ON THE BORDER, IN THE MARGINS, AT THE CENTER:
TEACHERS POSITION THEMSELVES IN THE SCHOOL AND WIDER COMMUNITY

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A DISSERTATION
in
Reading/Writing/Literacy
Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania
in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Education

2018

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Dedication

For my spouse, Nathanial Dixon

For my Mother, Maria Teresa Rivera
My Father, Fred Rivera

For the ancestors who crossed many borders
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Along this uncertain journey, there have been many people that I would like to include in this brief acknowledgement. My mother and father have always inspired me to keep moving ahead with my education. They are why I did this.

My spouse, Nathanial Dixon, who believed in me more than I believed in myself. When I received my acceptance letter, he was the first one to call my parents, even as I was unsure I wanted to go through with it.

His mother, Queenelle Dixon, has prayed for both me and Nate. She gave me tea to soothe my soul.

My Penn colleagues, Mary Yea and Alicia Pantoja studied with me, wrote with me, and encouraged me.

It is humbling that a dissertation committee would read my work and hear me defend so early on a drizzly spring morning. Thank you Gerald Campano, Eva Gold, and Susan Lytle.

Gerald, you were the one who encouraged me from the beginning. Thank you.

My chair, Diane Waff deserves special thanks. She is more than a chair. She is a selfless advocate. The Philadelphia Writing Project has been a sanctuary for me. Her leadership of the writing project is nothing short of awe inspiring. She has become a role model and a friend.

Lastly, and most pointedly, I want to acknowledge the teachers and students of Crawford who learned alongside me. Their voices are the powerful center of this work. I wish I could transcribe their names on this page. You will always be in my heart.
ABSTRACT
ON THE BORDER, IN THE MARGINS, AT THE CENTER:
TEACHERS POSITION THEMSELVES IN THE SCHOOL AND WIDER COMMUNITY

Robert Rivera-Amezola
Diane Waff

This study emanates from the work of an inquiry group of urban teachers at a school in Philadelphia. I was a teacher at this school for many years and after an extended absence I returned as a practitioner/researcher at a time when the school was considering the possibility of becoming a community school. In light of this potential, the inquiry group considered the following questions: First, how do the multiple communities and positions we inhabit inform our practice and relationships with students, families, and colleagues? Second, how is a context created to problematize the way we teach and support our students and families? Third, how do we construct our classroom practice in relation to the family and community as both context and resource? This study was grounded in the practitioner inquiry paradigm. As an inquiry group, we met twice each month during the school year, read a variety of texts, reviewed school policies, and analyzed classroom work. I also made my work with a third-grade literature circle a site of inquiry. I use the literacies of teaching and Borderland theory to frame this study. The generative nature of conversation within the inquiry group offered a liminal space that encouraged resource-based thinking even in the face of great obstacles and puzzling
moments. Findings point to the enormous potential of teachers as a resource when districts consider transitioning to a community school model.
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Chapter One

Introduction: The Literacies of Teaching and the Borderlands

“No other job in the world could possibly dispossess one so completely as this job of teaching. You could stand all day in a laundry, for instance, still in possession of your mind. But this teaching utterly obliterates you. It cuts right into your being: essentially, it takes over your spirit. It drags it out from where you would hide.”

Sylvia Ashton Warner
Teacher

Why this study?

As far as my career is concerned, aside from a brief time as a social worker, all I’ve ever known are schools and teaching. Some in the teaching profession can speak to having known they would be a teacher from childhood. Though I used to “play school” with my siblings when I was a little boy, as an adult it was never my intention to become a teacher. Nevertheless, life took me through a journey that eventually lead to who and where I am today. This study emanates from the great respect I have for the profession, not just because I am a teacher but because I know so many of them and I have heard their stories. I think I have a way to tell their story through my own.

The first half of the title of my dissertation has remained the same, even throughout the proposal stage. Although I have lived on the east coast for many years now, other than my spouse and his mother, I have no other familial connections here. They all have remained in El Paso, where I was born and grew up. Many of them, including both of my siblings, are teachers. Our family has deeply rooted ancestral ties to life along the Rio Grande. Borderland culture and its myriad complexities and
contradictions are still tied to who I am as both a teacher and a human being. I never would have imagined that I could tie these two seemingly disparate spheres of my life together until graduate school offered new perspectives at considering my career and acknowledging my cultural background as a way of knowing.

I was introduced to Gloria Anzaldúa and the notion of the borderlands as an intellectual paradigm while taking my coursework. Since then, I have been incredibly influenced by her work. She nestled into a place in my mind that would not go away. As a product of the borderlands, a space that is vague and uncertain at times, it became a framework that helped anchor me in many of my pursuits while at the university. I saw her theoretical framework as a useful way to think about the various positioning that occurred as the teachers struggled through the inquiry group, read our reading selections, and told their stories, most obviously as the teachers engaged in writing and reading their autobiographies. This conceptual framework and a review of some literature on borderland theory will be undertaken a little further in this study.

As I look on it now, my teaching experience can be partly described through work I have done with students who have had to negotiate their own borderlands. Starting in 1991, I began as a high school teacher in the Federated States of Micronesia. Officially, since 1986, Micronesians have lived under the colonizing thumb of the United States. It was on these islands, at an “English only” school, that I first began to think about the intersection of language, culture, and education. In Philadelphia, I began my teaching

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1 The relationship between FSM and the United States actually had its origins earlier, in 1969, with the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. Its eventual outcome became the dependency of the island groups on US economic aid in exchange for defense operating rights (http://uscompact.org/about/cofa.php)
career one month after the tragedy of 9/11. The Crawford Elementary school is located in a part of the city where, like many Philadelphia neighborhoods, a cross-section of racial groups and ethnicities are located in distinctly demarcated areas within a prescribed (often debatable) set of boundaries. A study of any US Census informed interactive map (e.g., statisticatlas.com) reveals that the school is located in the Latinx\(^2\) third of the neighborhood, slightly overlapped by the African-American section, followed by a non-Hispanic white population at the opposite end. The student population at the Crawford Elementary school reflects these demographics as a slight majority is Latinx. Student and family travel to and from various destinations in the Spanish speaking Caribbean at different points in the school year was commonplace. Though trends seem to indicate that the nation’s teaching force is slowly becoming more diverse, teachers nationwide tend to be white and female (Loewus, 2017). Crawford was no exception. At the time I was collecting data for this dissertation, out of 32 classroom teachers, 24 were white, four were Black, and four were Latinx. There was only one male classroom teacher (there were three others in ancillary roles). Equally of note was the leadership of the school. The longest held memory recalls only white male principals, however there were two consecutive years, while I was a teacher there, when that position was held by a Latinx female. One white woman at Crawford, often called “the lead teacher,” while not an officially designated administrator, has always been the unofficial driver of curriculum, operations, and roster designations. Her influence is significant. Both she and the principal cross the Delaware River to work each day from the suburbs of New Jersey.

\(^2\) I utilize here the gender non-binary term to describe U.S.-based person of Latin American descent.
I speak a little more about the site and the population of the school further in the conceptual framework chapter. I also include an overview of the seven teachers who are the focal point of this dissertation. They are the teachers who will comprise the inquiry community that I proposed to the whole staff of the school. I am the eighth teacher. As such, I locate this study under the umbrella of practitioner inquiry, where the boundaries between inquiry and practice are blurred (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

**The aim of this study**

I have always been interested in the stories that teachers tell (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Marcos, Sanchez, & Tillema, 2008; Riessman, 1993) and how these stories relate to their personal development and identity as teachers (Fenstermacher, 1978). Teacher stories are shared throughout this dissertation and serve as an anchor for the practical work that was encountered in the inquiry group. I was interested in what Susan Lytle calls “the literacies of teaching,” a critical framework that accesses teachers’ knowledge by creating a space to interrogate “stories of practice, a space that permits agency in the ways daily experiences are rendered, framed and responded to, and a space that embraces uncertainties and struggles endemic to this work” (2006, p. 257). Lytle writes that the texts, i.e., the classrooms, schools, communities, through which teachers live their professional lives are sites ripe for inquiry.

One of the many inspirations for this dissertation comes from Sonia Nieto’s *What Keeps Teachers Going?* (2003). Similar to the teachers in her book, the teachers who helped me in my research serve low-income students of linguistically and culturally
diverse backgrounds. They are arguably some of the most marginalized and vulnerable members of Philadelphia’s educational landscape (Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Rouse, 2012). They join a litany of the “invisible communities” that comprise our distressed schools (Campano, Ghiso, Yee, & Pantoja, 2013; Esquierdo & Arreguin-Anderson, 2012; Reilly, 2007; Yang, 2004). Nieto crafts narratives of teachers working under challenging conditions who have survived the surge of attacks on their profession from various fronts and have not only continued to persevere but have remained enthusiastic about their jobs. My aim was to join Nieto’s telling of these stories, to discover these “literacies of teaching,” and add to the literature that finds identity, inquiry, and community as key components for what keeps teachers going.

**Why now?**

To achieve my aims, I wanted to gather a group of teachers to engage in conversation. I called it an inquiry community. It took time for the group to move beyond conversation and into inquiry. Whether it ever became a stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) is debatable, and the discussion about this process will happen throughout this dissertation and in chapter 13. What I want to establish here, however, is the need for learning communities to come together in conversation toward accomplishing substantive even transformative change. I wonder if there has ever not been a trying time in the field of urban education. Today, the Department of Education is led by a multi-millionaire who never taught in a classroom. Anti-immigrant sentiment is visceral. Adults with very influential roles are actually talking seriously about arming teachers with firearms. The neoliberal agenda with its for-profit goals remains strong and resolute. The first three
pages of Lytle’s “The literacies of teaching urban adolescents in these times” was the shared read for the first day of the inquiry community meeting at Crawford. When Dirk, one of the teachers in the inquiry group, completed the piece, he was the first to speak: “I can’t believe this was written ten years ago” (analytic memo, November 17, 2015). Its relevance was unmistakable.

My goal was to explore the following questions with the inquiry community:

- How do the multiple communities and positions teachers inhabit inform their practice and influence their relationship with students, their families, and their colleagues?
- How do Crawford inquiry community teachers co-create a context to problematize and investigate the way they teach and support Crawford youth and families?
- How do Crawford teachers construct their classroom practice in relation to the family and community both as a context and a resource?

In addition to the teacher inquiry group, I engaged with students on multiple levels. My aim on this front was twofold: I wanted to be part of the school community again as unobtrusively as possible while still being helpful. Second, to work through some of the questions for this dissertation alongside the teachers, I needed my own “text” to explore the “active, intentional, and deliberative act” (Lytle, 2006, p. 259) of teaching. It was critical that I engage as a vulnerable practitioner, so my work with a third-grade literature circle over the span of a school year would be an important feature of my thinking. Chapter 9 further discusses the reasons for including student work.
Re-conceptualizing teaching as literacy was foundational to frame the work accomplished with my colleagues in the inquiry group and the students in the literature circle. Equally as important was re-conceptualizing teaching using a borderland framework, an intellectual and personal lens that I will explore at length in the next chapter.

**How the argument will proceed**

What will follow in this dissertation is an overview of borderland theory. It has been so tied to the seminal work of Gloria Anzaldúa that it is sometimes called “Anzaldúan theory.” I will also show the breadth of Anzaldúan theory as an epistemological framework for other work ranging from the study of arts-based programming for adjudicated youth to understanding the access of science education for language minority students. I will then move to the focus of this dissertation study and situate the seven teachers in this borderland space. I am in this space, too -- not simply as an outside observer and researcher, but as a practitioner, a former Crawford teacher for many years, and a product of the borderlands. I will show how the critical work on which we embarked helped us build and understand the various iterations of community. I use the borderlands as a lens to understand this specific work and re-conceptualize the literacies of teaching in general.

The argument follows the chronology that the inquiry group took as it unfolded. In chapter 5, I address the first of my three questions, where we explore the various and sometimes multiple communities and positionalities that inform our practice. Through the writing of autobiographies, the nature of the conversations was changed towards one that
was more community focused. These conversations were critical for the inquiry work that would be met ahead. In chapter 6, I unpack the second question as I write about how together the teachers created the context they would use to investigate the issues that would arise in the inquiry group. The group formed into an inquiry community as it engaged with protocols to allow for a more structured conversational process. The third question examines the school and the classroom in relation to the outside community. Chapter 7 looks specifically at the discussions the inquiry group had about Crawford’s School Advisory Council and the community members that comprised it. These conversations would offer a frame with which to consider the community as a resource in the context of schoolwork.

Beginning in chapter 5, each teacher’s story is told within the dissertation. Their stories are weaved into the tapestry of the whole argument. The literacies of teaching are best illustrated through these vignettes, and I delineate the elements of the borderlands in each one. In the discussion section in chapter 13, I make the case for the relabeling of these vignettes as testimonios, a Latin American tradition that permits experiences to extend beyond the personal to speak for and even represent communal experiences. The dissertation ends with findings and implications.
Chapter TWO

Conceptual Framework

“I am in between. Trying to write to be understood by those who matter to me, yet also trying to push my mind with ideas beyond the everyday. It is another borderland I inhabit. Not quite here nor there. On good days I feel I am a bridge. On bad days I just feel alone.”

Sergio Troncoso
Crossing Borders

Borderlands as paradigm

The opening chapter of Borderlands/La Frontera Anzaldúa viscerally describes the Mexican-U.S. border como “una herida where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—border culture” (1987, p. 25). I find this place aligned with the literacies of teaching proposed by Lytle who believes to be literate as a teacher entails an “on going, searching, and sometimes profoundly unsettling dialogue with students, families, administrators, policymakers, and other teachers who may read and write from very different locations and experiences” (2006, p. 259). Since the publication of Borderlands/La Frontera by Gloria Anzaldúa in 1987, the idea of the physical space that is the borderland has captured the imagination for thinkers, scholars, and literary writers in the late twentieth century (Pérez, 1999). Borderlands as symbol is the “cohesive metaphoric linchpin” (1999, p. 25) for a place rife with indignation and curdled with anguish. In its fluidity, it is like the shifting banks of the serpentine Rio Grande. In its volatility, like the Arizona desert as it is defended by xenophobic American minutemen; and, like the brash contradictions that demarcate the border town of Tijuana,
it is multifaceted and subjective. Some writers have used borderland as paradigm, a way of looking at the world, and articulating ideas. Specifically, borderland has been taken up by Chicana/o scholars seeking to understand, extend, and contribute to Anzaldúa’s thinking, even though some might contend that it has been around since colonial days in the Southwest (Bejarano, 2007).

Most Chicano/a scholars write from an intimate understanding of life on the geographical borderlands of the Mexico-US border. It is a space conceptualized by Anzaldúa as “Nepantla,” a place that blurs binaries and is uniquely situated in both time and place. “It is a limited space, a space where you are not this or that but where you are changing. You haven’t got into the new identity yet and haven’t left the old identity behind either—you are in a kind of transition” (1987, p. 237). She goes on to say that it is a disturbing and uncomfortable place to be because it can be a transformation space, where one’s identities are in flux, under construction, and continually reimagined. I am arguing that inquiry communities can become this transformative place, where “professional intimacy” (as coined by Carol Merrill in Lytle, 2006) describes the collegial relationships that help sort through pain and growth, and that the metaphorical space envisioned by Anzaldúa is one way to understand this intimacy.

Towards a workable definition

I would like to briefly review some examples of work in the literature that invoke a borderlands paradigm, but before I do it might be useful to settle on a definition. Delgado Bernal, Alemán, and Garavito (2006) offer a useful one when they posit that a borderlands theoretical perspective can be helpful for “explaining how physical and
symbolic boundaries between groups, especially groups that are hierarchically organized, affect the material conditions, sociopolitical realities, and hybrid identities of those at the bottom of the hierarchies” (2009, p. 565). They go on to note that “borderland theories demonstrate how groups negotiate these physical, metaphorical, and discursive boundaries” (2009, p. 565). This definition along with Anzaldúa’s image of the “open wound” (herida abierta) provides a worthwhile rubric.

I have found that the literature oscillates between terminology like “border theory” and “borderland theory.” For purposes of this paper, I would like to make a distinction between the two. Border studies contends with issues that address the geopolitical, socio-economic, and cultural spaces of the physical boundary between Mexico and the United States (Elenes, 1997) while borderland theory is that metaphorical, symbolic space, which derives from the physical space and its contentious history but from which the human condition has found meaningful, relatable, and useful as they create new subjective spaces no matter where they originate. While some scholars exchange and/or combine the two (Bejarano, 2007), I prefer to distinguish them here to mitigate confusion.

**Invoking the borderlands**

C. Alejandra Elenes argues that borderlands has served as a theoretical framework in education by acknowledging multiple subjectivities and difference. Elenes is cautious about the essentializing tendencies of multiculturalism, but she believes that borderland discourse can help underscore the multiple subjectivities that define our lives. In fact, she contends that “the borderlands can explain the situation of peoples all over the globe, not
only in the Southwest” (1997, p. 364). I would like to offer a sampling of work that invokes borderland theory as epistemology.

Aurora Chang (2013) took an ethnographic look at 25 multiracial college students and showed how they were able to decenter monoracial normativity by harnessing their facultad, Anzaldúa’s notion of agency and competency. Chang contends that “la facultad” served as one means of survival for these young college students who often felt marginalized in their higher education settings. Anzaldúa believed that la facultad was often automatically and unconsciously triggered as a natural response to multiple, sometimes tacit oppressions: “Pain makes us acutely anxious to avoid more of it, so we hone that radar. It’s a kind of survival tactic that people, caught between the worlds, unknowingly cultivate. It is latent in all of us” (as quoted in Chang, 2013, p. 28).

The Colombian family therapist, Pilar Hernández-Wolfe, rethinks mental health through borderland theory, in her view a fitting model for lessening the oppressive impact of highly ethnocentric and traditionally positivist mental health treatments (2013).

Also grounding his work in borderland theory, Nathan Shepley (2009) looks at college students in a rural Appalachian city and the challenges they confront in a first-year composition course. He is interested in the presence of culture in knowledge production, specifically in the writing process of the students. He wonders what a place-based ownership of writing studies would mean for students coming from locations far from academic strongholds. He re-visits Anzaldúa’s Borderlands at the end of his study and suggests its use in the first-year composition class as an investigatory tool for his students to access their own home cultures. Shepley admits his paper is an enactment of
appropriating the borderlands as metaphor and “an attempt to situate borderland theory in a marginalized region,” (2009, p. 88) and while to my thinking it is a stretch, it is worthwhile considering the relevance of Anzaldúa to an otherwise discordant place.

The efforts of five professors of education (Hardee, Thompson, Danaings, Aragon, & Brantmeier, 2012) in challenging traditional notions of privilege in their foundations courses provide an interesting way borderland theory is applied. These university professors, who served at five different schools populated mostly by white students, attempted to heighten awareness of white privilege and institutionalized racism through the use of a variety of readings and activities. While each professor initiated this endeavor differently they used a borderland framework to help guide their often tenuous and even conflictual attempts to heighten their students’ awareness. As these professors confronted difficult issues concerning race and inequality in their classroom, they experienced their own marginality as student responses, evaluations, and “stinging comments” (2012, p. 231) caused despair and uncertainty among the professors about the paths they were taking. This is an allusion to the “open wound” (herida abierta) that Anzaldúa speaks of.

One of the most interesting invocations of the borderlands comes from Mollie Blackburn’s work (2005) with Philadelphia Black gay youth at a local youth-serving agency. Blackburn utilizes Borderland Discourse as used by James Gee to describe “community based Discourse that allows interactions outside the confines of public-sphere and middle-class” (Gee as quoted in Blackburn, 2005, p. 91). In her view, “gaybonics,” a vernacular derivation of Ebonics among Black gay youth, qualifies as
Borderland Discourse. She uses Anzaldúa’s description of borderland as “vague and undetermined place[s] created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” to further theorize Gaybonics. Blackburn sees this discourse as the youths’ unique way of eliciting pleasure while subverting oppression, and “when their borders were violated, they shifted from this discourse to another to retaliate against hatred, thus positioning themselves as agents” (2005, p. 90). Gee’s notion of Borderland Discourse is demonstrated by Blackburn to be a form of resistance as well as an act of agency. Through her work with the marginalized (sometimes brutalized) gay youth who spent much time in the safer space of The Attic, Blackburn shows that the specialized language of the youth positioned them both as outsiders of dominant discourse at the same time that it created an insider culture.

**Summarizing the borderlands framework**

I offer this review of studies that utilize borderland theory as a sampling of the different ways this framework has been undertaken to help scholars and writers make sense of conditions that are uncertain, often emotional, and sometimes contentious. Gloria Anzaldúa’s work conceptualizing the geopolitical space of the borderlands into a workable metaphor is helpful for considering intermediary places in conflict. These places are transitional and marginalized. This is a space I see teachers occupying today, and certainly a position the teachers of this study find themselves. It is a place where top-down mandates, strenuous working conditions, and an absence of voice pervade the teachers’ working existence. I suggest that these are the same trappings that my group of third graders faced at the time of this study. Except, unlike an inquiry groups where
adults are able to talk about emotions and negotiate ambiguities in highly nuanced and intellectual ways, the children used literature as a conduit to express emotions they otherwise would not have the opportunity to articulate.

I place both the teachers and the children in this inconclusive space, like the borderlands themselves. Again, Anzaldúa describes the Mexican-U.S. border as “una herida” (a wound) that bleeds and hemorrhages. She also conceives of the borderlands as potentially transformative, “a space where you are not this or that but you are changing. You haven’t got into the new identity yet and haven’t left the old identity behind either—you are in a kind of transition” (1987, p. 237). This borderland space is where I locate the teachers and the school of this study.

In this chapter, I offered a succinct overview of some of the literature that utilizes borderland theory as an epistemological frame. Other studies will appear throughout this dissertation as needed. In the next chapter, I will layout a review of the relevant literature on teacher learning and inquiry communities. Since the principal source of data collection came from a teacher inquiry community, I attempt to insert this study within the current conversation. Then, I will offer a review of the literature on school and community relationships.
Chapter THREE

Literature Review

“Community is an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace, the flowing of personal identity and integrity into the world of relationships.”

Parker Palmer
The Courage to Teach

Teacher learning and teacher inquiry communities

There has been and continues to be a perception in teacher learning that teachers must be told what to do. When the National Reading Panel convened in 1997, it disregarded the experiences and voices of teacher practitioners (Calfee, 2014). Its offshoot, “Reading First” under No Child Left Behind prescribed lock-step methods on a road to literacy that teachers had to implement robotically (Manzo, 2005), administering assessments that only lead to more skill-based learning if the child did not pass certain benchmarks (Goodman, 2014). I myself remember the seduction of being handed a PDA when the implementation of DIBELS testing became all the rage. Newer teachers like myself were thrilled to be given shiny new devices. Those in charge later deemed DIBELS to be a very bad test, but it was one of many contributors to what Goodman calls the “pedagogy of absurdity” (2005, p. 22).

In teacher education, the “reflective practitioner” and the notion of teacher communities of inquiry and collaborative learning gained prominence in the 1990s (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). According to Senge (1990) the idea of a community of inquiry comes from organizational theory that situates a group of
individuals interested in looking at a problem over a sustained period of time (as cited in Zellermayer and Tabak, 2006, p. 34).

The literature is rich with examples of the enabling dimension that communities of inquiry provide, especially for urban teachers (see Carini, 2001, Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 1999a; Oakes & Lipton, 2001) whose professional identities are often mired with images of inadequacy. Ernest Morell (2003) speaks to the “humanizing experience” of a group of Los Angeles teachers who gathered once a week in the evenings for a summer research seminar as a companion to the student critical research seminar that occurred during the day. Here teachers were able to engage with difficult questions about the literature they were learning, and to discuss their own philosophies of teaching.

Jeffrey M. R. Duncan-Andrade (2004) discusses the critical inquiry group of seven elementary teachers who shared a commitment to social justice teaching, but seldom had an opportunity to talk about it. If it were not for the space that the inquiry community provided for teachers to come together, to discuss articles that analyzed educational inequality, and to share personal struggles, their work would have continued in isolation.

With a group of five teacher participants, Kathleen Riley (2015) engaged the question Within the context of the study group, what resources did teachers use to understand and change their practice? (p. 152). She describes four resources, autobiographical reflexivity, outside readings, interactions with students, and visions of the possible as resources already present with the teachers and ripe for generative teaching and learning in their respective classroom spaces.
Members of the Literacy for Social Justice Teacher Research Group work collaboratively to interrogate the potential of social justice teaching in schools and classrooms by taking a teacher inquiry approach as they question, look at data, and develop new questions (Rogers, et al., 2009) about what it means to be a social justice teacher. The authors take critical stances to literacy, inquiry, and analysis while building community.

Across the literature there are many iterations of teacher inquiry. While most describe “systematic, intentional studies by teachers of their own classroom practice,” (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1990, p. 2), the teachers in this study find themselves at the beginning stages of forming something entirely new for them—a community of teachers, with a variety of questions in their mind, and a supportive space to explore them. Initially, the questions will begin with ones that concern their positionality in a school as it ponders the process and ramifications of becoming one of several city-wide community schools. Then the conversations will move to classroom instruction and student work and wider implications for looking at student work and the community at large.

**School/community relationship**

In 1978, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot wrote, “The greater the difference between family and community culture and school norms, the greater the need for parents and teachers to work hard at knowing one another. Because they come together as strangers who share in the common task of education and socialization, they must engage in a relatively self-conscious and painstaking task of discovering each other” (p. 189).
The dissonance between families and schools has been supported by educational research (Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999) that finds the gulf between the values of mainstream culture (Heath, 1983) and the values of “other people” (Delpit, 2006) wide and incomprehensible. These differences are often linked to culture (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). In *Dreamkeepers*, Ladson-Billings distinguishes between the “culturally relevant” educator and the “assimilationist,” where the latter emphasizes the community at the expense of the individual.

Some more empirically based studies have affirmed the negative impact on students when the dissonance between families and school is high (Arunkumar, Midgley, & Urdan, 1999; Brown-Wright, et al., 2013; Kumar, 2006). In particular, Arunkumar notes that “students from cultures outside the mainstream may experience a sense of dissonance when they encounter a devaluing of their beliefs and behaviors at schools that reflect the dominant white, middle-class ideology” (as cited in Brown-Wright, et al, 2013, p. 318). It is quite clear that especially in distressed areas, where schools and community resources are not only lacking but are unresponsive to the needs and the culture of the surrounding community, the longer it is for students to increase their academic gains and for a community to realize its growth potential. The stronger the connection between educators and families, the greater the outcome for all involved. Improved educational outcomes, the quintessential goal of schools, positively correlate with the success of communities (Noguera, 2003, Warren, et. al, 2009).

I am honored to have been among the first readers of Lynne Strieb’s book *Inviting Families into the Classroom* (2010) when Diane Waff hosted the Philadelphia Writing
Project Literature Circle and convened a reading of the book still in draft form. The brazen honesty with which Strieb shared some of the most poignant moments of her career solidified my own wish for an open and vulnerable dissertation. In the book, she carefully considers her teaching practice through the years and the impact the families, guardians, and community had on her work. Like Ballenger (1992) who used the community as a source of knowledge (Moll, et al., 1992a; Moll, et al., 1992b) for understanding how to be a better educator of children outside of her cultural sphere, Strieb (and many teachers like her) have exemplified the possibilities of expanding beyond the four corners of the classroom.

Policies have supported partnerships with neighborhood groups, organizations, and families that strengthen ties with local schools and districts (Heath & McLaughlin, 1994; Noguera, 2003; Tellez & Cohen, 1996; Warren, et. al., 2009). Some of the best illustrations in the literature are of real teachers doing the actual outreach to families and communities. For example, Juan C. Guerra (2008) documents the moving curriculum of Mrs. Orozco, a Mexican teacher whose classroom was filled with the “environmental literacy” that surrounded her students and their families: potato chip bags, packaging for food and clothing, orange juice bottles. Mrs. Orozco encouraged this as her students were expected to describe and write about them. In this way, she ensured that the children learned the required school curriculum “in the context of the rich knowledge base they brought from their homes and the surrounding community” (p. 301).

The literature finds home-school initiatives that are wider in scope. For instance, a group of teachers at Thornwood Public School in Canada harnessed Richard Ruiz’s
(1988) “language-as-resource” framework to co-create with the students and parents a series of dual-language stories that represented the myriad of languages the were lived and breathed at the school (Cummins, Chow, Schecter, 2006). By affirming the identities of the students and involving parents and other community members, the teachers acknowledged the powerful contributions families made to their children’s learning. They join other thinkers and practitioners (Campano, 2007; Faltis, 1995; Fu 2003; Hornberger & Link, 2012; Torres-Guzman, 1991) who valorize the language resources within a community rather than isolate them as mere vernacular idiosyncrasies.

The imperative to critically interrogate the connections between home, school, and community are greater now as demographic numbers affirm the heterogeneity, diversification, and glaring inequity (Orfield, 2013) in American schools (Allen, 2007; Valdes, 1995). Even as the face of urban school continues to change, the “illusion of mobility and assimilation through schooling that creates distance and hostility between middle-class-oriented teachers and lower-class parents” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1978, p. 31) remains true today. This dissertation and the teachers whose stories comprise it humbly enter this conversation. They (we) struggled through how to consider community as a resource within the context of teaching and learning. Rather than providing clear solutions or suggestions for “best practices,” I believe the teachers ultimately settled on a “tolerance for ambiguity” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 101). More on the findings will come at the conclusion.
Conclusion

This review of literature situates this study within the growing understanding and utilization of communities of inquiry. Increasingly, educators are harnessing the power of inquiry to further their own intellectual advancement, professional goals, and psychological well-being. This chapter also reviewed the literature on the relationship between schools and their surrounding community. As more schools are looking towards the community school model, there is a need for these relationships to be not only better understood but enhanced in creative ways.

At the conclusion of the dissertation, I will review some of the studies that have been done on community schools, with a specific focus on the teachers’ role within these schools. The literature is relatively sparse in this area, but the most comprehensive studies indicate that the most successful community schools build strong partnership with teachers, create opportunities for their leadership, and integrate learning groups where teachers discuss ways to integrate community knowledge into the curriculum. In the next chapter, I will describe the design and methodology of this study as it was proposed in the beginning and as it inevitably evolved within the course of the school year.
Chapter FOUR

Design and Methodology

“Inquiry is fatal to certainty.”
Will Durant

Methodology

I approached this study as a practitioner and I used the methodologies of practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). In their framing, Cochran-Smith & Lytle hold that practitioners are vital possessors and creators of knowledge. Voluntary communities of teacher researchers possess the power to position teachers as knowledgeable resources, confident in their practice and in their ability to question assertions that rarely consider their input. This study would have lacked authenticity if this was not the preeminent methodological approach. Cochran-Smith and Lytle blur the binary image of teachers deriving their knowledge either from a body of formal knowledge, often university-sanctioned, or from the practical realities that inform the day-to-day work that teachers do. “Knowledge-of-practice” is unique in that it sets teachers upon a path, a stance, of deliberation and systematic inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2009). Through time and the discourse that would foster critical conversation, collaborative analysis, and open interpretation in order to generate new questions and ways of thinking, the frame of “knowledge-of-practice” is a generative one that expands the notion of practice “connected to more democratic schooling and to the formation of a more just society” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 294).

I also draw from the tradition of participatory research. As cited in Zeichner &
Noffke (2001), Hall writes that practitioner research draws knowledge from the dialogue that flows from the participants who are involved in the research. This configuration would confirm Cohen’s (2010) findings that in a group “teachers [are] able to make and recognize identity bids, using shared discourse strategies to build on key identity claims, without necessarily agreeing with each other’s pedagogical analysis or decisions” (p. 479).

Chicana feminist epistemology was very influential for me. Dolores Delgado Bernal asserts that “traditional research epistemologies reflect and reinforce the social history of the dominant race, which has negative results for people of color in general and students and scholars of color in particular” (1998, p. 563). This realignment of method, methodology, and epistemology resonates with the knowledge-in-practice conception that “captures the universe of knowledge types” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 274) that exists at the disposal of teachers everywhere. Strauss (1990) says, “A Chicana cultural standpoint that is located in the interconnected identities of race/ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality and within the historical and contemporary context of oppressions and resistance can also be the foundation for a theoretical sensitivity that many Chicana scholars bring to their research” (1998, p. 563). It is this framework that brought Sofia Villenas to conclude, after a long process of reflecting upon and reconciling her insider/outsider status as a Chicana ethnographer among a community with which she culturally identified, to become “the subject and the creator of knowledge” (1996, p. 730).
Ambiguity from the start

The messiness of research and practitioner inquiry was evident everywhere I turned. There were no guidelines to follow, no manual with a page by page about what to do next. My notes are filled with documentation about my uncertainties and the angst that came with it. The teachers who volunteered to be part of the group called themselves an inquiry group from the start. That is, I called it an inquiry group. I sent a letter to the staff in the fall of 2016 (Appendix A). Before I even penned the word “inquiry,” I explained the purpose of my dissertation: “I am interested in the way teachers read the educational landscape today, how it influences our professional identity and the work we do in the classroom, and how we construct our practice in relation to families and the community.” So, by the third paragraph of the letter, I was setting an agenda for a possible group. In retrospect, I wonder now how relevant these words were for the teachers who read them. What exactly did I mean by “educational landscape”? Was this the local landscape, the wider national educational discourse? Was I talking about state and district policy or did I mean teaching, learning, and curricular mandates? Then there were phrases like “professional identity” and the construction of practice tossed in there that made me wonder how off track I was with the day-to-day reality of the teachers. More importantly, I wondered whose inquiry this was, the teachers’ or mine.

Later in the letter I introduce “inquiry group.” I clarify for those unfamiliar with the term that such a group would be a place “where you would have the opportunity to think and talk about your teaching and maybe work through a question you might have about your practice.” It was this paragraph that helped me balance my insecurities about
the third paragraph. I wanted the group to be about the teachers’ needs, not mine. But I was unclear about how to do this. Teachers have varying needs according to their particular contexts, so how was I going to manage this?

As the school year rolled on and as “group” met (as it came to be called by the teachers who signed up), I found that while my questions helped frame my guidance of the group (and the eventual aim of this dissertation), they were interpreted in ways unique to each teacher. I hope this dissertation will help tell the story of how the teachers found meaning along with me about their teaching lives.

The site and population

The site of the dissertation was the school where I worked as a fourth-grade teacher from October 2001 to June 2010, and as technology teacher leader from the fall of 2010 to the spring of 2012. Bob Fecho writes that practitioner researchers, “due to their close and considerable ties to the community being researched, carry weightier responsibility and vulnerability in the process” (2003, p. 286). At certain points while collecting my data and writing this dissertation, I caught myself betraying “methodological believing” (Elbow, 2008) by questioning my objectivity. This was ultimately futile, and I found that the best way to combat the pull of classic scientism, is to write. I did not know anything until it was written. Anzaldúa (1987) expresses it well when she talks about coping with the “psychic unrest” of the Borderland: “To write, to be a writer, I have to trust and believe in myself as a speaker, as voice for the images. I have to believe that I can communicate with images and words and that I can do it well” (p. 95). Her thoughts about writing and being a writer come from one of her least
anthologized chapters, “Tlilli, Tlapalli/The Path of the Red and Black Ink.” In her essay, “Writing the Self: Gloria Anzaldúa, Textual Form, and Feminist Epistemology” (2007) Tara Lockhart (2007) has suggested that in this chapter Anzaldúa illustrates the ways writing necessitates multiple relationships, one of which is the relationship between feeling and knowing, the conscious and the unconscious. I would say that this feminist epistemology is one of the ways I came to make some sense of my data. Lockhart’s insights have served me well as I endeavored to understand Anzaldúan theory and her complex writing. She will be referenced more further into this study.

The Crawford Elementary School is located in a section of the city that historically has had a large Polish population, followed by Irish, German, and Italian groups. More recently, Latinx and African-Americans have populated this particular section of the city. Fully half of the student population is Latinx (Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Mexican) with African-Americans comprising slightly over a quarter. The school serves grades pre-K to 4.

In the spring of 2016, I presented preliminary thinking of my proposal to the staff at a professional development day. I continued my contact with staff members through various social events, through on-line conversations such as social media and the school’s listserv. On October 20, I sent the letter mentioned above to the entire school. It was an open invitation to anyone who was willing to be part of an inquiry community. This way I felt assured that the community was based on principles of equity and a spirit of democracy. The invitation was sent via email to the entire staff soliciting interest in the formation of an inquiry community. Within two days, seven teachers responded with
interest. An 8th came on board a few weeks later. The table below is a breakdown of the teachers who expressed interest. Proper names are pseudonyms. All but one teacher (Veronica), who was compromised by an after-school club that would have prevented her from attending many group meetings, remained for all 14 sessions.

**Table 1: Participating teachers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Years teaching</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (Edwina)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sp. Ed.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (Hannah)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>ESOL</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (Maria)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (Veronica)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 (Betty)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>ESOL</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 (Delaine)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>African-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 (Dirk)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Sp. Ed.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 (Dana)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dana, a third-grade teacher, who was also a participant in the inquiry group, hosted me while I was at Crawford. All of the sessions were held in her room. I spent most of my time in her classroom, so I was sensitive to her schedule and space and did not want to be intrusive. Establishing a sensitive reciprocal relationship (Marshall & Rossman, 2015) was important to me. I coordinated with the principal, with whom I already had a previous working relationship. He suggested many opportunities for me to engage in the school. Ultimately, I settled on working with several students who needed extra support in a variety of areas. Chiefly, I worked with a literature group comprised of students from Dana’s room:

**Table 2:** Literature Circle third-grade students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (Jose)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (Emilio)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (Manuel)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (Jameer)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>African-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 (Teresa)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This literature circle with the five students was a powerful example of the investigative work that is possible with third graders. Together they read a young adult novel entitled *Esperanza Rising* and engaged in real-world discussions that only rich literature is able to inspire. Portions of my meetings with the group will be discussed in chapter 9. In this chapter, I explore each of the dissertation questions within the context of the literature group. More importantly, learning alongside the students, I was a fuller
participant in the teacher inquiry group, using my own classroom context as a source for inquiry.

**Data collection methods**

Beginning in early December I met with the teacher inquiry group at least twice a month. Our last meeting was June 14, 2016. The group met for a total of 14 sessions. I also interviewed each teacher twice throughout the year for a 45-minute period. Depending on the teachers’ preference, these interviews took place during lunch, before or after school. All inquiry group sessions and interviews were recorded. The base questions I used for each teacher are listed below. For the full interview script including probes that accompanied each question, please see Appendix B.

**Round One**

1. How do you define community?

2. What is a success that you experienced recently in your work with a student, a parent, a teaching strategy? What made this experience different from others that you had?

3. What are some of the struggles that you encountered in your work as a teacher in this community?

4. As you think back to our first meeting as an inquiry community, what are some of the hopes you now have? What are some of your apprehensions?

5. At this stage in our process of inquiry, what comes to your mind when you think about teaching?
Round Two

1. As you look back to our meetings and to the (your) year as whole, what have been some of your discoveries? What has stood out to you?

2. Can you reflect a bit on some of your own communities or positions and how they might inform your practice and influence your relationship with students, their families, and your colleagues?

3. What aspects of the time we have spent together as an inquiry community helped you to think about the way we teach and support our students and families?

4. If we could continue meeting, how would you like to see the inquiry group move forward?

5. This question was specifically tailored to the teacher and was based on the previous interview or something that was mentioned during the inquiry group.

By February I began meeting formally with the group of students in the chart above. Our last meeting was June 15, 2016. The group met for a total of 26 sessions in an unoccupied classroom. This was a group that both the principal and Dana, the classroom teacher, believed needed an “extra challenge.” The principal agreed to purchase materials for me to use with the children. In consultation with Dana, I decided that a book group would be the best way I could support the children. We used Pam Munoz’s *Esperanza Rising* as our text. I met with each of the parents of the children, explained what I would be doing in our group, and obtained written consent to record the sessions. I also took notes in a journal.
Collaborative analysis

I transcribed every one of the inquiry group sessions into a transcription software called Express Scribe. I also transcribed all interviews and recordings of my sessions with the students. While it was suggested to me that I hire someone to do this work, I utterly enjoyed this process. It gave me an overview of the conversations that were happening and I felt the process provided an intimacy with the data that I could not have had if it was merely presented to my already as a hard copy.

There were three times that the inquiry group used transcriptions of a previous meeting as the reading, February 2, April 5, and May 17, 2016. In this way, true to practitioner inquiry form, portions of analysis were collaborative and democratic. Themes that were coming up for the group emerged from this collaborative analysis.

Additionally, the second interview I conducted with each teacher contained a transcribed portion from the first interview or a section of the inquiry group meeting that I was interested in clarifying more with the teacher. The thought of coding data was an intimidating one for me, especially as some of my doctoral peers talked about coding software that they had been using for other classes or research projects. Although I found Childers’ (2014) assessment that “coding, or any other systematic, a priori structural process of analysis is a failed attempt to discipline a world that is uncontainable” (p. 189) resonant to the tameless borderlands and the counter-hegemonic notions of an inquiry stance, it was helpful once I was out of the data collecting space to re-read my transcripts and notes with key elements of my research questions in mind. Therefore, I looked for and marked off three areas in the data all tied to ways community came to be understood.
in the inquiry group: through colleagues, through students and their work, and thorough family and neighborhood.

**Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the overall design and methodology of this study. As practitioner inquiry, the work largely emanated from the needs of the teacher group. While this allowed for great flexibility with how the study would proceed, I found that inquiry was a work in progress and that there were many moments when I had to be directive in my approach. I had three general questions that I wanted to have answered through my work with the inquiry group. While inviting the teachers to contribute to the readings we would use in the group, I selected most of them and created the agenda for all meetings. As the year moved along, teachers were feeling more comfortable with the group and clearer with its intentions. One teacher suggested a reading for the group and other teachers brought in student work to analyze. Another teacher who had a leadership role in the school took on a consistent role in the inquiry group by reporting out meetings that had occurred at the school (more about this will be discussed further). This way, there was information to talk about that pertained to the overall questions of the study. In this sense, the inquiry community was instrumental in co-designing this study.

Every session was recorded. I transcribed each one and arrived at a comfortable and useful way to code the transcriptions to help me answer my three questions. Some of these transcriptions were used as text for a session, which provided the data for collaborative analysis. My personal interviews with each teacher consisted of questions that were identical for each teacher. These questions reflected the three overarching
questions of this study. At each interview, I asked one additional question that was
unique to that teacher. That question helped me to clarify uncertainties I had in my mind
after each inquiry group.

Finally, I worked consistently with a group of third graders. This was an
important aspect of the research in that it helped position me as a colleague and co-
practitioner. While there are elements of ethnographic research in this study, the principal
research design was active practitioner inquiry. I used my work with the third graders
when appropriate in the inquiry group meetings. However, I was also careful to prioritize
the work the other teachers were conducting in their rooms. At all times during the data
collection phase, I memoed as a way to process the balancing I had to do in my mind
between outside researcher and inside practitioner.
Chapter FIVE

The Influence of Multiple Communities and Positionalities

“Everytime someone gives you a formula for what you should be and what you should do, you should know they are giving you a pair of handcuffs.”

Junot Diaz

Protocols

“I am not sure if I am wording this right, but it sounds like you are irritated on a few levels.” This was the reframe offered by one of the teachers after Dana, another teacher, began the second day of the inquiry group with a story, a moment in the day that was on her mind and which she wanted to share with the group.

In his book, *Critical Incidents in Teaching: Developing Professional Judgement* (1997), David Tripp explains that the everyday occurrences in a teacher’s life can provide ripe fodder for an exploration of the motivations and structures behind our practice. To provide some structure for the inquiry groups, I proposed a protocol that was derived from David Tripp called the “Guided Reflection Protocol.” To help me explain the process, I also handed out the brief article, “Reflection is at the Heart of Practice” (1999). Coming to the decision to utilize a protocol was a difficult one for me. I was torn between wanting to allow the group the freedom to identify the structure for the group themselves and to provide a defined parameter for teachers to follow in order to provide that structure. In addition, I have never been officially trained in the use of protocols, and groups like Critical Friends (CFG), but its promise to foster communities of learners (Bambino, 2002) and create what Law calls (2005) “collective intentionality” for a shared end spurred my decision to utilize some of CFG’s methodologies. I ultimately decided
that a protocol would be the best way to define each meeting but the flexibility to amend, even abandon, a protocol as we learned alongside each other was always an option.

I looked at several protocols to attain the right spirit and “feel” (Allen & Blythe, 2004) for the group. Some placed teacher inquiry front and center from the beginning (i.e., the BayCES Teacher Inquiry Protocol, Appendix C). I determined that this would have been too intimidating for the teachers. Though we called it an inquiry group, that would come later. Inquiry is a concept that while understandable at face value, becomes more complicated once teachers consider the many questions they could be asking. What the teachers wanted and what appealed to them was a space to simply talk. The “Guided Reflection Protocol” comprised the following steps:

1. **Write stories.** Each group member writes briefly in response to the questions: What happened? (10 minutes)
2. **Choose a story.** The group decides which story to use. (5 minutes)
3. **What happened?** The presenter reads the written account of what happened and sets it within the context of professional goals. (10 minutes)
4. **Why did it happen?** Colleagues ask clarifying questions. (5 minutes)
5. **What might it mean?** The group raises questions about the incident in the context of the presenter’s work. They discuss it as professional, caring colleagues while the presenter listens. (15 minutes)
6. **What are the implications for practice?** The presenter responds, then the group engages in conversation about the implications for the presenter’s practice and
for the participants’ own practice. A useful question at this stage might be, What new insights occurred? (15 minutes)

7. Debrief the process. The group talks about what just happened. How did the process work? (10 minutes)

Feeling depersonalized

Each teacher kept a journal, which they brought with them to every meeting. On this day, after the teachers wrote for the first 10 minutes, Dana volunteered to share her story. Dana was angry about an email sent to the staff that morning by the lead teacher cautioning the staff to use Lysol wipes to clean their hands and to keep student desks clean to help curb sickness and teacher absences. Dana said that she posted a reply-all suggesting that instead of asking teachers to use Lysol wipes, the school should keep soap in the bathroom dispensers, mop the floors each day, and provide fresh plastic trash can liners in the wastebaskets. She received a message stating that her email would be reviewed by a moderator before it would be available for all to view. Soon after, the moderator responded that the message was inappropriate and would not be posted.

The mystery of “who is the moderator” simmered in the inquiry group for a while, but more importantly was the “irritation” felt by Dana and, as more clarifying questions uncovered her sentiments, it was evident that Dana echoed a familiar refrain heard by teachers who feel burned out (Darling Hammond, 2000) and seldom feel acknowledged in the profession (Dunham & Varma, 1998; Freire, 1997; Giroux, 1985; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Jenlink, 2014; Larrivee, 2012):
I think you need to bring everybody in and listen to people’s ideas and listen to why they might have been feeling the way that they are feeling and collaborate and start pulling in people’s strengths and recognize that because it can’t just be, you know, it’s a group, it’s a team effort and, it’s a group effort, and then when my email wasn’t acknowledged, I just kind of felt like nobody really cares, you know (inquiry group, December 8, 2015).

A little later in the discussion, Maria observed that while Dana was expressing her perspective in the email, the response message back, in her experience, has had similar iterations for other teachers in the building:

. . . throughout time when you are expressing however you are feeling in a professional mannerism and the response is either non (inaudible) or just, I don’t know, you know just not accepted or ‘yeah we are here with you’ but then it’s out the window kind of thing (inquiry group, December 8, 2015).

Delaine followed by expressing:

I have so much weight on my shoulder. I don’t have a contract, I don’t have, you know, I, you’re taking on so much and then does anybody really see it? Does anybody ever see the positive side? Does anybody ever see a moment where they just say, you know, ‘Thank you?’ (inquiry group, December 8, 2015).

In her book, *Burnout: The cost of caring* (1982), Christina Maslach talks about a dimension of burnout she calls “depersonalization.” This involves a process in which people feel dehumanized through impersonal interactions with colleagues, which often leads to cynicism towards work and other colleagues. While I am not suggesting that Dana or any of the teachers in the inquiry group were at the “burnout” stage in their careers (Maslach, 1982; Maslach; Maslach, Leiter, & Schaufeli, 2008), Dana’s experience with the email exchange and the moderator indicates that a clear demarcation was established between her concern and the priorities of the moderator, and that this demarcation created a boundary that positioned her identity as a teacher away from the center of the profession: “. . . it doesn’t really matter what you say. It doesn’t really
matter what you feel. It is not appropriate. I am rejecting what you are saying . . .” (inquiry group, December 8, 2015). Indeed, Maria’s “out the window” imagery and Delaine’s wonder about the lack of gratitude from administration also illustrate these teachers’ potential march towards Maslach’s depersonalization aspect of burnout, “as though the individual is viewing other people through rust-colored glasses,” (1982, p. 4).

What ended up happening at the end of this meeting was that Dana felt a little better about the email events that occurred that morning after talking with the inquiry group and listening to the others. The beginning of a shared experience, a “third space” (Bahba, 1994), was emerging. Researcher Danaifer Cohen finds value in groups where “teachers [are] able to make and recognize identity bids, using shared discourse strategies to build on key identity claims” (2010, p. 214) even if teachers disagree pedagogically. In these incredibly difficult days in education when public urban school teachers find themselves fighting for recognition, acknowledgement, even some veneer of empathetic understanding; where their marginalization as professionals is pervasive and their recognition as producers of knowledge is disregarded, the “border thinking” Walter Mignolo invokes as “the epistemic singularity of any decolonial project” (2013, p. 1) is useful.

Let me take a few lines here to state that I in no way mean to misrepresent the colonial reality of the subaltern, with its legacy of subjugation and the dehumanizing practices of imperial ideology upon vast swathes of humanity. Instead, it is interesting to me that (in the local context of Philadelphia, at least), as teachers are reduced to automatic depositors of decontextualized knowledge in an age of neoliberal thinking and
corporate take-over, as efforts to dismantle traditional forms of gathering (I’m talking about union busting) find greater voice and occupy the sustained defensive energies of teachers, it is the decolonial argument that promotes the communal, concerns itself with economic justice and global equity, and challenges dominant forms of thinking and doing (Mignolo, 2013).

More importantly, the teachers were using the inquiry community in this initial stage for what they wanted to use it for. The best illustration of this was when I attempted to link Dana’s concern about not being heard and appreciated for her strengths (“. . .my question is, how can we get the administration to realize that they need to bring in people’s strengths and work from there?”) to a general classroom concern about student strengths (“But my worry that while we are not getting that [appreciation] from the administration about our strengths, how much are we doing just that in our practice with our students and not seeing their strengths?”). My comment was barely acknowledged. Instead, Delaine asked if anyone from the group was on the building committee. As the union representative, Betty explained how important it was for teachers to use an envelope placed on the bulletin board in the teacher’s common area to write concerns that teachers wanted addressed at the building committee meetings. “I have to literally rack my brain to think about what I’m going to talk about at building committee once a month,” she said, “because I don’t like to just sit there to be bashing at, that’s not the point of what it is” (inquiry group, December 8, 2015).

Interestingly, this was new information for the teachers in the inquiry group. They immediately began to strategize about how they would make use of the envelope and how
they would make others aware of this method of having issues addressed. Rather than becoming a complaint session, the teachers use this space and this time in the conversation to gain a sense of efficacy.

Additionally, the teachers were operating still at the margins, but looking for ways into the center, perhaps wondering: “Is this a safe place?” “What is this all about?” “Is this worth my time?” This transcript revealed that three teachers out of eight in attendance monopolized the conversation. The others did a great deal of listening.

Finally, I wondered about my role as facilitator. I was also learning, finding my place, and stumbling along, all the while self-questioning what I was doing. It was very evident to me that my pre-conceived plans about bringing the conversation to a student-focused one was not important for the teachers at this meeting. All the while, at what point, I wondered, was it important for me to change course and nudge teachers in a more “productive” direction? When am I the arbiter for what is productive and what is not?

Dana

Dana’s life outside of school is full. She is an active member of her church. She volunteers her time at a local facility that provides lodging for cancer patients and their caregivers. She also maintains a blog. Dana’s mother lived through Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma for just over a year after she learned of her diagnosis. Writing is an integral part of Dana’s grief and a crucial part of keeping her mother’s memory alive. For the last five years, Dana’s blog has catalogued favorite images of her mother and other family members and inspiring quotes from figures as diverse as Mother Teresa and Albert Einstein. She has written extensively about virtues like gratitude, having hope, cultivating
patience, and enjoying the present moment. Dana is able to turn an otherwise mundane event like accidentally breaking a bottle of salsa at the grocery store into a life lesson.

About school matters, she can be reflective and philosophical. While I was collecting data for this dissertation, Dana was teaching the third-grade class that contained most of the designated English language learners. While happy with her classroom in general, she often talked about her discouragement with the leadership of the school and its unwillingness to appreciate her efforts.

I do what I can to do the best and I try to fit everything in, which is challenging, but, and work with what we have, so I try not to be hard on myself, this is my job, I have to enjoy it, so I just try to enjoy it the best that I can, and I just filter out all the negative noise, comments, discouragement from other people, the disorganization, the lifelessness that I see in a lot of people. I just try to ignore it. Not take it personal and take it for what it is (personal communication, February 17, 2016).

On the other hand, statements that contradicted her reflective nature sometimes clouded her discerning abilities. At times she resorted back to “blaming the victim mode” as when she faulted parents for merely signing a permission form for their child to participate in the science fair, but not guiding them through the work that was involved or purchasing the required materials. “I just feel like sometimes people in this neighborhood are not rational, for many reasons, because of drugs, or lifestyle, or whatever, so they don’t approach things well” (personal communication, February 17, 2016). She will again refer rashly to parents as “selfish” later in chapter 11 where we discuss how teachers analyze student work.

Dana lives her life through the various communities that influence her life, whether her own family, the volunteer work at the lodging for cancer victims, or her
church; and, she took initiative to begin new ones like the periodic breakfast gatherings she organized for staff at the school, an inspiration she claims came from meeting with the inquiry group community. “I think it was a good opportunity for us to share and for us to get our voice out there,” she said, “Sometimes it can feel overwhelming but through the community group, or inquiry group, it’s not” (personal communication, June 17, 2016).

The journey of learning about her mother’s cancer, living through the illness with her and her other family members, and making sense of her existence without her mother in it is fundamental to understanding Dana’s worldview. Dana is reflective and thoughtful on the one hand, but she is also a teacher who struggles to make sense in her own way of life’s incomprehensible moments.

I think you have to have faith in yourself, too, as a teacher, and sometimes just shut the door to all that outside influence, that you know, people can have. Just teach to your kids, too. But I definitely think that where you are in life can affect your teaching, um, you know, as stress can come into play with anything, but ultimately, I think, that, we know ourselves best, and then we can bring that through our teaching, too (personal communication, June 17, 2016).

Like an introspective fieldworker, Dana’s reflexivity (England, 1994) has encouraged new inroads into her own self-discovery. The contradictions and complexities with which she lives her life situates her firmly within the borderlands (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010), where the multiple communities that illuminate her life find no easy definition. She is a dedicated teacher practitioner, but her professional identity is not steadfast or easily quantifiable. My time with Dana was well spent as she shared with me the questions she had about her career and the projections she envisioned for her future. I was also at a critical point in my own career, uncertain about where I would go next after
exiting the graduate program. I shared these anxieties with Dana. As of this writing, Dana transitioned out of Crawford and moved to a role within the school district where she will provide mentoring and coaching for struggling teachers.

**Crawford autobiographies**

“Teaching as Autobiography” has been a chapter in Sonia Nieto’s *What Keeps Teachers Going?* (2003) that I have used through the years in both my work with the Philadelphia Writing Project and in other school settings. I am always impressed by how resonant and accessible this chapter is to teachers. In response to the chapter, Veronica said, “I was like, ‘My life is an autobiography! I could not believe it!’” (inquiry group, December 22, 2015). For Delaine, Nieto’s line, “Teachers do not leave their values at the door” (p. 24) became a mantra for the rest of the school year. At some level it is disconcerting to think that teachers have never been given the opportunity to consider their own autobiography, or more poignantly, to have given themselves permission to consider their own lives outside the four walls of their classroom. Nieto’s work has always been a centering piece for me and it was proving to act the same for many of the teachers in the group.

I proposed that we work on our own autobiographies, and so as not to add more to the teacher’s already busy lives, the autobiographies were written within one meeting. To help trigger the writing and narrow the autobiographical focus to the Crawford school community, I provided the following prompt: *Think about and reflect on your history here at Crawford. Think about your relationships with your colleagues, your students, their families, and the larger community. How has working here influenced you to*
continue your pursuit of teaching? How has it challenged it? What are some of the milestones that come to your mind as you think about your own his/her story as a teacher here?

Significantly, little was included in the autobiographies that reflected relationships with students or families. All of the autobiographies that were written referred to strong, sometimes powerful collegial relationships. Most referred to these relationships using familial terms (“family,” “mother bird”). This should not be too much of a surprise. After all, given some of the challenges faced by the teachers, it is no wonder that they found support among each other.

Some teachers were quite emphatic from the very beginning about this connection. Delaine said:

Crawford has been my only school, only school I have taught at. The only school. It became my family. I never left. I didn’t want to go anywhere else. . . and I hear, and I met many people now in different schools and they do not have the sense of family, working family, academic working family like we do (inquiry group, December 22, 2015).

Later, Betty seemed to confirm this sentiment when she reminded the group about the time she had to split her teaching during the 2013-2014 school year between Crawford and another Philadelphia school due to budget cuts. “It was not a family sense at that school. At all,” she said, “I mean people didn’t even look at you if you walked down the hallway. Smile at you or say hello. Which sounds silly, but I mean it’s, you know, it doesn’t necessarily exist at other places” (inquiry group, December 22, 2015).

In his autobiography, Dirk vividly describes his first day at Crawford when he transferred from a violent middle school in the southwest part of Philadelphia (now closed) to Crawford. At the time the old Crawford building included a dark basement
where most of the prep and support teachers were headquartered. To his surprise “two kind and gentle ladies” (his description of Hannah and Betty) were located down there “like two princesses locked in the dungeon.” He described how Hannah, Betty, and other teacher colleagues helped him succeed at Crawford, including Edwina who he referred to as a “mother bird” teaching her dependent how to navigate a new climate. “Then I felt like I became part of the Crawford family,” he concluded (inquiry group, January 12, 2016).

Perhaps the most sentimental interpretation of the family metaphor in the group was the story told by Edwina who served as a captain in the U.S. Army Reserves. I started working at the school in October of 2001. The horror of 9/11 had occurred just a month before. In fact, I remember being caught off guard during my initial drive to work in the dense neighborhood where the school was located. At that time, many homes and businesses across the country were festooned with red, white, and blue—mostly in the form of the American flag—and this racially diverse neighborhood was no exception. A row home a block away from the school was entirely covered from top to bottom, end to end with one large giant flag!

“I got a phone call,” Edwina says as she begins to emotionally tell her story of having to leave her job for an Army Reserve assignment in the Middle East:

I had to tell [the principal] that I was leaving. And he was crying. I got a phone call on Tuesday. I told him Wednesday that Friday was my last day. So, Crawford was great. They gave me a parade. A going-away parade. I don’t know how they did it so fast. Marty and Gwen [two support staff] helped me pack up as much as I could and I put things away, and I was gone. I didn’t want to call Crawford or my family that much because . . . every time I called Crawford, they always cried. The ladies in the office would cry. So I was like, ‘Look I’m so far away, don’t make me cry.’ My poor soldiers, ‘You OK Captain Thompson?’ I’m like, ‘Yea.
Just talking to my Crawford family or I’m talking to my family.’ You guys were so great. You sent me care packages and letters and pictures, so it was really nice (inquiry group, January 12, 2016).

Edwina’s story, as of those of the other teachers of the inquiry community, would continue to unfold. I had considered making the writing of the teaching autobiography a “homework” assignment to give the teachers more time to think through their narratives. As it turned out, the work of writing ones teaching autobiography did not require an extended period of time for the participants to feel its power. I thought the autobiographies would help the teachers think about their multiple communities and positionalities and how it influenced their lives as teachers, but rather, they considered each other in the making of community and their identities as teachers. I was reminded of the unlikely direction the autobiographies took the teachers when I read Junot Diaz’s words at the top of this chapter. Inevitably, as I planned each group session, it was impossible to predict its results. As Will Durant said at the top of chapter 4, inquiry is anything but certain.

**Conclusion**

Once again I was off the mark as a facilitator. I came into these two sessions with my own agenda. The very first day that the teachers would begin writing and sharing their autobiographies (which was the third meeting of the inquiry group), I introduced the day’s agenda by suggesting that we review portions of Sonia Nieto’s work, write and share our own stories, and connect them to “our relationship here to this [neighborhood] community and its uniqueness as we move forward as a community school and how we think about how that influences our teaching.” Obviously, this did not turn out the way I
had hoped. In fact, by the second autobiography day, I noted a shift in my regard for the very term “community,” and what this dissertation research would entail as it evolved. As noted above, many of the teachers shared the influence their colleagues had on them during difficult moments when they considered leaving the school or the profession as a whole. Whether due to a difficult experience with a principal, a particularly challenging student group, or an otherwise rough year, the collegial community was a strong motivator for the teachers and this was something “I don’t think I personally had given as much thought as I probably should. Let’s just put it that way.” I continued, “In my quest to understand community I am just realizing how community is such a broad, gigantic term” (memo, January 12, 2016).
Chapter SIX

The co-Creation of a Context

“Teaching reading is seen as teaching for living.”

Lorraine Wilson
Reading to Live

“I had to read it twice”

It bothers me when citizens outside of the education field de-intellectualize teachers. I see it all the time. But I have also seen how teachers rise to the challenge to engage in highly academic talk. Paolo Freire’s, “The Importance of the Act of Reading,” (1983) is a traditional piece teachers interrogate during the Philadelphia Writing Project Summer Institute. His advice to teachers to treat the “word-world” (p. 6) as less about traditional decoding and memorization and more about creativity and reading the world (which precedes reading the word), offers fertile ground for conversation. In my experience, Philadelphia teachers in the Institute typically understand Freire’s “archeology” (p. 9) of reading by engaging especially with his treatment of language through his telling of childhood stories. It is a natural fit as teachers consider their own lives in relation to reading and literacy.

After the inquiry group took the time to read the piece together, they were immediately intimidated by it:

Hannah: “I had to read it twice.”

Edwina: “I know. OK, I thought it was me.”

Dana: “No, oh, no.”
Edwina: “Some of his choice of words were . . .”
Dana: “Yeah.”

Adding further complexity to the meeting, I introduced a protocol called “Save the Last Word for Me,” one of the protocols from the National School Reform Faculty, as a way to help us move through the article and the conversation. “Save the Last Word for Me” allows each member of the group to participate by quietly reflecting and verbally responding to sections of the written piece. Although protocols in general serve a valuable purpose as a way to help ensure that the goals of a group are carried through, they are inherently unnatural ways to communicate, especially for those new to them. The structure of this specific protocol created some initial confusion, even a bit of discomfort. For Hannah in particular, whose ease with people is marked by her inviting personality and boisterous laughter, the quiet pauses between conversations were the toughest adjustment to make. “Save the Last Word” provides for each participant to take a turn leading a discussion by choosing a resonant portion of the reading for everyone else in the group to respond to. When all members of the group have responded to the lead’s selection, she then re-occupies a central position by reflecting on what she has heard from the others and offering her own take on the selected portion of the reading. These two factors, a challenging reading and a structures conversation, contributed to an initial tension that eventually began to fade as the group adjusted to the protocol, made connections to the reading, and either changed or completely abandoned it to fit their needs.
Hannah

Hands down, Hannah was the most popular teacher at Crawford. Hannah is the sort of individual who brightens a room with her infectious smile and genuine connections with the people who surround her. A natural raconteur, anyone listening to one of her tales, no matter how grave, could almost always be guaranteed a hearty laugh at one point in her telling. Perhaps more than any teacher, I was most curious about the contradiction between her perceptions and her actions. Talking to Hannah about the children of Crawford was like hearing a songbird tell the story of the chickens who lived in a coop. If only the chickens could fly and sing like the other more fortunate songbirds of the world:

They [the students] love having lunch with you. I never would have thought to have lunch with a teacher in my [school]. I wanted to escape. But, ‘Can I have lunch with you, can I have lunch with you?’ They want to have lunch, they want to sit there, they want to talk, they want to play games, they want to hear a funny story, they want to just talk to each other because I don’t think they get a lot of that in their houses (personal interview, January 19, 2016).

On the other hand, Hannah’s actions were bountiful and genuine, as in the story she tells of springing to action for Luciana, a little Dominican girl with severely impaired front teeth that made her the target of ruthless teasing by her peers:

I couldn’t take it anymore. I don’t want her to go to middle school with the buck teeth. So, I called Temple University School of Dentistry. I got an appointment for the mom, you know, because she has that insurance, that Medicare insurance, and just a few weeks ago the mom took her. [Luciana] kept saying to me, ‘I’m getting my braces! I’m getting my braces!’ I gave her my phone number, I’m like, ‘Luciana, call me, let me know what happens.’ So I think, her appointment was in December and they evaluated her and they said, because the lady said if she’s a candidate, we can do it, I’m like, ‘She’s going to be a candidate. She’s got buck teeth!’ (personal communication, January 19, 2016).
Within this dissertation, there will be more samples of Hannah’s dubious perception about communities like Crawford. It was a challenging reconciliation to make in my mind, but it was equally challenging for Hannah as well. A life-long product of catholic schools (even her own children attended parochial schools), Hannah said she was not a very self-reflective teacher. She admitted having difficulty writing during our meetings, preferring to talk out loud instead. But the journaling helped her voice vexations about what Mirtha Quintanales in *A Bridge Called My Back* called “primary emergencies” (2003, p. 151). These “primary emergencies” run the range of identity markers such as professional experience, family of origin, personal biases, and class values. For Hannah, the combined messages from these “primary emergencies” all seem to be tossed into one simmering cauldron, such as in this excerpt:

> But even my family, even friends or people that are in the middle class, they blame everything on the parents, and no matter how often I try to say it’s not the parents’ fault, even if the parents are junkies, the parents learned from their parents and from their . . . you know what I mean? And they’re stuck in this neighborhood and that’s what you need to do is give them an education to have lives that maybe are a little more easier, or, I don’t know (personal communication, June 1, 2016)!

In his book, *We Can’t Teach What We Don’t Know* (2006), Gary Howard utilizes his journey as a white teacher in various multicultural settings to bluntly confront his own place in the history of white oppression while moving toward what he calls a “transformationist pedagogy.” As I am attempting to do in this dissertation, Howard uses Anzaldúa and borderland theory to help him make sense of very complicated human interactions and understandings. In educational spaces that embrace transformationist pedagogy, teachers maintain healthy personal identities while honoring those of their
students. “La Tierra Transformative,” (2006, p. 142) as he calls it, is a space where teachers in a multicultural setting strive towards equity, work towards self-awareness, and honor the resources all students bring.

Shor and Freire (1987) write about the importance of dialogue in the quest for understanding. “Dialogue seals the act of knowing, which is never individual, even though it has its individual dimensions” (p. 3). This dialogue was critical for Hannah who used the inquiry group to sort out her many disquieting moments. In this way the inquiry group served as a metaphor for the tumultuous space that is the borderlands; but, as much as the borderlands is a space of rancor and confusion, it is also a source of knowledge and empowerment. Hannah’s willingness to be disturbed and to question her own assumptions during our meetings together were crucial for the growth of the group as a whole. Hannah would talk often about hoping the inquiry group would continue after I left. “It would be nice I think if schools could do this more, have teachers just talk, be open, but that’s very difficult” (personal communication, January 19, 2016).

**Teachers problematize the reading**

In the following portion of the meeting, Betty selected the bottom of page 8 from Freire’s piece:

The students did not have to memorize the description mechanically, but rather learn its underlying significance. Only by learning the significance could they know how to memorize it, to fix it. Mechanically memorizing the description of an object does not constitute knowing the object. That is why reading a text as pure description of an object (like a syntactical rule), and undertaken to memorize the description, is neither real reading, nor does it result in knowledge of the object to which the text refers (1983, p. 8).
After an uncomfortable pause, the teachers began to respond. Hannah’s response contextualized Freire’s words into an actual classroom experience:

So I love the idea of “to learn the underlying significance” of what they have to learn and just, I’m thinking of in fourth grade the teachers are teaching the calculator, you know, that fancy fancy calculator that will do equivalent fractions, that will multiply fractions. It does everything and there’s different steps, and I know that some of them were talking about, between us, only, cuz, you have to do it this way, the teachers are under so much pressure, but they’re teaching how to do it. You know, you do this and you press this and you press this and you press that and you’re going to get the equivalent fraction. But the students don’t really know what the equivalent fraction even means (inquiry group, February 9, 2016).

Just before this interaction, the teachers broke from the protocol to engage in conversation that had to do with listening to children. They problematized vocabulary words that their students were required to know and the literature they had to read. They thought about a piece of literature they had taught for years critically and in this respect, teachers reflected out loud about their failure to listen when caught up in a prescribed curriculum and the rigor of the day:

Hannah: “Yea. I didn’t know what that meant either, ‘chortle.’”

Dana: “What does it mean?”

Hannah: “It means, like to laugh. That was Betty’s favorite word for years. She is like, ‘Oh my god, that’s chortle.’ It was a word in the story.”

Dana: “I never heard that word.”

Robert: “That’s the point of this. It’s so taken out of context. The other one I used to get up . . . Oh, I’m breaking the rules here, but anyway, the ‘paddock.’ They had to know what a ‘paddock’ was for one of their stories. Who the hell has a paddock in north Philadelphia?”

Hannah: “Wasn’t that Sara, Plain and Tall or something?
Edwina: “What is that?”

Robert: “It’s where you keep horses.”

Edwina: “Oh, a ‘paddock.’”

Robert: Yea, *Sara, Plain and Tall* or something.

Dana: “Why do they have that? Why would they ever see that?”

Edwina: “Some of those stories were so stupid.”

Hannah: “‘Chortle.’ I knew that you knew what it meant, and for years Betty would be like, ‘Oh, that’s a real chortle’” (inquiry group, February 9, 2016).

The teachers came out of the protocol and a conversation unfolded about the words that not only their students had trouble with, but that they themselves had to decipher in the course of their teaching. In breaking away from the protocol (I was a conspicuous culprit), some interesting discoveries began to emerge for the teachers. They began to interrogate the requirement to learn certain words in the curriculum, and they also began to ponder the importance of listening to their students in a variety of settings.

At the racetrack you would go to the paddocks. I’ve been to horse races. I don’t know, they are just two slight examples of just listening to what the kids, especially when you see their fears and anxieties and you know just being able to talk about things that they probably didn’t think they were going to talk about in school that day (inquiry group, February 9, 2016).

Without explicitly pointing to it, Hannah shared that it was her own reading of the world, as Freire would say, that helped her know the meaning of the word ‘paddock.’

More importantly, instead of suggesting that students should learn other words, or engaging in even more criticism of the curriculum, she begins to wonder about listening more as a remedy for ill-conceived curricula.
Dana immediately followed with sharing that morning’s meeting with her students and the discovery she had made that two of her students had sleepovers at each other’s homes. The morning meeting context was her one opportunity to really listen to her students and to learn about the close relationship between two students, who she previously surmised barely knew each other. In her way, Dana was taking a stab at contextualizing Freire’s “reading of the world” by suggesting that her students’ sleepovers and knowledge of each other’s home life was a “text” that they engaged with and learned from, much like the morning meeting was her own text from which she discovered valuable information about her student’s lives.

Hannah pursued her criticism of *Sara, Plain and Tall*, the traditional curricular text, one that I was very familiar with having taught it for years when I was a fourth-grade teacher at the school:

Hannah: “But the kids don’t want to read about *Sara, Plain and Tall*, That’s the most boring story that we ever made those fourth graders read. She was a mail order bride, wasn’t she? *Sara, Plain and Tall*? Didn’t she come to be living with that guy?”

Robert: “Yea!”

Hannah: “She didn’t even know him. That was the creepiest story.”

Robert: “Now that you think about it, it is kind of sexist.”

Hannah: “It’s the creepiest story!”

Edwina: “It’s a boring story.”

Hannah: “I was so bored by it, and we have thousands of books and people
have great libraries like yours, and, let these kids read what they like . . .”

Again, this exchange occurred before Betty’s turn in the protocol. Interestingly, it seemed to serve as a prelude for the portion in Freire that Betty chose to discuss. The “mechanical” approach to reading the word (in this case learning the vocabulary and reading unrelatable text) was a routine all too familiar to the teachers. It was important for the teachers to visit this idea, even if it detoured from the flow of the protocol. Moreover, the teachers allowed their own discomforts and familiar contexts to help mediate the novelty of using protocols for meetings. Hannah’s visceral discomfort with silence initiated relevant conversation about Freire’s words and jumpstarted the ensuing conversation. Dana’s connection to her classroom’s morning meeting routine provided a tangible way to make sense of a complicated piece of writing.

**Conclusion**

This chapter was about the co-creation of a context for problematizing and investigating the way teachers teach and support youth. It explored one of the very first experiences of the group to deconstruct a difficult reading within the parameters of a protocol. With the exception of the first meeting where teachers used the “Guided Reflection Protocol” to share individual stories, this was the first meeting the teachers used a structured guide in the form of “Save the Last Word for Me” protocol. There were certainly bumps along the way, and the teachers eventually abandoned the protocol, but engaging with a complex read like “The Importance of the Act of Reading” benefitted from some patience. Drawing from Sleeter, et. al (2004) scaffolding implies “guidance,
change from external control to self-control, appropriation of strategies, and
collaboration’ (p. 92). In this sense, the teachers took initial step to inquire about a
traditionally used text and the vocabulary therein and to critically understand its
appropriateness within the context of the students they teach. In the next chapter, we will
explore how the teachers did the same as they thought about families.
Chapter SEVEN

Constructing Classroom Practice in Relation to Community

“In the American school, in the first year, Miss Moy washed her hands with alcohol and used a lot of Kleenex. Her hair was red and her face was full of freckles. I do not know how she did it, but she taught me to read in English.”

Rolando Hinojosa
Estampas del Valle / The Valley

Control

As I began analyzing my data, the theme of “control” began to emerge in a variety of areas. Indeed, “control” is a theme prevalent in a variety of ways in K-12 settings. Teachers look for ways to control movement and conversation in classrooms, especially in rooms that are overflowing with students (typical of many schools in Philadelphia). Administrators are vigilant about controlling access to buildings for both security measures and overwhelming parental involvement. The inquiry group explored both of these areas of control beginning in the spring of 2016.

By that early April, conversations about community schools were gaining momentum city-wide. Both the mayor and the superintendent were advocating the idea in the media. A city councilperson was pressuring Crawford to submit an application as one of the inaugural community schools. Crawford staff members participating in the Community Schools Ambassador Program had attended four sessions by this time, becoming better informed about how to initiate the community school process.
Community Schools Ambassador Program is a collaborative initiative between the Media Mobilizing Project and the Philadelphia Coalition Advocating for Public Schools. The program is designed to build leadership skills for parents, school staff, and community members. Hannah and Betty along with the school counselor and another teacher of the school were regular participants in the program. Through this program, it was learned that one of the crucial elements behind creating a community school was parental/community involvement. Typically, a school’s School Advisory Council (SAC) would have a significant voice in any discussion regarding the development of a community school. The inquiry group began to wonder about Crawford’s SAC.

**Betty**

Betty was the most politically active member of the inquiry group. She was the building representative for the collective bargaining unit. In this capacity, her job was to be as informed as she possibly could about the rights of teachers within the union’s contract with the school district. While Betty’s job, at minimum, would have been to be the voice of the teachers when concerns arose between the union and school district policies, Betty’s involvement was far more informed, participatory, and personal.

Betty’s world was exceptionally school-centered. Her life was at a juncture where most roads index the public schools—a young mother with 2 elementary school-aged sons, a high school teacher for a husband, and an education reform activist for a mother. “Once I became a parent . . . that changed the way I looked at teaching. How I dealt with kids, how I treated kids, how I treated parents, especially once my own children got into ool” (personal communication, June 8, 2016). Arguably, Betty’s “literacies of teaching,”
informed both “within and beyond” (Lytle, 2006) her classroom, included the insights she gained from her own shifting positions as mother, daughter, and spouse.

The “Parent Cafe” was an initiative from a local community based non-profit organization brought into the school by the counselor. It was designed to bridge the needs of schools and the parents. Once a month the “Parent Cafe” offered breakfast, fellowship, and activities for the families that came in, usually centered on a certain theme. Betty was the only teacher who took the time to participate in one of the “Parent Cafes,” admitting her own bias, even fear of parents, and the awakening she had when she realized that her concerns were equally salient for a mother “sitting across the table from you with no teeth.”

And even, since that moment, I couldn’t ever quite say it. It’s like back there, but it was the moment in time and space that you were having that conversation, which is a fascinating thing to do as a teacher. I mean to actually feel to be on the same level of your parents (personal communication, June 8, 2016).

It is no doubt that Betty’s varying positionalities and her commitment to understanding multiple perspectives enhanced her global understanding of extremely complex and uncomfortable situations. As an illustration of this complexity, it is important to understand an additional component of the Crawford school. Certain schools within the district are designated as placements for emotional support learning. These are spaces for students with individualized learning plans designed specifically for their emotional diagnosis. These classrooms, if not handled with a certain measure of assurance, can become volatile places. When two teachers on separate occasions were physically attacked by two separate students, in her role as the union’s building
representative, Betty believed it was her responsibility to come out of a singular teacher protectionist stance and consider multiple perspectives that included administration, support personnel both within and outside of the building, and the community.

... everybody sees things from their classroom and their point of view. The interesting thing about this role is, you begin to see things from everybody’s point of view. That’s the part of the job I actually like, because, there isn’t one perspective on anything. There is [sic] very different perspectives and it’s worth hearing what people have to say, and where they’re coming from and understanding it and then figuring out where we need to go (personal communication, June 8, 2016).

Betty consistently attended activist meetings across the city such as with the “Teacher Action Group (TAG)” and the “Community School Task Force (CSTF).” She and her mother, also a former SDP teacher and union representative, often attended meetings of the School Reform Commission and occasionally spoke at these meetings in defense of public education. During testing season, Betty opted to keep her own children out of government-mandated standardized tests. The teacher activism that combined Betty’s commitment to community organizing and liberatory education practices (Picower, 2012) had to negotiate borders both inside and outside of the classroom. She often used the inquiry group as a sounding board and confidential arena with which to air emotions that otherwise would have had to be handled alone. Similar to how Hannah used the metaphorical borderland space that was the inquiry group, Hannah considered multiple emotions that otherwise needed to be reined in when handling public circumstances in her role as union representative.
School Advisory Council

About the same time charter schools threatened to open near Crawford in 2013, Betty became the union representative for the school. She inquired at the time what was necessary to combat the incursion and it was at this time that she learned what a School Advisory Council was. Since that time, she was reflective about what role the SAC had at Crawford. In her own research, mostly conducted by asking veteran teachers in the school, the SAC was in existence and played some part, off and on, through the years at Crawford. However, interested members of the school staff largely undertook leadership and initiative, even though criteria coming out of the district office for the establishment of SACs required parents to hold a minimum of 51% of SAC seats. This policy has only recently changed by way of Policy 920 passed by the School Reform Commission in 2016. Now, it is only required that parents and family “represent the largest group on the

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A brief timeline of the history of SAC development in the school district was provided for me by Shannon O’Brien, program specialist in the Office of Family and Community Engagement:

1980-2000: District begins multiple “school-based management” initiatives
2009: Renaissance School Advisory Board recommends the creation of SACs in all Renaissance schools
2010: Renaissance School Initiative begins
   - 13 schools in first cohort (mix of District schools and Renaissance Charter schools)
   - SACs in Renaissance Charter schools:
     - SACs primarily act as accountability bodies
     - SACs review the school administration and their evaluation is taken into consideration for the charter’s contract renewal with SDP
   - SACs in the District schools (Promise Academies):
     - Function more as input-giving body
     - Unclear objectives/purpose
2013: Major budget cuts
   - Bare bones staffing plan at schools
   - Major reduction in family and community programming and support staff
2010-2015: Promise Academy SAC model is expanded to other schools
   - Mixed messages about whether SACs are mandatory (but no SRC policy)
March 2016: SRC Strategy, Policy, and Priority (SPP) Meeting
   - Results in Policy Working Group
SAC” (SAC Launch Guide, 2016, p. 10), ostensibly to address the difficulty of recruiting parents and family members as reported by some schools throughout the district.

Betty was part of the agenda for the March 1 inquiry group meeting. She handed out a sheet from the Office of Family and Community Engagement of the school district entitled “Understanding School Advisory Councils.” This sheet, designed more for school staff, was dense and contained detailed information about what comprised a SAC. She also handed out a sheet entitled “First Steps to a Successful Start: Quick Tips for a New School Advisory Council,” a bulleted fact sheet also intended for school personnel. There were two flyers designed for parents she handed out, one entitled “Help Make Your School Better: Join the School Advisory Council,” and a brochure entitled “Make Your Voice Count! Join SAC.”

Delaine began with the question, “How do you choose who will become a representation, a sampling of what our Crawford parents are like for the SAC?” (inquiry group, April 1, 2016).

Betty: So, that’s a great question. So, basically when I, like I said, it sounds, I was very clueless as to how this all came to be and just kind of joined in and started going to meetings. I knew, I had the sense from administration and stuff they like to keep the meetings small. They don’t want it like, um, you know, for like a lot of people we have them just like in the front conference room and it is like very controlled, like the agenda is set, what they are talking about, who the parents are, who are on there, you know, they basically asked and invited the parents to come and be on there. Um, again, different things are going down. I have to figure out now why some of these are getting cancelled (inquiry group, April 1, 2016).

With PSSAs underway, a full month elapsed before the next inquiry group reconvened. In that time, while all teachers were busy preparing for the exams, Betty pursued her interest in the SAC question and the representation of parents and families at Crawford’s fledgling SAC. For instance, she learned through a conference call with the
Community Schools Ambassador Program that the superintendent’s timeline for the formation of community schools and the governance structure of the community schools did not align with the comfort level of grassroots groups like the Ambassadors or the Community Schools Task Force. In fact, the CSTF held a series of face-to-face meetings with the superintendent himself. In essence, district administration would have community schools happen at a much quicker pace than what those at the school and grassroots level were comfortable with. Also, Community Governments, the body that would serve as the voice for the community in community schools, was less of a priority for district administration. “Obviously, that would make 440 very uncomfortable” (Betty, inquiry group, April 1, 2016).

The theme of control had particular resonance at this meeting because only a few days before the inquiry group meeting a parent physically assaulted a new teacher in the schoolyard. Most disturbing to the teachers in the group was that it took place in front of all of the students in the class, while they were in line, including the child of the assailant.

At the April 1 inquiry meeting, the teachers analyzed a transcription of a portion of the last meeting. Betty reflected with interest that the transcription helped her to see her progression with her meeting with the principal. She had addressed the need to increase the number of parent/family members represented in the SAC, but she was concerned about the limitations placed upon her and the school counselor to recruit parents. The principal did not want flyers handed out in the schoolyard.
“I think the problem with that is just maintaining some control over that. I think they want to have it by invitation only, but I think ultimately it is a control factor,” (Betty, inquiry group, April 1, 2016).

Others in the group chimed in:

“I’m confused. What is bothering him when he is like that? What is he not comfortable with?” Delaine asked.

“You mean why he doesn’t open it up to all parents?” asked Hannah.

“Right.”

“Because he doesn’t want crazy parents.”

“I don’t blame him,” Edwina offered.

“We got a lot of crazy, so that’s why,” Hannah concluded.

It was at this point that I offered a reframe: “Well, with that kind of like, with that sort of like, label, ‘crazy parents,’ are those the parents that would come to a SAC if it were just open?” I continued to wonder that while their concern for violent encounters with parents like the one they had just experienced with the new teacher was visceral and valid, would a forum like a Student Advisory Committee and its potential for serious and good work in a school setting be attractive to so-called “crazy” parents. In fact, with the busy lives parents lead, and the unspoken barriers parents feel, we should consider it fortunate to have any parents at all.

I found that to conceive of the community as a resource, as “cultural funds of knowledge” (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004; Moll & Greenberg, 1990), was a conception that had to be continually mined, explored, and reanalyzed. Teachers teaching in highly
stressed areas are capable of exploring this line of thinking, but it is not one that is endorsed by the district as a whole. The supports available for teachers at the front lines are minimal and venues like an inquiry group where teachers can begin to ask hard questions and express viewpoints in a safe place are nearly non-existent. However, teachers like Betty, when offered the opportunity, the space, and the encouragement among a receptive community of colleagues, are capable of hard reflection.

I guess the hard part, I don’t know people have a way of tackling this, I think a lot of times, maybe as like principals, or even, maybe even as teachers or as like the school, you know, you want to say or give lip service that you’re doing something but in fact, like, you know, ‘are you?’ kind of thing and like, how do you approach that to be like, ‘Are we really serious about this or is this something we’re just trying to put on?’ (inquiry group, March 1, 2016).

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to begin to answer the dissertation question, *How do Crawford teachers construct their classroom practice in relation to the family and community both as a context and a resource.* There were two parts to this consideration. The first consideration came largely through the information that one teacher provided. Through her research, the inquiry group learned about the School Advisory Council, an officially sanctioned body whose composition was comprise mostly of parents, and what this council’s stake would be if the school pursued a line of work to become a community school. The second consideration occurred indirectly, within the context of the SAC. Largely through my own inquiry, but also in light of a recent encounter between a teacher and a parent, the group wondered about the reputation parents had at the school (“crazy”) and how this regard influenced their involvement (or lack of it) in official bodies like the
SAC. Betty questioned the authenticity of this involvement. Also considered was how these labels lead to “control,” or lack of it, as a factor that informed the paucity of parent outreach for SAC participation. In the chapter to follow, the teachers begin to consider work with students in the classroom. Control continued to surface in these discussions, specifically the control over their sense of autonomy in the classroom.
Chapter EIGHT

Looking at Student Work - The Boy in the Wheelchair

“Confusion is a luxury which only the very, very young can possibly afford and you are not that young anymore.”

James Baldwin

Puzzling Moments

As the group moved on to consider puzzling moments in the classroom, control, or at least the restraints within which teachers place their students, was a theme that emerged. However, in my analysis, teachers began to consider how they themselves were controlled. For example, by the time the group was exploring the details of the Student Advisory Committee and the next steps in pursuit of a community school application, it was spring and testing was in full swing. Teachers found space in the inquiry group to express their thoughts not only about how they felt with compliance requirements like high stakes assessments, but about having to be monitored themselves by district and state-level proctors sent to the school. Since 2011, when the school was among several others in Philadelphia flagged and tiered¹ for testing improprieties (Winerip, The New York Times, 2011), teachers were still healing even after the school was eventually cleared in 2014 (Mezzacappa, The Notebook, 2014). “You just feel like you are not a professional,” Hannah shared, “You feel like you are a teenager. You know, having,

¹ Crawford fell under so called Tier 2. Through a state-commissioned analysis, these were schools found to exhibit “egregious” patterns of wrong-to-right erasures over many years in their test’s answer sheets. Schools at this tier would be investigated by the district with the help of pro bono legal support (Mezzacappa & Harold, Education Week, 2012). Several teachers at Crawford were in fact interviewed by investigators.
needing to be supervised because you are doing something, that you may do something wrong” (inquiry group, April 19, 2016).

To spark conversation about student work, the group utilized Cynthia Ballenger’s text *Puzzling Moments, Teachable Moments* (2009). It was appropriate for two reasons. First, since a common complaint among teachers who are delivered professional development videos to watch is the misalignment between classroom images depicted in the videos and the teachers’ actual classroom experiences, it was important for me that the teachers felt represented in the literature they were reading. While using science as a backdrop, Ballenger’s elementary students were urban children of color, many of whom were immigrants.

A second reason why the text was appropriate was the inquiry stance she takes in her observations. Ballenger looks at students who are not doing well academically, referring to them as “puzzling children,” and insisting on “an attitude of puzzlement and inquiry” (2009, p. 2). By positioning the work that we would be doing in the remaining sessions as open and indefinite, I hoped that the teachers would feel less inhibited about sharing classroom experiences and student product.

Since I was conscious of the teachers’ time and careful about any “add-on” responsibilities outside of group time, I insisted that all reading be done during the group session. We read ten pages together of her section “Supporting Thoughtful Conversation.” Here, Ballenger maintains that children are always making sense, even if we think they are engaged in “off-task” classroom behaviors, side conversations, or even
wrong answers. With this approach, we are not closing off any possibility about learning from children instead of quickly diagnosing them.

Here again, the theme of control came up. Delaine engaged with Ballenger’s challenge that useful information can be gleaned by simply allowing children to speak spontaneously instead of raising their hands. Ballenger also talks about “revoicing,” the practice of repeating back to a child what she said in the language she used.

And it just made me think how many times you are sitting there going, OK, this kid knows what they are talking about. So, if you are revoicing it, as it comes out the way the child said it, you are giving that child an opportunity to clear up. It goes with just like being able to take the time. I feel like sometimes we are just rushing, rushing, rushing (Delaine, inquiry group, April 5, 2016).

**The Whittier Inquiry Group, Crawford Style - Part One**

When teachers journaled about their own puzzling moment in the classroom, Delaine again offered to share. We used one of the protocols Ballenger describes in her chapter “Making the Familiar Strange.” The Whittier Inquiry Group in Chicago is a group of K-6 teachers that follow an approach that helps them create reflective space to consider student work (2009, p. 82).

1. **Getting started. A presenter is chosen to guide the session and share student work, a guiding question, or a puzzling moment.**

Delaine’s share refers to a picture located in Appendix D. It is important to keep this picture in mind while reading Delaine’s journal entry. Another important note is that the teachers in the inquiry group did not have this picture in front of them while Delaine was sharing.
In guided reading today, my students were looking at a boy in a wheelchair painting a picture. I was trying to see if they would notice the strong details. They said, he was white, meanwhile the book was black and white; that he liked to paint, and he hadn’t painted a picture yet. So then I tried to dig a little deeper and I ask, ‘How is he different from you?’ And I got, ‘He has black hair, and the page is black and white. He likes dogs.’ There is no dog on the page. So, I asked, ‘What is he sitting in?’ And they all looked and there was no answer. I just was puzzled as to why our kids don’t ask questions. The child on the front page was sitting in a wheelchair (Delaine, inquiry group, 04/19/2016).

When Delaine finished reading her journal entry, I quickly offered to the group that I was new to the protocol, that I was hardly an expert, and that we were forging ahead together. Though the actual protocol does not call for it, I suggested that Delaine re-read her journal entry to give us a clearer sense of the issue. Truthfully, I hadn’t listened quite as well the first time, so I needed to hear the puzzling moment again. Delaine graciously obliged.

**2. Describing the data. Participants share what they heard or what they notice in a non-judgmental way while the presenter takes notes.**

It took a few tries, but teachers eventually were able to distinguish between sharing an observation and jumping to a conclusion or offering an opinion. Hannah, for instance, struggled with her language, but settled with, “My objective observation is that you didn’t ask them if they had any questions, before the pre-reading, to generate questions.” Nestled in this comment was in fact an opinion, and a judgmental one at that, about how the lesson should have begun. Dana followed with, “My question is, how. . .” but stopped short of actually asking a question. Finally, it was Betty who helped move this phase along by reflecting that “I just noticed that they didn’t seem to notice things in the picture.”

Robert: I notice the boy went right to a color issue.
Dana: I noticed the boy assumed that the person in the picture liked dogs.

Dirk: He didn’t seem to know what a wheelchair was.

After this brief flurry, there was quite a long pause as I wanted to give participants an opportunity to think. The recording reveals uncomfortable coughs and papers shuffling. After some time, I moved ahead.

3. **Raising questions. Participants ask clarifying questions.**

I quickly moved to Dana after I introduced the third part of the protocol since she initially started with a question in the noticing part. “Why didn’t you ask why he said the kid liked dogs? So, there was no dog in the picture, right? So, I would have been curious as to know why do you think he likes dogs? What made you think that?” This is where the picture Delaine was referring to is important. It turns out, on closer inspection, the little boy in the wheelchair was in the process of painting a portrait of an animal that very well looks like it could be a dog. It turns out it was the teacher who was not observing as closely as the students were. In response to Dana’s question, Delaine said she asked the children, “Why is this kid like you?” Delaine surmised that since the children like dogs, they “just transferred that onto the kid on the cover of the book.”

Hannah asked a second question: “Was the goal of the pre-reading lesson that you did, was it just to get background knowledge for the students to get to know the character in the story before you actually left the story?” Delaine’s response was telling:

That was some if it because we had done some of those things before, but I have just been noticing that my kids are very weak on picking up details. They don’t see them! So, I was telling myself, ‘Wow, this is strong. This kid’s in a wheelchair! He’s gonna, boom! They are going to see it! They did not see it at all (inquiry group, April 19, 2016).
I consider this response with more questions. Did Delaine not see the image on the canvas that the little boy was about to paint? Or, did she see it but expect the children to consider the image on the canvas with more wonderment instead of jumping to a conclusion? Was Delaine on “automatic pilot,” as teachers often are, assuming that most of the children were less than capable of noticing detail?

Delaine continued, wondering why her students don’t ask questions. Hannah asked if she modeled how to ask questions in the first place. “I’m not judging at all,” she says, “I’m just asking the question cuz it’s taken me a long time to get my kids to ask questions.” Delaine responded:

I spend a lot of time on a young level, I say, ‘If you don’t know, ask me.’ But maybe not as detailed as your saying, to get that out of them. But I try and say it at a younger level, ‘If you don’t know something, ask me. If you don’t know what that is, ask me.’ You know, I do a lot of that, but as far as what you’re saying, the detail, how to do this, questions, I guess it will take time cuz they are so young (inquiry group, April 19, 2016).

Betty: No, they just don’t know how to do it.

Hannah: They don’t know how to do it. A lot of modeling.

I decide at this point to move on to the next part of the protocol since it seemed that based on Betty and Hannah’s responses, teachers were beginning to reflect. Before I move on, I want to pause briefly and think about what transpired during the first half of the protocol. The picture that Delaine was asking the children to respond to came from a scripted, highly structured, systematic phonics program that teachers that year were mandated to cover. In addition to a variety of tools to help children learn digraphs, letter combinations, spelling rules, and syllabication, there were mini-books that students used to read a story with the teacher and color along the way. It was the picture on the cover of
one of these mini-books that Delaine presented. The content of the book was as uninspired and colorless as the front picture depicts (a boy learns to paint a red dog).

While I questioned Delaine’s inability to notice the dog that the boy was painting, upon analysis I became convinced that Delaine was eager to connect a lackluster picture with the lives her students lead. In her hasty quest to do so, she was met with the tension several teacher face when having to deliver scripted curricula. Namely, how to deliver the content while engaging students in a literacy event that would underscore the centrality of everyday cultural experiences in children’s lives (Carrington & Luke, 2003) while affirming children’s cultural and linguistic identity within and beyond the school curriculum (Blackledge, 2000).

In her haste, I wonder if Delaine would have done well to step back and consider possibilities. Anzaldúa speaks of the Coatlicue state -- a moment of pause and consciousness raising. A place “to slow us up so that the psyche can assimilate previous experiences and process the changes.” She goes on to warn that “If we don’t take the time, she’ll lay us low with an illness, forcing us to ‘rest’” (1987, p. 68).

Delaine

From the start, Delaine had been one of the most vocal members of the inquiry community. My notes show that she rarely missed a session, and as the most veteran member of the group, she carried a great deal of history and knowledge with her, not only about Crawford elementary, but about education in general. She also was the most eager to take risks by vocalizing her thinking in the group and to try new ideas in the classroom. Her pursuit of new knowledge was also reflected in some of her
accomplishments such as earning her principal certification later in her career. During our group times, she would frequently make comments about everything she was learning and the next steps she wanted to take in her life’s journey, “I’ve had so many moments which have been a good experience going through this with you. Also, I tell people all the time, I tell my dad, I tell people all the time, I say, you know I know what I need to do now to do my doctorate by being a part of Robert’s [group]” (personal communication, May 21, 2016).

Delaine tells how her career in education began:

I came from the New York City school system, and this whole thing of integration was never a big thing in New York City. All schools were big melting pots. You had all ethnicities in every building and when I went to apply for the job they said, ‘This is a really good school but they’re really way out of compliance for the ratio of African-Americans to Hispanics to Asians in this building.’ And when I came to Crawford there was only two African-American teachers there. And Mr. Jones, after meeting him he explained that to me as well. But then after meeting me he said that he felt with my persona and my attitude, that kids need to see someone like me that they, you know, I told him the whole history about how I grew up in New York City and my family wasn’t wealthy, but it was just the attitude of what my parent’s expected. And I said, at the time when I grew up as a little girl, my parents hadn’t had their first home yet, and me and my sister slept in one bed, together, which is why we are so close today, I think, and I said I remember the sign on my television at home. My dad had a sign over the TV that said, ‘Turn me on, turn your future off.’ And from that we all had this attitude about school. You know I have a sister who’s a professor and teaches calculus. My other sister is an attorney, and then I made my way into education. And he said, kids in this neighborhood need to see somebody like you that even though you didn’t grow up with a silver spoon in your mouth, if you get your education, the whole world is your canvas. And I respected him for saying that to me (personal communication, January 13, 2016).

The social and economic realities of the students and families that Delaine taught always played a significant part in how Delaine viewed her practice. This will be explored more below as the Whittier Protocol continued. One of the questions underlying
this research, *How do Crawford inquiry community teachers co-create a context to problematize and investigate the way they teach and support Crawford youth and families* was addressed in a chapter earlier in this dissertation. For Delaine, it was very important that she feel a sense of trust, as she would in a family, to be able to take some of the risks that she did, to explore some of the contradictions that she faced in her teaching, and to remain openly vulnerable (Delpit, 1986, 2006; Ballenger 1999).

Delaines’s vision of family, however, was grounded in the reality of many families -- that they are flawed, imperfect, and less than ideal. In her long career, Delaine was at a point where she was comfortable with her role in Magdalena Lambert’s image of the “dilemma-managing teacher” (1985, p. 190) -- a teacher who uses her own knowledge base, not those solely produced by others, to cope with dilemmas rather than look for solutions. I worked in Delaine’s classroom often within the course of gathering data for this research. I was particularly interested in the times when she and her students were engaged in Kid Writing. At first glance, the classroom of Kindergarteners looked chaotic. I had the privilege, however, of sitting with individual or small groups of students while they worked on their writing. Inevitably, the students would answer my queries with, “My teacher said . . .” Amid what looked and sounded like disarray, the students knew precisely what Delaine wanted them to do. Delaine’s classroom was not a text-book answer for managing a classroom. Instead, answers for Delaine were not found in extremes, but in the messy middle somewhere. Delaine was far more at ease living with the ambiguities of teaching than a teacher with less experience.
More than others, she referenced the inquiry group as a “family,” and occasionally shared narratives about her history, the history of the school, and the community (Delpit, 1986; Delgado Bernal, 2002), no matter how imperfect these narratives were. These insights were vital for the inquiry group’s long view. Here she recalls a particular time in Crawford’s relationship with the community when “you could see there was just this gap and this fear of even just communicating with, you know, I’m not going to tell those people about my business. About my life, about my family, about my children. You know. There was definitely a space in between that was just that barrier that kept, I think that kept us for a long time of getting a sense of community and family. And then once we did establish, once we began to establish that, they let the community, the community let us in more” (personal communication, May 31, 2016). This Anzaldúa perspective of Crawford’s relationship to its community recalls the fact that “the teacher brings many contradictory aims to each instance of her work. And the resolution of their dissonance cannot be neat and simple” (Lambert, 1985, p. 181).

The Whittier Inquiry Group, Crawford Style - Part Two

4. Reflection and wonderment. Participants try to see the world through the child’s eyes.

Coming out of a teacher lens and viewing the world like a child is a very hard transition. The teachers struggled with this stage, and as a facilitator/participant I was no help as I often fell into a teacher role myself. The conversation at this stage started with what young children don’t notice, followed by resources young children don’t have, and
ending with a fascinating self-analysis by the teachers arching back to the theme of “control.”

Betty started off by reflecting on her own 4-year old son and her former experience as a Kindergarten teacher. “I found a lot of times that they don’t necessarily notice difference yet,” she said. “They don’t notice race yet, they don’t notice you are in a wheelchair, not just because they don’t know what a wheelchair is, but it doesn’t even occur to them that you are different because you are sitting and I’m standing” (inquiry group, April 19, 2016). The whole group nodded in assent.

My notes from this day indicate my frustration that the teachers could not acknowledge that young children can indeed be careful observers and nuanced thinkers. In retrospect, this frustration was also informed by the widening gulf I discovered within myself between the practical knowledge of teachers in the field and my own growing academic understandings, especially with regard to children and race (Comber, et al. 2001; Roger & Mosley, 2006; Polite & Saenger; 2003; Segura-Mora, 2009).

Again, no one had the actual picture in front of them. I wondered out loud whether the children were referring to the child’s race when Delaine reported that they referred to him as “white.” Maria, the only other teacher in the group with as intimate a knowledge of the program as Delaine, then chimed in:

So, I guess my thing is they are looking at this book and the pictures are just white, it’s just a color to them, it’s not like a racial thing. You know what I mean? Again, I agree with Betty. I think they are so young I don’t know. I think they are just saying exactly what they’re looking at in the book. A child sitting there. They don’t recognize that it’s a child in a wheelchair. They just see another child and it just happens to be a black and white book. Now, if it was a color, with some color in it, perhaps maybe if they said that I might question (inquiry group, April 19, 2016).
In fact, Maria may have been correct. The images on the cover of the little book were quite non-descript. However, Delaine was still perplexed about why the children did not notice the wheelchair.

Hannah offered a very different angle. She wondered about the fact that in her personal experience working with children, too often many express doing very little after a weekend. “They are always inside their homes,” she said. Like Betty earlier, Hannah used her own child-rearing experience to make sense of the situation:

I’m just thinking that when my kids were little, you know, we were at the zoo, you know, we had passes to the zoo, we had passes to the different museums, and so, when you are out and you are exposed like that, you are going to see people riding on a wheelchair, or you are visiting people in a hospital, so I just think that maybe some of that also has to do with that these kids really aren’t exposed to things like that because they just, I don’t know if you find that with your students, but they always seem to either be in their own homes or maybe in the home of a relative, you know, at a party, but very infrequently are they out at a place where you might encounter someone you know, rolling down in a wheelchair, or somebody with a prosthetic leg, or something like that, so, when I think they are not noticing a lot of details, maybe they are not exposed to that kind of detail in their lives because they are so isolated (inquiry group, April 19, 2016).

This was an angle frequently articulated by Hannah that features “mainstream culture” (Heath, 1983) often associated with the middle class. It was a perspective that she found difficult to deconstruct critically, but as time went on, she was able to come away from it and look at arm’s length.

Delaine countered with a perfectly satisfying response:

Based on how I hear what happens in the classroom, a lot of my kids, I thought they would nail it because most of my kids say they don’t go to the doctor. They go to the emergency rooms all the time. They don’t go to a doctor’s office. They are in the hospitals all the time because, you know, unfortunately, that’s the way their insurance works so I find that a lot of them go to emergency rooms all the time, versus going to doctors. You know, they don’t have their own pediatrician. So, I figure, because, they do that a lot, they would probably pick that up (inquiry group, April 19, 2016).
Delaine reflected out loud about the time she was the same age as her Kindergartners. “I was always asking my mom, ‘But why?’ I worked that ‘But why’ so much that my mom would say, ‘Delaine, if you say but why one more time . . .’” She went on to wonder why her students didn’t question her. “I think sometimes a lot of times kids are just afraid to ask questions because it identifies them as not being smart. They don’t want you to know that they don’t know; or, maybe I don’t make it OK for them not to know.”

This powerful reflection came out of the group’s version of open wonderment, the highly speculative moment within the Whittier protocol that gave teachers space to think out loud and in open vulnerability.

This stage cogently closed when Betty referred the group back to a previous professional development they had that utilized a book called *Mosaic of Thought* by Ellin Oliver Keene and Susan Zimmerman as its framework. The professional development asserted the tendency adults have to shut down children’s natural curiosity. In schools, teachers ask students to sit quietly, fold their hands, and raise them for a question. Betty referred this to the control teachers insist they have in their rooms. “If you took the teacher out of the equation,” she said, “I wonder even more what they would be talking about.” Delaine came back to Ballenger’s insight about the sidebar conversations that take place in the classrooms and how quickly well-meaning teachers suppress them.

Finally, Maria quietly surfaced the reality that all teachers face every year. A “Distinguished” rating of the Danielson Framework in the domain of “Instruction” used
by the school district to evaluate teachers highlights the initiative that administrators
would like to see in classrooms:

The teacher uses a variety or series of questions or prompts to challenge students
cognitively, advance high level thinking and discourse, and promote
metacognition. Students formulate many questions, initiate topics, challenge one
another’s thinking, and make unsolicited contributions. Students themselves
ensure that all voices are heard in the discussion (Danielson, p. 47).
Within the context of dialogue, Maria continued to express this gradual
“withering away of the teacher” (Shor, 1982) in terms of her own teaching, and reflect on
the challenges in achieving this goal:

The way things are heading. We’re supposed to step back or, and let them . . .
which is, I know for me, it is difficult. I have to practice doing it more often, but,
all the trainings we’ve been to and the things that we’ve seen, you are supposed to
step back and just let them go and you do hear good conversation, but you have to
allow them to do it. And with the questioning, and it’s true, you have to, I mean
really it is amazing once you model and what they come up with, and then they
are doing it all the time, ‘I wonder what this is,’ or ‘Why.’ (inquiry group, April
19, 2016).

5. **The presenting teacher shares. The presenter can now share what she is
thinking.**

Delaine always took notes during our meetings, even if she was not a presenter
such as with this protocol. When it was her time to share what she took from the session,
she narrowed it down to three items. First, return to using the same book but this time,
“take a whole other approach.” She wanted to keep quiet this time, allow the students to
discuss the picture on their own, and make a better effort to simply listen. Secondly, she
wondered whether she faulted her students’ natural inclination to imagine, to “make it up
as they go along.” This second round, she would go into that imagination with a greater
sense of openness, to look at it as “not such a bad thing.” Thirdly, she wanted to be sure
she was allowing them the space and opportunity to generate their own questions, “not cut it off.”

6. **Implications for teaching and learning.**

Often, our group would run well after the 90-minute time allotment. I was conscious of trying to keep as much to the schedule as possible while still maintaining a reasonable sense of flexibility. This day was not an exception. Hannah offered to bring Delaine a graphic organizer she utilized to model questioning with students. I brought up the hope that this process would be repeated at a subsequent meeting. With that, the time had ended.

**Conclusion**

This chapter described the first time a teacher invited the group to consider classroom work. It was a good initial attempt for several reasons. First, while Delaine’s presentation was not student work, it was a good representation of student-teacher interaction. Delaine’s vignette illustrates her veteran status in the group and the direction she perceived the group to go in (a family). The relief among the other teachers in the group when Delaine volunteered to be the first to present was audible. In this sense, Delaine took on a rather matriarchal role by breaking the ice, so to speak, that would open future possibilities for other teachers.

Secondly, looking at the interaction and student lives as unevaluatively as possible was also a first for teachers; or, at minimum, it was a rare occasion. There were moments when this was difficult to do, as when Hannah was quick to offer advice about the way Delaine presented the picture of the boy in the wheelchair. Dana seemed to want
to build on Hannah’s comment but stopped short of doing so. The difficulty for teachers not to react evaluatively is quite reasonable. They are in a profession that expects this kind of response especially when numbers, rubrics, and letter grades are attached to student output at almost every turn. However, I also wondered again how natural this is for humans in general. How often do we evaluate the service at a restaurant, basing the tip on that service; or, a neighborhood, before we decide to move there? This comes quite quickly for most and protocols are designed to slow this inclination. Therefore, Delaine’s analysis helped the group practice this important skill and gain more ease with the use of protocols.

Finally, as a facilitator, this first attempt was good for me. I mentioned writing about my own frustrations with the group after the meeting when they voiced their belief that children are unable to detect differences or perceive race. Their perceptions were contrary to mine. I also was quick to evaluate. This session showed me that I was there to learn alongside my colleagues and that my reflections afterwards helped me consider what should happen in the following sessions.

The next chapter will serve somewhat as an interlude. I will describe some moments in my work with the third graders in the literature circle. As I have mentioned before, it was paramount in my view to do the work with children in order to be true to the practitioner inquiry stance that I wanted the teacher inquiry group to take. I wanted to be prepared as well with puzzling moments in case the group was not able or willing to produce their own to analyze. As it turned out, the teachers were quite willing to produce
their own moments. What I offer in the next section is my own interpretation of the children’s words and work while utilizing a borderlands framework to help me.
Chapter NINE

The Literature Circle

“For me, the person I was becoming when we left was erased, and another one was created.”

Esmeralda Santiago

When I Was Puerto Rican

Esperanza Rising

As I discussed in chapter 4, it was important for me to remain meaningfully connected to the school while I was conducting my research and gathering data. A fundamental component of doing inquiry is the willingness to learn. I could only do this if I engaged with the work of schools directly. Working with students as part of my day not only helped me to accomplish this, but it also linked me to some of the work the teachers were doing in their classrooms. It also helped me to analyze “puzzling moments” that I thought might be useful for topics of inquiry in the teacher group. As it turned out, the teachers had sufficient material to work with.

Much as I did with the transcripts for the teacher group sessions, I used my dissertation questions as a guide for analyzing the students’ words. I looked for and coded how I constructed the literature group in relation to the children’s family and community not only as a context for what we were reading, but also how family and community were seen as resource. I looked for the multiple communities the children inhabit and how these communities inform their reading of the text. Finally, I looked for how our literature circle became a community that helped us encounter difficult and puzzling issues. While I attempt to make sense of the following interactions using these
themes as containers, all three themes ultimately blended together, illustrating the complexity of issues the children grappled with. I don’t claim to have a complete understanding of everything the children said in the excerpts that will follow, but using the borderlands as a conceptual framework, as well as my research questions, I was able to think about these interactions in interesting ways. Since the pattern of speech for a group of children is different than those of a group of adults (children are less conscious about the pragmatics of speech than adults), I chose to transcribe whole sections of conversations and number each line for easy reference. Lines in brackets denote overlapping speech.

The book that I chose was *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Munoz. It was a book I was exposed to for the first time when I was invited to join the teaching team with Gerald Campano and other doctoral students for a graduate course my first year in the RWL program. I mention this anecdote briefly because *Esperanza Rising* joins *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* as a text that was not only new to me, but helped to validate my experience as a Mexican-American within the context of a university setting. This coming of age novel centers around a young girl named Esperanza who must leave her privileged family behind in Mexico in order to escape the malevolent intentions of greedy family members. As she travels through Mexico and finally crosses into the United States, Esperanza and her mother discover themselves and strengthen their relationship. I consider this book one of those rare finds that allow children to tap into their identities while experiencing a riveting storyline, the way good literature should read.
Most education websites would place this book appropriate for upper elementary level students. I was confident that given the make-up of the students who would be participating, the book would be well within their reach.

“Family is importanter than money” - Multiple Communities the Children Inhabit

From the first day, the children approached the book as if watching a telenovela, an extremely popular genre of television. Some studies have suggested that telenovelas have served as a venue for maintaining aspects of Latinx culture and a form of resisting mainstream culture (Rios, 2003). Medina and Costa (2013) looked at how the power of globalization is reinforced in telenovelas and how one third-grade class made meaning of telenovelas as performed spaces. Repositioning children as authors and producers of telenovelas, Medina, Costa, and Soto (2017) argue that this media genre is but one example of disrupting normalized ways of doing literacy. It is a transgressive and agentic act for children whose cultural backgrounds harbor colonized legacies.

My notes at the time indicate that the children were either watching or quite aware of popular telenovelas such as “Amor De Barrio,” “Los Ricos No Piden Permiso,” “Tres Veces Amor,” and “Vino el Amor.” I myself have been an occasional fan and come from a family tradition of avid telenovela fandom. No weekly phone call from my mother back in El Paso is complete without the latest update on her telenovela viewership.

In this section of the novel, after Esperanza’s father was killed by bandits, her cruel uncle proposes to her mother: “I have come to give you another chance. If you
reconsider my proposal, I will give you a bigger, more beautiful house and I will replant everything” (2001, p. 48).

1 Jose: Oh, when he asked, would you, when he asked if Ramona
2 wouldn’t marry him. So I was right!
3 Robert: So he said, ‘If you will think about marrying me again.’ What will
4 he do for her?
5 Jose: I was right. She, he will build a other house like I said. My
6 hypotheses is right!
7 Jameer: I hate you <in jest, for getting his prediction right>
8 Robert: Now let’s see what happens. Do you think that Ramona, mama, is
9 going to have the same answer, refuse?
10 Jose: No!
11 Jameer: No.
12 Emilio: Yes!
13 Manuel: Yes
14 Robert: Do you think she is going to accept this time?
15 Jameer: No
16 Emilio: No!
17 Jose: Maybe, maybe not.
18 Robert: Well, you’ve got to choose something.
19 Teresa: Yes. No
20 Jose: Uh . . . What would be worse? Be poor or marry him?
Robert: That’s a good question.

<audible pause>

Manuel: Marrying him.

Teresa: Marrying him.

Emilio: Marrying him.

Robert: So, you would rather be poor than marry him?

Jose: Yes!

Jameer: I’d rather be rich.

Manuel: Well, we’re not a girl so we can’t marry him.

Jose: Ha! He would do everything for rich. I wouldn’t. Life is more than money.

Robert: Let’s see what happens.

Jose: It’s what I always say.

Robert: <I continue reading from this point in the text. I was not paying attention to Jose at this time. I only heard his reference to family after listening to recording>

Jameer: What?

Jose: Family is importanter than money.

In this excerpt, I was interested in two things. First, the sense of drama with which Jose met the opening chapters of the book. It reminded me of the melodramatic way telenovelas are produced and with which they are viewed. There was a performance aspect to his reading of the book. The other children in the group read the book this way,
too (audible gasps, heated debates, and eager anticipation). This made me wonder about the ways traditional texts are typically presented in classrooms—more as pieces to be deconstructed, analyzed, and responded to with text-dependent comprehension questions. Rather, I found that the students were more engaged with the emotions of the story and the dramas that precipitated them. They were far more comfortable with ambiguities in the story than I was as a teacher. For example, when I raise the question about whether or not Ramona would accept the marriage proposal from Tio Marco or not (line 12), I go on to insist that the children make a choice, essentially between two binaries (line 16). I find it interesting that Jose and Teresa’s responses (“Maybe, maybe not” “Yes. No.”) sandwich my insistence, almost as if to challenge my thinking and reclaim an ambiguous middle space that is far more complicated to investigate than I was ready to do in that instance as a teacher.

Secondly, I was interested in the reference to family. Familismo is a well-known social science term theorized as a cultural value that emphasizes the collective and the needs of the family over the individual (Moore, 1970; Sabogal, et. al., 1987; Molina and Alcantara, 2013). For Jose, indeed, for most of the children, this connection was a theme throughout our time together. Not only was it an anchor of the novel itself, but it was the context with which the children made sense of the book. In his challenge to Jameer that life is “importanter” than money, Jose is staking an unusual claim that in my experience, I don’t hear too many 8-year olds make. We take for granted that children are seduced by the reach of material wealth, but here Jose advances the importance of family and connection in ways that I seldom have heard in a classroom setting. In fact, I did not hear
this sub-conversation between Jose and Jameer while in the heat of reading the book. It was only until after listening to the recording and transcribing the material that I took note of his passion. I am compelled to wonder just how often children either are willing or go on to engage in complex inquiry under the literal noses of their teachers. What are the spaces that our children inhabit that have yet to be explored by the teachers that engage with them? I continued to be fascinated by this question as I listened to the recordings of the children.

**Family Work - Family and Community as Resource**

The literature group also involved homework. Only, I called it “Family Work.” In my effort to construct a practice in relation to the family as a context, I assigned this family work to be completed at home jointly by the student and the parent. I was very clear that family members did not have to write anything, but instead, could engage in a conversation together. If possible, the child would write what the conversation entailed. A sample of a “Family Work” letter I would send home and a response is in Appendices E1-E3, which includes a translation. Evident in the sample is when the child wrote her thoughts prior to engaging in the conversation with her family member (darker pencil print, upper half), and when she continued her thoughts during and after a conversation (lighter pencil print, lower half).

The Family Work was turned in with varying degrees of faithfulness, but in general, responses to the Family Work was the same as I remembered it to be when I was a fourth-grade teacher several years ago. I used to incorporate a reading response journal (Calkins, 2001), but I adapted it so that I could hear from family members at different
times in the year through the journal, by way of the reading that was happening in the
students’ lives. Students found it much more engaging, and parents were more than
willing to participate in an event that was reachable and relevant to their experience (see
Appendices F1-F3, G1 & G2).

In this discussion, Teresa and Manuel, who were regular submitters of the Family
Work, discuss their experiences with it. As usual, the resulting conversation is layered in
meaning and ripe for analysis, especially using a borderland lens. As a reminder, speech
lines in brackets denotes overlapping speech.

1 Robert: So, [what I’m hearing you say is that your parents are pretty busy
2   working all the time, so when it is time for homework . . .
3 Emilio: [My real-My dad’s all the way in Harrisburg.
4 Teresa: [My mom does not work. My mom, she just like, works in the
5   house.
6 Emilio: [My real dad is in Harrisburg.
7 Robert: [Yea, cleaning house. Well, that is work, don’t you think?
8 Emilio: [My real dad is in Harrisburg
9 Teresa: Yea, that is still work. She’s like, [sometimes she feels like not
10   working, like in a real, real work.
11 Emilio: [Actually, I live with my step-dad.
12 Manuel: Is your mom that one who picks you up?
13 Emilio: [I live with my ste-, I live with my . . .
14 Teresa: [Not anymore. [Because
Robert: [But, does she gets paid for that work, that she does in the house?]

Emilio: Manuel.

Teresa: [No.]

Emilio: [You know, I live with my step-dad]

<Manuel and Emilio engage in inaudible conversation>

Robert: [Oh, she doesn’t go to other people’s houses?]

Teresa: No. It’s her own house.

Robert: Her own house, yea. While your dad goes to work?

Teresa: So, she stays in the house because=

Emilio: =I live with my step dad

Manuel: <to Emilio> Your step dad lives there?

Teresa: My mom likes doing the homework.

Robert: [She just doesn’t . . .]

Emilio: [It’s that, I live with my step-dad. My real dad, he lives in . .

Robert: Ok

Teresa: My mom likes it, but she busy too much.

Robert: How about if you asked her, if you talked to her?

Teresa: Like we don’t write, but we conversaysh, it’s still good, because we just share stuff.

There are two areas of this transcript that cause me to pause. First, I continue to be astounded by the challenge to listen broadly, as Kathy Schultz (2003) describes—to the
larger context of the students’ lives; or to what Pat Carini refers as “attentiveness to the particular” (2001). Again, only after listening and transcribing did I hear what was really going on for some of the children. Notable here is my complete disregard for Emilio’s attempts to fold into the conversation by way of his share about his living situation. He had his own borderlands to describe, his own ambiguous space, between a father in Harrisburg, who visited once in a while, and a step-father at home. This subject would come up for Emilio periodically, triggered by moments in the novel that may have related in his mind to his own life. Kathy Schultz points out that education literature foregrounds the importance of observation, and that observation can be done at a distance, but that listening requires proximity and intimacy (2003). It is not lost on me that in this intimate setting, I was challenged by taking on the “active process of listening that allows us to both maintain and cross boundaries” (2001, p. 9).

Second, I am uncomfortable when I read myself asking Teresa if her mother was being paid for the work that she did. I was eager to put a label on the kind of work that Teresa’s mother was engaged in, clearly coming out of a fixed mindset (Dwek, 2006) that saw work as either compensated or not. There was also some assumption on my part that Teresa’s mother worked as a housekeeper. Instead, I believe Teresa was negotiating middle spaces that defined work in a variety of ways. She was making meaning of the different ways work can be assigned ("she busy too much"), the range with which work is ascribed value ("Yea, that is still work. She’s like, sometimes she feels like not working, like in a real, real work"), and how it often designates an individual’s worth ("My mom does not work. My mom, she just like, works in the house").
Eventually, Esperanza and her mother find themselves in a worker’s camp in California. For the first time, Esperanza must work very hard while her mother is employed in the field. I ask what I thought was a simple question: What do you think Esperanza’s progress in the field will be like? My notes indicate “the responses started out to be half-hearted but then later became more heated and animated. I am not clear about the extent the children’s imagination is working here as they explain their home experiences” (memo, March 1, 2016):

1 Manuel: I never take care of anything. Well, I take care of my dog. [Or do I? I don’t know idea, I don’t even know. I don’t care about anything. I don’t take care of anything.

4 Emilio: [I need to clean them up when they use the bathroom, need to change their diapers.

7 Teresa: I change them clothes. Sometimes I even help my mom wash the dishes.

9 Emilio: And I wash them when my mom goes out.

10 Manuel: So you take care of the dishes.

11 Emilio: You do the dishes?


13 Robert: So you can relate a little bit to the work Esperanza has to do.

14 Teresa: [I do dishes, I do sweeping, I do mopping, I do cleaning, I do cleaning the baby’s diaper, only when they do number 1.
Emilio: [I do sweeping. I do mopping.

Emilio: I do them when they do number 1 and number 2.

Teresa: Wash their teeth at night. I put them pajamas. I put them clothes when it’s time, like, right now.

Emilio: I always have to put them milk like they’re, [when they are night, when it’s the night.

Teresa: [I need to give them milk when they’re thirsty. I have to wash the baby bottle.

I find Bakhtin’s (1982) notion of heteroglossia useful here. By line 16, Teresa’s urgency about all of the housework that needed to be done began to heighten. She was urged forward by Emilio’s own urgency of household chores that were his responsibility. They both began to mimic what they no doubt hear and see at home by their own family members. Bakhtin says that “our speech, that is, all our utterances (including our creative works), is filled with other’s words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of ‘our-own-ness’...These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate” (1986, p. 91).

**Wipe - How Our Literature Circle Became a Community**

Like the teachers of this study, our students occupy multiple communities that inform their thinking, give them meaning, and help them to make sense of their lives. We would be remiss if we ignored them just because we are entering a school building where certain rules must be followed. I join others who argue that these are valuable resources
that are often overlooked in our classrooms (Compton-Lilly, 2003; Heath, 1983; Lee, 2007; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Nieto, 1999, 2002; Strieb, 2010). One of my goals in this dissertation was to explore these communities, and while it would be folly to make sense of their deep legacies and profound meanings, it was a fascinating process wading through the messy waters.

The tremors from the discussion transcribed above continued to be felt the very next day. My notes indicate how puzzled I was that the children entered the room still discussing parts of yesterday’s themes. The care of infants was most on their minds, which is something Esperanza has to learn how to do very abruptly while she remains in the camp with the rest of the young girls. There were two stories in educator Lynne Strieb’s book, *Inviting Families into the Classroom* (2010) that have always stood out to me. The first was of a student whose father was a barber and proceeded to cut his child’s hair in the classroom so that all the children might learn about his profession. The second was her story about bringing in babies and their mothers for her students to observe. Strieb writes, “Everyone has them around—if not at home, then in the family or in the neighborhood. Being with babies is an experience we’ve all had in common regardless of culture, race, ethnicity, gender, class, or level of education. They remind us of ourselves” (p. 149). I have engaged the use of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) for the word “wipe” in the following transcription where the “Englishes,” (Kirkland, 2010) the home languages of the children begin to emerge.

1 Emilio: I took out the diaper and then I wajp it and then I waipt his bottom
2 with the wajpi, and then I threw, [and then I
Jameer: [Wajpi? You call it a wajpi?]

Wajp.

Carols: [Well that’s what they call it. That’s what they call

Emilio: [Wajpi. Same thing. Same thing, wajpi is same thing.

Jameer: It’s called wajp.

Emilio: Wajpi is same thing. It’s the same thing.

Jameer: A wajpi? Never heard of it.

Manuel: You never heard of it, seriously?

Jameer: Never heard of a wajpi.

Emilio: Teresa, have you heard have you ever hear of a wajpi?

Teresa: Ummm. My mom using their Spanish, they call them ‘wajpi.’ Um,

no, ‘waje,’ ‘wajpe.’

Jameer: ‘Wajpe’?

Manuel: <as if thinking to himself aloud, yet under his breath> wajpe, wajpe.

Wajper.

Wajpe.

Teresa: Wajpe

Emilio: I wajpt [his, the wajpi up his bottom, and then I dropped one of the

<inaudible>


Jose: Guys! The book!

Robert: So I think that Emilio brings up a really good point. You are right.
Some people would say wajpi cuz it is a Spanish language, we pronounce the ‘e’ as a ‘y’ but in English, wajp, is not pronounced at all. The ‘e’ is silent.

Jameer: Wajp

Robert: So, so you are correct and you are correct.

Manuel: [Hey!

Teresa: [But if you <inaudible> Hispanic you gotta wajp it. There’s three different, wajp, wajpi, and wajpe

Jameer: [But if it had, but if it had, but if it had no, uh, what’s it called, it if had no ‘e’ it would have been wip. If it had no ‘e’ it would have been wip.

Robert: Wip. That’s right.

Jameer: Like ‘I’m gonna wip you’ <inaudible. Makes a hand motion as if hitting something>.

Robert: So, I think you all make really good points to the pronunciation of the words.

The word “wipe” is more than just the action of cleaning after a baby’s bottom. It is also referring to the small moistened piece of cloth used to help clean after infants—to the product itself. The word is often found on the packaging of Huggies and Pamper baby products. The children in this piece are traversing cultural and linguistic borderlands (Jameer), navigating through complexities they may have never considered (Teresa and Emilio), all while making sense of the mundane (Manuel) in their own terms. Jameer, the
only African-American in the group and non-Spanish speaker, challenges the pronunciation of the word early on (line 3). He must preserve the standard English pronunciation of the word, if only because he is native to the language and the minority in the group of bilinguals. Nevertheless, he embraces the flexibility of the word’s pronunciation at the very end when he is able to transform the sound of the word to “whip” and connect it to a cultural script familiar to him (e.g., “I’m going to whip your behind”).

Teresa and Emilio seem both to take the lead in tutoring Jameer about a translanguaging (Garcia, 2014; Garcia and Kleyn, 2016, Garcia, 2017) experience. Equally important is what Garcia refers to as transculturacio, “a process in which a new reality emerges, compounded and complex; a reality that is not a mechanical agglomeration of characters, not even a mosaic, but a new phenomenon, original and independent” (2014, p. 4). Teresa thinks through variations in the pronunciation of the word as she has experienced them in her home life (line 12). A young embodiment of the “new mestiza” (Anzaldúa, 1987/1999), Teresa articulates the Spanglishes (Stavans, 2004; Martinez, 2010; Morales, 2002) emerging from the borderlands while Emilio experiments with hybrid grammatical forms. In line 16 he “wiped” using the “Wipe” before (presumably) throwing away one of the “wipes.”

Finally, in what seems to be solitary contemplation, Manuel plays with the word in his mind and with his voice (lines 14 and 17). Again, the power of recording is salient here as this was not my focus at this moment in time. Listening to the recording reveals Manuel in the background sifting through a wide range of possible pronunciations and
handling of the word—a word trademarked and capitalized upon by a major American
corporation, but for one bilingual child a word that provides a brief opportunity for
personal manipulation, creativity, and play. This in my view is Anzaldúa’s “Nepantla” in
joyful action—that space “where you are not this or that but where you are changing”
(1987/1999, p. 237). And in this ambiguous space, the children have formed a
community of readers, of learners, and experimenters. As a community, the children
begin to see (in their own terms) that language is not a separable unit (Blackledge and
Crees, 2014) but is manipulatable, where “the words of a language belong to nobody”
(Bahktin, 1986, p. 88). The Saint Lucien poet Derek Walcott seems to echo Bahktin when
he declares that “the English language is nobody’s special property. It is the property of
the imagination. It is the property of the language itself.”

Conclusion

Had I had the opportunity to do so, I would have wanted to present the urgency of
performing chores at home that I heard in Teresa’s voice. This was my puzzling moment.
I would have wanted to present to the inquiry group the transcription and I would have
been very interested in hearing their take on it. What do they make about the students’
urgency about chores and housework? How are we relating anything that we do in the
classroom to their real experiences at home? Since this conversation seemed to continue
the next day, what literacy events would you capitalize on to take advantage of this
energy and connection?

My work with the third graders during my data collection was incredibly
enjoyable. I had the luxury of spending so much quality time with them while reading
and discussing an excellent work of fiction. They were also (admittedly) a small set of students. This is a much easier size to engage conversationally. This is not the norm for a teacher facing close to 30 students daily. However, one of the powers of an inquiry community is its re-energizing quality. The teachers discovered that the inquiry group was a place to “re-see” (Carini, 2001) students in ways they may not have thought about. In the next chapter, two different inquiry group teachers follow Delaine’s lead and present their own “puzzling moment.”
Chapter TEN

Looking at Student Work - The Superheroes

“Everyone is necessarily the hero of his own life story.”

John Barth

Another puzzling moment

Another piece of reading that participants of the Philadelphia Writing Project’s Invitational Summer Institute have been exposed to is a short excerpt from Margaret J. Wheatley’s 2002 book, *Turning to one another: Simple conversations to restore hope to the future*. In “Willing to be Disturbed,” Wheatley lyrically suggests that restoring hope can only come from challenges that stir and rattle the core of our belief systems. “We have to be willing to let go of our certainty and expect ourselves to be confused for a time” (p. 38). This was exceptionally the case when the inquiry looked at another example of student work.

Once again, I was prepared with my own “puzzling moment.” If, after our journal time, no one had their own classroom experience to share, I would be prepared with one from the *Esperanza Rising* literature circle. In fact, the agenda indicated quite explicitly that I would be sharing a puzzling moment. To my surprise, Maria and Betty both decided to present work they were doing with Maria’s second-graders. I proposed remaining with Chicago’s Whittier Inquiry Group protocol outlined in Ballenger (2009) as we did the month prior to guide us through the analysis. In reading through the transcripts of this meeting, the facility with which the group followed the protocol is
clear, even if it was only the second time it was utilized. Rather than explicitly
delineating each part of the protocol step by step as I did in Chapter 8, I will instead
narrate the events as they unfolded.

The “clearing”

By March, instead of beginning each meeting with a check in, we began using a
process called a “clearing.” For the first 10 minutes, teachers could talk about what they
wanted keeping the following guidelines in mind:

- Nothing is irrelevant
- Only speak twice if everyone else has already spoken
- No dialogue
- Silence is OK

The “clearing” was an opening Delaine said was used at her church at the
beginning of meetings and other services. It was brought into our inquiry group.

It was May 4 and the arduous chore of PSSA testing was over, but the unrelenting
weight of teaching in a stressful environment like Crawford was still present. During the
“clearing,” Edwina shared overhearing a Kindergartener discussing with his little friend
the recent return of his father from jail, the break up that ensued between his father and
mother when the father learned that mother was “messing around” during his jail time,
and their recent reunion now in the same house and the fact they are back to doing the
“yucky stuff” together.

It was “Turn off the TV” week at the school, an annual event that encourages
children to play outside and take part in physical activity. Often, city officials take part in
some of the activities. During one of these school-wide events where students and teachers gather at various corners to promote walking or biking to school, Hannah told of being with a group of third and fourth-graders when a smartly dressed woman approached them. Hannah introduced her by saying “she works for the mayor.” When Hannah suggested out loud to the official that the mayor increase funding to schools for librarians, one of the girls remarked, “maybe we can get some money so that we don’t have to live in the shelter anymore.” According to Hannah, the city official’s demeanor changed.

Betty’s “clearing” was a little different. She related being at her weekly meeting with the School Therapeutic Service (STS) staff in her capacity as building representative. These professionals are contracted by the district from the Children’s Crisis Treatment Center to provide behavioral support for teachers and students who have been emotionally diagnosed. At this point in the year, there were a total of eight STS workers in the building with a minimum total of three children on their caseload. These workers had taken over the library as their headquarters and misunderstandings between their role and the teachers’ expectations were beginning to increase. In addition, the number of behavioral eruptions in the building seem to be taking its toll as more of these students were being moved out of a self-contained emotional support room and integrated into the general population.

A close look

“So, we brought stuff.” These were the words that opened the end of the journal-writing portion of our meeting (we had completed the “clearing” and a status update on
the School Advisory Council), and began our dive into student work. The excitement of this time could not be overstated after the dire remarks during the “clearing.” For me, personally, as a participant/facilitator, it was vindication that some process was at work and teachers were feeling comfortable with the group.

In fact, Betty and Maria had two “moments” in their possession, and after a quick gauge of where the group wanted to go, they chose the “moment” that, in Betty’s words, was “more of a twisted nature.”

Maria suggested Betty present. Essentially, the task was a progress monitoring one that helped Betty, when she used to be a Kindergarten teacher, assess where her students were in their writing up to a certain point. “It’s not like Kid Writing where you assist them. Its by themselves, what they can do, and then you collect it,” (inquiry group, May 4, 2016). Betty and Maria had been doing this assessment monthly since January. In this case they had created their own template: a piece of paper with three boxes aligned at the top labeled “Beginning,” “Middle” and “Ending” (the 4 pieces of student work analyzed in this session can be found in Appendices H-K). A checklist for students to use that would help them track their usage of writing conventions was also provided for them.

The topic was left open for the students. “But what we have found in the time of doing this, that what tends to happen they always write about the playground. They always want to write about the park” (inquiry group, May 4, 2016). Betty explained that she and Maria introduced variations in topics for the children like sharks, but then the children would do little to veer away from the shark topic. Betty continued to explain:
So then the last one, I had a few kids who I know they can write, but they are constantly writing about like superheroes, so, then I’m like, but it’s like the movies, like they are kind of re-creating the movie, like in their writing. So then this time I had said please don’t write about superheroes. Lets not do superheroes. Anything else, lets not do superheroes. So, I guess our puzzling moment, or what we were stuck on was that we had these four stories here, so what we got was violence (inquiry group, May 4, 2016).

Betty looked to me for guidance at this point about how to continue. I glanced down at the protocol script and merely indicated that we were at the first part where the presenting teacher is sharing the puzzling moment and student work. Betty did not share the actual physical copies of the student work with the group, but chose instead to read the writing aloud. I have chosen to transcribe the student writing as it was read by Betty during her presentation. Again, to view the actual student work, please refer to Appendices I, J, K, L. While the remaining teachers attempted to simply listen, I have chosen not to transcribe the various gasps and remarks that were uttered. Instead, I prefer to focus at this point on Betty and Maria’s words as they present the student work:

**Student writing #1:** This story is made of a movie. It’s called The Walking Dead. First, a zombie came and I shot him with a gun. Next, the police came to get him. Next, he shot me on the head. I lie in jail. Then I shot someone in the head. Last, I call my mom to pick me up. Then I kill a zombie. The end.

**Betty:** He was very proud of that writing. He really wanted to tell the story. This next one has a title at the top, ‘The Walking Dead.’

**Student writing #2:** I was playing the walking dead. My friend was the zombie and I was the human. I was shooting him a lot. Then I got out a bullets. I got in my car and went to refill my gun with bullets and killed the zombies. Then my friend Alex, he had a ax and we started killing the zombies and we won the war and we were happy and I learned never play zombie games!

**Betty:** “And that was that one. At least he had a lesson.”

**Student writing #3:** One day I was in the street shopping and I got a gun and when I came back out I saw a zombie and then I saw Chucky and then I saw Slender Man. Then I saw Jeff the Killer. Then I killed them all. Then I went home and
played video games. And then I went to bed. When I woke up I saw another monster. Then I killed the monster.

**Betty:** And then, well, this was a little different. She did clarify because I tried to get the student not to do it. This title is ‘When My Mom Died and Me.’

**Student writing #4:** Me and my mom got in the pool. I said, ‘Mom, you want to see how long I can stay under water?’ She said, ‘Yes.’ I went under water. I came back up. Her head came off. And then blood was all over. I said, ‘Mom, my hair got wet.’ I see her head came off. I jump and I die. And we died!

**Betty:** And then I said, ‘Did this story really happen?’ And she said, ‘No, I just made it up.’ So I said, ‘Do you really want to write about your mom dying?’ And she said, ‘Yes, I really want to write, it’s just pretend. It is not real.’ She wanted to write. So those were our stories.

**Maria:** But prior to this assignment, there was an assignment a few months ago. . . where Betty read from *Rumpelstiltskin* and they had to do a writing assignment to continue the story and even with that it was very violent and dark would you say? Dark. And we just let them be. But I just, it was just interesting to see how dark it is and how just, you know, a little disturbing.

**Betty:** It makes us uncomfortable.

**Maria:** To see what they’re writing and you know you want to write, you want them to be comfortable with the writing process, but at the same time, you know, what we’re seeing is just, I know it is a product of what’s happening. What they are exposed to. So yea, it is pretty crazy.

Reminding the group that the second portion of the protocol was to merely verbalize noticings without judgement, the group moved on. Betty and Maria also had to be reminded that it was their chance to simply listen and take notes. Again, I chose to write here the noticings and not the remarks that were made in between:

**Noticing #1, Delaine:** This is so hard because I feel like I know you both so well, but, um, the fear that you both must have had after you know that you taught so much quality writing to them, that all of this violent writing would come up.

**Noticing #2, Robert:** I notice, if I can use a university word, I notice ‘coda.’ In other words, you said it, a lesson in at least two of them. I learned never to play zombies, and Jeff, Slender Man, zombies, horrible awful people, I killed them all. They are evil people, I got rid of them. So I heard power. I was able to overcome this.
Noticing #3, Hannah: I thought the stories was a show. So I guess I should say my observation is that, you know it seems like they’re writing stories about what they’re watching on television.

Noticing #4, Edwina: My observation, it’s like, Maria and Betty want them to write freely, and then when they get, it seems like it’s a little disturbing, then they are trying to put parameters around their writing. You know, even before this, you know, OK, don’t write about sharks, don’t write about parks, don’t, and then this came so it’s like, I wonder if they like, ‘Oh my god, maybe we should have never told them not to write about that so we could get more of that and nor this. What did we do?’

Noticing #5, Robert: Sort of similar, I heard, attempting to give freedom, but being prescriptive anyway in the teachers.

Noticing #6, Delaine: This sounds a little weird, too, but I am going to say it anyway. She told them not to write anymore about superheroes, but they still had it in their minds. A lot of them were still the superhero.

Noticing #7, Robert: I saw order. Beginning, middle, end. Unlike Kid Writing where it is just a blank, two blank papers. I saw lines.

Noticing #8, Edwina: For second-grade, it is some nice writing.

Noticing #9, Delaine: Right, they followed instructions. A beginning, a middle, and an end.

Noticing #10, Delaine: It’s got to be disturbing, they [Betty and Maria] both got babies that age. It’s gotta be disturbing, both of them have kids that same age, and their kids ain’t <inaudible> this stuff.

Noticing #11, Edwina: Yea, wow. I wonder, like, you know, at what age do girls transition from, you know, I don’t want to say it, you know, girly girly, you know, unicorns, and rainbows, and stuff writing, to something like this.

Noticing #12, Delaine: And she gave her an out. That was puzzling to me. She gave her an out. ‘Are you sure you want to write about killing your mom?’

As the protocol moved on, it was time to ask clarifying questions. One teacher asked if, despite the content, the writing assessment met the needs of the teachers. Both Betty and Maria felt it was very useful, and that formative assessments like these have shown them both what they need to teach and where to plan ahead.
Another teacher asked if they regretted suggesting to the children that they not write about parks and sharks. Betty in particular felt that a place she would like to develop in her professional learning is how to help students choose topics. She worried that for second-graders, a long list of potential topics would be too daunting for them, but that there was also a need to help students manage their freedom of choice. Tied to this question, Delaine asked if the presenting teachers noticed an increase in the enjoyment of the writing by the students given that they were offered this freedom. Betty only spoke about one student among the four who was so obsessed with superheroes that “he would have a difficult time writing” anything else.

Finally, some wanted to know if the writing was done in small groups, where students could talk to each other. If so, could this account for why so many covered the same themes. The presenting teachers said the work was done independently. Students share their work after it is written, but given the subject matter of these pieces, they were reluctant to have the students share their work. Maria expressed particular concern about displaying the pieces. “I can’t imagine putting these up and people are like, ‘what are you teaching in that class?’”

Maria

“I’m not one to break rules” (personal communication, February 9, 2016). Maria was very clear about this as she asserted her fidelity to accomplish what is asked of her professionally from her employer, namely, the School District of Philadelphia. But just because she takes pride in her sense of responsibility, should not suggest to anyone that she is incapable of seriously and critically thinking about her job and the enormous
obligation she feels as an educator of young children. Referring to the mandated phonics program, a portion of which was analyzed by the inquiry group and discussed in chapter 8, Maria continued, “so I’m usually the one Ok, yea, I’m going to do it because this is what I’m told to do and I’m going to, you know, this is what they expect of us, but it, for me, it doesn’t seem to be working . . .” (personal communication, February 9, 2016).

In a group setting, Maria was reserved, but in a one-on-one conversation, her strong convictions were unequivocal. These polarities are seemingly mirrored in Balanced Literacy, an approach to reading and writing that found common ground between whole language and phonemic learning. Maria strongly believed in the Balanced Literacy approach when she began teaching and she voiced regret of its diminishing role in today’s prescriptive education climate. As a result, she contends that “the joy of learning, the love of reading doesn’t seem to be there anymore for them. We’re losing readers” (personal communication, February 9, 2016).

Maria also began teaching at Crawford at a time when the school was advancing its bilingual curriculum. In fact, she was part of an initial team that researched and eventually implemented a program at the school. She taught in a bilingual classroom. “We only did it up to second grade and it ended. We never really gave it a chance, you know, and I think it would have been a great program. But, nope, done, over, stopped it, and then we moved on” (personal communication, February 9, 2016). Maria continually expressed frustration with the district’s own lack of sustained fidelity with programs while she herself maintained her own.
These frustrations perhaps derived from Maria’s firm sense of herself as a teacher and her evolving sense as a mother, and her confidence that one informs the other. “I don’t stop being a mom. I come in and I am still in that mom mode. But, with more. There’s an agenda. So, I am here to make sure that, you know, they know how to respect one another” (personal communication, May 3, 2016). This agenda also includes what she calls her “investment” in the Crawford community, one which she says she feels closer identified with, as a Latina/Hispanic (she used both terms interchangeably to describe herself), and one where she also believes provides a space to make up for the disconnect she felt growing up in a predominantly Caucasian (her word) environment with few Hispanics around her.

I didn’t associate very well with my identity because there was nobody else around . . . I was back and forth. I almost lost my ability to speak the language, I was forgetting and I feel like it wasn’t until I became a teacher and I came here that I connected again to that with the kids, with the parents, with my colleagues that are Hispanic, because there was a little bit of a disconnect for me. Even though my mother always tried to keep those values and the culture, it was just, it was really difficult. I don’t want to say difficult, it’s just as a kid, there just weren’t many children that I was around growing up that were Hispanic. We always seem to be, from what I remember, in schools that were mostly Caucasian. Even when I was in middle school, again, I was the only one. So, and high school was different, high school was just all mixed, but from early on, there was a very small percentage, so, when I came to Crawford I felt like I was more connected and that was what I loved about it. My eyes opened more, I was able to practice more my language abilities, my Spanish came back, and I feel like I was more connected with the families, from different cultures, thought, different Hispanic cultures—Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, and I love that, because I don’t think I really would be able to have that opportunity elsewhere. Here, I feel like, wow, I’m able to work with families from all over. Different parts of the Latin American countries, which I thought was great. I love that, so, I don’t know, I’m grateful for being here, because of that, because I really thought that I was losing my self-identity. I know that sounds really bizarre, but, it was just, it was almost lost (personal communication, May 3, 2016).
As I see it, Maria is one example of Anzaldúa’s new mestiza, a crucial elaboration of selfhood (Ortega, 2015) and hybridity for the 21st century. She has seen this play out in her professional career. Her enthusiasm for teaching in a bilingual program was cut out from underneath her. Her belief in balanced approaches to literacy and language production for her students has had to be suspended in favor of the district’s array of scripted programs. Like her oscillation between “Hispanic” and “Latina” as a way to self-identify, Maria negotiates various polarities in her life that acknowledge the plurality of her identity and rejects the dual, hyphenated creation of a dominant culture (Lugones, 1995, p. 32). In her essay, “Writing the self: Gloria Anzaldúa, textual form and feminist epistemology” (2007) Tara Lockhart suggests that at the end of “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” Anzaldúa 5th chapter, she quietly and patiently commits to enduring and adapting to dominant ways of knowing in order to survive. Maria is equally quiet and patient as she gathers fragmented pieces of personal and professional identity to make room for diverse ways of knowing and expressing the self.

**A closer look**

Moving on to reflections and wonderments, I read directly from Ballenger (2009) and reminded the teachers that it was our time now to see the world through the child’s eyes, to share ideas of the children’s intentions, and that the term “wonderment” again meant we were entering a highly speculative space.

The presenting teachers, Betty and Maria, would simply take notes now, which they did with eager intent. As with the noticings, I chose to write the wonderments and not the remarks that were made in between:
Wonderment #1, Edwina: Well, I think that um they want to be able to achieve their writing goal in their room and I think they are finding something that probably they are seeing at home, you know. The Walking Dead movie, or another horror movie, you know, something the little girl saw, you know, someone at a pool with their head, so maybe they are seeing some scary movies and maybe trying to make sense, you know, and then writing about it, and then maybe it won’t be so scary for them. That is my take on it.

Wonderment #2, Robert: I really like that, you know, just wondering also about, not that, I don’t know either, but you know the children, and I think I am coming from the little lunch conversation I had with the kid. Coming from so much potential fear and ambiguity in life, this exercise is a way of, and writing itself is a way of making sense much like we do here in our own group.

Wonderment #3, Delaine: I was in the same thought mind. My wondering was like, did they accomplish what they needed to accomplish for that writing activity? I, you know, I think they basically did. It’s just, are we ready to accept what they’re putting on paper. And they write something that they had probably fresh in their mind, maybe, that they can write a lot about, cuz second graders think that we are constantly telling them ‘You got to write enough, write some more, write some more.’ So they were trying to write enough, too. So when they have something that they watch vividly, and it’s in their mind, a lot of time they just keep going going going and you get that.

Wonderment #4, Robert: And I don’t know about you, but I remember as a kid having death fantasies. Not fantasies, but just like, um, children I think wonder what it is like to lose a parent, and what it is like to have to go to your parent’s funeral and this sort of like being the center of attention, and, I think that that’s normal. I am not a psychologist, I think I just remember reading that. That this is sort of like part of child development. I remember wondering that as a child, personally, and again back to your, you know, point about making sense of stuff that is non-sensical, you know, well, let me kill my own mother first before someone else does. If that’s going to happen, you know, I don’t know I wish I was more up on my Freud but it sounds very psychoanalytic.

Wonderment #5, Hannah: I just think that they have such limited exposure in their lives. I know most of them stay in. I know my students stay in, ‘what did you do?’ Most of the time they stay in because it is so violent out there, and if they are watching, I mean he mentions Chucky, he mentions Slender Man, he mentions all these characters, in these scary movies that they all watch. I was cleaning my garage on Saturday, but I found some of my kid’s journals in a bucket, in a big box, and I brought them inside, ‘This is no time for reminiscing. We’re cleaning the garage!’ As I’m looking through it, I look at some of my kid’s journals, and I don’t remember what grade they are from, but it was about baseball practice, we won the game on Saturday, and so, I wonder, if they don’t have enough exposure
in their lives to things, other things in their lives that they could write about. I just remember turning that page on Saturday where one of my sons wrote about their, a baseball game they had won, he got a hit or something, I don’t know, sometimes I do blame on you know the lives the kids lead, that they are just so isolated from the rest of the world because they stay in a lot and, you know, you can’t really blame the parents, but, are they not experiencing=

Wonderment #6, Robert: =But what you call isolation, I just wonder if, again looking through the child’s eyes, making sense, and I think this has already been said, of what I know, what is my world. Somebody even said again, ‘I became the superhero.’ You know, I’m wondering if that is the turn the children were taking, and how powerful is that? I mean, how absolutely powerful, and taking something and making it your own so that you have come to terms with what you know. I don’t know=

Wonderment #7, Delaine: Like he said, we started killing and we win. You know, he knows that if everybody is dead he is the winner.

Maria and Betty shared thoughts they had derived from both the noticings and the wonderments. Maria was most impressed by Delaine’s observation that the children still identified themselves as the heroes in their own stories. She wondered out loud about the superheroes she remembered growing up like Superman or those in popular films like Star Wars, but she acknowledged that today “you have more, different types of superheroes.”

Maria found benefit in my wonderment about death and how small children process the complicated subject. Through the creation of a fictional account, Maria believed that some children regain control over something far beyond their immediate reach. Referring back to the child who remarked that her story was “fake,” Maria said, “It’s easier to deal with death of a parent if you know that the next day she is still there.”

When Edwina wondered if the children were trying to make sense of ambiguity, whether in the movies they watch or in the lives they lead, Maria began to think about one student in her room who was “going through a lot right now,” and the “therapeutic”
experience she believed writing provided for her students. Here she is explaining what happened for this child (not one of the four presented above), while she and Betty were attempting to mitigate a break down he had in the classroom. Just before Maria’s response, Delaine asked if the break down was violent:

Just, just, he couldn’t just, violently, like, because I was hitting a topic, topics that were very difficult for him. He, “I have nothing to write about.” Well, let’s go through the list. Think about a moment a good moment with your brother. “No we are not together anymore!” And I know it was tough, but the fact, he did it, he drew pictures, he didn’t want to just, “I can’t draw.” I’ll show you how to draw. He drew a picture. He did. He wrote one sentence. That is probably the most we have gotten out of him the whole year. But, that was very therapeutic (inquiry group, May 4, 2016).

According to the presenting teacher, after this episode, the child eventually turned a desk over and had to be removed from the classroom. Betty summed up this portion of the protocol best:

. . . we had like a fear of the writing. I think we did. I think we were kind of like Edwina said, ‘My god what did we just do?’ But then listening to this, I find it is their way of expressing themselves and figuring things out and at the end of the day it is what they are watching and seeing, so if I am trying to give them freedom, again, if it is a hard thing to, ultimately, I rather they write than, just as long as I don’t get fired. So it is less scary to me now (inquiry group, May 4, 2016).

In my view, the “engaged pedagogy” that bell hooks describes in *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), where education becomes the practice of freedom, and where both teachers and students are emboldened to integrate mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being, was represented in the events that took place in Maria’s classroom. What started to be a formative assessment on writing, much less a mundane lesson on the lock-step sequencing of events in a piece of fiction, became a far more holistic, far less prescribed experience that challenged the teachers’ comfort, encouraged the children’s creativity,
and nourished, however unintentional, the emotional journey of many children in that urban space.

Turning to the Borderlands, Anzaldúa says that writing for her produces anxiety, much like living in the actual Borderlands itself—“a state of psychic unrest” (1987, p. 95). In retrospect, it should be no surprise that a range of reactions occurred in that classroom on that day—from the turning over of desks, to the quiet production of puzzling pieces that disrupt what we perceive as normative practices. As for Anzaldúa, the souls of these children, and their teachers who were willing to be disturbed, were re-made through the creative act.

“It is constantly remaking and giving birth to itself through my body. It is this learning to live with la Coatlicue that transforms living in the Borderlands from a nightmare into a numinous experience. It is always a path/state to something else” (1987, p. 85).

In chapter 8, the group did not have time for the final portion of the Whittier Inquiry Group protocol. Implications for teaching and learning can easily be swept under the rug, but there were many suggestions after Maria and Betty presented, but more importantly, the energy that permeated the entire session continued through to the end. Here, I offer, in abbreviated form, the implications for teaching and learning that the teachers offered one right after the other:

**Implication #1, Edwina:** Well, thank you for sharing. I don’t have like this quality of work. Most of the students I have, I work with, are IEP students, so I thought this was really beautiful. But I do have some kids that do bring up some questions and I just hope I am open minded to <inaudible>.

**Implications #2, Robert:** . . . we talk about control a lot, of letting that go, afraid of a certain topic, afraid that it is not going my way, or the lesson plan kind of way, and this talk today, well you brought that up, Betty, especially with the fear of what was going to happen, and I think that the implication is that you sort of
have to let that go, as fearful as that is, that seems to be an implication that I take away from this.

Implications #3, Delaine: Well, I think that as far as the Kindergarten level, I’m always a lot of times fearful the same way, and I see also at your beginning, middle, and end. You even let them have the freedom to do pictures. Sometimes I see my kids doing some really outlandish pictures and I want to stop them, but in seeing this I realize too that they need to get it out. They need to have an outlet, too. I mean this picture of his is very vivid. The bullets are there, the gun, is there, you know, so, they have to, even at an early age, at the early stages when we are doing Kid Writing, I don’t get words, but I get some really vivid pictures, sometimes. So, but, you have to be able to let them have that outlet and get it out.

Implications #4, Robert: And the other implication for me is how much of our teaching has kind of made writing pleasurable and enjoyable and therapeutic, how much, I just wonder, how much of that really is a natural process for kids? But we have gotten so academic about it, you know, with punctuation, with all kinds of rules that we make. Spelling.

Implications #5, Robert: And to what extent, as you are saying that Hannah, an implication, to what extent, you use the word isolated, like our kids are, to what extent are we isolated? Like I come back here to Crawford from the green bucolic Penn campus, you can get so lost in that. I think of the GSE, and these academics writing papers, and sometimes I just want to wring their neck cuz they don’t know what it is like at Crawford. To what extent are we isolated over there? So isolation really is kind of a subjective experience.

Implications #6, Hannah: Right, right. And we always talk about background knowledge, that’s why I always say is the background knowledge we want them to have they don’t, but boy do they have a lot of background knowledge.

Implications #7, Betty: I think the other thing for me, I don’t think we really discussed it this way, but I think it, I just happened to reflect on it listening to all this, cuz there is a fear of like what’s in there, I think another thing happened, and I only realized this after, is judgment. I mean I think I’m like judging the parents for allowing this to be going on, that there’s almost like a ‘let me stop that’ but the thing is I can’t stop that and I really shouldn’t like let them watch it. If a parent is letting them watch it and they are able to do that, that’s ok in that house. That may not be OK in my house, but why should I bring that into. Cuz I think I did that. Like I didn’t realize it until now, but I definitely did that when I was freaked out and appalled, so I think it makes me think about that, too.

Implications #8, Edwina: Yea, because, I thought the opposite, I thought, ‘Wow, maybe they want to spend some, a little bit more time with the kids so they allow them to watch TV with them and watch something like this, you know . . . like
The Walking Dead and they say, ‘Oh, can we watch it with you mom, dad’ and they say, ‘Sure, come on,’ you know. I wonder.

Conclusion

When the teachers had their “clearing” on this day, I also had my own. The days I was at Crawford were ones I always looked forward to, especially working with the children. There are certain affordances one enjoys with children that a regular teacher, the stressed “lids that sit upon the emotional, intellectual, and physical pressure cookers we more commonly call classrooms” (Fecho, 2004, p. 13), could not always fully appreciate. Among these was the opportunity to have lunch with students while not worrying about preparing for the next class. I had lunch with Gregorio, a student I never worked directly with, but who asked to spend time with me. Gregorio told me about an experience he had the night before. Guns were being fired outside of his home. But according to Gregorio’s telling, he was not upset by the situation. It was a regular occurrence. In fact, he felt safe. He told me his father brought him into his bedroom where he could sleep between him and his mother. More telling for me was Gregorio’s description of the location of his home. I memoed that day:

He described his neighborhood this way: “So our house is here but behind us is the ghetto.” I asked for more clarification. “Well, what do you mean ghetto? What’s a ghetto?” And at this point he started talking in Spanish and what he said was, “It’s just a place where people do bad stuff, where they hurt each other” (memo, May 4, 2016).

I continued to wonder in my notes about the idea of sanctuary and social safety (Bloom, 1997). Gregorio, and many of the children at Crawford, would be referred by Anzaldúa as “nopal de castilla” (1987, p. 67), the defenseless cactus of the desert (which I remember eating as a child), vulnerable to attack and subject to feelings of inadequacy.
Gregorio’s family still functioned as the prototype of social safety, but if Borderland theory is to be helpful here, “coatlicue” (Anzaldúa, 1987), that momentary pause in life that allows us to find our place somewhere in the active search to make meaning out of meaninglessness, I would argue, was located within the sanctuary of Gregorio’s home, under the soft sheets, between his mother and father, where the complicated “other,” or, in Gregorio’s words, “ghetto” was someplace else, outside of sanctuary.

The teachers met my “clearing” with the same gasps, shakes of the head, and declarations of disbelief that punctuated the telling of the other clearings, or the reading of the four superhero stories by Betty and Maria’s students. I am not trying to take that away from the teachers. They are expressing their natural and human inclination to react to the extraordinary, the unusual, and the perplexing. In fact, I would argue that the absence of cynicism and their willingness to wonder, question, and be disturbed, even if only through a formalized protocol, strikes me as the essence of inquiry-based learning.

“If our solutions don’t work as well as we want them to, if our explanations of why something happened don’t feel sufficient,” Wheatley says, “it’s time to begin asking others about what they see and think (2002, p. 39). Gerald Graff (2003) talks about the “hidden intellectualism” of students whose non-academic interests are not as valorized as traditional academic study. I suggest that the careful noticings, the thoughtful questions, and the insightful wonderings posed by the teachers in this group to better understand complicated student work served a scholarly purpose.
Chapter ELEVEN

The Last Day of School

“Spring is proof that there is beauty in new beginnings.”

Matshona Dhlwayo

Planning for a culminating event

The last inquiry group meeting met June 15, 2016. In six working days, the teachers would be at that most long-awaited time of the year—the last day of school where no students would be physically present in the building. In the district, the agenda for the last staff day is seldom prescribed by central administration. The leadership of each school is free to decide how the day will proceed. While teachers are required to remain for the duration of the day, most school principals allow the staff to leave early as long as minimum requirements are met. As might be imagined, exhausted teachers typically want to begin their summer somnolence as soon as possible.

This fact was already on the minds of the inquiry group teachers nearly a month away from the last day. But before planning for what the group would do on that day could begin, there was still some processing that they had to do from the puzzling moment presented by Maria and Betty. Reading through the transcript of the meeting that occurred May 17 for a second time, I was struck by how much the teachers were unsettled by the generous read of the children’s hero stories. It was as if the stranglehold that prevented the teachers to think about the stories in imaginative and humane ways regained its strength and challenged what Pat Carini calls the “saving grace” that shields teachers from “the narrow confines of school jargon and tiny ideas” (2010, p. 59).
Countering Edwina’s suggestion for a teaching and learning implication (implication #8 in chapter 10), Dana used the word “selfish” to describe the TV watching habits of the children:

I mean, this is just an image in my head. [The parents] might only have one TV in their house, and the parent, ‘We’re watching this show and that’s it,’ so it’s the Walking Dead . . . I just thought, I saw it as being selfish, those parents are just being selfish (inquiry group, May 17, 2016).

She referred back to her own childhood and how watching “The Walking Dead” was a far cry from watching “The Crosby’s,” or paying Monopoly together as a family.

Delaine’s word was “irresponsible.” She supported Dana’s assertions by offering a separate example in the form of another television show on the FOX network called “Empire.” While the show centers on a Black family who has made it big in the world of entertainment, the rap music and graphic images rendered it unacceptable for younger viewing in her eyes, and she was unsettled by how often she heard it referenced in her Kindergarten room. “It went back to the irresponsibility piece for me, and you know, there’s so much other things I think they can watch on TV if they want to share that time with them” (inquiry group, May 4, 2016). Like Dana, she circled back to her own formative years and remembered reading the “Nancy Drew” series of books.

For Maria, it was less about relating the students’ experiences to her own former ones and more about wondering how her second-graders would make sense about a very complex show like the “Walking Dead.” “When you watch the show, it’s very dramatic, and there’s a lot going on, other than just killing zombies” (inquiry group, May 4, 2016). She wondered how her students are considering the storyline of the show before reaching sensational endings that would appeal to a child’s imagination.
Nepantla

Hannah’s responses on this particular day were the most revealing of a teacher whose time in the inquiry group offered possibilities for reframing and reconsideration of previously held deficit notions. You may remember that it was Hannah whose mainstream cultural perceptions camouflaged hidden biases. But they did not happen without considerable anguish. As Dana admonished the selfishness of parents, Hannah wondered if

maybe the parents [thought] that it’s OK that it’s just, like its nothing with sex. It’s just violence and . . . maybe they think that the violence is not that bad. I’m just saying maybe they think they wouldn’t let their kids watch. I don’t know (inquiry group, May 4, 2016)!

While not especially coherent, Hannah’s struggle is evident here. She is taking an inquiry stance, where her “knowledge of practice” (Lytle, 1999) is challenged, and she struggles to find new meaning. The pedagogic act of creating new knowledge is intimately connected to the knower, and, “although relevant to immediate situations, [is] inevitably a process of theorizing” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 133). Earlier I mentioned that Hannah admitted to not being a very self-reflective teacher, but I found that when she engaged in conversation rather than in writing, and she was very interested in the discussion that was taking place, she was in fact quite reflective. Hannah made theorized the world through relationships and her talks with the individuals in these relationships. Quiet moments in the group were difficult for her, but when she had the time to verbally articulate her thoughts, she was incredibly perceptive.
Hannah’s thinking process is unmistakable here as she discusses her role as a teacher of writing. In response to Betty’s question about what I meant when I referred to having a “resource perspective,” Hannah offered:

Well, my thought is that, and this has taken me years to realize it and lots of PDs on writing and just, digital storytelling, Kid Writing, it’s, I just think that if you let them write, what they want to write about, and you embrace it, and you take interest in it, regardless of what they write about, then, then they start liking writing. Then they are very eager to share the next piece of writing and, you know, and then they want to share the next piece of writing, and then, eventually, you know, they are writing things that . . . you know, maybe something that it does, it does, but then they learn to be good writers, but I think you just, if they are talking about crazy dead people, I think you just have to, ‘This is great,’ and ‘What happens next?’ and, I do, and ‘Your mother’s head fell off,’ and ‘what happens next?’ (inquiry group, May 4 2016).

While it is fair to say that Hannah has held a generally optimistic and resource-oriented mindset in the time that I have known her, and that the response above is typical of Hannah’s teaching orientation, she revealed her own “breakthrough” within the course of the inquiry group meetings and the continuous unfolding of her understanding of the children of Crawford. Referring back to her suggestion that the students lead isolated lives (wonderment #5 in chapter 10) Hannah revealed:

What stuck with me all night was when you had said the whole isolated thing that maybe we’re the ones that are isolated. Some of these kids are in a world where they can’t go out and play or, and I went home and I just thought about it the whole night that, you know, I’m the isolated one. You know, I don’t have to listen to parents fighting or gunshots or you know withstand abuse and you know live some of their tortured worlds. You know, I really am the isolated one . . . and we think they’re isolated because they don’t do anything, and we get to take our kids here and there and everything but, you know, it’s just what they go through, it’s just terrible (inquiry group, May 4 2016).

What is most apparent for me as I consider the events of the inquiry group, process these events, and formulate my ideas for the purposes of writing this dissertation is that learning is iterative and inconclusive. At this point in our meetings, a mere month
away from the end of the school year, one could argue that the teachers had only begun to scratch the surface about what was capable for them as a learning body. Hannah’s remarks above speak to this. More importantly, they speak to the unending opportunities that abound when teachers take an inquiry stance and when they continue to allow themselves to live in the metaphorical borderlands and the uncertainty that it represents, “where you are not this or that but where you are changing” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 237). This is “Nepantla,” the in-between state that Anzaldúa articulated. The state of existence lived by people on the borderland. A state I find teachers who take an inquiry stance occupying as they mediate what they know (“The Cosbys,” Monopoly, and Nancy Drew) and what they think they know (“The Walking Dead”). As they have conceptualized it, teachers who take an inquiry stance, as Hannah so classically illustrates, “see beyond and through the conventional labels and practices that sustain the status quo by raising difficult, sometimes unanswerable, questions about their own assumptions and practices and the assumptions and practices of their colleagues” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 151).

**Dirk**

“Then, yea, seeing your parents get into a fight out in public and stuff, I mean it’s, you know, and it goes along with the whole different society from ‘The Cosbys’ what these kids witness, you know, on a regular day” (personal communication, May 4, 2016). Dirk’s verbal contributions to the inquiry group were minimal. As the most taciturn member, it was always a pleasure to hear Dirk’s perspective on a topic or particular issue. At this inquiry group session he shared a conversation he had with a student during one
of his small groups. In this event, a child shared with him that her mother’s boyfriend had fallen off his dirt bike while riding on the street, and that a fight had ensued between the boyfriend and the culprit of the fall.

After Dirk’s telling of the story, Hannah praised the ease with which Dirk handled it as the child told it. Hannah, Betty, Dirk, and one additional teacher shared a classroom, so often Dirk would teach while one or more of the teachers were in the room. “It’s part of their daily lives,” Hannah said, “so they’re going to share it with Dirk who reacts, you know, ‘Oh, well, that’s a shame that he fell off a dirt bike.’ You know, I think it’s great that they feel comfortable enough and I think that is what makes a great teacher . . .” (inquiry group, May 4, 2016).

Indeed, the community of teachers in that classroom was an important variable for Dirk’s sense of survival in a profession where he invoked the metaphor of being in a battle where “you are under attack all the time and so you are in the fox hole with these other teachers,” (personal communication, February 23, 2016). As a special education teacher, he was able to relate several run-ins with irritable parents, obscure lawyers, and learning support compliance monitors all of which contributed to an additional layer of stress.

An anthropology major in college, Dirk often thought widely about universal human experiences. For instance, he connected his ideas about the importance of a teaching community in a stressful location to the multilayered communities he could identify in his students:

The [students] that are not blood related like how we consider in mainstream America, American society, they still say, ‘Well, that’s my
cousin,’ and which is like a big part of a traditional society, too. You know, modern anthropologist say all that’s a fictitious relationship or something. It’s real to them, so you have a total cultural judgment and a value to say that’s like a fictitious relationship I think some anthropologists say, so yea, so you’ve got that really great sense of community in a neighborhood like this where you have so many problems with poverty and violence and all the terrible things you hear about and all these realities of everyday life. They do have that good sense of community. I never had that (personal communication, February 23, 2016).

By his own account, Dirk’s family of origin was small. Dirk also lived close enough to the school to walk, so he was appreciative of the communities he saw in the neighborhoods as he traveled to and from work. “So, that’s really neat. You see, you got the whole community of a neighborhood overlapping.” But when it came to his own teaching practice, he was unable to find ways to overlap his love of science fiction, horror films, and comic books into the curriculum he taught. Once, in the last 15 minutes of class time, Dirk noticed his students drawing pictures of animatronics from the popular video game “Five Nights and Freddy’s.” Rather than being offended, he was intrigued, and shared with me that he loved introducing his students to characters their generation may not have heard of like Godzilla. I asked him if he ever thought about bringing that in for official instructional purposes:

Dirk: I don’t think so. Not really. Not that I can really recall.

Robert: Do you think it’s possible?

Dirk: Oh, sure, yea.

Robert: And so why haven’t you done it?
Dirk: Yea, that’s a good question. I just never thought of it really. I guess maybe I compartmentalize things in my mind when it’s I get students in their free time, then I feel maybe, I, you know, since it’s not business, I feel like we can talk about that and then maybe just when we’re doing instruction, that part of my brain turns off. Maybe something like that, because I just never think of it when we’re doing, you know, I could say, you know, write a story about Godzilla vs. King Kong, or something, but I never do. It’s not a bad idea, to do stuff like that (personal communication, February 23, 2016).

To some degree, Dirk’s resistance to adapting the curriculum more suited to his students’ needs and interests mirror Maria’s own reluctance not to “break rules.” He also exhibited the same quiet resolve and patience as Maria and Anzaldua at the end of “How to Tame a Wild Tongue.” Additionally, there is a “committed ferocity” (Lockhart, 2007) present in all three. It is a disheartening that the profession loses teachers like Dirk who seldom have spaces like the inquiry group to share what they know, contribute to a collective, and extend their own personal knowledge.

**Curriculum as window and mirror**

The last read the group did together was another Philadelphia Writing Project favorite, “Curriculum as Window and Mirror” by Emily Style (1988). It was a way to “prime the pump” before the teachers began thinking about how we would end the school year with the rest of the staff. In keeping with the spirit of the piece, different parts resonated for different people. Dana summed up for everyone when she said, “I think that was a simplistic way of saying our experience will shape what we see” (inquiry group, June 15, 2016).
On that last inquiry group day, we also reviewed a list of the readings, the protocols, and the activities that we utilized in the 13 months that we met. Over the course of three final sessions, for various lengths of time, the group debated a number of ideas. Perhaps the best way to organize a non-linear progression of ideas and conversations is to highlight them (paradoxically) into categories:

**Table 3:** Ideas generated by the teachers for the last day of school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idea</th>
<th>Teacher’s rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing autobiographies</td>
<td>“I just think that it was just so powerful and all the teachers have this same kind of frame of reference because we all have a Crawford autobiography because we are all Crawford teachers but there’s so many differences.” Hannah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Adding flowers to a vase symbolizing the power of community | “I don’t want to say like a commercial for what we did, but the thing about that day is it’s got to be short and sweet and to the point and we’re done.”

  “So I think it just kind of puts it like in the, brings it back to community, like the work we did, kind of the work that teachers all have done in that room anyway so it kind of is bringing them into it. But then somehow connecting it to like this group and how we would want to keep the work like going. Why the work was important and helping us think of all these different things because that is what it does, too” Betty |
| Every teacher brings in a piece of writing, an activity, etc. that students did. | “Everybody just bring a little piece of something that worked, that went wonderful with their class and just bring it and then everybody gets to see that all their work that they had done this year wasn’t in vain.” Delaine |
| How to define a puzzling moment                          | “It just made me like stop worry about this direct instruction, curriculum I have to use and just listen to”                                                                                                                                 |

130
Listen to the hero stories

“That was a great conversation.”

Delaine

Facilitating small group discussions

“along what Delaine was saying highlightable moments that had occurred in the school year for them in the small group.”

Robert

Each inquiry group member takes leads discussion at a table

“. . . you could ideally since all of us have been doing this all year each one of us could be like in a group, in a different group, and kind of lead the group, be the Robert of the group, with a guiding question or a guiding thought, but I don’t know how people would respond to that.”

Hannah

While this chart is an unfair representation of the robust conversation that occurred prior to finalizing the agenda for the actual event, it does capture some of the major strands of ideas that emanated from the group. There were concerns that kept repeating as the teachers talked about their ideas. Among these was the fact that it would be the last day of school and teachers would be “checked out.” The teachers were extremely mindful of this. They struggled over how to create the right balance between meaningful work and not overly tasking the others on what should be a relaxed environment. As indicated in the chart above, Betty used the word “commercial” several times as a way to think about this time:

. . . we’re hoping to have something similar next year. Obviously it’s going to change, but it will be a way to encourage people to do that and like they have to see that people care about it and the thing is it seems to be a common thing they all talk about that we feel that this isn’t a lot of work to us. I don’t feel tired when I leave here like everything else I do in this building where I feel depressed and tired and like ‘Oh, my god’ like that’s the opposite for this. Maybe people want to
be involved in something that rejuvenates them and actually makes them feel good about what they do. I think that’s what you have to communicate (inquiry group, June 15, 2016).

There were political concerns as well. For instance, the inquiry group teachers often talked about top-down meetings that were unilateral in their orientation. Once it was determined that small group discussions would be the best way to facilitate “entering the conversation” (Rose, 1989), the inquiry group worried that the teachers who normally sit with each other would remain in their groups. It was decided that we would ask teachers on this day to find a seat so that each grade would be represented at the table. Considering some of the entrenched cliques that had formed over the years within a veteran staff, the inquiry group teachers did not take this decision lightly either. This decision was influenced by another factor besides Crawford’s history of top-down meetings. At the Parent Cafe discussed in Betty’s vignette in chapter 10, few rules were implemented. There were two, however. Anyone in the room had to participate in the discussions (no casual observers); and, you were strongly encouraged to reach out to people you did not know. While I was at Crawford collecting my data for this dissertation, I attended a Parent Cafe meeting and this was my experience. Betty also shared with the group that at every meeting there were pre-set guiding questions for the people at the table to explore together, “and it was fascinating to hear what people thought of the questions that were on the table” (Betty, inquiry group, May 31, 2016). One of the loveliest ideas in my mind is that the methodology of a community-based group informed the format of this teacher activity.
The last day of school

My notes at the end of the day began this way:

The day started off as a surprise. We were expecting to meet in the library, but true to Crawford form, a late minute email sent by [the school-based teacher leader] was that we were not to use it since it would be cleaned. We should use the smaller Art Room instead. After having set up the library, we quickly set up the Art Room. That was fine—until the deluge arrived. Noon-time aids and classroom assistants were also present and that caused a significant change in our groupings. Nonetheless, we carried on. Betty was fabulous about quickly adding names to the chart paper as these individuals arrived to sit. Mood was already giddy as it was, after all, the last day of school (memo, June 23, 2016).

The inquiry group ultimately decided not to host a breakfast that day as Dana had begun doing periodically throughout the year since the inquiry group began meeting. Instead, the group collected money to buy candy for the tables and the bouquet of flowers that would be used for the flower vase activity at the end. Ultimately, 45 minutes was set aside for the group’s work with the staff. While a written agenda was not handed out to the staff, the inquiry group teachers had a facilitator’s script (see Appendix L). The basic plan for the day, while straightforward, belies the work involved to reach this point:

• Introduction
• What the Inquiry Group means to us
• Looking at student work in small groups - Puzzling Moment
• Debrief
• Conclusion - Flower vase activity

After a brief overview of what the inquiry group was about and how it came to be, the teachers elected to each take a brief turn to describe what the group meant for them. This came after a conversation about how other teachers might have perceived our meetings throughout the course of the school year. In their own words, the teachers
wanted to convey their personal feelings, however briefly, about the time that was spent together. It was a chance for each teacher to highlight her own personality (note Dirk’s reference to the inquiry group as “the Inquisition group”).

Betty then lead to the beginning of the small group conversations. She gave a very brief overview of the writing assignment that produced the pieces. Dana followed by explaining to the teachers that they had 10 minutes to review the student work and to use the questions at their tables to guide their discussions (see Appendix M). Not only were these questions inspired by the work in the Parent Cafe, but the group really deliberated about how they would convey the essence of the protocol experiences that helped to comprise the fabric of the inquiry group meetings. In Delaine’s unique style she enjoined that “we want them to see how we became this focused group, and that we weren’t just sitting up here just chit chatting and eating fruit. We were like really diving in” (inquiry group, June 15, 2016).

Maria would then lead a debrief of the process and the observations that the teachers had about the student work (more to follow in the next section). This would be followed by the flower vase activity lead by Dirk. Betty had seen this done before and suggested it would be a wonderful way to represent the power of community. We brainstormed a list of events or activities that marked certain moments in the course of the school year for which a wide range of teachers and staff members would have had a part. When the event was called (the full list is on the last page of the facilitator’s script, Appendix M), anyone in the room involved in any part of its implementation would stand and a flower would be placed in the vase. By the end, a large bouquet in the front of the
The debrief

Obviously, I did not digitally record this day since I did not have permission to do so. Therefore, I am left to the notes I took immediately following the event. Like all the other teachers of the inquiry group, I was assigned to a table as a facilitator. The majority of my notes were focused on one particular teacher who seemed very annoyed by the whole process. She was extremely critical of the student work and focused exclusively on the standard conventions (or lack of) that she saw in the writing. Both Maria and Dana invited the whole staff to share out their observations. Here my notes reveal a variety of reactions:

**Teacher A:** ‘When I was a kid, we used to do <insert middle-class heteronormalized activities, like scenes from Norman Rockwell>.

**Teacher B:** ‘These images and writing are just the beginning of a larger conversation. I would expect to ask the child, ‘Tell me more about this. What is going on here?’’

**Teacher C:** Asking me directly, ‘So how are we expected to take this? That this is normal? That we are supposed to be OK with this stuff?’

**Teacher D:** Not saying much, but a look on his face that said, ‘Yea, what do you expect. It’s what the kids are living with today. It is what I experience in the behaviors of the kids as Dean of Students.’

**Teacher E:** Sentences are complete, words that had to do with horrific elements are spelled correctly, but the more conventional words are not.

**Teacher F:** After listening to Maria’s report about her insights about the writing after our discussion, ‘This is not surprising considering where we teach.’

**Teacher G:** I wonder what kids in wealthy communities write. I’ll bet they write about the same thing (memo, June 23, 2016).
Since this was the last day of school, and the very last activity before the teachers were dismissed for the year, the inquiry group was also eager to leave at the end of our combined group effort. This was also a rather bittersweet ending as Hannah had announced two months earlier that she was transferring to another school. Since we were in no position to debrief among ourselves, I later sent a questionnaire out to them with three very simple questions:

1. What sticks out for you in the conversations you heard when you were at your tables?

2. Other than the fact that [the principal] got the flowers, what surprised you from any part of our presentation?

3. Is there anything else you would like to add that was not covered above?

In general, all the teachers reported that they were surprised that the majority of the staff was able to engage in meaningful discussions as a respectful community of learners.

**Table 4:** Teacher reflections about the last day of school activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Question 1</th>
<th>Question 2</th>
<th>Question 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dirk</td>
<td>People were interested in the writing, and came up with things I would never have thought of.</td>
<td>The insightful thoughts shared by people.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>Our table had initial similar reactions to the writing as our Inquiry Group did. They were disturbed by the violent content and that kids were watching the Walking</td>
<td>I was surprised that the &quot;conversation&quot; went as well as it did! We were able to conduct a rather in depth, productive conversation with a very large group of</td>
<td>I am very happy at least one person expressed interest in joining the IG next year! Mission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dead. As the group tried to answer our guided questions, they were able to start to talk and think differently about the writing. One teacher related it to current political events—thankful for the Congressman that staged the sit in. A classroom assistant felt it was an outlet for students. It was mentioned that violence is all around us—TV shows, news, and neighborhood. Lastly, a teacher felt it was the way for the students to convey empowerment. I was surprised people stayed on task.

Delaine
I remember the judgments coming from everywhere, "who watches these kids, these are not super-heroes, What parent would let their child watch the walking dead?"

I was surprised that everyone did not complain about sitting with their comfort zone people! I was surprised at the great involvement on the last day of school.

The faces of people when Maria said "We hope others might join the group" I feel that if more people don't come on board how will we be considered for a community school under the guidelines? Our group really was a fine example...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Most people became engaged in the conversation. They were in a thoughtful discussion about the students' work.</td>
<td>The mood in the room from when people entered until we began the discussion. Upon entering I heard some negative remarks and noticed some sour puss faces. Once we got the conversation started, most participants got involved in the discussion and seemed genuinely interested in the topic. I really enjoyed the flower activity. People liked being recognized for their leadership of participation in various school wide activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>I was surprised to hear the non-shocking comments—the kids were just telling a story about a game.</td>
<td>I wasn't surprised to hear meaningful conversations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwina</td>
<td>Most of the people mentioned how well the students were writing.</td>
<td>I really liked how many of the teachers expressed how they liked this presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I can't think of anything right now!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

There was a critical moment near the ending of the May 31 inquiry group meeting when the teachers were gaining energy as they tossed about a variety of ideas for the last day of school. Several times, Delaine voiced concern about acquiring the principal’s
permission. She was concerned that in addition to the planning we were engaged in for the last day, the kinds of ideas that the group had been engaged with over the course of several months would not be heard by the principal and “officially” sanctioned by him. “If he doesn’t know we’re thinking like this,” she asked, “how can he open up as an administrator to let us have the leadership, embrace the leadership with him, to do the things that we want to do for our school?”

Before the inquiry group sessions began, I am fairly certain that Delaine’s professional self-image as a teacher leader was non-existent. This could be true for most of the teachers in the group, as well. Teacher leadership has gained greater attention in areas for many important reasons like school reform initiatives, teacher attrition concerns, and interest in educational accountability (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). In my view, these are different arenas than the one Delaine was coming from. She was drawing from the collective power of the inquiry community, and she identified herself, as part of that community, on equal footing with official leadership positions. From the margins, she found herself, along with the inquiry community, at the center. This was extraordinary to me.

Always reflective, Betty considered Delaine’s question with a response about teacher leadership. It evoked some of the multiple communities and positions she inhabits: official union building representative, inquiry group member, and teacher colleague. Here she harnesses her “literacies of teaching,” to help her find a way to interrupt traditional notions of power:

. . . through the conversations we’ve had . . . it’s not so much that I’m the building rep having a conversation with [the principal]. The bigger thing I took out of this,
because it did help shape some of those conversations and going about it, absolutely, but what it also did is, like, we work on writing in our class. So, because of the pressure of using the Progress, Common Core book and to use this, and to do this constructed response here, and do that. . . it’s very easy to move away from how I used to teach even, let alone, so, what we started doing was those monthly things that you saw me, us, bring in that we do. So, having a group like this has not, has maintained for me to be like, no, we’re going to keep doing it, Maria and I are going to keep talking about it, even if it just ends up me and her having an inquiry group next year, if nobody else wants to do it, me and her will take the time to look at it, and question it, and we’ll still talk about it, and then we’re still going to do X, Y, and Z in the classroom to have the kids talk about it, too. So, we are just taking something that, like, what if going by the wayside but now because we’re here, not because I care what [the principal] thinks about it, but because me and Maria actually think it is really valid and important for us as teachers and our students . . . It doesn’t matter what he thinks (inquiry group, May 31, 2016).

In their conceptual framework for teacher knowledge and learning Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) offer “knowledge-for-practice,” “knowledge-in-practice,” and “knowledge-of-practice” as three ways to look at teachers and the work that they do. Cochran-Smith and Lytle blur the binary image of teachers deriving their knowledge either from a body of formal knowledge, often university-sanctioned, or from the practical realities that inform the day-to-day work that teachers do. “Knowledge-of-practice” is unique in that it sets teachers upon a path, a stance, of deliberation and systematic inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2009). Through time and the discourse that would foster critical conversation, collaborative analysis, and open interpretation in order to generate new questions and ways of thinking, the frame of “knowledge-of-practice” is a generative one that expands the notion of practice “connected to more democratic schooling and to the formation of a more just society” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 294). I believe that the teachers in the inquiry group at Crawford
discovered agency within the community as they took more ownership of their practice and their leadership stance in the wider school community.

When Dan Lortie wrote *Schoolteacher* in 1975, he advanced the notion for professional communities as a way to help teachers grow professionally. Since then there has been substantial documentation of practitioners coming together to look at their practice jointly through reading, writing and oral inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992, 1993, 2009; Lytle, 2006). Central to the idea of practitioner research is that practitioners are “legitimate knowers and knowledge generators, not just implementers of others’ knowledge” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 89). Betty articulated this clearly as she challenged decontextualized programs like the Common Core Progress program the teachers were required to follow. The community of teachers forwarded their own knowledge and collective thinking with the whole staff on that last day. They realized they were taking many risks doing so. This kind of stance is undoubtedly respectful of teachers and bound to nourish the continued professional development and sustainability of teachers. Communities of inquiry offer teachers a sense of connection in a lonely profession and renew teachers by providing a place for intellectual growth and engagement (Weinbaum, 2004).

Inquiry community holds much promise for discovery of how families of urban children might be regarded more as resources and less as problems to tolerate. To understand how teaching and learning is both affected by and affects the families that schools serve and the communities in which they are nestled, inquiry communities offer a place where teachers can begin to consider the reciprocal impact of their roles on one
another. Without a purposeful and respectful place to think about families and their communities, teacher and school talk can sometimes descend into blame games, unfair labeling, and innuendo. These familiar tropes were echoed when the staff as a whole came together to look at the student work (recall my notes above on Teachers A, C, D, E, and F).

But this was not consistent throughout. Teacher B above, who charged the staff to consider the images and writing as simply the beginning of a larger conversation is an invitation to official leaders and policymakers to provide the spaces or at least the encouragement for teachers to gather in the spirit of inquiry. As teachers continue to be faced by a stream of mandates and policy changes, an opportunity to discuss these reforms in light of the families and communities they serve is greatly informed and enhanced by inquiry (Weinbaum, 2004). It is an opportunity to look closely and “re-see” (Carini, 2001) not only student work, but also the families and contexts from which they derive. “Cliché and generalization obscure the particular, depriving the local, the immediate of its power. This is not without consequence, for it is the particular’s sensuous resonance with body and soul and the feelings that resonance stirs that jar complacency” (Carini, 2010, p. 36).
Chapter TWELVE

Facilitation

“The important and difficult job is never to find the right answer, it is to find the right question.”

Peter Drucker

Edwina

Edwina spoke earnestly, and often emotionally, about many of her struggles. Whether it was the inquiry group meetings, our interviews together, or during casual conversations, the time I spent with Edwina, during the course of this data collection period, caused me many moments of reflection. The following note exemplifies the self-doubt that riddled me during this period, and quite frankly has not gone away:

I interviewed [Edwina] today. What came out of that experience for me is the emotion that is present for the teachers. I don’t know that I was prepared for this. Am I equipped and capable of handling the emotions that have come out of these sessions? Is this what the IRB takes care to check for when it asks questions about whether the research would be hurtful or in any way inconvenience the participants? While I think in general, the teachers enjoy the process and the group, I worry that I am setting up unintended expectations (memo, January 27, 206).

In chapter 5, I wrote about Edwina’s autobiographical share when she departed for the Middle East after 9/11, serving as a captain in the US Army reserve. I count Edwina, along with Delaine, as one of the first teachers I grew to know when I arrived at Crawford at that time. While I was teaching at Crawford I got to hear many of her stories, including one she surfaced again during our interview about growing up in a section of Philadelphia where racial tensions were high. While walking to school, boys on the roof...
of a home used to throw stones at her and her friends as they delivered racial taunts. This story is still difficult for Edwina to retell.

Nieto (2003) refers to the anthropologist Mildred Dickeman who contends that when teachers recognize their “forgotten, repressed, or ignored” experiences they can begin to understand the students they teach. Edwina had just come out of a very trying experience as the special education liaison for several years. In that role, Edwina would have handled a growing caseload of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for students designated as requiring additional learning support. She often was at the center of many interactions with irate and demanding parents and lawyers that placed her in incredibly uncomfortable positions, where “... more and more parents are demanding. They come at your face and [say] ‘I want an IEP’ and like do they really understand, grasp the concept of what that entails?” (Edwina, personal communication, June 6, 2016).

She also talked about feeling marginalized in the school where her needs came second, “I think, um, to be taken as a teacher. I don’t know. Some, I feel some regular ed. teachers feel that special ed. teachers are not teachers to those of the regular classroom teachers” (personal communication, January 27, 2016).

Now, she was enjoying her time as a teacher, able to work in small groups with some of the most vulnerable children at the school. Yet, even in this happier space, Edwina, like all teachers, still grappled with personal values and experiences that either got in the way of or enhanced her work with students (Nieto, 2003):

I don’t make a big deal with pencils, notebooks, folders, you know, why? Ok, the parent didn’t give a folder, they didn’t get them notebooks, they didn’t get them pencils. Ok, I got it, I can give it to them. Ok, so, they got a new tattoo. I can’t let that affect me. Because I see them. Ok they got another piercing. That’s what they rather spend money
on. Ok, you know, I’m still not going to treat their kid differently. You know. I’m not going to hold it against them. Which I feel some people do (personal communication, January 27, 2016).

Similar to all the teachers included in this study, I could have written an entire dissertation about Edwina’s literacies of teaching. She had many stories about her service as a reservist in the United States Army and her time in the Middle East that did not make it into this dissertation. I wondered how Anzaldúa’s “la facultad,” her notion of agency and competency, worked into Edwina’s life. For instance, Edwina had to transition from Captain Edwina, the reservist officer who slept with a loaded firearm under her bedding each night while in Qatar, to teacher Edwina who learned to teach in crowded hallways and the dark basement of an old urban elementary school building. What were the affordances of “la facultad,” a resource that uses pain to develop personal acuity, for Edwina and her life as a teacher? Aurora Chang believed it was “la facultad” that helped the multiracial college students she studied in her ethnography (cited in chapter 2) navigate ambiguous and sometimes painful spaces. Anzaldúa nevertheless believed that something very basic is lost as “la facultad” is developed within a person’s psyche. “We lose something in this mode of initiation, something is taken from us: our innocence, our knowing ways, our safe and easy ignorance” (1987, p. 61). Edwina’s often emotional telling of stories and experiences during our inquiry group time was often a gateway for others in the telling of their own stories.

**The practitioner researcher**

Edwina’s vignette above is a fitting beginning to this chapter where I want to discuss some of my interactions with the inquiry group as an uncertain facilitator. I will
return to Edwina at the conclusion of this chapter. At no time in the 14 sessions was I completely at ease with what I was doing. As noted earlier, for each session I was prepared with an agenda, the readings (if any) we would engage with, and any other material that we would need. But because one of the methodologies in which I place this project is participatory action research (McIntyre, 2008), I was fully aware that one contribution of PAR is that it allows participants to insert themselves into the research process (Freire, 1970). I am not clear if this was always the case. Therefore, like Kathleen Riley in her group of teachers (2015), I was the leader of the Crawford inquiry community and considered myself a practitioner researcher within the group, learning (and stumbling) alongside my colleagues. A memo I wrote in the early morning of April 19, 2016 captures my trepidations:

I find that even as much as I prepare for each inquiry group meeting, I still feel woefully unprepared. Questions like, “Do I know what I am doing?” “How will I sound leading the group today?” The old imposter syndrome: “When will they discover I have no idea what I am talking about?”

For today, I am struggling about how to present a “puzzling moment.” I am almost certain that the group, even though I intend on giving them time to journal about a puzzling moment, will not come up with any. They have been immersed in PSSA testing since last week. I could be wrong and later chide myself for not giving the teachers the benefit of the doubt. However, I am prepared to share a “puzzling moment.”

I thought I would use a Descriptive Review process from Pat Carini, and I combed through the literature I had here at home. I have been to a few descriptive reviews in my time, but not enough to be as good or competent in chairing one as I have seen, for instance, Mary Wise do during Summer Institute time, or the few times I have been to Philadelphia Teachers Learning Collaborative.

Then, I said to myself, ‘Robert, just stick to what you know.’ We explored several pages of Ballenger’s book last time. Why not do what she did, whatever that was? I looked through the book and in her chapter entitled, “Making the Familiar Strange,” pp. 80-85, she describes two processes—the Chèche Konnen Center (CKC) and the Whittier Inquiry Group: Protocols for Group Talk. I think we will
use the latter today. I wish I would have reminded the group members to bring along their copies of the book. Maybe I will make copies of the section.

I think, bottom line, this morning, the take home message is that I need to “be a teacher,” learn “alongside” my group, and freely admit, I don’t know exactly what I am doing, but let’s explore together.

Ugh! This is harder than it sounds. It is this whole issue of control, sounding academic, being prepared to write a dissertation, and overall feeling competent that is most making me feel uneasy (memo, April 19, 2016).

What came out of the inquiry group meeting that day was what was already discussed in chapter 8. Tanya puzzled over her students’ inability to identify a boy on a wheelchair and the group limped through the Whittier protocol for the first time.

In a delightful essay entitled “The Outsider” (2018) philosopher Amy Olberding likened her farm and the paraphernalia that comes along with rural living as ways that have helped her engage in what she calls the “sterile world of academe.” The reuse of items found abundantly on farms like salvaged telephone or appliance wire repurposed for crucial uses like securing a muffler to a pickup truck, or providing caging for a sapling fruit tree to protect it from ravenous deer, helped her vitalize the “mental habits that are at odds with the orderly practices of academe” (Olberding, 2018). There were many moments in my work with the teacher inquiry group that I needed simply to gather what I already knew and use it. Most of the work was planned, but much of it was keeping one step ahead of the work, always hoping that the others simply would not find out. Olberding learned to find satisfaction in getting away with things. “Impostor syndrome rides on the perception, most fundamentally, that one is getting away with something. I struggle to grasp just why this sleight-of-hand ought be counted a bad thing” (Olberding , 2018). I suppose Olberding reached a point in her academic career where she
could get away with these feelings, but at this stage, I was still palpably aware of them and ever-so vigilant about being detected.

**What are the rules?**

McIntyre (2008) says that one of the responsibilities of the practitioner of PAR is to ensure that the participants are the key decision makers. However, I was a co-participant, and like them, I brought certain skills and resources to the meetings. Some of those resources, like the protocols and the readings were highlighted in the memo above. As a co-participant, I also brought along my own humanity, my own compulsions, and my own insecurities.

By the second inquiry group, we began to start each session with what I called a check-in, a brief time when teachers were able to talk about anything they wanted to talk about. By March, we had begun to call the check-ins a “clearing” as was discussed in chapter 10 when Delaine suggested this method based on her church practices. I believe the check-ins were important as they allowed the teachers to release anything they had been holding on to during a stressful school day. Only one rule covered this portion of the day, and that was that the check-in was a time just to listen—not respond to others.

Teachers seldom followed this rule.

I would like to describe here what occurred during the check-in time of one session. A teacher began the group by sharing how one of her nine-year-old students produced a suicide note and told friends she wanted to cut her veins. I was the first to break the “no response” rule by asking how she was. Others chimed in, asking various questions.
Betty talked about her “quandary” about the state of affairs in the school library which had been overrun by staff from a local agency contracted by the school district to offer wrap-around services for students deemed most in need of school and home support. Apparently, their location in the library had caused much disruption for other teachers and staff working with teachers, and, as the union liaison, she was unsure how to deal with this. Everyone in the group was interested in this check-in as they, like most teachers in the building, had an opinion about wrap around services in a school.

I decided to share my elation at the progress I felt I was making with the literature circle I was conducting with the third graders and how “cute and sweet” they were and how they blew my mind away about some of the things they were saying. I continued, “Some of the connections they are making to the text that we’re reading, the connections across the literature that I guess the three third-grade teachers are working with them on. I just felt good about what I was hearing.”

But after my check-in, there was silence.

After this silence, another teacher checked-in by sharing her feelings when she heard over the news that a judge ordered the school district that it was compelled to hire more school counselors. (“Judge to Phila. Schools: Hire back counselors,” Katherine Graham, 02/06/2016).

“Well, we could use another one,” said one teacher.

“Wait till they appeal it,” voiced another.

There is a lot to unpack in the telling of the teachers’ check-ins in this session. To be sure, some of their concerns were grave ones and necessitated follow-up, such as the
teacher who shared her concern about the suicidal student. It was natural to want to carry the conversation forward with topics that were so salient for the teachers, as the occupation of the library, to the dismay of the whole school, by workers from an outside agency. But as important as these issues were, why was I summarily ignored? Why was I the only one who did not benefit from a follow up? A few initial ideas come to mind. First, despite the fact that I worked at Crawford for several years, I had been away for nearly four years. There was still an insider/outsider status that my presence suggested and this was not going to go away. Second, my check-in did not align with the theme of the others. I was saccharine, perhaps naively optimistic, able to remove myself from the general malaise of a school work-week in ways that the other teachers could not/did not want to do. The teachers respectfully heard me out, and were probably happy for me at some level, but they were at a point in the day and the week where alliances were what they really needed. Finally, teaching children is at the core of what teachers do. Sometimes, the center can be an uncomfortable, or an unwelcomed place to be. One had to be ready for it. I was premature taking teachers back to this center. I did not listen to the room.

**Conclusion**

The final inquiry group meeting, before the last day of school, produced a memo different from the others with regard to my feelings about facilitation. I wrote:

Our last inquiry group meeting yielded enthusiasm and cooperation for what we plan to do next week at the staff-only last day of school. Each teacher took on a role and probably for the very first time I felt I was not in charge of an aspect of the inquiry group meeting. That was encouraging (memo, June 17, 2016).
As was discussed in the previous chapter, the inquiry group had been building momentum to finally act upon the work they (we) had been accomplishing during most of the school year. The momentum was so great, it was the first time I felt completely released of any hint of an “official” role in the group.

The agenda for the May 31 inquiry group included a time for Edwina to bring up a puzzling moment she was experiencing in one of her small groups. As a result of the enthusiasm and increasing momentum of the group’s planning for the last day, we were not able to interrogate her puzzling moment. I suggested it be part of the agenda for the June 15 meeting. Again, negotiating and planning for the last day took up everyone’s time and energy and the puzzling moment was never explored. I sensed from her a hint of disappointment, and for a brief moment, some hesitancy to participate in the group’s discussion. I was deeply troubled by this.

Several years ago, I was about to begin my first large facilitation with a group of young TFA pre-service teachers with my friend and fellow PhilWP colleague Christina Puntel. She handed me a PDF entitled the “Zen of Facilitation.” The authors warn that facilitation is “not easy and that it requires tremendous dedication to practice and reflection, is not learned quickly, is continually humbling, and is fascinating” (Killion & Simmons, 1992, p. 6). I think I agree as this dissertation clearly shows my continuing evolution. This chapter attempted to illustrate some of my concerns, unexpected turns, and complications that come with facilitating an inquiry group. My experience as a Philadelphia Writing Project Summer Institute facilitator for a number of years might have rendered me an expert by this time, and given that the participating teachers of this
study were at this point long time colleagues, it could have been further assumed that this role would have been one I would have entered into with sufficient aptitude. This was not the case.

The inquiry group assembled seven veteran teachers who were closely tied together in such a way as only time could create. Casual conversations were bound to happen naturally, but the conversations that were facilitated by me, often through the use of a protocol or agenda, were opportunities for colleagues to inquire into their practice and student learning (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Lieberman & Miller, 2000). What I was also negotiating was my own learning as a teacher practitioner, as an inquiry group leader practitioner, and as a university student practitioner. These seemingly separate spheres coalesced and blurred boundaries, and rather than finding the right fix and the best outcome for each, they produced for me only more questions:

- Where should I have listened more and where could I have intervened better?
- What would I have said or done differently if I were a teacher again in that space and not a graduate student looking to complete a task? How does this matter?
- What exactly is going on here, and what are the next questions I should be asking?
Chapter THIRTEEN

A discussion of the work and the data

“I preferred the world of imagination to the death of sleep.”

Gloria Anzaldúa

The multiple frameworks of this study

As I shared at the very beginning of this dissertation, education has occupied a central role in my life. It is through the lens of a practicing teacher that I wrote the preceding chapters. In her 2003 book *What Keeps Teachers Going*, Sonia Nieto writes about teachers, and through their compelling autobiographies distills the complex interface between their personal lives and histories and the professional decision-making that brought them to teaching. This was the melody that drifted through the pages of this dissertation as you met the seven veteran teachers of the inquiry community who represented a range of specializations, ethnicities, and histories. I included myself in this list as I considered myself a practitioner researcher as well as the facilitator of the inquiry community.

To better understand what keeps teachers going I located this study within the tradition of practitioner inquiry, where practitioners, as Cochran-Smith and Lytle argue, “who are deeply engaged in the work of teaching and learning know something about that work and, collectively with one another and with others, including parents and community groups, have the capacity to generate and critique knowledge, figure out how to use (or not use) knowledge generated by others, improve practice, and enhance students’ life chances” (2009, p. 125).

Borderland theory provided another context. The borderlands are spaces where cultures coexist in the same site. In her unpublished manuscript, *Light in the Dark*, Gloria
Anzaldua writes that “the border is the locus of resistance, of rupture, of implosion and explosion, and of putting together the fragments and creating a new assemblage” (n.d., p. 49). Anzaldua’s references to ancient symbols and concepts like Coyolxauhqui, “the ancient dismembered Aztec deity who represents the psychic and creative process of tearing apart and pulling together (deconstructing/constructing),” (n.d., p. 50), provided valuable and pertinent frameworks for me to consider as I worked with the teachers and wrote this study. “Nepantla, the midway point between the conscious and the unconscious, the place where transformations are enacted, a place where we can accept contradiction and paradox” (n.d., p. 56), symbolized the powerful potential of an inquiry community where reflective practitioners enter into a state of unrest as they problematize issues and work towards transformational change.

Artwork often best represents the borderlands, its metaphoric power, and its prescience. Anzaldua herself favored the work of art by the Chilean artist Liliana Wilson entitled “El Color de la Esperanza (The Color of Hope)” that captures what she feels is Nepantla’s characteristic tension (Light in the Dark, n.d.). A modern-day youth is sleeping near the chain link fence at the U.S. - Mexico border. The youth is being watched over by ancient symbols like the sun (Tonatiuh), and the Virgen de Guadalupe. I rather prefer “Big Baby Balam,” a self-portrait of the Chicana artist Yreina Cervantez. In the self-portrait, the artist’s face is hidden behind a mask that to some represents a jaguar. Her skin is adorned with Mesoamerican iconography. The artwork to me represents the many layers of identity, which denotes the constant state of unrest that is Nepantla.
My study sees Lytle’s “literacies of teaching” as a valuable framework to consider classrooms and schools as texts with multiple possible interpretations. I would extend these texts to the personal and cultural lives that help teachers make meaning. Since I located myself as a practitioner in the inquiry community learning alongside my colleagues, it was just as important for me to think about my own literacies and use it as a context for my learning, for my way of knowing. Until about the age of 9, I grew up on a tiny, unpaved street in a subsection of El Paso, in an adobe structure where my father was born as well. It is the house that my grandparents built, literally with their own hands. Just a few feet away is the oldest mission in Texas, built by the colonized indigenous people of the area in 1682. It is the location of many marriages and baptisms (including my own) in my family. My father loves to tell the story of how high the thick rope used to carry him into the air when he would ring the church bell as an altar boy.

Just ten miles away is the Rio Grande and Mexico. Praxedis G. Guerrero is a small town in Mexico along the border founded just after the Mexicans lost the war to the United States. Mexicans who did not want to be US citizens came to towns like this along the river. My family moved here around 1910 after my grandfather’s grandfather was killed by Texas Rangers for his land. This is my personal context—a quick visual to help articulate a representation of the borderlands, its influence on my thinking, and the resonance of Anzaldua’s work to people like me, even 2,000 miles away here in Philadelphia.
I was interested in these multiple frameworks to help me understand my profession. In a spirit of inquiry, I was interested in learning more with the teachers of Crawford, a school where I worked as a teacher for many years.

**Review of the central questions and the approach to inquiry**

My first question was to explore how the teachers of Crawford construct their classroom practice in relation to the family and the community. I wanted to think about family and community as a context for learning and as a resource, as this seldom seemed to be the focus in classrooms in my experience. My second question was about the contexts teachers come from that inform who they are as individuals and teachers. I was interested in how the multiple communities and positions teachers inhabit inform their practice and influence their relationship with students, their families, and their colleagues. Finally, I wanted to explore how we, a Crawford inquiry community, novices in the formation of inquiry communities, co-create this context to problematize and investigate the way we teach and support youth and families.

Crawford, like most public schools in Philadelphia, is comprised of students from low-income households. The students are largely Latinx and African-American, with a portion of working class, non-Hispanic white children. In these settings, it is typical to see prescribed programs and decontextualized curricula that has the potential for worrisome effects on the children and their teachers. While students face schoolwork that has little connection to their home realities and community experiences, teachers increasingly feel deskill ed as professionals and have become reduced to program implementers rather than creators of robust learning experiences. Given these realities, I
submit that this study, and these questions are more important than ever, and hopefully contribute to the field of inquiry.

The connection with the existing literature

Since 1990, Cochran-Smith and Lytle have argued that what is missing from the knowledge base of teaching are the voices of the teachers themselves. They make the point that, because educational research is rarely presented to teachers as value laden and socially constructed, teachers are not encouraged to interrogate its premises and relevance for their own situations. They argue that teaching is a deliberative rather than a technical activity (2009). “Learning to struggle together” (2000) as Lieberman writes, is a common description in the literature of the process by way teachers in teacher research communities make problematic commonly held notions and assumptions about teaching and learning. Teachers “learning in the afternoon” (1994) in the Seminar in Teaching and Learning struggled with very sensitive topics ranging from race relations to gender issues to interpersonal relationships within a high school building. Through the seminar, teachers combined their individual and collaborative inquiry into their work as change agents. Their work showed new understanding of how teachers learn. The struggle to attain new learning and co-construct new meaning is reflected in the work of urban educators as seen in Duncan-Andrade (2004), Morell (2003), Riley (2015), and Waff (2009).

The literature documents the dissonance between families and schools. This dissonance is often augmented by assumptions and misunderstandings between cultural and class values that render the positions that teachers and families take as “worlds apart”
as Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1978) famously wrote. However, the literature also speaks of policies and grassroots efforts by teachers and schools that support partnerships with neighborhood groups, organizations, and families, strengthening ties with the work children do in classrooms (Heath and McLaughline, n.d.). Throughout the process, the teachers wrestled with these dual notions and struggled with what it meant for them as they engaged in discovering what it meant to be a community school.

This dissertation included many examples of how borderland theory has been used across fields as an interpretive framework. Conceptualized as “Nepantla,” an in-between space, writers and knowledge makers have used the concept as a way to describe the disruptive spaces that challenge binary thinking in favor of ambiguity. The borderlands have been used as a framework to understand everything from arts-based programming and adjudicated youth (Hardee & Reyelt, 2009); the challenges faced by first-year college composition students in Appalachia (Shepley, 2009); efforts of education professors to heighten their students’ awareness of white privilege and institutionalized racism (Hardee, et. al., 2012); and the access of science education for language minority students (Aguilar-Valdez, et.al, 2013). Anzaldúan theories challenge hegemonic structures and deficit perspectives, while underscoring reconciliation of multiple viewpoints and imaginative creativity.

**Data discussion**

The data collected for this study primarily came from the work done in the inquiry community of the Crawford school. All 14 sessions were recorded. I also interviewed each teacher individually for about 45 minutes twice during the school year. These were
also recorded. I kept a journal with me to jot down field notes and I memoed after each inquiry group session. I also memoed a great deal while I was at the school. I took care to review my notes with the teachers and member check on a periodic basis. All recordings were transcribed, often immediately after the inquiry community meetings. The transcriptions would sometimes become the text for the next inquiry community session. Transcriptions from the interview would sometimes serve as the spark for conversation in the next interview. I met 27 times with the student literature group of third graders. With parental permission, these sessions were also recorded. I talk about the collaborative analysis that took place three times during the inquiry sessions. The first time we did this teachers re-read their own autobiographies and read a partner’s. As they did, five questions guided their reading and annotation of the writing:

- Where do you see images of community?
- How is community being constructed?
- What are you seeing?
- What did you include, not include?
- What surprised you?

The second time was when we took an excerpt from an earlier meeting where the focus of discussion was the formation of a community school committee and the complex arrangements that would entail. Here, the group again focused on images of community. The third collaborative analysis was text that came from a transcription of the session where two teachers presented a puzzling moment from their classroom. The puzzling moment had to do with the four sets of writing where second-grade students wrote
curious stories that some teachers felt depicted acts of violence, disturbing fantasies, and re-enactments of popular television entertainment. The teachers annotated the inquiry conversation and reconceptualized the student work looking at community as context and resource.

As I started to sift through the rest of my transcriptions, including the ones that were collaboratively analyzed, I took on a more deductive approach, looking for words that indexed my three research questions. These included the three areas of community formation

- Community through colleagues
- Community through students and their work
- Community through family and neighborhood

Earlier this year, David Laberee used an image of writing I have frequently used myself. In a web post he wrote called “The Five Paragraph Fetish,” he said that writing is more like molding a lump of clay into unique forms rather than filing in a set of jars that are already fired. As I began to write, I knew I had a story to tell and I was less concerned about organizing my thoughts into prescribed areas and more interested in letting the themes of community that emerged from the inquiry group tell itself. With Lytle’s “literacies of teaching” and Anzaldúa’s borderlands as my frame, I hoped to find answers to my three questions. The findings of this research center on how community is formed, lived, and even imagined by the teachers of the inquiry group and the students themselves. I narrowed my findings to how building community answered these questions. For my first research question, I found that teachers need a space to consider
how their multiple memberships in communities and their various positionalities help contribute to their knowledge base. Not only do they need to be considered, but they should be acknowledged. The vignettes scattered throughout the dissertation was a device to help capture the voices of the teachers. In this respect, they functioned similarly to the testimonios in Latin American culture where personal experiences speak for larger (often marginalized) communal experiences. Ethnographer Celia Haig-Brown (2003) explains that testimonios are to inform people outside a community/country of the circumstances and conditions of people’s lives within. “The life story presented is not simply a personal matter,” she continues, “rather, it is the story of an individual who is also a part of a community. A testimonio presents the life of a person whose experiences, while unique, extend beyond her/him to represent the group of which she/he is a member” (p. 420).

What came out of the interviews with the teachers and the sharing in the inquiry sessions was that unless invited to consider how their lives and the multiple communities played significant roles in their work as educators, these factors in their lives would never have been considered or acknowledged. For example, Dana used her blog to sort through the grief of losing her mother to cancer. Later in the school year, she and I used digital story-making with her third graders as a venue for the children to tell their stories and develop their writing. Betty, a young mother, realized that her own dreams, aspirations, fears, and worries were nearly identical to those of a mother sitting across from her at the Parent Café—a woman with whom, under other circumstances, Betty never would have imagined she would have anything in common. In this excerpt, Dirk reacts to my
suggestion that he use his fascination with science fiction and vintage film as a way to work with his special education children:

Yea, that’s a good question. I just never thought of it really. I guess maybe I compartmentalize things in my mind when it’s I get students in their free time, then I feel maybe, I, you know, since it’s not business, I feel like we can talk about that and then maybe just when we’re doing instruction, that part of my brain turns off. Maybe something like that, because I just never think of it when we’re doing, you know, I could say, you know, write a story about Godzilla vs. King Kong, or something, but I never do. It’s not a bad idea, to do stuff like that (personal communication, February 23, 2016).

Dirk here seems to be waiting to be given permission to use what he knows best as a way to develop literacy work with his students in ways that would be far more appealing to his children. His “compartmentalized” mind kept him from thinking about relationships that could have informed his practice.

For my second question, in order for the co-creation of a context to do the work that the teachers ultimately did, which was to support youth and families, I found that teachers need to be able to talk about and process the stress that comes with teaching before a substantive context can be created to move forward with teaching and supporting youth and families. Otherwise, teachers go home, bottle up their emotions, or share them with willing members of their families. Delaine’s suggestion about the clearing to begin each inquiry group was not only a very good idea but it was adopted by Betty who used it to begin the start of her union meetings in the hope that doing so would lead to more productive meetings. Here, Dana feels significantly outside of a professional community when her email to the principal about a concern she had went unacknowledged:

I think you need to bring everybody in and listen to people’s ideas and listen to why they might have been feeling the way that they are feeling and collaborate and start pulling in people’s strengths and recognize that because it can’t just be,
you know, it’s a group, it’s a team effort, and then when my email wasn’t acknowledged, I just kind of felt like nobody really cares, you know (inquiry group, December 8, 2015).

Moments like this exemplified the depersonalization teachers often felt within the course of the day. But I found that when they were sensitively heard, the work of supporting children and families could be done. It was as if these stressful conditions took up valuable space in the teachers’ minds, keeping them from problematizing ways to work with the youth and families, and harnessing their valuable knowledge base.

My notes are riddled with the angst I felt throughout the year when it seemed to me like the inquiry sessions were going to be nothing but gripe sessions. These teacher lounge talks have been satirized and immortalized in popular media representations of haggard teachers smoking their stress away while exchanging war stories and one-upmanship as in the popular television animated series “The Simpsons.” In fact, images of battle were frequent as I swept through my notes. For example, in one staff meeting, the principal likened the staff’s experience to working “in the trenches.” Recall Gregorio’s description in Chapter 10 of “the ghetto” located just outside the walls of the safety of his home, where gunshots were fired. Words like “attack” and being “at war” were not necessarily common but were present. In fact, the day of the second collaborative analysis, much time was spent by the inquiry group teachers processing the events of the previous day when a popular first grade teacher was physically assaulted by a parent in the schoolyard.

Finally, for my last question, I found that when teachers have the time to talk, with careful and systematic facilitation, they can build the foundation they need to reconceptualize family and community as a context and a resource. There was one
inquiry session where I mentioned the word “resource” in the context of family and community and what it looks like in the classroom. I counted 12 times I used the word “resource” before Betty finally said the following:

I think I’m just trying to like figure out here what you keep saying about using it as a resource. And I think where I might be having some trouble is maybe I just don’t understand how to do that. Like, how are we thinking about it as a resource? What are we building from? Are we building from like the writing, the background knowledge, like, uh, I think I’m a little confused about how to make that connection (inquiry group, February 9, 2016)?

Betty’s words are representative of the disconnect between the realities of everyday classroom life in urban settings and the reframes that those outside of the day-to-day imagine the potential of classrooms to be. Again, my notes reflect the tension I had with my insider/outsider status and the struggle I found myself in as I was absorbed in the language of University while immersed in the ecology of the school.

While teachers began to recognize their literacies of teaching, they also made inroads to recognizing the “literacies of family and neighborhood.” For example, when Edwina suggested that watching the “Walking Dead” TV series could be perceived by families as quality together time, it was a reframe that considered a family context through a resource lens. Another example is a story Hannah would tell over again about her Guatemalan student whose father was detained in Texas due to his immigration status. The little boy would not talk about his father but Hannah eventually took it upon herself to connect the boy’s immigration journey through Central America, to Mexico, and into the United States as a way to learn about geography, writing, reading, art making, love, courage, and justice. The pity she initially felt for the child was turned around as a context for learning.
My findings in this area show that maintaining a resource orientation in the face of so much resistance (whether it is a school’s counter-narrative to that of the community in which it is located, cultural disconnects between middle class values and other values) is very hard work indeed. It requires a stance of inquiry that is systematic and perspectival, and it is a stance that can be maintained with the right encouragement and spirit.

Conclusion

The teachers learning in the afternoon in Lytle’s 1994 article used talk, text, and task in their inquiry community. I would argue that the Crawford teacher inquiry group used talk, text, and task to think about various iterations about community that school year. Like those teachers, the Crawford teachers used their discussions, both formal and informal, as a way to enable an oral inquiry that provided them the opportunity to experiment with ideas, and demarcate jump off points for further discussion. Crawford teachers created text in the form of autobiographies. As stated earlier, we analyzed this text collaboratively. I would argue that the transcriptions created from the talk also qualify as texts that served teachers as reflective pieces equally as powerfully as the autobiographies. Finally, the task of looking at student work through a new lens and then collectively presenting their thinking to the entire staff of the school, many of whom were unafraid to voice their skepticism of the teachers’ reframe, gave the inquiry community teachers a new sense of agency. For a brief period, on that last day of school, they held the attention of their colleagues and were creators of a professional development that began its expression through collaborative inquiry. The teachers at Crawford were not
just putting distant theory into practice but instead were engaged in Lytle’s literacies of teaching framework. The teachers’ willingness to be disturbed helped them to enter into a discussion about puzzling, even upsetting representations of student work, and engaging in challenges to personal beliefs and deeply held notions of teaching and learning. It opened a creative space that would invite new perspectives for professional growth. This is the space that Anzaldúa and others who find meaning in her work would refer to as Nepantla, the in-between space that is confusing and messy and inconclusive, but yet so filled with potential for new meaning.

One of my favorite illustrations of Nepitella is Molly Blackburn’s (2003) use of it to describe the trying space of the 23 SEPTA bus in Philadelphia that transported Black LGBT youth from the safety of the Attic Youth organization in center city to their respective homes in North Philadelphia. This middle space between two locations was filled with angst, and pain, but it was also a place where the youth learned to assert themselves when confronted with homophobic taunts. Like the journey on the 23 SEPTA for the Black youths, I suggest that the inquiry community was a journey for the teachers, similarly filled with angst, emotion, and creation.

The final chapter will describe the findings of this study and offer some implications for work with inquiry groups, facilitation of these groups, and community schools.
Chapter FOURTEEN

Conclusion: Revisiting the Literacies of Teaching and the Borderlands

“Reading, writing, teaching, learning, are all activities aimed at introducing civilizations to each other.”

Carlos Fuentes

Findings

I hesitate to conclude this dissertation with yet another term that harkens orthodox methodology. Listening to transcriptions, writing this work, re-listening, re-writing, re-thinking, confirmed for me the iterative nature of inquiry. It never really ends. I hope some of the conclusion I write in this chapter are satisfying, but I suspect they will continue to evoke new questions, new perceptions, and new ways of being. Three questions guided this research. I will begin with the first question.

Chapter FIVE, How do the multiple communities and positions teachers inhabit inform their practice and influence their relationship?

Building community as we understand each other. I will begin this section with how I ended chapter 12. My memo that day documents how very surprised I was by the powerful sense of collegiality that came from listening to the autobiographies that day. I had not anticipated it. As I reviewed the transcripts for the first three or four inquiry groups meetings, it was clear to me why the teachers needed that time to use the gathering for what they wanted to use it for. Even though these were veteran teachers who had worked alongside each other for many years, they needed to re-establish bonds that had very deep roots. But because of the strains of the job and the depersonalization
that they each felt in a highly bureaucratized job, it was as if the teachers needed to re-establish connections that were frayed or forgotten, to begin to “interrupt the taken-for-granted alliances of power/knowledge” (Lytle, 2006). Had I begun immediately with an invitation to look at student work; or, to consider learning and curriculum without a pause for consideration of the teachers’ literacies of teaching, the teachers would have been unresponsive.

Chapter SIX, *How do Crawford inquiry community teachers co-create a context to problematize and investigate the way they teach and support Crawford youth and families?*

*Building community as we understand our students and our work.* It follows to say that the co-creation of a context for the teachers to interrogate the way they teach could not have occurred as intimately as it did if the time was not taken for the inquiry community to consider their history together and a shared concern for elements of the education program they had been utilizing for years. While it is entirely comprehensible that any group of teachers without this history or a shared concern could have accomplished equally compelling work, I argue that these teachers had the added benefit of their history, their evolving trust in each other, to help them enter that liminal, or “third space” (Gutierrez, 2008; Lizárraga & Gutiérrez, 2018), where learning ecologies are expansive and generous as they privilege the distribution of knowledge. This space would enable them to interrogate teaching and learning in ways they never could and reach some conclusions they never would have imagined.
Chapter SEVEN, *How do Crawford teachers construct their classroom practice in relation to the family and community both as a context and a resource?*

Building community as we understand the neighborhood and families. This was (and probably still is) very hard work. “One would expect that parents and teachers would be natural allies,” Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot writes, “but social scientists and our own experience recognizes their adversarial relationship” (1978, p. 20). The 14 inquiry sessions were simply not enough time for the teachers to tackle the incredibly difficult questions and emotions that informed their perceptions of the neighborhood where Crawford was located and to critically interrogate their deeply held assumptions about the families that entrusted their children to them. But what was crystal clear was that the foundation was established for that work to continue. In fact, I would argue that the work of bringing together “worlds apart” started as the teachers looked carefully at the superhero stories. For some teachers in the inquiry community, it was a tougher bridge to cross than for others, but as in any inquiry process, each forged ahead at their own pace, some with more questions than others, but always wondering.

At this time, it is inconclusive whether inquiry, as Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2009) have conceptualized it, becomes a habit of mind for any of the members of the Crawford inquiry community. Chances are, it hasn’t. But what this experience has done for me is helped me witness the possibilities for transformation. It was a powerful event to witness my colleagues on that last day of school present their thinking. A few of them in the group like Dirk, Maria, and Edwina would have very few opportunities to stand in front of all of their colleagues and hold the floor. In addition, they not only held the attention
of the entire staff, but they proposed radically new ways of seeing children, their families, and the community.

**The literacies of teaching and the borderlands**

In their vision for new epistemologies, Elenes and Delgado Bernal (2010) believe that borderland theory can be useful to educators as they help Latinx students maneuver through the contradictions that make up the world that they inhabit. “They argue that Chicana feminism and borderland theories demand that binary thinking be abandoned and that the margin be conceptualized as a place to resist and move beyond oppressive ideologies and practices” (Petrone, 2016). I made the claim earlier in this dissertation that the borderlands are a real space and that the herida abierta is a real experience for many that should not be trivialized. But the connections between nepantla pedagogies (Delgado Bernal, D., Burciaga, R., & Flores Carmona, J., 2012; Prieto, 2012), where modes of teaching and learning are always visionary, and the work the teachers accomplished in the inquiry community to make sense of their own contradictions, to make themselves vulnerable through story-telling (Lytle, 2006), was compelling for me.

When I was a little boy, crossing the border into Mexico on weekends to buy inexpensive cases of soda, or on holidays and special days to visit my Tia Chayo and Tio Juanito, were always fraught with a confusing mixture of feelings. There was tension meeting the Mexican border guards on the south side of the Rio Grande, especially if we knew we were transporting goods that would require my dad to bribe the officials. I remember one time when we were trying to get a small refrigerator across to my Tia Chayo’s home and watching my dad through the back of the pick-up truck speak with
animated gestures with one of these officials. I could not hear what was being said but we
made it across and delivered the appliance to my overjoyed aunt. We were never really
perceived as Mexican by my aunt’s neighbors. We were just visitors from the other side.

Once over, the Mexican side of the border always seemed to smell horrible to me
and my siblings. Inferior sewage systems along the river were the major culprit. Stray
dogs seemed to roam everywhere and there were no orderly lanes on the roads like there
were on the American side, so driving, to me, seemed incredibly perilous. These clashes
with American systematicity provoked my father into another denunciation of the
Mexican way of doing things in contrast to the order and discipline of the American way.

My Tia Chayo’s home was a modest three-room adobe structure with a wood-
burning stove and an outhouse which we hated using. Once we were in the enclosure of
my aunt’s property though, all the tension we felt making the crossing dissipated for a
while. The chickens and rabbits she had on her property were fun to chase around. The
food was always delicious, and my aunt’s robust laughter and tight hugs always made me
feel good.

I was lucky. I was the oldest. Because I had more time with my grandmother I
could speak Spanish as she spoke to me covertly, disregarding the wishes of my father
who wanted to hear solely English once back home. While we identified as Americans
and were familiar with the mythology of American meritocracy and superior
achievement, I also knew that part of me was never really folded into that dream. My
earliest racialized memory is seeing my beloved grandmother saunter up the walkway
towards my parochial school while I was standing with my friend Kenny, a little white
boy whose hair looked yellow to me. I must have been in second grade, but I remember clearly making up some story so that I could separate myself from Kenny so that he wouldn’t hear me talk in Spanish with my grandmother. Just as we were never quite Mexican enough in Mexico, I never felt quite American enough in America.

This little anecdote is not intended as a vapid navel-gazing exercise. I certainly hope that this dissertation has not come across as solipsistic in any way. Those who know me well recognize my introversion and loathing for the center stage. Using the borderlands as my guide, my intention was to frame the very complicated lives of the teachers in the inquiry community as they pondered the web of relationships, contradictions, and ambiguities that unconsciously inform their work. There were moments of success and laughter, and there were disturbing and emotional times that rattled their familiar sense of control and security. At times the teachers felt like they occupied center positions that validated their literacies of teaching such as the steps they took to attend the Community Schools Ambassador Program on their own time to learn about the uncharted territory of the community school landscape; or, when they took absolute control of planning and leading the conversation on the last day of school.

At other times, teachers occupied marginal existences. When Dana felt she was not being heard by the administration over an issue that was very important to her, she was left wondering about her place in the school as an otherwise successful teacher. The teachers unpacked their concerns about scripted programs (Saxon® Phonics, Common Core Progress) they were obliged to do, and were on a path to decisive work that questioned their level of autonomy and agency.
In a certain way, the life and discourse of an inquiry group is illustrative of some critical social practices that are essential to being an inquiring teacher. The literacies of teaching implies that teaching is hardly a neutral skill but is a socially situated practice (Street, 1995) and one of a multiple set of identities and discourses (Gee, 1999) that inform one another. Whether they were aware of it or not, the inquiry group exposed issues of power through their analysis of the everyday work that they do in classrooms with the aim of sustaining meaningful change (Rogers et al., 2009). They (we) learned to do critical social practice together, as a community, and in this sense, taking an inquiry stance finds itself in line with the contextualized world of New Literacy Studies (Street, 1995; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Janks, 2010; Pahl & Rowsell, 2010) with vast implications for teacher learning and teacher leadership.

Other implications

I will conclude with additional implications derived from my time with the inquiry group and the findings of this study.

*Implications for schools and school districts interested in forming community schools.*

The literature is scant to non-existent with regard to the role teachers play in the formation of community schools. At best, published reports indicate surveys that show a majority of teachers believing that student access to integrated social, health, and educational services is very important for improving student achievement and reducing absenteeism (Quinn & Dryfoos, 2009; MetLife, 2010). Indeed, the emphasis when creating community schools is on the needs of the surrounding community and neighborhoods, but the role teachers can take in forming these partnerships can be
invaluable. A 2012 study by the Center for American Progress lists as one of its three recommendations for maximizing the benefits of community schools to “design school-specific strategies with input from teachers and service providers” (Chang & Lawyer, p. 17). The study cites several examples of creative ways health providers and teachers exchange information for the benefit of the students in community schools across the country. In 2017, the National Education Policy Center and the Learning Policy Institute together released a report that gathered information from 143 research studies on community schools. The report showed there are four features commonly found in successful community schools. The feature that explicitly brings teachers into the elixir is when community schools build a culture of professional collaborative learning and shared responsibility. The specific finding in this area of the report indicate that this collaborative effort helps to sustain relationships beyond the school walls. “The development of social capital and teachers learning from their peers appear to be the factors that explain the link between collaboration and better student achievement,” (Maier, et. al., p. 71). While the literature does point to specific school examples where teachers enact the feature of professional collaborative learning and shared responsibility successfully in community schools, this practice should be implemented with fidelity to best harness the resources of the community for curricular purposes.

*Implications for facilitation of inquiry groups.* The facilitation of an inquiry group is an uncertain road. To be prepared with an agenda is crucial, but if it is so prescriptive as to be unavailable for participants to believe they have a part in making it their own, it runs
the risk of alienating voices and subjectivities. On the other hand, there has to be an understandable direction. The teachers read and heard my research questions, but as a whole, they were generally meaningless to them. Once we distilled our inquiry into simpler language (how can we think about the Crawford community as a resource?) the teachers could wrestle with a clear objective. There was room in this question for teachers to use their knowledge and experience to build learning. I also touched on my own insecurities while facilitating the inquiry group. As with anything else, time and experience are bound to be the best remedies for uncertainties. However, the essence of inquiry is to always be curious. Therefore, being so comfortable that curiosity is jeopardized by unchecked self-assurance may not lead to the most generative outcomes that a true inquiry community might reach.

*Implications for building ownership of an inquiry group.* One of the realizations through doing this work is that inquiry takes time. Inquiry groups need time to form and feel committed to the work. This is implied in the literature, but again, there is no manual for how to do inquiry. This understanding should be clear and teachers need to be generous with each other about the process. Importantly, the first 4 sessions of the inquiry group centered on identity work. The teachers considered Sonia Nieto’s teaching as autobiography and proceeded to write their own autobiographies before sharing them out loud with each other. Some might assume that this kind of work is the “fluff” one completes before the real substance of the inquiry work can begin, but in fact, this initial work on the teachers’ own lives, their histories, and their experiences was critical to the
kind of learning that took place in the group. Conversations about schools and instruction became more community focused. When considering community school development, discussions became less about having committees of community people with allusions to the neighborhood, and more about understanding community as a resource. Once the teachers moved through this initial portion of the group they could begin the work of value-based talking, evaluation, and discussion about student work and the wider community.

*Implications for building the spirit of inquiry into a busy school day.* When Betty commented that she did not feel tired at the end of each inquiry group session like she might feel after any other of the multitude of meetings she attended, it made me wonder how the sentiment of inquiry communities could be built into regular school-sanctioned professional developments. What are the liminal spaces that could be created, however briefly, in these bureaucratic routines? I already referred to one of Anzaldúa’s lesser known anthologized chapters in *Borderlands* (1987) when I referred to her thoughts about writing and being a writer. This modality is what I suggested helped me work through some of the challenges I faced working with colleagues I had known for so long. What if administrators worked in these reflexive moments through writing at the end of each PD so that it becomes part of the muscle memory of each staff meeting? “Picking out images from my soul’s eye, fishing for the right words to create the images. Words are blades of grass pushing the obstacles, sprouting on the page . . .” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 71). This simple practice has great potential for weary teachers to regain their psychic energy.
Implications for inquiry as a part of professional development. I want to recognize again my privilege during the time that I was at Crawford. I was not teaching with a full schedule. I could think deeply about the inquiry community and prepare for subsequent meetings. Additionally, I had the luxury of working with a small group of children and the trust of parents to audio record my work with them. This is almost unheard of in a teacher’s daily routine. What if portions of a teacher’s week were carved out for “random recordings” and that administrators understood that this was not simply formative assessment for curricular planning? It would be a spot-check of sorts, teacher driven, where reflection would be prioritized over standards-based lesson planning. The implication here is that there is a hidden world out there that teachers are missing when they are not given the opportunity to “re-see” (Carini, 2001). As an illustration, I leave this dissertation with one final snippet of an interaction with my students as they were busy creating placards that they would use if they were in a situation where they had to demonstrate for a cause. The culminating activity for the group of third graders in the literature circle was to think about a social issue that they believed needed attention in the world. This stemmed from discussion of the plight of farm workers in Esperanza Rising. Jose, who believed that family was “importanter” than money (chapter 9), was dead set on workers’ rights. This decision was informed not just from the events that came from the book, but from the actual fact that his father, a landscaper, was at the time unemployed and recovering from a fall from a tree that injured his leg. Jose shared this story over and over again with the literature group. I loved his idea for advocacy of
workers’ rights. When he changed his mind to recycling, I was very disappointed. The
underlined sentence denotes an excitable speech register:

Jose: Mr. Rivera, why don’t I do recycle paper? Recycle paper for not
cutting trees down. Mr. Rivera, what about if I do recycle paper.

Hmm.

Teresa: People should recycle more.

Manuel: People should recycle stuff.

Teresa: People should recycle=

Manuel: =Maybe you should show like you dropping the paper in the
recycle bin.

Jose: I know, right. I can write the recycle sign in green.

Robert: So then you prefer that idea over the worker’s rights? I thought that
was a good idea.

But of course. It all makes sense. By advocating for better recycling, less trees
would need to be cut down, thereby preventing future falls for workers like his father. I
totally missed that one. It took a re-seeing to realize that the kids were way ahead of me.
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Initial letter to the school staff

Hello Crawford teachers,

I wanted to take a few moments to tell you about the focus of my dissertation. I am interested in the work we do here, the way teachers read the educational landscape today, how it influences our professional identity and the work we do in the classroom, and how we construct our practice in relation to families and the community.

I would be more than happy to share more details about the research but I wanted to be brief and not get too bogged down with details in this email.

One of the ways I am looking to collect data is through a voluntary inquiry group. For those not familiar with inquiry, an inquiry group is where you would have the opportunity to think and talk about your teaching and maybe work through a question you might have about your practice.

My vision is that a group of us would gather after school about twice a month. Our meetings would be fairly structured, but not so much that it would be inflexible to the way the group wants it to move. The purpose of the group would be to build a community of practitioners that would reflect on our work, support each other in our own professional inquiries, and build on the resources we have among each other, the families and children we serve, and the community context that Crawford is very much a part.

Kindergarten and 1st grade teachers might want to use this time to think about their work with Kid Writing. Perhaps you are team teaching this year and would like to explore that as your inquiry.

Again, your participation would be voluntary. I see this group as being very reciprocal in nature where I am not only getting the information I need for my research, but that it is a worthwhile experience for you as well.

I have developed a quick and easy form for you to fill out where there is room to ask me questions, schedule a time for more face-to-face conversation, or simply indicate your interest (http: XXX). While I don’t have the exact dates of our meetings, I am thinking we meet either Tuesdays or Wednesdays.

I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Robert
APPENDIX B1: Teacher interview questions

Interview Questions
Round 1

I want to ask you some questions about your ideas about community. I also want to ask you a few questions specifically about what you shared during our reading of our autobiographies. Just a reminder, I have an interest in how teachers think about community. More specifically, I am interested in how Crawford teachers construct their classroom practice in relation to the family and community both as a context and a resource.

I am interested in how the multiple communities and positions teachers inhabit inform their practice and influence their relationship with students, their families, and their colleagues.

Finally, I want to know how we as an inquiry community co-create a context to problematize and investigate the way we teach and support our students and families.

Round 1 questions:
1. How do you define community?
   Probes: What are the communities you are a part of? What are the communities you see around Crawford?

2. What is a success that you experienced recently in your work with a student, a parent, a teaching strategy? What made this experience different from others that you had?
   Probes: Recent projects, recent “diversions” away from the prescribed curriculum

3. What are some of the struggles that you encountered in your work as a teacher in this community?
   Probes: Think of teaching in this teacher community, in the surrounding Crawford community. Expand your notion of community in any way that suits you to answer this question.

4. As you think back to our first meeting as an inquiry community, what are some of the hopes you now have? What are some of your apprehensions?

5. At this stage in our process of inquiry, what comes to your mind when you think about teaching?
APPENDIX B2: Teacher interview questions

Interview Questions
Round 2

1. As you know, during our inquiry group meetings this year, we have been trying to explore how we as teachers construct our classroom practice in relation to the family and community both as a context and a resource. As you look back to our meetings and to the (your) year as whole, what have been some of your discoveries? What has stood out to you?

2. I know for me, being back this year at Crawford in the capacity that I was helped me to really reflect on the multiple communities and positions that I inhabit. For example, one of the more obvious ones was the fact that I no longer taught here at Crawford and that my position as a full time graduate student removed me a bit from the way lives are lived here in this community. Another example that comes to mind for me is my marriage to Nate. Initially, it didn’t feel like a big deal, but I have to admit that when you all had a little celebration for me at one of our inquiry group times, I was reminded about how absent this part of my life had been to my students and this community of teachers. It made me realize that moving forward, I can’t camouflage this aspect of who I am in whatever direction I wind up heading. Can you reflect a bit on some of your own communities or positions and how they might inform your practice and influence your relationship with students, their families, and your colleagues?

3. What aspects of the time we have spent together as an inquiry community helped you to think about the way we teach and support our students and families?

4. If we could continue meeting, how would you like to see the inquiry group move forward?

5. __________________
APPENDIX C: BayCES teacher inquiry protocol

BayCES TEACHER INQUIRY PROTOCOL (30 minutes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Purposes/Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Facilitator introduces protocol and goes over format.</td>
<td>• Important to keep time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 5    | Presenter shares his/her inquiry-in-progress. This includes:  
- Research question/focus  
- Context: class, kids, curriculum…  
- Overview of his/her inquiry process  
- Question, struggle—what he/she wants group to think about when looking at the data | • Presenter needs to give enough context so that listeners can have an informed discussion—but does not need to give lengthy background. |
| 4    | Group reads data/materials (if necessary—otherwise presenter can use this for more presentation or discussion time) | • A chance for listeners to engage actual materials from the teacher’s work. |
| 5    | Questions from listeners; presenter responds. Start with clarifying questions (factual) and move to probing questions (for benefit of presenter). | • A chance for listeners to get clarification and to get deeper into the presenter’s thinking and dilemma. |
| 10   | Discussion by the group  
- feedback (“I liked,” “It struck me…”)  
- reflective questions (“I wonder…”)  
- possible directions (“What if…”) | • Facilitator reminds group of what the presenter wants feedback on.  
• Presenter is quiet; group speaks to each other, not to the presenter.  
• The presenter does not need to respond to issues or questions raised. |
| 3    | Presenter reflections  
The presenter talks about what s/he heard, learned, is thinking now—whatever feels most useful. | |
| 2    | Process reflections (presenter first)  
Facilitator closes protocol. | • Important to check on process. |
APPENDIX D: Delaine’s image
APPENDIX E1: “Family Work” letter

Hello parents!

In our book, *Esperanza Rising*, we are reading that Esperanza and her family have had to work in poor conditions. Some of their family members and friends have had to protest for better working conditions.

Have you ever had to protest for something you believe in? If you could protest about something, what would it be? Is there something you think is unfair in your community or in society?

We look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you!

Mr. Rivera

Hola padres!

En nuestro libro, *Esperanza Rising*, estamos leyendo que Esperanza y su familia han tenido que trabajar en condiciones precarias. Algunos de los miembros de su familia y amigos han tenido que protestar por mejores condiciones de trabajo. ¿Hay algo que usted cree que es injusto en su comunidad o en la sociedad?

¿Alguna vez ha tenido que protestar por algo que crees? Si se pudiera protestar por algo, ¿qué sería?

¡Esperamos oír de usted!

Sr. Rivera
Hola Maestro,

Quiero contar que sí sé lo que en algunas ocasiones, en las que algunas amistades y familiares se quejan de no recibir un pago justo por su trabajo, también se quejan de aguinaldos, muchas veces bajos temperaturas o mucha calor, también se les exigen mucho trabajo. Pero cada vez que se paga injusto, en mi opinión, sería importante que todo esto cambiara, para bien de la manera más correcta para jefes y empleados. Gracias.
APPENDIX E3: “Family Work” letter translation

Hello teacher,

I want to tell you that I have known some cases in which some friends and relatives have complained about not receiving a fair payment for their work. They have also complained about working conditions that are very cold and very hot. They also do much work. For every hour, they receive an unfair payment in my opinion. It is important that all this behavior change on the part of bosses and their employees.

Thank you
Hello parents!

As we continue to read Esperanza Rising, a story about a rich little girl who lived in Mexico but had to leave her country, we are learning of Esperanza’s experiences in the United States.

Esperanza took care of the babies and tried to help Mama when she got sick. Do you help people where you live? What do you do? What does Alondra do to help where you live?

We look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you!

Mr. Rivera

Hola padres!

Continuamos a leer Esperanza Rising, una historia sobre una niña rica que vive en México, pero tuvo que abandonar su país, estamos aprendiendo de experiencias de Esperanza en los Estados Unidos.

Esperanza tomó el cuidado de los bebés y trató de ayudar a Mama cuando ella enfermó. ¿Ayuda a gente donde usted vive? ¿A qué te dedicas? ¿Qué hace Alondra a donde vives para ayudar a otros?

¡Esperamos oír de usted!

Sr. Rivera
Hola Ma. Rivera. Teresa es una niña que ayuda en algunas cosas en el hogar. Ayuda a recojer sus juguetes y los de sus hermanitos. También ayuda a ordenar su cuarto. A veces ayuda a recojer la mesa. También ayuda a doblar su ropa.

Gracias.
Hello Mr. Rivera,

Teresa is a good young girl who helps with certain things at home. She helps by picking up her toys and those of her brothers. She also makes up her bed. Sometimes she cleans the table. She also helps by folding her clothes.

Thank you
APPENDIX G1: “Family Work” letter

Hello parents!

As we continue to read Esperanza Rising, a story about a rich little girl who lived in Mexico but had to leave her country, we are learning of Esperanza’s experiences in the United States.

Esperanza took care of the babies and tried to help Mama when she got sick. Do you help people where you live? What do you do? What does Carlos do to help where you live?

We look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you!

Mr. Rivera

Hola padres!

Continuamos a leer Esperanza Rising, una historia sobre una niña rica que vive en México, pero tuvo que abandonar su país, estamos aprendiendo de experiencias de Esperanza en los Estados Unidos.

Esperanza tomó el cuidado de los bebés y trató de ayudar a Mama cuando ella enfermó. ¿Ayuda a gente donde usted vive? ¿A qué te dedicas? ¿Qué hace Carlos a donde vives para ayudar a otros?

¡Esperamos oír de usted!

Sr. Rivera
APPENDIX G2: “Family Work” letter parent response

I help my parents out since they are elderly, sick and have language barrier, I help them in taking them to their doctor’s appointment, to do their chores, in translating for them and in helping my father to walk since he is blind. Manuel help his grandparents in translating for them on whatever he can and he also helps his grandmother to get to places by holding him and guiding him. Manuel is his grandfather’s eyes.
APPENDIX H1: Betty and Maria’s student work

The drawing shows a story with three panels:

**Beginning:**
- A boy is walking.
- The boy says, “I’m next.”
- The boy says, “I shot him with a toy gun.”
- The boy says, “Tell him.”

**Middle:**
- A police officer is standing.
- The officer says, “Tell him.”

**Ending:**
- A boy is standing and his head is down.
- The boy is wearing a crown.
- The boy says, “Tell him.”
APPENDIX H2: Betty and Maria’s student work
APPENDIX I1: Betty and Maria's student work

I was playing. The was birds. Then I was shooting him. At the same
my friend was. The was going out of. Bully toys.
APPENDIX 12: Betty and Maria's student work
Then I killed them all.

Then I saw a snake.

Then I saw a toad.

I came back out. I saw a toad.

And I got a gun and shot it.

One day I went in the store and shopping.
APPENDIX K1: Betty and Maria's student work

She said yes I can still under water. Her hand came up. Her mom said you want to see how long I can still under water. She said yes I can still under water. Her hand came up.
APPENDIX K2: Betty and Maria’s student work

And then Blood was all over.
APPENDIX L: Last day script

Conversation:

**Robert:** Introduction

What the inquiry community means to us:

**Edwina:** We were given the opportunity to share personal stories and knowing they would be confidential was great. Very bonding.

**Delaine:** I loved working with the team solving inquiry questions we had concerning our classrooms. I loved learning about the backgrounds of my teammates! Oh . . . the salsa was always great!

**Dana:** I really enjoyed the gluten-free snacks. It was interesting to reflect on your teaching practice and share ideas among the group.

**Hannah:** We wrote and shared our teaching autobiographies which gave us all an opportunity to reflect on our teaching and learning. The most powerful aspect of this for me was sharing our stories in a carefree and nonjudgmental environment. It was refreshing and calming to hear that the other teachers in the group had similar challenges and concerns. It was a very enlightening and positive experience.

**Dirk:** The inquisition group was a great reminder to pause and reflect on what being a teacher is all about. The teachers shared experiences from their career histories. We also read and discussed interesting articles which were informative and sparked conversations about our personal perspectives.

**Betty:** Puzzling moment – our favorite part of the IG was sharing student work we found puzzling and disturbing. The Inquiry Group gave us the opportunity to look deeply, discuss, and reflect on student work, the lives of our students, their families, our teaching, and our own procedures.

Explain activity in 215: Our students write daily in 215. They write according to standards in the common core. During Daily 5, they get to choose what they want to write about. Of course, we follow Common Core to assess writing. In addition to our required writing pieces per quarter, we have students complete this writing graphic organizer so we can have a piece of authentic writing monthly to evaluate growth. Therefore, they can write about whatever they choose. We combine scores within a quarter for an extra writing grade. They are just given this paper, a rubric, and told to write. Afterwards, we have students share their writing so the class can ask questions and have thoughtful discussions.
APPENDIX L: Last day script

Dana: this is what we need you to do, you will have 10 minutes. We gave you a packet of four writing samples from Maria and Betty’s students that they presented to the Inquiry Group as “puzzling.” We would like you to review these samples and discuss these questions to share out:
What do you see in the writing?
What is significant about this writing?
Looking through the students’ eyes what are they trying to convey?
What questions does the writing raise for you? No judgement. Work in groups using Guiding Questions . . . . . (Time?)

Maria: Debriefing (10 min) – Popcorn share out of highlights of your table conversation. Can someone share what stood out in your table?

Maria: Betty and I picked this as a puzzling moment b/c we were disturbed by the content in the writing and that the parents let them watch “The Walking Dead.” After presenting this to IG, we all had similar parental judgments. We realized they could be using the writing as an outlet to be a hero, and/or understand and cope with death/violence they experience both through TV and real life. We also realized the idea of a hero has changed since we were kids. The work we have done in the IG all year has been very beneficial to me as a teacher. We are hoping to continue this work and these discussions next year for anyone interested. We will be looking for new recruits.

Dirk Flower Activity – We want to demonstrate how each of us contribute to our Crawford School Community in so many ways. Please stand if you have contributed or participated in the following ways:
APPENDIX L: Last day script (flower vase)

1. Apple Crunch – Edwina
2. Red Ribbon Day – Delaine
3. Inquiry Group – Dana
4. Crawford Breakfast – Maria
5. Homework Club – Dirk
6. Chapter Meetings – Hannah
7. Union meetings or rallies – Betty
8. Crawford concerts – Robert
9. After school club – Edwina
10. Saturday school – Delaine
11. Eye mobile – Dana
12. Dental van – Maria
13. Girl scouts – Dirk
14. Crawford Spring Clean Up – Hannah
15. Leadership – Betty
16. Data team – Robert
17. PSSA pep rally – Edwina
18. School trips – Delaine
19. PDs – Dana
20. Spelling Bee – Maria
21. Turn Off the TV Week – Dirk
22. Move It Outside Day – Hannah
23. Fun Day – Betty
24. Community Schools Ambassadors – Robert
25. SAC – Edwina
26. Monetary or other donation on behalf of a student or their family – Delaine
27. Happy hour – Dana
28. Change toilet paper – Maria
29. Swept, mopped, or vacuumed your room – Dirk
30. Hope Lodge – Hannah
31. PACES Day – Betty
32. Student of the Month – Robert

Robert – The smallest contribution can help create something beautiful. Thanks for making Crawford community so beautiful!
APPENDIX M: Last day table questions

1. What do you see in the writing?

2. What is significant about this writing?

3. Looking through the students’ eyes, what are they trying to convey?

4. What questions does this writing raise for you?
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