in part because of her confusion over the “chain of command” (field notes, May 21, 2013). She explained that the principal, the administrative team, her grade level team, and the district instructional coach all seemed to have different expectations of her. Sometimes, this led her to write one thing on the board and do something else. Upon making this statement, she asked, “Is this OK? I feel duplicitous” (field notes, May 21, 2013). Although I believe that she made the choice to participate in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) because she saw this as a space in which she could collaborate with other like-minded teachers to design curriculum that was “authentic” (interview, June 3, 2013) and “accessible” (interview, June 3, 2013), it seemed that her past professional development experiences led her to assume that someone in a position of power would, ultimately,

have control over what teaching and learning would look like in her classroom. This had been the case throughout her career as she began her work in the classroom at a time in which school knowledge was consistently standardized in an effort to contain and control it (Giroux, 1985). Although it seemed that her intention in making this statement was to be humorous, when asked what questions she had about participating in this research project, Sophia voiced, “I will just do whatever Michelle tells me to, and it’ll be great” (interview, June 3, 2013).

The participation in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) contrasted with most of the other professional learning experiences that she had grown accustomed to while working in high-needs urban public schools. In reflecting on this, she voiced, “This summer learning community was different than any of my previous PDs because of the asset-based thinking” (personal communication, November 11, 2013) we engaged in, explaining,

It placed the students in the position of power, where they were experts with something to share with their peers and teacher....The members of the learning community got to engage in a conversation about the material, rather than simply take notes and ask questions as information is presented to us. (personal communication, November 11, 2013)

Sophia also noted, “It was the participants’ experiences and noticings that were making the unit work” (personal communication, November 11, 2013).

As previously discussed, one noticing that Sophia shared in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) was that language is tied to identity. Although she had learned this in her teacher education program, she had not given this much thought until she began to treat

language as an object of study, learning from the experiences of language users whose language practices were not always valued and looking at language in practice, considering what there might be to learn about language and language use. In her post interview, Sophia reflected on how her participation in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) prepared her for the work that she would eventually do in her classroom.

I don't think I ever really thought about language in those ways. I didn't think about it as a choice or a tool. I just thought it was something. Maybe a part of identity without understanding how it was a part of identity. I think I learned ways to talk about language, ways to look at language, and I started becoming aware of it, which I think was important. (interview, June 7, 2014)

These new understandings, gained as a result of the dialogue and problem posing (Freire, 2007) that grew out of an inquiry into language and an exploration of everyday language practices influenced the choices that Sophia made in her effort to further develop her own as well as her students' critical language awareness.

#### **SOPHIA'S FACILITATION OF A UNIT OF STUDY IN HER CLASSROOM**

Sophia's inquiry into language and how she might design instruction with the goal of further developing her own as well as her students' critical language awareness did not end with the presentation of her personal inquiry project in the National Writing Project summer institute in which she participated or with the conclusion of our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007). Through engaging in these experiences, she got to know Garrett, who, like her, had just finished his first year at Del Campo High School. After reading Fecho's (2000) article, "Critical Inquiries into Language in an Urban Classroom," Garrett and Sophia decided to think together about Fecho's (2004) book, *"Is this English?": Race*

*Language and Culture in the Classroom*, in order to better understand what inquiry-based critical language study might look like at Del Campo High School. This was the beginning of a teaching partnership, similar to the one that Fecho described with Marsha Pincus in the book that Garrett and Sophia read together. Fecho (2004) wrote,

Whether in an SLC meeting, standing in the grey cold of our school parking lot, or, as in this case, in the five minutes between classes...our topics of conversation were rarely the minutiae of teaching one finds in faculty rooms...Instead we would frequently raise issues of pedagogy and theory as we stood in the swirl of this action. (p. 26)

Like Fecho and Pincus, Sophia and Garrett shared a similar philosophy about teaching students, however, their classrooms felt different, as the two brought contrasting strengths to their work with students, as well as to their collaborative relationship. Prior to implementing a unit of study in each of their classes, Sophia and Garrett went on to read and discuss sections of Brown's (2009) *In Other Words: Lessons on Grammar, Code-switching, and Academic Writing* to consider how they might introduce sociolinguistic meta-language (Godley & Loretto, 2013) into their units of study, as well as additional chapters from Lippi-Green's (1997) *English With an Accent*, to make sense of how they might address institutionalized language ideology within this curriculum. Sophia and Garrett seemed to push each other to slow down, reflect, and re-think what failed to work. Though Mattie experienced this while participating in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), she missed this collaboration while implementing her unit of study (field notes, March 19, 2014), and it seemed to limit her success in immediately implementing the modifications that had the potential to better support students.

Despite Sophia and Garrett's commitment to preparing themselves for this work, prior to beginning her unit of study, Sophia wrote that she was nervous about facilitating

critical language study in the classroom and voiced concern that she might not have put enough independent thought into the plan (teaching reflection, April 14, 2014). Although she had continued to read about language study and had engaged in much of the work that she would be facilitating in her classroom, an inquiry-based approach required that she re-think the role of teacher and learner in this space. In describing problem-posing education, Freire (2007) wrote,

Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects, which in banking education are 'owned' by the teacher. (p. 80)

Freire went on to explain that the students' response to the challenge the group explores "evokes new challenges, followed by new understandings" (p. 81). Because of her history, as a student and as a teacher participating in banking education, Sophia seemed to feel nervous facilitating a curriculum built on students' noticings, as they explored language in practice. Throughout this study, Sophia continued to experience these moments of uneasiness (teaching journal, April 7, 2014; April 23, 2014; April 30, 2014; May 1, 2014; May 5, 2014; May 16, 2014; May 19, 2014) in response to the conversations she would sometimes engage in with students, their reactions to aspects of the unit, the language that students chose to discuss and post on charts featured on the classroom walls, as well as her own concern that her students might not take ownership of their own inquiry project. In one teaching reflection Sophia wrote, "How do I become more comfortable with the discomfort"? (teaching reflection, May 2, 2014). It seemed, however, that consistent meeting times were helpful in thinking through what might be causing the discomfort and considering how we might address it, keeping our goal in mind. At these meetings, Sophia, Garrett and I would draw on data collected as well as on our personal reflections in order to plan for future instruction, considering resources

that might support us in our growth as teachers as well as in making modifications to our plan. In discussing the importance of this support system, Sophia shared,

I don't think I could have done it without the conversations and the planning and the reading beforehand. I don't think I would have been equipped or prepared. I mean I imagine that's why people didn't take it up on our team. (interview, June 11, 2014)

Though several of Garrett and Sophia's colleagues seemed interested in the work that we were doing, they seemed to recognize that we did not have scripted lesson plans that we could pass on, allowing them to easily facilitate our plan. Sophia and Garret's commitment to transform teaching and learning in their classrooms included inquiry, dialogue, reflection, action, and modification in an effort to accomplish the goal of further developing their own as well as their students' critical language awareness with the support of others who shared their commitment to creating change.

### **The pre-study perceptions of the community**

Like Mattie, Sophia began this work in her classroom by inviting her students to "live the questions" (Rilke, 1934, p. 13) through writing what they noticed about their own as well as others' language use, whether or not they believed that there were correct and incorrect ways to speak and to write, as well as their reflections on people's responses when interacting with someone who used different language practices than those in which they typically engaged.

In their written reflections, eleven students explicitly stated that there were "right" and "wrong" ways to speak and to write, making arguments such as, "That's why there are grammar rules," "It is best to answer properly," and questioning, "Why do people choose not to use appropriate language?" (written reflection, April 14, 2014), suggesting an agreed-upon understanding of what constitutes "proper" (written reflection, April 14,

2014) and “appropriate” (written reflection, April 14, 2014) language. Some of these students provided examples of language use that they believed to be wrong, sharing, “Writing LOL and OMG aren’t acceptable,” and described what individuals did when they used language incorrectly, writing, “They use foul language, bad grammar, and slang every chance they get to, instead of using proper words and grammar” (written reflection, April 14, 2014). Other students who argued that language can be “right” and “wrong” voiced recognition that speech and writing are not one in the same.

Eight students shared that there were no “right” and “wrong” ways to speak and to write, making arguments that suggested an understanding that communication is what counts (NCTE, 1994) such as, “As long as they understand some stuff, that should be good,” (written reflection, April 14, 2014) and demonstrating their awareness that there are different ideologies about language (NCTE, 1974) commenting, “Not everyone thinks the same” (written reflection, April 14, 2014). One student reflected on the role that schools have played in sending messages that would suggest language use is not as simplistic as “right” and “wrong,” sharing, “People think there are wrong ways to write because of the specific ways they teach us at school” (written reflection, April 14, 2014).

In thinking about their own language use, most students wrote that audience (NCTE, 1994) impacted the choices they made as language users, often contrasting how they used language with their peers with how they used language with the various adults in their lives, making comments such as, “When I am around adults, I speak more respectable, more proper” as well as “I add a certain level of politeness”(written reflection, April 14, 2014). Individual students also noted that situation, education, race, ethnicity, culture, age, personality, mood, and purpose impacted how each of them used language (written reflection, April 14, 2014).

A few students wrote about linguistic discrimination (Baugh, 2003; Alim & Smitherman, 2012), one focusing on how people are stereotyped as a result of their language practices. A number of students demonstrated this judgment, making comments, such as, “I really can’t stand it when people mess up with something so easy, like ‘what.’ They put ‘wut,’ ‘wat,’ ‘wht,’ all different shorthand ways,” and “It truly aggravates me when other kids use slang” (written reflection, April 14, 2014). In addition, one student wrote that individuals who use “improper language” are “lazy” (written reflection, April 14, 2014).

Students who identified as multilingual communicated that there were specific people with whom they spoke their native languages (NCTE, 1994). One student wrote, “With my family, I speak Spanish, and with others, I speak English” (written reflection, April 14, 2014). A number of students who spoke Spanish shared that they did not speak Spanish with or around their teachers, stating, “When I’m with teachers, I use only English,” (written reflection, April 14, 2014) sometimes telling stories of teachers correcting their use of language and leaving them confused, as a result of these corrections (written reflection, April 14, 2014). A few students recognized that they switched codes, describing this as speaking “on and off Spanish,” and sharing that there are times when “both come out in a conversation” (written reflection, April 14, 2014).

Just as there was evidence that the majority of the participating students valued what they typically referred to as “proper” (written reflection, April 14, 2014) English, one student recognized the merit of other named languages and varieties, although this claim seemed to be made with less confidence. She wrote, “Spanish isn’t a wrong way to speak. Even authors sometimes write in Spanish (Gary Soto), I think. I just know that some authors do. They go from Spanish to English” (written reflection, April 14, 2014). This suggested to me that students had few opportunities, at Del Campo High School, to

read texts in school in which writers used languages other than English or hybrid language practices. Or, that if they did, little attention was paid to language use during reading experiences.

Only one student addressed the relationship between language and identity, sharing, “Language defines me. I have my own voice. I have my own speech patterns. I also have my own way of conversating to others because I’m a unique individual” (written reflection, April 14, 2014). He, however, wrote that he chose to express his uniqueness through speaking “correctly” (written reflection, April 14, 2014).

I will stand out from other people by letting them know that I speak in a correct and knowledgeable manner, rather than “ghettto,” as people refer to it as. (reflective writing, April 14, 2014)

Another student, aware of the different expectations of the individuals she interacted with while portraying different aspects of her identity, wrote about the oppression she has experienced in negotiating the different linguistic and cultural contexts in which she has found herself.

My family always scolds me for not speaking Spanish properly. My dad gets upset that I speak a lot of English. My friends think it’s weird I know Spanish. (written reflection, April 14, 2014)

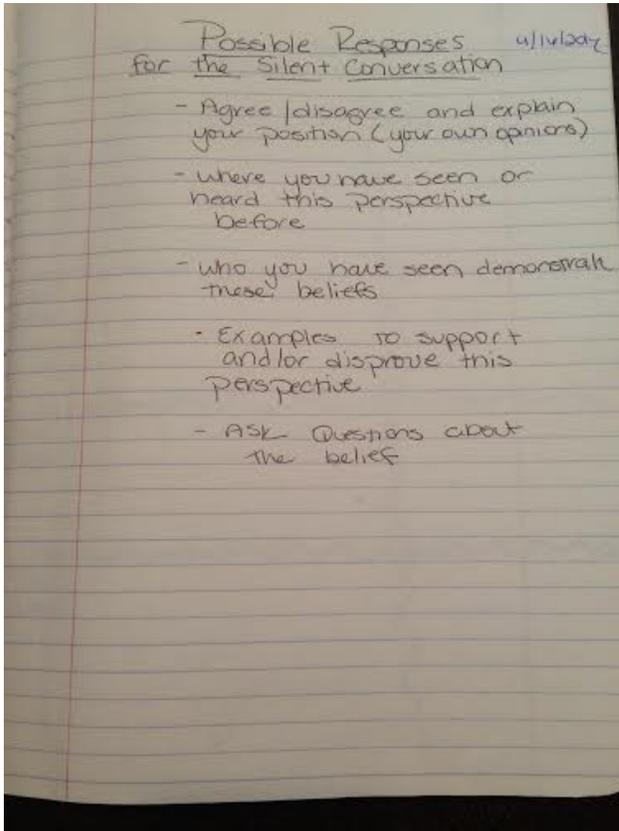
Unfortunately, this student did not experience “cultural fluidity” (Paris, 2012) in the different spaces and communities in which she interacted. As a result, she did not see her own multiculturalism and multilingualism as an asset, as a set of tools that will ensure “access” (p. 89) and “opportunity” (p. 89) for a “changing nation” (p. 90) (Paris & Alim, 2014).

We also made efforts to learn more about students’ perspectives regarding language and language use prior to the unit of study through observing them as they interacted in response to common language myths (Lippi-Green, 1997; Zuidema, 2005)

early on in the unit, similar to the experience in which Mattie's students participated. Through this inquiry into language, we saw the perspectives they shared in their written reflections play out in their interactions with one another. In addition to working together to think through the four language myths discussed by Lippi-Green (1997) and Zuidema (2005), 1) Standard English is better than other varieties, 2) Some languages and dialects don't have grammatical rules, 3) English must obey rules of grammar, 4) English is not as good as it used to be and is getting worse, Sophia invited her students to respond to, "English is the hardest language to learn," as this was a myth commonly voiced by Sophia's students, that she brought to the attention of our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) over the summer. In addition, she created an opportunity for her students to explore the myth, "You can tell what language a person speaks by looking at them," as the data demonstrated this was a perspective that the students in Mattie's class continued to wrestle with throughout the first iteration of this study, recognizing that their assumptions were often incorrect, yet continuing to make these assumptions (field notes, January 7, 2014; January 13, 2014; February 25, 2014).

To explore these myths, Sophia invited her students to participate in a silent conversation, responding to the myths and the thinking of their classmates through writing. Prior to inquiring into these myths, Sophia recommended some strategies that students might try out to share their thinking.

Figure 5.2: Strategies for Conversation



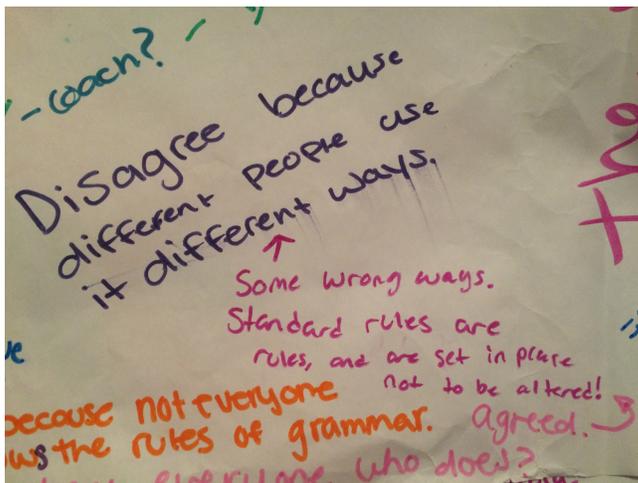
It was Sophia's hope that as her students would inquire into language, they would share opinions, consider the perspectives and beliefs of individuals and groups with whom they had interacted, provide examples that supported or disproved these perspectives and beliefs as well as pose new questions that they might focus on through future inquiry (field notes, April 16, 2014). Some of the students, however, felt so strongly about their opinions that they chose, instead, to counter other perspectives through stating their own beliefs, treating these beliefs as if they were truths that, therefore, did not warrant further discussion, instead of thinking through the myths together, sharing examples and counter-examples, which might have eventually led them to pose new questions. These beliefs,

seen in this experience as well as throughout the unit of study, seemed to run counter to taking on an inquiry stance, limiting dialogue that might have led to the development of new understandings and perspectives. Freire (2007) wrote,

How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own? How can I dialogue if I regard myself as a case apart from others—mere “its” in whom I cannot recognize other “I”s? How can I dialogue if I consider myself a member of the group of ‘pure’ men, the owners of truth and knowledge, for whom all non-members are “these people” or “the great unwashed”? (p. 90)

While the students participating in both iterations of the study demonstrated a diversity of perspectives and understandings about language and language use prior to participating in our work in the classroom, unlike Mattie’s students, a majority of Sophia’s students had consented to the standard language ideology (Lippi-Green, 1997) and this seemed to influence their interactions while participating in this inquiry experience and throughout the remainder of the unit of study.

Figure 5.3: Language Myth Response # 1

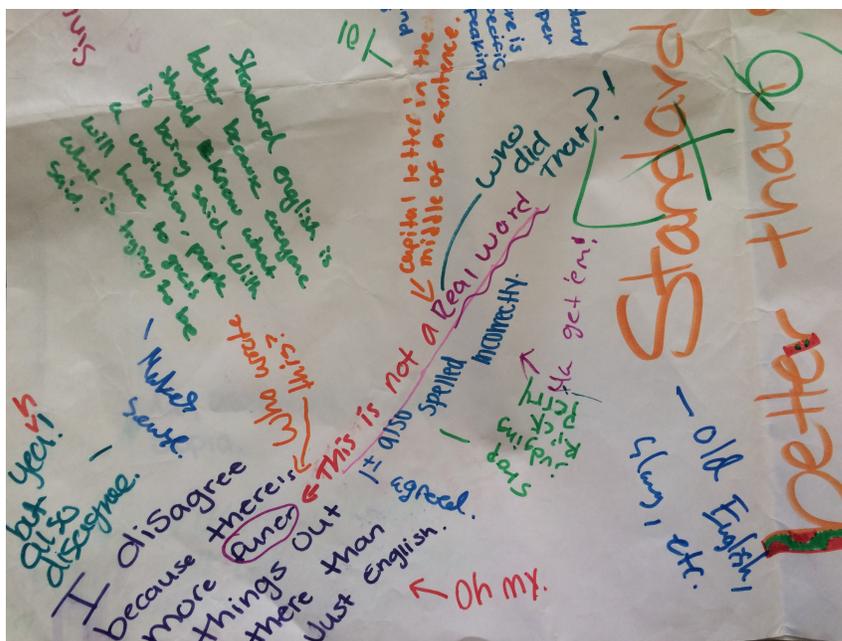


In this example, a student shared that she disagreed that “English must obey the rules of grammar” (Zuidema, 2005), stating, “Different people use it different ways” (Language myth response, April 16, 2014), voicing recognition of different varieties

spoken by individuals and groups. Her classmate responded, “Some wrong ways. Standard rules are rules, and set in place, not to be altered!” (language myth response, April 16, 2014).

Instead of drawing on the strategies that Sophia encouraged them to try out, some of the students who showed their support of these language myths, demonstrated their perspectives and their power through making a choice to correct their classmates’ spelling, grammar, and use of language, one going as far as to make use of white-out, rather than considering and speaking back to the ideas their classmates’ presented.

Figure 5.4: Language Myth Response # 2



In this example, students responded to the myth, “Standard English is better than other varieties” (Zuidema, 2005). Rather than commenting on the idea presented, “I disagree because there’s funer things out there than just English,” some of the students seemed interested in calling out the individual who made this statement, asking, “Who wrote

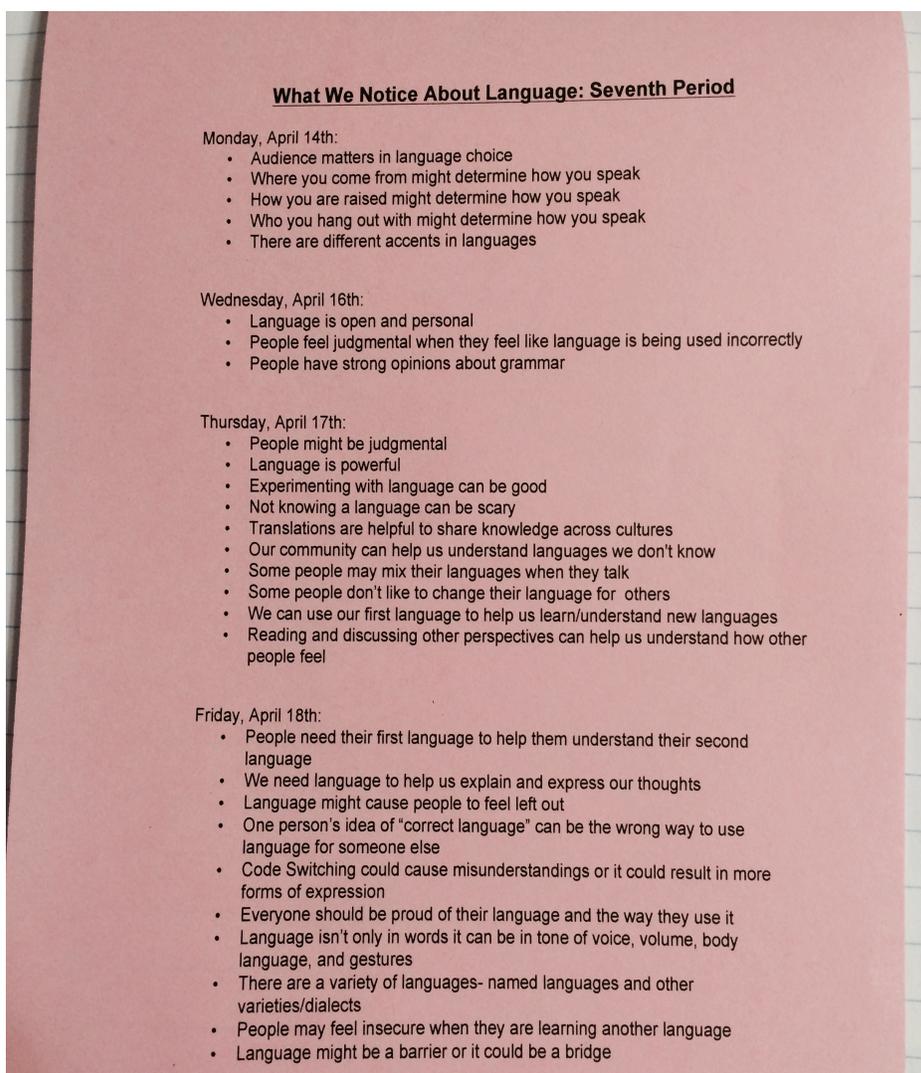
this,” “Who did that,” demonstrating the judgment about language use that some of the students referenced in their written reflections prior to this unit of study (written reflection, April 16, 2014) through their commentary like, “Oh my” (language myth response, April 16, 2014). In addition, one student, referencing, the use of “funer” wrote “This is not a Real word,” which resulted in a critique about the choice to capitalize the “r” in real (language myth response, April 16, 2014). This image also showed the correction of another student’s spelling of the word, “yeah” (language myth response, April 16, 2014).

After thinking together about these myths, the students voiced the following noticings: “Language is open and personal,” “People feel judgmental when they feel like language is being used incorrectly,” and “People have strong opinions about grammar.” (language noticings, April 16, 2014). Unlike Mattie’s students, whose noticings grew out of their discussions about language and language use as they engaged in “collaborative knowledge building” (Wells, 1995) in response to the perspective communicated in each of the myths, Sophia’s students’ noticings during this lesson seemed to develop as a result of their observation of their classmates’ reactions to the language myths.

Sophia’s students continued to add to their noticings throughout the unit of study, sharing things they learned as they observed their classmates’ reactions when inquiring into language, such as “Our community can help us understand languages we don’t know,” (language noticings, April 17, 2014), “Language can cause people to feel left out,” (language noticings, April 18, 2014) and “One person’s idea of correct language might be the wrong way to use language for someone else” (language noticings, April 18, 2014) as well as noticings that seemed to come from engaging in the inquiry process, “There are a variety of languages-named languages and varieties/dialects,” (language noticings, April 18, 2014) “Some people mix languages when they talk,” (language

noticings, April 17, 2014) “Language might be a barrier, or it might be a bridge,”  
(language noticings, April 18, 2014).

Figure 5.5: Noticings about Language and Language Use



In reflecting on students' engagement with the language myths, Sophia wrote,

My academic students seem more willing to challenge the myths and beliefs- where as my Pre-AP students seem to find a value in them when the myths conform their worldview (teaching reflection, April 16, 2014).

## **An inquiry-based instructional approach**

### ***Inquiring into language as a community***

Throughout the unit of study, while inquiring into language, students in this class, made statements in which they referred to African American Vernacular English as “slang,” describing it as “ghetto,” and “ratchet” (teaching reflection, April 30, 2014), and, in doing so, positioning users of this language in negative ways, as well. In sharing his thinking in response to the sign that was written in African American Vernacular English, seen in figure 5.6, Yalmar, a student identified by the school as Hispanic/Latino, commented, “At first I thought this was just written by a Mexican, and he got it wrong” (field notes, April 18, 2014).

Figure 5.6: Artifact Exploration



During one lesson, Sophia asked me to facilitate the share session, voicing that she was struggling with making the connection between the inquiry part of the workshop and the opportunity to document what the students noticed about language as a result of the inquiry (field notes, April 18, 2014). When the students were reluctant to share their own noticings during that lesson, I invited them to discuss what they were thinking about as they looked through a collection of images we had chosen because we believed they sent

messages about language and language use, including the sign seen in figure 5.6. I thought it would be important to think with the students about their responses to these images because I had heard a number of comments, like Yalmar's, in which African American Vernacular English was positioned as incorrect and of lesser value than other languages and varieties. This data episode highlights a share session in which I interacted with Francisco in response to this sign. Like Yalmar, Francisco was identified by the school as Hispanic/Latino.

**Michelle:** A lot of you were reading the images today. What did you notice as you read these images?

**Francisco:** People don't use language right.

**Michelle:** OK, so maybe in one of the pictures, there is a different way of using language than maybe how you think it should be. Is that what you mean?

(It is silent. Someone laughs. Francisco looks at me as if to say, "This is not what I mean.")

**Michelle:** You're saying it's incorrect.

(Silence. More laughter.)

**Francisco:** Yes. (field notes, April 18, 2014)

In addition to highlighting some of the students' responses to African American Vernacular English when discussed during this unit of study, this also demonstrated our Difficulty maintaining an inquiry stance, as teachers facilitating this study, when confronted with a resistance to the value of linguistic diversity and oppressive discourse, responses that conflicted with the critical (Freire, 2007) and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014) we were making efforts to put into place. Because these views were prevalent throughout the unit of study in this particular class, Sophia and I often found ourselves concerned about legitimizing

these perspectives in the classroom space. However, in not accepting Francisco's noticing, I, like the students when they interacted in response to the language myths, potentially shut down the opportunity for further problem posing and dialogue. In this example, I attempted to "deposit knowledge" (Freire, 2007, p. 76) through re-stating his noticing, instead of seeing this as a critical teaching moment (Goodman, 2003) one that we might continue to inquire into.

The modification made in this iteration of the study, ensuring that we had regular meetings times in which Garrett, Sophia and I would consider the data collected as well as our reflections regarding how each lesson went, allowed us to revisit moments of teaching and learning, working together to determine how best to address perspectives that seemed counter to what we were hoping to accomplish. In an effort to revisit the negative positioning African American Vernacular English, a perspective that was not adequately challenged and inquired into during the first iteration of this study, while simultaneously supporting students in thinking through how we might collect and explore our everyday language practices, Sophia and Garrett decided to show their students a video clip of some Del Campo students who volunteered to be filmed while engaging in conversation. After inviting students to think through language samples that we pulled from the video clip, which included examples of the heritage practice of African American Vernacular English and examples of a number of community practices, (Paris, 2012; Alim & Paris, 2014) Sophia and Garrett invited their students to explore parts of June Jordan's (2007) essay, "Nobody Mean More to Me Than You and the Future Life of Willy Jordan," in hope that this experience would support students in better understanding African American Vernacular English as well as our own inquiry into our personal language practices and the language of our social worlds. Sophia introduced this

lesson, encouraging students to be open-minded and objective in exploring different language practices.

So far we have been doing a lot of looking at our own personal language practices, just us, just who you are as a person. Now, we're going to start investigating the language of our social worlds, and it gets a little more complicated because we're going to start looking at the language practices of other people around us. We're going to look, specifically, today at what language is valued at Del Campo High School, the language of our social worlds, things that people say in the hall around you, things that people say in your classes, or in your homes, and we're going to talk about it. And because we're looking at other people's language and other people's social practices, we might not always agree with what people say, so as we talk about these things today, we want to look at it with an objective, scientific perspective. We want to look at what other people are saying, really look at it, and why they are saying it. And we're going to talk about some issues today that have come up as uncomfortable, things that have been put up on the language samples that have, maybe, caused us stress, that might be uncomfortable for some people and acceptable for others, and we'll talk about why. (field notes, May 2, 2014)

After watching the video clip of Del Campo students engaging in conversation, the following discussion took place,

**Sophia:** I feel like it is a pretty good sampling of, like, Del Campo language.

**Francisco:** No, it's not.

(Other students in the class call out, "no.")

**Kori:** They kind of, like, made it...

**Kendrick:** commercialized.

**Kori:** Yeah. That is not...No.

**Ali:** They knew people were listening.

**Denny:** There wasn't cussing, so it's not Del Campo language.

**Kori:** I think this class could do a better version. (field notes, May 2, 2014)

In response to this video clip, the class identified examples of slang (“thirsty,” “swag,” “dat,” “Ima,” “doe”) and African-American Vernacular English (“Chris, why you laughing?”), allowing Sophia to support them in differentiating between the two. In addition, students engaged in conversation about the importance of understanding the audience and context in order to make sense of the comment, “I’ll see you on the streets, Homeboy,” collected through watching the video clip (field notes, May 2, 2014). However, as is demonstrated above, the participating students did not feel that these language samples were authentic and seemed bothered that Sophia saw them as representative of how students at Del Campo spoke. Kori’s final statement, “I think this class could do a better version,” (field notes, May 2, 2014) suggested that she felt this representation of language use at Del Campo was limited, leading me to wonder if she saw her own language practices, which she felt contrasted with those that the students drew on in the video clip, as more worthy of representing how language was used at her school.

Anticipating a bit of resistance based on students’ previous responses to language use that strayed from what they defined as “standard” or “proper,” Sophia drew on her students’ critiques of overdeterministic links between language, race, ethnicity, class etc. (Paris & Alim, 2014), making efforts to remind students that our language practices are not pre-determined based on one’s background and that we all have a repertoire of community and heritage practices (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014). She shared,

Kendrick and Denny, when I was talking to them just now, they brought up something really interesting, they brought up the fact that it's not just African American speakers who use these language practices, these words, that it can be larger groups of people from different groups, socially and racially, and not all African American speakers use this way of speaking. And what June Jordan is going to do, she is going to talk to you about this variety. She's going to explain it. (field notes, May 2, 2014)

Sophia created space for the students to read Jordan's essay for the remainder of class, jotting down a few ideas or examples in their notebooks that stood out as significant. When students got to class the next day, Sophia invited them to take out their notebooks and share their thinking. Upon walking around the class, most students had not written anything down and chose not to engage in conversation about the text. Assuming they needed more time, Sophia reminded them of what she had invited them to do and made space for them to revisit the text. Few students seemed to return to the text. In addition, many chose not to write or discuss their thinking in response to what they had read. Frustrated, Sophia approached me and shared,

What I'm seeing is that most people didn't read it yesterday and didn't read it now. They're just not doing it. It makes me want to dig my heels in and force them to do it. (field notes, May 2, 2014)

Sophia and I decided, instead, to walk around the class and engage the students in conversation in order to better understand what seemed like resistance, which contrasted with how this class usually took up their assignments. In Sophia's teaching journal, she wrote, "Usually, my Pre-AP students are along for the ride. They participate pretty well." She went on to explain that this unit of study seemed to be "engaging a different group of students" (field notes, April 18, 2014), those in her academic classes.

I approached Kori, who identified as Black, as well as Francisco and Carla, who the school identified as Hispanic/Latina, asking what stood out to them as they read.

Their response was similar to the conversation the class had after watching the video clips from which they collected the language of Del Campo students.

**Francisco:** “He have him wallet?” Like, nobody’s gonna say that.

**Kori:** No, we don’t talk like that. That’s...that’s completely wrong. (field notes, May 2, 2014)

In response to their efforts to disidentify with these ways of using language, I encouraged this group of students to speak back to the guidelines for Black English, created by Jordan and her students, inviting them to join me in thinking through how each of us might accomplish the same goal through language.

**Michelle:** What about has vs. have? (reading June Jordan’s examples) “She has many books,” “She have many books.”

**Kori:** I use “got.”

**Michelle:** You would use “got?” “She got many books?”

**Kori:** No, “He gots many books.” Yeah.

**Carla:** I would use “has.” Like, “She has a lot of books.”

**Michelle:** What about you guys?

**Francisco:** “She got a lot of books.”

**Michelle:** You would use got, too? I don’t think I’d say “got.” I would say “has.”

**Kori:** See, that’s why I say, since we all come, we’re not very diverse. We are, like, as to race, but, like, where we grew up, it’s basically all the same, because it’s all one area.

**Michelle:** So, what does that say about language in general? Some of our language practices...

**Kori:** are similar. (field notes, May 2, 2014)

Because it was our hope that through participating in this unit, the teachers and students would have an opportunity to further develop awareness of our own language practices and the language practices of their social worlds, it seemed to make sense, in the moment, to begin thinking about how we might define our own language use, just as Jordan and her students did in the piece that we read. When this group of students was encouraged to name what they believed they did with language, rather than defend what they did not do, the tension seemed to decrease, allowing us to take on an inquiry stance and engage in productive conversation about what we were noticing about language and language use.

Upon realizing that Francisco stated he would use “got” instead of “has” or “have,” Kori shared a noticing that though her community is racially and ethnically diverse, they are “similar” (field notes, May 2, 2014) in terms of how they use language. They do not only draw on their heritage language, they engage in language sharing (Paris, 2009) and because of this, they could not identify with terminology like “African American English,” that suggested to them a definitive tie between language and race.

The decrease in tension, once students began defining their own “ways with words” (Heath, 1983) created an opportunity for this group of students to engage in “real talk” (Alim & Smitherman, 2012) about language, positioning, and students’ resistance to aspects of this unit of study, resistance that they had been hesitant to discuss with us until this lesson. Recognizing the discomfort that some of the students seemed to experience during this lesson and in other moments throughout this unit of study, Carla made efforts to better understand Kori’s dismissal of Jordan’s discussion and guidelines for Black English.

**Carla:** Do you feel offended by this, that this is how they think you talk?

**Kori:** Cause I’m very proper. I can be. But, no, it doesn’t offend me.

**Carla:** Kendrick probably feels offended.

**Kori:** Yeah.

**Michelle:** So what would be offensive about this? The fact that it has the title of Black English?

**Carla:** I mean, we all talk like that.

**Kori:** Most people, like, are stereotypical towards Black people and think that's how all Black people talk, but there's Black people out there who have Ph.D.s. (field notes, May 2, 2014)

Unlike Kori, who seemed to have an issue with the term “Black English” because she identified as African American, yet did not believe she made use of the features of Black English discussed in Jordan’s essay, Carla, who the school identified as Hispanic/Latina, found the term problematic because she believed, “We all talk like that,” (field notes, May 2, 2014) regardless of race. Though Carla did not identify as African-American, she voiced that she did make use of particular features of Black English, as discussed in Jordan’s essay (field notes, May 2, 2014). Kori’s statement, “Most people, like, are stereotypical towards Black people and think that’s how all Black people talk, but there’s Black people who have Ph.D.s,” (field notes, May 2, 2014) suggested that she had internalized the perspective, like many of the other students in this class, that in order to be academically successful, one must have access to Dominant American English. In identifying as “proper,” and rejecting ways of speaking that contrasted with Dominant American English, and how it was positioned, Kori constructed herself as a particular kind of “social being” (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 63), one that she believed would have access to higher education and upward mobility.

Although Kendrick was unwilling to share his thinking with the entire class, afterwards, he confided in me that, as an African American, he, too, felt positioned by Jordan’s essay, as Kori and Carla thought he would. Kendrick explained that Jordan’s

writing “made it seem like we were animals or something,” (field notes, May 2, 2014). Like Kori, he associated “Black English,” as defined by Jordan and her students, with “people who are illiterate” (field notes, May 2, 2014) and spaces “you’re not supposed to be walkin’ down the street at” (field notes, May 2, 2014). He voiced that he felt particularly angry by Jordan’s use of a term that suggested all African Americans spoke in a particular way.

**Kendrick:** That’s like the language you find walkin’ down the street at a place you’re not supposed to be walkin’ down the street at. “Where are you?” “He be at the club?” What are you talkin’ about?

(Denny laughs.)

**Kendrick:** I’ve heard people say that before. I’ve heard somebody say it before.

**Michelle:** But it bugs you?

**Kendrick:** But it's people who are illiterate. She is doing this like this is the standard way.

**Michelle:** So, it bugs you. It bugs you. Are you particularly bothered because she is calling it Black English?

**Kendrick:** Yes!...Other people’s English, but not just one way. Yes. (field notes, May 2, 2014)

Although Sophia was committed to creating a space in which her students might “engage in a critical examination of social, cultural, and political forces at play in language use” (Alim & Smitherman, 2012, p. 178), she struggled with how this inquiry work, aimed at further developing their critical language awareness, caused discomfort, voicing that she was initially “unprepared for their negative reactions to it” (teaching journal, May 2, 2014). Although Sophia believed many students in her other classes felt “awakened” (teaching journal, April 16, 2014) and “empowered” (teaching journal, April 17, 2014) as

a result of the thinking their classes were doing as they inquired into language, it seemed that many of the students in this class felt “labeled” (teaching journal, May 2, 2014), leading them to resist in multiple ways. In thinking about June Jordan’s essay as well as the readings with which we asked them to interact early in the unit of study, Denny and Kori shared the following:

**Denny:** I feel like they are targeting race...Y’all are saying it’s our opinion, but every story we read is targeting race.

**Kori:** You never really hear about how Caucasians talk or how Mexicans or how Hispanics talk, well, probably Hispanics, but it is always targeting the Black culture and how we talk. (field notes, May 2, 2014)

Although we made efforts to explore texts within this unit of study that highlighted different voices, perspectives, and experiences, Ali, who identified as a White speaker of “Standard English,” echoed Kori’s perspective at the conclusion of the unit of study voicing that that the texts we read together, during this unit of study, explored the experiences of “just one race” (field notes, May 30, 2014). Though the class seemed hesitant to engage in a discussion about what bothered them about this unit of study, during most of our lessons, during the post-study interview, Lisette, who the school identified as Hispanic/Latina, eventually confirmed that she struggled to connect with the experiences of the language users whose stories we explored in the readings (field notes, May 30, 2014). This response was similar to what the students communicated to Sophia as she circled the room in an effort to better understand the students’ resistance to Jordan’s essay. Sophia shared,

As I was walking around, what I was getting from a lot of people is that they don’t value Black English, that they value “standard” ways of speaking, and they don’t feel comfortable saying that in this space. (field notes, May 2, 2014)

Throughout this unit of study, students voiced their frustration with the assumptions made about their language practices. Denny shared,

I hate when people speak Spanish to me. They think I'm Mexican, but I am part Italian...They always think I'm Spanish speaking, but I don't even speak Spanish...It makes me mad. (field notes, April 16, 2014)

After sharing a similar experience in which someone approached her and began to speak Spanish to her, Alana, who the school identified as Hispanic/Latina, commented, "Don't just assume. I'll start talkin' Japanese or something," (field notes, April 16, 2014), referencing how her repertoires of practice (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003) was often overlooked instead of honored and extended (Paris, 2012). Agreeing with Alana, Kendrick voiced, "Assumptions is the lowest form of knowledge to me" (Field notes, April 16, 2014). While the pieces we read did not, in fact, feature the experiences of only one racial group, as the students suggested, in retrospect, we realized that, in an effort to discuss linguistic discrimination and inequity, most of these readings addressed the writers' or characters' marginalization in response to their language practices. Although our intention was to present the students with counterstories, proving that language is never socially neutral (Fairclough, 2001; Gee, 2012) as it is often presented in school, it seemed that students in this class felt positioned and resisted in multiple ways as a result of this, sometimes taking an active stance, as can be seen in Kori's response,

That's not what WE say. I'm gonna take up for my race. That's not how WE talk. There's some people who talk that way, but there's other people who talk educated. It's not every Black person. (Field Notes, May 2, 2014)

But more often, demonstrating passive resistance, correcting their classmates' grammar instead of engaging in discussion about language myths, questioning how they might make sense of texts in which the writer code-switches, despite the fact that these texts included translations in circumstances in which context clues could not be drawn on

(field notes, April 17, 2014), choosing not to read, discuss, or share noticings in response to texts that might challenge their worldviews, and responding with silence when invited to share their thinking. In reflecting on this at the conclusion of the unit of study, Sophia shared the following:

**Sophia:** I think, overall, the students felt incredibly valued throughout it, with the exception of the people in seventh period.

**Michelle:** They, maybe, felt defined?

**Sophia:** Yeah

**Michelle:** We weren't attempting to do that, but I can get how that could cause them to feel that way. (interview, June 17, 2014)

Although no modifications were made in the third iteration of this study in response to what we learned as a result of looking closely at the students' responses to the texts we used as artifacts, we came to understand the need to locate texts that explored the experiences of a more diverse group of language users who write about positive experiences with language as well as negative experiences, ensuring that students did not experience hopelessness that had the potential to paralyze and immobilize (Freire, 2007) rather than lead to reflection and action.

In addition, this experience reminded us that though we hoped to position ourselves as learners with our students, we could not overlook the power we had in picking texts, language samples, and various artifacts to explore and analyze, a power that led us question whether it was truly possible to become "a student among students" (Ellsworth, 1989; Freire, 2007).

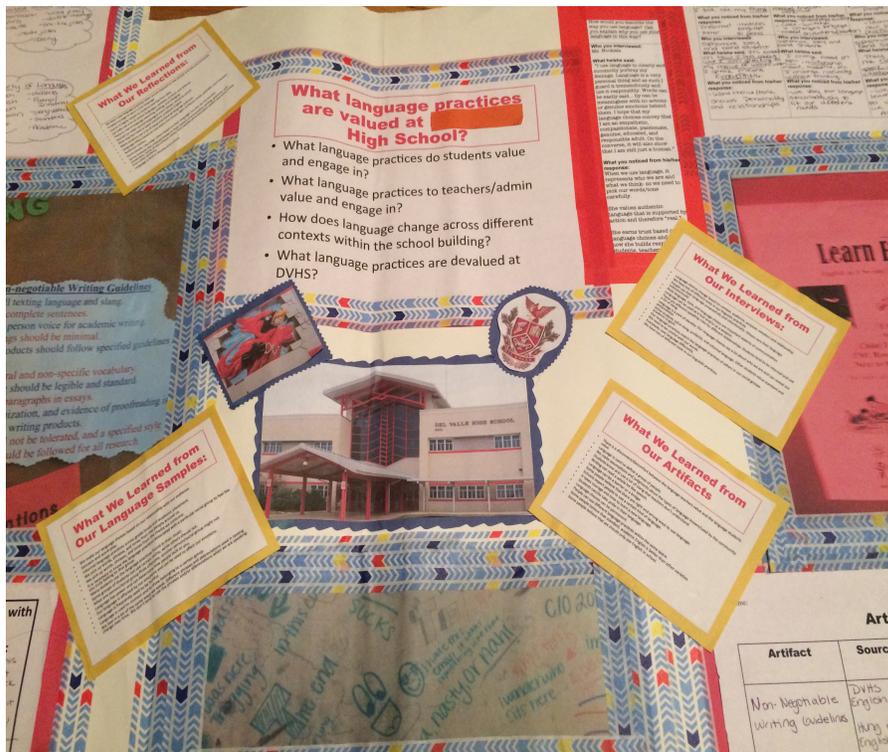
### ***Personal inquiry project***

In response to data collected in the first iteration of this study, Sophia introduced the inquiry project earlier in her unit of study than Mattie did, ensuring that she had an

opportunity to model how the students might “live the question” (Rilke, 1934) through choosing a topic and revisiting the many ways we had inquired into language throughout this unit of study: reflecting on our experiences with the topic, collecting and exploring language samples, conducting interviews, reviewing related artifacts, and synthesizing the information gathered in order to determine what further collection and exploration might be done.

Although Sophia began working on an inquiry project in our professional learning community, (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) focusing on perceptions of multilingualism in the world, she and Garrett decided that that it might be more relevant if they were to engage in this process with their students, in response to questions that came up for them while inquiring into language during the unit of study that they facilitated in their classrooms. This led them to pose questions in an effort to better understand what language practices were valued at Del Campo High School. As they invited their students to do, Sophia and Garrett created a poster that highlighted what they learned from their analysis of their reflections, language samples, interviews and artifacts. The poster served as visual that could be referenced while participating in roundtable discussions. This method of sharing what the students learned as a result of their inquiry projects allowed for them to continue “living the questions” (Rilke, 1934) with others responded to what the presenters were noticing as a result of the data that they had collected, rather than preparing a more formal presentation in which they were positioned as experts, as had been the case in the first iteration of this study.

Figure 5.7: Sophia’s Personal Inquiry Project



Through facilitating her own inquiry project with the support of her students, Sophia saw, firsthand, the “disconnect/discomfort between the language that teachers valued and the language students valued” (field notes, May 8, 2014-May 23, 2014; language inquiry project, May 8, 2014-May 23, 2014). In addition, she was reminded of her students’ skill with various verbal art genres (Alim 2004), such as “sarcasm,” “puns,” “insults,” “word play,” “double-meaning,” “one-line jokes,” “inside jokes,” and “irony,” (field notes, May 8, 2014-May 23, 2014; language inquiry project, May 8, 2014-May 23, 2014). In noticing the different ways that language was used at Del Campo High School, Sophia was reminded, “We have lots of different tools in our linguistic practices,” and, quite often, “Students can/do take pride in their language” (field notes, May 8, 2014-May 23, 2014; language inquiry project, May 8, 2014-May 23, 2014).

Like Mattie's students, Sophia's students shared that they found the personal inquiry projects they were invited to design and facilitate to be the most meaningful part of the unit of study. Ali explained that she appreciated these projects because "we got to explore our own topics that interested us" (interview, May 30, 2014). In reflecting on students' choice of topic after the unit of study, Sophia voiced concern that some of the students in this class might have "picked topics just to pick topics" (interview, June 17, 2014). While this may have been the case with particular individuals, it became clear to me after returning to the data that many of the students made choices to explore language practices with which they demonstrated linguistic creativity, language practices in which they took pride, practices that Sophia also came to recognize and value while working on her own inquiry project in which she explored the language practices that both students and faculty valued at Del Campo High School.

Ali and Gloria, a student, who the school identified as Hispanic/Latina, focused on the art of sarcasm, looking closely at language samples in which individuals used sarcasm, trying to make sense of speakers' intentions, interviewing people about their use of sarcasm as well as their experiences with sarcasm, and exploring popular memes in which sarcasm was demonstrated. In reflecting on what she learned as a result of engaging in this inquiry project, Ali shared,

We always thought that sarcasm was just basically used as an insult. It can be a way to start a conversation, or it can be a way to not make everything so serious. There's always that one person when you are put in a room of strangers who always has a sarcastic phrase and it made everyone loosen up, and it was easier to be around people. (interview, June 4, 2014)

Kori, Kendrick and Francisco explored what they referred to as "trashtalk" in the context of sports communities, collecting language samples from teammates as well as from professional athletes featured in the media, looking at the purposes of engaging in

this language practice as well as the impact that “trashtalk” might have on both the speaker and the opposing players. For their artifact collection, Kori, Kendrick and Francisco looked at t-shirts worn by athletes and their fans that demonstrated “trashtalk,” as well. In reflecting what she learned as a result of this inquiry project, Kori explained, “I’ve always thought it was, like, to put somebody down” (interview, June 4, 2014). However, after looking at “trashtalk” in practice, she recognized, “It’s not always negative. It can be like, to boost you up to win, to get into somebody else’s head, so you can win. Sometimes, it motivates you” (interview, June 4, 2014). Both students’ noticings demonstrated that these inquiry projects led them to better understand the complexity of language, specifically within these verbal art genres (Alim, 2004). Prior to engaging in this work, both groups had pre-conceived understandings about how these verbal art genres (Alim, 2004) worked. Ali stated that she initially believed that sarcasm functioned primarily as an “insult” (interview, June 3, 2014). Similarly, Kori thought that “trashtalk” was used solely to “put somebody down” (interview, June 4, 2014). However, looking at multiple examples of language in practice and interviewing people in response to these examples led both groups of students to develop new understandings. Other students in this class inquired into topics such as language use in social media, the role language played in memes, language use and relationships, language and religion, language in various genres of music. No one chose to pursue language and discrimination, multilingualism, or focused on language practices that have been historically marginalized, like African American Vernacular English, which were all popular topics in other classes as well as in other iterations of this unit of study.

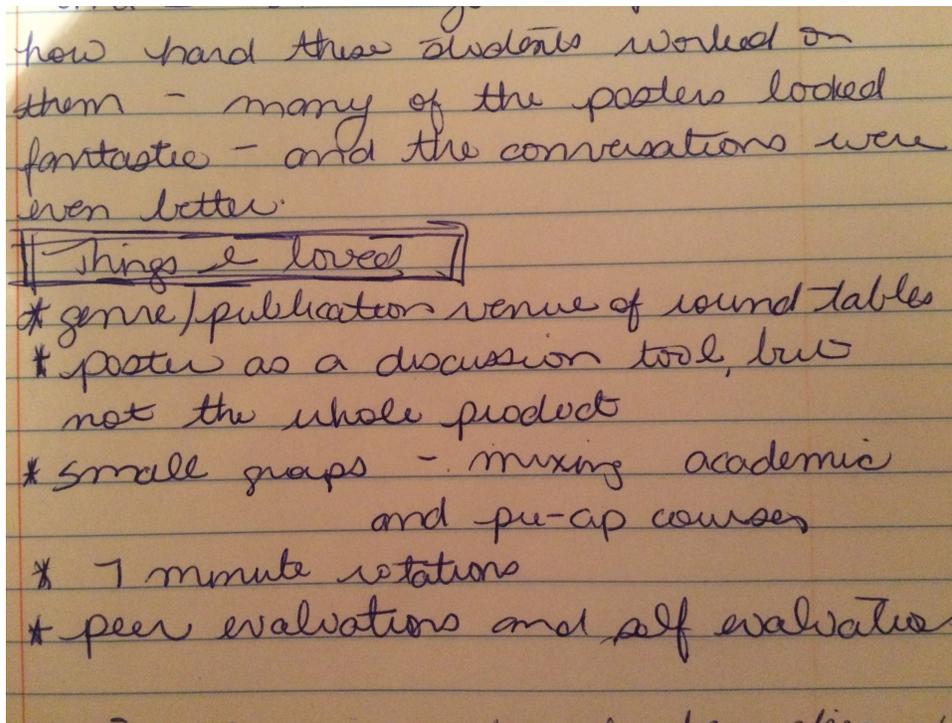
While Lisette voiced that she liked “really getting to go into detail about certain things and really explore it” (interview, June 3, 2014), others seemed to find it challenging to return to the same topic and process each day in an effort to delve a little

more deeply. As a result, we made efforts to scaffold this process, creating meeting notes that the groups made use of, providing a space to document their noticings as they inquired into their topic and prompting them to think about what understandings they were developing together as a result of their “collaborative knowledge building” (Wells, 1995) as well as what additional data they might need to collect in order to test their theories about language and language use. Unfortunately, these meeting notes proved to be overwhelming and, at times, turned into “busy work.” In reflecting on our attempt to provide scaffolds through the use of meeting notes, Sophia wrote,

I think throughout the year, we didn’t really push students to go deeper. We did units as weeks. We’d spend a week on poetry and move on...I think the meeting notes each day kind of led to that “Oh, you just look at language samples for a day, and you move on.” I think I think if we'd slowed down the handout process and modeled more how to go back to and add to, that might have helped. (interview, June 17, 2014)

After her students published their projects, thinking with students in different Del Campo High School English classes who had also inquired into language over the past six weeks, Sophia wrote in her teaching journal, “Students found it hard but engaging” (teaching journal, May 29, 2014). Despite the challenges, there were a number of things that Sophia appreciated about the inquiry projects, as seen in her teaching journal.

Figure 5.8: Reflection on The Inquiry Projects



These included the choice to have students share their noticings about their topic through the genre of roundtable presentations, creating opportunities for all participants to draw on what they had learned throughout this unit of study to make sense of new noticings; the chance for her Pre-AP students to engage in conversations with students in academic classes, who often brought with them different experiences and communicated alternative perspectives; and the use of peer evaluations and self-evaluations to reflect on the experience.

### **A focus on everyday language practices**

#### ***Language stories***

In contrast to the challenges Sophia experienced as she invited this class of students to inquire into language by learning from the experiences of other language

users, Sophia's students seemed eager to tell their own stories about language and language use (Goodman, 2006), just as Mattie's seemed to be. Prior to inviting her students to reflect on their language histories (Okawa, 2003), she invited them to do a brain dump, jotting down "what they know about how they learned language and how it had grown, changed, evolved" (field notes, April 23, 2014). Jason, a student who self-identified as African-American, wrote about the language associated with music and theatre that he drew on when participating in the performing arts, such as "stage left," "stage right," as well as the notes he read when playing a song on an instrument (language notebook, April 23, 2014). Gloria wrote about her respect for her grandparents who came to the United States and learned a new language, one that they spoke in order to communicate with their grandchildren who did not understand Spanish. Gloria wrote, "I don't really acknowledge the fact that my grandparents speak fluent Spanish, and the majority of time they speak English" (language notebook, April 23, 2014). Lisette wrote about feeling "dumb" (language notebook, April 23, 2014) when she mispronounced words and used grammar incorrectly, stating, "I like my language to sound as correct as possible in order for me to be elegant. I do not like sounding ignorant" (language notebook, April 23, 2014).

### ***Language mapping***

Similar to what we did in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), Sophia invited her students to create language maps. Students documented the different spaces in which they spent time and the different individuals and groups they interacted with in these physical and digital spaces, often describing the tone of their language, using terms like, "respectful," "ghetto," "playful" (language maps, April 21, 2014-May 4, 2014). At times, they gave

names to their language practices such as “teammate talk” (language maps, April 21, 2014-May 4, 2014). Some specified which named languages they spoke in different spaces and included examples of phrases or words that they made use of in their interactions with particular people in these spaces. In her teaching journal, Sophia wrote, “They do seem to be reinvigorated by the language mapping-and are taking their time to make them great living documents” (teaching reflection, April 23, 2014).

In response to the data collected during the first iteration of this study, which showed that the language mapping seemed to have more potential than we had the opportunity to see, Sophia positioned the language maps as “living documents,” (teaching reflection, April 23, 2014) encouraging the students to return to them, adding information they gathered as they explored and collected their own language samples and learned about their language histories. However, some of the students seemed to take this up more than others. Because Sophia made efforts to introduce the language inquiry project earlier in the unit, a choice that was also made in response to the data collected in the first iteration of this study, there did not seem to be dedicated time to add to the language map after conducting interviews and collecting language samples in an effort to synthesize all of the information collected in order to better understand the students’ personal language practices.

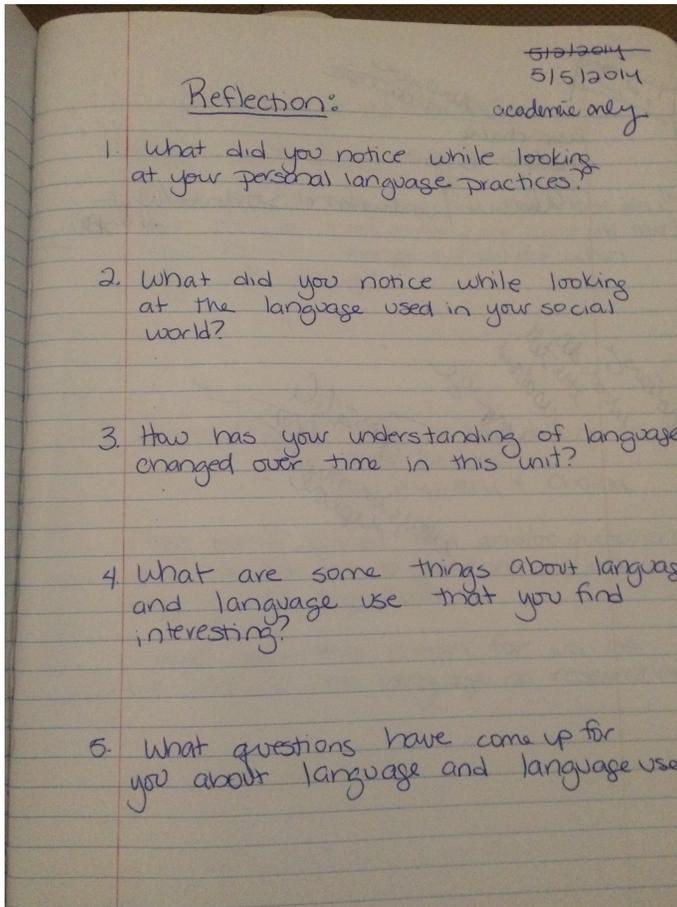
Kendrick was a student who returned to his language map, adding language samples as he inquired into his own language practices. Though Kendrick, like many of his classmates, claimed at one point, “I never heard anyone speak like that,” (field notes, May 2, 2014) voicing that the rules for Black English, as discussed in Jordan’s essay, were “dumb” and “fake (field notes, May 2, 2014), his language map demonstrated that there were times he eliminated the verb “to be” when combined with another verb, as seen in his language samples, “How hard you working,” “We eating” (language map,



While we did not believe that there would be anything gained in informing Kendrick that his language map did, in fact, include examples of African American Vernacular English, in addition to other languages and varieties, we wondered if he might have made this connection, himself, if given more space to synthesize what he learned through collecting his own language and the language of his social worlds, recognizing this as an additional tool in his linguistic toolkit. If so, we question if that might have led him to reconsider his perspective on the value of this language. Although he never, specifically, identified himself as a speaker of African American Vernacular English, a language that he critiqued earlier in the unit of study, while reflecting on his own positionality as he worked to make sense of the data he collected on his personal inquiry project, Kendrick wrote, “I’ve used language my whole life. I’ve used many forms: slang, trash talk, proper, and improper” (language inquiry project, May 28, 2014-May 29, 2014). Though it seemed that he continued to see language as a hierarchy, suggesting that particular practices are worth more than others, it was clear that he came to recognize that his linguistic toolkit is made up of many tools.

Though many of the students in the class I observed were not given explicit directions to return to their language maps and their language samples to consider what they had learned through the exploration of everyday language practices, Sophia made a choice to do this in her academic classes through posing some reflective questions, asking the students to document their noticings about their own language and the language of their social worlds, considering how their understandings of language had changed throughout this unit of study as a result of the inquiry work they had done (teaching journal, May 5, 2014). This may have been a useful experience for Kendrick and his classmates in the Pre-AP class to experience, as well.

Figure 5.10: Reflecting on Our Own Language

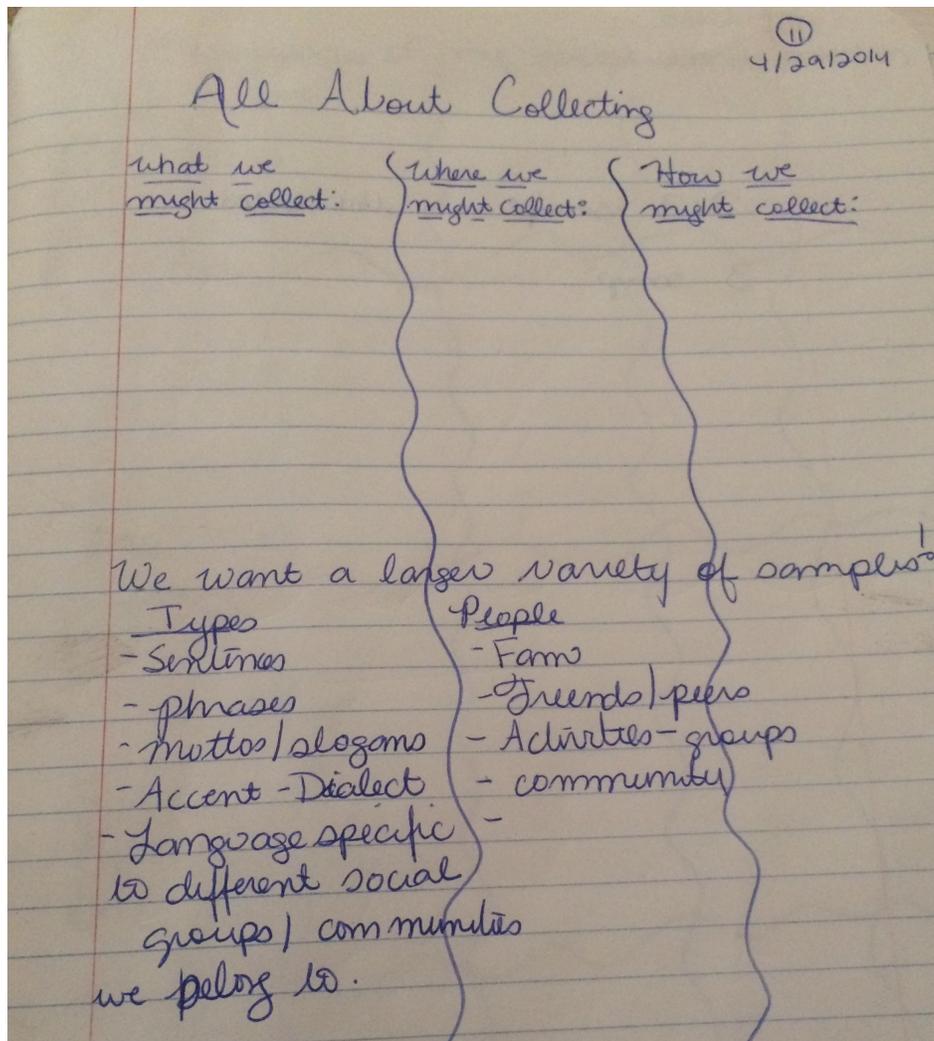


### ***Collecting language***

In response to the data collected during the first iteration of this study that suggested the need to better support students in how to collect and think through language samples, which Sophia described to her students as, “interesting things you hear or say or read that you encounter in your daily life that stand out as something we could analyze and discuss” (field notes, April 25, 2014), Sophia invited her students to brainstorm about what they might collect, where they might collect, and how they might collect language. Comparing this to butterfly collecting, Sophia told her students, “We go out into the wild, we see something interesting, or useful, or unique, and we need to

figure out a vehicle to capture it and bring it back to the class to study it" (field notes, April 30, 2014).

Figure 5.11: Strategies for Collecting Language



Through her mini-lessons, Sophia suggested that students might collect sentences, phrases, mottos, and slogans. She voiced that students might make note of the use of accents and dialects, as well as language specific to particular social groups and

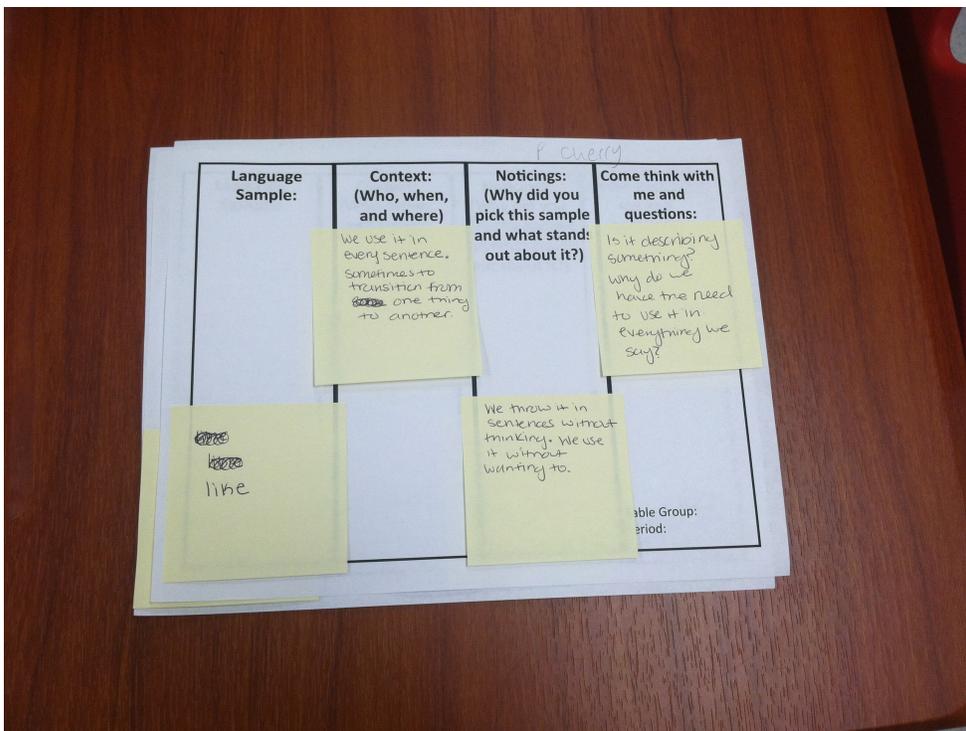
communities. Students added to Sophia's list, specifying that they might collect slang words and shortcuts (which were collaboratively re-defined as abbreviations and acronyms), the use of languages other than English, inappropriate language, profanity, and physical language (field notes, April 30, 2014). The class determined that these language samples might be found in the various spaces in which they spent time, in the different communities in which they participated, on social media sites, on television, and in movies or books, as well as in the news. In addition, they shared that language samples might be collected by writing them down in a notebook or typing them into the notes section on a phone, taking a screenshot, or through audio and video recording (field notes, April 30, 2014).

In addition to thinking about how and where to collect language samples, Sophia invited her students to collaborate with her, pulling language samples from a video clip of Del Campo students engaging in a conversation (field notes, May 1, 2014), as discussed earlier in this chapter. Sophia also shared numerous language samples that she collected while participating in the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) and in preparing for her own inquiry project, thinking with students about how these language samples might be charted in order to support the group in better understanding language in practice (field notes, April 29, 2014).

Put language samples in the first one: sentences, phrases, "ums," whatever it is we come up with that we think it is interesting. Then, we'll have a context where we write down the where and the when and the how it is taking place, so we can talk about it in a little more detail; What we're noticing about the "um"...where it comes in a sentence, how often I say it, why do you think I do it; what questions do you have about the way that this is used, what would you like to know more about. (field notes, April 25, 2014)

Once students began collecting their own language samples, they shared them in small groups, determining which ones might be useful to discuss with the entire class. This photo highlights the thinking of one group of students who discussed the use of “like,” as a vernacular feature, hypothesizing that this use of “like” might be used to signal a transition.

Figure 5.12: Charting Language



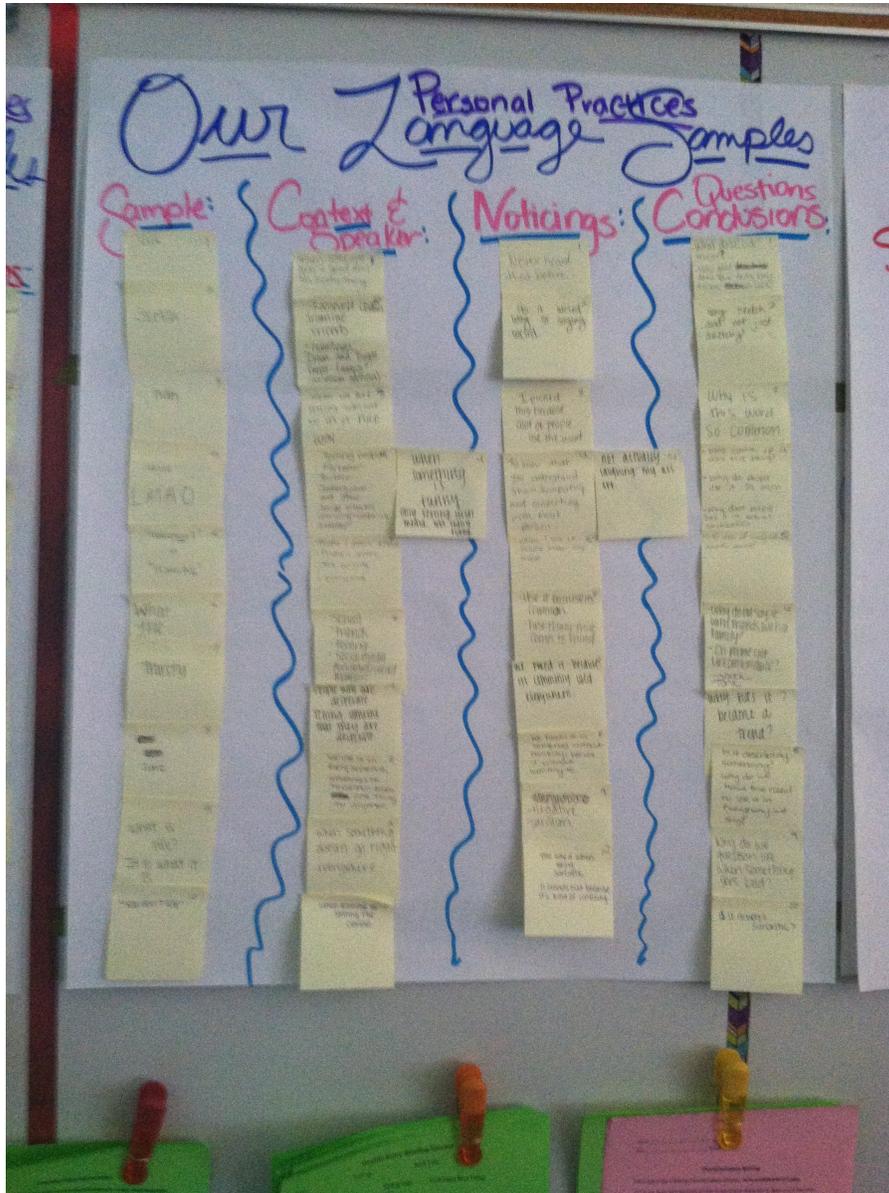
In addition to exploring discourse markers, such as “like,” students brought in examples of slang terms (“thirsty”), phrases (“You don’t say”), and acronyms (“LMAO”). Recognizing that students seemed drawn to particular kinds of language samples, Sophia wrote in her teaching journal, “How do I encourage more diverse collecting?” (teaching journal, April 29, 2014). In addition to considering how to expand the possibilities for the collection of language, Sophia realized how important it was to continue thinking

through language samples, as a class, encouraging students to document what took place before and after the language sample was verbalized or written in order to understand the context. In addition, we found that we needed to revisit what was meant by context and noticing, as students, sometimes, collapsed the categories.

In this iteration of the study, it was our hope that the “Come think with me/Questions” section of the chart might encourage further inquiry in contrast to asking students to come up with “Conclusions,” as we did in the first iteration of this unit of study, unintentionally suggesting that it might be possible to understand how language was working as a result of thinking through one language sample. Even with this change, Sophia voiced concern that students were quick to draw conclusions in response to looking at a language sample. In her teaching journal, she wrote, “How do I help the students understand that when we are looking at samples of other people’s language we are making hypotheses? That we don't know for certain?” (teaching journal, April 29, 2014).

Although some students may have taken this up independently, it seemed that it might have been beneficial to explicitly return, as a class, to some of these questions we posed when charting language, encouraging students to pursue a line of inquiry, rather than just collecting unrelated language samples, in order to, once again, communicate the need to look across language samples to better understand how language might be working. In addition, pursuing a line of inquiry as a class might have been useful in preparing students to draw on language samples in an effort to explore a topic or to seek information that might support them in answering a question as they facilitated their personal inquiry project. After sharing the language samples that the students found most interesting with the class, the language samples were added to the class chart, as seen in Figure 5.13.

Figure 5.13: Language Samples

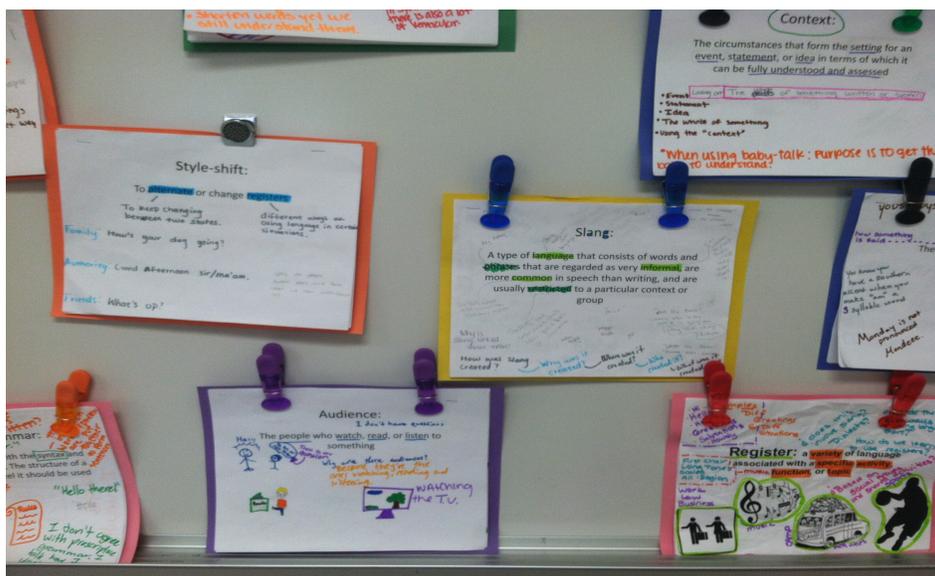


***Sociolinguistic meta-language***

Drawing on data collected during the first iteration of the study as well as our reflections as students who participated in the second iteration of the study discussed

what they noticed about language and language use, Sophia, Garrett, and I determined the sociolinguistic meta-language (Godley & Loretto, 2013) that might be useful to students in discussing their noticings about their own language as well as the language of their social worlds. Small groups of students were introduced to a term, such as, “styleshift,” “slang,” “register”, “vernacular” etc. (field notes, April 25, 2014). Students were then asked to put the definition of the word they were given into their own words, pose questions in response to it, share examples, provide language samples demonstrating the word, and/or include an image that represented this word (field notes, April 25, 2014). The following day, students walked around the room with a list of the 13 words that we hoped they might draw on in their reflection and analysis of language in practice, adding to the definition of each of these words, drawing on the examples, posing questions, and creating images that might be helpful in making sense of each of these words.

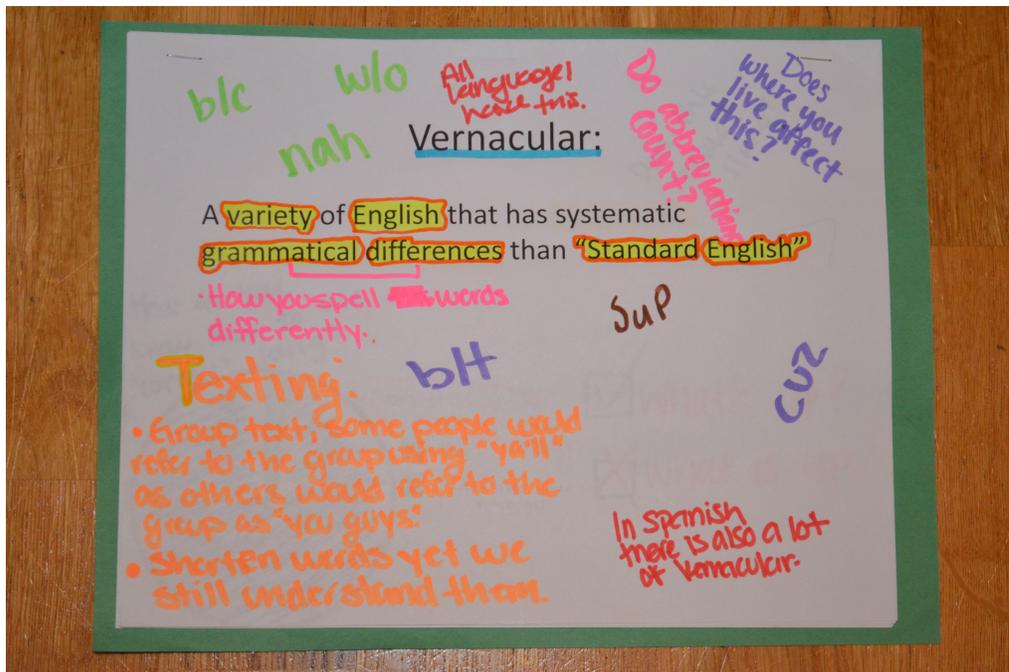
Figure 5.14: Sociolinguistic Meta-language



As Sophia shared her own language samples and modeled how to think through what she collected, she drew on the sociolinguistic meta-language we introduced to the students, encouraging them to return to the list in their notebooks and the posters on the wall to do the same (field notes, April 29, 2014-May 1, 2014).

When Sophia and I initially discussed how we might introduce students to this vocabulary, we thought it might be useful to return to these terms throughout the unit of study, revising our original understandings, if necessary, adding additional examples and posing questions that came up in response to particular words, as we were studying language. I never observed the class engage in these revisions. Although students were given the definitions of the words, some of the examples added and the re-writing of the definitions proved that a few of the students' initial understandings were inaccurate. As a result, Sophia clarified misconceptions through making use of this language while modeling how to go about analyzing the language samples she collected. Students successfully drew on some of this vocabulary in thinking about their own language use. However, other terms like "vernacular" had to be revisited and taught more explicitly, so students were able to understand the difference between this term and "slang, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Figure 5.15: Vernacular vs. Slang



This image demonstrates students' thinking as they tried to make sense of the term, "vernacular." Their examples of "Sup," "cuz," and "nah" demonstrate their struggle to differentiate between "vernacular" and "slang" (vocabulary wall, April 25, 2014), a misconception that we recognized in their conversations as they inquired into language, as well.

### **A transformative teaching and learning experience led by the participants**

#### ***Post-study perspectives of the community***

Though this unit of study challenged some of the participants in ways that did not always feel comfortable (field notes, May 2, 2014; interview, June 4; teaching journal, April 7, 2014), there was evidence that students developed new understandings about the complexity of language and language use. At the end of the study, fifteen students wrote that language should not be classified as "right" and "wrong," stating, "There are so

many types of English,” and different individuals “use language in many different ways” (written reflection, June 3, 2014). They voiced recognition that language is learned through acquisition, writing, “language grows when we interact with new people” and “The way I use language is very similar to the people I hang around with” (written reflection, June 3, 2014). In addition, they demonstrated that rules are socially-constructed, stating, “There’s nothing even to base off of whether you’re communicating and using language right or not,” (written reflection, June 3, 2014).

The participating students’ writing also indicated that many continued to develop metacommunicative awareness (Alim, 2004) and metalinguistic awareness (Andrews, 2010; Martínez, 2010) recognizing the expansiveness of their linguistic toolkit, beyond an understanding that they spoke one way with adults and another with their peers, writing, “I notice that I have many different ways I use language” and “I differentiate my language for different people and different situations” (written reflection, June 3, 2014), providing examples of how they code-switch and styleshift, often sharing what they learned from reflecting on their practices through the creation of language maps as well as through the analysis of their own language samples.

Students also discussed the connection between language and identity, sharing “I use language, words, and speech to fit and match my personality, to help people know me by my language” and “The way you speak and write are simply who you are” (written reflection, June 3, 2014).

Although there was evidence that students continued to see particular ways of speaking and writing as “higher status” through their use of the terminology like “proper language” and “better language,” (written reflection, June 3, 2014), most of the participating students demonstrated an acceptance of linguistic diversity, which was not evident prior to participating in this unit (written reflection, June 3, 2014). Some students

even demonstrated an appreciation for linguistic diversity, positioning language diversity as “fascinating” and “interesting” (written reflection, June 3, 2014).

### *Trying on critical identities*

Although students in this class, sometimes, seemed resistant to thinking with the class about linguistic discrimination (Baugh, 2003), engaging in conversation about language practices and communities who have historically been marginalized, a number of students posed questions in their writing demonstrating that they continued to take on an inquiry stance, and that they were beginning to think about many of the topics that, earlier in the unit of study, led a number of the participating students to remain silent and to resist participation. One student wrote, “Why do we teach non-English speakers to speak English, instead of teaching us English speakers to speak their language, too?” (written reflection, June 3, 2014). Another student wrote, “Why do people judge the way a person speaks or writes?” (written reflection, June 3, 2014). A third student asked, “Does Standard English even exist?” (written reflection, June 3, 2014). One of the students in Sophia’s class even began to question why we might choose to adapt our language through styleshifting, writing, “Are people scared that others are going to judge them according to the way they talk to them? Because of that, could it be a reason people change the way they talk?” (written reflection, June 3, 2014).

Sophia grew as a result of engaging in this work with her students, as well. Through designing and facilitating her own inquiry project, focusing on what language practices were valued at Del Campo High School and from listening to and learning with her students, she developed new understandings about her students’ identities as language users. In reflecting on this at the conclusion of the study, she shared,

I think I learned that they were more aware of it than I was when I was their age. They took it up more intentionally and cared more about their personal practices than I expected they would...I think a lot of my Pre-AP students had already spent a lot of time thinking about what language was valued and what language was not, intentionally, as a part of their identity as Pre-AP students, and successful students. (interview, June 17, 2014)

However, unlike in this unit of study, Sophia believed that these were not conversations many of them had previously experienced in school, which might have explained why these conversations seemed threatening to both the teacher and the students at times. Instead, she believed that students were more likely to engage in these conversations outside of the class, voicing, “I think it was a personal thing, maybe something they talked about and thought about with their parents. Not an in-school thing, maybe” (interview, June 17, 2014).

Through engaging in this work, Sophia also developed an awareness of the assumptions that she had about her students’ language practices.

I went in thinking that they’d feel like their language practices were non-standard, and their language practices were not valued. I thought I was being “social justicey” by wanting to expose them to these things. I think that was an unfair assumption. They valued their language practices, and they felt like their language practices were valued in lots of situations. (interview, June 17, 2014)

Sophia shared, at the conclusion of the study, that the work we did together led her to recognize the value of an inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning.

I think it’s something I definitely want to use as much as I can. I think they were much more engaged in it, and I think they liked it a lot. Sometimes, I worry it wasn’t as effective as it could be because it was the first time I’d done it. (June 17, 2014)

Wells (2001) writes,

More valid as a measure of the progress that has been made is an evaluation of the student’s ability to bring his or her knowledge and skills to bear in solving new problems that are of personal significance. (p. 174)

When I visited with Sophia seven months after the study, I saw evidence of her commitment to the use of an inquiry-based instructional approach, even though the study had ended. Similar to the experiences they had in the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), Sophia and Garrett continued to take on an inquiry stance, as teachers, inviting their colleagues to join them as they read and thought together in an effort to transform teaching and learning in their classrooms, trying out new things in response to their inquiry, and making modifications to their practices as they reflected on what worked and what did not, even though this was no longer in the context of a formal research study. Similar to the language study, Sophia and Garrett were making space to explore their students' literacy practices, mapping them as we had done with students' language. Moreover, there was evidence that students were pursuing lines of inquiry, not only as users of language, but as readers and writers, as well. In addition to seeing student noticings about the genre of feature article posted on the board when I visited Sophia's class seven months after the study, Sophia shared with me what some of her students were experiencing as readers in her classroom.

I had a kid that started with *My Bloody Life*, moved on to Luis Rodriguez's *Always Running*, moved on to Geoffrey Canada, and is now wanting to read more books about non-violence and protest and how the world works, pushing himself on what he has seen and is interested in. (interview, November 12, 2014)

They, too, were inquiring into topics that they found meaningful in their reading lives.

Most importantly, though, there was evidence that Sophia was claiming what teaching and learning looked like in her classroom. In describing the choices that she and Garrett had made that year, she shared, "If we don't stand behind it, it's not in our classrooms," (interview, November 12, 2014) explaining, "It has to be right for the students and our situations in the classroom in the moment" (interview, November 12,

2014). Unlike the year before in which she voiced concern about the authenticity of her teaching and her students' learning, Sophia and Garrett established a process of liberation (Freire, 2007), organizing collectively (Giroux, 1985), working with teachers and students to transform teaching and learning, not only in their classrooms but in their school and community, as well.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In chapter five, I presented findings that emerged from iterative analysis of Sophia's participation in the professional learning community as well as through her implementation of a unit of study in her classroom aimed to develop her own as well as her students' critical language awareness. Through focusing on Sophia and her students' engagement in each of the essential elements of this study 1) an inquiry-based instructional approach, 2) a focus on everyday language practices, and 3) a transformative teaching and learning experience led by the participants, I presented the significant modifications made as Sophia and her students aimed to further develop their critical language awareness. In addition to revisiting the following modifications that were initially introduced in Mattie's work with her students: 1) strategies to support "collaborative knowledge building," (Wells, 2001) and 2) strategies to support disciplinary understandings as well as two additional modifications that grew out of the second iteration of this study: 3) Strategies to support maintaining inquiry as stance 4) Strategies to support teacher/researcher collaborations.

In chapter six, I continue to embed comparative analysis of both iterations of this study, as I make four assertions that grew out of retrospective analysis. I will follow this up with a discussion detailing what the participating teachers learned through inquiring

into language with their students, the success of our pedagogical goal, and will also share implications for teacher education, language arts education, and future research.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout chapters four and five, I have embedded comparative analysis as I presented the findings that emerged through the exploration of the cases of Mattie and Sophia's participation in the professional learning community and their implementation of a 6-week unit of study aimed to further develop their own as well as their students' critical language awareness. In chapter six, I will continue to reference the cross case findings that grew out of what Gravemeijer and Cobb (2006) refer to as retrospective analysis, meta-analysis across the entire investigation, a process that prepares a researcher to make assertions as well as recommendations, documenting their learning process in an effort revisit and, if necessary, revitalize pedagogical theory (Reinking & Bradley, 2008), identifying the "conditions under which it applies" (Firestone, 1993).

I will begin this chapter by elaborating on four assertions (Gravemeijer & Cobb, 2006) that emerged from retrospective analysis: 1) The participating teachers and students struggled to maintain inquiry as stance while they worked toward the goal of further developing their own critical language awareness. 2) There were opportunities for greater transformation when the participating teachers and students learned with supportive, reflective collaborators while working toward the goal of further developing their own critical language awareness. 3) There were opportunities for greater transformation when the participating teachers and students noticed and named their own language practices while working toward to the goal of further developing their own critical language awareness, and 4) The teachers' and students' participation in the professional learning community and in the unit of study in the classrooms seemed to incite emerging critical identities while they worked toward the goal of further developing their own critical language awareness.

Following a discussion of these four assertions, I will focus on what the participating teachers learned through inquiring into language with their students, the success of the pedagogical goal, and conclude with implications for teacher education, language arts education, and future research.

#### **ASSERTIONS FROM RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS**

##### **The struggle to maintain inquiry as stance**

###### *Mattie's participation in the study*

Though Mattie made use of an inquiry-based approach in working with her students as readers and writers, she had spent significantly less time inquiring into language and language use prior to implementing this unit of study in her classroom. As discussed in chapter four, despite the fact that Mattie voiced that she saw the value in students collecting their own language samples and inquiring into their own language practices through language mapping, she made a choice to have students think back on how they thought they used language when they failed to bring in language samples, rather than considering how she might modify her practices to support students in collecting authentic language samples (Godley & Escher, 2012) in an effort to teach into their inquiry process and further develop disciplinary understandings (Wilhelm, 2007).

Though Mattie consistently created opportunities for her students to share their thinking in response to various language samples, artifacts, and ideas that they explored in this unit of study, she required consensus prior to documenting class beliefs about language and language use, encouraging students to “think as a community,” (field notes, January 8, 2014) a stance that contrasted with Fecho’s (2000), who argued “sustaining multiple perspectives and not pushing for consensus should be the goal of an inquiry

classroom” (p. 390) as well as the recommendations made by Godley & Loretto (2013) who voiced that an inquiry classroom must allow for “multiple points of view, tensions, hybrid identities” (p. 40), a goal that seems relevant if we are to “sustain linguistic, literate, and culture pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (Paris, 2012, p. 93). Although students pledged each day to “speak their minds without judgment,” (field notes, December 16, 2013-March 7, 2014) as they recited their class compact, they seemed to understand that to participate in this community, it was expected that they engage in particular discourses, discourses that demonstrated they valued diversity, specifically the many languages and literacies that individuals might draw on across their lifeworlds. These were perspectives that Mattie communicated in her interactions with her students and demonstrated through the quotations posted on her classroom walls. Although she did not explicitly “impose her thought” (Freire, 2007, p. 77), her strong stance in her position of power, no doubt, influenced the beliefs that students voiced during the class share sessions. It is likely that the position that Mattie took and her willingness to state her opinions, taking on the role of a learner within the community, limited her students’ inquiry stance, at times. However, as she consistently took on a discourse of acceptance, one that positioned all languages and language users who spoke those languages as worthy of being celebrated, she seemed to encourage her students to voice similar perspectives in this space.

It is important to note, however, that other teachers, those with very different perspectives than Mattie, seemed to influence students’ perspectives, as well, as a result of their positions of power, and in doing so, potentially limited the students’ inquiry stance, as Mattie did. Although one group in Mattie’s class demonstrated how problematic it was that we make assumptions about one’s language use with limited information, upon interviewing a teacher as part of this personal inquiry project, this

group came to the conclusion that these assumptions were not, in fact, racist. Sharing the words of their teacher, the students concluded their project with, “We don’t like that we stereotype people, but, it’s just how life is” (field notes, February 25, 2014). Although it was the practice, in this unit of study, to question all perspectives about language and language use, students seemed less likely to publicly question their teachers’ perspectives, reminding us that though it was our intention to position ourselves as learners with our students (Freire, 2007), as Mattie made an effort to do prior to and during the study, the institutional power that the teachers had in the classroom could not be overlooked (Ellsworth, 1987).

Through the implementation of the unit of study in Mattie’s classroom, we also came to notice that the way we asked students to share what they were learning seemed to impact the stance they took in thinking about the data they collected as they pursued their personal inquiry project. As students prepared for and presented collaborative TED talks during the first iteration of this study, they took on the kind of expertise that is often seen from TED presenters, making definitive claims, rather than thinking with the group about what they noticed in an effort to consider other perspectives and pose new questions that might have supported them in delving more deeply into their inquiry topic (Wells, 1995).

### *Sophia’s participation in the study*

As discussed in chapter five, Sophia also struggled with maintaining an inquiry stance. Despite the fact that she was actively engaging in her own inquiry process, beyond that of the teacher learning community, about how best to facilitate inquiry-based critical language study in the classroom, she voiced that she was nervous to begin this work, questioning whether or not she had prepared enough. Recognizing that “it was the participants’ experiences and noticings that were making the unit work,” (personal

communication, November 11, 2014), Sophia worried about how she might proceed if her students failed to take ownership of the inquiry process (teaching reflection, May 13, 2014). While she was pleasantly surprised with the efforts her students put into their personal inquiry projects, writing in her teacher journal, “I guess this really does prove the idea that choice matters-these topics matter”(teaching journal, May 13, 2014), she struggled during the class inquiry in moments in which she and her students experienced “discomfort,” (field notes, May 2, 2014) particularly when her students seemed to resist participation or chose to respond with silence. In these moments, she was, at times, at a loss for how to proceed, occasionally asking me to take over or provide additional support (field notes, May 1, 2014).

Although there were examples of students who demonstrated resistance to thinking as a community about their beliefs regarding language and language use in Mattie’s class, the student participants in the first iteration of this study typically voiced appreciation for linguistic diversity and commonly positioned linguistic discrimination (Baugh, 2003) as problematic. In Sophia’s class, however, this was not the case. As discussed in chapter five, students, sometimes, shut down the inquiry process, positioning particular language practices as “right” and “wrong,” and unworthy of discussion, making arguments such as “Standard rules are set in place, not to be altered” (language myth response, April 14, 2014), and in making these statements, positioning themselves with those who typically make and enforce those rules, those in positions of power.

When confronted with resistance to linguistic diversity and oppressive discourse, Sophia and I sometimes struggled to maintain inquiry as stance, concerned about the danger of legitimizing these perspectives in the classroom. As discussed in more detail in chapter five, we, sometimes, found ourselves repositioning noticings and encouraging

students to take different positions, rather than posing questions, engaging in further inquiry in direct response to the tension we were experiencing in the classroom.

### **The potential when learning with supportive, reflective collaborators**

#### *Mattie's participation in the study*

In reviewing the data collected across the investigation, it was clear that transformation came more easily when teachers and students had the opportunity to learn with supportive, reflective collaborators. Unlike Sophia and Garrett, who planned together and met regularly to think through the data we were collecting, reflecting on each of their experiences while implementing a unit of study in the classroom, Mattie implemented her unit of study independently. Although she voiced that our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) supported her in ways that her school-based professional learning community did not that particular year, she shared that would have liked to implement this unit of study with Sophia and Garrett, so she, too, had the opportunity to think about how this was actually working in practice with others who were committed to the same goal that she was. She explained, “They have each other to bounce ideas off of. They have that support system” (Interview, March 19, 2014). Although I encouraged Mattie to commit to a consistent meeting time, her multiple commitments often meant that these meetings were cancelled. Without this support, the job of putting countercultural practices into place in an effort to embrace cultural pluralism (Paris, 2012), had the potential to be overwhelming and may have led Mattie to make choices with limited time to reflect, such as asking students to document how they thought they used language, rather than re-thinking how she might support students in the collecting of authentic language samples (Godley & Escher, 2012), after an initial attempt proved to be challenging.

Though some of Mattie's students seemed to resent Mattie's rule that the community commit to particular beliefs while participating in this unit of study, it was clear that the work Mattie did to create an inclusive and safe space meant that students felt comfortable to share their experiences and to engage in conversations about language, race, power, and positioning with Mattie and their classmates, conversations that would ultimately lead them to further develop their own critical language awareness.

### *Sophia's participation in the study*

In reflecting on the role that our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) played in supporting Sophia to transform teaching and learning in her classroom, Sophia shared that she could not have accomplished what she did without the support of this group as well as the thinking that Garrett, Sophia and I did in response to what we were experiencing as we reflected on data collected during the unit of study (interview, June 17, 2014).

In addition to supporting her in facilitating inquiry-based critical language study, Sophia's participation in our professional learning community allowed her to form a partnership with Garrett that continued to grow after the study had concluded. In addition, in forming a relationship with Mattie, Sophia learned strategies that supported her in navigating her commitment to the district as well as to her students and to herself. As a result of these relationships, she no longer felt "duplicitous" (field notes, May 21, 2013). As discussed in chapter five, though our research study ended, Sophia and Garrett continued to take on an inquiry stance, as we did in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), inviting colleagues to collaborate with them, working toward new "innovations" in their classrooms, engaging in professional reading and reflecting on how they were

drawing on what they were learning to better support their students and become the kind of teachers they wanted to be.

Unlike Mattie's class, Sophia's class was more hesitant to publicly engage in conversations about language, race, power, and positioning throughout the unit of study. Though Fecho (2000) argued that when students engaged in conversations with those who shared different perspectives, they had opportunities to "extend, deepen, and complicate" (p. 388) their initial understandings of language and language in practice, it became clear to us that we had to re-think how we might encourage students to collaborate in the second iteration of the study. Throughout this experience, it was often a struggle to engage the students in a whole-class share session in which they reflected in their noticings. Because we believed that students grew as a result of thinking together about the language samples and artifacts, Sophia made a choice during this unit of study to spend less time facilitating whole-class share sessions and more time conferring with partners and groups who felt comfortable thinking together about the theories they were forming as a result of the inquiry. In reflecting on her own efforts to implement critical pedagogy, Ellsworth (1989) writes,

Acting as if our classroom were a safe space in which democratic dialogue was possible and happening does not make it so. If we were to respond to our context and the social identities of the people in our classroom in ways that did not reproduce the repressive formations we were trying to work against, we needed classroom practices that confronted the power dynamics inside and outside of the classroom that made democratic dialogue impossible (p. 315).

Like Ellsworth (1989), Sophia found that students in her class formed affinity groups, which "provided some participants with safer home bases from which they gained support, important understandings and a language for entering the larger classroom interactions" (p. 317). Upon recognizing the potential of these student-selected partnerships and groups, Sophia found ways to build on what seemed more likely to

support students in accomplishing the goal of further developing their own critical language awareness.

### **The promise of noticing and naming our own language practices**

#### *Mattie's participation in the study*

In addition to preparing the teachers to support their students in collecting and exploring their language practices, Mattie and Sophia developed new understandings about language use through the collection of their own language, understandings that impacted their expectations for their students. Prior to participating in this study, Mattie discussed the importance of her students being able to “adapt” (written reflection, June 11, 2013) their language to ensure that language use was “appropriate,” (interview, June 3, 2013) according to the context in which it was spoken or written. As she collected her own language, she found that there were many factors, in addition to context, that influenced her language use, sharing, “I found within spaces, I talk differently” (field notes, June 13, 2013). In addition, she came to see that she made choices as a user of language that might not be deemed “appropriate” (written reflection, June 11, 2013) by particular groups and communities in which she participated. However, these choices were made in an effort to accomplish purposes beyond participation in these communities. This developing understanding began to disrupt her “discourse of appropriateness,” (Flores & Rosa, 2015) an approach to language education that Flores & Rosa argue privileges “dominant white perspectives on the linguistic and cultural practices of racialized communities,” (Flores & Rosa, 2015), aiming for students to demonstrate White middleclass norms in contrast to implementing a culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, Paris & Alim, 2014) in an effort to sustain heritage and community linguistic and cultural practices (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014).

Mattie's new understandings, as a result of noticing, naming, and reflecting on her own language practices led her to consider that her students should engage in rhetorical decision-making inside of the classroom, just as they do in their daily lives. As discussed in chapter four, Mattie came to understand, "Sometimes, an audience might not approve of your writing because of the language you are choosing, and you need to be able to adapt it for your audience, if you CHOOSE to, as a writer" (field notes, July 16, 2013). As a result, she began to see that the goal was not to ensure that that her students could speak "appropriately." Rather, there was a value in inviting her students to engage in conversations about their language and language use, allowing the class to continue to develop their metalinguistic (Andrew, 2010; Martínez, 2010) and metacommunicative (Alim, 2004) awareness, as this would, more likely, serve them throughout their lifeworlds.

Although there was less time dedicated to language mapping and the collection of language samples in the first iteration of this study, students in Mattie's class often responded to the texts we read in which language users discussed their experiences with language through making personal connections, sharing their own experiences with language learning, language loss, and positioning. It was in writing their own language stories (Goodman, 2006) that Mattie believed her students took "ownership" (field notes, January, 16, 2014) of this unit, recognizing the relevance of the work that we were doing together.

### *Sophia's participation in the study*

Early on in our professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007), Sophia shared that she felt hesitant to speak in response to the pieces we were reading because she "had no real experience"

(field notes, June 18, 2013). Like many speakers of Dominant American English, Sophia's language practices were invisible to her, due to the fact that they had been positioned, throughout her life, as the norm (Alim & Smitherman, 2012). In fact, Sophia shared that when she was first invited to create a language map and collect her own language she initially felt "depressed," (field notes, June 18, 2013), voicing, "I'm not going to have a list like this" (field notes, June 18, 2013), comparing her own language practices to the list that Anzaldúa (1987) included in her chapter, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue." Through noticing and naming how she used language, however, she shared, "It made me realize I am intentional in my spaces, or even subconsciously acting different, and it was useful to identify those differences" (field notes, June 18, 2013). Understanding how her audience, her purpose, the context in which she spoke, and her relationship to the space and individuals with whom she communicated impacted the styleshifting that she did led her to recognize that her language does serve as a tool, better preparing her to think with students about the tools in their linguistic toolkits. Without this work, it is possible that Sophia's perceived inexperience would have continued to cause her to refrain from engaging in conversations with students about their language use.

Rather than making connections to the texts that we invited them to explore, as the students in Mattie's class did, student participants in Sophia's class demonstrated that they disidentified with these authors' experiences. Although it was not our intention to do so, it seemed that the students felt wrongfully positioned by these pieces, claiming, specifically, that many of the texts we invited them to read essentialized the African American experience. Sometimes, Sophia's students actively resisted, sharing their perspectives through statements such as, "That's not what WE say. I'm gonna take up for my race. That's not how WE talk" (field notes, May 2, 2014), which allowed for

continued conversation. Other times, however, they passively resisted through refusal to participate, choosing to remain silent, as well as creating obstacles that stood in the way of them engaging in inquiry, such as voicing difficulty in understanding a text in which a writer code-switched, despite the inclusion of translations and context clues to support readers who were unfamiliar with the Spanish language.

In both iterations of this study, however, the student participants' seemed to grow when given the opportunity to notice and name their own language practices. As discussed in chapter five, in her teaching journal, Sophia wrote that her students were "reinvigorated" (teaching journal, April 23, 2014) by this part of the process. Moreover, it was through this work that students came to see that they acquired language practices from the communities in which they participated, and had opportunities to engage in conversations about the different factors that influenced the choices they made as language users, such as audience, context, purpose, how they saw themselves, how they wished others to see them etc. In fact, through their personal inquiry project, many of the students in who participated in the second iteration of the study chose to explore verbal art genres (Alim, 2004) that they noticed themselves engaging in frequently upon collecting their own language. It seemed that they were drawn to verbal art genres (Alim, 2004) in which they felt powerful, those that they felt they demonstrated expertise in, such as the use of sarcasm, what one group referred to as "trashtalk," and language use in social media. Through engaging in this inquiry work, students developed new understandings, as discussed in chapter five, leading them to re-think their pre-conceived notions about the ways that language works.

## **Emerging critical identities**

### ***Mattie's participation in the study***

Very early in Mattie's career, she was invited to participate in our National Writing Project site. Through this community's support as well as through the support of her department, which had changed dramatically during the year that she implemented our unit of study in her classroom, Mattie had made it a part of her practice to challenge district mandates that she believed were not in the best interest of her students. Though she had made efforts to question those in power, to ensure that her students had choices as readers and as writers, she had not always seen her students do the same, despite encouraging them to take a stand through quotations posted on the wall and through choosing what they wished to write about. Through her work implementing a unit of study in her classroom with the goal of further developing her own as well as her students' critical language awareness, Mattie began to see that, like she often did, her students were taking on the role of "risk-taker," (interview, June 7, 2014) in new ways. Although Mattie had encouraged consensus in documenting beliefs about language and language use on the wall, her students independently used their notebooks to counter community perspectives and demonstrated that they were developing strong stances about language rights in the conversations that they had. In addition, students began thinking together about how they might go about creating change, based on the inequities they had come to better understand through their participation in this unit of study. Four months after the study had ended, Mattie shared that the work the students did in this unit of study continued to have an impact on their classroom participation. She explained that this work had led them to feel more "powerful" (interview, June 3, 2014), which resulted in them posing "really tough questions" and engaging in new kinds of conversations (interview, June 3, 2014).

### *Sophia's participation in the study*

It was through Sophia's participation in the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) that she first created space within her classroom to learn from her students about their experiences as language users, leading her to pursue a line of inquiry in which she began to think about students' and teachers' perceptions of multilingualism at her school, considering why these perceptions existed and how these perceptions impacted the choices students made as users of language at Del Campo High School.

As discussed in chapter five, although it was her intention to position herself as a learner (Freire, 2007) in her classroom during the course of this unit of study, Sophia came to see that she brought with her some assumptions about how her students identified as language users. Reflecting these assumptions, Sophia shared,

I went in thinking that they'd feel like their language practices were non-standard, and their language practices were not valued. I thought I was being "social justicey" by wanting to expose them to these things. I think that was an unfair assumption. They valued their language practices, and they felt like their language practices were valued in lots of situations. (interview, June 17, 2014)

Upon recognizing that she did have assumptions that proved to be inaccurate regarding her students' perceptions about their language use, she made a choice to re-visit her personal inquiry project, focusing, instead, inviting her students to support her as she inquired into what language practices were valued at Del Campo High School. In addition to using her work as a model for how students might go about designing and facilitating their own inquiry projects, Sophia had the opportunity to share the data she collected with her students and learn from their perspectives as they thought with her about the language samples, artifacts, and interviews that she drew on to share her noticings. As she engaged in this work, Sophia negotiated what it meant to take on the

role of “learner” in her own classroom (Freire, 2007), creating an opportunity for her to engage in conversations with her students that led her to develop a critical identity and further develop her own critical language awareness.

The biggest shift seen in Sophia, however, was the stance she took as a teacher the following year. In addition to demonstrating that she had internalized the process of engaging in inquiry (Wells, 1995), which supported her in her interactions with her students, Sophia began to question district mandates when they seemed counter to supporting her students as readers, writers, and users of language across their lifeworlds, just like Mattie did. Sophia explained, “If we don’t stand behind it, it’s not in our classrooms” (interview, November 12, 2014). Sophia was no longer passively implementing initiatives “that didn’t make sense,” (field notes, May 28, 2013). Instead, she had learned an approach and was building a community to support her in creating a teaching and learning environment in which she and her students thrived.

Although many of Sophia’s students were initially reluctant to consider the perspectives that contrasted with what they had come to believe about language and language use as well as ways of using language that contrasted with the choices they believed they made as users of language, at the conclusion of the study, there was evidence that her students were beginning to pose some of the questions we made efforts to think through, as a group, early in the unit, questions such as, “Why do we teach non-English speakers to speak English, instead of teaching us English speakers to speak their language, too,” (written reflection, June 3, 2014) “Why do people judge the way a person speaks or writes,” (written reflection, June 3, 2014), “Does Standard English even exist?” (written reflection, June 3, 2014). It seemed that they just needed a bit more time to get there and a space in which they knew they were safe to pose questions that were on their mind, as a result of inquiring into language.

## **WHAT DID TEACHERS LEARN THROUGH INQUIRING INTO LANGUAGE WITH THEIR STUDENTS?**

While it was clear that inquiring into language within the professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) provided teachers with an opportunity to further develop their critical language awareness, the teachers continued to develop new understandings about language and language use as a result of exploring language with their students, as well. As discussed in chapter four, through looking at language in practice, Mattie came to see language as “a flexible social tool” (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 63) that speakers and writers could call on as they saw fit. In repositioning language use as a choice, however, she failed to consider the “many dimensions of language, which are not subject to conscious or direct control” (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 5), dimensions that her students brought to her attention in their continual reflection on the assumptions that are made about particular languages and language users, assumptions that Mattie had not thought much about prior to these conversations, as they rarely impacted her due to her positioning as a White speaker of dominant American English.

Although Sophia learned about the relationship between language and identity in her undergraduate teacher education program, she shared that she had forgotten this prior to reading Anzaldúa’s (1987) work and thinking about it with her students. Like Mattie, Sophia’s positioning as a White speaker of Dominant American English meant that she was rarely positioned in negative ways as a result of her perceived language practices. Sophia was reminded of the relationship between language and identity, once again, through observing her students’ reactions when they felt inaccurately labeled during this unit of study. Recognizing that her own perceptions about her students’ identities as language users were inaccurate, Sophia planned for a personal inquiry project in an effort

to notice and name what languages and language practices were valued at Del Campo High School, inviting her students to act as co-investigators. Through this project, Sophia came to see her students' linguistic dexterity demonstrated through various verbal art genres (Alim, 2004) such as "sarcasm," "puns," "insults," "word play," "double meaning," "one-line jokes," "inside jokes," and "irony" (language inquiry project, May 8, 2014-May 23, 2014). As Sophia and her students continued to think together about language, it also became clear that Sophia that her students were more likely to develop new understandings about language use when given the opportunity to name what they did with language rather than defend what they did not do.

#### **DID THE INNOVATION FURTHER THE PEDAGOGICAL GOAL?**

This study was designed in an effort to further develop the critical language awareness of the participating teachers and students. In the professional learning community as well as in both units of study implemented in the classroom, the participants had opportunities to explore patterns in language (Wolfram, 1995), notice how language varies according to context (Wolfram, 1995; NCTE, 1994), recognize attitudes and ideologies about language (NCTE, 1974; NCTE, 1994), consider the role that audience plays in the choices made about language use in both speech and writing (NCTE, 1994), examine the role that language plays in how we communicate (NCTE, 1994), trouble what it means to be "correct" (Alim & Smitherman, 2012), and problematize the relationship between social inequalities and language (Alim & Smitherman, 2012).

Throughout both iterations, modifications were made to support the teachers and students in achieving the goal of further developing their critical language awareness. The data discussed in chapters four and five demonstrate that the participants began to

recognize the expansiveness of their linguistic toolkits, demonstrating an understanding that they engaged in code-switching and styleshifting in an effort to get things done with language as well as to present themselves to the world. Though there were tools that, sometimes, went unrecognized, as well, the participating teachers and students engaged in a process that led them to pay attention to language, and as a result of that process, many communicated that they just couldn't help but continue noticing how language was working, even after the unit of study had concluded. Through collecting their own language and the language of their social worlds, the participating teachers and students began to legitimize variation and language shift, although there was evidence that some participants continued to value particular language practices more than others. In addition, it was clear that through treating language as an object of study, the participants developed new understandings about the complexity of language and language use and, as discussed through the final assertions that grew out of retrospective analysis, the work done in the professional learning community as well as in the classroom seemed to insight emerging critical identities, calling attention to and critiquing not only the relationship between language and social inequalities but other forms of institutional racism that they saw as unjust, considering what role they might play in creating change.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### **Teacher education**

As discussed in chapter two, too often, teacher education programs fail to prepare pre-service teachers to teach in linguistically complex classrooms and worlds (Smitherman & Villanueva, 2003). Although some of the teachers who participated in the professional learning community had the opportunity to take a course designed to introduce them to language theory, history, and research while participating in pre-

service teacher education programs, this experience seemed to have a limited impact on their work because it was disconnected from practice. Through inquiring into their own language, the language of their social worlds, and a topic of interest related to language, the participating teachers not only had the opportunity to experience a process that they might facilitate in their own classrooms in an effort to further develop their own as well as their students' critical language awareness, they also developed new understandings that impacted how they thought about language and, therefore, impacted the goals and expectations they had for student learning.

Prior to exploring her own language practices, Sophia struggled to engage in conversations about the social dimensions about language variety, sharing that she had “no real experience” (field notes, June 18, 2013). As discussed earlier in this chapter, because she identified as a speaker of Dominant American English, her language practices were initially invisible to her. Mapping her own language allowed her to recognize that she did, in fact, styleshift. In thinking with her students about their own language practices, she was able to draw on the tools she had come to recognize in her own linguistic toolkit as a model for what she would invite her students to do.

This study demonstrates that if we are to sustain “linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling,” (Paris, 2012), it is necessary that pre-service and practicing teachers have opportunities to treat language as an object of study, linking theory to practice, so they are prepared to engage in metalinguistic conversations (Andrews, 2010; Martínez, 2010) in the classroom about the rhetorical decision-making that students might engage in in academic settings and beyond.

## **Language arts education**

Andrews (2010) argues that we must focus on further developing students' metalinguistic awareness in language arts classes, rather than teaching a "fixed code of oral and written expression," (p. 13) inaccurately communicating that this code might be drawn on in all communicative events. He writes,

This view all but ignores some basic issues: What constitutes an act of communication? How do we communicate in ways other than through speech and writing? How does language vary, inevitably and legitimately between speakers and among groups of speaker/writers? Questions like these are seldom asked in a traditional language curriculum where there is just one standard or benchmark of what represents "good English." (p. 13)

An inquiry-based approach to critical language study created opportunities for the participating teachers and students to explore the questions that Andrews poses, and in doing so, develop new understandings about how language works.

Because the teachers and students had participated in an educational system that traditionally values and promotes "an overarching, homogenous standard language which is primarily White, upper middle class, and Midwestern" (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 65) and had been personally impacted by the standard language ideology imposed and maintained by this educational system in multiple ways, it was important that teachers and students had the opportunity to think with a trusted group of individuals as they explored language samples and artifacts that led them to question perspectives that had previously been presented to them as truths.

Although this study draws from a limited sample size, it was clear that the high school participants were initially less willing to re-think the perspectives they had taken on, as a result of participating in a system that imposes a standard language ideology, than the middle-school participants were. If we seek to prepare students to participate in

a pluralistic society, it is recommended that this approach to language study begins earlier in a student's academic career

Similarly, because the participating teachers had limited experiences with critical language study and varying experiences with an inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning, it was useful for them to form professional partnerships, both inside and outside of their schools, engaging in professional reading, collaborative planning, and reflection on student work in order to make modifications to their plans in an effort to accomplish self-selected goals in their classroom that were useful in supporting their students as readers, writers, and users of language.

### **Future Research**

Reinking & Bradley (2008) argue that one way a design-based researcher can make generalizations about what she has learned is through a process of replication across diverse instructional contexts. Though I made efforts to put this innovation into place in four different classrooms, two of which were discussed in this dissertation, it would be useful to implement this study again with a different population of students and teachers, drawing on what was learned as a result of retrospective analysis (Gravemeijer & Cobb, 2006) in addition to the iterative analysis that we did as we implemented the study. Though the modifications helped us achieve our pedagogical goal, this innovation is far from perfected.

Retrospective analysis would suggest the need to continue thinking about how to address the challenges we experienced in maintaining inquiry as stance. Though the students and teachers grew as a result of naming and noticing language in practice, it is possible that, at times, explicit instruction was necessary, particularly in moments in which teachers and students seemed to misinterpret and misunderstand important

disciplinary concepts. This might also have been useful in ensuring that the teachers and students acquired background information informing them how languages and language users have been positioned throughout history.

Retrospective analysis also suggested the need to spend more time thinking about our own positionality as White teachers, who often spoke what might be described as Dominant American English, thinking about language with a diverse group of students, many of whom had experiences with language that contrasted with our own. Though teachers in this study further developed their own critical language awareness as a result of inquiring into language and language use with their students, it seems that we might continue to consider what it looks like to learn about language with and from our students, recognizing the limitations of this based on our positions of authority in a system that traditionally privileged particular “ways with words” (Heath, 1983) and, therefore, particular speakers and writers.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In this chapter, I have embedded comparative analysis in my discussion of four assertions that grew out of retrospective analysis. These include 1) The participating teachers and students struggled to maintain inquiry as stance while they worked through the goal of further developing their own critical language awareness, 2) There were opportunities for a greater transformation when the participating teachers and students learned with supportive, reflective collaborators while working toward the goal of further developing their own critical language awareness, 3) There were opportunities for greater transformation when the participating teachers and students noticed and named their own language practices while working toward to the goal of further developing their own critical language awareness, and 4) The teachers’ and students’ participation in the

professional learning community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2007) and in the unit of study in the classroom seemed to incite emerging critical identities while they worked toward the goal of further developing their own critical language awareness. In addition, in this chapter, I discuss what teachers learned through inquiring into language with their students, the success of the pedagogical goal, as well as offer implications for teacher education, language arts education, and future research

### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

I began this piece with a dedication to Shanitria Harris, a brilliant poet who is also a friend and former “student” from my days at Reagan High School. Over the past ten years, she has served as my “teacher,” in so many ways. Recently, she shared some writing. “I am no stranger to linguistic warzones. Ask the slam poets I run with. Words are my friends and my best weapons.” Must our schools be “linguistic warzones?” In “What Are We Seeking to Sustain Through Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy? A Loving Critique Forward,” Paris and Alim (2014) pose the following questions:

What if, indeed, the goal of teaching and learning with youth of color was not ultimately to see how closely students could perform White middle-class norms but to explore, honor, extend, and, at times, problematize their heritage and community practices? (p. 86)

Mattie and Sophia committed themselves to further developing their own critical language awareness in an effort to work toward the goal that Paris and Alim (2014) argue is necessary. It is my hope that this study demonstrates the potential of design-based research as a means of supporting practicing teachers in transforming teaching and learning in their classrooms through the implementation of critical (Freire, 2007; Freire & Macedo, 2011; Giroux, 1985) and culturally sustaining pedagogies (Ladson-Billings,

2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014), those that encourage problem-posing and embrace the cultural and linguistic flexibility of youth, that is too often devalued in our schools as well as in society.

Freire (2007) writes,

To exist humanly is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*. (p. 88)

This study tells the story of teachers and students working together to name the world in an effort to change it. Although there were times, throughout this study, in which the world has not, yet, been renamed, I have hope.

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