

**Constructing Authority across Racial Difference
A White Teacher Signifyin(g) with African American Students
in a High School English Classroom**

by

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ABSTRACT

Constructing Authority across Difference A White Teacher Signifyin(g) with African American Students in a High School English Classroom

by

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This in-depth case study of classroom interaction illuminated how a white female teacher and African American students used talk to build positive authority relationships across their racial difference. Racial difference in classrooms can engender cultural misunderstandings between teachers and students around behavior, communication, and learning styles. Focusing on Black/White relationships as a particular configuration of racial difference, this study demonstrated how a white teacher's authority was constructed in culturally responsive and relevant ways through her engagement in and legitimization of Signifyin(g), a culturally-specific, African American discourse practice. Ethnographic discourse analysis made visible the process by which this teacher used authority established through Signifyin(g) for an array of educational purposes—to discipline students and manage the classroom while minimizing conflict; position students as the co-producers of knowledge; construct participation structures that afforded students access to and engagement in learning; and build cross-racial political alliances. Conceiving of authority as a process, product, and relationship highlighted the discursive moves the teacher made to accumulate cultural capital and build connections with students over time and from one moment to the next. Contextualized by the taken-

for-granted, everyday life of the classroom, multiple forms of authority practiced by the teacher and students were made vivid by analyzing episodes of classroom interaction that featured Signifyin(g). Results enabled an articulation of culturally responsive authority, constituted through discourse and the legitimization of students' culturally-based discourse practice. Practicing culturally responsive authority requires effective use of classroom discourse to accomplish educational goals coupled with a deep understanding of language variety. The centrality of classroom discourse in building cross-racial authority relationships emphasized the need for prospective teachers to study representations of classroom interaction, such as portrayed in this dissertation, and reflect on how they use language in the classroom. Pointing out the particular implications for white teachers, this dissertation calls for teacher preparation to foreground teachers' use of language and incorporate pedagogical approaches that cultivate cross-cultural empathy, awareness of social inequalities, and a white identity that serves as a source of legitimacy in the classroom.

Chapter I: Addressing Cultural Asynchronization with Authority

This introductory chapter articulates the practical problem I address in this dissertation: cultural asynchronization in K12 classrooms characterized by racial difference. White women dominate the U.S. teaching force while students of color comprise a growing percentage of the student body. Multicultural education scholars have pointed out that such demographically-defined racial difference holds the potential to engender cultural misunderstandings between students and teacher. These cultural misunderstandings, articulated in literature as a lack of cultural synchronization, have been shown to inhibit the academic achievement of students of color, position them as recipients of disciplinary action, and contribute to school failure. In response, multicultural education scholars have put forth pedagogical models that advocate teachers synchronize their pedagogy in response to students' cultures. I draw from these culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies to frame my study, devoting special attention to the concept of mutual accommodation—a process of authorization through which students and teacher negotiate the legitimacy of students' home-based cultural practices and school practices. My study uses theoretical constructs of classroom authority to illustrate the authorization process of mutual accommodation.

I continue this chapter by describing how I designed and conducted an ethnographic case study of cross-racial classroom interaction that illuminates how a White, woman teacher and African American students negotiate the legitimacy of language, literacies, identities, culture, and behavior. I pose the question,

How do a White teacher and students of color negotiate authority across racial difference?

which guided my inquiry, and explain how, to answer this question, I derived theoretical constructs of classroom authority as a teacher-student relationship, a process of negotiation, and commoditized power socially legitimized by that process. After outlining the chapters of the dissertation, I sketch the study design, including the rationale for selecting the research site and participants and present a vignette depicting mutual accommodation I observed at my research site.

Next, I elaborate my rationale for centering classroom authority in this study: it allows me to address three problems particular to classrooms comprised of White teachers and students of color. First, garnering authority from students of color tends to be a problem for White teachers because of differing cultural conceptions of what counts as legitimacy. Second, authority issues with respect to knowledge and discipline seem intensified in classrooms with White teachers and students of color when cultural incongruence is a factor. Third, how authority is socially negotiated as legitimate power through classroom talk can determine students' access to participation and engagement in teaching and learning. After presenting a vignette depicting the problem of authority in a classroom characterized by racial difference, I suggest that the three theoretical constructs of authority as a relationship, a process, and product are important for providing culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies in classrooms characterized by racial difference. I synthesize literature on classroom power with frameworks for studying language and literacy events to outline such theoretical constructs.

Throughout the chapter, I articulate the theoretical assumptions underpinning the constructs I use to frame and study the problem of racial difference and cultural incongruence. This involves clarifying key concepts—race, racial difference, culture, and cultural asynchronization—and considering the political, theoretical, and methodological implications of my approach within broader traditions of research on the education of Black students. In this way, I respond to calls for more theoretically-informed representations of the constructs I employ when studying race (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; O’Connor, Lewis, & Mueller, 2007). As a researcher of race and literacy, I recognize that I assume a position of privilege in wielding power to create racialized categories to describe groups of people and research participants (Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003), and I have carefully considered the language I have chosen to represent them. I conclude this chapter by exploring what it means to study authority as a racialized, discursive process in cross-racial classrooms.

I also incorporate reflections on my positioning in relation to this research throughout the chapter, demonstrating “strong reflexivity” by considering the subject of knowledge as part of the object of knowledge (Harding, 1993). Strong reflexivity is important because beliefs serve as evidence in the research process as the problem is articulated, the literature reviewed, the study designed, the data collected and analyzed, and the results presented and discussed. Part of this reflexivity entails rendering visible my own racial epistemology and how it impacts, and is impacted by, this research study (Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003). To accomplish this, I articulate my vantage point—my point of view in relation to the ideas I present and the people I represent within shifting frameworks of power dynamics. In this chapter, articulating my vantage point reflexively

involves describing my personal and professional experiences and how they influenced the epistemological lens through which I viewed and understood the problems of racial difference and cultural incongruence. I explain how my interest in cultural asynchronization has been shaped by my experiences as an urban high school teacher, how my understandings have evolved through engagement with literature that helped me view racial difference as a broader, systemic issue facing teachers and teacher educators, and how I locate potential solutions in the classroom practices of White teachers, in culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies, and in this study's results. I conclude this chapter not only by exploring what it means to study authority as raced, but by reflecting on what it means *for me* to study authority as raced.

Articulating the Problem of Cultural Asynchronization

Racial Difference

Classrooms in which “racial difference” is a factor reflect a growing norm in today’s K12 education system: students of color¹ comprise an increasing percentage of the K-12 student body and White teachers comprise the majority of the teaching force (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002; Hodgkinson, 2002). According to the Center for Education Policy (2006), four out of ten students attending U.S. public schools in 2004 (the last year of available data) were children of color, with African Americans representing 16%, Latinos 19%, Asians and Pacific Islanders 4% and other non-White students 3%. Yet

¹ I use the binary White/of color because it is politically useful for pointing out the problem of “racial difference” that characterizes contemporary teacher-student demographics. However, I am aware that the term “of color” has been criticized because it allows “White” to connote colorlessness.

nearly 90% of the teaching force was White, with African American teachers representing only 6%, and other teachers of color comprising 5%.² With White teachers constituting the norm, the racial diversity of the U.S. student population is not reflected in the teaching force, making demographically-defined racial difference a significant factor in today's classrooms. Moreover, given trends in demographic data, the problem of racial difference is likely to intensify in the future.

Studying Race

In order to frame this problem of racial difference in U.S. classrooms, I use a definition of *race as a demographic group* because of its political significance as a category of analysis. As Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) argue in their call for a critical race theory approach to education, it is imperative to consider race as a category of analysis because it continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States. Educator Carol Lee (2007) agrees:

In order to understand how the construct of race functions in U.S. society, we need accurate historical and contemporary accounts that focus on how race is operationalized in institutional structures and opportunities. In order to gauge the social distribution of resources and opportunities, we need data by race. In the absence of such data, we will have no way of gauging both opportunities and progress or a lack thereof. (11)

² In general, I replicate the language of the original text and at times footnote it with an explanation.

In other words, without designating race as a demographic category in the analysis of educational data, such as enrollment or achievement data, we run the risk of shrouding racial inequalities that are only visible when data is disaggregated across racial groups. In addition to studying race as a demographic group, studying *race as culture* has been politically strategic for scholars interested in improving the education of Black students because, as Ladson-Billings (1994) points out, little literature on preparing teachers to educate Black students existed prior to the 1990s. She attributes this dearth of literature to failure to consider African Americans as a racial group with a distinct culture that requires specific attention. As part of a tradition by which researchers study race as culture, education scholars have articulated Black culture as shared practices, competencies, and orientations distinct from the normative White culture, and they explore the cultural meanings of those distinctions in educational contexts (O'Connor, Lewis, and Mueller, 2007).

Cultural (A)Synchronization

Articulating the distinct qualities of Black students' culture, Jaqueline Jordan Irvine (1991) asserts that demographically defined racial difference has the potential to manifest in the classroom as a "lack of cultural synchronization" between Black students and White teachers. By studying how Black teachers effectively teach Black students, Irvine illustrates how cultural synchronization operates when students and teachers share the same cultural background, that is, the same knowledge, customs, values, language, norms, and behaviors (Ogbu, 1988, cited in Irvine, 1991). Conversely, cultural a-synchronization stems from incongruence between students and teachers' home culture,

language, environment, values, and learning style, and it results in disenfranchising Black students, and other students of color, from learning.

In classrooms, cultural asynchronization manifests as misunderstandings related to behavior, communication styles and cognitive learning processes, contributing to the over-representation of Black students as recipients of disciplinary action as well as Black students' academic under-achievement (Irvine, 1991). Examining the impact of culture on classroom management, Carol Weinstein, Sandra Tomlinson-Clarke, and Mary Curran (2004) explain how misunderstandings about behavior can be attributed to cultural differences: "Definitions and expectations of appropriate behavior are culturally influenced, and conflicts are likely to occur when teachers and students come from different cultural backgrounds" (p. 26). Misunderstandings related to communication can revolve around cultural differences in dialect, interactional styles, rhetorical norms or ways of organizing ideas, narrative structure, the role of orality and print, and degree of personal investment in argued positions (Delpit, 1995, Gay, 2000). Geneva Gay (2000) describes how cultural asynchronization may involve misunderstandings between students and teachers related to ways of learning:

The cultures of schools and different ethnic groups are not always completely synchronized. These discontinuities can interfere with students' academic achievement, in part because how students are accustomed to engaging in intellectual processing, self-presentation, and task performance is different from the processes used in school. (p. 12).

The lack of synchronization between the cultures of *schools* and different ethnic groups, if not addressed, can manifest in cultural asynchronization between *White teachers* and students of color.

Irvine (1991) underscores the urgency of addressing the lack of synchronization resulting from racial difference when she states, “Cultural misunderstandings between teachers and students result in conflict, distrust, hostility, and possible school failure for Black students” (p. 26). I echo Irvine’s sense of urgency in addressing the problem of cultural asynchronization, and in the next section, articulate my vantage point in relation to the problem of racial difference and its corollary of cultural incongruence.

Studying Myself

To position myself in relation to the problem I outlined as cultural asynchronization in classrooms characterized by racial difference, I describe my experience with cultural incongruence and situate that experience within broader, more systemic issues facing the field of education today. As an English teacher in an urban high school in Oakland, CA, I experienced firsthand the challenges posed by cultural incongruence. Although it changed during the time I taught, the student population of the high school was approximately 43% Latino, 38% African American, 15% Asian, 3% Pacific Islander, 1% Caucasian, and <1% Native American; approximately 80% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch; and nearly all of my students’ home languages were either Ebonics or a native language other than English (Oakland Unified School District, 2003). As a White, middle class, native-English-speaking woman with little substantial intercultural experience, I faced the challenge of becoming an effective teacher for my students, whose cultural backgrounds were different from my own. My experiences as a secondary school teacher have served as the motivation for this research study, which aims to address the problem of cultural asynchronization arising from racial

difference by contributing to the fields of multicultural education, language and literacy, teacher education, and English education.

Situating my own struggles as a White teacher within literature on preparing White teachers to address cultural incongruence has shaped the epistemological lens through which I view the problem as systemic, rather than limited to my own idiosyncratic experience. Teacher educators have remarked that the vast majority of White teachers enrolling in teacher education programs have grown up in racially-segregated neighborhoods and attended racially-segregated schools (Cochrane-Smith, Davis, and Fries, 2004; Gay & Howard, 2000; Sleeter, 2001; Zumwalt and Craig, 2005). These White teachers, as a result, have had few intercultural experiences so that without intervention, they, like I was, are likely to be under-prepared to address the challenges presented by teaching students with cultural backgrounds different than their own.

Although I frame the problem of racial difference as located in the cultural incongruence between White teachers and students of color, I locate the solution in the knowledge, pedagogy, and practices of White teachers.³ It is not my intention to portray White teachers as the exclusive embodiments of the problem: my experience has shown me how the institutional context of schooling and the world beyond weighs heavily on the classroom and can constrain or expand possibilities therein, and researchers have demonstrated how schools as institutions function in various ways to systematically reproduce racial inequalities (Anyon, 1997; Kozol, 2005; Lewis, 2003; Oakes, 2005; Pollock, 2004). However, my experience has also convinced me that teachers hold

³ I also participate in efforts to recruit teachers of color to the profession as advocated by my former urban teacher education professor, Kitty Kelly Epstein (2008).

immense power to influence students' learning and educational outcomes through their interactions.

My experiences as a White secondary school teacher have made me empathetic to the challenges facing under-prepared White teachers-in-training and attentive to the prevalence of deficit, homogenized perceptions of White teachers (Lowenstein, 2009). I recognize that the presence of racial difference *in itself* may not necessarily lead to cultural asynchronization, and case studies of effective White teachers of African American students, although scarce, do exist (see e.g. Cooper, 2003, Ladson-Billings, 1994; Rex & Jordan, 2005). I view White teachers as capable learners, who with intervention are capable of being highly effective teachers of students of color. After all, it was through my own (sometimes painful and humbling) learning encounters with colleagues, students, endlessly patient teacher education faculty, and authors of multicultural education literature that I was able to address my inadequacies as a White teacher of students of color.

Encounters with literature on pedagogies designed to ameliorate cultural asynchronization inspired me throughout my high school teaching as I sought practical solutions to the problems I faced in the classroom. Two texts in particular, Gloria Ladson-Billings' (1994) *The Dreamkeepers* and Geneva Gay's (2000) *Culturally Responsive Teaching*, have continued to serve as anchoring points in my subsequent studies. I have since revisited these texts with fresh eyes seeking a more systematic solution to challenges presented by racial difference. In the next section, I explore the models of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies and how they have contributed to the education of Black students and other students of color.

Addressing the Problem of Cultural Asynchronization

Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogies

To address problems associated with cultural asynchronization, multicultural education scholars advocate that teachers synchronize their pedagogy with students' cultural practices, and they put forth pedagogical models for doing so. By studying successful teachers of African American students, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1992a) derived "culturally relevant pedagogy:" "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 382). The primary goal of culturally relevant pedagogy is to facilitate the development of a "relevant Black personality" that enables African American students to pursue educational goals without sacrificing their identification with African and African American culture. In practice, culturally relevant pedagogy is comprised of three durable components—fostering students' cultural competence, facilitating students' academic achievement, and generating a lens for sociopolitical critique, which are operationalized in different ways according to context. Fostering cultural competence means that culturally relevant teachers "allow their students to be who they are" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 62). They affirm students' individual and collective identities by validating their frames of reference, prior experiences, community, and cultural history and practices, including their language and literacy practices, both inside and outside of school.

Like Irvine (1991), Ladson-Billings premises her argument on the assumption that African Americans as a racial group have a distinct culture that requires a specific

pedagogical approach. However, she emphasizes that systemic racism, prevalent within schools and in society, contributes to African American students' under-achievement. According to Ladson-Billings (1992a) what distinguishes culturally relevant teachers from "assimilationist" teachers is their drive to address systemic racism, or "their desire to prepare students to effect change in society, not merely fit into it," facilitated by an explicit socio-political critique of the status quo through collective action (p. 382). This co-creation of a critical lens requires the re-positioning of the teacher as resistant to the dominant culture.

Similarly, Geneva Gay's (2000) model of "culturally responsive pedagogy" uses "the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 29). In addition to using students' cultural backgrounds as resources for learning, culturally responsive teaching is also transformative and emancipatory in that it fosters students' political and social consciousness so that they may actively participate in challenging forms of oppression, exploitation, prejudice, and racism in the world around them. Moreover, culturally responsive pedagogy empowers students, facilitating their development into highly competent, autonomous learners who assume authority over their own learning. Culturally responsive teaching is comprehensive and multidimensional, and encompasses curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques, and performance assessments.

Both culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally relevant pedagogy emphasize the importance of teachers developing cultural competence, validating students' culture,

fostering academic achievement for students of color, and creating a socio-political consciousness to challenge racism and other forms of oppression. However, while Irvine and Ladson-Billings' arguments are grounded in a strategic essentialism that *centers race* as a politically-significant category of analysis and focus on the education of *Black students*, Geneva Gay's (2000) articulation of culturally responsive pedagogy *centers ethnicity* and is inclusive of *all under-achieving students of color*. Premised on a definition of culture as "dynamic, complex, interactive, and changing, yet a stabilizing force in human life" (Gay, 2000, p. 10), Gay's model of culturally responsive pedagogy recognizes diversity within ethnic categories and is designed with highly ethnically-affiliated students in mind. Taken together, culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive pedagogy invoke both the political significance of essentialized categories of race *and* the fluidity, dynamism, and complexity of ethnicity and culture, and I refer to these two teaching approaches collectively as culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies.

This study adds to the literature on culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies, and in the next sections, I articulate how I focus on the process of mutual accommodation to address the problem of cultural incongruence in classrooms comprised of White teachers and students of color.

Mutual Accommodation

Multicultural education scholar Sonia Nieto (1996) describes the process by which teachers synchronize their pedagogy with students' cultural practices as "mutual accommodation," which is achieved when students and teachers modify their behaviors

to serve both of their interests—for students to succeed academically without sacrificing their culture. Nieto explains,

Mutual accommodation means accepting and building on students' language and culture as legitimate expressions of intelligence and as the basis for their academic success. On the part of students and families, it means accepting the culture of the school in areas such as expectations about attendance and homework and learning the necessary skills for work in school. (336)

Nieto argues that all too often, it is the students who are required to accommodate the school's expectations and adapt their cultural practices to align with school culture.

Yet, for teachers, negotiating the legitimacy of students' home-based⁴ language and culture and school culture can present a practical problem: "Deciding when to accommodate and when to require students to accommodate can be difficult" (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004, p. 33). Seeing how mutual accommodation operates in practice will expand teachers' repertoires in order to utilize students' language, culture, and experiences as educational resources, as Nieto (1996) calls for. This study illustrates the process of mutual accommodation as a process of authorization through which students and teacher negotiate the legitimacy of students' cultural practices and school practices.

⁴ When I refer to "cultural practices" or "home-based language and literacy practices," I refer to the practices with which students and teachers engage outside of school. Shirley Brice Heath's (1983) ethnography across home and school contexts compellingly argues that language and cultural practices stem from home environments. I am aware that I may be making assumptions about what practices students and teachers actually engage in at home, so when I characterize an activity or way of talking as "cultural" or "home-based," I have observed it in an extracurricular context and am inferring that it is practiced in the home. The distinction between home/school language and literacy practices seems politically meaningful when discussing issues of access in classrooms, so I maintain this binary throughout my dissertation, despite critiques that it essentializes and simplifies culture (Gutierrez and Rogoff, 2003).

Studying Cross-Racial Classroom Relationships

To address the problem of cultural incongruence in classrooms characterized by racial difference, I conducted a study that draws from literature on culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies to examine cross-racial classroom relationships. This study illustrates the process of mutual accommodation as a process of authorization through which students and teacher negotiate the legitimacy of students' cultural practices and school practices. The following orienting research question guided my inquiry:

How do a White teacher and students of color negotiate authority across racial difference?

To answer this question, I derived theoretical constructs of authority as a teacher-student relationship, as a process of negotiation, and as socially legitimate power produced by that process. Using this theoretical frame, my ethnographic case study of cross-racial classroom interaction illuminates how a White, female teacher, pseudo-named Ms. Cross⁵, and students who identify as Black or African American negotiate the legitimacy of language, literacies, identities, knowledge, cultural practices, and behavior across their cultural difference.⁶

To study how teacher and students negotiated authority productively across racial difference, I examined moments of mutual accommodation. I present episodes of classroom interaction depicting these moments that make visible the nuances of language

⁵ Ms. Cross allowed me to choose her pseudonym. I chose "Ms. Cross" because of her ability to cross racial borders and establish positive relationships with her students.

⁶ Although many of the students who participated in the study identified their race/ethnicity as "Black," I occasionally use the term "African American" to distinguish them as descended from Africa as an ethnic group distinct from other groups, such as those with Caribbean ancestry, who may be racialized as "Black" in the U.S. (Waters, 1996). Ms. Cross self-identified as White as a member of that demographic group.

that created or complicated students' access to learning. With discourse analysis, I illustrate how the language teacher and students used in classroom interaction to negotiate authority affected their capacity to build relationships with each other, attend to their racial and cultural differences, and engage with English subject matter instruction, language and literacy instruction, and classroom discourse.

In what follows, I describe how I frame the study, narrate the research process, and share and discuss the results of my dissertation. After that, I sketch the study design and explain my rationale for studying classroom interaction, teacher-student relationships, Black/White race relations as a particular configuration of racial difference, and language and literacy instruction in Ms. Cross's high school English classroom.

Outlining the Dissertation

Framing the Study: Chapters I-III

My introductory chapters frame this study of cross-racial classroom interaction. In the first chapter, I articulate the problem of racial difference and its corollary of cultural asynchronization and argue that classroom authority represents a particular problem for White teachers of students of color. In the second chapter, I situate my study within multicultural education literature that posits "warm demander" approaches to authority as culturally responsive and relevant classroom management for African American students. I build a bridge between bodies of literature that emphasize on one hand, the role of race and culture and on the other hand, the role of authority in teaching and learning in order to broaden conceptions of authority to be more aligned with culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies. In Chapter III, I outline the logic of inquiry that sustains the

theoretical coherence of *this* research. Deriving four conceptualizations of authority from my review of literature, I articulate how I “see” authority, along with race, as socially constructed in normative, everyday classroom practices and discourse and envision discourse as language-in-use, as reflective and constructive, and as a local and global process. “Seeing” race, authority, and discourse in these ways warranted my methodological approach to studying them using a microethnographic discourse analysis and interpretive ethnography.

Telling the Story: Chapters IV

In Chapters IV and V, I tell the story of the research process. I narrate how I negotiated entry to Metro High School to study the classroom interaction of a White teacher with the “It Factor,” an ability to build positive relationships with African American students. I explain why I collected data as ethnographic fieldnotes, individual and focus group interviews, classroom artifacts, questionnaires, and audio and video recordings of classroom interaction. Using ethnographic data to establish a rich, detailed milieu, I reconstruct critical moments of classroom interaction that guided me in teasing apart aspects of the “It Factor” and led me to identify Signifyin(g), a discourse practice usually specific to the African American community, as significant in the process of building cross-racial authority relationships. Animating Signifyin(g) with the intricacies of its forms and functions, I describe the emergent methods I tailored to the data in order to select, transcribe, and analyze episodes of classroom interaction.

Sharing the Results: Chapters VI-IX

In Chapters VI through IX, I present the results of my microethnographic discourse analysis. The first three results chapters portray moments of cultural synchronization that demonstrate how Signifyin(g) served as a resource for teacher and students to construct and negotiate positive authority relationships across their racial difference. Applying tools from English education, literary theory, and sociolinguistics, I analyze episodes of classroom interaction to illuminate how teacher and students used Signifyin(g), to construct productive authority relationships as they negotiated the legitimacy of behavior, literacies, and identity. In Chapter VI, I demonstrate how Ms. Cross's authority was built over time through her use of Signifyin(g), which authorized her to shape students' behavior and co-create with students a productive learning environment. Chapter VII depicts how Ms. Cross's authority was constructed through her communicative competence in a particular form of Signifyin(g): verbal dueling. In Chapter VIII, I illustrate how Ms. Cross and students used Signifyin(g) to negotiate the legitimacy of literacy practices, highlighting how engaging in Signifyin(g) in classroom interaction requires literacy skills akin to reading a social text. Legitimizing students' culturally-based ways of talking authorized them to participate in classroom discourse and engaged them in English subject matter instruction, standardized test preparation, and language and literacy learning. With renderings of strategically-selected representations of classroom interaction, my study will help teachers envision and enact authority in more culturally congruent ways that can bridge gaps between students' home and school culture, language, and literacy practices.

In Chapter IX, I examine authority relationships in a moment of cultural asynchronization as students and teacher engage in authority negotiations about what counts as legitimate language, literacies, identities, and cultural practices. I use positioning and politeness theory to trace the discursive construction of race as students perform discursive work to keep Signifyin(g) from escalating into serious teacher-student confrontation. I illustrate how, when issues of race seem to threaten their cross-racial classroom relationships, students and teacher discursively maneuver around explicit conversations about race and power, complicating what counts as legitimate in the classroom. I argue that the discursive moves teacher and students make to preserve their positive relationships precludes substantial conversations about race and racism, obscuring the role racialized authority relations from beyond the classroom play in configuring teacher-student relationships within the classroom. Consequently, the authority of whiteness is inadvertently reproduced through classroom discourse. I suggest that in these moments of cultural asynchronization, skillfully engaging in explicit conversations about race and power could ultimately enhance the teacher's authority, positioning her as a white ally aligned with her students in challenging racism and pursuing social justice.

Engaging in the Conversation: Chapter X

Chapter X engages these results in conversation with existing literature on authority and explores the theoretical and practical implications for culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies. Tracing the evolution of my research questions, I posit this student-teacher relationship as a theoretically significant case that illuminates fresh

understandings about authority in classrooms characterized by racial difference. Positing Ms. Cross's classroom as a theoretically significant case for study, I elaborate a new vision of authority that includes practical forms that represent what authority may look like as enacted in the classroom. I explore the nuances of what it means for white teachers to construct authority relationships with black students by resituating Ms. Cross's approach to authority within warm demander approaches and considering sites of incongruence at which issues of legitimacy remained unresolved and required ongoing negotiation. To further explore how race matters in teaching and research, I review the usefulness of multiple definitions of race for teaching and research, consider politics of essentialization and authentication around the relationship between race and language, and elaborate a useful distinction between culturally congruent and culturally responsive and relevant communication. Situating Ms. Cross's case within literature on culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies enables the embellishment of previously articulated forms of authority and the articulation of a new vision of authority—a vision of what culturally relevant and responsive authority might look like as constituted in and through discourse and the legitimization of a culturally-based discourse practice. In concluding, I offer insight as to how teacher educators might help White teachers address the practical problems with authority they may encounter with students of color by incorporating discourse analysis as a tool for inquiry, adopting sociolinguistic approaches to language and dialect diversity, cultivating white teachers' cultural competence as an authentic white identity, and fostering awareness of structural inequalities through social justice education.

Sketching the Study Design

Why Episodes of Classroom Interaction?

I present episodes of classroom interaction because I am convinced that representations of how talk can be used productively across cultural difference will help teachers, especially White teachers, who comprise the majority of the teaching force, address the problems of cultural asynchronization in classrooms characterized by racial difference. Although a solid philosophical and theoretical foundation for envisioning culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies is crucial (Milner, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2006) so are representations of classroom practice that clarify these approaches if White teachers are to enact these pedagogies. Research demonstrates that intentions are not sufficient: even White teachers who practice certain features of culturally relevant pedagogy are susceptible to unintentionally reproducing racial inequalities in their teaching (Hyland, 2005; Tyson, 2003).

My belief about the importance of representations of classroom talk stems in part from my experience. Although I valued culturally responsive and relevant approaches to teaching and learning when I encountered them through my teacher credentialing program, I struggled with how to implement those principles in my daily classroom practice. When faced with the immediate, day-to-day challenges of teaching, I sought curriculum that I could incorporate into a lesson plan and disciplinary strategies that attended to the challenges I faced. I have since revisited Ladson-Billings (1994; 2006) and Gay's (2000) work along with other pedagogies that address the problem of cultural incongruence, and upon reflecting, realize that what would have helped me as a White

teacher were representations of classroom discourse that illustrated the nuances of language that would have allowed me to engage in the process of mutual accommodation and implement the principles of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies through talk. It is through this talk that classroom relationships, crucial to the work of teaching and learning, are built, and I study classroom talk to learn how teachers can build culturally responsive and relevant authority relationships with their students.

Why Teacher-Student Relationships?

The centrality of teacher-student relationships in culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies served as a point of departure for selecting a research site and participants. Irvine (1991) identifies supportive teacher-student relationships as a “fundamental necessity from which all other solutions and interventions emerge” for Black students (p. 125). For White teachers, establishing relationships with students of color may be a precondition for learning. White educator Gary Howard (2006) explains the value of teacher-student relationships for White teachers and students of color:

[...] for those students who have been the most burdened by the history of social dominance and are, therefore, caught in the lower realms of the achievement gap, an authentic relationship with us [White teachers] often necessarily precedes their learning (p. 130).

Howard suggests that a precondition for White teachers to provide culturally responsive or relevant pedagogies is to cultivate positive relationships with students of color.

Why Ms. Cross?

Seeking to study the classroom practice of a White teacher who established positive relationships with students of color required me to be highly conscious in selecting a research site and participants. Selecting Ms. Cross's high school English class was purposeful: it provided an information-rich case for studying cross-racial classroom relationships. I sought a White, *woman* teacher because in addition to being White, the majority of the teaching force is women (Center for Education Policy, 2006). To identify a White female teacher capable of establishing positive relationships with students of color, I used chain sampling, which entails identifying cases of interest from "sampling people who know people who know people who know what cases are information rich, that is, good examples for study" (Patton, 2002, p. 243). Specifically, I inquired with my faculty advisor, who referred me to a literacy specialist in a county-wide Intermediate School District, who referred me to the Superintendent of a predominantly African American school district, who recommended Ms. Cross, a high school English teacher with a reputation for establishing positive relationships with students.

Why Black/White Race Relations?

Focusing on Black/White⁷ race relations as a particular configuration of racial difference was also purposeful. I am aware that challenges associated with cultural asynchronization are not confined to White teachers and African American students, and, like Gloria Ladson-Billings, Geneva Gay, Sonia Nieto, and Jacqueline Jordan Irvine, I

⁷ I use the term "Black/White" to connote the historical and political meaning that has characterized race relations in the U.S.

assume *all* teachers can benefit from models of pedagogy that explicitly consider students' cultures to promote the academic achievement of *all* students. However, I suggest that there are particular theoretical and pragmatic arguments for focusing on the relationship between a White teacher and African American students for this study. First, as this introductory chapter shows, there is a substantial body of literature that articulates problems associated with cultural asynchronization between White teachers and Black students, and I review additional literature in Chapter II. This literature served as a solid platform that informed my study's theoretical framework and methodological design, while shaping its implications.

Studying Black/White race relations is worthwhile for other reasons. Literary scholar Lisa A. Long (2005) writes that “the Black/White racial matrix is stubbornly trenchant and particular and deserving of our attention [...]” (p. 5). She attributes the salience of Black/White race relations to the legacy of slavery in its historical formation as “the institutionalized racial lightning rod that has galvanized and, to a certain extent, organized subsequent discussions of race in the United States” (p. 5). In other words, Black/White race relations have configured our contemporary conversations about race by serving as a racial template upon which other racial discussions are inscribed. If this is true, then it would seem that examining classroom interaction between White teachers and African American students would be theoretically significant in that results could inform instruction in other contexts in which racial difference and cultural incongruence are a factor.

In addition to the theoretical significance of centering the relationship between Black students and White teachers in my analysis, the practical conditions of schools

today compel the more pragmatic arguments. African American students as a group have consistently lagged behind their white counterparts in math, science, and reading on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) achievement tests during the years 1990-2005 (Center for Education Policy, 2006). In citing the under-achievement of African American students, it is not my intention to perpetuate the construction of a “deficit model” of African American students’ capacity to learn, but to highlight that African American students have been and continue to be under-served and miseducated by U.S. schools (Milner, 2009). Because White teachers comprise nearly 90% of the teaching force, it seems safe to assume that many of their teachers are White, making case studies of classrooms in which White teachers work productively with African American students worthy of our attention and inquiry.

Moreover, despite *Brown v. Board of Education*’s attempt to desegregate the public school system, African American students tend to be highly concentrated in particular schools and school districts all over the country, what Gary Orfield and Susan Eaton (1996) and Jonathon Kozol (2005) refer to as “apartheid schools.” Such de facto segregation implies that many White teachers may have had little contact with African American students in K-12 schools prior to assuming teaching positions. Such racial polarization makes Black/White race relations an important educational issue.

Why Language & Literacy in a High School English Class?

I purposefully selected an English class because it seemed to afford frequent opportunities to study language and literacy practices—language and texts serve as the basis for the subject matter of English. I concentrate on language and literacy practices

because in U.S. society, literacy holds particular significance in African American history in its gatekeeping function and role as conveyor of cultural codes (Ladson-Billings, 1992b; 1994). Today, literacy scholars concerned about how students of color have historically been (and are) denied equitable access to education are calling for secondary educators to pay greater attention to literacy. These scholars frame literacy as a civil right (e.g. Greene, 2008; Plaut, 2009). Language has also served as a battleground in African American history, as in the Ebonics debate (Perry and Delpit, 1998) and the court case *Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School Children v. Ann Arbor School District Board* (Smitherman, 1981), which drew attention to the language needs of African American students who speak African American Vernacular English. In secondary English classes, teacher and students talk explicitly about language and texts. Language and texts are both the object of English curriculum and instruction, and the means by which teaching and learning are realized, making English classes valuable sites for literacy instruction.

I focused my research at the high school level because of the particular challenges adolescents face with respect to literacy. Until recent years, adolescent literacy has been overlooked because many people believe that reading and writing is learned in elementary school; however, in the move from elementary to secondary schools, adolescents are entering classrooms where academic literacy is defined in terms of disciplines, presenting them with new literacy challenges that require the learning of new skills (National Council of Teachers of English, 2007). Despite literacy initiatives across disciplines, literacy instruction still seems to be primarily conducted by English teachers (Lee, 2007). This suggests that examining language and literacy instruction in an English classroom would have the broadest applicability to literacy education in other disciplines.

My initial observations of Ms. Cross's linguistically-rich class confirmed that her class would be a fruitful site for studying language and literacy instruction, as the following vignette demonstrates.

Portraying Mutual Accommodation in Ms. Cross's Class

A vignette from Ms. Cross's class illustrates how Ms. Cross's classroom served as a rich site for studying the nuances of mutual accommodation as a process of authorization through which the legitimacy of students' home-based language and culture and school culture were negotiated. I recorded this episode of classroom interaction in my fieldnotes during the initial week of ethnographic observation. The episode illustrates the authorization process of mutual accommodation as Ms. Cross and a student named Mack⁸ negotiated the legitimacy of his rap as an introduction to a timed-writing essay on a standardized test.

As part of preparation for the timed essay writing section of the state-mandated standardized test, Ms. Cross assigned students the task of drafting an engaging introduction that appealed to emotions in response to a prompt. The following day, students read their introductions aloud to Ms. Cross and the class, who provided them with feedback. Mack was the fifth student to share his work that day. His "introduction" was emotive and engaging, but it was in the form of a rap, which he read with the rhythm and tone of a rap performer. When Mack presented his "introduction," Ms. Cross was faced with the practical problem of deciding whether or not to validate Mack's rap as a legitimate form of expression, although it

⁸ Students selected their pseudonyms.

did not meet the school-based expectations for an introduction according to the genre of essay-writing on standardized tests.

Ms. Cross's response demonstrates the authorization process of mutual accommodation that required her and Mack to modify their cultural⁹ and classroom practices. First, she validated Mack's introduction as being emotive and engaging and meeting the expectations of the assignment in that way. Then she commented on the form of his introduction, telling him that she knew he was a great rapper, but he needed to rewrite his rap in essay style. She suggested that he keep the same ideas and sentiments, but change the form to meet the expectations of his audience: the readers of the essay test. In turn, Mack was faced with the choice of revising his culturally-based form of expression to accommodate the school-based expectations according to what counted as an "introduction." Mack said, "Alright," and rewrote his introduction while the next student shared her draft with the class.

This process of authorization and mutual accommodation was marked by cooperation, a shared goal of pursuing achievement on the standardized test. This study portrays moments of such mutual accommodation to render visible the authorization process by which students' cultural and school based practices are negotiated.

In the next section, I explain why I focus on classroom authority as a particular type of relationship, as a commodity, and as a process of negotiation to address the problem of cultural incongruence when racial difference is a factor.

⁹ As I came to know Mack, I learned that composing and rapping was an extracurricular cultural practice for him. During lunchtime he participated in a rap circle with some of his classmates. The lines between home/school are somewhat blurred because I frequently observed him during class scribbling lines in his notebook or mouthing words silently as he nodded his head to the rhythmic tapping of his hand on his desk. However, these activities were not sanctioned as "curricular."

Problematizing Authority

My study centers on classroom authority because it allows me to address three problems particular to classrooms comprised of White teachers and students of color characterized by cultural incongruence:

- 1) Garnering authority from students of color tends to be a problem for White teachers because of differing cultural conceptions of what counts as legitimacy
- 2) Authority issues with respect to knowledge and discipline seem intensified in classrooms with White teachers and students of color when cultural incongruence is a factor
- 3) How authority is socially negotiated as legitimate power through classroom talk can determine students' access to participation and engagement in teaching and learning

Cultural Conceptions of Authority

First, teachers' authority seems particularly problematic in classrooms in which racial difference is a factor because conceptions of authority are cultural and may serve as sources of misunderstandings between White teachers and students of color. White teachers may rely on "role authority" which is conferred by a teacher's institutional position (Dworkin, 1987 quoted in Cothran & Ennis, 1997). Role authority is premised on students' automatic respect for the institutional role of the teacher, regardless of the teacher's individual qualities or characteristics. Donetta J. Cothran & Catherine D. Ennis

(1997) see this form of authority as a reflection of “dominant European American culture,” and they explain that relying on role authority is no longer sufficient for teachers because students from non-European American cultures may believe that authority must be earned (p. 542). This may be especially true for Black students. Lisa Delpit (1995) explains:

[...] Black people often view issues of power and authority differently than people from mainstream middle-class backgrounds. Many people of color expect authority to be earned by personal efforts and exhibited by personal characteristics. In other words, “the authoritative person gets to be a teacher because she is authoritative.” Some members of middle-class cultures, by contrast, expect one to achieve authority by the acquisition of an authoritative role. That is, “the teacher is the authority because she is the teacher.”¹⁰ (35)

Black students, therefore, value authority earned by personal efforts and traits as opposed to authority derived from acquiring an institutional role. Delpit explains that when authority is derived from an institutional role, it is not affected by what a teacher does or says in the classroom, so the teacher is absolved from having to actively garner authority from students. According to Delpit, “Black children expect an authority figure to act with authority” (p. 35), implying that authority is earned through a teacher’s action in the classroom. Such drastic differences between how White teachers and Black students tend to conceive of authority make classroom authority a potential source of cultural misunderstanding in classrooms characterized by racial difference.

¹⁰ In this quote, Delpit contrasts “Black people” with “people from mainstream middle-class backgrounds” and “people of color” with “members of middle-class cultures.” It seems that she is inferring that those from mainstream middle class backgrounds would be White.

Gerald Grant's (1988) study of a racially desegregated high school portrays how these differences in authority may play out in teacher-student relationships. Without the ability to rely on their role authority, White teachers at this high school were concerned about what they perceived as Black students' "lack of respect for authority," and they struggled with discipline problems (p. 26). David Gillborn (1990) found similar sentiments among White teachers in an inner city school, who tended to see conflicts with Afro-Caribbean students as racially-based threats to their authority as Whites.

In a collaborative study, African American teacher Jennifer E. Obidah and White teacher Karen Manheim Teel (2001) depict Teel's challenges with garnering authority from African American students. Teel explains how she presumed her authority: she expected students to automatically pay attention to her when she talked, sit quietly when being spoken to, follow her directions without complaint, and show her respect as their teacher. Teel describes her journey as she learned that as a White teacher, she could not presume her authority based on her role as teacher but had to earn her students' respect and trust by changing her practice:

I also believed that my role as the authority figure in the classroom would be enough to command the students' respect. [...] Jennifer and I discussed the issue of teacher authority and how it is an earned status for inner-city African American students as opposed to a given. Just because I am the teacher doesn't mean that they will automatically respect and oblige me. There must be trust as well. [...] With a White teacher, such respect and trust are far from automatic. They must be earned. (51)

Rather than presume their authority, White teachers like Teel need to garner authority from students in responsive ways that constitute legitimacy in a given cultural context. In

this way, teacher authority represents a unique problem for White teachers in classrooms in which cultural incongruence is a factor.

Intensified Teacher-Student Authority Relationships

Secondly, I focus on authority as a dynamic student-teacher relationship because disparities between students and teachers may be intensified in classrooms comprised of students of color, especially when it comes to whose and which knowledge counts.

Articulating the connection between cultural asynchronization, knowledge and authority, Ladson-Billings (1994) points out that teachers make assumptions about their minority students' knowledge based on their preconceived notions of students' cultures, and these assumptions configure the authority relations between teachers and their minority students, positioning teachers as "all-knowing" and students as "know-nothings":

The role of the teacher in many classrooms is that of leader or authority figure. The teacher is regarded as all-knowing and the students as know-nothings (or at least as know-very-littles). This relationship is exacerbated in classrooms of minority students. The teacher may assume that, because of poverty, language, or culture, the students know little that is of value in a classroom setting. In these classrooms the relationships between teacher and student is hierarchical or top-down. The teacher assigns, the student carries out the assignment. The teacher talks, the student listens. The teacher asks, the student answers. Rarely are the roles reversed.¹¹ (55)

¹¹ Although by not racializing the teacher in this quote, Ladson-Billings may be implying that teachers in general are subject to making assumptions about their minority students. Yet it seems safe to say that given that 90% of the teaching force is White, White teachers are markedly implicated in these authority issues arising from cultural incongruence.

Ladson-Billings adds that these “typical roles can interfere with students’ ability to succeed” (p. 55), implying that such top-down authority relations can impede teaching and learning and moreover, are more likely to do so in classrooms of minority students.

Authority issues appear intensified not only when teachers make assumptions about minority students’ knowledge, as Ladson-Billings (1994) describes, but also when they make assumptions about students’ behavior. Multicultural education literature on African American students is rife with examples that depict disciplinary problems arising from conflicting behavioral expectations as teachers enact their authority to manage students’ behavior. For instance, Ann Arnett Ferguson (2000) attributes teachers’ misinterpretations of students’ behavior to their reliance on the image of Black men as criminals. These misinterpretations resulted in disciplinary action against Black boys, while teachers deemed comparable behavior by White boys innocent. Skiba, Michal, Nardo, & Peterson (2002) explain, “Teachers who are prone to accepting stereotypes of adolescent African-American males as threatening or dangerous may overreact to relatively minor threats to authority, especially if their anxiety is paired with a misunderstanding of cultural norms of social interaction” (xx). Skiba and colleagues suggest that teachers contribute significantly to the over-representation of African American males as recipients of disciplinary action and highlight the role cultural misunderstandings related to norms of interaction may play in such misunderstandings.

As Skiba and colleagues (2002) note, disciplinary issues can also arise from differences in speech styles that teachers perceive as challenges to their authority. For instance, Geneva Gay (2000) explains how African Americans’ participatory-interactive communication style of call-response varies from what is often expected in schools:

“African Americans ‘gain the floor’ or get participatory entry into conversations through personal assertiveness, the strength of the impulse to be involved, and the persuasive power of the point they wish to make, rather than waiting for an ‘authority’ to grant permission” (p. 91). Offering firsthand testimony, of how call-response can create authority issues in the classroom, Teel (with Obidah, 2001) describes how her lack of cultural knowledge about African American forms of discourse caused her to misinterpret students’ call-response and back-talk as misbehavior. Amanda E. Lewis (2003) reveals how White teachers’ lack of communicative competence resulted in African American boys being repeatedly sent out of classrooms for disruptive behavior, denying them access to teaching and learning.

As these examples illustrate, authority issues can occur when White teachers hold expectations for speech style and behavior that are incongruent with students’ ways of talking, behaving, and knowing. Cultural incongruence can intensify authority issues stemming from differences in communication style and behavioral expectations between White teachers and Black students, resulting in the over-representation of Black students as recipients of unjustified disciplinary action.

Portraying the Problem of Authority in Ms. Carpenter’s Class

A vignette of classroom interaction from my own experience as an urban high school English teacher clarifies what cultural asynchronization looks like in practice and demonstrates how easily differences in communication style can make students of color, especially African American males, vulnerable to disciplinary action when a White teacher is under-prepared to teach across racial difference.

When I noticed Larenz with his headphones on, I approached him combatively, lifted his headphones from his ears, and said commandingly, “Put those away. You know the school policy.”

Larenz looked up at me from his desk and contritely said, “I’m puttin’ em up.” He reached below his desk for his duffel bag, set it on his desk in front of him, and pulled the headphones off. I thought he intended to place the headphones conveniently on top of his duffel bag so that he could put them on again when I walked away.

I responded, “I don’t want you to ‘put them *up*’; I want you to put them *away*.”

“*I am!* I’m puttin’ em up! I’m puttin’ em up!”

I placed my hand on Larenz’s desk and leaned forward. “I said, put them *away!* Do you want a referral to the office?” The situation was escalating out of control. Why didn’t he just do what I asked? Why did he have to challenge my authority?

Larenz looked puzzled and increasingly scared as he placed the headphones in his duffel bag, zipped it up, and returned it to the floor below his desk. He picked up his book and pretended to engross himself in it. I looked around the room to see if I had won the battle. The students looked embarrassed, for both me and Larenz.

It wasn’t until my carpool colleague told me on the ride home, “You do know that in some dialects, puttin’ something up means puttin’ it away, don’t you?” that I understood why the embarrassment weighed so heavily in my classroom. Speechless, I thought about my persecution of Larenz and how because of a subtle difference in how we talked, I almost suspended him from school.

This episode shows how cultural differences in communication style can have disciplinary consequences for students of color when a teacher lacks knowledge of

culturally-based ways of talking. Larenz was attempting to comply with my directive, but because I had such a limited understanding of his language use, I interpreted his actions as a challenge to my authority as teacher.

I believe that every teacher has moments they wish they could re-live differently, and it is through honest, vulnerable reflection that we grow. I present this vignette not only to clarify how cultural misunderstandings related to communication can be read as behavior issues, but also to acknowledge my own complicity in the over-abundance of unjustified disciplinary action against Black students. By sharing my own moment of cultural incongruence, I hope to contribute to the solution.

I also present this vignette to illustrate how in moments of cultural asynchronization, decisions teachers make to legitimize or marginalize students' cultural and linguistic practices are especially significant in classrooms in which racial difference is a factor. This represents the third reason why I focus on classroom authority in this study.

Teachers' Power and Classroom Authority

Authority has been defined as legitimate power, and I elaborate this basic definition of authority by examining research on how power functions in the classroom. Considerable research shows that how teachers manage power in the classroom governs whose literacy practices (Heath, 1983; Larson & Irvine, P. D., 1999; Obidah & Teel, 2001; Rex & McEachen, 1999), knowledges (Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson, 1995), languages (Razfar, 2005; Wenger & Ernst-Slavit, 1999), and discourse genres (Gee, 2000; Lee, 1993) are legitimate versus whose are silenced, invisible, or invalid. Kris

Gutierrez, Betsy Rymes, and Joanne Larson (1995) explain that as the teacher makes decisions about what counts as legitimate knowledge, “the power arrangements of the classroom, then, influence classroom practices; that is, what is learned and who gets to learn particular forms of knowledge” (p. 450). In other words, how teachers manage their power in the classroom plays a significant role in determining what constitutes legitimate classroom practices with which students from nondominant cultures can effectively engage or withdraw. Grounded in a Vygotskyian sociocultural perspective that locates teaching and learning in classroom discourse (Cazden, 1972; Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Edwards & Westgate, 1987; Mehan, 1979), this strand of research examines the microlevel of interactive classroom talk in order to render visible how teachers can wield power to authorize students’ cultural practices through decisions about participation.

The process of legitimizing power is not enacted exclusively through a teacher’s decision-making and management of power, however; it is a process of discursive negotiation. Lesley Rex (2006) synthesizes ethnographic and sociolinguistic literature on race and classroom discourse to articulate a foundational construct that describes this negotiation process as it takes place through classroom talk: “[...] what teachers and students say to each other can illuminate how different cultures effectively negotiate to produce classroom practices with which they productively (or unproductively) engage” (p. 34). Using the literature on classroom power as a springboard, a basic definition of authority as legitimate power may be reconceived as power that is socially legitimated through interaction.

Studying Classroom Authority

Articulating these three problems particular to White teachers in classrooms of students of color enabled me to ask the following focused research questions:

How can White teachers garner authority from students of color? How can they conceptualize legitimate sources of authority?

How can White teachers and students of color build productive authority relationships that engage students in curriculum and instruction, create access to classroom discourse, and minimize power disparities?

Answering these questions required a particular way of “seeing” authority as socially-legitimated power.

As Socially-Legitimated Power

A construct of authority as a process, along with constructs of authority as a relationship and a product are central for addressing the three problems with authority I identified as particular to White teachers in classrooms of students of color. Such constructs of classroom authority are also aligned with recent theorizations that portray classroom authority as socially constructed. Judith L. Pace and Annette Hemmings (2006) articulate classroom authority as “jointly negotiated through the symbolic actions of teachers and students” and “shaped by local contextual forces and larger social, political, and cultural factors” (p. 1). The process of negotiating authority becomes a complex *process* of socially legitimizing power through classroom talk.

As power gains legitimacy, it configures a teacher-student authority *relationship* that may be intensified in classrooms of White teachers and students of color. Pace and Hemmings (2006) describe authority as a “complex social relationship that unfolds in schools and classrooms through various kinds of interactions that hold varied meanings for teachers and students” (p. 1). As socially legitimate power is produced, authority as a *commodity* is earned. In the next section, I describe how I approach the study of authority conceived as a process, product, and relationship in cross-racial classroom interaction.

In Cross-Racial Classroom Interaction

Like power, authority as legitimate power may be examined in interactive classroom talk. To study authority in classroom talk, I draw from theories of discourse which posit discourse as not only reflecting the world, but also as constructing it. As discourse scholar and rhetorician Barbara Johnstone (2002) explains, “Discourse is both shaped by and helps to shape the [...] world as we experience it” (p. 30). Authority is both constructed and reflected in interactive classroom talk. Just as discourse shapes and is shaped by context (Johnstone, 2002), so authority shapes and is shaped by its multiple layers of context. For example, Pace’s (2003a; 2006) studies of authority in a high school English classroom consider bureaucratic mandates for standardized tests as larger, political factors and the race of students and teachers as a local contextual feature that influences classroom authority.

Although considering race as a *contextual* feature of classrooms is valuable, I argue that studying authority as socially constructed through classroom interaction necessarily *warrants consideration of social identity as part of the construction process*.

As David Bloome and colleagues (2005) explain with respect to classroom language and literacy events, “What people do in interaction with each other is complex, ambiguous, and indeterminate, and it often involves issues of social identity, power relations, and broad social and cultural processes” (p. xvii). As Bloome and colleagues’ explanation suggests, identity and authority are implicated in the social interaction of language and literacy events such that in classrooms characterized by racial difference, authority becomes a complex, racialized social process, even if not explicitly so.

Considering how authority and race operate in classroom interaction is important because the influence of racial difference adds a complex dimension to classroom literacy interactions. As Rex (2006) writes, “For students to succeed in multiracial classrooms requires a particular way of thinking about the interrelationship between social roles and relationships, language use as social identity, and constructions of subject matter” (p. 7). This “way of thinking” may not be perceived as necessary for students to succeed in racially homogenous classrooms; consequently, in classrooms characterized by racial difference, we need to understand how race influences, and is influenced by, authority. Studying classroom authority as a racialized process, product, and relationship required a particular theoretical frame for studying the relationship between race and authority.

What It Means to Study Authority as Raced

So far, I have articulated my approach for studying race—as a politically-significant category of analysis—within broader traditions of research that examine Black students’ culture as unique and warranting culturally-specific pedagogies. Studying race in essentialist terms as deterministic of culture has been politically strategic, allowing the

formation of political solidarity around a shared identity. Yet Carla O'Connor, Amanda E. Lewis, and Jennifer Mueller (2007) warn that conceptions of race as culture reify race as a fixed, objective category linked deterministically to culture, as if cultural characteristics were innate or biologically-determined rather than socially constructed. Explaining the implications of such essentialization, they contend:

When race is operationalized in this way, we lose sight of Black heterogeneity and underconceptualize accordant intersectionalities. In addition, we overlook the extent to which Blackness is reflected not only in the meanings students bring with them to school but also in the meanings that are imposed on them by school structures. In the process, we underestimate the emergent and dynamic meanings of race and the impact of racial discrimination. (542).

The theoretical framework and methodological approach I employ to study race builds on O'Connor, Lewis, and Mueller's (2007) considerations for researching "Black" education experiences and outcomes by heeding their call to devote attention to how race is produced in school settings as much as something that students bring with them, focus on how everyday interactions in schools affect opportunities for learning, and consider how students interpret their racialized social positions in relation to their schooling experiences.

What It Means *for Me* to Study Authority as Raced

Throughout my research, I actively resisted the inclination to essentialize Ms. Cross and students. That is, I tried to avoid assigning them traits because of their membership in cultural groups. In the Oakland, CA schools where I taught, making assumptions about students' practices based on their membership in racial or ethnic

groups was impossible because the boundaries between groups were constantly blurred and blended into a sort of urban youth culture. Some students who identified as Asian defied the “model minority” stereotype by wearing saggin,’ baggin’ pants, singing rap songs, speaking Ebonics, and affectionately calling each other “nigga” as a term of solidarity. Some Latinas belied stereotypes of the quiet Hispanic girl by engaging in “loud-talking” and other communicative practices often ascribed to African American women. Some African American boys could transform from “mean-muggin’ thugs” in the hallway to the most diligent, attentive student in class. Identities blurred and blended in such a diverse context as boundaries were perpetually shifting and reconfigured, disrupting any tendency to essentialize. Falling into the trap of essentialization seemed easier in the classroom I observed, perhaps because the boundaries seemed more fixed given the juxtaposed homogeneity of the Black/White dichotomy, and I constantly struggled with an inclination to make assumptions about students and Ms. Cross because of their membership in Black and White cultural groups.

I also struggled with how to represent students’ and Ms. Cross’s membership in cultural groups and their engagement in cultural practices ascribed to those groups. Kris Gutierrez and Barbara Rogoff (2003) advocate considering people’s experience in activities, their “repertoires of practice,” as a unit of cultural analysis by examining their practices across contexts. I was able to observe Ms. Cross and students in extra-curricular contexts—in individual and focus group interviews conducted during Ms. Cross’s prep period, at lunchtime, and after school. In these interviews, I deliberately tried to create an alternative space to the classroom by ensuring confidentiality, establishing a more intimate rapport, and offering light refreshments. Creating this alternative space enabled

me to observe Ms. Cross and students' practices across contexts and portray Signifyin(g) as one of students' home-based ways of communicating.

Still, addressing issues of culture, power, legitimization, and access in the classroom required me to draw some boundaries around what I observed as "culturally-specific" practices and communication styles. I continually questioned my assumptions and sought evidence for these boundaries in the data and in literature to limit essentialization to that which seemed meaningful for what it could illuminate about students' engagement with classroom discourse, language and literacy practices, cultural difference, and productive relationships with their teacher.

I found that another way to minimize the impact of essentialization was to think carefully about the scope of my study's implications. The purpose of this case study is to describe the classroom interaction between a particular White teacher and particular Black students in a particular geographical, cultural, sociopolitical, and historical context, and like any ethnography, the results are intrinsically linked to the context in which they are produced. Yet, I adopt Anne Haas Dyson and Celia Genishi's (2005) approach that case studies matter, and to make my case study matter, I have followed their advice to 1) afford readers a "naturalistic generalization" (Stake, 1995) by providing such a rich, detailed description of the site and classroom interaction that readers have the sense of "being there" so that they may generalize from their vicarious experience in personal ways that allow them to add what they learn from my study to their existing understandings, and to 2) create "propositional generalizations" (Stake, 1995) by situating the details of this case within relevant literature so that common principles can be generated. Ultimately, determining how this case study matters requires the reader to

engage in a highly self-conscious and selective process of generalization and essentialization in order to determine how to assimilate the results and filter their applicability to their own situated work. I have tried to model such reflexivity throughout this introductory chapter and the entire dissertation.

Chapter II: Reviewing Literature for Authority

In the introductory chapter, I articulated the problem of cultural asynchronization in classrooms characterized by racial difference, focusing on relations between White teachers and Black students. This entailed illuminating the particular challenges White teachers face in garnering authority in classrooms of students of color because of different, culturally-based conceptions of what constitutes legitimacy. I suggested that a construct of classroom authority that represents mutual accommodation—the authorization process by which teacher and students negotiate the legitimacy of cultural and classroom practices—seems central to providing culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies in classrooms characterized by racial difference. Reframing mutual accommodation as authority facilitated raising the question,

How do students and teacher negotiate authority across racial difference?

Addressing this question requires theoretical constructs of classroom authority as socially-legitimated power negotiated through a racialized, discursive process.

In this chapter, I build a foundation for this theoretical framework by reviewing literature that informs the issue of classroom authority. Reviewing the literature for conversations about authority has provided me with theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical insights that construct my own authority to study the matter and contribute to these conversations.

Viewing, Reviewing, and Re-Viewing the Literature

This review represents the culmination of an inquiry I began five years ago into constructs of authority that have influenced education discourse and teachers' thinking about authority. Over the years I have read and reread the texts in this review, each time aware of how my reading of them has shifted in tandem with my vantage point, that is, my point of view in relation to the literature I present. In this chapter, articulating my vantage point involves rendering visible the process I used to construct this review—the decisions I made to include, exclude, and represent the literature—as I narrate my exploration through literature as a quest for “authority.”

I represent the literature in this review as two distinct but related bodies: 1) multicultural education literature that foregrounds the role of race and culture in teaching and learning, and 2) education literature that takes authority as its main topic. Maintaining the integrity of these two bodies of literature shows how my study creates conversations between them. To construct this bridge, I draw from my exploration of multicultural education literature as well as Mary Haywood Metz's (1978) ethnographic study of authority in two racially-desegregated middle schools. Straddling the two bodies of literature, Metz's study seems an appropriate tool for building this bridge. Because she conducted her ethnography in racially-desegregated schools, she considers how understandings of authority are culturally-based by examining distinctions among the tracks of students, the composition of which reflect racial patterns. Positing authority as a vital organizational feature, Metz employed a sociological framework to study the social

construction¹² of authority in “the classrooms and corridors” of these schools. Because Metz addresses issues of race, culture, and authority, her text represents a bridge between multicultural education literature that foregrounds race and culture, and education literature that foregrounds authority in teaching and learning.

Seeking the perspectives of multicultural educators, I combed multiple databases using combinations of “authority,” “multicultural education,” “culture,” and “education” as keywords, title words, and subject headings, but to my surprise, my repeated searches yielded few results. This is because rather than focus on authority explicitly, multicultural education literature generally portrays authority as a confluence of caring relationships, authoritative discipline, and a direct communication style.

What my searches did yield, however, were valuable texts that allowed me to trace bibliographies and discover more texts that referred to authority. These texts could be categorized loosely under multicultural education research Christine Bennett (2001) refers to as “Equity Pedagogy,” or pedagogy that aims to achieve equal access to educational opportunities for all students, and they include literature on culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies. The literature herein is not intended to represent a comprehensive, systematic review. But I believe that I have conducted a worthwhile attempt to unearth the references to authority buried within literature on culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies—references embedded within discussions of classroom management, culture, communication, discipline, and care.

¹² Judith L. Pace and Annette Hemmings (2006) articulate Metz’ work as studying the “social construction” of authority, although Metz herself does not use it, probably because the term was not available at the time of Metz’ publication in 1978.

Considering Warm Demander Approaches to Authority

One example of how authority is portrayed as a confluence of care, discipline, and communication style in multicultural education literature is the image of the teacher as “warm demander” (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Bondy, Ross, Gallingame, & Hambacher, 2007; Irvine & Fraser, 1998; Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Ware, 2006;) who “provides a tough-minded, no-nonsense, structured, and disciplined classroom environment” (Irvine & Fraser, 1998, p. 1). The image of the teacher as “warm demander” jived with my own recollection of what was effective for African American students when I was a high school teacher...with one exception: the warm demander teacher “teaches her African-American students with a sense of passion and mission based in the African-American cultural traditions and history *she shares with her students*” (Irvine & Fraser, 1998, p. 1). That warm demander approaches are grounded in culturally synchronous relations between Black teachers and Black students suggests that it is important to consider the degree to which they are useful for White teachers in addressing the particular problems they face in garnering authority. This consideration has shaped how I made decisions about including, excluding, and representing the literature in this review.

To explain, literature that demonstrates culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies between Black teachers and Black students (Callender, 1997; Foster, 1997; Hollins, 1992; Irvine, 1991; Lee, 1993, 2005; Monroe & Obidah, 2004) has been instrumental in framing my understanding of the problem of racial difference and cultural incongruence, and I extensively to these texts in my introductory and concluding chapters. I am acutely aware of how my White researcher’s “cultural eye” may occlude African American teachers’ perspectives (Irvine, 2003), which would be a tremendous

oversight because literature on how Black teachers approach authority for Black students is extremely informative for White teachers. However, *for this review* I intentionally privilege literature that addresses authority issues in classrooms comprised of *White* teachers and students of color, particularly African American students.

The literature on White teachers of African American students illuminates the nuances and complexity embedded in such cross-racial teaching as examined in Nora E. Hyland's (2005) case study of four teachers (three White and one Latina) who self-identified as good teachers of students of color. By analyzing how these teachers used metaphors to describe their teaching, Hyland illustrates the degree to which their approaches align with culturally relevant pedagogy, pointing out the affordances and limitations of their approaches. The case studies of the three White teachers appear as a backboard against which to bounce ideas about the particularities of authority relations between White teachers and Black students.

My tendency to focus on literature about authority relationships between White teachers and Black students responds to research that suggests that there may be something peculiar to the Black student – White teacher authority relationship that warrants attention. Patricia M. Cooper (2002) identifies conceptions about authority as a distinguishing characteristic of White teachers' versus Black teachers' approaches to the education of Black children. Comparing the narratives of White teachers of Black students (e.g. Herbert Kohl, Jonathon Kozol, and Vivian Paley) and literature on effective Black teachers of Black students, Cooper concludes that while Black teachers are comfortable in their authoritative roles as warm-demanders (Irvine & Fraser, 1998), White teachers seem less willing to directly assert authority. The differences between

how White and Black teachers enact authority in ways that are effective for Black students remains an unresolved issue in the literature.

The distinction between how White and Black teachers approach authority is reiterated in other literature as justification for stressing the perspectives and practices of effective Black teachers (Irvine, 2003), which has been crucial because until the 1990s, there was scant pedagogical models for preparing teachers to educate Black students (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Since then, efforts to study effective teaching of African American students seem to focus on African American teachers, and their voices resonate throughout the literature. Less common seem voices of White teachers who are effective with students of color. Like Cooper (2002) and Lesley A. Rex (2006), I see my role as contributing to a conversation between literature on effective Black teachers and effective White teachers. If inter-group conversations among teachers across races are vital to the enterprise of providing effective teaching and learning for students under-served by schools (Dickar, 2008), then it would seem that literature could serve as one of many worthwhile forums for such inter-group conversation. Resituating this case study literature on culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies in the concluding chapter engages two White teachers—Ms. Cross and me—in a literary conversation about authority with African American educators.

It seems that what constitutes effective authority is not only controversial within literature, but among teachers as well. Maryann Dickar (2008) describes how different approaches to authority fueled debates between White and Black teachers at a predominantly African American high school. Specifically, Black educators raised

questions about White teachers' classroom practices they felt diminished teacher authority in the profession while White teachers defended their practices as democratic, promoting autonomy and agency. This debate between Black and White teachers warrants Dickar's speculation that, "Teacher authority may be very much informed by race, with White and Black teachers preferring different strategies to establish that authority, including [teachers'] ways of dressing [in clothing] and disciplining students" (p. 10). The vast distinction between how Black teachers and White teachers conceive of and practice authority suggests that more research is needed to tease apart these differences. By adding to literature that examines the work of White teachers of African American students (Bondy, Ross, Gallinane, & Hambacher, 2007; Cooper, 2003; Hyland, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Rex and Jordan, 2005), my case study contributes to the generation of common principles across cases (Dyson and Genishi, 2005; Stake, 1995).

Data from my case study seems to confirm Cooper's (2002) conjectures and Dickar's (2008) observations about the distinct ways Black and White teachers approach authority. In an interview, Ms. Cross noted how her Black colleagues at Motivation High recommended she approach authority in the classroom by "going hard" on students, a phrase associated with how effective Black teachers of Black children approach their authority (Cooper, 2002). Ms. Cross explained how she found "going hard" on her Black students problematic because of her race.

Yeah, when I first started teaching here – it's not just me, it's any classes that I see here – it's very difficult to get through to these students, to get them to sit down and pay attention to you, [to convey to them] that you mean business. They [Black colleagues] tell you when you first get here, You have to be grouchy. You can't

be their friend. And I experienced at the age of 22 trying to be hard on them [...] and it took me not very long to realize that as a White teacher, “going hard on them,” like they like to say, and being mean to them is to totally turn them away. Completely turn them away [...] [Students say or think,] “Here’s this White person who’s gonna boss me around. *My mama* don’t boss me around like you, let alone a White person do it.” So you know, that’s difficult, and there had to be a way to get by that.

In this excerpt, Ms. Cross describes how her experiences with authority seem very different from those of her Black colleagues who advocate “going hard” on students, which Ms. Cross equates with “being mean.” I see part of my role as a White teacher, teacher educator, and researcher as exploring the nuances of what it means for White teachers to construct authority relations with Black students.

Part of my contribution to this conversation entails noting points of difference in racial understandings. For instance, when Ms. Cross talked about “going hard” on students, she seemed to equate it with “being mean.” However, in literature on effective Black teachers of Black students, “being hard” on students takes on a different meaning. In her advocacy of segregated schooling for African American children, Vanessa Siddle Walker (1996) describes how effective Black teachers at a segregated school held high expectations for student learning, and students referred to this as the teachers being “hard on them” (p. 127). Similarly, a Black student in Michele Foster’s (1991) study of an effective Black teacher bragged about his teacher “being mean” because it showed them that she cared. Illuminating such points of difference in racial understanding marks my tentative move toward bridging perspectives between Black and White educators—perspectives that have for the most part remained segregated (Delpit 1995; Dickar, 2008; Noblit, 1993).

Studying the nuances of racial difference is important for examining the transferability of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogical approaches, such as warm demander approaches to authority, to cross-racial classroom contexts, and research is beginning to do that. A study on culturally responsive classroom management by Elizabeth Bondy, Dorene D. Ross, Caitlin Galligane, and Elyse Hambacher (2007) offers a representation of three elementary school teachers—one White, one African American, one Asian—who employ warm demander approaches. Bondy and colleagues illustrate that although the teachers' cultures and styles varied, all three were effective as warm demanders in developing relationships and establishing expectations because they employed a culturally responsive communication style and insisted that students meet expectations. The study indicates that warm demander approaches to authority *can* be effective for White teachers of African American students in elementary schools. Exploring the applicability of these approaches in other contexts could further illuminate their potential.

From this viewpoint, I delimited the literature in this review by including texts that would have helped me as a White, urban high school teacher as well as White preservice teachers with whom I have worked address the particular problems with authority facing White teachers. These problems were identified in my introductory chapter. First, garnering authority from students of color tends to be a problem for White teachers because of differing cultural conceptions of what counts as legitimacy. Second, authority issues with respect to knowledge and discipline seem intensified in classrooms with White teachers and students of color when cultural incongruence is a factor. Third, how authority is socially negotiated as legitimate power through classroom talk can

determine students' access to and engagement in learning. Through these lenses, I reviewed the literature, beginning with references to authority in multicultural education.

Teasing Apart Authority in Warm Demander Approaches

Multicultural education literature that explicitly refers to authority tends to depict it as a confluence of discipline, caring relationships, and communication style, frequently discussed in terms of culturally responsive classroom management and, as I noted, represented by the image of the teacher as “warm demander.” Teasing apart the qualities of warm demander approaches to authority illuminates and complicates their potential for informing White teachers about culturally responsive and relevant authority relations with African American students.

Multicultural education literature calls for teachers to enact their authority judiciously to discipline students for misbehavior (Cooper, 2003; Walker-Dalhouse, 2005; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, and Curran, 2004). Yet, what constitutes “judicious” use of authority is contingent upon the cultural context, and according to literature, being effective for Black children requires teachers to assume an authoritative approach. Cooper's (2003) empirical study of effective White teachers of Black children shows how teachers used their authority judiciously and authoritatively, in ways that validated students' membership in cultural groups for educational purposes: “to increase student achievement, self-efficacy, self-respect, and group membership for the sake of both individual and group development” (p. 421). An *authoritative* approach is to be distinguished from an *authoritarian* approach, which would represent an abuse of authority or wielding of power for power's sake. Cooper asserts that the Black students in

her study did not seem injured by their White teachers' authoritative approach, nor did the teachers seem to "indulge" in their authority (p. 422). Such an authoritative approach is marked by an ethical use of power or a "moral authority," as in the "teacher-centered" classroom George Noblit (1993) studied.

Being an authoritative teacher of Black students requires teachers to earn their authority through actions. Lisa Delpit (1995) elaborates:

The authoritative teacher can control the class through exhibition of personal power; establishes meaningful interpersonal relationships that garner student respect; exhibits a strong belief that all students can learn; establishes a standard of achievement and 'pushes' the students to achieve that standard; and holds the attention of the students by incorporating interactional features of Black communicative style in his or her teaching. (36).

Embedded in Delpit's characterization of the authoritative teacher are suggestions for thinking about legitimizing authority so that it is earned. Specifically, she suggests that a teacher's authority can be earned in part through meaningful relationships with students and interactions that incorporate a culturally responsive communication style.

White teacher Karen Manheim Teel (2001, with Obidah) describes how she learned through dialogue with Black teacher Jennifer E. Obidah that authority needed to be earned. In fact, Teel says, the students presented her with repeated opportunities to assert her authority because they wanted her to assume authority, take charge, enforce rules, and control the classroom. Once she changed her approach to discipline to be more authoritative by being more assertive, raising her academic expectations, and following through with consequences for misbehavior, Teel found students accepted her as an authority figure.

Teel's authoritative approach to discipline was accompanied by respect and affection for students. To be culturally responsive, relationships with students of color should be caring relationships (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2006; Noblit, 1993; Walker-Dalhouse, 2005; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, and Curran, 2004). Gay (2000) describes culturally responsive caring relationships as characterized by "patience, persistence, facilitation, validation, and empowerment for the participants" (p. 47). She suggests that in order to provide culturally responsive caring, teachers should hold high expectations for all students, practice personal and professional self-awareness, and acquire a knowledge base to discern what constitutes caring in a particular culture because, like authority, definitions of care also tend to be influenced by race and culture.

Eileen Parsons (2005) suggests that African American students benefit from another type of caring—culturally relevant caring. She illustrates culturally relevant caring in her portrayal of a White teacher in a 4th grade classroom of African American students. To be culturally relevant, care should be accompanied by a commitment to justice. Parsons explains:

In light of the historical and present conflicts and assumptions surrounding race in the United States in relation to democratic ideals, justice and caring must come together in the act of teaching; if not, systemic inequities and inequalities are preserved and perpetuated by the teacher's actions. (26)

Culturally relevant caring for African American students, then, involves an awareness of racial inequalities and commitment to addressing them. Linking care with justice to build culturally relevant caring relationships with African American students represents one way for White teachers to earn or legitimize their authority in the classroom.

According to multicultural education literature, another way for White teachers of African American students to earn their authority is to engage in communication practices that are responsive to students' culture (Brown, 2003; Gay, 2000), such as a "Black communicative style" when interacting with African American students (Delpit, 1995). Most scholars agree that a direct discourse style is more effective for African American students in conveying authority than an indirect style (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007; Brown, 2003; Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1983; Noblit, 1993; Obidah & Teel, 2001; Walker-Dalhouse, 2005). A direct style is characterized by direct commands as opposed to questions that students may not take seriously. Using humor, terms of endearment, familiar expressions, and references to pop culture also represent culturally responsive communication as facets of classroom management that can function to build caring relationships with students and hold their attention (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007).

Familiarity with culturally-specific communication practices could also benefit White teachers of African American students in establishing their authority. Call-and-response and Signifyin(g) represent culturally-specific African American communication practices. Call-and-response is a type of interaction in which statements, or "calls," are punctuated and emphasized by expressions, or "responses," that may or may not be solicited (Foster, 2002). Signifyin(g) can involve play with words in innovative ways or verbal battles for status that appear confrontational (Lee, 1993; 2007; Obidah & Teel, 2001). White teachers are more likely to be unfamiliar with these culturally-based communication practices (Obidah & Teel, 2001), and therefore, may not be able to capitalize on students' home-based language resources and more consequentially, may

interpret students' "responses" or verbal dueling as misbehavior (Gay, 2000; Irvine, 1991). Employing these interactional styles with African American students offers a way for White teachers to earn their authority.

To summarize, multicultural education literature that refers to authority is highly instructive for White teachers of African American students in providing teachers ways to think about and enact authority in response to students' culture. This literature advocates that instead of grounding their authority in their institutional role as teacher, White teachers of students of color garner legitimacy through judicious discipline, culturally responsive and relevant caring relationships, and culturally responsive communication. For African American students in particular, this literature recommends that teachers earn their authority through a convergence of authoritative discipline, caring relationships blended with ambitions for social justice, and Black styles of interaction. I revisit these portrayals of authority in the discussion chapter when I engage this case study in conversation with multicultural education literature.

Complicating Warm Demander Approaches

To explore the degree to which approaches to authority grounded in Black teacher-Black student pedagogies may be transferable to cross-racial classrooms with White teachers and Black students, I would like to complicate some of the literature's recommendations for how White teachers of students of color can garner authority through discipline, care, and communication, particularly as they are framed as elements of "warm demander" approaches to authority. Teachers characterized as warm demanders tend to employ explicit disciplinary techniques, use direct communication, and hold high

expectations for African American students. Such an approach may ultimately *cause* disciplinary problems for White teachers who see this method of teaching as authoritarian (Delpit, 1995; Irvine & Fraser, 1998), as creating interactional conflict that contributes to the over-representation of African American students as disciplinary recipients (Gay, 2006), or as provoking student resistance, as Ms. Cross described of her experience. It is important to consider *in what ways* and *in what contexts* warm demander approaches might be applicable for White teachers because just as *students'* race and culture are crucial factors in teaching and learning, so are *teachers'* race and culture.

Distinguishing the particular role authority plays in classrooms of White teachers and students of color could be informative for White teachers in enacting their authority in culturally relevant and responsive ways. Metz (1978) complicates what enacting authority relevantly and responsively might mean when she asserts that in her study, the classroom relationships in which teacher and students' conceptions of authority aligned were the most harmonious, although not always the most productive for learning academics. She illustrates why highlighting the educational purposes of authority is important: "The strongest classroom conflicts occurred when the students perceived the teachers to be claiming the right to demand obedience while they clearly failed to serve educational goals" (p. 133). In lower track classes—largely comprised of Black students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds—students perceived teachers as failing to serve educational goals when they made little effort to teach, disciplined a student without justification, and treated students differently, that is, treated "different people committing the same offense in different ways," particularly in multiracial classrooms (p. 140).

Emphasizing the educational purposes of authority could entail broadening teachers' understandings of authority beyond caring, disciplining, and communicating to consider how authority as socially legitimated power can determine whose and which knowledges, literacies, and cultures are deemed legitimate or invalid (Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson, 1995; Rex, et. al., 2010). Authority employed to promote students' self-efficacy, self-respect, and cultural memberships is an essential quality of effective White teachers of African American students (Cooper, 2003).

Validating students' knowledge that they bring to the classroom is a feature of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies, yet in classrooms of students of color, authority disparities between students and teachers with respect to knowledge may be intensified. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) explains that traditional authority relations position teachers as "all-knowing" and students as "know-nothings (or at least as know-very-littles)" (p. 55). In contrast, in culturally relevant teaching, "Students are not seen as empty vessels to be filled by an all-knowing teacher. What they know is acknowledged, valued, and incorporated into the classroom" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 95). How White teachers can legitimize students' culturally-based knowledge and literacies is demonstrated by Ladson-Billings' (1992b) description of White elementary teacher Anne Lewis' validation of African American (and Latino) students' cultural frames of reference as lenses for reading. Approaching authority as a construct pertinent to how knowledge is produced and legitimated in classrooms of students of color clarifies the educational purposes of authority—to validate students' culture, literacies, and knowledge.

Stressing the educational functions of authority is also warranted by the possibility for over-emphasizing discipline at the expense of learning. Although attention to discipline is critical for teaching African American students, particularly boys given the prevalence of disciplinary action against them (Ferguson, 2000; Lewis, 2003; Milner, 2009; Skiba, et. al., 2002), an over-emphasis on discipline holds the potential for limiting African American students' access to learning opportunities (Milner, 2009). It may be a slippery slope from authority to authoritarianism that replaces the educational purposes of African American schooling with discipline and "socialization," or the learning of society's rules for appropriate behavior, as school's primary purpose. In education courses, for example, the complexities of authority may be occluded by discipline because of the demands of the educational institution: "The whole question of teacher's authority becomes confounded with, trivialized, and buried by the main issue of concern to outside [institutional] powers, namely the maintenance of 'classroom discipline'" (Maher, 1999, p. 9). Teachers' susceptibility to equating learning with control and enacting institutional authority as if it were a pedagogical purpose may originate from two particular ideas: "Unless the teacher establishes control, there will be no learning; and, if the teacher does not control the students, the students will control the teacher" (Britzman, 2003, p. 224). Reframing the purpose of authority as *disciplining students' misbehavior* to be *fostering student resilience* could promote a supportive environment that promotes students' success despite challenging circumstances. Insisting that students meet expectations for behavior holds the potential to "put respect, not order, at the center of their classrooms" (Bondy, Ross, Galligane, & Hambacher, 2007, p. 346). In addition, expanding conceptions of authority to include its role in facilitating the production of

knowledge could help teachers create academically-engaging classroom environments with culturally-based learning opportunities for African American boys that reduce behavioral problems (Monroe, 2006).

Raising questions about care and communication as facets of warm demander approaches and culturally responsive classroom management adds to the complexity of White teachers applying these approaches and management techniques in classrooms with students of color. For instance, establishing caring relationships may be challenging when cultural conceptions of what constitutes care clash in the classroom. African American students often expect teachers to show emotion in the classroom (Delpit, 1995), while White teachers may be uncomfortable with the intense emotional investment genuine caring requires of their professional role (Obidah & Teel, 2001). Some teachers may believe that they are demonstrating care by offering students “one more chance”; however, offering additional chances can imply to students that the teacher does not mean what they say, which may be construed as a lack of caring (Bondy and Ross, 2008). For other teachers, discomfort with racial and cultural differences can impede establishing close relationships with students (Obidah and Teel, 2001). In addition, racism can be hidden in acts of caring, as Hyland (2005) conveys in her study when a particular White teacher’s care “demonstrated a sense of superiority over her students” versus respect for them. This condescending type of care contributed to low expectations that limited their access to learning (p. 440). In demonstrating how conceptions of care can be culturally-grounded, this literature indicates that more research would be beneficial to illuminate what culturally responsive and relevant caring relationships look like between White teachers and students of color.

For White teachers, garnering authority from students of color through culturally responsive communication strategies seems equally fraught, particularly with respect to Black communication practices. Sociolinguistic research indicates that White women can learn to speak African American English given motivation, time, and feedback from native speakers (Sweetland, 2002), but scholars speculate whether White women have the “force of presence” to assume an authoritative role in classrooms because they are socialized to speak softly, indirectly, and non-assertively (Brantlinger, Morton, & Washburn, 1999; Thompson, 2004). While some wonder if White teachers *can* engage in culturally responsive communication practices with African American students, Hyland (2005) raises the question of whether or not they *should*. Hyland describes how a White teacher adopted the communication practices of the students of color she served. She suggests that although this White teacher appeared to practice culturally relevant pedagogy by adopting the worldview of her African American students (Ladson-Billings, 1994), the teacher had learned students’ communication practices by imitating them rather than genuinely adopting their worldview, reflecting a depoliticized view of culture that depicts Black/White power relations as equal. Hyland describes how this may be very offensive to people of color, such as her African American doctoral student who

was visibly offended by the mimicry of Black speech patterns and later commented to me [Hyland] how typical it was for a White person to believe that she could simply colonize the behavior of people of color without realizing how racist it is to sit there and imitate people while pretending she was just like them. (448)

Hyland questions the ethics of White teachers appropriating Black communication practices, although it is proffered in multicultural education literature as a way for White teachers to earn their authority from African American students. Politics of authenticity

complicate what constitutes culturally responsive communication styles in classrooms in which racial difference is a factor.

In reviewing multicultural education literature that foregrounds the role of culture in teaching and learning, my “cultural eye” scrutinized the literature for references to authority that would address the particular problems White teachers of students of color face in garnering authority in the classroom. My review indicates that empirical research is beginning to consider the applicability of warm demander approaches for White teachers and students of color (Bondy, Ross, Gallingame, & Hambacher, 2007), while studies of culturally responsive and relevant caring (Parsons, 2005) and classroom management (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, and Curran, 2004) add to literature on effective White teachers of African American students (Cooper, 2003; Hyland, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Rex & Jordan, 2005). Unresolved is what culturally responsive and relevant discipline, care, classroom management, and communication as facets of warm demander approaches to authority might look like for White teachers of African American students. Next, I turn to education literature that foregrounds authority as an explicit topic of study and contemplation, portraying it as central to teaching and learning.

Searching and Re-Searching Literature on Authority

As I noted previously in this chapter, I see my role as creating a conversation between the two bodies into which I have categorized the literature in this review. In constructing this bridge, I use Metz’s work in conjunction with the results of my review

of multicultural education literature to build a bridge between issues of race and culture, and authority in teaching and learning.

My quest for education literature that takes authority as its main topic was also guided by the particular problems facing White teachers of students of color. Specifically, I sought literature that would inform White teachers about ways to envision different grounds upon which to legitimize their authority beyond their intuitional role as teacher and to enact authority responsively in classrooms of students of color. Other literature illustrates for what educational purposes authority might be employed, such as producing knowledge, deliberating morality, and facilitating access to and engagement with teaching and learning. In what follows, I narrate this quest for “authority” and its educational purposes, along with ways of addressing unresolved issues raised by multicultural education literature and problems particular to White teachers of students of color.

To identify literature that considers authority as an explicit topic of study, I conducted systematic searches of various databases (ERIC, Wilson Select Plus, WorldCat, Jstor, and GoogleScholar) three times over the past four years using various combinations of “authority,” “education,” and “classroom” as keywords, title words, and subject headings. My initial search of ERIC, Wilson Select Plus, Jstor, and WorldCat databases in 2005 yielded theories of authority that offer teachers ways of envisioning authority as well as empirical studies that depict ways of enacting authority in the classroom. In 2007 my searches of ERIC, Wilson Select Plus, and WorldCat databases returned another worthwhile theory of classroom authority that inspired me to revise my thinking about the trajectory of a construct useful for White teachers of students of color.

I used Google Scholar in 2009 to identify published texts that cited literature gleaned from prior searches. With these search results, I updated my review to its current state. This process of searching and re-searching for literature on authority developed my appreciation for a field of study that is perpetually evolving, a reminder of the socially constructed nature of knowledge.

Authority seems to be a well-theorized construct in the literature that portrays it as central to teaching and learning. The theories offer ways for teachers to legitimize their authority beyond grounding it in their institutional role as teacher. Specifically, the theories enable authority to be conceived as shared, socially constructed, and located in interactive classroom discourse—ways that are useful for White teachers in earning their authority with students of color.

Empirical studies also seem useful for White teachers because they provide representations of authority as practiced. However, before delving into the empirical literature on authority, I critique the theories of authority.

Critiquing Theories of Authority

In presenting theories of authority, I begin with R. S. Peters' (1959) constructs because they are foundational, having served as the basis for subsequent theories of authority, although they require elaboration to be useful for today's White teachers of students of color because they seem to reflect an over-reliance on legitimization by the institution.

Drawing from social theory (Weber, 1947), Peters (1959) articulates two constructs of teacher authority: authority in the sphere of social control legitimized by the

institution of schooling and authority in the sphere of knowledge derived from competence, training, and expertise in a given sphere. With respect to authority in the sphere of social control, Peters writes, “The justification of authority in the sphere of social control is so obvious that it seems almost otiose [futile] to parade such reasons in public” (sic, p. 249). Peters’ construct assumes that a teacher’s authority in the sphere of social control is stable because the authority of the institution is stable, and for the most part, the institution of schooling may have seemed stable prior to the emergence of more egalitarian constructs of authority based on critical scholars’ questioning of the education system’s role in reproducing societal inequalities (Pace, 2003b). In contrast, authority in the sphere of knowledge is somewhat more tenuous because it is legitimized through “public procedures.” Peters writes, “In fields where it is appropriate to talk about knowledge there must be reasons which support the claim to know, and there must be public procedures for testing the reasons put forward” (p. 251). Yet these “public procedures” for producing knowledge have the potential to become institutionalized as they are systematically replicated and perpetuated as disciplinary knowledge (Foucault, 1980). Consequently, a teacher’s authority as social control and as knowledge are legitimized by the institution.

Although Peters’ (1959) constructs of authority may represent the first published literature of ruminations on the topic of authority and have informed subsequent studies (Buzelli & Johnston, 2001; Pace, 2003a; Oyler, 1996a), they seem to reflect an unequivocal reliance on the institution for legitimacy, which could result in teachers’ presuming their role authority in the classroom. In light of multicultural education literature that cautions White teachers against relying on this type of authority and

advocates that teachers earn their authority (Delpit, 1995; Obidah & Teel, 2001), Peters' constructs of authority appear theoretically insufficient for conceptualizing authority in K-12 classrooms characterized by racial difference and possibly cultural incongruence.

Extending Peters' theory, Celia Oyler (1996a, 1996b) articulates two mutually-constitutive dimensions of authority: authority over content, which involves decisions about what counts as knowledge in the classroom, and authority over process, which refers to "who gets to do what, where, when, and how" (p. 21). In contrast to Peters' (1959) constructs of authority, construct of shared authority allows authority to be thought of as socially legitimated, rather than presumed in the institution's legitimacy.

However, at the time I encountered Oyler's (1996a) theory, I had difficulty seeing its potential for White teachers of students of color because it seemed to overlook issues of race and culture. To derive her theory of shared authority, Oyler investigated a first grade "urban" classroom comprised of students with "poor, nonmainstream" backgrounds, and she claims that sharing authority is effective for them: "All students, whether poor and minoritized or not, can actively contribute to the work of the classroom in both process and content dimensions" (Oyler, 1996b, p. 157). However, she does not explain how the teacher and students navigated conflicts of interest based on cultural differences, nor does she allude to any culturally-based mutual accommodation that may have been necessary to achieve a shared agenda. This omission from her theorization was concerning because it could perpetuate the idea that authority is a neutral phenomenon, decontextualized from students' and teachers' race and cultures, even though multicultural education scholars have emphasized the cultural nature of authority (Cooper, 2002; Delpit, 1995; Obidah & Teel, 2001). My own experiences as a white

teacher of racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students were rife with moments of cultural incongruence that contributed to authority issues, so I was skeptical about the applicability of sharing authority to classrooms characterized by racial difference.

Since then, I was heartened to discover Oyler's subsequent work with teacher-researcher Brian Schultz (2006) that illuminates the potential for sharing authority to help White teachers legitimize their authority in classrooms of students of color—by assuming the position of a White ally alongside their students in racial struggle. By demonstrating his willingness “as a White person able to frankly address matters of racism and oppression,” Brian positioned himself as an “active ally of the African-American community's struggle” and earned students' trust (Schultz & Oyler, 2006, p. 441). This strategy of allying with African American students against racial injustice holds potential to be part of culturally relevant pedagogy as displayed by Hyland's (2005) study in which a White, 4th grade teacher, “Maizie,” built an alliance with her students by engaging them in critiques about how racial groups were portrayed in the curriculum. Because Maizie and Brian were aware of structural inequalities and reflective about how their Whiteness positioned them in relation to their students in the classroom, they were able to re-position themselves as White allies with their African American students in racial struggle. Highlighting aspects of shared authority, Schultz and Oyler's (2006) study contributes an invaluable representation of how White teachers can legitimize their authority in classrooms of students of color.

More recent theoretical innovations articulate authority as a social construction (Pace & Hemmings, 2006). Building on Metz's (1978) construct of authority as rights

and duties configured by a school's moral order of shared goals, values, and norms, Pace and Hemmings elucidate authority as:

- 1) Dependent upon teachers' legitimacy, students' consent, and a moral order
- 2) Multiple in its forms and types and the ways in which it is interpreted
- 3) Enacted through dynamic negotiations between teachers and students that often involve conflict
- 4) Situated in various arenas, such as curricula and classroom discourse, and shaped by multiple, interacting influences, including different perspectives on educational purposes, values, and norms, as well as policy and bureaucratic mandates
- 5) Consequential for classroom life, students' achievement, teachers' work, and democracy

These theoretical innovations enable consideration of contextual features of authority, such as how race and culture influence classroom authority relations. Recent studies featured in Pace and Hemmings' (2006) anthology have considered race as context in their examination of authority, enabled by their theorization of authority as a social construction.

A handful of studies locate the social construction of authority in classroom talk. Adopting an ethnomethodological approach (Garfinkel, 1967), Douglas Macbeth (1991) frames authority as "practical action," locating it in the social action that comprises the everyday, commonplace events of the classroom—the routine classroom talk. Examining

classroom talk illuminates the taken-for-granted authority relations that contextualize teaching and learning and allowed Macbeth to illustrate how talk not only *reflects* authority in action, but *produces* it as a discursive construction. Teresa Crawford (2008) also portrays authority as socially constituted through classroom talk. In her framework, authority is distributed through cultural models, or socially constructed shared ways of being, doing, and knowing (Gee & Green, 1998), which, over time, facilitate or limit students' access to and engagement with teaching and learning. As part of the classroom's cultural model, the social construction of authority is intertwined with the construction of identities as socially negotiated roles that determine students' access and engagement. These theories of authority locate its social construction in classroom discourse.

Although theorizing authority as socially constructed in classroom discourse acknowledges students' participation in constructing authority relations, the literature tends to present the teacher's perspective and focus on the teacher's authority. As a result, the students' role in *co-constructing* authority relations may be understated. In a study that was intended to examine how *teachers* create order that governs participation in the classroom, Davies' (1983) highlights the crucial role *students* play in constructing order. She describes how as she "viewed and re-viewed" the videotapes and their transcriptions, she "became more and more aware of the work the *children* were doing to assist the teacher in the construction of these various orders" (p. 14). Davies highlights students' role in the social construction of authority relations through classroom discourse.

Synthesizing these theories yields a portrayal of authority as shared, socially constructed, co-constructed, and located in everyday classroom talk. These theories

extend possible sources of legitimacy beyond the institutional role of teacher to consider how authority may be socially legitimated in interaction. Particularly useful for White teachers is the potential for positioning themselves as allies with their students of color as a means of constructing culturally responsive and relevant authority relations grounded in social justice. These conceptualizations of authority served as theoretical frameworks for empirical studies, and they have informed my own ways of seeing and studying authority.

Researching the Empirical Literature on Authority

I review these empirical studies that focus on authority in conversation with my analysis of multicultural education literature. Building the bridge between these two bodies of literature entails exploring how the literature might address the problems particular to White teachers of students of color, especially by minimizing authority disparities with respect to knowledge, often exacerbated in classrooms of students of color. Investigating how teachers can employ authority for educational purposes—such as the production of knowledge, moral deliberation, and the creation of opportunities for students to engage with and access teaching and learning—is also important for building this bridge, and Metz’s (1978) study of authority again serves as a useful tool.

Viewing the literature through these investigative lenses affected my decisions about including and excluding the literature in this body. I deliberately included studies that depict unproductive authority relations between White teachers and students of color: this research is instructive for teachers in terms of the potential pitfalls of ignoring authority and may help White teachers combat unintentional racism (Hyland, 2005) or racist outcomes (Pace, 2006). Mindful that White blinders do not slip over my “cultural

eye,” I intentionally privilege studies that examine authority in classroom contexts for which racial and cultural difference are a factor. To stay focused on the classroom as a politically-important site in which teachers have tremendous impact, I omitted studies of authority outside classrooms, such as in after-school programs, counseling sessions, and at district levels. Because studying race requires situating meanings of race geographically (O’Connor, Lewis, and Mueller, 2007), I limited the empirical studies in this review to those conducted in the U. S. to maximize their applicability to the problem of racial difference and cultural incongruence facing today’s U. S. classrooms. Limiting the scope of my review in these ways focused my sights on authority issues in U. S. classrooms comprised of White teachers and students of color.

Illuminating the Educational Purposes of Authority

Empirical literature that posits authority as its central topic broadens multicultural education literature by emphasizing the educational purposes of authority. In Oyler’s (1996a, 1996b) model of sharing authority, what counts as knowledge and the process by which knowledge is produced are considered a function of authority. Sharing authority over knowledge and process creates opportunities for student learning by providing them with access to classroom discourse and processes of knowledge production, making knowledge negotiable. Like dialogic pedagogies, which elicit and extend students’ contributions to classroom conversation, the premise of sharing authority is that students will become more autonomous, self-monitors of their learning as they assume more authority. Oyler (1996a) contrasts teacher-student authority relations in dialogic pedagogies with “traditional” pedagogies in which knowledge is not negotiable:

In traditional modes of teaching, authority is not often a problematic concept. The teacher is expected to maintain it, and students are supposed to respect it. It is only in the move toward more dialogic pedagogies involving negotiations of knowledge and power that sharing authority even arises as a possibility or concern. (20)

This debate between “traditional modes of teaching” and dialogic pedagogies may be framed in terms of an epistemological struggle between constructivism and behaviorist paradigms, with the authority to produce knowledge at the center of the struggle (Crawford, 2008). In her study of shared authority in a 4th grade/5th grade classroom, Theresa Crawford (2008) illustrates how authority can be shared over time through participation structures that afford students access to classroom discourse and opportunities to produce knowledge, increasing their access to learning. That the classroom Crawford studied was comprised of a White teacher and approximately 47% White and 53% students of color suggests that sharing authority may offer a way to reconfigure traditional authority relations and minimize authority disparities with respect to knowledge that plague many classrooms of minority students (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Oyler and teacher-researcher Brian Schultz (2008) offer White teachers another way to minimize authority disparities with respect to knowledge. They examine how a White teacher and African American students in a 5th grade classroom shared authority during a community action project that fostered democratic principles. Sharing authority required Brian, the teacher, to authorize discussions of race and defer to students’ knowledge of racial politics. By sharing authority over content and process in this way, Brian increased his own knowledge of racial politics. Schultz and Oyler’s (2008) work bears particular import for classrooms in which racial difference and cultural incongruence are a factor because it illustrates how sharing authority over what and how

knowledge is produced across racial difference can legitimize students' and teacher's authority to produce knowledge.

When authority over knowledge and process are not shared and students' home knowledge is deemed illegitimate in the classroom, particularly in cross-racial contexts, students may be less engaged in learning. Pace (2006) illustrates how a teacher's strategy of establishing boundaries between home and school knowledge to avoid "unsafe" topics and maintain order created distance between the teacher, students, and the curriculum. When who can speak and what counts as knowledge are not negotiable, students' access to classroom discourse and knowledge production and engagement with the curriculum may be limited.

In Brian's class, students and teacher were able to negotiate knowledge and process because their curriculum—a community action project—was negotiable and allowed for students to initiate learning activities and co-design the curriculum (Schultz & Oyler, 2006). This suggests that particular curricular approaches, such as inquiry- and project-based learning, may be more conducive to sharing authority than other curricula that are less negotiable. Studies of authority in less-negotiable curricular environments illuminate that curriculum matters. For instance, in classroom contexts where standardized testing is high stakes, students' opportunities to produce knowledge may be limited. John S. Wills' (2006) study of social studies instruction in an elementary classroom illustrates how a teacher's positive enactment of authority was compromised by standardized testing because the students were not afforded the authority to produce knowledge.

Such curricular contexts may also be less engaging for students. Metz (1978) explains why this might be so from the perspective of the Black students in the classrooms she studied:

At the same time that the Black children in the lower tracks might find the school's curriculum both irrelevant and useless to them, they recognized perfectly clearly that the school is the agent of the larger society and must represent its values. If what the school teaches is irrelevant to their lives, then their lives are irrelevant to the larger society. (87)

Metz's observations are echoed by contemporary studies of authority in curricular contexts of test preparation (Pace, 2003a). Wills (2006) suggests that not only did the implementation of test-based curriculum jeopardize time for meaningful social studies, but also threatened classroom authority relationships by limiting opportunities for building and sustaining trusting, caring teacher-student relationships, which are a precondition for engagement in learning for many students of color (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; 2008; Howard, 2006).

Yet, teachers have the power to make the curriculum negotiable through their pedagogy. By destabilizing the authority of the teacher and textbook through particular activities, students can be granted opportunities to interrogate the authority of disciplinary knowledge in a history class (Bain, 2006). In making the authority of the curriculum negotiable, teachers may face moral dilemmas, such as whether to foster students' authorial voice or regulate the content of student writing when an elementary student introduces a beer-drinking character in a story (Buzelli & Johnston, 2001) or whether or not to pursue moral deliberations of interest to students, which may threaten the teacher's authority, during discussions of literature in an English class (Pace, 2003a). Although

these studies represent moral dilemmas that may accompany authority negotiations, they also point to the potential for using authority for the educational purposes of encouraging moral deliberation.

The potential to use authority for moral deliberation is exemplified in Mary Juzwik's (2006) depiction of a teacher's use of authority to enable her students to learn moral lessons from the history of the Holocaust. To position herself with moral authority, the teacher employed narrative as a rhetorical tool and verbal art, which heightened students' engagement in the curriculum and increased their access to classroom discourse as they contributed their own narratives. At the nexus of discourse studies, sociolinguistics, and composition and rhetoric, Juzwik's study points to the importance of teacher's talk as a means through which teachers can position themselves with authority.

Locating Authority in Classroom Talk

The import of teacher's talk for the building of authority relations is substantiated in other literature. Explaining that the students in the lower tracks of the schools she studied seemed particularly sensitive to teachers' tones, Metz (1978) concurs:

[E]ven the tone of voice in which a teacher gives a reprimand or punishment is important in a student's acceptance of its legitimacy. If the teacher's tone implies personal dislike or an attempt to humiliate, his action will be taken as a personal attack rather than an action in the service of legitimate classroom order and education (137).

In addition to tone of voice, teachers can use silence or contingent consequences to reprimand. Macbeth (1991) analyzed the discourse a teacher used to reproach students for misbehavior, illustrating how teacher and students took turns speaking (turn-taking) and

how the order of the turns created meaning (sequences) to co-construct the order of the classroom, or the everyday routines by which the classroom is managed. In doing so, he illuminates how authority may be projected from one turn to the next, highlighting not only *what* language the teacher uses, but *how* the teacher uses language (or silence) to structure the interactional organization of the classroom and construct the taken-for-granted authority relations that contextualize teaching and learning

Attention to the content and form of teachers' discourse may be particularly useful for White teachers in constructing productive authority relations with students of color. In a portrayal of authority relations that were not productive for students' learning, Pace (2006) demonstrates how a White teacher's strategy of using grades as an incentive to engage African American students in learning was mitigated by her use of polite talk that redressed the pressure on students to strive for good grades. Polite talk was needed in order for the teacher to have positive relationships with the students and preserve their positive self-images as she imposed her expectations for their learning. These contradictory messages embedded in the teacher's discourse evoked an ambivalent mixture of consent and resistance from Black students and ultimately, established low expectations for their learning. Through a content analysis of the teacher's talk, Pace explains that ultimately, "Genuine authority and deep involvement in learning were weakened by emphasis on order and grades rather than intrinsically valuable educational purposes" (p. 109).

While theoretical frameworks of authority are helpful for envisioning authority, empirical literature clarifies how authority operates in practice by providing representations of its enactment.

Building Bridges between Race & Culture and Authority

Synthesizing my analyses of multicultural education literature with theoretical and empirical literature on authority illuminates several important points. White teachers' options for legitimizing their authority are expanded as educational purposes are elaborated. White teachers are provided ways to minimize authority disparities with respect to knowledge and discipline. Yet tensions may exist between sharing authority and warm demander, authoritative approaches, and occasions for moral dilemmas may be more frequent in classrooms in which authority is shared. Studying authority in classroom talk holds the potential to provide practical representations that illustrate rhetorical tools and discursive moves White teachers may employ to build authority relationships with students.

Taken together, these two bodies of literature contribute several alternatives to grounding authority in the institutional role of teacher. Theories of authority offer ways to think about authority as shared, socially-legitimated, and socially constructed. In multicultural education literature, teachers' legitimacy is articulated slightly differently—as “earned”—so that discipline, care, and communication may be conceived as sources of authority. As White teachers practice culturally responsive and relevant discipline, care, and communication, their authority becomes socially-legitimate and African American students authorize them to guide their learning. As authority is earned, or legitimized, over time, this authority may become self-sustaining, serving as its own source of legitimacy. In other words, authority breeds authority. But such authority would still require maintenance and repair in classroom interaction, as studies that locate authority as reflected and constructed in classroom talk would suggest.

Multicultural education literature suggests that establishing caring relationships with students could serve as a way for White teachers to legitimize their authority with students of color. Yet, conversations about care are virtually absent from empirical literature on authority, suggesting that the relationship between care and authority needs to be more closely examined. Moreover, preservice teachers tend to compartmentalize care as an interpersonal relationship as opposed to seeing it as an essential component of classroom management (Weinstein, 1990), suggesting that guidance and support are needed to help them see how cultural conceptions of care can complicate authority relations so that they can enact care as a source of legitimate authority for students of color.

Synthesizing the bodies of literature also shows that a particular way White teachers can earn their authority with African American students is by promoting social justice, both in and beyond the classroom. In multiracial classrooms, it means treating students equitably so that different students are not treated differently for comparable misbehavior and all students are supported in ways that respond to their learning needs. Promoting social justice also involves acknowledging societal inequalities, disrupting those inequalities in the classroom, and allying with students to address them. Yet, just as White and Black teachers may view their authority differently, so may they see their politicized roles differently. Cooper (2003) notes that Black teachers tend to be more comfortable than White teachers in addressing issues of race with their students. Without the ability to serve as a White ally for their African American students against racism, White teachers miss a valuable opportunity to earn their authority and use that authority to accomplish a worthwhile educational purpose.

Taken together, these two bodies of literature articulate various educational purposes of authority: the production of knowledge, moral deliberation, validation of students' culture, social justice, and fostering students' resilience. Literature that depicts authority as central to teaching and learning tends to emphasize the educational purposes of authority. The empirical studies show how teachers can employ pedagogies and curricula that enable sharing authority with students and reconfigure traditional authority relations in ways that position students with the authority to produce knowledge and make decisions about classroom facilitation. What is missing from these empirical studies of authority is how White teachers can use authority to foster students' resilience by insisting that students of color fulfill high expectations (Bondy, Ross, Gallinane, & Hambacher, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2002; Metz, 1978).

In some ways, the tenets of sharing authority seem in tension with the tenets of warm demander approaches to authority and calls for teachers to be authoritative in classrooms with African American students. While research has begun to explore the applicability of sharing authority in classrooms with White teachers and students of color (Crawford, 2008; Schultz & Oyler, 2006), other research points out the moral dilemmas White teachers may face in negotiating authority in cross-racial classroom contexts (Pace, 2006). These tensions require attention in order to uncover the contextualized nuances of authority. As Metz (1978) notes, studying which approaches to authority are beneficial for which students in which classroom contexts is important for clarifying theories of authority, expanding teachers' conceptions of authority, and refining their repertoires of practice for building authority relations with students. Studies that locate authority in classroom talk provide a solid foundation for such endeavors.

Some empirical studies that focus on authority highlight the importance of classroom talk, offering representations of teacher discourse that illustrate rhetorical tools and discursive moves teachers may employ to build productive (and unproductive) authority relations. Such representations are key to illuminating how White teachers can earn their authority with students of color by engaging in culturally congruent communication, yet they are fairly elusive in multicultural education literature, as are representations of discipline, care, and classroom management as facets of warm demander approaches to authority. By providing a representation of a classroom interaction between White teacher and African American students in which authority relations are constructed, negotiated, and maintained, my study adds to existing research that informs how White teachers can build culturally responsive and relevant authority relationships with students of color.

Building a bridge between bodies of literature that emphasize on one hand, the role of race and culture and on the other hand, the role of authority in teaching and learning has allowed me to broaden conceptions of authority to be more aligned with culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies. This was important because culturally responsive teaching is “comprehensive” and “multidimensional,” encompassing curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques, and performance assessments (Gay, 2000). A vision of culturally responsive authority could span these multiple dimensions of classroom life while taking into account care, discipline, and communication. Moreover, it would complement existing work on culturally relevant and responsive care (e.g. Gay, 2006; Parsons, 2005), discipline (e.g. Monroe, 2006), communication (e.g. Brown, 2003), classroom management (e.g. Bondy, Ross, Galligane, and Hambacher, 2007; Brown, 2003; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, and Curran, 2004), providing explicit, theoretical grounding for explorations of how teachers can enact authority in ways that are effective for students of color. The theoretical framework I articulate in the next chapter initiates such a conceptualization by extending and elaborating theoretical constructs of authority.

Chapter III: Ways of Seeing and Studying Race, Authority, and Discourse

“Constructing” through Discourse

In this chapter, I begin to outline the logic of inquiry that sustains the theoretical coherence of my research (Gee & Green, 1998; Bloome, et. al., 2005). I situate this framework within the “linguistic turn” in the social sciences, through which the power of language was reconceptualized from that of reflecting realities and worlds to constructing realities and worlds. The language I use reflects this mode of thinking by highlighting how theories and ways of seeing are “constructed” by scholars, how “constructs” represent these ideas, how researchers “portray” what happens in classrooms. At the same time my language reflects this mode of thinking, it constructs it as I “discourse” a world “into being” (Bloome, et. al., 2008, p. 61), constructing this world through my own ways of seeing and studying. In doing so, I articulate my vantage point in relation to the tools I incorporate in this framework.

In articulating my vantage point through which I see and study authority and race in classroom discourse, I flip the lens of discourse analysis to spotlight my own use of language. I do this by devoting careful attention to the language I use to theoretically frame my study. I try to make visible how and why I privilege particular theoretical and methodological approaches, acknowledging that research studies are inevitably and unavoidably ideological and involve social relationships, politics, power, and cultural production and reproduction (Bloome, et. al., 2008). Such reflection is particularly

appropriate for a discourse analysis because language serves as both the object of research and the means by which knowledge is produced through the research. Some of my reflective ruminations about my language choices are represented as footnotes.

Constructing “Theoretical Coherence”

To construct theoretical coherence within this research, I define key constructs and theories, and articulate research questions that guided the conduct of this study. Specifically, I outline four constructs of authority derived from my review of literature that make possible the asking of research questions to address the problems with authority facing White teachers in classrooms of students of color. These constructs of authority serve as a foundation for articulating how I “see” authority, along with race, as socially constructed in normative, everyday classroom practices and discourse. How I “saw” authority and race shaped how I empirically studied them and what came into focus when I did.

Warranting my methodological choices by grounding them in previous frameworks for studying authority and race, I describe how I have assembled theoretical and methodological tools from sociological studies of education, ethnomethodology, discourse analysis, and ethnography that posit language as central to studying language and literacy events and interactions, as well as issues of race and authority in the classroom. Because discourse analysis is “less a methodology than a set of ways for ‘seeing’” (Bloome, et. al., 2008), I describe how I “see” discourse as language-in-use, as reflective and constructive, and as a local and global process. I convey how “seeing” discourse in these ways warrants my particular methodological approach for studying it,

making visible how decisions about theory and method of discourse analysis are intertwined (Bloome, et. al., 2005; Gee & Green, 1998). To maintain the theoretical coherence of my logic of inquiry, I weave threads throughout this framework to align my theoretical and methodological approaches to studying authority and race as discourse.

Constructing “Authority”

Constructing “authority” discourses into being what counts as knowledge in this research study by shaping what aspects of classroom life are foregrounded and which are backgrounded (Bloome, 2007). In its most basic sense, “authority” may be defined as legitimate power (Pace & Hemmings, 2006; Weber, 1947). Considerable research shows that how teachers manage power in the classroom governs whose and which language, literacies, knowledge, and ways of knowing count (Gee, 2000; Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson, 1995; Heath, 1983; Larson & Irvine, P. D., 1999; Lee, 1993; Obidah & Teel, 2001; Razfar, 2005; Rex & McEachen, 1999; Wenger & Ernst-Slavit, 1999). Using literature on classroom power as a springboard, a definition of authority as legitimate power may be embellished as power that is socially legitimated through interactive classroom discourse. Social interaction is a complex feature of classroom life warranting an equally-sophisticated construct of authority to elucidate the various, imbricated ways authority operates in classroom discourse. As Bloome, et. al. (2005) explain: “What people do in interaction with each other is complex, ambiguous, and indeterminate, and it often involves issues of social identity, power relations, and broad social and cultural processes” (p. xvii). To construe the elusiveness of authority as it operates in its complexity, I conceive of four constructs of authority that *connote* associations rather

than *denote* literal or direct signification. These four overlapping constructs of authority are central to representing authority as it functions in classroom discourse: authority as a product, a process, a type of relationship, and as multiple forms of practice.

In the sense that power is a *product* of classroom discourse, socially legitimated power functions grammatically as a noun. However, it is the *process* by which power is legitimated that determines who has authority, and this warrants a construct of authority that operates as a verb. It is also important to consider how authority as a process configures relationships, especially because of the centrality of teacher-student relationships for students of color as posited by multicultural education literature.

Authority as a particular type of student-teacher relationship configured by processes of power functions grammatically as an adjective. Fourthly, a definition of authority as a form of practical enactment offers a way for teachers to envision and enact their authority in practice. Conceived this way, *forms of authority* serve the grammatical purpose of adverbs by describing how authority may be acted out in classroom practice. All four inter-locking constructs seem necessary because taken together, they hold the potential to illuminate the complexity of authority in a way that can work cooperatively with the complex life of the classroom and “comprehensive” and “multidimensional” character of culturally responsive and relevant teaching (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Apprehending authority in its enigmatic constellation of product, process, relationship, and forms of practice requires unraveling the configuration and appraising each construct.

As a Product

To articulate a construct of authority as a product, I draw from Bloome and collaborators' (2005) construct of power as product. A view of power as product entails defining power as a commodity, a good that may be given, received, and transferred in the context of a market economy comprised of competition, exchange, and acquisition of power. "Commodities" may be equated with power when it is perceived they may be traded for economic, cultural, symbolic, or social capital (Bourdieu, 1977). Bloome and others (2005) suggest that literacy may be equated with power when it is viewed as a measurable set of skills that may be exchanged for occupational or educational opportunities. Conceiving of literacy as power enables investigation of how power creates or denies access to literacy skills and how literacy skills (or lack of) create or deny access to power. In the research of language and literacy events, a construct of power as product enables questions about "who has what literacy skills, who provides or denies access to literacy skills, and what one needs to do to gain access to literacy skills" (Bloome, et. al., 2005, p. 160). Such questions of equitable access are central to literacy research that takes social justice as its purpose and seeks to understand how literacy education can be effective for all students (Bloome, et. al., 2005; Rex, et. al., 2010).

Similarly, race may be equated with power. Another way of conceptualizing how race impacts people's lives is that it shapes access to various resources that serve as economic, symbolic, cultural, and social capital and enhance a person's status in a particular context (O'Connor, Lewis, and Mueller, 2007). For example, race may function as symbolic capital that generates racial privilege, as in the case of "White privilege," which is unearned but accrued advantage from being a member of the

dominant racial group (Lewis, 2004; O'Connor, Lewis, and Mueller, 2007). This white privilege can translate into classroom authority through the embodiment of the teacher. Without earning authority, a White teacher may, by default, rely on the power and privilege of Whiteness accrued from beyond the classroom.

As part of my theoretical framework, viewing power as a product enables a construct of authority as socially-legitimated power to be understood as a commodity. Conceptualizing authority in this way, as a noun, enabled me to ask the question,

How is authority as a product garnered and accumulated?

Including the language “garnered” and “accumulated” connotes that authority may be garnered from moment-to-moment and accumulated over time. Commoditized authority represents one facet of authority as it operates in classroom life; another feature is represented by the construct of authority as the process that produces authority the product.

As a Process

To foreground a conceptualization of “authority” as a process, I emphasize the “How” when I ask the question,

How does power become socially legitimated as authority?

Answering this question requires conceiving of authority as a verb, as the series of purposeful actions by which the legitimacy of power is constructed and negotiated.

Viewing authority as a process entails considering the discursive performances by which teacher and students negotiate the validity of knowledge, language, literacies, and culture.

Bloome and colleagues' (2005) construct of power as a process is helpful for conceptualizing authority as a process of negotiation. Approaching power as a process involves locating it in the interconnected discursive actions that configure relations between people, events, institutions, and ideologies. In this view, power is "contested and dialogic," and all participants' actions contribute to producing power that is characterized by "bargaining and compromise" (Bloome, et. al., 2005, p. 162). Characterized by bargaining and compromise, a construct of power as process is highly conducive to studying classroom authority as a social process of negotiations for legitimacy in classrooms characterized by racial and cultural difference.

For such classrooms, the value in viewing authority as a process is that it makes vivid how mutual accommodation may be accomplished in classroom interaction. According to Sonia Nieto (1996), mutual accommodation involves teachers validating students' language and culture and using them as resources for academic learning while students and their families accept aspects of school culture that facilitate scholastic success. When power is conceived as a process, mutual accommodation becomes a series of interconnected, purposeful, discursive actions through which students and teacher negotiate the legitimacy of students' home-based cultural practices and school practices. To illuminate this process, I ask,

How do teacher and students construct and negotiate authority across racial difference?

The importance of distinguishing between authority construction and negotiation stems from the empirical research on authority that portrays how teachers and students work together to produce a shared agenda of teaching and learning (Oyler, 1996a, 1996b)

and how they bargain when their interests conflict (Pace & Hemmings, 2006; Pace, 2003a; 2006). Describing authority as constructed represents instances when teacher and students' goals are in alignment, and as negotiated when their interests are not. In classrooms characterized by racial difference, the process of constructing and negotiating authority may be iterative and recursive as when mutual accommodation is required to ameliorate moments of cultural asynchronization.

Just as power as a process is an integral feature of everyday life and configures virtually all social relationships, so authority as a social process of legitimization configures relationships between teachers and students, and relations between classroom participants and the institution of schooling and ideologies. I distinguish between authority "relationships," which are constructed and negotiated in moment-to-moment interactions and authority "relations," which represent broader, more-durable, structural relations in society.

As a Relationship

To connote the particular type of teacher-student relationship configured by social processes of power, I use the term "authority" as an adjective to describe a particular type of connection. The salience of relationships for many students of color combined with the imperative to consider the power dynamics embedded within cross-racial classroom relationships (Howard, 2006; Irvine, 1991) makes it important to ask,

*How do teacher and students build and construct across racial difference
authority relationships that are productive for learning?*

Although nearly synonymous, “building” authority relationships connotes that they evolve over time while “constructing” them refers to their configuration in moment-to-moment interaction. Focusing on relationships that are productive for learning highlights the importance of using authority for educational purposes, such as those I identified in my review of literature on authority: the production of knowledge, moral deliberation, validation of students’ culture, social justice, and fostering students’ resilience in the face of adverse conditions. Relationships that count as “productive for learning,” could also include those relationships that afford students engagement in curriculum and access to classroom discourse. This understanding of learning is grounded in socio-cultural studies of education that locate learning in classroom talk (Cazden, 1972; Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Edwards & Westgate, 1987; Mehan, 1979) as well as pedagogies that advocate for curriculum to be culturally responsive and relevant for students (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

As my review of literature illuminated, representations of how teachers might envision and enact their authority in culturally responsive and relevant ways will be useful for White teachers of students of color. Therefore, a construct of authority as it is practiced through classroom talk is necessary.

As Form(s)

I synthesize various definitions of the word “form” to articulate a construct of authority that characterizes it as practiced in the classroom. This construct is important for illuminating the practical implications of this study. In choosing the term “form,” I

establish a connection with previous theories of authority that apply the same language, albeit for rhetorical purposes rather than theoretical (Pace & Hemmings, 2006).

Authority as a form could represent the character or mode in which authority is enacted in the classroom. From this perspective, authority is multiple in its forms (Pace & Hemmings, 2006), and the forms are not discrete: they may overlap (Oyler, 1996). With understandings of the various ways authority may be performed, teachers can employ strategies that allow them to construct with their students authority that furthers educational purposes.

An applied construct of authority as forms of practice accentuates teacher and students' capability to shape and reshape authority relations from one moment to the next within the context of the authority relations and relationships that have been built over time. To convey this concept, a definition of form as an "outline" or "mold" is useful. To clarify with imagery, an outline or mold gives shape to authority as it is established over time, but it is up to classroom participants to fill in the substance and reconstitute that authority through their moment-to-moment interactions. This implies that the form of authority is durable in its continuous presence, but flexible in its shape, like a mold or outline. Elucidating forms of authority as practiced required me to ask the question,

What forms characterize authority in a classroom in which racial difference is a factor?

Practicing authority in its multiple forms as momentary and potentially momentous enactments which configure classroom authority relationships and broader authority relations imitates the process by which normative classroom practices are constructed. In fact, I "see" authority as a component of those normative classroom practices, which are

constituted through everyday interactions and local classroom discourses that are influenced by global processes.

Seeing Race and Authority

These four inter-related constructs of authority—authority as practical forms, a particular type of relationship, social process of legitimization, and commodity or capital—serve as a foundation for articulating how I “see” authority, along with race, as socially constructed in normative, everyday classroom practices, local classroom discourse, and global processes. This articulation is important not only for elaborating these four constructs, but also rendering visible their theoretical underpinnings.

Just as authority as a process becomes racialized in classrooms characterized by racial difference, so do authority as a relationship and a product. As capital, race and authority may be exchanged or traded for other commodities; race and authority are intertwined in configurations of relations and relationships. Therefore, this framework needs to be able to take both race and authority into account.

In my introductory chapter, I explained why and how I variously used the term “race” to articulate the problem of racial difference and cultural incongruence in classrooms characterized by White teachers and students of color. Situating my approach to studying race within broader traditions to studying “Black” education experiences and outcomes, (O’Connor, Lewis, and Mueller, 2007), I represented race as a politically-significant demographic group (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lee, 2007) and as culture—the distinct shared practices, competencies, and orientations of a group (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Irvine, 1991). Conceiving of race in these ways has been useful in

garnering attention to the unique learning needs of African American students as distinct from White students' and making the case for culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies.

However, as Carla O'Connor, Amanda E. Lewis, and Jennifer Mueller (2007) point out, deploying these definitions of race in research holds the potential to overlook differences within the category "Black," ignore intersectional identities that play a role in students' educational experiences, obscure what it means to be Black from students' perspectives, and understate racial discrimination perpetuated by how schools determine what it means to be Black. They call for researchers to consider how race is *produced* in schools as much as something students bring with them, how everyday interactions create and limit opportunities for learning, and how students read their racialized schooling experiences. This call is answered by viewing race as socially constructed through everyday practices and locating the social construction of race in local classroom discourse.

In my review of literature, I noted that theories which portray authority as socially constructed offer a way for White teachers to envision legitimizing their authority with students of color beyond grounding it in their institutional role as teacher. To frame my study of authority in a classroom characterized by racial difference, I draw from and extend these theories of authority to depict authority as socially constructed through students' and teachers' everyday interactions, their normative classroom practices, and interactive classroom discourse.

As Socially Constructed in Everyday Practices

In her sociological research on “everyday racemaking” in schools, Lewis (2003) portrays race as constituted through everyday practices that shape social experience and educational outcomes. She explains,

Race is not something we are born with [...] but something that is mapped onto us from the first moments of life [...]. Racial identities do not automatically follow from these early external racial assignments. They take shape over time, through multiple interactions with those who are the same and those who are different. [...] Race then is not a real or innate characteristic of bodies but a set of signifiers projected onto those bodies—signifiers we must learn about and negotiate in order to successfully move through the social world. (6).

Portraying race as socially constructed is not to say that race is not real. As Lewis (2003) explains, “[T]hough not natural or biological entities, racial classifications are socially ‘real’ and thus are powerful in their consequences for people’s lives: they result in objective, measurable differences in the life circumstances of different racial groups” (p. 6). Learning *how* race is consequential for people’s lives, including their educational experiences and schooling outcomes, requires a focus on everyday practice.

Portraying race and authority as socially constructed makes possible the study of the process by which race and authority are constructed. Characterizing race and authority as “everyday” practices informs “where,” or in what aspects of classroom life, to look for them. Like race, authority may be construed as socially constructed and jointly negotiated between students and teachers through their symbolic actions (Pace & Hemmings, 2006). How authority is socially-constructed in these interactions is through students and teachers’ everyday classroom practices. This theoretical move to “locate”

authority in everyday practice is grounded in an ethnomethodological approach, which considers the regularities of social order to be the sum of actors' practical action in their commonplace activities of everyday life (Garfinkel, 1976). Students and teachers, then, may be said to create the order of a classroom, including the teacher's authority, through their practical action from one moment to the next (Macbeth, 1991) as they determine appropriate actions based on how they make sense of the practical situation at hand.

As part of an ethnomethodological approach, the focus on classroom participants' sense-making resonates with Pace and Hemmings' (2006) characterization of authority as "a complex social relationship that unfolds in schools and classrooms through various kinds of interactions that hold varied meanings for students and teachers" (p. 1). Studying how teachers and students make sense of their everyday interactions renders visible race and authority as the taken-for-granted social processes that configure classroom authority and race relationships—the processes by which everyday interactions in schools affect students' opportunities for learning, which is particularly important for studying "Black" educational experiences (Lewis, 2003; O'Connor, Lewis, and Mueller, 2007). From an ethnomethodological perspective, seeing authority and race as socially constructed in everyday practice posits authority in the social action that comprises the everyday life of the classroom—students' and teachers' normative classroom practices as constituted in and through their local interactive discourse.

As Constructed through Normative Classroom Practices and Discourse

My effort to "locate" race and authority in normative classroom practices is grounded in sociocultural and sociolinguistic studies of education that explore how

teachers and students co-construct expectations for talking, being, doing, and knowing in particular classroom contexts. For instance, these studies show how norms for participation, or participation structures, shape how teachers and students can participate in classroom discourse (Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Cazden, 1988; Schultz, Florio, & Erickson, 1982).

To illuminate the relationship between the social construction of these norms and the social construction of race, Lesley A. Rex (2006) locates their mutual constitution in classroom talk. Grounding her framework for studying race in classroom literacy interactions in ethnographic and sociolinguistic studies of racial difference, linguistic variation, and classroom discourse, Rex portrays race as shaping and shaped by teacher and students' normative classroom practices as a confluence of social relationships, personal identities, and knowledge, all of which are observable in classroom talk as they are discursively constructed.

Analogous to how Rex (2006) portrays race, Teresa Crawford (2008) locates the social construction of authority in classroom discourse. In Crawford's framework, authority is distributed through cultural models, or socially constructed shared ways of being, doing, and knowing (Gee & Green, 1998), which are built over time, through moment-by-moment interactions. As part of the classroom's cultural model, the distribution of authority to produce knowledge is intertwined with the construction of identities as socially negotiated roles that determine students' access and engagement.

Although Rex (2006) and Crawford (2008) approach their respective studies of race and authority in different ways, they are in essence articulating a comparable concept: that the social construction of race and authority is located in students' and

teachers' normative classroom practices and discourse, which construct the shared ways of being, knowing, talking, and doing in the classroom.¹³ This concept is vital with respect to how teachers envision practicing their authority so as to co-construct with students effective normative practices, including participation structures, and productive relationships that engage students in curriculum and grant them access to classroom discourse. Because these practices are constituted in and through discourse, what is critical is that teachers develop their sense of how to use language to enact appropriate and culturally responsive forms of authority in the situations they encounter.

Studying Race and Authority

In and Through Discourse

My theoretical framework situates both race and authority as constructed in normative, everyday classroom discourse, making how I “see” discourse central to the theoretical coherence of this research. Viewing race and authority as socially constructed over time through everyday, moment-by-moment interactive classroom discourse calls for an articulation of discourse theories, which warrant the methodology of discourse analysis for studying race and authority in classroom interaction. Drawing from microethnographic perspectives of discourse analysis I articulate how I view discourse as language-in-use in order to study how it reflects and constructs race and authority as global and local processes.

¹³ I privilege Rex's language “normative classroom practices” over “cultural models” to prevent conflation with my previous use of the word “culture” as the shared practices of racial and ethnic groups.

As Language in Use

The construct *language-in-use* represents how people use language in face-to-face interaction. Viewing discourse as language-in-use enables the examination of how people use language, for example, to construct and transform relationships with each other, institutions, and identities, or to work together to construct shared social practices that determine what constitutes appropriate ways of talking, being, knowing, and doing in particular contexts (Bloome, et. al., 2008). For the purposes of this study, analyzing classroom discourse as language-in-use makes it possible to trace how race and authority operate in everyday, moment-to-moment interactions that, over time, construct normative practices in the classroom by illuminating not only *what* language teacher and students use to construct and negotiate race and authority, but *how* they use language to do so.

As Reflective and Constructive

As I elucidated in the introduction to this chapter, a view of discourse as reflective and constructive is rooted in the linguistic turn in the social sciences, which highlights how language is used to socially construct, or “discourse into being,” everyday life and social institutions by constructing relationships, power relations, capital, knowledge, and realities (Bloome, et. al., 2008). Such a view of discourse foregrounds the constitutive qualities of talk in that “discourse is both shaped by and helps to shape the [...] world as we experience it” (Johnstone, 2002, p. 30). Employing this view in research enables investigation into how language has operated to construct hierarchies of power relations that privilege some groups of people and disadvantage others (Bloome, et. al., 2008). Employing this approach in *this* research illuminates how authority as relationships,

capital, forms, and process, along with race are discourses into being through local classroom talk.

Seeing authority and race as constructed in classroom talk is aligned with previous approaches to studying them. Highlighting the constructive qualities of classroom talk, Douglas Macbeth (1991) employs discourse analysis to demonstrate how authority may be projected from one turn to the next. In doing so, he illuminates how talk not only *reflects established authority*, but *produces it in the moment* as a discursive construction. In this way, authority is both reflected and constructed in and through classroom discourse. Similarly, race may be viewed as reflected and constructed in and through classroom discourse, as Rex (2006) suggests.

I use concepts of language-in-use and the reflective and constructive qualities of discourse to refer to the “local” or “micro” production of talk in face-to-face interaction, yet how people talk in face-to-face interaction is influenced by “macro” processes (Bloome, et. al., 2008; Rex, 2007) or “global” processes (Erickson, 2004).

As Local/Micro and Macro/Global Processes

Viewed as both a local and global process, discourse may be constructed locally in classroom interaction but still influenced by global processes that “appear within talk but derive from places in the social world far removed from the immediate scene of talk’s conduct” (Erickson, 2004, p. 107). These “places in the social world” are both temporally and spatially “removed.” Erickson (2004) clarifies the relationship between local and global processes by elaborating a conceptualization of talk in local social interaction:

- 1) The conduct of talk in local social interaction as it occurs in real time is unique, crafted by local social actors for the specific situation of its use in the moment of its uttering, and
- 2) The conduct of talk in local social interaction is profoundly influenced by [global] processes that occur beyond the temporal and spatial horizon of the immediate occasion of interaction. (viii)

Bloome and colleagues (2008) characterize macro level processes as “the broad social, cultural, and political processes that define social institutions, cultural ideologies, and all that happens within and across them” (p. 20). My primary locus of analysis is the local or micro-level construction of authority and race; however, understanding classroom interaction at the level of face-to-face interaction necessarily involves considering how macro or global processes affect classroom discourse.¹⁴

Viewing discourse as a local and global process is aligned with previous approaches to studying race and authority in classroom interaction: how students and teachers talk about race in the classroom is reflective of broader views of race. Rex (2006) explains:

Race becomes observable as dynamically interrelated social relationships, personal identities, and academic practices that are discursively constructed, *and yet which are never separate from broader social and class issues*. As such, *race can be studied as influenced by and influencing the normative classroom conduct of teachers and students as both a local and a global phenomenon*. (35, italics added)

¹⁴ I use both dichotomies local/global and macro/micro. Local/global connotes temporal and spatial distinctions while macro/micro invokes associations with scale and relationships between individuals and relationships and structural relations. I also use the language of the authors when I refer to their work.

Lewis' (2003) approach to studying processes of racialization in schools also involves viewing everyday practices as local and global processes. For instance, she examined processes of racialization in schools as situated within patterns of residential segregation that determined school demographics. To examine the relationship between the global processes of residential segregation and the local process of racialization in the schools, Lewis gleaned the perceptions of suburban residents as well as the administration, staff, teachers, and students in the schools. By highlighting how understandings about race are geographically and historically situated (Lewis, 2003; O'Connor, Lewis, & Mueller, 2007), Lewis' (2003) work exemplifies an approach for considering how the local construction of race is influenced by global processes.

Likewise, the local construction of authority is affected by global factors such as the institutional features of schooling and the cultural and historical context (Pace & Hemmings, 2006). This relationship is illustrated by John S. Wills' (2006) portrayal of how education policies that require state-mandated, standardized testing impact authority relations in the classroom, and Mary Haywood Metz's (1978) examination of the social construction of authority in a racially desegregated school during the 1970s when civil strife and racial tensions were high, contributing to a "crisis of authority" between teachers and students. Considering broader cultural and social processes illuminates how ideologies and institutions can impact the local construction of race and authority by enabling questions about how racial authority relations in society are reflected in classroom discourse and reproduced in classroom authority relationships.

In summary, both local and global processes are central to a construct of authority as a social process of legitimizing power. Although power may be legitimized in local classroom interaction, how teachers and students talk to each other is highly influenced

by talk far removed, temporally and spatially, from the classroom. This raises an important question about how authority relationships that are locally constructed can influence societal power relations and the global processes that produce them.

An answer may lie in characterizing the relationship between local and global processes as a source of productive debate in sociology and literacy studies. Social theorists have tended to emphasize the role of global processes impacting the local social action, portraying ideology as deterministic of local actors' discourse (Erickson, 2004). On the other hand, literacy scholars raise concerns about privileging the micro at the expense of the macro (Street, 2005). These voices from literacy studies raise concerns that researchers become so engrossed in micro interaction that they underestimate how macro processes, such as policy, influence classroom discourse around language and literacy events, which are highly imbued with political rhetoric and policy that dictates what counts as legitimate literacy. What these debates point to is the necessity of examining the *relationship* between global and local processes, which is particularly important for literacy studies (Street, 2005).

Yet it is in the conduct of talk in local social interaction where Erickson (2004) locates the potential for social change—in local practices of syncretism and cultural hybridity:

- When we adapt in response to routine instead of adopting practices without any change in form or use
- When we assimilate new cultural forms and functions within old ones and make accommodations within old cultural forms and functions to make room for the new

“Locating” opportunities for social change in local discourse enables questions about how local discourse can disrupt the reproduction of societal power relations by reconfiguring traditional racialized teacher-student authority relations in the classroom.

At its most ambitious, it could be asked how classroom discourse that reconfigures traditional, top-down classroom authority relationships can re-construct racial power relations in society. This may sound ambitious, but if researchers are blind to opportunities for affecting global processes in local discourses, then we certainly will not see them.

“Seeing” in local classroom discourse the potential for effecting change in global processes warrants a microethnographic approach to discourse analysis informed by interpretive ethnography. In order to make connections between the local classroom discourse and global processes, I draw from an interpretive ethnographic approach, which is aligned with frameworks for studying the discursive construction of race in classroom interaction.

Through Ethnography

Whether a discourse analyst acknowledges it or not, all discourse analysis is situated within an ethnographic context (Bloome, et. al., 2008). My preference is to acknowledge the ethnographic context by explicitly grounding my methodological approach in two ethnographic traditions: microethnography, or what Erickson (2004) refers to as “ethnographic microanalysis of social interaction” (viii), and interpretive ethnography. I warrant these methodological choices by illustrating how they align with frameworks for studying authority and race as socially constructed in normative,

everyday classroom practices, local classroom discourse, and global processes, and by demonstrating their appropriateness for studying authority as the four, inter-locking constructs I characterized as process, product, relationship, and form.

Interpretive Ethnography

Interpretive ethnography describes the ethnographic component of my microethnographic approach. As explicated by Erickson (1986), an interpretive ethnographic approach involves making visible the “invisibility” of everyday classroom life, documenting concrete details of practice, and highlighting participants’ interpretations of social action, classroom life, and practice. In examining the everyday interactions of the classroom and the meanings they hold for participants, this approach entails “being unusually thorough and reflective in noticing and describing everyday events in the field setting, and in attempting to identify the significance of actions in the events from the various points of view of the actors themselves” (p. 121). To emphasize the local meanings-in-action, an interpretive ethnographic approach shines a spotlight on the perspectives of participants.

An interpretive ethnographic approach is aligned with Rex (2006) and Lewis’ (2003) frameworks for studying race, which emphasize the importance of ascertaining classroom participants’ perspectives on race. Lewis (2003) advocates talking and spending time with participants: “Determining how racial narratives and understandings shape people’s lives, how their social location shapes their life chances, and how they understand these processes requires both speaking with people in depth about their lives and spending time with them in their real-life context” (p. 7). Rex (2006) concurs that

participants' ways of making sense are a priority. Articulating a framework for studying classroom literacy interactions as raced, Rex demonstrates through a discourse analysis of three vignettes how studying race in classroom interaction entails examining:

- 1) How students and teacher consider themselves and each other as raced
- 2) How students and teacher integrate their views on race with their goals for teaching and learning
- 3) The meaning students and teacher make of race in their social interactions

Rex and Lewis' frameworks for studying race through the perspectives of participants, portraying understandings about race as local, warrant an interpretive ethnographic approach.

To study authority, Metz (1978) shed light on participants' perceptions in her ethnographies of three junior high schools. She conducted interviews that allowed her to demonstrate teachers' and students' perspectives on authority. Culling the perspectives of students in the lower track classes, who were predominantly African American and from low-income backgrounds, was useful in illuminating factors that may contribute to authority conflicts across racial difference. For example, Metz was able to show that what teachers interpreted as baseless challenges to their authority reflected students' disapproval of what they perceived as unfair disciplinary practices.

For studies like mine and Metz's that involve White researchers exploring classrooms characterized by racial difference,¹⁵ incorporating students' perspectives seems particularly important. If cultural incongruence is a factor for cross-racial teaching, then it would also seem to be a factor for cross-racial researching. Including participants' perspectives positions teachers and students as the co-producers of the knowledge engendered by this research. Such epistemological positioning, which may be especially important for researching across race and culture, is afforded by an interpretive ethnographic approach that entails valuing and validating local interpretations.

Yet an interpretive ethnographic approach engages these local interpretations with social theories in order to explain processes of local interaction (p. 139). Social theories can bridge everyday practices with global processes of social and cultural reproduction. Lewis (2003) explains: "Any attempt to imagine or represent people's daily struggles to make sense of their own lives and identities must be undertaken with close analytical ties to the broad social, cultural, political, and economic context" (p. 7). The usefulness of ethnography for studying racialization as a global and local process is illustrated by Lewis's cross-case analysis of three schools: "a fairly typical and diverse urban school, a fairly typical and homogenous suburban school, and a school that structurally and culturally was a bicultural or nonWhite space" (p. 8). Drawing from her analyses of the racialization processes across the three cases, Lewis theorizes a process of racialization that engages local meanings of race in dialogue with global processes of social reproduction via social theories.

¹⁵I defined racial difference as the normative conditions of classrooms taught by White teachers who comprise the majority of the teaching and students of color who make up an increasing percentage of the student population.

Employing an interpretive ethnographic approach allowed me to engage the local conduct of interactive talk in dialogue with global processes, illuminating the opportunities for local talk to generate social change. I make my use of an interpretive ethnographic approach explicit as a particular type of ethnography for conducting a “microanalysis of social interaction” (Erickson, 2004). To analyze the social interaction of the classroom, I employed discourse analysis as articulated by a microethnographic perspective.

As Microethnography

As I noted previously, social interaction is a complex feature of classroom life, warranting a conceptualization of authority useful for considering this complexity as well as the “comprehensive” and “multidimensional” character of culturally responsive and relevant teaching (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Spotlighting the everyday life of classrooms, a microethnographic approach portrays teachers and students as actors and re-actors within the events and environments they encounter and animate, and classrooms as complex sites where teachers and students “create and re-create, adopt and adapt, and engage in a full range of human interactions” (p. xvi). Portraying classroom life as complexly animated by teachers and students, a microethnographic perspective holds the potential to shed light on the complex, simultaneous ways authority can function in multiple forms and as a social process, teacher-student relationship, and exchanged capital. The theoretical assumptions that underpin these constructs—viewing authority and race as socially constructed through normative, everyday practices; viewing

discourse as language-in-use, constructive and reflective, and local and global—are aligned with the assumptions upon which a microethnographic approach is grounded.

“Seeing” discourse as language-in-use that is reflective and constructive requires a methodology that regards language as crucial to classroom life. A microethnographic approach places language at the center of language and literacy learning: language serves as both the object of learning and the means by which learning is achieved (Bloome, et. al., 2008). With its focus on language, a microethnographic discourse analysis, then, is instrumental for studying how teacher and students use language to construct and reflect their commoditized authority. By enabling the analysis of the content *and* form of classroom talk, discourse analysis illuminates not only *what* language teacher and students use to construct and negotiate authority, but also *how* they use language to do so. In this way, a microethnographic approach to discourse analysis makes vivid the discursive process by which power becomes socially legitimated as authority. Rendering this process as practiced visible allows for multiple, overlapping forms of authority to be represented through episodes of interactive classroom discourse.

I have suggested that by practicing particular forms of authority on a routine basis, teacher and students work together to use language to construct normative ways of “doing” and “discoursing” authority as part of their normative classroom practices. A microethnographic discourse analysis is useful for illustrating how teacher and students shape and reshape authority as opportunities for learning—what counts as knowledge and who has the authority to produce it—from one moment to the next as they build over time these shared ways of being, doing, and knowing (Smith, 2008). A micro-level discourse analysis allows for the study of the moment-by-moment interactions that comprise an

“episode” of interactive discourse in which authority is constructed and negotiated, as well as the study of a series of episodes through which authority is constructed over time as a normative practice.

In addition to making viable discourse analysis of local talk, a microethnographic approach brings to bear the relationship of the local with the global by considering how ideological stances are reflected in local talk (Carter, 2008). Discourse analysis that incorporate social and cultural theories engages the global in dialogue with the local. Such analyses may illuminate how global, racialized power relations impact the local construction of race and teacher-student authority relationships.

Although discourse analysis represents a way of “seeing” as I have articulated it throughout this framework, it may also provide the methods for studying language-in-use, the constructive and reflective capabilities of discourse, and the relationship between local and global discursive processes.

Through Discourse Analysis

To analyze how teacher and students used language to construct and negotiate race and authority in and through classroom discourse, I selected discourse analytic tools in response to what I “saw” in the data as the lived experiences of the classroom participants in my study and to what I was “looking” for in the discourse—the construction and negotiation of race and authority. Engaging theory, methodology, and results in a dialectical, recursive process in line with a microethnographic approach (Bloome, et. al., 2005) required flexible methods for analyzing discourse—methods which emerged in tandem with the data as I analyzed it. Working across theoretical

issues, methodological issues, and results in a dialectical, recursive process enhanced the theoretical coherence of my logic of inquiry.

Because scholars who engage in discourse analysis draw from a variety of disciplinary fields, discourse analysis is an inherently interdisciplinary field of study (Bloome, et. al., 2008). My discourse analysis of classroom interaction borrows analytical tools from various disciplines and subfields, including discursive and social psychology, literary studies, social theory, English education, sociolinguistics, rhetoric, politeness theory, sociology, Women's Studies, and social justice education. To illustrate what such an interdisciplinary assemblage of discourse analytical tools can illuminate, I describe two particular tools that figured prominently in my methodological approach: positioning theory from the field of discursive psychology and politeness theory, an interdisciplinary construct grounded in social anthropology and sociolinguistics, among others.

With Positioning Theory

Positioning theory may serve as a useful tool for studying classroom authority. Rhetorician Barbara Johnstone (2002) suggests, "in many ways people's positions in the world are their positions in discourse, since the power to shape the world is, to a large degree, the power to shape how people talk about the world" (p. 112). This implies that students' and teachers' positions in the classroom may be represented by their positions in the classroom discourse, which reflect and construct what a participant is "entitled to say and do" (Harre & Slocum, 2003), in other words, authorized to say and do. By representing who has the authority to say what, when, and how, positioning theory serves

as a useful analytical tool to make visible how commoditized authority is exchanged or circulated in interaction.

Positioning theory is also useful for illuminating how authority operates as a fluid, iterative process. In a self-study of classroom discourse in a field instruction seminar, I applied positioning theory to learn how students-learning-to-be-teachers and I as their field instructor constructed and negotiated authority (Ford, 2005; Ford, forthcoming). Using positioning theory, I was able to identify particular discursive moves students and I made to negotiate normative classroom practices and the legitimacy of a particular classroom management strategy for our teacher education classroom and the classrooms at their field sites. My analysis illustrated how discursively positioning teacher education students as the co-producers of knowledge can facilitate the emergence of their teacher identities. Positioning theory allowed me to demonstrate through micro-level analysis how the teacher and students discursively positioned themselves and each other as they constructed and negotiated authority as a fluid, iterative process, and how they used politeness moves to do so.

With Politeness Theory

My study of authority in a teacher education classroom illustrates how classroom participants can use politeness moves to preserve positive relationships as they exercise power. According to sociolinguist Miriam Locher's (2004) theory of politeness, when participants enact power, relationships may be threatened, temporarily displacing the social equilibrium of the interaction. Politeness moves are employed in discursive interaction to obscure or mitigate the exercise of power in an effort to maintain the

equilibrium of relations within a social group. In other words, politeness makes the exercise of power palatable (Pace, 2006). Thinking about politeness in relation to power is especially helpful for the study of authority as the social process through which power becomes legitimate.

Conceiving of politeness in relation to social face is also useful, particularly for studying racialized authority negotiations. According to social anthropologists Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, relationships may be threatened when participants perceive that their social face is threatened. Social face is a participant's "image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes" that garner positive social value in a particular context (Goffman, 1967, p. 5). Politeness moves are what participants use to minimize or repair threats to a participant's social face (Brown and Levinson, 1987). As face-saving techniques, politeness moves perform "relational work" that enables participants to maintain positive relationships with each other (Locher, 2004). Examining how teachers and students use politeness moves makes visible how they maintain their positive authority relationships. Judith L. Pace (2006) used politeness to demonstrate how a White teacher made her enactments of authority palatable by neutralizing threats to African American students' social face. To explain, the teacher exerted her power by applying pressure on students to get good grades, but mitigated this face-threatening pressure with polite talk. These mixed messages evoked an ambivalent mixture of consent and resistance from African American students and ultimately, resulted in lowering expectations for their academic performance. Pace's use of politeness as a way of looking at authority negotiations substantiates what positioning theory illuminated in my previous study—that politeness moves perform significant

functions in the discursive construction and negotiation of classroom authority (Ford, 2005; Ford, forthcoming). Because of the particular role a “cool social face” occupies within African American discourse (Morgan, 2002), employing politeness theory based on the concept of social face seems useful for studying authority in classrooms of African American students.

Although politeness is an ever-present feature of interaction, what constitutes politeness in a given social context is inextricably linked to the interactive norms of the context (Locher, 2004; Eelen, 2001). This suggests that while politeness moves may consistently function as discourse markers for the exchange of commoditized authority or exertions of power in the midst of being socially-legitimized, the content and form of the politeness moves may be quite different in different classroom contexts. To previous studies of power, politeness, and authority in teacher education (Ford, 2005; forthcoming), professional development (Rex & Schiller, 2007), and secondary schools (Pace, 2006), I add this study of authority in cross-racial classroom discourse in a high school English class.

To illustrate the coherence within my discourse analysis, results chapters begin with a theoretical framework that guides my approach to discourse analysis, and continue with a description of the various, interdisciplinary discourse analytic tools I employed to study race and authority in the classroom interaction. By incorporating such an array of analytical tools, I extend the use of these tools beyond what may be their intended application. In a display of syncretism and cultural hybridity, I extend the theoretical coherence that links how I define what counts as knowledge with how I produce

knowledge, aligning my theoretical and methodological frameworks, and cohering ways of “seeing” authority, race, and discourse with ways of studying them.

Chapter IV: Narrating the Research Process

In this chapter, I tell the story of the research process that produced the results presented in subsequent chapters. I narrate how I came to study the classroom interaction between Ms. Cross and students of Metro High School, including my precipitous meeting with a charismatic superintendent. He referred me to a White teacher he characterized as having the “It Factor,” which enabled her to establish positive relationships with African American students. Drawing from ethnographic traditions that foreground local interpretations, I create a multi-voiced narrative that positions the research participants as collaborators in the research project.

Narrating critical moments from my initial days of observation at Metro High provides the ethnographic grounding for the microethnographic discourse analysis portrayed in my results chapters. These moments serve to contextualize aspects of the “It Factor” in Ms. Cross and students’ subsequent authority construction and negotiations. Teasing apart these aspects guided me toward understanding the centrality of African American discourse, cross-racial alliance-building, relational work, and normative classroom practices as critical factors in how Ms. Cross and students’ constructed over time and negotiated from one moment to the next authority relationships that were productive for teaching and learning. In describing how I came to focus on Signifyin(g) as key to the process of building these relationships, I establish the reasons for selecting the focal episodes that produced the results of this study.

My Cultural “I”

In my introductory chapter, I described how articulating my situated point of view helped me strive for strong reflexivity in the research process (Harding, 1993). In subsequent chapters, verbalizing this “vantage point” involved carefully attending to my “cultural eye” (Irvine, 2002) to refrain from occluding issues of race and culture in my quest for literature about authority. Describing how I “saw” race, authority and discourse was key to constructing theoretical coherence with how I studied them (Bloome, et. al., 2005; Gee & Green, 1998). In this chapter, I consider the “I” of the researcher, focusing on “my cultural I” as a White, standard-English speaking, woman, graduate student researcher.

To make visible the “I” in my research, I “read” my research and myself as “racial texts” (Cochrane-Smith, 2000) constructed through a confluence of my racialized “ways of knowing” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), my emotional stake and interest in the outcomes of the research, and my own authority configured by processes of power and privilege throughout the research process. In doing so, I respond to Stuart Greene and Dawn Abt-Perkins’ (2003) call for researchers to make visible their identities, particularly racial identities, as data to be analyzed and theorized as part of the research process. Green & Abt-Perkins urge researchers to be reflexive about their racial epistemology and make visible their “worldview” as a system of knowledge that operates as a lens or frame that shapes what counts as knowledge and the process by which knowledge is produced (Ladson-Billings, 2003). They argue that “researchers should examine their own investments as they study the literate practices of minority students, blurring the line between researcher and activist” (p. 3). Advocating for researchers to

illuminate how race serves as a marker of difference and privilege, Green & Abt-Perkins assert, “It is necessary to interrogate our sense of privilege in the research we conduct, the power we wield as we create racialized categories to describe students and teachers, and present what we find” (p. 3). To make visible their racial epistemologies, investments in the research, and power and privilege, the contributors to Greene & Abt-Perkins’ (2003) anthology, *Making Race Visible: Literacy Research for Cultural Understanding* were guided by a series of questions that informed my own heuristic process.

Gazing at the cultural “I” at once involves embracing myself and displacing my self. To explain, Marilyn Cochrane Smith (2000) writes that distance between teachers and their work is required to make *teaching* readable as “text.” To create this space between my self and my work and contemplate research as a readable “text,” I apply discourse analytical tools that illuminate my stake and interest in the research and my relative position in relation to research participants within circulating power dynamics. To make visible my racial epistemology, I derived three heuristic questions:

How is race operating in my interpretations, representations, and language use?

What are the racial and political implications of my results?

How has the research process transformed my own thinking about race?

Answering these questions required recollecting moments from my own experiences and reconstructing moments from the observational and interview data I collected during my school-year-long ethnography at Metro High School.

Recollecting and Reconstructing through Narrative

Narration makes visible my cultural “I.” In narrating this research process, my intention is to provide a rich, detailed ethnographic description of the site, research participants, and classroom interaction that allows readers to visualize “being there,” so that they may generalize (Dyson and Genishi, 2005; Stake, 1995) from their vicarious experience in ways that enhance their understandings of what it means to teach and learn across racial difference in today’s classrooms. Using narrative to tell this story makes visible my participation, perspectives, and responsibility in producing whatever knowledge readers may glean from this study.

In narrating the story of this research, I am mindful of the power we as researchers wield in telling a particular story, a “qualitative researcher’s version of a master narrative” (Appleman, 2003, p. 79). To disrupt this “master narrative” as I reconstruct events, relationships, and conversations, I incorporate the voices of participants as much as possible, deriving their perspectives from observations and transcriptions recorded in field notes, student writing and classroom artifacts, and transcriptions of recorded interviews. Quotation marks, block quotes, and transcription formats are employed to distinguish participants’ language from my reconstructions. I used footnotes to elaborate points of information and recollection, explore narrative tangents, and establish intertextual connections within this dissertation and with other literature. Considering multiple interpretations is key to representing this research because my ethnographic narrative is one of many stories that could be told, and my vision is only ever partial (Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003; Haraway, 1991).

Introducing...

I begin my narrative by describing how I negotiated access to the site in which I conducted this research because it was an important part of establishing trust and rapport with participants. Such mutual trust was essential for accessing participants' perspectives throughout the research process (Erickson, 1986). Using a narrative format to introduce readers to those who authorized and consented to participate in my study constructs a context for the stories in which they figure.

The Charismatic School Reformer

Sitting across from Superintendent Crown of the Metro Public School District (MPSD), I was excited and nervous.¹⁶ I was seeking Superintendent Crown's permission to conduct my dissertation research at Metro High School in his school district, located in one of the few suburbs of Inner City predominantly populated by African Americans.¹⁷ Unseasoned in the politics of access in ethnographic fieldwork, I was very sensitive to how I would be read—as a White woman, as a graduate student and inexperienced researcher, and as an academic elitist from a Research I university. Foregrounding my former identity as a high school English teacher in an urban school district, I shared from my heart my humbling experiences with cultural incongruence and racial conflict that resulted from my own inadequate preparation as a teacher. What was at stake, I

¹⁶ This is a pseudonym I selected to highlight the superintendent's influence, stature, and socially-ascribed sovereignty as the "hero" of a failing school district.

¹⁷ I assigned the school district the pseudonym "Metro Public School District" to spotlight its location within a metropolitan area and proximity to predominantly African American "Inner City," where many students who attended MPSD lived and from whence they were bussed.

explained, was the quality of education received by kids of color, like my former students and like the students at Metro High. This study was vital to me, I relayed, because too often teacher-student relationships are over-shadowed by test scores, but those relationships are crucial to getting kids to learn. What I did not say, also in my heart, was that my dissertation project was at stake because gaining access to another equally-ideal field site could prove difficult.¹⁸

I was led to the MPSD through a series of word-of-mouth referrals.¹⁹ Seeking a White, woman teacher capable of establishing positive relationships with students of color, I was referred to Ms. Cross, a high school English teacher, who had a reputation for establishing positive relationships with students. That is, she had what the superintendent called the “It Factor,” a mysteriously tacit ability to make connections with students. Many would call this interpersonal skill “charisma,” attributing it to a personality type. I was excited to meet this teacher, and I was excited to be conducting my research in the MPSD.

Spearheaded by Superintendent Crown, the MPSD was in the midst of an intensive school reform effort: during his two-year tenure, school and community stakeholders had transformed a district labeled “at-risk” into a district characterized by “excellence and high promise” by applying a business model to restructure and reinvent

¹⁸ In retrospect, Crown probably would have understood because he was working on his own dissertation at the time and completed it in 2009. An academic researcher himself, Crown’s interest in my project aligned with his interest in building a knowledge base for school reform and teacher education to better serve students of color.

¹⁹ In technical terms, this process is considered a “purposeful” sampling technique called chain sampling, which entails identifying cases of interest from “sampling people who know people who know people who know what cases are information rich, that is, good examples for study” (Patton, 2002, p. 243).

the failing public schools (Superintendent, 2007).²⁰ Crown had established valuable partnerships for MPSD with churches, colleges and universities, organizations, and corporations that supported school improvement. Because of his innovations and efforts, Superintendent Crown was recognized with an Administrator of the Year Award during the year I conducted my study at Metro High School, and his accomplishments have earned him great acclaim so that he was recruited to a neighboring school district to perform comparable miracles. Interestingly, Crown's research speaks to contemporary misperceptions that school reform is the product of a charismatic leader.²¹ Although he has received considerable recognition from his work in Metro, he has used his charisma as a tool for cultivating strategic partnerships that sustain school reform.²²

Talking with Superintendent Crown, it was easy to see why he was viewed as a charismatic school reform leader (Detroit Free Press, 2007).²³ In addition to telling stories that animated the colossal challenges of school reform, the professional development he described resounded with promise.²⁴ For the year in which I collected data, Crown's

²⁰ To protect the confidentiality of the research participants, I used pseudonyms to cite this source while trying to convey its credibility.

²¹ To combat these misperceptions, Crown explores the possibilities of implementing sustainable reform in metropolitan area schools through partnerships with community stakeholders that garner social and cultural capital for students. Although he has received considerable recognition from his work in Metro, his charisma has been a tool for cultivating strategic partnerships that sustain school reform. This is why I use scare quotes to describe him as heroic: to simultaneously align him with and distance him from this characterization.

²² This is why I use scare quotes to describe him as heroic: to simultaneously align him with and distance him from this characterization.

²³ I use pseudonyms for this source, too, to protect participants' confidentiality.

²⁴ The professional development conducted in MPSD the years before my study reflected efforts to position students as knowledge-producers, align curriculum, and respond to low-income students' needs. Crown explained that teachers focused on curriculum alignment and mapping as well as utilizing data and state standards to inform instructional decision-making. According to Crown, professional development workshops encouraged a Socratic method, which fosters students' critical thinking and logical reasoning to position students as the producers of knowledge in the classroom. To address the needs of the 88% of students who were eligible for free or reduced lunch (Motivated High School, 2009), professional development was designed to help teachers provide engaging instruction for low-income students in urban

vision was to emphasize depth versus breadth²⁵ with a guiding question, *What is teaching?* The intent was to move instruction toward a learning-centered classroom by increasing student engagement in subject matter.²⁶ Crown was also focused on improving student achievement. A company I call College Exam Assistance (CEA Prep)²⁷ that provides tutelage for the American College Test (ACT) was contracted to conduct workshops to not only prepare high school students for the college entrance exam, but also the government-mandated, standardized test of which the ACT was a component. At the time, I wondered if deep engagement in subject matter instruction was compatible with standardized test preparation.

There were stories to be told about Metro High: the school's statistics presented an intriguing puzzle to a researcher. Although students' test scores were significantly lower than the state average, those scores did not capture the whole story of students' academic performance.

According to the Superintendent, a staggering number of students were attending college. Prior to his tenure, only 75% of the seniors graduated and only 50% of those graduating seniors went on to college. During his two-year tenure, however, the

schools. These reforms, among the many others Superintendent Crown described, sounded exciting, and I could see why as a "School of Choice," (See http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,1607,7-140-6530_30334-106922--00.html) the high school was attracting students from Inner City, about 40 miles away from Metro High.

²⁵ Or in language I was familiar with: "uncoverage versus coverage" (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

²⁶ This vision was to be implemented in part through the Japanese model of Lesson Studies, which entails teachers collaboratively planning, observing, and debriefing lessons in order to cultivate reflection and improve their classroom practice. In Lesson Study, teachers: think about the long-term goals of education - such as love of learning and respect for others; Carefully consider the goals of a particular subject area, unit or lesson; Plan classroom "research lessons" that bring to life both specific subject matter goals and long term goals for students; and Carefully study how students respond to these lessons - including their learning, engagement, and treatment of each other (Mills College, <http://www.lessonresearch.net/>)

²⁷ As with the individual participants in this research, a pseudonym has been used to protect the identity of the company.

graduating classes had a 100% graduation rate, and moreover, 100% of those graduating seniors had gone on to either a two year or a four year college.²⁸ As Crown pointed out, there was a story to be told that the test scores were not telling. Another puzzle emerged related to gender. Crown explained that even though girls outperformed boys on statewide tests, more boys were recognized as Honored Scholars with grade point averages above a 3.0.²⁹ These inconsistencies³⁰ made me curious about gendered patterns of relationships and teaching and learning at Metro High, and I was eager to hear the stories of the students and teachers and meet the teacher with the “It Factor.”

The Teacher with the “It Factor”

In our first conversation, I began assembling the pieces of what Superintendent Crown had referred to as the “It Factor.” Ms. Cross³¹ accepted with enthusiasm my

²⁸ I have tried to verify these statistics. For one of the years in question, the Metro School Improvement Plan (2009) reported 21 retentions and less than 10 drop outs in the 12th grade class, which is different than what I recorded in my notes from my interview with the superintendent. I suspect that Superintendent Crown was able to read the statistics in ways that represented the hard work he and his team devoted to improving the school system. In this sense, the positive graduation rate and college attendance rates were a reflection of what was at stake for him as the “hero” hired to revive and replenish a failing school district in a political context in which test scores are purported to be the sole indicators of success.

²⁹ I was not able to verify this information and was met with skepticism at the school site when I inquired about boys outperforming girls in grade point average.

³⁰ Although I was a bit incredulous about the reliability of the Superintendent’s statistics, when a member of the University of Michigan’s Institutional Review Board called their validity into question, I was indignant. Was this faculty member doubtful that African American students could succeed? That predominantly African American school in a predominantly African American suburb of Inner City could function sufficiently to send all of its graduating seniors to college? These questions illuminated for me the degree to which I was wrestling with my perceptions and expectations of this predominantly African American school district. The faculty member, who had access to state-wide school data, informed me that achieving 100% graduation and college attendance rates would be an unusual feat even for affluent, predominantly White schools in suburban districts that were highly functioning, and he warned me to verify the data before including it in my dissertation. I have chosen to include what the Superintendent reported because it privileges the meaning a participant made of the data, although it is a bit opportunistic of me because I have a stake in representing students of color in ways that challenge deficit models and allow teachers to see students’ potential.

³¹ With her approval, I selected Ms. Cross’s pseudonym because to connote her ability to cross racial and cultural borders.

invitation to be part of the research project. Emphasizing that my purpose was not to evaluate her teaching, but to describe it, I talked about how I hoped to interview her periodically about her goals for lessons and how she thought they went. Amenable to feedback and questions to prompt her reflection, she explained, “When people offer different ways to do things, I interpret it as possibly helpful for my practice, so I listen.” She approached receiving feedback on her teaching the same way she told students to take her feedback on their writing, saying, “I’m not perfect, and if I pretended like I didn’t need help, then I would *have* to be perfect, and that would be really hard to do.” Ms. Cross seemed comfortable with talking reflectively about her practice.

In our initial conversation, I highlighted that I was particularly interested in issues of cross-racial teaching, but that I did not want her to change her practice in any way on my account. She laughed and said that racial issues did come up in class and that when students use stereotypes to talk about her race, she turned it back on them and used stereotypes to talk about theirs. I was eager to see such offensive rhetorical moves in defensive action and was relieved at the ease with which she talked about race. She explained to me that when she had first started teaching at Metro, students said to her, “You’re White, you won’t understand.” But after a couple of years, she had earned their respect by getting involved in their lives.³² I suspected this “getting involved in their lives” had a lot to do with the “It Factor.”

I conveyed to Ms. Cross that I was interested in how she and the students talked to each other, that I would be observing the class every day, that when she and the

³² For instance, at first, parents and students were surprised that she went to the school’s sporting events; now they noticed if she didn’t go.

students were comfortable enough, I would start video recording so that I could transcribe the classroom interaction. As I explained risks associated with the research related to confidentiality and discomfort, she shrugged them off, saying that the research process would be like part of her everyday practice, but with someone else there to help. It was “all about growing,” and she readily provided her written consent to participate in the study.³³

When I learned that Ms. Cross earned her Master’s degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Online University, I expressed interest in learning more about how the teaching of English had evolved since I had taught it four years ago. We shared a passion for literature, particularly fantasy literature and as she put it, “stuff not about the everyday, real world.” Ms. Cross also mentioned that she was in the final stages of revising for publication a young adult fantasy novel she had written, and when I asked her if she shared her writing with her students, she expressed a bit of regret that her students were not particularly interested in the genre of fantasy. She wrestled with how to get students to “step outside of their immediate lives to see there’s a world beyond the city of Metro” because “some students say they will not read anything unless it’s by an African American author.” Zane books and *The Coldest Winter Ever* by Sista Souljah were popular with students, but to Ms. Cross, they seemed a bit racy and risqué for a whole class read. To establish solidarity with her I agreed, telling her about how I had read Sista Souljah’s book with my high school students, circulating personal copies and engaging in informal conversations with them to avoid issues of censorship due to what some may find controversial content. I was excited to help Ms. Cross address these

³³ See Appendix A.

problems of practice she had identified—how to select relevant, engaging, and accessible literature that was school-sanctioned and construe literature as both a mirror and a window (Glazier & Seo, 2005).

I envisioned Ms. Cross's classroom as both a mirror and window, offering me insight into a new and familiar world. Ms. Cross was in her 6th year teaching, and in many ways, I felt Ms. Cross was in the place in her teaching where I would have been, had I stayed in the high school classroom. I felt good about my relationships with students and felt I designed rigorous curriculum and provided challenging instruction. But I knew that I could have thought more deeply about issues of race, particularly my own race, and how they affected my classroom relationships. As I walked out of MHS, past the rows of cultivated flower beds and neatly trimmed lawn, I thought about the similarities between Ms. Cross and me that constructed our co-membership: we were both White, straight, educated, book-loving, myopic, experienced high school teachers. I was excited to learn more about the students and puzzle out the "It Factor."

The Students

The strategic process by which I selected two of Ms. Cross's five classes for close study illustrates the role of empirical observation in ethnographic fieldwork and a collaborative aspect of the research process. After observing for eight schooldays, I selected two classes of 11th graders for participation in my study. My observations informed my choice. First, I noted a large quantity of interaction in both classes, although the discourse seemed qualitatively different, particularly with respect to gender. In 3rd period female students seemed to dominate, while 4th period boys seemed to monopolize

class discussions despite girls being equally represented. Moreover, I observed that Ms. Cross responded to students in different ways: she seemed to verbally banter back-and-forth with the boys and sort of compliment and nurture the girls. The quantity and quality of the interaction in these two junior classes seemed to offer rich data sources for my analysis of classroom discourse and made possible the inquiries related to gender.

Because one of the purposes of my study was to examine how teacher-student relationships were built over time, selecting classes in which relationships were central was important. In these two 11th grade classes, relationship-building seemed prominent in the classroom discourse, and the classes' composition and attendance were relatively stable, which would allow me to track the evolution of relationships over time.

In order to arrive at the decision to select these two junior classes, I compiled a Pro/Con chart depicting my observations. (See Figure IV-1.) Then I discussed my observations with Ms. Cross.

Figure IV-1 Pro/Con Observation Chart of Ms. Cross’s Classes

Hour	Class	Pros	Cons
1	10 th grade honors	Students talk about grades before class, relatively high-achieving and grade-motivated; Able to work independently; Could challenge stereotypes about African American students’ academic performance. Significant Case: A student apologized to the whole class for disrupting them the day before	Relationship work is less central to interaction; Students are already motivated by grades, so teachers can say, “Well, those aren’t my kids, the class is a higher track.” I want to study how this teacher engages students who may not typically be engaged in school.
2	10th grade	More struggling students than in other classes, so relationships more central to interaction; Relatively more interaction because students seek teacher’s approval, recognition, and feedback; Students are engaged in learning but struggling to master the material; Significant Case: A politically conscious student who talks about race	Big class and high absenteeism, so difficult to track interaction and relationships over time; Students will be reassigned to a different class in upcoming weeks because a new teacher is being hired; this would change the dynamics of the social network and relationships in the class.
3	11th grade	Strong female students who engage; Relationships are central to interaction; Relatively more interaction, including more counterscripts than in other classes; Students say they like the class; Students are expressive, dramatic. Several significant cases: Diamond, Sincere, Paris, Starla; 14 female, 10 male; Students enthusiastic about my study and eager to help teachers	Non-contiguous speech: students don’t raise their hands, there are a lot of side conversations and counterscripts so it will be challenging to record and transcribe classroom talk
4	11th grade	Strong male characters who engage; Several students had this teacher last year; Ms. C. uses more whole-class management strategies because of the intensified and increased interaction. Significant cases: Mike, Mack, Tina, Ailey, Becky; 14 female, 14 male	Non-contiguous speech; Students don’t raise their hands, a lot of side conversations and counterscripts so will be challenging to record and transcribe; Students enthusiastic and eager to present their own research interests
5	11th grade	Very small class: 14 students; Can get to know students well; Many athletes-interested in talking with me about UM basketball. Significant case: Reynaldo lost his stripes due to miscommunication between Ms. C. and Sergeant J.	Very small class: 14 students; Less interaction than the other classes; Students seem quiet.

Ms. Cross and I narrowed our attention to three classes: periods 2, 3, and 4. To further prompt Ms. Cross's thinking, I posed the questions, *Controlling for time of day and eating, which class makes you most tired? In which class do you feel you expend the most energy? The least?* She thought for a moment and replied that they all take different kinds of energy, but agreed that periods 3 and 4 would be more conducive to investigating relationships over time and because the curriculum would be constant across both classes and the interactional flavor and relational differences would be highlighted in the discourse. (Figure IV-2 portrays Ms. Cross's descriptions of her classes.)

Figure IV-2. Descriptions of Ms. Cross's Classes

Period	Class	Observations
1	10th grade Honors	1 st period has a lot of leaders, so managing the discussions can be challenging because no one wants to follow. With honors kids, you have to keep up with them and if they don't feel you're doing it right, they'll let you know.
2	10 th grade General	2 nd period is the most low-achieving. You have to convince them to do work. For some of the students, like Lonnie, it's enough that they try because she has trouble with English and she'll sit with her head down, but like the other day she was writing her essay, and it's good to see her at least try. They'll engage.
3	11 th grade General	The test prep and upcoming school-wide ACT is stressful, so it makes me tired. The class also has some strong females: Diamond, Starla, and Staci. It would be a good place to examine gender dynamics. I think the boys are easier to relate to.
4	11 th grade General	4 th period is bigger and they are more difficult to convince to do work. They like to play and have strong male characters in that class. Sometimes I have to make them stay late into the lunch period because they won't settle down.
5	11 th grade General	5 th period the students are a bit lethargic after lunch and there are very few of them. They are a breeze, but it's tough sustaining energy at that time of day.

After selecting the two junior classes, I sought students' consent.³⁴ Foregrounding my identity as a former high school teacher, I talked about how hard it was to become a good teacher of students of color because I was White and relayed the story of Larenz, the African American young man I almost suspended for saying, "I'm puttin' it [his bag] up" instead of "I'm puttin' it away."³⁵ Upon hearing that story, the students conveyed incredulity that I could be so ignorant, that language could matter so much, or even that there were such striking differences in language use that could cause a teacher to almost reprimand a student. Part of the reason for their skepticism, I was to learn, was because they had constructed with Ms. Cross shared many understandings about language use.

The students in periods 3 and 4 expressed enthusiasm about participating in my research study. I explained that I would be observing their class every day, and when they were comfortable, video recording it. Emphasizing that I wanted to represent their perspectives as students, I told them I would be seeking interviews with them, that food would be provided, and that they would be compensated \$10 for a 40 minute lunch-time interview and \$15 for a 90-minute focus group interview after school. The girls in 3rd period were excited because they said they loved Ms. Cross's class, recognized the importance of teacher-student relationships, and believed that helping teachers improve their practice would be a good thing. Within the next week, I was able to see what I interpreted as the extent of their devotion to Ms. Cross.

Students in 4th period seemed more ambivalent about my project, but said they would like to learn how to use research to advocate for changes in their learning

³⁴ See Appendix B for the script I presented to students.

³⁵ I presented this vignette in Chapter I to illustrate the cultural incongruence that can arise from cross-cultural miscommunication, resulting in unwarranted disciplinary action against African American boys like Larenz.

environment. Later, I learned this meant they wanted to rid themselves of the test preparation they were subjected to on a weekly basis. I am happy to share their story about those Thursdays, although it is not a happy story to share.

Illuminating the “It Factor”

My initial observations confirmed that Ms. Cross’s classroom would yield a rich data for my research project. Two things struck me related to language, race, relationships, and what the teaching of English meant in this classroom: that the classroom discourse “sounded black” and that the standardized test constituted the bulk of the curriculum and instruction.

“Sounding Black”

I was struck by how Ms. Cross and her students engaged in what I made sense of as “verbal banter,” rapid exchanges of verbal bursts that interspersed instructional discourse. This “verbal banter” seemed to reflect and reinforce teacher and students’ positive relationships. As she engaged in this verbal banter, it seemed to me that Ms. Cross “sounded black.” By “sounding black,” I refer to the prosodic features of language use associated with black speech.

Linguists have devoted attention to unpacking elements of African American English (AAE) that mark the phonology of the dialect as distinctly “sounding black.” For instance, John Rickford (1972, cited in Rickford & Rickford, 2000) posits stress and intonation as the primary indicators of the phonology or sound patterns of AAE. In Rickford’s study, research participants accurately identified the race of the speaker as

black or white 86% of the time, citing “inflection,” “variation in pitch and rhythm,” “intonation,” and “tone” as indicators, and acoustic phonetic analysis suggested that the two black speakers demonstrated wider variation in pitch and intonation than the white speakers, although their pronunciation of consonants and vowels was comparable. Other research highlights the role of intonation in helping listeners identify speakers as African American (Wolfram & Fasold, 1974, cited in Green, 2002). The prosody of Ms. Cross and students’ speech led me to characterize it as “sounding black.”

The term “sounding black” has been employed in studies of linguistic discrimination that describe how people tend to associate particular dialects with race in the absence of a visual representation of a speaker (Baugh, 1999). However, rather than as a way to racialize discourse, another way to think about “sounding black” may be to consider how people tend to be able to identify dialects with which they are familiar. Participants in William Labov and colleagues’ (1968) study identified the race of the speaker far less accurately, 30-60% of the time. As “difficult cases” to identify, the black and white speakers’ racial identities were confounded by their language use. This study was useful in pointing out that what counts as “sounding black” is socially constructed, contingent upon the frame of reference of the speaker rather than representative of an objective categorization or genetic origins (Rickford & Rickford, 2000).

Living and teaching in the ethnically and linguistically diverse Bay Area of California, my ear became attuned to a multiplicity of languages, dialects, and accents, infusing me with the languages of Spanish and Ebonics and regional slang.³⁶ Although

³⁶ I could ask students, *Why you frontin’?* when they pretended to be *too cool for school* and let them know, *Puede salir cuando su tarea es fin* or *You can bounce when you’re done with your homework*. Through

dialects frequently used by members of racial groups may regionally differ, my intensive engagement living and teaching in Oakland schools helped me identify the prosodic features of participants' speech as the sounds of black language.

When I heard Ms. Cross “bantering” with her students, I realized that since returning to my highly segregated home state in the Midwest and entering academia, I have been immersed in general and standard English. I never felt entirely comfortable “speaking the skin” my students of color inhabited always, skin that for me was more like a colorful coat I could exchange for my own plain, white skin when it suited me (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002).³⁷ I miss the freedom of word play, the improvisation, semantic license, augmentation, and neologism (Spears, 2007) that characterized my students' and, on occasion, my ways of speaking.³⁸ These recollections congealed when I heard the sounds of black language in Ms. Cross's classroom discourse.

Because I am neither a linguistic, nor a connoisseur of language varieties, nor a native speaker of AAE, it was important for me to explore in detail literature on the dialect. This investigation led me to identify Ms. Cross and students' give-and-take verbalizing as “sounding,” another word for Signifyin(g), an African American discourse practice that emerged as central to this dissertation. Although I could not have foreseen

interaction, I picked up some of the local dialect, such as saying “skinned-ed” when using shades of skin color to describe someone, which was a common practice in the Bay Area, and “hella” to mean “very.”

³⁷ Lisa Delpit (2002) explains the visceral connection between our “mother tongue” and our identity: “Our language embraces us long before we are defined by any other medium of identity. In our mother's womb we hear and feel the sounds, the rhythms, the cadences of our ‘mother tongue.’ [...] Our home language is as viscerally tied to our beings as existence itself [...] It is no wonder that our first language becomes intimately connected to our identity. Just as our skin provides us with a means to negotiate our interactions with the world—both in how we perceive our surroundings and in how those around us perceive us—our language plays an equally pivotal role in determining who we are: it is *The Skin that We Speak*” (xix). She continues by saying that our language “skin” can determine our status in society.

³⁸ Although the loss I feel is for language not my own, it is a loss that helps me understand the ruptures experienced by people whose languages have been colonized or marginalized by Englishes. These understandings play a significant role in the questions I raise in the discussion of this study's results.

this particular focus at the time of my initial observations, I did realize that the presence of features of AAE in the classroom discourse would be an ideal site to examine features of cross-racial interaction.

Stressing Testing

The second thing that struck me was that I had under-estimated the impact the federal policy No Child Left Behind (NCLB) had on classroom teaching and learning. When I left the high school classroom to pursue graduate study, NCLB had been passed but the effects had not yet trickled down from Washington, D. C., to the states, to the districts, to the classroom. I underestimated the pressure schools, teachers, and students were under, particularly those with test scores not making their Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). I underestimated the impact the threat of sanctions from high-stakes testing would have on the classroom, and specifically, the extent of direct test preparation students in Ms. Cross's class would receive.

Ms. Cross felt tremendous pressure to improve students' achievement on the Midwestern Department of Education's standardized test and the ACT. She explained to me that Metro High had not made AYP and was in the initial phase of intervention. If scores were not substantially improved, the school faced repercussions. Ms. Cross's stake and interest in students' achievement reflected concern for her job, the district, the school, and especially the students of Metro High: "I don't want to lose my job because the school [gets reconstituted], I don't want the state to take over the district like they did in Inner City, I don't want my kids to lose their school. That's what no one thinks about: Where do the *kids* go if they close the school?" The majority of her curriculum and

instruction was designed with goals of improving students' test scores.³⁹ These goals were clarified in the extent of practicing with test materials, although the preparation was integrated into the curriculum.

Although Ms. Cross was committed to preparing students for the test, she was ambivalent about its value as curriculum. On one hand, she appreciated the test driving the curriculum because it seemed aligned with many of the state standards. On the other hand, it did not assess listening, speaking, and critical thinking skills, which were also important. She saw the test as relevant for students because it was necessary for admission to many colleges and could provide financial aid in the form of the Midwestern scholarship. But she also speculated that the teaching and learning of English would look very different if not for the test: she would “teach a different kind of writing—their own writing” instead of having students write timed, 5-paragraph essays that responded to a prompt. Students would engage in literature circles, literary analysis, the study of literary elements, and reading and writing to learn instead of learning to speed read and skim short passages on various random subjects in order to answer multiple choice questions.

As I mentioned, I had viewed working with Ms. Cross as a professional development opportunity because with a Masters degree in English curriculum and instruction, she seemed well-positioned to update me on cutting-edge pedagogy. I was surprised at the extent to which the standardized tests now seemed to drive decisions about teaching and learning. As a teacher educator and part of a network of teachers, I had heard stories of frustration from teachers in schools that serve students of color from

³⁹ See Appendix C for a calendar of daily “Do Nows,” activities, and homework assignments.

low income backgrounds who were struggling to bring up test scores, and I was aware of some Intermediate School Districts' efforts to design units of study around tests as a genre of text. I wondered how such extensive test preparation constituted an extreme case (Patton, 2002) and might affect the research in terms of what I was able to examine in the classroom discourse and contribute to the field of English education. To ensure that I would have data to work with that was not all about the test, I extended the duration of data collection beyond what was intended. However, reviewing early field experiences as part of the analytical process illuminated that the story I would tell in this dissertation was rooted in the context of the test preparation.

The “It Factor”

By telling stories that occurred in the context of this extensive test preparation, I am able to tease apart the elements of the “It Factor” in ways that guided me toward how to select and analyze the classroom interaction. Framing the results of this study, these stories indicate how Ms. Cross's ability to build productive authority relationships with students was reflected and constructed in moments of conflict and negotiation around the potentially-biased nature of the test and a student named Calvin's miscued response to a call; in addition, her capacity for relationship-building was refracted in the classroom discourse of a CEA instructor who provided test preparation in Ms. Cross's classroom once a week.

Exposing Racial Bias

As part of the test preparation, Ms. Cross incorporated curriculum and instruction designed to enhance students' awareness about the political impetus and implications for the test. Ms. Cross's primary motives were to motivate students, and she felt that if race were a factor in students not fully applying themselves to the test, then she wanted to address it. In her words: "I'm trying to in as many ways as I can to motivate the kids to do well. To try to get them to think of it as just not any other test. [...] Maybe these ten students have a big issue on race and don't like feeling that [people perceive that] obviously they can't do it [pass the test]." To address the politics of race surrounding the test, she asked students to respond to the prompt: Write 3-4 sentences describing how the ACT may be biased. Then she facilitated a conversation about the ways the test may be biased, assigning homework that required students to write a letter to an unspecified government official explaining why they think the test is biased or not.

From students' letters and class discussion, I gleaned students' perceptions of the racial politics surrounding the test. Synthesizing students' voices from a combination of data sources creates a united voice and highlights through the amalgamation the potential for social organization and action. Students felt that the test was biased against them for many reasons, and they alluded to race and social class as a factor in the test. Most vehemently, they believed that the time allotted for the test did not allow them to demonstrate their skills. As Diamond noted, "It's just ridiculous in how the time limit is 45 minutes for a 75 question test!" Students argued that if they could take more time to think about the questions, then they might get more answers right and guess less often. They also felt the content of the test should be modified to more closely reflect what they

had learned in school. Sincere said, “People should research what’s going on in school, like she doin’ (nodding to and looking at me) and then develop the test.” The implication was that the schools the students had attended had not adequately prepared them for the test. In his letter, Dante elucidated,

I think that since we are in an urban community that we have a disadvantage. The people who are in suburban communities have a better chance of getting a high score because they have more resources than we do. They may have better books, more computers, and the teachers might teach them at a more advanced level.

Part of the reason why students may have felt that they needed more time and that the test did not reflect their schools’ curriculum was because of language differences and the unfamiliar vocabulary they encountered. As Melina explained, “The ACT has confusing words and more to do with how well you know how to speak.” Mercury wrote, “The questions don’t really apply to everyone, meaning its questions are primarily designed for children of the Caucasian persuasion and doesn’t [sic] necessarily adapt to the formats of other races.” For these reasons students contended that the content of the test should be changed.

Unlike other students, Ryan did not believe that the tests themselves should be changed, but instead, “The race checking the paper should be changed.” I think Ryan was referring to the scorers of the essay tests, the audience he had been encouraged to envision as he practiced timed-writing tests. But his point was that the power dynamics contextualizing the test should be reconfigured. Ryan showed a blossoming awareness of how the ACT’s played into deficit representations of African American students in ways that benefit Whites. His letter conveys logic that because African American students are failing the tests, not Whites, then the test must be a tool for discrimination: “I believe that

the ACT's should not be an opportunity for Whites to discriminate against the entire [race]. The reason why I think this way is because of all the failing [scores]."⁴⁰ Extending this line of thought, Uniq called the test "degrading" because it could be used to label students as smart enough for college or not: "Everybody knows that the test singles out one or two races so that everybody knows they're really smart enough to get into college." Uniq saw the test as perpetuating a system whereby members of certain races are afforded more opportunities for college than others.

Other students accepted these pressures and were determined to persevere. Mercury demonstrated such resilience when he wrote, "I personally do not feel these are challenges we as students cannot overcome, but just feel it adds greatly to the pressure of the test [...] It's simply take it and pass, and you're good for life. Take it and fail, and you're [sic] college hangs in the balance." Yet Mercury's cavalier attitude belies the pressure he and the other students and Ms. Cross felt to improve their test scores.

After the students vented their frustrations with the time constraints, the difficulty, and the boredom, Ms. Cross invited them to think more deeply about racial politics contextualizing the test by posing questions through call-and-response.⁴¹ In 4th period,

⁴⁰ I replaced Ryan's words "school" and "grades" with "race" and "scores" to help articulate his argument. I felt I knew Ryan well from participating in focus groups in which he displayed thoughtful observations about race, but sometimes lacked the language to explain his complex ideas. In the interactive context of focus groups, I had the opportunity to clarify his intention and provide him with language to help him articulate his ideas. I've drawn from those interactions to clarify his meaning in this context.

⁴¹ Call-and-response is an African American discourse practice in which statements are punctuated and emphasized by expressions, or "responses," that may or may not be solicited (Foster, 2002). These responses may be affirming and/or encouraging and refer to the timing or content of the speaker (Smitherman, 1977). Call-and-response is often used to construct a sense of community or solidarity (Smitherman, 1977)

the sequence began like this, with gradually more and more students responding to her calls:

Ms. Cross: Where does the test come from? Who writes the test?

Students: Iowa.

Ms. Cross: Who is the test written for?

Students: The majority.

Ms. Cross: Who is the majority?

Students: White people.

Ms. Cross: Who does better on the test?

Students: White people.

Ms. Cross: One of the big questions is whether that's intentional or not.

After clarifying the issue at hand as whether or not the test was intentionally biased in a way that allows White people to do better on it, Ms. Cross's discourse shifted to a motivational "pep talk" in which she tried to get students fired up about test preparation and the upcoming diagnostic practice test.

For Ms. Cross this was a hard discussion to have with students, and the students in 4th period "didn't seem to be taking it seriously. Perhaps they were uncomfortable, perhaps they didn't want to discuss it at that point." The discussion ended in tension and Ms. Cross and students concluded the class on a disconcerting note. One of the boys, Calvin, had responded to one of Ms. Cross's calls with a sarcastic response, and Ms. Cross chastised him in front of the class, contributing to the tension. As she sat down next to me after 4th period, she said, "I hate being mean to kids."

Although I was eager to unpack what had just happened, I wanted to respect Ms. Cross's emotional expenditure in facilitating such a high stakes conversation, so I just said, "Yeah, that was a hard conversation to have." Ms. Cross thought for a moment

before saying, “I have to go find Calvin.” I told her I would see her the next day and silently hoped we would have the opportunity to talk about what had happened.

Driving home, I reflected on my stake and interest in Ms. Cross and students wrestling with issues of race as they related to the test. Would acknowledging that the test was racially biased feed students’ resistance to the test? That was what I had experienced teaching in Oakland, CA. With its legacy of the Ebonics debate (Perry & Delpit, 1998), Oakland was a hotbed of school-based political action, and students grounded their resistance, sometimes explicitly and thoughtfully, in political stances. I was concerned for Ms. Cross, whom I admired for taking such a risk both as a White woman addressing issues of race with African American students and as a teacher questioning the decision-making of educational authorities in a school for which testing was so high stakes. I speculated about how my inevitable “consequential presence” (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995) may have influenced Ms. Cross’s decision to address the issue of racial bias in the test. Had I done a sufficient job masking my stake in her pedagogical decisions? Had my questions or comments about the test revealed my own frustrations with the test-driven curriculum and instruction? I had to admit I was struggling to sort out my own understandings of the political impetus and implications of test-focused policies, which I saw at the time as so absurd that I perceived them as subject to questionable enforcement. Was my own preference for the curriculum and instruction Ms. Cross *could have* provided without the pressure to perform on the tests visible in my discourse? As I pondered these considerations, I realized that for me, the stakes were low, but my interest in my research and students’ performance on the test was high.

Even though the moments in which Ms. Cross and students were grappling with the possibility of the test being racially biased were tense, the conversation constructed an enduring subtext of a particular form of teacher-student authority relationship. By having this conversation with students, Ms. Cross positioned herself as an ally with them against the forces imposing the test and its associated preparation and pressure. Although she and students, for the most part, would identify Ms. Cross racially as White, she had made visible the machinations of racial oppression by outing “White people” as having a stake in orchestrating a test on which they could succeed more easily than Black students. In doing so, she repositioned herself as a White ally with students in resisting societal racial oppression. In reflecting on this event, I felt I had put together another piece of the puzzle that was the “It Factor.”

Repairing Relationships

From this event, I also gained a deeper sense of how Ms. Cross negotiated classroom conflict. I used Ms. Cross’s words, “I hate being mean to kids” as a focal point of our interview, asking her what she meant. She explained:

It was about a deeper more serious issue too. Usually when I lay into them it will be quick – mostly about their grades and not performing. And now I went kind of deeper. I think at that point, I may have touched some of them. But what made me feel like I was being mean (when I sat down and said that) was because I wasn’t able to lift them back up. As I said, they left feeling dejected: it was a pretty somber atmosphere when it was all said and done, and they had to leave. That prompted me to think I was being mean to them.

In delimiting what counts as “being mean” to students, Ms. Cross conveyed how she envisioned the boundaries of her authority.⁴² To Ms. Cross bringing up the issue of the possibility of the test being racially biased was not mean, nor was it mean to engage the students’ emotions around issues of race, especially to motivate them to perform better on the test. What *was* mean was that she did not have the opportunity to “lift them back up,” to verbalize their emotion, to ease the tension, to come to a resolution about how to approach the problem of racial bias in the test. Ms. Cross’s style seemed to be to address controversial issues by talking them out.⁴³

Ms. Cross’s preference for dealing with conflict rather than letting bad feelings fester was displayed in the lengths she went through to repair her relationship with Calvin after their conflict. As I mentioned, Ms. Cross had been using a call-and-response discourse strategy to facilitate the conversation about the racial bias in the test, and Calvin responded inappropriately. The pertinent sequence went something like:

Ms. Cross: So what do people expect you to do on the test?
Students: Fail
Ms. Cross: But what *are* you gonna do?
Students: [Pass]
Calvin: [Fail]

When Calvin did not respond accordingly to her call, Ms. Cross scolded him in front of the class while Calvin sat with his head down, embarrassed. Within 15 minutes of the

⁴²Tracing Ms. Cross’s use of the phrase “being mean” elaborates the nuances of how White teachers envision and enact their authority with African American students in comparison to African American teachers. I raised this issue in Chapter II as a potential source of racial misunderstandings between Black and White teachers and I revisit it in the discussion chapter.

⁴³ Chapters VI-VIII illustrate how Ms. Cross used a particular discursive practice, Signifyin(g), to confront potentially volatile issues while minimizing conflict with students.

conflict, Ms. Cross informed me that she was going to look for Calvin to talk with him about what had happened.

The next day, I asked Ms. Cross if she was able to catch up with him. “I was,” she responded. Feigning disinterest in order to minimize her stake, I casually said, “I wondered how that went.”⁴⁴ She told me this story:

I found him in the lunch room and I called him outside. He saw me and had that smile on his face that he always has, constantly glued to his face. Called him out in the hall on the side and I asked him – like when I get on the kids I’ll let them take a break and I go and grab that child and ask him, like I do every child, I ask them, Do you know why I acted like that toward you like I did? If they know, [they’ll say] yes or no, so I can get a feel toward them. – He said no. I explained to him about the fact it was a serious topic and it was okay and I thought people were grasping the point and here it comes—a joke—and you laughed and that just blew my whole point. I asked him, Did you say that for a reason? Were you joking around? Did you say it because you wanted to change the subject or what? He said, I was just joking around. According to him, he was just joking around. Okay. We came to an agreement. I gave him the little [head nod] and he turned into my “number five favorite” again.

In her attempt to repair her relationship with Calvin, what was important to Ms. Cross was that Calvin understood why she reproached him, that he had a chance to explain his behavior, that he did not feel unjustly reprimanded, that they came to a mutually agreeable way to construct and resolve the problem (Rex, 2007). Calvin’s account of this interaction correlated with Ms. Cross’s. In an interview, he said that he learned to take the test more seriously. I came to realize that embedded in this repair scene were negotiations of normative practices that enabled Calvin and Ms. Cross to resolve this conflict in the moment and sustain their relationship over time. This involved

⁴⁴ I took a great deal of care to phrase my questions as I wrote them down before formal interviews in order to maintain our positive relationships.

coming to an agreement on when it was appropriate to joke around or be serious, how to distinguish playful from serious messages in moments of reproach.⁴⁵

Reflecting more deeply on these critical moments allowed me to see that for Ms. Cross, “being mean” involved making students feel racially oppressed in her class. This concern for students’ “racial safety” reflected the care she expressed for students’ emotional and psychological well-being, and it extended to the classroom interaction she facilitated with the entire class her as well as one-on-one interactions with students like Calvin. How Ms. Cross envisioned the limits of her authority as represented by the subtle distinctions drawn around what counts as “being mean to kids” seemed to offer insight into what being authoritative in line with warm demander pedagogies might look like for White teachers.

To my surprise, delight, and dismay, I did not see any other significant instances of conflict that required such deliberate reparations. I was surprised because I had frequently experienced them as a teacher and had expected to see racialized conflicts in an English class. When teaching literature such as Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, and even Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, racial issues constantly seemed to surface in my classroom. I speculate that the absence of visible conflict in Ms. Cross’s class may be attributed in part to the curriculum of the standardized test, which is intended to be culturally-neutral, bereft of issues of race and power.⁴⁶ I was delighted because the lack of observable conflict

⁴⁵Discourse analysis of episodes of classroom interaction in Chapter VI portrays the process by which Ms. Cross and students co-constructed norms through which they negotiated the legitimacy of behavior. One of these episodes features Calvin, and another features the phrase “my favorite class.”

⁴⁶ The norms of Whiteness seem to operate insidiously and invisibly through NCLB’s policy and state standardized curriculum (Leonardo, 2007; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005)

implied that positive relationships were constructed, so the superintendent had steered me right: Ms. Cross did have an “It Factor.” I was somewhat dismayed because it made my task of making visible the invisible “It Factor” more complicated. However, the discourse analytic tools that would illuminate the tacit, taken-for-granted aspects of how Ms. Cross and students built their positive relationships were at my disposal, and although I did not realize it at that the time, the routine discourse practices through which authority was constructed and negotiated were observable in student-teacher interaction.

Comparing students’ interaction with Ms. Cross to their interaction with the instructor of CEA Test Preparation also indicated the fitness of studying classroom relationships in interactive discourse. The starkly contrasting, racialized interaction reinforced the enduring positive authority relationships that contextualized the moment-by-moment authority constructions and negotiations between Ms. Cross and students.

“Losing Thursdays”

The superintendent had informed me that the school district’s reforms included contracting with CEA Prep to provide weekly workshops for high school students to help them prepare for the ACT. On Thursdays, a CEA Prep instructor came into the juniors’ math and English classes to teach students testing strategies to improve their scores. CEA also offered periodic diagnostic tests, which indicated students’ progress and areas of strength and weakness. One way to tell the story of CEA Prep’s weekly workshops is to say that MPSD was providing students with access to “high yield test strategies” from “experts,” and that was the superintendent’s story.

Another way to tell this story is through Ms. Cross's eyes. As I noted, Ms. Cross believed that improving her students' test scores was paramount. She was well aware of the sanctions imposed by NCLB and the state of Michigan, and she did not want Metro to close or be taken over by the state, reconstituted, or labeled a "failing" school. She understood that to prevent these consequences, action needed to be taken in the classroom to prepare students for the test, and she was taking that action. Yet Ms. Cross resented the CEA instructors because their presence implied that *she* was not *sufficient* to prepare the students for the test. I empathized with her. The CEA instructors glided into her class each week while she sat and watched, preparing her lesson plans for the following days, occasionally intervening to help manage the classroom. Through my teacher education field instructor's lens,⁴⁷ I noted that the CEA instructors proceeded to "teach" without incorporating checks for understanding or waiting until the students were paying attention, much less engaged. At one point, Ms. Cross told me she felt that CEA was hurting students because "losing Thursdays" due to their presence disrupted the continuity of her lessons, undermining the test preparation she was providing them. For Ms. Cross and the students, continuity of instruction was precious due to disruptions caused by the school calendar, unforeseen absences that were beyond Ms. Cross's control, the excessive testing, and unforeseen events.⁴⁸ Yet, Ms. Cross's story is one of optimistic frustration, and she worked hard to mask her frustrations with "losing Thursdays" from the students and the CEA teachers.

⁴⁷ I had the privilege of serving as a field instructor for the University of Michigan Teacher Credentialing Program for three semesters during graduate school.

⁴⁸ See Appendix C for the class' instructional calendar.

Still another way to tell the story of the CEA test preparation is through the students' eyes, which were sometimes closed on Thursdays. For instance, on one Thursday, Ms. Cross had been called to an administrative meeting and a substitute sat in her place. The CEA Prep instructor, Ms. Tamberlyn, paced the room, open instructor's manual in hand, reading aloud passages of text and multiple choice questions for students to answer so that they could practice applying testing strategies she had just explained. In my field notes, I wrote that "students are dropping like flies" and identified seven students in 3rd hour with their heads down within the first ten minutes of the instruction.

Starla tried to intervene, informing Ms. Tamberlyn, "You teach boring."

Ms. Tamberlyn replied, defensively, "Well, I have to go over the passages."

Starla suggested she get people to volunteer more, and added, "And if you tell them to read, then they should read."

At this, Ms. Tamberlyn said to the class, "You are choosing to lay your heads down, but those of you who want to do better on the test will engage and volunteer to read."

As I watched, I wrestled with my own complicity in witnessing Ms. Tamberlyn's struggles. I had been observing the class for over two weeks and knew students' names so that I could hold them accountable for their behavior. However, if I intervened, what would happen to my relationship with students? Would they recognize me as an authority figure? Resisting the urge to take action, I recorded copious field notes with the hope that they would illuminate features of Ms. Cross's authority relationships I might be missing.

My role as an observer helped me see through Ms. Tamberlyn's eyes. From her perspective, Starla's intervention probably seemed like a challenge to her authority. But

as I reflected on the exchange, I saw Starla⁴⁹ as trying to address a learning problem by presenting Ms. Tamberlyn with an opportunity to assume the authority to facilitate classroom discourse in order to engage students in the curriculum. It occurred to me that because in the short time she was there each week, Ms. Tamberlyn was not able to co-construct with students shared understandings about how to have class discussions. As a result, students were not engaged and did not access the classroom discourse. By comparing the monologic approach of Ms. Tamberlyn's instruction with the dialogic approach of Ms. Cross's teaching, I was able to tease apart an element of the "It Factor" that shaped how I studied the classroom discourse. Specifically, Ms. Tamberlyn and Starla's interaction highlighted for me the importance of establishing normative classroom practices that allowed students to participate in classroom discourse and engage with the curriculum.

When Ms. Tamberlyn did finally start asking students in 3rd period to read, she picked the wrong student. Ms. Cross had negotiated a special arrangement with Elliot that he would not have to read aloud in class, although he participated frequently in classroom discourse and engaged thoughtfully in the curriculum. When Ms. Tamberlyn asked him to read, Elliot stood firm, saying first, "No," then, "I said no." At that point, Paris intervened and said, "He doesn't read." Ms. Tamberlyn tried coaxing him, "What's your name?" then, "Elliot, will you please read?" "N-O. No." "Please?" "No." Encountering such resistance from moment-to-moment, such authority negotiations did not bode well for Ms. Tamberlyn: she could neither construct enduring authority relationships with students through her moment-to-moment interactions, nor could she draw on any

⁴⁹ Starla vanished from class one day. All I could learn was that she did not go to Metro High anymore.

authority relationships that had been built previously. To me this foregrounded the significance of establishing authority relationships as normative classroom practices, like Ms. Cross had with Elliot: she authorized his excuse from reading, and he authorized her to get him to participate in every other way. Even in Ms. Cross's absence, students like Paris and Elliot⁵⁰ tried to maintain those norms. In contrast, Ms. Tamberlyn did not have a chance to construct over time productive authority relationships with students, which meant that her momentary authority negotiations were to be characterized by conflict.

However, the conflict between Ms. Tamberlyn and the students was not cross-racial; it was cross-cultural. Ms. Tamberlyn appeared multiracial with light brown skin, and she spoke soft-spoken general and standard Englishes in the classroom. In contrast, Ms. Cross identified as White and appeared so, but she spoke with the prosody usually attributed to African Americans. Comparing classroom interaction with Ms. Cross to that of Ms. Tamberlyn disrupted essentialized notions research participants and I may have held about race and language use. Ms. Cross, who was categorized as "White," was more "culturally Black," while Ms. Tamberlyn, who was read as "Black," performed more "culturally White" in the classroom, especially in the context of the typical heavy verbal bantering of 4th period. However, on the day in question, the major players in the classroom discourse—Mike, Calvin, Smooth, and Brad—had their heads down.

I empathized with Ms. Tamberlyn's situation. Conducting test preparation workshops with affluent, White students whose parents paid top dollar showed me that there is no time in such workshops for building relationships with students; it is just not

⁵⁰ Paris and Elliot do not appear again in this study because they were no longer in Ms. Cross's class in November. I had noticed Elliot's name on a weekly disciplinary bulletin and heard from Ms. Cross that Paris had been expelled for fighting. Before leaving Metro High, however, Paris had dropped by to say goodbye to Ms. Cross and express disappointment that she had to leave.

part of the curriculum.⁵¹ CEA Prep's curricular approach was designed for tutoring individuals or small groups of students who signed up for their services and paid substantial fees for them. When she applied to work at CEA, Ms. Tamberlyn had not really signed up for the kind of teaching she was expected to do at Metro High, and she had certainly not been trained to do what Ms. Cross did. Like all of the participants in this research project, including myself, Ms. Tamberlyn was entangled in a government-orchestrated bureaucratic spider web through which pressure and threats of sanctions unfolded, leaving various unsuspecting casualties, including CEA Prep and its instructors, in its wake.⁵²

Yet Ms. Tamberlyn's presence on Thursdays was invaluable to me and my research because it hinted at aspects of the "It Factor." By comparing the classroom interaction, I was able to refine my plan for collecting and analyzing data in a way that would make vivid the work Ms. Cross performed in 1) establishing productive relationships with students that would garner their authorization to engage them in teaching and learning, 2) co-constructing with students participation frameworks that

⁵¹ I worked for a wonderful, small test preparation company in California owned and operated by a man who believed in making high quality test preparation accessible to all students: he charged fees competitive with other companies like CEA Prep for students in suburban areas whose families could afford them, but significantly reduced the price for students in urban and under-resourced areas.

⁵² Although they probably profited from their contract with Metro High (does any company do anything if not for profit?), CEA Prep could also be considered a casualty of this arrangement. Metro High's test scores for the year they were contracted actually declined from the previous year. I am not trying to assert a causal relationship that would imply that CEA Prep caused the decline in scores. However, the correlation could not have served a promotional value for their service. They were taking a risk in offering a service they were fairly unprepared and unqualified to provide. CEA Prep's acknowledgement that they may have bitten off more than they could chew could be inferred by their revocation of the "guarantee" they usually offer to their paying clients who take their workshops, which states that if the client does not feel ready, did not score higher, or did not make acceptable gains, he or she can study with them again for free. Ms. Cross pondered this in terms of what was at stake for CEA prep if students' scores did not increase; to her, their interest was clear: they profited from the contract with the district. CEA and others may tell a different story, though, and my perspective was limited to what I observed on Thursdays in Ms. Cross's class and what I heard from her and the students.

gave them access to classroom discourse, and 3) learning their culturally-based communication practices so that she could validate and utilize them as instructional resources.

Collecting and Analyzing Data

The stories I shared that left such vivid impressions on me were recorded in the earliest days of my field work as a participant-observer. Narrating these stories was warranted because rigorously describing participant-observation involves acknowledging how “I” served as an instrument of data collection. As I have modeled, participant-observation also entails viewing the inevitable “reactive effects,” or “the effects of an ethnographer’s participation on how members may talk and behave” as a source of learning and observation (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995, p. 3). These stories gathered through participant-observation guided my decisions about data collection and analysis that would allow me to generate vivid, informative representations of classroom interaction.

To render visible how Ms. Cross and students constructed normative practices for participating in classroom discourse and negotiating momentary authority relationships, I collected the following empirical materials: (See Figure IV-3).

- Ethnographic fieldnotes as a participant-observer
- Transcriptions of video and backup audio recordings of classroom interaction
- Transcriptions of video and audio recordings of focus group and individual interviews

- Classroom artifacts, including handouts and student work
- Questionnaires that addressed emergent lines of inquiry

Assembling such an array of empirical materials allowed me to triangulate data sources to enhance the “trustworthiness” of my interpretive claims and triangulate the methodology of discourse analysis with an interpretive ethnographic approach. My interpretive ethnographic approach involved making visible the “invisibility” of everyday classroom life, documenting concrete details of practice, and highlighting participants’ interpretations of social action, classroom life, and practice (Erickson, 1986).

Figure IV-3 Summary of Data Collected

Data Collected	Scope of Data Collected	Methodology
Fieldnotes	48 days Pre-Test 10 days Post-Test	As a daily participant-observer, I wrote fieldnotes for almost 100 class periods and video recorded about 75 class periods. My sustained presence allowed me to establish rapport with participants and access local meanings of classroom interaction.
Video Recordings of Classroom Interaction	37 Pre-Test 14 Post-Test 56 video files	
Audio and Video Recordings of Focus Group and Individual Interviews with Students	Total: 15 interviews 29 students Round 1: 7 interviews 22 students Round 2: 3 interviews 15 students Round 3: 5 interviews 18 students	I conducted 3 rounds of focus groups. The purpose of Round 1 was to probe students’ schooling experiences to “learn how to look” at the classroom interaction in order to select episodes of authority negotiation. The purpose of Round 2 was to glean students’ perspectives on the test preparation curriculum. This line of inquiry emerged during the research process and I co-designed the interview guide with Ms. Cross. Round 3 consisted of follow-up interviews with students to pursue lines of inquiry emerging from analysis of classroom interaction and transcripts.
Audio and Video Recordings of Interviews with Teacher	10 interviews	I conducted 10 formal interviews with the teacher deriving questions from observations, focus group data, and transcripts of classroom interaction.
Notes from Interview with Superintendent	1 interview	I conducted an informal interview with the Superintendent when seeking access to the school site.

Sights and Sounds of Fieldwork

Performing interpretive fieldwork required me to spend an extended amount of time in Ms. Cross's classroom⁵³. I was a daily participant-observer during October-December, a periodic participant-observer January-February, and a daily participant-observer for over two weeks in April-May. I recorded field notes for almost 100 class periods and extended them within 1-2 days. Some of my most fruitful reflections on my observations occurred during my 40-minute drive home, and I frequently audio recorded these thoughts or called my "research assistant"⁵⁴ to record them as I talked. My elaboration of observational field notes produced rich detailed descriptions of classroom practices.

Recording observational field notes in the live setting of a classroom may seem elementary. However, the physical arrangement of Ms. Cross's classroom made it extremely important to pay attention to how I was positioned in the classroom and how my physical vantage point could privilege some foci while occluding others. Desks were arranged in rows of three or four on each side of an open space through which Ms. Cross traversed as she taught. A White board that depicted the daily lesson's aim, a framing "Do Now," class activity, relevant state standards, and homework assignment occupied the "south" wall while the chalk board for note-taking occupied the "north" wall. Due to the configuration of the classroom, students varied in their proximity to Ms. Cross and me such that it was not possible for me to be privy to all of the interaction. To maximize

⁵³ See Appendix D for a Timeline of Field Work

⁵⁴ Although my mother is not a fully-trained researcher, she is an educator with a master's degree. Triangulating my observations and interpretations of the data with her has enhanced the interpretive reliability of my claims.

what I could see and hear, I used four data collection instruments Triangulating the observations recorded in my field notes, I variously positioned a video camera so as to capture student-teacher interaction and placed two audio recorders at opposite ends of the classroom to capture the “underlife” of the classroom, or students’ informal talk. Using a multitude of data collection tools enhanced the reliability of my data.

Interviews with Ms. Cross and students allowed me to incorporate participants’ perspectives. I conducted 10 formal interviews with Ms. Cross. For some formal interviews, I used a general protocol that began by asking Ms. Cross about her intended goals for the lesson, then asking how well she thought the lesson accomplished those goals. Leading off with her curriculum design about which she was very deliberate established rapport in each interview and prompted her reflection about the more tacit, internalized aspects of her practice. Often, I prepared interview guides derived from observational field notes, zeroing in on a particular episode of interaction, a student, or a snapshot of her own discourse. True to the enthusiasm she showed for engaging in this research in our introduction, Ms. Cross seemed to enjoy those moments when she mused, “Hmmm...That’s a good question. I hadn’t thought about that,” or, “Why *do* I do that?” By illuminating Ms. Cross’s rationale for her classroom practices, these interviews helped me identify episodes of classroom interaction that represented normative ways of constructing and negotiating authority relationships.

Focus group interviews, combined with my sustained presence as a participant-observer and detailed field notes enabled me to identify episodes of classroom interaction that were meaningful to participants. In selecting episodes, I sought “conceptually important” cases, or cases that may occur infrequently, but are significant conceptually

(Weiss, 1994). I conducted three rounds of focus groups with 29 different students for a total of 15 focus group interviews. A strength of focus group interviewing as a method is that a researcher may access many voices in a short amount of time while allowing participants to “share and compare” their stories (Morgan, 1997; 1998). Using focus groups, I was able to access 55 different points of view on the three focus group topics because many students participated in more than one focus group.⁵⁵

Probing students’ schooling experiences in focus group interviews helped me “learn how to look” at the classroom interaction (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995). Designed as exploratory, that is, to allow participants to generate ideas as they “swap stories,” this first round of interviews illuminated students’ tacit and internalized thoughts about race in the classroom (Morgan, 1998).⁵⁶

When I asked students to describe what they found engaging about Ms. Cross’s class, Sasha told me, “She make’ it fun.” Mack grinned, “She be makin’ me laugh, though.” Sincere said, “She joke’ around with us.” Mercury embellished, “She gives us what we need, you know. If we need to be serious, she’s serious. If we need a laugh, she’s funny.” Calvin related Ms. Cross’s joking around to the test, saying, “I wouldn’t have taken the test seriously if she *hadn’t* joked about it.” Although students had difficulty providing me with examples, a student named Mike was able to point me in the right direction. He explained his passion for the “going back and forth” in which he and Ms. Cross frequently engaged: “If you set yourself up for a joke, I’m gon’ talk about you. Ms. Cross set’ herself up for jokes and I come back again. It’s like ping pong. I don’ like

⁵⁵ For example, Mercury, Mack, Tina, and Ryan participated in all three focus groups, so I was able to access their perspectives on the three different topics.

⁵⁶ See Appendix H for the Round 1 Focus Group Interview Guide.

losin’.” Mike figured prominently in the episodes of interaction I selected for closer analysis, and Signifyin(g) in the classroom held special meaning for him.

I selected episodes for closer analysis by reviewing my field notes and videos of classroom interaction for scenes in which students laughed or the class became loud, indicating that they may be having fun or joking around, and thus, engaged. In these episodes, I observed that Ms. Cross interwove her instruction with particular discursive practices, making space for the “banter” with students I had noted in my early field observations.

Foregrounding Signifyin(g)

Triangulating data from interviews with field observations highlighted the importance of these discursive practices. I identified ten strategies Ms. Cross seemed to use routinely, recorded these practices in my field notes, noted them as patterned in my second analytical memo, and coded segments of video to mark episodes of classroom interaction for discourse analysis.⁵⁷ (See Figure IV-4 for Ms. Cross’s Ten Routine Discourse Strategies).

⁵⁷To code the video recordings, I used Atlas qualitative data management software conducive to a grounded theory approach whereby codes may be generated through the research process.

Figure IV-4 Ms. Cross’s Ten Routine Discourse Strategies

Discourse	Ms. Cross’s Routine Discourse Strategy
“My favorite class”	Praise and reproach
“Who got ‘A’? Who got ‘B’?”	Call and response, an emphasis on oral recitation
Verbal bantering	Signifyin(g)
Sounding Black	Prosody and intonation associated with black speech
Mix of direct and indirect style	Indirection
“Sweetie,” “Sweetheart”	Terms of endearment
Elliot began, “We was” Ms. C. interrupted: “ ‘We was’?” The class chorused: “We <i>were!</i> ” Elliot corrected himself. Starla {to Diamond}: How much do braids cost? Diamond: I’ll aks my mama. She...Ms. C: “Aks?” Diamond: Yeah, I’m a aks my mom. Ms. C: “aks?” Diamond: Yeah, because she got a friend who braid hair and she knows...”	Selectively “correcting” students’ language
Counting “1,” “2,” “3”	A contextual cue that made inappropriate behavior consequential for the class
“Good answer!”	Coaxing, nurturing, caring
“You’re gonna lose your participation points”	A contextual cue that signaled to students to change their behavior; disciplinary strategy that relied on students’ investment in grades

After exploring sociolinguistic literature on African American language, I realized that five of these discourse strategies resembled culturally-specific African American discourse practices and therefore warranted further exploration for the discourse analysis of cross-racial authority.

This led me to focus on what the sights and sounds of field work pointed to as the most conceptually significant discourse practice in use in this classroom—Signifyin(g) and how it served as a resource for constructing authority across teacher and students’ racial difference.

Backgrounding the Test

By focusing on Signifyin(g), I excluded close analysis of other facets of classroom discourse, such as the curriculum of standardized test preparation. Being immersed in theories emphasizing the constitutive capabilities of discourse, I hesitated to become complicit in the perpetuation of the “accountability movement.” Although NCLB claims to serve the needs of students of color and from low socioeconomic backgrounds, the policy’s rhetoric seems to impair those it allegedly serves (Darling-Hammond, 2004; 2007; Gay, 2007; Karp, 2004; ; Leonardo, 2007; Ravitch, 2010 Wood, 2004). How could I write a dissertation about a test-driven classroom without succumbing to a test-driven dissertation, riddled with the deficit language and rhetorical flaws of NCLB? Even though the test exists in the physical world, we “discourse” its significance “into being” (Bloome, et. al., 2008). I grew concerned that if I spotlighted the test, the vitality of classroom life in Ms. Cross’s class would be obscured. But I was most concerned that as a result of the pressure, Ms. Cross and students would succumb to seeing their worth through the eyes of test scores (Berliner, 2007).

At the time of this study, the pressure in schools that did not meet AYP was enormous, and this pressure was reflected in classroom practices (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Wood, 2004). I watched while Ms. Cross and the students became increasingly frustrated with their diagnostic test scores, which seemed to fluctuate dramatically, despite their efforts. Along with participants, I felt the pressure of the test on my research in which my stake and interest were high. My empathy with participants helped me recognize the importance of situating this study within the political milieu that permeated the discourse of this classroom, school site, district, and state of Midwestern. It is

paramount to see the actions of this teacher and students as influenced by the macro forces and pressures of governmental policies.

Although admittedly, I had less stake in students' performance than my participants, I had high interest in how I would represent them in this study. How could I produce a study from a classroom so burdened by the pressures of high stakes testing without becoming consumed by the outcomes of test myself? My decision to maintain my focus on the definitions of learning I outlined in Chapter III—the production of knowledge, moral deliberation, validation of students' culture, social justice, fostering students' resilience, engagement in curriculum and instruction, and access to classroom discourse—rather than cave in to evaluating students through test scores was manifold. By locating learning in classroom discourse, I was able to stay tuned to the processes of relationship building, capital circulation, and practice that were the focal points of this research. Positioning the test as *context* of the classroom discourse was crucial; methodologically, this allowed me to foreground the meanings participants made of the test, rather than the test itself.

What a focus on the outcomes of the test threatened to occlude was how participants' talk held the potential to challenge and reconfigure the meaning of the test from its generally accepted importance as the only worthwhile measure of students' achievement. As I explained in Chapter III, “seeing” how discourse at the local or micro level holds the potential to challenge or disrupt global or macro level discourses is a difficult task for researchers, but made possible by microethnographic approaches to discourse analysis that examines the relationships between local/global/micro/macro discourses and processes. In practicing my own type of syncretism, I deliberately chose

to focus on facets of classroom life beyond the test instead of accepting test preparation at Metro High as normative. My attention was drawn to the social context of learning that serves as the precondition for pursuing various educational goals, including the production of knowledge, moral deliberation, validation of students' culture, social justice, and fostering students' resilience. Employing authority to accomplish these multiple functions of education is aligned with the comprehensive and multidimensional qualities of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ I realize that by omitting students' test scores from this study, I leave myself open to charges that I may have low expectations for students of color. This is not the case. Like many other educators interested in serving the needs of students of color and/or from low income backgrounds, I believe that there are more productive ways to do so than through NCLB's policy (Darling-Hammond, 2004, 2007; Wood, 2004; Leonardo, 2007; Gay, 2007; Karp, 2004; Ravitch, 2010; Meier, 2004; Kohn, 2004).

Chapter V: What's Signifyin(g)?

As explained in the previous chapter, the conceptual focus of my study and methods of analysis emerged through the research process. Critical moments pointed to the importance of how Ms. Cross used students' culturally-grounded communication practices, created opportunities for students to participate in classroom discourse, and addressed with students issues of race to establish productive authority relationships with them. Relevant theory, methodology, and results dialectically evolved through a recursive progression (Bloome, et. al., 2005) as I collected and analyzed my data: observed the classroom, generated lines of inquiry, noted patterns, interviewed participants, and consulted literature. This process led me to name the discourse practice of Signifyin(g) as a critical facet of the "It Factor" that enabled Ms. Cross to build productive authority relationships with students across their racial difference. In literary theory Signifyin(g) is portrayed as a culturally-specific African American discourse genre that is multiple in its forms and functions. However, Signifyin(g) is not typically well understood by White teachers who construe its verbal playfulness as impertinent and ill-mannered (Kochman, 1981). In this chapter I explain those elements most relevant for alternative ways of understanding how Signifyin(g) operates and what it accomplishes in social interaction.

What's Signifyin(g)?

Signifyin(g) is considered a uniquely African American discourse genre which has been traced to African roots and U.S. Whites' enslavement of Blacks (Gates, 1988; Morgan, 2004). English educator Carol D. Lee (1993) explains the meaning of

Signifyin(g) among African Americans: “To signify within the African American community means to speak with innuendo and double meanings, to play rhetorically upon the meaning and sounds of words, and to be quick and often witty in one’s response” (p. 11). Sociolinguist Geneva Smitherman (1977) defines Signifyin(g) as a “verbal art of insult in which a speaker humorously puts down, talks about, needles—that is, signifies on—the listener” (p. 118-119).

Signifyin(g) is portrayed in literature familiar in high school English curricula, such as Zora Neale Hurston’s novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. It is also depicted in popular culture such as the MTV show “yo mama,” which involves a verbal competition between opponents who exchange insults. Signifyin(g) can look like “yo’ mama” jokes, exchanges of insults more broadly defined, or subtle insults embedded within naturally occurring talk.

Whose Signifyin(g)?

Although on television White contestants sometimes enter the ring of verbal dueling, according to literary theorist Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1988), there is no equivalent construct outside the Black community. The uniqueness of Signifyin(g) as an African American discourse genre is represented in Gates’ spelling, which I appropriate here. Gates capitalized the word and dropped the final “g” to connote the vernacular use of “Signifyin” by the Black community as distinct from the White term “signifying.” The brackets surrounding the “g” highlight the difference produced through this process of renaming the White term and represent Signifyin(g) as a culturally-unique discourse genre specific to the African American community.

In this chapter I employ the “White” term “signifying” and the “Black” term “Signifyin(g),” which, according to Gates (1988), “have everything to do with each other, and, then again, absolutely nothing” (p. 45). “Signifying” has denoted the meaning that a term conveys or is intended to convey, while “Signifyin(g)” connotes “the playful puns on a word [...] which a speaker draws on for figurative substitutions” to convey multiple, humorous, and often “telling” meanings (p. 49). Gates explains:

Whereas signification depends for order and coherence on the exclusion of unconscious associations which any given word yields at any given time, Signification luxuriates in the inclusion of the free play of these associative rhetorical and semantic relations. (49)

Invoking both of these terms is an attempt to situate my analysis within the “two parallel [or ‘perpendicular’] discursive universes” of the Black and White linguistic circle (Gates, 1988, pp. 45, 49) in order to unravel the multiple interpretations within and around a White teacher’s use of Signifyin(g) as a pedagogical tool with African American students. Using discourse analysis, I illustrate how Ms. Cross’s use of Signifyin(g) as a culturally congruent discourse practice constructs her authority as a White teacher of African American students.

In previous chapters I devoted special attention to the language choices I made to represent the ideas I convey. I continue to heed my words in this chapter. However, I do not always make these choices explicit for my readers. Instead, I allow the ambiguity of my language use to reverberate with the multitude of possible interpretations. By allowing meaning to resonate in the rhetorical space between us, I aim to position my reader with choices among several interpretations.

While it is my intention to foster multiple interpretations in my articulation of Signifyin(g), an elaboration of its forms and functions within the African American community is necessary to clarify its boundaries for empirical study, in other words, to be able to define what counts as Signifyin(g) in the classroom. To define Signifyin(g), I draw from the fields of sociolinguistics and communication before explaining the methods I employed to select episodes of interaction that portray how Signifyin(g) functioned in relation to authority.

What's Signifying?

Signifyin(g) is multiple in its form, function, and rhetorical purposes. Rather than create a typology of Signifyin(g) for the classroom, my intention is to explore the social function of Signifyin(g) in order to contribute to the knowledge base of classroom teaching and learning. Therefore, I use what scholars, many of whom Signify themselves, have identified as features of African American discourse, along with frameworks for studying race, discourse, performance, authority, and language and literacy as heuristics—tools for discovery—through which to make meaning within the classroom discourse and examine how Signifyin(g) operated in relation to the construction and negotiation of authority.

As a speech event within the language system of African American English (Green, 2002) or mode of African American discourse (Smitherman, 1977), Signifyin(g) appears in various forms. Signifyin(g) is perhaps most well known as its portrayal in popular culture as the dozens. The dozens involves exchanging insults about a target's mother or other relative and often takes the grammatical form of "yo' mama" followed by

a simile: “Your mother (is) so *adjectival*... (that) ...” where “so” and “that” are used for emphasis (Morgan, 2002). As a particular form of Signifyin(g), the dozens operates through indirection because it requires the hearer to deconstruct the meaning conveyed through the logic of the adjectival attributes (Morgan, 2002).

The dozens represents a particular variation of verbal dueling, or “game activity” through which insults are exchanged (Mitchell-Kernan, 1972). Signifyin(g) may also appear in the forms of capping, woofing or sounding. Milder than the dozens, capping represents another form of Signifyin(g) in which insults are exchanged, but not necessarily in the grammatical form of the dozens (Smitherman, 1977). Thomas Kochman (1981) suggests that within the African American community, verbal dueling offers Black men and women the opportunity to hone and display their ability to endure verbal insult without resorting to violence. The objective of verbal duelers is to use language to dominate their opponent and display their verbal skills and communicative competence in Signifyin(g).

In addition to verbal dueling like the dozens, Claudia Mitchell-Kernan (1972) highlights how Signifyin(g) may be employed in natural conversations as encoded messages. Relying on indirection and interpretation, Signifyin(g) offers a way to subtly insult, or make a negative commentary about, a target while avoiding confrontation. Indirection operates by allowing a hearer to choose from an array of interpretations with varying degrees of threat. The hearer may respond to serious interpretations, or play-ful, sometimes complimentary ones. Highlighting rhetorical functions of Signifyin(g), Smitherman (1977) articulates indirection as a rhetorical strategy that uses the power of suggestion and innuendo for persuasive purposes, such as circumventing counter-claims

and verbally meandering around a point. In this way, Signifyin(g) may be used to make a point—that is, to instruct—without preaching or lecturing (Smitherman, 1977).

Smitherman notes that speakers who competently employ indirection often win arguments. Using indirection for persuasive purposes requires verbal acuity and a sophisticated understanding of the rhetorical situation, that is, the relationship between the rhetorical purpose, speaker, hearer, and other hearers because Signifyin(g) relies on several layers of context (Morgan, 2004).

The “other hearers” to whom Morgan (2004) refers may be envisioned as multiple rows of audience members observing and evaluating the performance and performers of Signifyin(g). As the performance of verbal art, Signifyin(g) draws from the Black oral tradition to incorporate poetic features, such as exaggerated language, plays on words, image-making and metaphor, and braggadocio, into performances (Smitherman, 1977). These poetic features not only serve aesthetic purposes, but also function rhetorically within Signifyin(g) events. Rickford & Rickford (2000) characterize this verbal artistry as “highly stylized lying, joking, and carrying on with such virtuosity as to inject one’s message with metaphor and eloquence while elevating one’s social status and parodying one’s interlocutors or their attitudes and behaviors” (p. 81). By illuminating the artistic features of Signifyin(g), sociolinguists have attempted to construe the value and complexity of Black language use.

Signifyin(g) can be done for fun (Smitherman, 1977) as “an end in itself” (Mitchell-Kernan, 1972, p. 165), functioning as play in some contexts.

The forms and functions of Signifyin(g) described in the literature of sociolinguistics were helpful in cultivating my understanding of how Signifyin(g) can

operate within the African American community. However, because Signifyin(g) is particularly sensitive to the interactional context in which it is used (Kochman, 1981; Morgan, 2004), it seems especially important to consider the role Signifyin(g) played in the classroom, and in particular, *this classroom*, among *these participants*, in *these rhetorical situations*. Therefore, in the remainder of this dissertation I consider this articulation of Signifyin(g) as a *frame* for the discovery process.

Because this frame has been constructed through my “cultural I,” my vantage point as a White, standard-English speaking, woman, graduate student researcher, I “read” my selection of and experiences with Signifyin(g) as “racial texts” (Cochrane-Smith, 2000) informed by my racial epistemology, my emotional stake and interest in the research, and my position within processes of power and privilege related to race and language.

Why Signifyin(g)?

In addition to the sights and sounds of field work, questions from my own experiences with African American English as an urban high school teacher constituted a signpost that directed me toward the significance of Signifyin(g) in the construction of authority relationships in this classroom. What I was learning about African American discourse made me wish the Oakland Unified School District had been able to provide me and other teachers unfamiliar with the nuances of Ebonics with the professional development promised by the Ebonics Resolution (Perry & Delpit, 1998). For me as an English teacher, learning the essential grammatical structure of African American English has been easy; however, learning how and when to employ its rhetorical moves

and poetic devices in a real-life interactional context such as a classroom characterized by racial difference seems much more difficult.

Part of the reason I view African American language-in-use as challenging is that I have had limited encounters with Signifyin(g). I describe myself as a native speaker not only of English, but a native speaker of *standard* English.⁵⁹ The few times I encountered Signifyin(g), I recognized it as something foreign, something different, if I recognized it at all. I recall seeing an episode of *Good Times* (Kenwith, 1975) in which a Black candidate was running for office and the Evanses were trying to get him to abandon the standard English he was using in his campaign and use Black vernacular to attract Black voters. At the end of the show, they got him to “do the dozens,” engage in a verbal battle. I was captivated by the way the characters used language and exchanged insults, and although I didn’t quite understand all the references, I recognized that for the Black people on the television, there was something important to them about their “different” way of talking. What it was, though, was a mystery to me.

⁵⁹ In the household where I grew up, I was reproached for speaking colloquially or using slang, the most extreme example being that I was encouraged to answer the telephone by saying, “It is I.” I frequently corrected others’ language: when they said, “I did good,” I said, “You did well,” and they thought I was agreeing with them, that they had truly accomplished something. My penchant for correction was not entirely my fault: I was born to a mother who was an English teacher and parents for whom upward social class mobility was a central goal. This combination contributed to my early understandings that language indexed social class such that speaking in standard form garnered cache in society while using slang did not. These lessons of language were conveyed to me when I acquired the word “ain’t” from a neighbor girl and tried it out on my mother, to which she replied that I should not talk like I was “ignorant” and from a certain economic background. Although I appreciate these lessons because they have instilled in me the verbal acumen to achieve academically (write this dissertation) and a passion for language that led me to the field of English, I have had to actively resist using my knowledge of standard English as privilege to position myself and power to wield over those who speak in marginalized dialects. I explained how the urban high school students I taught were the first to open my eyes to the beauty and sophistication of Black verbal art.

Another formative experience I had with (and recognized as) Signifyin(g) was in an urban classroom when I walked in and saw my close friend and English teacher colleague Maureen (Ms. Benson) exchanging yo' mama jokes with her ninth graders. I was amazed, impressed...and slightly appalled. But I had seen the close relationships Maureen had with her students, many of whom were deemed unruly by other teachers, and noted the high quality work they produced. Yet I couldn't help but wonder what place these yo' mama battles had in an English class. And when I asked Maureen, who is White, where she had learned all those yo' mama jokes, she replied, "Atlanta," explaining that she and her friends there had engaged in competitions to see who could come up with the most jokes. Then she played for me the song, "Ya Mama" by the Pharcyde. But the significance of Signifyin(g) and the nuances of its use still remained a mystery to me. For white teachers like Maureen and me, I wondered about issues of authenticity, appropriation, and awkwardness in using a communication style usually associated with other racial groups. Consequently, when I saw Ms. Cross Signifyin(g) with her students, I seized the opportunity to unravel this mystery of African American language use for myself and for other White teachers who may be encountering Signifyin(g), perhaps unaware of its signification, significance, and existence.

Illuminating the significance of Signifyin(g) and the nuances of its use in Ms. Cross's classroom involved rigorous, systematic analysis of classroom discourse and working across theory, methodology, and results in a dialectic recursive process.

Analyzing Signifyin(g) in Classroom Discourse

Discourse analysis entailed selecting episodes of interaction, transcribing them, and annotating them in a dialect, recursive process. I reviewed episodes of interaction from the coded segments of video that identified Ms. Cross’s ten routine discourse practices, many of which involved African American English. At this stage in my analysis, I was beginning to make sense of the discourse in terms of race and authority. (See the third column in Figure V-1.)

Figure V-1 Making Sense of Ms. Cross’s Routine Discourse Strategies

Discourse	Ms. Cross’s Routine Discourse Strategy	How I Made Sense of the Routine Discourse Strategy
“My favorite class”	Praise and reproach	Authority as Classroom Management/African American Discourse
“Who got ‘A’? Who got ‘B’?”	Call and response, an emphasis on oral recitation	African American Discourse
Verbal bantering	Signifyin(g)	African American Discourse
Sounding Black	Prosody and intonation associated with studies of linguistic discrimination	African American Discourse
Mix of direct and indirect style	Indirection	African American Discourse Strategy
“Sweetie,” “Sweetheart”	Terms of endearment	Authority as Care

Elliot began, “We was” Ms. C. interrupted: “ ‘We was’?” The class chorused: “We <i>were!</i> ” Elliot corrected himself. Starla {to Diamond}: How much do braids cost? Diamond: I’ll aks my mama. She...Ms. C: “Aks?” Diamond: Yeah, I’m a aks my mom. Ms. C: “aks?” Diamond: Yeah, because she got a friend who braid hair and she knows...”	Selectively “correcting” students’ language	Linguistic Authority
Counting “1,” “2,” “3”	A contextual cue that made inappropriate behavior consequential for the class	Authority as Classroom Management
	Coaxing, nurturing, caring	Authority as Care
“You’re gonna lose your participation points”	A contextual cue that signaled to students to change their behavior; disciplinary strategy that relied on students’ investment in grades	Authority as Classroom Management

Using a purposeful sampling strategy, I selected information rich episodes of classroom interaction in which I observed features of African American discourse intensely manifested (Patton, 2002). To study these episodes in depth, I transcribed them, mindful of the details of bounding episodes meaningfully and ethically.

Because interpretation and meaning-making begins with transcription, I encountered from the outset critical decisions about what to include and what to omit from transcripts (Ochs, 1979). A major decision involved how to contextualize each interaction in ways that illuminated associations between local and global, micro and macro aspects of interactive talk. When I observed classroom talk hinting at processes removed temporally or spatially from the local context (Erickson, 2004) or references to social institutions, cultural ideologies (Bloome, et. al., 2008), I triangulated these

intertextual connections by consulting other data sources, such as field observations, interviews, and classroom artifacts, warranting my interpretive claims.

Especially because I am not a native speaker of African American language, it was important to cultivate tools that would help me make visible the salience and richness of Signifyin(g) as it operated in relation to authority. Drawing from sociolinguistics, discursive psychology, and social anthropology allowed me to assemble an inter-disciplinary analytical framework that included features of African American discourse, positioning theory, and politeness theory.⁶⁰

To analyze how Signifyin(g) functioned in relation to authority in the classroom interaction, I engaged these heuristics and transcripts in a recursive dialectical process. As I noted discourse markers that indicated rhetorical strategies and language used in African American discourse, I modified the transcript accordingly. Conversely, when I encountered discourse markers that I could not identify but seemed significant, I sought analytical tools from sociolinguistics. Through this dialectical process, I was able to identify discourse markers that indicated participants were employing rhetorical strategies and language particular to Signifyin(g). These discourse markers of African American language-in-use included tonal contouring, stress, figurative language, and braggadocio. My transcription scheme depicts these various discourse markers of Signifyin(g).⁶¹

In tandem with these sociolinguistic tools, I applied positioning and politeness theory to elucidate how Signifyin(g) operated in relation to authority. With positioning

⁶⁰ See Appendix F for a list of the features of African American discourse that served as analytical tools.

⁶¹ See Appendix G for my transcription scheme.

theory I examined how participants located themselves and each other in terms of power to participate in and shape classroom discourse (Davies & Harre, 1990; Harre & Slocum, 2003; Johnstone, 2002). This entailed noting use of pronouns and tonal contouring to make visible how participants aligned or distanced themselves and each other in relation to identities and cultural group membership. Positioning theory allowed me to trace participants' momentary negotiations for status, a form of authority particular to Signifyin(g) as verbal dueling. Using politeness theory, I investigated how participants performed "relational work" that enabled them to maintain positive relationships with each other (Locher, 2004). Politeness moves are what participants use to minimize or repair threats to a participant's social face (Brown and Levinson, 1987) or mitigate the exercise of power (Locher, 2004). In the transcripts, I noted how participants used politeness moves marked by insults and indirection to comment negatively on a participant's behavior, question and defend their authenticity, and threaten and save their own and others' social face.

Who's Signifyin(g)?

Although Signifyin(g) is articulated as a culturally-specific African American discourse style, I ascribe Signifyin(g) as a "home-based" discourse practice to some of the students in this class not because they identified as African American or Black, but because I observed them Signifyin(g) in contexts outside of the classroom. Signifyin(g) was part of their repertoires of practice—their tendency to engage over time in a particular cultural practice (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). In focus groups, some students' ethnic affiliation seemed heightened because their dialects were intensified, a sign that

the social qualities of “swapping stories” and “sharing and comparing,” important facets of focus group methods, were constructive in how they yielded data (Morgan, 1997; 1998). These interviews with students elaborated the role Signifyin(g) played in their English class and in their lives. For students like Calvin, Signifyin(g) represented a verbal activity in which he and another student had engaged since they were children, having grown up in the same neighborhood. This suggests that Signifyin(g) played an important role in their neighborhood and community relationships.

Signifyin(g) also played an important role for students in school, creating or denying them opportunities for learning. Mike articulated what it meant for him to be able to Signify in Ms. Cross’s class. Signifyin(g) was an affordance for his learning: in other classes he was “kicked out” for “jokin’ around.” He said, “I don’t go back and forth with other teachers because I’d get kicked out. I get kicked outta there. Sometimes my jokes be too raw.” But Signifyin(g) was meaningful to Mike in another way. He explained that sometimes things he went through outside of school made him mad, “and teachers, they don’t care about it.” In Ms. Cross’s class, however, Signifyin(g) served as an outlet for him to express himself and participate productively in the classroom discourse.

What Calvin and Mike point to about Signifyin(g) is the importance of situating it in its interactional context. Signifyin(g) was acceptable in their home communities and in Ms. Cross’s class, but it was not appropriate in other classes. This points to the importance of norms or rules that constitute the boundaries of appropriate Signifyin(g) as a speech event.

Encountering dilemmas with respect to transcribing participants' language, my essentialist notions of racial identity and language were disrupted as I made decisions about representation. Transcribing speech textualizes identity, inevitably surfacing ethical issues of representation (Fine, 2000). A previous experience from my days as a high school teacher made me particularly sensitive to students' "textual identities" as I transcribed their talk. High school students who pronounced with pride that they spoke Ebonics recoiled at Zora Neale Hurston's rendering of the dialect in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and protested that her written portrayal of the dialect did not represent their speech. I grappled with decisions about how to represent the richness of students' dialect, essential to illuminating culturally-based communication.

Transcribing Ms. Cross's discourse was also problematic. Although she spoke with the prosody associated with Black speech (Rickford, 1972, cited in Rickford & Rickford, 2000) and incorporated many features of African American English (Green, 2002; Morgan, 2002; Smitherman, 1977), such as figurative language and braggadocio, my analysis indicated that she did not employ non-standard grammatical forms as she did so. I wrestled with how to transcribe *all* participants' dialects to reflect my assumption that everyone speaks a particular dialect, but some dialects are deemed more standard than others (Wolfram, 2006). Yet how would Ms. Cross feel if I aligned her with students by portraying her speech as dialectically marked as theirs? By incorporating indicators of prosody and tonal contouring into my transcription scheme, I have tried to represent Ms. Cross's combined use of rhetorical strategies and language that characterize African American discourse, but without the grammatical form of African American English.

Representing participants' dialect was a central dilemma as I prepared for Round 3 focus group interviews in which I collaborated with Ms. Cross and students to pursue lines of inquiry emerging from my discourse analysis of transcripts of classroom interaction. To minimize the stakes for participants, that is, the emotional value they associated with being represented in particular ways, I showed them video clips so that they could hear the speech, but not see it reflected in the transcripts. The transcripts appeared as racially-neutral, unpunctuated general English. This created the space for me to hear the discourse in new ways that resonated with participants' interpretations of the sounds and speech. The limitation of the medium of a traditional printed dissertation precludes me from doing this for my readers, so I derived a transcription scheme to represent the features of African American discourse relevant to my analysis.

Destabilizing the normalcy of general and standard Englishes was important for me because of the identifications I shared with Ms. Cross. Like me Ms. Cross was not a native speaker of African American English. If unrecognized, this identification held the potential to mask the status of Ms. Cross's general English as a globally and macro-level privileged dialect. Speaking general English was part of Ms. Cross's repertoire of practice, audible in audio recording of her interviews, but difficult to observe in her interview transcripts. Although I was not able to destabilize the standard-ness of Englishes through my transcription, I try to do so through the results I present.

Ms. Cross informed me that she learned to Signify through interacting with students: she just "picked it up over the years." This learning process was for Ms. Cross a tacit one, but I speculate that Ms. Cross's savvy literary background and out-of-school literacy of creative writing allowed her the freedom, confidence, and aptitude to

experiment with and cultivate her Signifyin(g). In addition to my few but memorable, exoticized encounters with Signifyin(g) in pop culture and literature, my learning process of Signifyin(g) has been through immersion in this study's data and other literature on the subject. My knowledge of the subject matter of secondary English Language Arts, composition, literary studies, and discourse analysis prepared me to make sense of the Signifyin(g) in classroom discourse by familiarizing me with its features—the figurative language, the grammatical structure, the rhetorical strategies, the competitions and authority negotiations. Even though my position as a non-native speaker of African American English places me at risk of not identifying all instances of Signifyin(g) or of missing or misinterpreting one or some of the multiple messages embedded in the classroom discourse, my status as a learner allows me to make explicit aspects of language use that may be tacit for a frequent and fluent speaker of African American English.

Call and Response

In focusing my inquiry of cross-racial authority on Signifyin(g), I heed calls from educational researchers who advocate for teachers to provide culturally responsive communication for African American students, (Ball, 2000; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Foster, 1995). In educational research Signifyin(g) has been portrayed as a source of cultural asynchronization when White teachers fail to understand Black students' communicative practices of Signifyin(g) (Irvine, 1991; Kochman, 1981). However, Signifyin(g) has also been portrayed as a valuable resource for classroom learning. For instance, English educator Carol D. Lee (1993, 2007) has found Signifyin(g) to be

pedagogically productive for the teaching and learning of English Language Arts.

Describing Signifyin(g) as a “an intellectual tool” that African American students bring into the classroom, she demonstrates how she, an African American teacher, employed Signifyin(g) as a scaffold for students’ learning of literary interpretation and literary reasoning (Lee, 1993). Through Lee’s (2001) instruction, students applied their talents for figurative language and language play to canonical texts with the same level of attention they devoted to their out-of-school Signifyin(g). Because Signifyin(g) operates through indirection, circumlocution, metaphor, imagery, humor, irony, rhythm, puns, and plays on words (Smitherman, 1977)—literary devices that comprise U. S. national curriculum standards for English Language Arts (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010)—incorporating Signifyin(g) as a resource for teaching in an English class makes sense.

In addition to English Language Arts subject matter instruction, Lee (2007) makes vivid the relevance of Signifyin(g) for any classroom in which students Signify. In a vignette, Lee (2007) illustrates how she used Signifyin(g) to reposition a resistant student, Taquisha, as a meaningful participant in classroom discourse, creating an opportunity for her engagement in teaching and learning. Pointing out that understanding and interpreting student resistance is often a problem for new teachers, Lee (2007) uses a metaphor to characterize the invitation she presents to Taquisha through Signifyin(g) to participate in the classroom discourse: “I liken this small but powerful move to a kind of Tai Chi move in which I deflect her motion toward me by simply getting out of the way. There can be no fight if I don’t hit back. At the same time, I am not willing to let Taquisha off the hook, so I ask her [about the subject matter-related task at hand]” (p. 135). Lee’s work

argues for the relevance of Signifyin(g) for preparing teachers of African American students.

This chapter builds upon and add to Lee's (1993; 2001; 2007) representations of a teacher who Signifies with her students who engage in Signifyin(g) as part of their cultural practice. With the exception of Lee's research, it seems that we have few representations of how this discursive practice can operate in classrooms, and none of which I could find that depict a *White* teacher employing it with students.

Yet in classrooms with African American students who Signify, White teachers are confronted with how to interpret students' talk in interactions. Lesley Rex (2007) illustrates how a White, male teacher named Stan negotiates appropriate behavior with an African American female student, Sonandra, who Signifies, although he does not engage in Signifyin(g) himself. Rex raises questions about how White teachers who are not speakers of African American discourse can interactively engage with students for whom African American English is their primary language, and asks, What do these White teachers need to understand in order to integrate Signifyin(g) into their pedagogy?

Although I cannot answer these questions conclusively, nor can I "solve the mystery" of Signifyin(g), in the next four chapters, I will illustrate how a particular White teacher, Ms. Cross, employed Signifyin(g) in a secondary English classroom in ways that were useful for teaching and learning, particularly in the construction of authority relationships. Exploring the discursive nuances and racial politics of classroom Signifyin(g) between a teacher who identifies as White and African American students who engage in Signifyin(g) can shed some light on ways White teachers might construct their authority through culturally congruent communication.

How Signifyin(g) Works

Multiple in its forms and functions, Signifyin(g) emerged as a primary ingredient of Ms. Cross's communication style and approach to relationship-building. In order to elucidate the connection between Signifyin(g), race, and authority, it was important to make vivid the role Signifyin(g) played in the classroom interaction. This entailed asking the following research questions:

How does Signifyin(g) function in this classroom?

What forms does Signifyin(g) take in this classroom discourse?

What counts as Signifyin(g) for these participants? For what commodities can

Signifyin(g) be exchanged in this classroom? In society?

How does Signifyin(g) operate to build authority relationships?

Laminating these questions atop my previously articulated research questions about authority as product, process, relationship, and forms enabled me to examine in more detail the relationship among authority, race, and Signifyin(g).

As I noted earlier in this chapter, I employed a conceptualization of Signifyin(g) from the fields of literary theory, English education, communications, and sociolinguistics as a heuristic for inquiry. Extending this interdisciplinary conceptualization to a cross-racial classroom, I envisioned classroom Signifyin(g) broadly and in various ways to make visible particular aspects of authority and race and their relationship with Signifyin(g). Specifically, I conceived classroom Signifyin(g) as students' home-based discourse practice, as a culturally-based discourse practice particular to the African American community, as a literacy, as an interpretive framework

for “reading” social texts, as a normative classroom practice, and as a speech event situated in classroom interaction. Discourse analysis of episodes of interaction illuminates how Signifyin(g) served as a significant resource for Ms. Cross and students to construct authority relationships that were productive for learning across racial difference. The process by which Ms. Cross and students effectively negotiated the legitimacy of behavior, literacies, language, cultural practices, and identities represents one of mutual accommodation: as Ms. Cross validated Signifyin(g), students authorized her to teach them.

These productive authority relationships were constructed and sustained through everyday authority negotiations, which although momentary, could have enduring effects if consistently riddled with cross-cultural conflict. By performing relational work through Signifyin(g), students and Ms. Cross were able to negotiate contentious issues, such as what counts as valid and valuable language, literacies, and cultural practices while building and maintaining positive authority relationships that were productive for teaching and learning. Discourse analysis illuminates how Ms. Cross employed sanctioned discursive strategies of Signifyin(g) to comment negatively on students’ and the class’ behavior she deemed unproductive for learning. Signifyin(g) operated through indirection that allows for multiple interpretations, so students were able to preserve their social face by responding to playful or complimentary messages embedded within serious or negative ones. Because she used Signifyin(g), students responded to her reproach by changing their behavior (at least for the moment) without conflict. Ms. Cross exchanged status accrued from verbal dueling for classroom authority. By legitimizing Signifyin(g), Ms. Cross validated one of students’ multiple literacies they brought from home to the

classroom, enabling her to engage them in the curriculum of standardized test preparation, to provide them with access to classroom discourse, and to nurture seeds of critique of authority relations that privilege particular literacies over others. Throughout these everyday authority negotiations, Signifyin(g) served as a valuable resource for constructing over time a culturally congruent form of authority across racial difference.

Yet Signifyin(g) has its limitations, and discourse analysis makes visible how when issues of race and racial difference threaten teacher and students' positive authority relationships, indirection can foreclose productive conversations that facilitate racial consciousness and political awareness. As a result, white power and privilege accrued from beyond the classroom can be reproduced within the classroom.

In this chapter I employed both the White term signifying and the Black term Signifyin(g) to situate my analysis within the perpendicular worlds of Black and White language (Gates, 1988). I drew upon associations and connotations rather than definitive denotations, allowing meaning to resonate in the rhetorical space constellating around these worlds. Positioning readers with choices among multiple interpretations in this way replicates, but with significant differences, how students were positioned with the authority to choose among an array of meanings by Ms. Cross's use of Signifyin(g) in the classroom.

Chapter VI: Authority with Encoded Messages

In richly describing the ethnographic context of Ms. Cross's and students' classroom interaction, I speculated that Ms. Cross's communicative style was a key facet of the "It Factor." She seemed to be able to address potentially inflammatory issues without igniting conflict. This chapter disentangles Ms. Cross's interactional style to make vivid how she used Signifyin(g) to manage the classroom and discipline students for misbehavior while minimizing confrontation.

The relationships Ms. Cross built with students by discussing the potential for racial bias in the test and repairing her relationship with Calvin contextualize these moment-by-moment interactions. As Ms. Cross's authority gained momentum, each face-to-face contact bore the remnant of the established authority. In this way, Ms. Cross's authority is reflected and constructed in and through the classroom discourse portrayed in Signifyin(g) interactions.

In the previous chapter, I introduced Signifyin(g) as a culturally-specific African American discourse practice that involves particular conceptions of indirection, play, tonal semantics, and social face. Using these qualities of Signifyin(g) as heuristic tools, I demonstrate in this chapter how Ms. Cross employed Signifyin(g) in the classroom to manage the class and discipline students for misbehavior. Specifically, I present episodes of interaction depicting barbed praise, barbed compliments, and capping, forms of Signifyin(g) that operate as encoded messages that rely on indirection and interpretation.

The meanings enmeshed in these forms of classroom Signifyin(g) are in part conveyed through tone. Smitherman (1977) elaborates on how tone can function within a particular social context as a relationship between the poetic qualities of the discourse and the meaning. She articulates tonal semantics as the “use of voice rhythm and vocal inflection to convey meaning,” which includes words carefully selected for sound effect as well as modifications in stress, intonation, rhythm, and volume (p. 134). For students, reading the tone requires consideration of the performance context or rhetorical situation. Although Smitherman (1977) writes, “The speech rhythms and tonal inflections of Black speech are, of course, impossible to capture in print,” I derived a transcription scheme to illustrate variations in Ms. Cross’s tone and rhythm and explore the significance of these variations in my analysis.⁶²

Displaying a range of Signifyin(g) demonstrates the spectrum of the ways in which the discourse practice can operate and how what came to be regarded as normative authority practices were constructed.

Barbed Praise: Creating a Productive Classroom Environment

Ms. Cross used Signifyin(g) to create a classroom environment that was productive for teaching and learning. One particular strategy she used was what Claudia Mitchell-Kernan (1972) refers to as a “left-handed compliment,” and I call “barbed praise” conveys a negative commentary within a complimentary remark so that “[w]hat

⁶² See Appendix G.

pretends to be informative may *intend* to be persuasive” (p. 166, italics added).

Marcyliena Morgan (2002) points out that what makes Signifyin(g) effective is the incorporation of interpretive “play” into a serious message. She elaborates: “The notion of ‘play’ involved in signifying differentiates the real from the serious by focusing on that which is socially and/or culturally significant [...] and placing it in implausible contexts ” (p. 56-57). When the implausible context is established, participants’ shared background or cultural knowledge interact with the context through irony, wit, and humor as “play” on and with the serious intention. By incorporating “play” into her negative commentary on students’ behavior, Ms. Cross used barbed praise to create a productive classroom environment while minimizing conflict.

Ms. Cross’s use of barbed praise was marked by prosodic shifts—dramatic variations in tone and the rhythm of the speech. This tonal contouring was important for cueing students to her sentiments of praise or reproach. In the following three episodes, Ms. Cross’s barbed praise associated with the phrase “my favorite class” represents a routine verbal cue that she employed to signal to students that they were or were not behaving in ways she found productive for learning. When Ms. Cross used the phrase to construe praise or reproach, the rhythm of the speech changed. In the transcript, accents above certain syllables represent these alternative stress patterns while the arrows after some syllables indicate the rising and falling intonation.

All of the episodes are from the say day, and they include transcripts from both 3rd and 4th hour classes. Including snapshots of interaction from both classes is important to conveying the irony, wit, and humor in Ms. Cross’s use of the phrase “my favorite class” because she uses it with both classes. As a group, these episodes demonstrate the multiple

ways Ms. Cross and students used the phrase to create a productive classroom environment. Teaching and learning in these three episodes involved preparation for the state-mandated standardized English subject matter test.

Episode I

In this episode, students in 3rd period have just completed their Do Now which was to recall from a prior lesson general strategies for taking the multiple choice portion of the standardized English test: “List 2-3 ACT English strategies you can use when taking the English test.” Ms. Cross has asked them to share the strategies listed.

Ms. Cross’s use of the phrase, “my favorite class” is marked by tonal contouring that conveys praise, and only three words in the line, “Did I tell you this is my favorite class?” are stressed: “tell,” “fa” in “favorite,” and “class,” compared with the emphasis on every other syllable in the surrounding discourse.

Transcript I: Did I tell you this is my favorite class?

- 1 Cindy: Read enough to answer the question
2 Ms. Cross {writing on the board}: Gó::od↑. You wánna réad e↑nóugh↓ to ánsver
3 the quéstion abóut the únderlined pórtion.
4 Giovanni: Choose the shortest answer
5 Ms. Cross: {writing on board}: Yes if you dón’t knów the ánsver, chóose the
6 shórttest óne. The shórttest ónes are usually ríght. Góod↑ one↓. {turning to from
7 the board to face the class, smiling} did I↑ téll↑ you↓ this↑ is my fávo↓rite↑
8 cláss↑ Whát↓ else↓
9 Malashia: No change
10 Ms. Cross: Yes↑ twenty-five-percént of the tíme no-change is ríght.

Ms. Cross poses the rhetorical question, “Did I tell you this was my favorite class?” with a smile on her face to praise students for participating in class discussion and in ways that demonstrated their recall of a prior lesson. Their participation created a classroom environment in which they were positioned as the co-producers of knowledge, in this case, knowledge about standardized test-taking strategies.

The next episode demonstrates how Ms. Cross also used the phrase to reproach students, then praise them.

Episode II

In this episode of interaction from 4th hour, Ms. Cross is reviewing a previous lesson that focused on knowing the content of the test as a test taking strategy. Ms. Cross asks for volunteers to participate by recalling what is on the English test, but students do not recall the answers she is looking for. Instead, they engage in word play, and she chastises them, saying, “This was my favorite class.” Stressing the words “was” and the “fav” in “favorite,” Ms. Cross conveys her reproach. She pronounces the word “my” as “mah,” a dialectal pronunciation associated with “sounding black” in the local African American speech community, according to a study in which working-class black used the pronunciation 60% of the time while working-class whites used them only 12% of the time (Edwards, 1992, cited in Rickford & Rickford, 2000). In this interaction, Ms. Cross’s use of dialectal pronunciation dramatizes her Signifyin(g).

Transcript: “My favorite again”

1 Ms. Cross {writes a "T" on the board}: What-the-English-test-tests

2 Mike: Tenácity
 3 Ms. Cross {slowly nodding}: Tena::ácity .. is a↓ word↑
 4 Smooth: Treméndous
 5 {Students in chorus call out other words that begin with "T"}
 6 Ms. Cross: This wá::as mah fáv'rite class
 7 Mike: Whatever
 8 Ms. Cross: So↑ lame↓
 9 Students grumble
 10 Malashia: Transítions
 11 Ms. Cross: Tra::ansi↑tions↓
 12 {Malashia holds up her notebook to show she has her notes from Monday}
 13 Ms. Cross: Ve↑ry↓ góod↑. You're↓ my fá↓v'rite agáin.

Ms. Cross invokes the phrase “my favorite” twice in this episode. First, she uses it to convey to fourth period that she deems their word play inappropriate and unproductive for learning. The phrase, conveyed in a disappointed tone, signaled to students that they had fallen out of favor because they were not effectively recalling the prior lesson, which implies that they either did not take notes or had not brought their notes to class, and as a result, they were not prepared for the day’s lesson. From Ms. Cross’s perspective, this would mean that she would have to re-teach the lesson. In an interview, Ms. Cross expressed frustration about the amount of re-teaching she was required to do because of students’ frequent absences and occasional lack of preparedness, although she did not mind reviewing lessons when “they just don’t get it.” Although she recognized that re-teaching was a necessary aspect of teaching, she considered it unproductive for some students’ learning. Ms. Cross used the phrase again to convey to the class that they are back in favor by complimenting Malashia, and by extension the class, for engaging in behavior that created a classroom environment productive for teaching and learning.

The next episode depicts a student’s use of the phrase “my favorite class.”

Episode III

This episode is also from 4th period. It occurred toward the end of the class when students were taking a practice test, applying the test-taking strategies they learned through the day's lesson. Five minutes before they were to be dismissed for lunch, students stopped working on the practice test and began talking, and Ms. Cross reproached them for it, conveyed through her tone and the repeated emphasis on “not” and the “fo” in “focusing.” Although Blake has raised her hand, she remains attentive to chastising the class for their lack of focus.

Transcript: “We’re not her favorite any more”

- 1 Ms. Cross: You gúys are nót fócing whátsoéver {To Blake who has her hand
- 2 up} °Just a minute sweetheart° {To the class again} Your scóres went dón on
- 3 the lást práctice tést and yóu're nót fócing
- 4 Kenneth: {shaking his head and looking down}: Uh↑ oh↓ we're↑ not↓ her
- 5 fáv'rite any more

Kenneth uses the phrase “my favorite class” to show Ms. Cross that students understood when they were not behaving consistently with her expectations. He draws from and contributes to a shared, routine discourse practice that helps to create a productive classroom environment in which students authorize Ms. Cross to shape their behavior.

These three episodes portray the various ways Ms. Cross and students used the phrase “my favorite class” to co-create a classroom environment productive for teaching and learning. The phrase variously functioned as a compliment, “Did I tell you you’re my

favorite class?” As a reproach, “This was my favorite class.” As a reprieve, “You’re my favorite again.” And as a reconciliation, “We’re not her favorite anymore.”

Analysis

Ms. Cross and students’ multiple uses of the phrase, “my favorite class,” functioned as normative practices that helped them create a classroom environment that was productive for teaching and learning. Ms. Cross’s use of “my favorite class” is a representation of Signifyin(g) as a “left-handed compliment” or what I refer to as “barbed praise.” The praise is barbed because of the play involved in the implausibility of the statement. To explain, the statement, “this is my favorite class” was complimentary in that it positioned students in a particular class with higher status than the students in her other classes. However, the compliment was compromised because Ms. Cross told both of her classes they were her favorite, and students recognized that being her true favorite was impossible.

Sometimes Ms. Cross’s barbed praise was aimed at the entire class, as the previous episode demonstrates. In this sense the Signifyin(g) could be considered by practitioners as a classroom management strategy. Other times, a barbed compliment targeted an individual student, and the authority negotiation that ensued would appear as an effort to discipline a student for misbehavior, as in the next episode.

Barbed Compliments: Shaping Students' Behavior

Ms. Cross also used “left-handed compliments” to subtly comment negatively on individual students’ behavior. Combining the poetic quality of discourse with its communicative function, Ms. Cross’s tonal semantics cued students to her disapproval, allowing compliments to function simultaneously as reproach. While barbed praise is characterized by an implausible compliment, a barbed compliment involves embedding a negative commentary in a complimentary remark. Because a speaker’s intention is subject to interpretation, such barbed compliments afford both speaker and the target the option of avoiding a real confrontation. In this episode, Ms. Cross used a barbed compliment to persuade a student, Cindy, to do something that will benefit her learning, while minimizing the potential for conflict.

Episode IV

Students in 3rd period have just finished their Do Now, which required them to metacognitively reflect on their reading process as part of their preparation for the standardized reading test. They responded to the prompt, “Explain in 2-3 sentences what you can do to increase your reading speed.” Ms. Cross has just finished recording attendance and addressing dress code violations.

Transcript: “You Look Beautiful”

- 1 Ms. Cross: OK. So whát-cán-you-do to increáse your réading speed↑
- 2 {Cindy is looking in a pocket mirror and patting her hair back from her face.}
- 3 Ms. Cross {aside to Cindy}: You look beau:uitiful, dár↑linh↓

4 {Cindy smiled as she looked down and slid her mirror into her bag.}
5 Ms. Cross {to the class}: Tera↑?
6 Tera: Look for the main ideas↑

Imbricated in Ms. Cross's compliment, "You look beautiful" and the term of endearment, "darlin'" is another message: *Put your mirror away*. The implication is at once, *Now that you've taken care of your looks, we can get down to business*, and *Your looks don't matter here; we have work to do*. Yet it is also Ms. Cross's tone that conveys the negative message to Cindy. She exaggerates the long "u" sound in "beautiful," and the tone of "darlin'" sounds sarcastic. Ms. Cross's use of indirection in the form of a barbed compliment allows Cindy to respond to the flattering message, while heeding the commentary on her inappropriate behavior.

Analysis

In this and the previous three episodes, Ms. Cross's use of the barbed compliment and praise minimized the threat of conflict effectively so that her authority appeared seamless. It was through such moment-to-moment interactions that her authority was constructed as the class re-engaged in the lesson and Cindy put away the mirror. These interactions highlight the influential role students played in the construction of classroom norms: they authorized Ms. Cross to shape their behavior and co-create a productive classroom environment.

However, at times, conflicts of interest between Ms. Cross and students were present, and the interactions seemed more like authority negotiations than constructions. In addition to utilizing barbed compliments to shape students' behavior, Ms. Cross

employed other strategies, such as capping, that did not involve flattery or praise, but direct insult, as the next episode illustrates.

Shaping Students' Behavior: Capping

To shape students' behavior, Ms. Cross also used capping, a mild form of verbal dueling involving the exchange of insults. Capping is characterized by two negative messages, one playful and one serious, and like other forms of Signifyin(g), enables participants to avoid confrontation because the ambiguous intentionality of indirection allows them to preserve their social face. Mitchell-Kernan (1972) explains how such indirection operates: "The speaker, because of the purposeful ambiguity of his original remark, reserves the right to subsequently insist on the harmless interpretation rather than the provocative one," leaving the target "in the embarrassing predicament of appearing contentious" (p. 170), if they respond to the more provocative interpretation. Conversely, the target may choose to ignore the more provocative or serious interpretation and opt for the harmless or playful one to avoid confrontation.

By incorporating indirection as a rhetorical strategy, capping allowed students to choose among multiple interpretations, each with varying degrees of threat. Understanding how Ms. Cross's use of capping functioned to shape students' behavior requires exploring how students might perceive these relative threats.

One way to think about the threats embedded in capping is as threats to students' social face. Erving Goffman (1967) defines social face as "an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes" that garner a participant positive social status in a particular context (p. 5). In this classroom, participating in lessons, classroom discourse,

and Signifyin(g) were “approved social attributes” that garnered students positive social status. Through indirection, Signifyin(g) allowed participants to conduct relational work, or the work they do constructing social face to build and maintain relationships with each other (Watts & Locher, 2005) as they constructed and negotiated authority.

Episode V

In performing relational work, Signifyin(g) allows Calvin and Ms. Cross to preserve their enduring positive authority relationship as they negotiate “authority over process,” or “who gets to do what, where, when, and with whom” (Oyler, 1996a). A multimodal analysis of the classroom discourse demonstrates the process by which Ms. Cross and Calvin negotiate the legitimacy of his behavior. Specifically, Ms. Cross employs Signifyin(g) to persuade Calvin to adopt behavior that would enable him to engage in learning. Using the rhetorical strategy of indirection, Ms. Cross conveys two messages to Calvin—a serious one and a playful one—that allow for multiple interpretations. Presented with the choice of responding to either message, Calvin opts for the playful one, preserving his social face and minimizing conflict.

The interaction represented in this transcript took place in less than a minute, and I have included the time in seconds to convey the rapidity with which momentary authority relationships can be constructed. Because the participants’ use of physical classroom space contributed to the meaning of the discourse, I conducted a multimodal analysis. The stimulus for Ms. Cross’s commentary on Calvin’s classroom practice was his effort to secure paper for the lesson by leaving his seat and crossing the room, so I represent in the transcript how the participants traversed the physical space of the

classroom as non-verbal communication. To clarify, the physical space of the classroom was organized with students' desks in rows on either side of an "open space" so that they were facing each other. Ms. Cross often traversed that "open space," from the "north" side of the class at the chalkboard to the "south" end of the class at the whiteboard. I use these terms to represent how the physical space was used and organize this episode into segments based on the significant moves, both verbal and non-verbal, made by Ms. Cross and Calvin. A narrative highlights these significant moves, while analysis interprets their significance.

In segments 1 and 2, I portray the verbal context of the interaction to show how seamlessly Ms. Cross integrates Signifyin(g) into her instruction. The class is in the process of transitioning from their "Do Now" warm-up activity into the day's lesson, and Ms. Cross has asked students to take out two sheets of paper. While Ms. Cross is engaged in a conversation with students on the "west" side of the classroom, Calvin leaves his seat on the "east" side on a quest for paper.

Transcript: Capping on Calvin

	Verbal Communication	Non-Verbal Communication	Time
1	Ms. Cross: Take óut two sheets of paper. Student: Are we takin' notes↑ Calvin: Are we takin' a tést↑	Ms. Cross stands at the north end of the classroom talking with students on the west side of the open space. Calvin sits in the front row on the east side of the open space.	0
2	Student: Oh, my God↓ we're takin' another tést↑ Smooth: Are we takin' a test↑ Ms. Cross: I am getting to that.	Calvin leaves his seat and crosses the open space to ask Sasha for some paper.	07
3	Ms. Cross {To Calvin}: Hów abóut we uh, hów bóut we sit dówn thére Calvin	Calvin looks up at Ms. Cross and holds up his index finger as if saying, "One minute."	17
4	Ms. Cross: How-bout-how-bout-how-bout you dig into that 5-year-old Spiderman boókbag and find your ówn↑ paper Mike: Oooh! Max: Oh! Other Students: Oooh! Tina: {Laughs}: A-ha-ha-ha-ha	Walking through the open space, Ms. Cross approaches Calvin, increasing their proximity and closing the physical space between them. Paper in hand, Calvin approaches Ms. Cross. They meet in the center of the open space, directly in front of his seat.	22
5	Calvin: Spi↑der↓man bookbag↑ Malone: Hey↑ I like Spiderman	Calvin stands only inches away from Ms. Cross, looming his 5 inches over her. He starts forward, as if inviting a physical confrontation.	27
6	Ms. Cross {laughing}: Get béhind me Calvin: [xxx]	Ms. Cross and Calvin circle each other so that she stands in front of his desk and he stands next to his. He looks at the ground and pouts.	31
7	Ms. Cross: What's the ma↑tter Swéetheart↑ Calvin: No↑thin'↓	Calvin sits down.	37
8	Ms. Cross: Aw I made fun↑ of your Spi↑dérman book↑bag↑	Ms. Cross stands in front of Calvin's desk looking down at him.	39
9	Calvin {as if crying}: Spidérman Spidérman Wa::ah Ms. Cross: Aw {Laughs}	Ms. Cross circles around Calvin's desk and begins backing away.	42
10	Ms. Cross {to class}: OK. Shh. Sométhing that you want to be sure you understand...	Ms. Cross re-enters the open space at the north end of the class and resumes instructional discourse.	54

Analysis

In segments 3 and 4, Ms. Cross observes Calvin out of his seat and employs Signifyin(g) to persuade him to return to it. Ms. Cross verbally sends two serious messages to Calvin. First, she sends the message that he needs to return to his seat, that he should bring his own paper to class, that his socializing with Sasha is not a priority, but that teaching and learning are. These messages are serious because they threaten his social face by threatening his image as a prepared student engaged in learning. The implication is that returning to his seat and bringing his own paper to class will allow him to engage productively.

Intertwined with these serious messages is a playful one, indicated by Ms. Cross's reference to Calvin's Spiderman bookbag as a "5-year-old" Spiderman bookbag. This playful message represents an indirect commentary, a cap on Calvin's maturity by associating him with a superhero backpack that a child would use. Ms. Cross threatens his social face by positioning him as a childish person, infantilizing and emasculating him, challenging the authenticity of his preferred identity as a near-adult man. However, these threats to Calvin's face are playful, not serious; in contrast, Ms. Cross seriously threatens Calvin's social face and status as a student by commenting on his lack of preparedness. Calvin is invited to respond to the playful message so that he may preserve his social face.

In addition to Ms. Cross's verbal communication, her physical movement toward Calvin as he returns to his seat clearly identifies him as a target for her Signifyin(g) and paves the way for the playful physical confrontation that occurs in the next segment.

Calvin's stake in the interaction is intensified by his classmates, who applaud Ms. Cross's capping with "Ooooh!"s and laughter.

Because Ms. Cross uses indirection, her intention is subject to interpretation, positioning Calvin with the authority to interpret her commentary and respond as he chooses in order to save his social face. Calvin restores his social face by responding to the playful face threat while downplaying Ms. Cross's negative commentary on his lack of preparedness, preserving his positive status as a student in the class.

Calvin responds to Ms. Cross's playful capping that challenges his authenticity as a near-adult man, the logic of which is that a near-adult man would not have such a childish backpack, therefore, Calvin must not be a near adult man. He exaggerates his masculinity and physical stature by simulating a physical confrontation, constructing a stereotypical image of himself as a powerful, menacing, masculine, Black, adult man, capable of physically defending himself, or even physical aggression such as those portrayed in the media. In this moment, the racial and gender difference that characterizes their teacher-student relationship becomes salient. In another context, Calvin's actions could be interpreted as a challenge to his teacher's authority or perhaps even considered physically threatening, given media stereotypes of Black men as aggressive (Ferguson, 2000; Skiba, Michal, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). But in this classroom in which Signifyin(g) was a normative practice, Calvin's actions serve as play that construct his authenticity as a mature man.

Moreover, Calvin's actions represent a highly competent display of Signifyin(g). Kochman (1981) offers insight as to how, explaining that the more blurred the line between the "serious" and the "play," the more effective the Signifyin(g). Yet, the more

blurred the line becomes, the greater the potential for genuine aggression. It is in the potential for becoming serious that play generates the tension and drama that characterizes Signifyin(g). And it is in participants' responses to the blurred boundary that signals whether the Signifyin(g) is playful or serious (Kochman, 1983).

Malone's tension-relieving, face-saving move authenticates Calvin's identity as a mature man. Malone points out the implausibility of Ms. Cross's construction of Calvin as an immature child by dissociating the Spiderman bookbag from childhood: he chimes in that he also likes Spiderman, effectively lending Calvin his own masculinity. The implication is that he and Calvin are both men, they are not children, but they like Spiderman anyway. Another interpretation could be that Calvin is immature because he likes Spiderman, then Malone is also immature because he likes Spiderman, too, and there is nothing wrong with that. Malone's face-saving move relieves the tension in the interaction while adding another voice, heightening the drama.

In Segment 6, Ms. Cross legitimizes Calvin's play but not his attempt to position himself as a physically aggressive man by laughing as she responds, "Get behind me." Because the norms of Signifyin(g) require her to maintain a cool social face, Ms. Cross effectively says, *Don't try to engage me in a physical confrontation because you will lose*. Moreover, if she does show fear, she plays into a stereotypical role in society that socializes White women to be afraid of Black men. Her laughter indicates that she is incredulous at Calvin's physical threat, incredulous for three reasons: 1) because of the racial politics contextualizing the interaction that compel her to avoid showing fear, 2) because through the norms of Signifyin(g), she knows that his nonverbal communication is not serious, and 3) because he is presenting an inauthentic image as a menacing adult

man, and she knows that he is not. Calvin's nonverbal communication shows the mock contrition of a wounded child as he pouts and looks at the ground, a stark contrast to the physically aggressive image he conveyed through his Signifyin(g). Through his childlike behavior, Calvin construes that the interaction has been play, not serious.

For the remainder of the interaction, Ms. Cross and Calvin perform relational work to affirm that their interaction has indeed been playful, not serious, and to restore any social face that may have been tarnished. This is critical because, as Kochman (1981) implies, when playful aggression takes on the *tone* of the serious, it has the potential to *become* serious. With a term of endearment, Ms. Cross highlights the care that characterizes their relationship. Calvin responds with an invitation for Ms. Cross to continue inquiring about what is wrong. She appears to sympathize with him, saying "Aw," before she returns to capping on him about the Spiderman bookbag. Her words have the effect of saying, *What's wrong? You can't take the capping?* Because part of the objective of verbal dueling is to demonstrate the ability to endure verbal denigration (Kochman, 1981), Calvin must show that he can. Extending the play, Calvin dramatically acts like his feelings are hurt, a face-saving move that ironically shows that he *can* take the capping without seriously losing face.

Signifyin(g) as Culturally Congruent Communication

Ms. Cross's use of Signifyin(g), a culturally-specific African American discourse style, constructed her authority as a White teacher of African American students. Ms. Cross modified the form of Signifyin(g) to respond to the needs of students. For Calvin capping was a responsive form, and because Ms. Cross and Calvin's interactions were

frequently characterized by play, they were able to engage in sophisticated, highly-skilled Signifyin(g).⁶³ Having grown up together, Calvin and Malone had engaged in Signifyin(g) since they were children and frequently “joked around” with each other in class. Although their interaction sometimes appeared confrontational to me, they assured me in an interview that it was not. The strategy of the barbed compliment seemed highly appropriate for Cindy, a female student who, like many teenage girls, was somewhat sensitive about her appearance, although perhaps a little more so than others.⁶⁴ That students like Kenneth employed the phrase related to Ms. Cross’s routine use of barbed praise suggests the strategy resonated with them. The degree to which Ms. Cross was able to assess her students’ needs was important for her Signifyin(g) because the presence or absence of conflict could depend on her selection of Signifyin(g) strategy in a given rhetorical situation with particular students.

Although many scholars of African American discourse suggest that Signifyin(g) is primarily males’ domain (xxxx), other scholars contend that women do engage in Signifyin(g), and they do so in particular ways (Morgan, 2002). Ms. Cross acknowledged

⁶³ You may remember Calvin from my narration of the research process because he figured prominently in a “critical moment” that portrayed Ms. Cross and him in conflict over a communicative misunderstanding. When Ms. Cross was facilitating the discussion about the potential biases of standardized testing, Calvin was the student who made the inappropriate joke at the inappropriate time, the student whom Ms. Cross reproached, and the student whom Ms. Cross, later that day, sought to amend the relationship. Although your previous encounter with Calvin involved a misunderstanding, let me assure you that at the time of this episode, the conflict had since been resolved and the relationship repaired.

⁶⁴ Earlier in the school-year, I had noted that Cindy had worn a head scarf to school because her hair wasn’t done, but to her dismay, she was forced to take it off to be in accordance with the dress code. I recalled in my fieldnotes my experiences with high school-aged females that this could be a shameful ordeal for girls because they were subject to teasing allegations that they were too poor to get a perm, braids, or a weave, or that they didn’t take care of themselves, or had no one at home to care for them. They could be capped on for looking like drug addicts, specifically, “crackheads.” I observed that other girls at Motivation High came to school with their hair undone, so it seemed to be an acceptable style. I wondered if undone hair made girls susceptible to that at Motivation High and if wearing a head scarf on a “bad hair day” constituted a gendered, culturally-based practice for African American women.

that she engaged in more “verbal banter” with the boys than the girls because it seemed to her as if “the boys can take it,” that is, tolerate being insulted better than the girls, who were more sensitive to “teasing.” To her, that her discourse practices might be gendered illustrated her attempt to align her practices with students’ needs.

Signifyin(g) as a Normative Classroom Practice

Signifyin(g) in this classroom required participants to hold shared understandings about how to interpret the serious, negative, complimentary, and playful messages embedded in the classroom interaction. In order for Cindy to understand Ms. Cross’s compliment as barbed, she needed to draw from a contextually-situated interpretive frame based on their shared understandings of the purpose of Signifyin(g). For Calvin and Ms. Cross to dance so dangerously close to a “real” confrontation required a shared framework for distinguishing the serious from the play and responding appropriately. And Kenneth’s use of Ms. Cross’s phrase “my favorite class” to reconcile with her after reproach indicates a shared understanding about the use of barbed praise. Through these shared understandings, Signifyin(g) came to be understood as a normative classroom practice through which Ms. Cross and students’ authority was constructed.

Considering Signifyin(g) as a performance of verbal art is helpful for illuminating how Signifyin(g) operated as a normative classroom practice grounded in shared understandings about what was acceptable behavior and discourse. For instance, students realized that it was acceptable for them to interject “ohhh!”s into the classroom discourse during episodes of Signifyin(g), but outside those episodes, they realized it was not acceptable. Richard Bauman (1975) explains that in verbal performance contexts,

participants are “cued” so that “their ears are signaled that words are to be understood in some special sense” (p. 171). To elucidate, a performance frame is “keyed” as an interpretive framework through a “structured set of distinctive communicative means from among resources in culturally conventionalized and culture-specific ways [...], such that all communication that takes place within that frame is to be understood as performance within that community” (p. 171). Ms. Cross’s shifts in tone, combined with her routine use of phrases such as, “my favorite class” conveyed a shift to the performance frame. Invoking this performance frame as a framework through which students and teacher could interpret the multiple meanings embedded in Signifyin(g) allowed them to construct shared meanings about the discourse practice that enabled it to serve as a normative practice in this classroom.

Authority as a Normative Classroom Practice

Through Signifyin(g) as a normative classroom practice, Ms. Cross and students constructed their authority. Students’ authority was constructed as they were positioned with opportunities to interpret Ms. Cross’s Signifyin(g) in multiple ways. Choosing among interpretations positioned them with the authority to change their behavior without being directly told to do so.

Operating through indirection, Signifyin(g) allowed Ms. Cross and Calvin, Cindy, and the other students in the classes to preserve their enduring positive authority relationship as they negotiate “authority over process,” or “who gets to do what, where, when, and with whom” (Oyler, 1996a). These episodes portray how indirection operated to persuade students to engage in behavior that was productive for learning. Specifically,

they illustrate how multiple messages worked in tandem, positioning students with the authority to choose among multiple interpretations and preserve their social face while receiving both messages. Students could choose to cooperate in the co-construction of authority relationships that were productive for their learning, or issue conflict that, over time, could impede their learning. By opting for interpretations that minimized conflict, students authorized Ms. Cross to shape their behavior.

The range of representations I have portrayed in this chapter can expand teachers' repertoire for practicing authority in the classroom by enabling them to envision how authority may be constructed in ways that are culturally responsive for African American students. Research has shown that cultural incongruence can arise from disciplinary conflicts between White teachers and African American students (Ferguson, 2000; Irvine, 1991; Obidah & Teel, 2001; Skiba, Michal, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). My analysis of capping between Ms. Cross and Calvin offers insight as to how teachers can think more carefully about how their language use might contribute to these "disciplinary" problems. When Ms. Cross initially asked him to return to his seat, "How about we sit down, there, Calvin?" He ignored her. Note that she employed an indirect discourse style, using a question to suggest that he sit down. However, when she shifted to a performance frame and Signifyin(g), Calvin responded to her serious message and authorized her to shape his behavior. I cannot claim that Signifyin(g) can resolve all cross-racial conflicts, or even that it solved all of the conflicts between Ms. Cross and students. But because such indirection positions students with the authority to change their behavior without being explicitly told to do so, I am suggesting that reconceiving *disciplining misbehavior* as

shaping behavior holds the potential to address the crisis of the over-representation of African Americans, particularly boys, in disciplinary action.

However, it is possible that the serious messages may become obscured by the playful interpretations that preserved Ms. Cross positive relationships with her students. This concern has been raised by scholars skeptical of White women's ability to assume authoritative stances in the classroom because of their preference for non-confrontational language (Brantlinger, Morton, & Washburn, 1999; Thompson, 2004). Notably, neither Ms. Cross nor Calvin return to the serious messages she sent about Calvin's lack of preparedness for the lesson. In-the-moment, her indirection was effective in persuading Calvin to return to his seat, and the next day, he came to class prepared with his own paper. But the following Monday, he was back to asking for paper from someone else again. Perhaps the serious message became obscured by the playful interpretation that preserved Ms. Cross and Calvin's relationship, or perhaps the consequence for lack of preparedness did not seem harsh enough a deterrent to warrant an enduring change in his behavior.

I speculate that Calvin's actions were socially-motivated: the transition period between activities afforded opportunities for students to socialize and for them to engage in Signifyin(g) with Ms. Cross. The episode featured in the next chapter represents another occasion of Signifyin(g) during a transition period, suggesting that Signifyin(g) was authorized at particular times during the class that became part of students' normative practice.

Conclusion

By analyzing classroom discourse, I illustrated how Ms. Cross, a White teacher, used barb praise, barbed compliments, and capping to co-create with African American students a classroom environment productive for teaching and learning and to shape students' behavior while minimizing conflict. I noted that choosing among interpretations positioned students with the authority to change their behavior without being directly told to do so. In this way, Signifyin(g) served as a resource for Ms. Cross and students to construct authority relationships that were productive for teaching and learning.

Representing a range of Signifyin(g) illuminated how authority was constructed over time through the routine classroom discourse practice of Signifyin(g). Applying positioning and politeness theory, I demonstrated how Ms. Cross and students constructed authority from one moment to the next through Signifyin(g) in ways that evolved as normative. These norms for engaging in Signifyin(g) enabled participants to hold shared understandings about how to interpret the serious, negative, complimentary, and playful messages imbricated in the classroom interaction. I suggested that invoking a performance frame as a framework through which they interpreted the multiple meanings embedded in Signifyin(g) allowed them to establish shared ways of doing and knowing Signifyin(g).

Indications of the roles race and gender played in the classroom interaction became visible in the episode of capping between Ms. Cross and Calvin. The importance for them as a white, female teacher and African American, male student in preserving their relationship in the context of their demographically-defined racial difference points

to the distinct role Signifyin(g) can play in constructing cross-racial authority relationships when it is socially-legitimated as a culturally-grounded discourse practice. Although barbed praise and compliments could be considered sarcasm, wit, and humor found in a variety of discourse communities, the dramatic tonal variations, shifts in rhythm, and pronunciation of particular words appear similar to prosodic and phonologic features of speech associated with African American English. In these interactions, barbed praise and compliments resemble portrayals of left-handed compliments that occur in natural speech among African Americans (Mitchell-Kernan, 1972), except that they are situated in classroom interaction and employed by a white woman teacher for educational purposes.

In the next chapter, I explore how Ms. Cross and students constructed the normative practices for a particular type of Signifyin(g), verbal dueling, through which they negotiated status as co-constructed by the audience through the circulation of threats and constructions of positive social face.

Chapter VII: Authority with Verbal Dueling

In this chapter, I focus on how Ms. Cross and students co-constructed the norms for engaging in verbal dueling, a particular form of Signifyin(g). In verbal dueling opponents exchange insults for verbal posturing, displaying their verbal skills and ability to endure insult without resorting to violence (Kochman, 1981; Mitchell-Kernan, 1972; Smitherman, 1977). To illuminate norms of this game activity, I analyze an episode of classroom interaction in which Ms. Cross and students negotiated the role of the audience in Signifyin(g). Highlighting the rhetorical strategies and language use particular to verbal dueling, I illustrate how in and through their discourse, Ms. Cross and students constructed the rhetorical situation of verbal dueling as momentary negotiations for status—a highly valued form of authority particular to Signifyin(g) that translates into other forms of classroom authority.

Signifyin(g) as Verbal Dueling

As I noted in Chapter V, Signifyin(g) may appear as verbal battles in which opponents exchange insults. According to Thomas Kochman (1981), competitors engage in verbal dueling to dominate their opponent, display their verbal skills, and demonstrate communicative competence in Signifyin(g). Competitors pursue these integrated objectives through particular rhetorical strategies and language use that construct their communicative competence, that is, their ability to use language appropriately in a rhetorical context (Hymes, 1972). In Signifyin(g) communicative competence is in “the eye of the beholder,” or more aptly, “the ear of the hearer” because what counts as

competence is socially co-constructed with the audience, who decides who triumphs and who is defeated in verbal dueling.

Rhetorical Strategies: Boasting and Insulting

In verbal dueling, performers triumph over their opponent by constructing an image of themselves as fearless and powerful. One rhetorical strategy they may employ to construct this social face (Goffman, 1967) is braggadocio, which entails stylistic boasting (Morgan, 2002; Smitherman, 1977). When Signifyin(g), it is important that the nature of the boasting be untrue or else it may be considered bragging. Bragging about social status and accumulated wealth, when true, tends to be considered inappropriate and frowned upon within the African American community (Kochman, 1981). However, when exaggerated, boasting can be an effective rhetorical strategy that allows performers to present a fearless and powerful image.

In addition to constructing a positive image, prevailing at Signifyin(g) involves positioning an opponent in a negative light. At the heart of the dozens and verbal dueling is an oral competition waged through the exchange of insults, which are typically untrue and intended to be humorous and to make an opponent lose their cool.

One way to think about the rhetorical strategy of insulting a competitor is as trading face threats with the aim of tarnishing an opponent's image. Although there are different kinds of face threats, a positive face threat is a threat to one's positive image (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Thinking of exchanging insults as the circulation of face threats allows them to be traced in interaction to make apparent the discursive strategies opponents employ to construct their own and challenge each others' status—their

socially-constructed rank in relation to others (Locher, 2004). Applying these elements of politeness theory makes visible how status is negotiated in and through Signifyin(g).

Because in Signifyin(g) “status” is socially co-constructed by the audience based on their assessment of competitors’ performance, understanding the particular role the audience plays in evaluating communicative competence and verbal artistry within the rhetorical context of verbal sparring is important.

The Role of the Audience

Understanding students’ role as the audience of verbal duels in this classroom requires explication of the role of the audience in African American discourse. When Blacks were enslaved by American Whites, speaking situations were very high stakes. Saying the wrong thing to the wrong person in the wrong way could mean life and death for them. For African Americans, survival in this context meant developing a keen and sophisticated sense of audience that included Black and White hearers, potential hearers, and overhearers—a conception of audience as multiple (Morgan, 2002). Marcyliena Morgan (2002) elaborates,

The audience and hearer, whether immediately present or presumed present through gossip, spies, etc., were socially and culturally constructed entities. As a result, speakers were also expected to exhibit their conversational prowess and manage to direct what was said to a Black audience who, in turn, held him or her responsible for what was said as well as possible interpretations. (25)

Within the African American speech community, the history of slavery and censored speech has wrought a complex conceptualization of audience as a community that engages in the evaluation of speech and its potential interpretations (Morgan, 2002).

It is this conception of audience that participants bring to bear on speech events such as Signifyin(g).

Because verbal duels are conceived as verbal art (Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 1977), the audience is invoked as evaluators of the competitors' performance. Theories of performance are instructive as to the compelling role the audience plays in evaluating verbal performance. Marcia Farr and Elias Dominguez Barajas (2005) explain, "Performance is the authoritative display of communicative competence by a 'performer' that is evaluated by an 'audience.' That is, there is a shared assumption among participants that hearers will judge those who verbally perform as good or not-so-good storytellers, jokers, preachers, and the like" (p. 17). Articulations of audience in theories of verbal performance substantiated my approach to selecting episodes of classroom discourse by guiding me toward verbal art which, in theory, would represent highly competent Signifyin(g) in classroom discourse. I was able to identify episodes featuring intense verbal duels by the enthusiasm of the audience's engagement, marked by students' interjections of "oohh!"s, "oh!"s and laughter. In Signifyin(g), the audience of the interaction plays a decisive role in evaluating competitors' communicative competence in verbal sparring.

The central role audience plays in African American discourse and performance means that meaning in interaction is co-constructed such that speakers and hearers share responsibility for interpretation (Morgan, 2002). Because all participants need to attune to the multiple meanings that may be made in various contexts, Goffman's (1967) construct of social face as an image of self that reaps positive social standing in a particular context takes on a particular significance within African American speech communities. While

maintaining social face is important for all interactive participants, maintaining a “cool” social face is particularly important for African Americans engaging in the performance of verbal art, especially music. Poetically, Smitherman (1977) explains:

The whole notion of ‘cool talk’ that has come to be associated with the music world suggests a posture of calmness and facilitates a kind of Hemingwayesque grace under pressure, which was and is vitally necessary for a Black man or woman in White America, who’s often tested, much arrested, but rarely blessed. (52).

Likewise, Morgan (2002) contends that “in many profound ways, a speaker’s social face, status and standing, or ‘cool’ are always at stake” (p. 42). She characterizes a “cool social face” as “the ability to act on symbolic incidents and subtle varieties of cultural practice with eloquence, skill, wit, patience and precise timing” (p. 40). She explains that maintaining a cool social face is challenging because participants must be mindful of the multiple interpretations that circulate among multiple audiences within and beyond the immediate rhetorical situation. For this reason, maintaining a cool social face in the face of insults garners a competitor status in verbal duels (Kochman, 1981). As complex discursive performances, demonstrating communicative competence in Signifyin(g) demands a profound, at least tacit, understanding of how to construct a cool positive self image in relation to the audience within a local rhetorical situation and in the African American discourse community.

Language Use: Verbal Artistry

Demonstrating communicative competence also involves effectively employing poetic features of discourse to display a dueler’s verbal prowess and enhance a dueler’s

status. According to Smitherman (1977), poetic features may include imagery, metaphors, hyperbolic or exaggerated language, the use of uncommon words and rarely used expressions, and other imaginative or figurative language that functions aesthetically to give the discourse a poetic quality. The rhythm and sound of the speech—the prosody, the timing, the alliteration, and rhyme also contribute to the poetic quality of Signifyin(g). The ability to capitalize on the linguistic resources at hand, that is, to improvise, displays the performer’s competence, timing, and wit.

Negotiating Norms of Verbal Dueling

To make visible how the discursive norms for verbal dueling were constructed in and through the classroom discourse, I employed positioning and politeness theory that illuminated the process by which status was constructed as a type of authority particular to verbal dueling. This involved noting how participants used rhetorical strategies of boasting and insulting to enhance their own and threaten each others’ status. Tracking the process by which teacher and students’ respective rankings were constructed allowed me to illustrate how status circulated as a form of capital and how participants were positioned and repositioned in terms of their participation in and power to shape the norms for verbal dueling in this classroom. Illuminating these norms was important for demonstrating how Signifyin(g) served as a resource for Ms. Cross to accumulate authority and to build authority with students relationships productive for teaching and learning.

Episode VI

In this episode, authority negotiations involve competition for status as competitors playfully exchange face threatening insults and construct fearless, powerful, and cool self images. In and through their discourse, they construct the rhetorical situation of verbal dueling as momentary negotiations for status garnered through the competent performance of verbal artistry, exchange of humorous and telling insults, and deft use of language, which have particular significance within the African American community and in this classroom.

Through these momentary authority negotiations, Ms. Cross and students construct the norms for the discourse practice of Signifyin(g) in the form of verbal dueling. In the content of their discourse and through the discursive moves they make, Ms. Cross and students negotiate the role of the audience by arguing about what constitutes embarrassment. Mike, an African American student, articulate embarrassment as something co-constructed with the audience, who experiences embarrassment along with the embarrassed, whereas, Ms. Cross claims embarrassment is a function of an individual's agency such that an individual has the choice of being embarrassed, irrespective of audience. While these two perspectives seem to represent divergent conceptions of the role of audience, in the context of Signifyin(g) in which meaning is doubled and re-doubled (Gates, 1988), Ms. Cross's position dynamically moves across contexts as she simultaneously disavows the role of the audience exactly as she is performing for their approval. In this sense her *lack* of embarrassment is co-constructed with the audience.

This transcript depicts classroom interaction from 4th period. As part of the instructional sequence of standardized test preparation, Ms. Cross has been teaching test-taking strategies for the English subject matter test. These strategies included general approaches to answering the multiple choice questions and examining the content of the test. In this lesson, Ms. Cross is reviewing the content of the test and students have been contributing answers. Several students are raising their hands.

Transcript: Who are You?

- 1 Ms. Cross: I see↓ all the ha::ands↑ that's↑ why↓ this is my favorite cla:ass↑
 2 Mike: OK↓ enough of that↓ come on↓
 3 Ms. Cross: The ide:ea↓ is to integrate↓ the strátégies↑ with your knówledge↓
 4 Combine those two together and you should be unstoppable↓ like Su↑perman↓ in
 5 front of a speeding train trying to catch [a bullet =
 6 Mike: = You're embár]rassing yourself↓ Sto::op↓
 7 Ms. Cross {to Mike}: I never embarrass myself.
 8 Mike: We are embarrassed fór you.
 9 Ms. Cross {to the class}: You can't embarrass yourself if you don't care what
 10 other people think about you. Remember that↓ Al↑right↓
 11 Students: Oooh
 12 Mike {laughing}: That↑ isn't↓ tru::uhu↑
 13 Ms. Cross: That is↑ true↓ you can't embarrass - only you↑ can↓ be embarrassed
 14 of yourself. I'm never embarrassed of myself. I could care↑ less↓ about what you
 15 think of me. Who are you↑
 16 Tina {laughing}: Ah-ha-ha-ha
 17 Students: Oooh
 18 Calvin {to Mike}: Who are you↑ buddy
 19 Students talk inaudibly
 20 Ms. Cross: O↑K↓ who↑ has another↓ one↑
 21 Giovanni: Choose omit

Turn-by-Turn Analysis

To explore in detail the sparrers' competition for status, exchange of face threats, and negotiations of authority in this highly complex interaction, I conduct a turn-by-turn

analysis. I begin with Ms. Cross's use of a familiar reference to her "favorite class," which in the previous chapter portrayed as "barbed praise," a normative classroom discourse practice of Signifyin(g) that functioned to create a classroom environment productive for teaching and learning.

1 Ms. Cross: I see↓ all the ha::ands↑ that's↑ why↓ this is my favorite cla:ass↑

In this interaction, this routine discourse practice serves another purpose: it keys students' performance frame and authorizes the subsequent verbal duel. The line is effective as a contextual cue because of the dramatic variations in Ms. Cross' tone—the higher pitched voice and elongated vowel sounds in "hands" and "class" key students' performance frame.

Accepting her invitation, Mike capitalizes on Ms. Cross's authorization to engage in verbal sparring.

3 Mike: OK↓ enough of that↓ come on↓

Because Mike uses indirection to Signify, multiple interpretations are possible. Mike may be Signifyin(g) on traditional teacher-student roles. He assumes the role of the teacher, reproaching Ms. Cross with, "enough of that," and "come on," which constitutes a call to move on, get serious, and return to the test preparation. In this way, Mike's indirection functions as a play on traditional teacher-student roles and the traditional authority relationship these roles typically configure.

The multiple layers of meaning involved with Signifyin(g) make another interpretation possible. Embedded within Mike’s play on the traditional teacher-student authority relationship could be a commentary on how Ms. Cross is talking. In this reading, when he says, “enough of *that*,” he also refers to her shift in style as she crosses a cultural border; his “come on” serves to call her out for appropriating a discourse style—a uniquely *African American* discourse style—not typically employed by a teacher, and more specifically, a *White* teacher. In this way, Mike’s utterance functions as a face threat that questions Ms. Cross’s authenticity as a White teacher engaging in Signifyin(g)—either she is not White or not Signifyin(g).

In another context, challenging a teacher’s authenticity could be viewed as a serious face threat. However, in this classroom, Mike’s face threat is received as playful for three reasons: 1) because Signifyin(g) and play are a normative part of classroom interaction, 2) because in this particular interaction, Ms. Cross authorized play by keying the performance frame through her routine verbal cue and tone, and 3) because Mike’s prior relationship with Ms. Cross included a history of verbal sparring and play.

Embedded in Ms. Cross’s next turn are responses to Mike’s challenges to her authenticity. She repositions herself as the teacher by summarizing the purpose of the day’s lesson: combining test-taking strategies with subject matter knowledge in order to perform well on the standardized English test. Her language is characterized by exaggeration and metaphorical imagery, which she performs dramatically and poetically.

4 Ms. Cross: The ide:ea↓ is to integrate↓ the stratégies↑ with your knówledge↓
5 Combine those two together and you should be unstoppable↓ like Su↑perman↓ in
6 front of a speeding train trying to catch [a bullet =

audience, being embarrassed would be the antithesis of cool. And the more Ms. Cross denies it, the more embarrassed and guilty she will look.

The implication is that Ms. Cross is embarrassing herself *in front of the class*, a rapt audience. Indirectly invoking the presence of the audience illuminates the stakes of the rhetorical situation—status in verbal sparring. Although still playful, Mike identifies her as the target using the pronoun “you,” telling Ms. Cross, “*You*’re embarrassing *yourself*.” Mike’s final word in the turn, “Stop!” functions as a playful command for Ms. Cross to cease her performance and as a warning that she should not engage in verbal sparring with him, presumably because he will win, which ironically, simultaneously represents a challenge and invitation for Ms. Cross to engage him in verbal sparring. She responds with braggadocio.

8 Ms. Cross: I never embarrass myself.

Ms. Cross constructs her image as fearless and powerful while keeping her cool. She is so cool that she is never embarrassed. Her sparring move is defensive, it is not offensive—she does not threaten Mike’s face with an insult, but merely defends her own.

In the next turn, Mike threatens this powerful image Ms. Cross is creating by affirming that she should be embarrassed, and explicitly invokes the presence of the class as audience by using the pronoun “we.”

9 Mike: We are embarrassed for you.

Mike’s explicit use of the pronoun “we” effectively positions Ms. Cross, “you,” as an outsider in this classroom: she is a White teacher, who is not a native speaker of African

American discourse, attempting to engage in verbal sparring, a culturally-grounded performance of verbal art, and “we” are a discerning audience of African American students, who are likely familiar with and may be adept at Signifyin(g). Being positioned as an outsider could be particularly face threatening for Ms. Cross given the racial dynamics of the classroom: there are 25 African American students and one of her, so she is the racial minority in this predominantly African American school.

However, Mike’s explicit invocation of this audience reflects what Thomas Kochman (1981) elucidates as a fundamental difference in Black/White cultural logic related to the role of the audience. According to Mike’s logic as an African American, embarrassment would be co-constructed with the audience, while from Ms. Cross’s White perspective, it would be a function of her own existence, which is experienced independently from others. These seemingly divergent perspectives may be attributed to the emphasis on communality and inter-dependence in Black culture and on individuality and independence in White culture (Kochman, 1981).

Mike’s patronizing tone, which implies that he has something to teach Ms. Cross about verbal sparring, positions Ms. Cross as a novice and him as the expert sparrer. Traditional student-teacher authority relations dictate that she is supposed to be the expert and the student the novice. However, through her performance of Signifyin(g), Ms. Cross is able to rise to meet the occasion.

In the next turn, Ms. Cross emphasizes that an individual has the power to determine whether or not he or she is embarrassed.

10 Ms. Cross: You can't embarrass yourself if you don't care what other people think
11 about you. Remember that↓ Al↑right↓

Ms. Cross's use of the general pronoun "you" makes the target of her Signifyin(g) ambiguous, leading to multiple interpretations. On one level, Ms. Cross could be seen as trying to encourage her students to seek their individual style and not allow others to negatively influence their performance in school: if they don't care what others think, they shouldn't be embarrassed about participating in the classroom discourse and engaging in teaching and learning.

On another level, Ms. Cross's braggadocio and condescending tone imply that it is she who is so fearless, so powerful, and so cool that she doesn't care what the audience (her students) thinks of her. The ambiguous pronoun "you" allows her to boast without threatening Mike's social face or insulting the audience—the class, whom she understands determines her status as a sparrer. Ms. Cross's use of indirection enables her to circumvent Mike's questioning of her authenticity as she claims the authority to employ an African American discourse style. Ms. Cross's response is so deft a display of Signifyin(g) that the audience responds with a chorus of "Ooohs!", legitimizing her use of Signifyin(g) and constructing her authenticity.

In addition to employing the rhetorical strategy of braggadocio and circumlocution effectively, Ms. Cross's status and authority as a sparrer are constructed through her understanding of the rhetorical situation of Signifyin(g). She adeptly signifies on the role of the audience. Her logic is marked by an apparent contradiction: she claims that the audience is irrelevant to a speaker's image precisely as she performs for that audience's validation and approval. What is ironic is that while Ms. Cross disavows the

audience, her status is determined by them: the audience at once means nothing and everything, reflecting what Gates (1988) refers to the doubling and redoubling of Signifyin(g). In this way, Ms. Cross's status as a sparrer is constructed through her competent performance of Signifyin(g).

Ms. Cross's competence is also constructed through her use of parallel statements that capitalize on rhythmic similarity and matching grammatical structure that highlight the contrast between their positions in relation to the topic (Morgan, 2002). She improvisationally takes up the grammatical form and rhythm of Mike's previously-launched insults. With a command akin to Mike's "come on" in line 2 and "stop" in line 5, Ms. Cross scoffs, "Remember that," repositioning herself as the expert with something to teach him about sparring and him as the novice, reconfiguring authority to a traditional relationship. In his next turn, Mike loses the form of the sparring that had been co-constructed in the interaction, suggesting that he is losing his cool.

13 Mike [laughing]: That↑ isn't↓ tru::uhu↑

Mike responds to Ms. Cross's claim that the audience doesn't matter with a directed negation of her claim. The multiple, layered implications are that 1) it isn't true that Ms. Cross doesn't get embarrassed 2) that in sparring, and in African American discourse in general, it isn't true that you can't be embarrassed if you don't care what people think about you because the audience co-constructs your embarrassment, and 3) it isn't true that she doesn't care what the audience thinks of her—she does, in fact, care very much: she is performing for the audience right now. Also, Mike laughs, uncharacteristically

losing his cool face, which represents a call for Ms. Cross to lose the cool face that prevents her from admitting the truth: audience matters, sparrers just play it cool.

However, Ms. Cross seizes this opportunity to solidify her victory in Mike's uncharacteristic loss of cool. After directedly negating Mike's claim that the audience co-constructs a speaker's embarrassment, she reiterates her claim that a speaker's image and sparrer's status are constructed independently from the audience.

- 14 Ms. Cross: That is[↑] true[↓] you can't embarrass - only you[↑] can[↓] be embarrassed
15 of yourself. I'm never embarrassed of myself. I could care[↑] less[↓] about what you
16 think of me. {to Mike} Who are you[↑]
17 Students: Oooh
18 Tina [laughing]: Ah-ha-ha-ha
19 Calvin [to Mike]: Who are you[↑] buddy[↓]

Again, Ms. Cross employs the defensive move of braggadocio, but in an unprecedentedly aggressive, playfully face-threatening move, she closes her turn with a return to the spar's rhythmic pattern with a challenge to Mike's authenticity, pointedly asking him: "Who are you?"

Of course, this question is riddled with multiple meanings that unfold as various contexts are considered. For example, within the rhetorical situation of Signifyin(g), *Who are you that as an audience, you think you're so important? Who are you to do battle with me?* Within broader politics of racial authenticity, *Who are you? Is your image aligned with your identity? What qualifies you to engage in Signifyin(g)? Can you display the communicative competence to construct an authentic image as a sparrer?* I suggest that still other interpretations are possible considering the context of the classroom: *Who are you as a student? Can you switch codes and engage in the serious learning of*

English? Ms. Cross's final three words are so powerful in their reverberating significations that again, the audience cheers, with Calvin echoing her cap on Mike in the form of call and response that demonstrates alignment and encouragement. By all accounts, Ms. Cross, the White English teacher unversed in Signifyin(g) prior to working at Metro High, triumphed in this verbal battle.

Norms of Verbal Dueling

Turn-by-turn analysis of this episode of classroom interaction illustrates how norms for verbal dueling were constructed as participants negotiated the role of the audience and competed for status. To authorize Signifyin(g), Ms. Cross used routine discursive strategies that included tonal semantics, figurative language, and barbed praise. These discourse strategies served as contextual cues, tacit signals that invited students to engage in Signifyin(g). Through these mutually-understood contextualization cues, Ms. Cross and students collaboratively constructed her authority to facilitate the flow of interaction, a facet of classroom process or "who gets to do what, where, when, how, and with whom" (Oyler, 1996a). However, once Ms. Cross authorized students to engage in Signifyin(g), this authority became negotiable as she and Mike competed for domination in the verbal duel, requiring her to earn back that authority by demonstrating her competence in Signifyin(g).

In addition to authorizing engagement in Signifyin(g), the co-constructed contextualization cues keyed students' performance frames so that they understood the classroom discourse as Signifyin(g), a discourse practice characterized by norms that shaped teacher and students' expectations about participating in classroom discourse.

Sharing the performance frame allowed Ms. Cross and students to co-construct a participation structure that enabled all of them to participate in the classroom discourse. This is because the audience played a significant role in these classroom Signifyin(g) events. In the classroom, students evaluated the competitors' performance by interjecting "ooh"s and "oh!"s and responding to calls, as Calvin did when echoing Ms. Cross's final insult, "Who are you?" Although likely to be reproached in other situations, these vocal evaluations served as normative practices that were socially acceptable during performances of Signifyin(g), and they provided students access to participation—students who may otherwise have sat with their heads down or have been kicked out of other classes for "going back-and-forth."⁶⁵

As a discerning audience, students may have been able to consider and respond to the manifold meanings that were embedded in the Signifyin(g) because they shared a conception of audience as multiple. In my analysis, considering audiences that spanned contexts unfurled these interpretations, making visible the layered implications of Mike and Ms. Cross's negotiations about what constitutes embarrassment. To reiterate, from the African American perspective, embarrassment would be co-constructed with the audience, and from the White perspective, embarrassment would be a function of individual experience and would be constructed regardless of audience. Analyzing Mike and Ms. Cross's interaction illustrates how these cultural logics may have been reflected and reconstituted in the interaction, as well as reconfigured. Although *in the content* of her discourse, Ms. Cross claimed that the audience had no bearing on whether or not she

⁶⁵ In Chapter IV I recounted how the main players in Signifyin(g) interactions sat with their heads down during standardized test preparation they did not find engaging. In Chapter V, Mike explained, "I don't go back and forth with other teachers because I'd get kicked out. I get kicked outta there. Sometimes my jokes be too raw."

was embarrassed, *through her discourse*, her use of Signifyin(g) conveyed that it did. The irony of her braggadocio, the play between her signification and Signification, represented the doubling and redoubling of meaning that characterizes Signifyin(g) so that the audience at once means everything and nothing (Gates, 1988). The audience was constructed as crucial to performers' status in sparring, although explicitly acknowledging the audience's role and overtly seeking their approval represented violations of the norms of Signifyin(g) in this classroom.

Based on this episode, verbal dueling may be understood as a competition for status, a kind of authority that seems particular to Signifyin(g) and is co-constructed with the audience. To garner status, opponents demonstrated communicative competence in Signifyin(g) through adept displays of language use and verbal artistry. In addition to irony, the poetic devices Ms. Cross employed included exaggeration, imagery, and metaphor, parallelism, and alliteration—literary devices English teachers should know and be able to teach as prescribed by U.S. national curriculum standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010) and students recognized through shared understandings about English class. Not only could Ms. Cross use these poetic conventions effectively, but she could also employ them on the spur of the moment. Her capacity for improvisation was further apparent when she replicated the form of Mike's sparring, adding the command at the end of her turn, "Remember that." Exhibiting competence involved awareness of when to exercise particular language for rhetorical effect, such as when to use pronouns that identified the target or when to employ a general second person "you" that made the target ambiguous. The poetic features that counted as

normative were constructed in conjunction with the routine rhetorical strategies of Signifyin(g).

Opponents also wielded the rhetorical strategies of boasting and insulting to compete for status. My analysis illustrates how braggadocio may be thought of as constructing a fearless, powerful, and cool social face while insults may be conceived as threats to coolness and positive social face. Tracking face threats as they were playfully exchanged in the interaction made vivid the rhetorical strategies each sparer employed: Ms. Cross relied mostly on braggadocio and verbal artistry to earn her status, while Mike launched playful insults at Ms. Cross. Within the game activity, Mike's strategies tended to be offensively oriented and Ms. Cross's were primarily defensive. Their use of these rhetorical strategies in these ways constituted the norms of verbal dueling as classroom participants competed for status.

One form of insult Mike aimed at Ms. Cross was the questioning of her authenticity and her authority to engage in Signifyin(g). In verbal duels, authenticity may be apprehended as the alignment between the image constructed through sparring and the sparrer's "real" identity. Struggles for authenticity tend to hold a particular place in Black culture. In fact, E. Patrick Johnson (2003) suggests that is precisely the struggle for authenticity that *constitutes* "Black" culture: "The mutual constructing/deconstructing, avowing, disavowing, and expanding/delimiting dynamic that occurs in the production of Blackness is the very thing that constitutes 'Black' culture" (p. 2). Kochman (1981) offers insight as to why discourses of authenticity might be implicated in the interaction between African American students and a White teacher. For Black performers, their individuality or uniqueness of style is vital, and an audience will show disdain for a

performer if they perceive that a performer's style is not their own or that he or she is imitating another's style. Black/White student-teacher relationships are contextualized by a history, at which many Blacks chafe, that is rife with examples of how Black cultural forms of expression have been appropriated by Whites for profit (Kochman, 1981). This history explains how Blackness can function as commoditized capital in some contexts, complicating politics of authenticity. Johnson (2003) elucidates that Whites' appropriation of Blackness may represent an act of "cultural usurpation" or oppression in which Blackness becomes fetishized or exoticized (p. 4). These global or macro level politics of authenticity contextualize verbal sparring in a classroom characterized by racial difference.

Despite these global and macro level politics, students did not seem to interpret Ms. Cross's engagement in Signifyin(g) as imitative, appropriative, oppressive, or usurpative. Instead, they seemed to deem her verbal dueling as authentic as indicated by their applause of her boasting and woofing. Yet because of the potential for negotiations around authenticity to become volatile, the norms for Signifyin(g) in this classroom may have delineated that challenges to an opponent's authenticity be performed in a playful, indirect way in order to preserve teacher and students' amicable relationships. In this way, Signifyin(g) as a normative classroom practice served as a resource for Ms. Cross and students to address these issues of authenticity that lurked in the subtext of classroom discourse, while building positive authority relationships across their racial difference. Ms. Cross's socially legitimated authenticity was exchanged for her classroom authority as a white teacher of African American students.

Verbal Dueling as a Resource for Constructing Authority

Ms. Cross's status constructed through her Signifyin(g) also translated into her classroom authority as a White, woman, English teacher. To clarify, I tease apart these intersecting facets of racial, gender, and professional identity and link them with forms of authority. Ms. Cross's communicative competence in Signifyin(g) translated into professional authority derived from her knowledge of English subject matter (Pace, 2003b). Although she was not a native speaker of African American English and had acquired the ability to signify by interacting with her students, Ms. Cross's literary background afforded her an advantage in using figurative language and poetic features when verbal dueling. She was highly adept at using various poetic devices.

Ms. Cross's use of Signifyin(g) heightened students' engagement in the preparation for the standardized English subject matter test in another way: by keying students' performance frame to highlight the main idea of the lesson on integrating test taking strategies with subject matter knowledge. Signifyin(g) served as a resource for constructing Ms. Cross's authority as an *English teacher*.

Signifyin(g) afforded play through which Ms. Cross and students reconstructed traditional teacher-student authority relationships. Mike's Signifyin(g) assumed an instructional tone as he tried to inform Ms. Cross about the audience's role in Signifyin(g), and his directives, "Come on" and "Stop," presume a position of authority that frees him from conventional politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987). As Ms. Cross and Mike's respective authority positions see-sawed between master and novice, they reconfigured traditional authority relations. In this way, participants' use of Signifyin(g) minimized the teacher-student authority disparity with respect to knowledge, which may

be exacerbated in classrooms of students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1994). In a classroom where what counts as subject matter knowledge is largely determined by a standardized test, opportunities for teacher and students to negotiate and play with authority relations need to be strategically created, and Signifyin(g) may afford such opportunities.

Signifyin(g) also holds the potential to reconfigure in the classroom racial authority relations configured beyond the classroom. This is because in this classroom context characterized by verbal competition, status earned through verbal sparring may be exchanged for classroom authority. Demonstrating communicative competence in a culturally-based African American discourse style positioned students and teacher with the authority to facilitate the flow of interaction and participate in classroom discourse.

Engaging in Signifyin(g) constituted Ms. Cross's authority as a *White* teacher because it represented a culturally congruent mode of communication for the students. That is, Ms. Cross's use of Signifyin(g) validated students' culturally-grounded discourse practice in the classroom so that what counted as legitimate language use was socially legitimated in interaction, although likely shaped by students' participation in African American discourse communities. Consequently, students authorized her to engage them in teaching and learning. In this way, Signifyin(g) served as a resource for Ms. Cross and students to construct positive authority relationships across their racial difference. The process by which Ms. Cross validated students' culturally-grounded discourse practice and in exchange, they authorized her as their White, female English teacher represents a process of mutual accommodation.

In this classroom, Signifyin(g) seemed to be somewhat of a gendered practice that allowed Ms. Cross to establish positive authority relationships with African American

boys, particularly those who identified with hip hop culture, like Mike, Calvin, and Mack. The classroom-situated verbal duels allowed them to showcase their verbal prowess honed through their extracurricular rapping. By engaging in a cultural form of expression pertinent to constructions of Black masculinity (Ferguson, 2001), Ms. Cross, a *White woman* teacher, was able to construct positive authority relationships with African American boys across both racial and gender difference.

Conclusion

Discourse analysis of this episode illuminates the process by which 1) the norms for verbal dueling the particular role of the audience were negotiated, 2) how the culturally-based discourse practice of Signifyin(g) was authorized, 3) how status as a verbal sparrer was accrued through communicative competence in the rhetorical strategies and language use of Signifyin(g), 4) how this white, female teacher's use of a discourse practice not typically ascribed to members of her race was authenticated, and 5) how status, communicative competence, and authenticity were exchanged for various forms of classroom authority.

Chapter VIII: Negotiating Literacies

In this chapter I illustrate how Ms. Cross and students employed Signifyin(g) as a resource for preserving their positive authority relationships while negotiating the value and validity of literacies. Portraying Signifyin(g) as a literacy, that is, as a mode of communication and a lens for "reading" classroom interaction, highlights the relevance of

conceiving of Signifyin(g) as both a discourse practice and as an interpretive framework. Discourse analysis illuminates how Signifyin(g) performed relational work and functioned as a strategy of resilience that helped participants cope with and critique authority relations that configured what counted as literacy in the classroom. Framing this discourse analysis with a conception of literacy as multiple makes visible how a “traditional” view of literacy as defined by government-mandated standardized tests circumscribed negotiations around literacy and legitimacy in this classroom.

Multiple Literacies

Conceiving of literacy as “multiple” and classroom interactions in terms of negotiations for power offers a way to make visible whose and which literacies “count” in society and in the classroom. Stephanie Power Carter (2006) portrays multiple literacies in terms of competitions for legitimacy that have marginalized and privileged particular groups and their practices so that each classroom language and literacy event is characterized by give-and-take bargaining. Carter defines multiple literacies as, “The social and cultural ways in which students communicate in their everyday lives as they engage, analyze, and critique the world around them” (p. 353). As a culturally-based discourse practice students used in their everyday lives, Signifyin(g) represented one of students’ multiple literacies that was socially legitimated as it came to be regarded as a normative practice.

In addition to functioning as a discourse practice, students’ social and cultural ways of communicating are part of their interpretive framework for understanding classroom interaction around language and literacy (Carter, 2006). In this sense,

Signifyin(g) can operate as a way of “reading” classroom discourse. Much like how the performance frame operated as a lens through which participants interpreted the multiple meanings imbricated in Signifyin(g), Signifyin(g) may serve as an interpretive resource that informs how participants engage, analyze, and evaluate classroom interaction around literacy.

Viewing Signifyin(g) as an interpretive lens for reading classroom interaction builds on previous work in literary theory and English education on how Signifyin(g) can be employed as a tool for literary analysis (Gates, 1988; Lee, 1993). Along with interpreting literature, Signifyin(g) may also be used to “read” social relations as socially constructed “texts.” In her analysis of “shop-talk,” Yolanda Majors (2007) illustrates how women used literacies cultivated in an African American hair salon to read power relations as social texts in narratives. Similarly, Signifyin(g) may be used to read power relations around classroom literacy interactions. Ms. Cross and students used Signifyin(g) as a culturally-based way of communicating to negotiate the legitimacy of multiple literacies, while maintaining their positive relationships, and as a critical interpretive framework for reading and challenging the legitimacy of test-based literacy.

Using Signifyin(g) to Negotiate Literacies

In addition to Signifyin(g), students brought to the classroom rap as an aspect of hip hop culture. Two students who most heartily engaged in hip hop literacy practices were Mike and Mack from 4th period. They wrote raps in their notebooks during class, engaged in rap circles at lunch, and alluded to hip hop songs in classroom discourse. As a

way of communicating in their everyday lives, rap represented one of their multiple literacies.

Beyond a way of communicating, hip hop and rap served as interpretive frameworks through which Mike and Mack read classroom interaction around literacy. Hip hop and rap were integrated with their educational and occupational goals: both young men aspired to produce and perform rap. In an interview Mack explained, “Ima go to college for it: i's gonna be something that I do in life. Ima go to college for sound engineering and production. I got a plan. Ima lay down everything I ever done and advertise ‘cause tha’s how people explode.”⁶⁶ Mike emphasized his interest in the technical aspects of rap production: “I’m more of a producer, like, I make beats. But I think Ima go to college for it, too. [...] I’m goin’ to technical school because I’m already cold at it, so I don’ need no more help. [He turned to Mack in display of the competitive spirit that frequently characterized his interactions.] Isn’t that right?” Mike and Mack integrated these college and career aspirations into their school-based literacy learning.

Mack and Mike viewed their classroom literacy learning through their interpretive lens of hip hop. When I inquired about how their skills of writing raps translated into their English class, they reframed the question, answering as if I had asked them how *English helped them write raps*. Mack explained, “Because English helps you to expand your vocabulary and show you different ways of writing.” He elaborated by describing his process of writing raps, which included revision: “Yeah, I revise. If I be writing, I

⁶⁶ To convey the language that Mack and Mike employed outside of the classroom, I highlighted some of the dialectal features of their speech, including the pronunciation of the dropped “t” in “it’s,” “that’s,” and “don’,” the use of the verb conjugation “Ima” to convey future verb tense as in “I am going to,” and the double negative for emphasis as in “I don’ need no more help.” This list does not reflect a comprehensive linguistic analysis of their discourse because what is more pertinent to my argument is *what they say* rather than how they say it.

think back to that line, I try to think of something better.” For Mike English helped him think rhetorically about his raps so that he considered his audience: “And if you’re good in English you can do, like, less cussing, and make it more presentable to people. [...] People don’t like the same stuff so you have to be your own self. You have to think of a better way, but it still gotta rhyme.” Although Mike and Mack were able to articulate how the literacy skills they acquired in English class enhanced their rap writing, less clear was how they envisioned their hip hop literacy skills enhancing their academic performance in English class. They saw English class as an instrument for furthering their postsecondary goals, viewed through their interpretive framework of hip hop literacy.

In my introductory chapter, I narrated how Ms. Cross and Mack negotiated his use of rap as an introduction for an essay, characterizing their interaction as mutual accommodation. Ms. Cross accommodated and validated Mack’s rap while asking him to revise his introduction in line with the accepted genre of writing on standardized tests, and Mack accommodated the expectations of the school’s culture by revising his essay. What Mack took away about essays from this interaction was straightforward: “You can’t rap on ‘em,” implying that timed writing essays for standardized tests had no place for rap.

Another way to interpret this interaction is through the lens of multiple literacies, with Mack’s hip hop literacy in competition with a more “traditional literacy,” which defines literacy narrowly as students’ quantifiable or classifiable ability to read and write in prescribed ways, such as on a standardized test (Carter, 2006). Because the government-mandated standardized test represented the officially-sanctioned literacy

curriculum in this classroom, a traditional conception of literacy was privileged, although Ms. Cross created discursive space for students' multiple literacies.

One of the ways Ms. Cross created this discursive space was by promoting her own literacy practices. One of the first things I learned about Ms. Cross when we met was that she had written a novel and was awaiting news on its publication. Through her authorship, she expanded her disciplinary subject matter knowledge and enhanced her writing pedagogy. However, in this classroom context in which what counted as literacy was defined by the government-mandated test, even literary analysis, which has historically been considered a disciplinary literacy (Lee, 1993), was relegated to the periphery. Consequently, Ms. Cross's creative writing of a novel might more appropriately be considered a "home-based" or "out-of school" literacy.⁶⁷ By inserting her own home-based literacy practice into the classroom discourse, although it is a discipline-sanctioned literacy, Ms. Cross authorized students' multiple literacies, such as hip hop and Signifyin(g), as legitimate topics in classroom discourse.

Studies that investigate the legitimacy of literacies address concerns about how institutional structures and educational authorities sanction particular literacy practices and identities while marginalizing others (Rex, et. al., 2010). With a multiple literacies approach, negotiations for legitimacy can be framed as competitions over what counts, that is, which literacy practices and identities are valued or may be exchanged for some form of capital.

⁶⁷ The English section of the test evaluates students' knowledge of isolated reading and writing strategies: the reading of short passages and composing of timed essay writing are fairly incongruent with reading and writing a novel. Therefore, Ms. Cross's literacy practice of writing a novel may be considered disciplinary literacy, although according to the definition of literacy delineated by the standardized test, it would not count as legitimate.

Research suggests that to illuminate whose and which literacies count, discourse analysis is a particularly useful tool (Rex, et. al., 2010). Analyzing an episode of classroom interaction illustrates how Ms. Cross and students negotiated the respective value of literacies and identities while using Signifyin(g) to preserve their positive authority relationships. I selected this episode not only because it offers another rich representation of verbal sparring that highly engaged students, but also because it holds the potential to illuminate the multiple literacies, literate identities, and contexts at play and at stake in this classroom as students and teacher engaged in high stakes conversations about the value and validity of respective literacies.

It is worthwhile to distinguish questions about *whose* from *which* literacies in considering their valuation: conflating literacies with identities could result in ascribing literacy practices to students as a consequence of their racial identification (Rex, et. al., 2010; Moje & Luke, 2009). I situate my examination of whose literacy counts within recently reviewed studies that explore the relationship between literacies and identities, metaphorically conceiving identities as positions (Moje & Luke, 2009). Approaching identities as positions showcases how students assume particular identities as they engage in literacy instruction and interactions. To make visible how literacies and identities were mutually constituted as they were taken up in the selected episode of classroom interaction, I applied positioning theory as an analytical tool, which entailed considering turn-taking and content of the discourse to discern how participants aligned or distanced themselves and each other in relation to identities and cultural group membership.

To make vivid which literacies count, I analyzed the content of the discourse to illuminate which literacies may be traded for capital. This may seem like a hyperbolic

heuristic with which to analyze a 60 second episode of everyday classroom discourse; however, in interviews students clearly conveyed a striking awareness of how their performance on the government-mandated test functioned as capital. Considering how students perceived the potential for various literacies to garner capital elaborates the stakes in negotiating multiple literacies and illuminates which literacies count.

In addressing questions of whose and which literacies count in order to blur the line between literacy practices and identities, I inadvertently reproduce other boundaries. Students move through various discourse communities, adopting different literacies and identities as they go (Moje, 2002; 2004; McCarthy & Moje, 2002), and maintaining the boundaries of these communities collapses questions about *which, where, and why* literacies count. Moreover, *all* literacies are culturally-based. By describing literacies as “traditional/multiple,” “home/school-based,” “test-driven,” “disciplinary,” “culturally-based,” and “in-school/out-of-school,” my intent is to avoid constructing a typology or reinforcing superficial binaries that may oversimplify the practice of literacies (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). My intent is to keep these spatially- and historically-constructed boundaries conceptually intact in order to examine the process whereby literacies are legitimized in ways that promote classroom-based learning.

By focusing on how particular literacies may be legitimized or marginalized in classrooms, I am able to point out aspects of classroom discourse that facilitate literacy learning across contexts. One aspect includes how Ms. Cross created discursive space for and authorized conversations about the legitimacy of literacies in the context of a traditional literacy curriculum and standardized test preparation. This was important considering what is at stake with the test, students’ literate identities, and negotiations for

what counts as legitimate literacy in the classroom and in society. Politeness theory illuminates how Signifyin(g) functioned rhetorically as a politeness move that helped participants maintain their positive relationships while negotiating the legitimacy of literacies. Performing relational work, verbal dueling helped to minimize threats to Ms. Cross and students' social face, mitigating their stake and interest in the interaction, which were heightened the day this episode took place because of a series of "pep talks." To construe the context of the interaction, I narrate the day's events by drawing from my observational field notes.

Context of the Interaction: Pep Talks

I sensed "urgency" in Ms. Cross's teaching that day. Earlier, the juniors and their teachers had been called to a "Town Hall Meeting" to inspire them to take the government-mandated standardized test seriously. Principal Richmond's (Mr. Rich) argument appealed to the collective struggles of the faculty, staff, administration, counselors and students' to elevate the status of the school and community, without explicit reference to race. College opportunities and the Michigan Promise, a scholarship that guaranteed students \$4,000 for a two-year or four-year college, were dangled as incentives. Students were encouraged to cooperate with test preparation in the classes and put forth their best effort on the practice tests. This junior-class "pep talk" set the tone for Ms. Cross's two junior classes in 3rd and 4th period.

From my vantage point as an observer with minimal stakes, but high interest in students' performance on the test, Ms. Cross and the students seemed to be dealing with the pressure from the test in different ways. Ms. Cross's response to the pressure involved

intensifying her teaching. In both periods, the classroom discourse was riddled with “pep talks” to entice student engagement in the test preparation on the one hand, and interspersed with disciplinary and classroom management conflicts on the other. Meanwhile students seemed less engaged than usual. One student from 4th period described the day as “slow” because they had just come from two meetings, which meant they were expected to sit quietly for two hours and listen. To me the tension in the classroom was thick as Ms. Cross grew increasingly frustrated with students and the students grew increasingly less cooperative.

To cut this tension, minimize conflict between Ms. Cross and students, and restore the norms of interaction that characterized their classroom, some students invoked Signifyin(g). This episode depicts one of these playful interludes in which Mike instigates a verbal duel with Ms. Cross to ease the pressure emanating from the looming school-wide practice test. Taking time out from this instructional test preparation afforded Ms. Cross and students an opportunity to critique the legitimacy of test-driven literacy.

Episode VII

This episode of verbal dueling from 4th period takes place during a transition period between activities designed to prepare students for the English subject matter ACT. Ms. Cross has demonstrated test-taking strategies, and students are about to practice applying them by answering questions about how to revise a sample passage.

The activity required them to display their revision skills decontextualized from their own writing.

The interaction involves Ms. Cross and Mike negotiating who is going to make the most money with their respective literacies: Ms. Cross's "million dolla novel" or Mike's rap, which is worth a "bill," that is, a billion dollars. At the heart of this negotiation is the question of whose and which literacies society values more. In the transcript below, line 6 marks the beginning of this negotiation. Mike seems to play on the word "write" as he refers to Ms. Cross's inability to write. On one hand, he is indirectly commenting upon Ms. Cross's habit of writing quickly, but illegibly on the chalk board, which students had complained about earlier in the class. Another interpretation is possible. He questions Ms. Cross's identity as an English teacher, a teacher of writing, who is herself supposed to know how to write. Ms. Cross defends her ability to write in line 8 in a display of her trademark braggadocio.

Transcript: A Million Dolla Novel

- 1 Ms. Cross: OK Put everything away except for one sheet of paper. That's all [you
2 will need]
3 Brad: [I can' write on] one sheet of paper dough
4 Ms. X: Well, if you have to do the whole ((writin'-on-two-sheets-of-paper-'cuz
5 you're stra:ange↑)) take out two sheets of pa↓per↓
6 Mike: Yóu↑ think↓ i's↓ stránge↓ because yóu↑ can'↓ wr::rite↑
7 Students: Oh!
8 Ms. X: I can't↑
9 Students: Whoa!
10 Students: Haha
11 Ms. Cross: That's↑ why↓ I'm↑ gon↓na be a published aú:↑ thor↓ in like↑ a↓
12 month and yóu're↑ gon↓na be wíshin' you were nice to mé↑ when↓ I↑ have ↓
13 a míllion dóllars in my↑ po↓cket.
14 Students: Whoa!
15 Students: OOOh
16 Smooth [pounding on his desk in rhythm]: A míllion dollar nóvel! Million-dolla-
17 nóvel.
18 Mike: When yóu↑ get↓ a míl↑ lion↓ I'm↑ gittin'↓ a bi::ill↑. Ye::ah.↑
19 Brad: Ay, are-you-gonna-be-a-million-dolla-no↑ve↓list↑
20 Mike: Tha's all she gon' háve is a míllion dóllars
21 Ms. Cross: Am I gonna be a million-dollar- no↑ve↓list↑ Yés↑ I ám↓
22 Mike: Ay go ahead↓ an'↑ belié'e↑ dat
23 Ms. Cross: I have the NÉw Yórk Tímes talkin' to me about my↑ nóvel
24 Calvin: Watch↑ out↓ Watch↑ out↓ You're a nó:o↑velist
25 Mike: Chill out. Don't steal my words

Whose and Which Literacies Count?

Examining whose and which literacies in this verbal duel requires tracing the literacies that are competing in this interaction, the discursive construction of literate identities, and participants' understandings about how literacies can function as capital.

Competing Literacies

Competing in this interaction are four literacies: Ms. Cross's home-based/disciplinary literacy, Mike's (and Mack's) hip hop literacy, Signifyin(g), and test-based literacy. (See Figure VIII-1). Circumscribing the negotiations among these multiple literacies was the government-mandated standardized test and the school's culture that subscribed to it.

Figure VIII-1. Multiple Literacies in Play in the Interaction

Who	Ms. Cross	Mike	Classroom Participants	Federal Government
Literacy	Disciplinary	Hip Hop, New Media	Signifyin(g), culturally-based	Testing Literacy, English subject matter
Race	White	African American	White/African American	Whiteness
Institutional Identity	Teacher	Student	Teacher/Student	Policy-makers, politicians, government officials
Literate Identity	Novelist	(Aspiring) Rapper	Audience/Verbal Dueler	Absent
Genre	Novel	Rap	Verbal Duel	Standardized Test
Mode	Print	Oral	Oral	Print
Cultural Production	Western society	Hip hop culture	African American culture	Whiteness

Valuing Literacies and Literate Identities

Analyzing the content of this classroom discourse illuminates the competing literacies involved in this negotiation. In one corner, we have Ms. Cross, a White teacher and novelist, and her disciplinary literacy of producing written literature through a system

of publication, the text a production of Western society. And in the other corner, we have Mike, an African American high school student who is an aspiring rapper, championing his hip hop and new media literacies entailed in producing and recording a rap; his text is a production of hip hop culture.

Examining the content of the discourse illustrates how Ms. Cross, Mike, Smooth, Calvin, and Brad negotiate the value of these respective literacies. Ms. Cross constructs her novel as valued by society, claiming that it will be published. She assigns her novel a financial value of \$1 million dollars, highlighting how literacy functions as economic capital in society and implying that having written literacy skills carries currency in the market beyond the classroom. She also invokes an external authority, *The New York Times*, to emphasize the high value placed on her novel. Smooth affirms the value of Ms. Cross's novel as a response to call (Smitherman, 1977), repeating, "A míllion dollar novel," then with more rhythm, "Million-dol-la-nóvel." In his discourse Mike also constructs the value of his literacy in society. He claims that if Ms. Cross gets a million dollars for her novel, he will get a billion dollars, presumably for his rap production.⁶⁸

Articulating a relationship between literacy and identity, Brad links the value of the novel with Ms. Cross's identity, calling her a "million dollar novelist," and Calvin affirms this identity by saying, "Watch out, you're a novelist." With these moves, Brad and Calvin align themselves with Ms. Cross and construct her literate identity as a

⁶⁸ If Mike were to compose and perform a successful rap, that may be true. The hip hop entertainment industry generates \$3-4 billion dollars in profit a year (Kitwana, 2003); however, it is unclear how much of that rappers actually take away given expenses related to their record label, manager, and production costs, but rappers earn an estimated \$1 per a \$10 album/CD (Farrell, 2009). A pertinent question may be how aware Mike is to the operations of the hip hop industry.

novelist. In contrast, because no one takes up Mike's contribution to the discourse, he is positioned without a literate identity and hip hop literacy without currency.

Smooth, Brad, and Calvin's efforts to align themselves with Ms. Cross's novel writing and distance themselves from Mike's rapping could reflect efforts to position themselves as taking up disciplinary literacy practices, which are more sanctioned by schooling than rap. These efforts could signify their perception that participating in school-based literacies garners symbolic capital in this classroom context. Aligning themselves with Ms. Cross's novel could also reflect their attempts to garner status within the context of a verbal duel. In this classroom, status operated as social capital that could be exchanged for symbolic capital—authority to participate in classroom discourse and influence the flow of interaction. Engaging in the literacy practice of Signfyin(g) and garnering status through verbal dueling were highly valued in this classroom.

Given the primacy placed on the test in this context, test-driven literacy was also highly valued. Students viewed performing well on the test as creating opportunities for them to acquire economic, symbolic, cultural, and social capital (Bourdieu, 1977). Most notably, students viewed performing well on the test as garnering them economic capital in the form of the Midwestern Promise. To students a high test score also functioned as symbolic capital within the education system when their grades were tied to their performance and their college applications required them to take the ACT.

In addition, students saw excelling on the test as garnering cultural capital for them as African Americans. Ryan, a student from 4th period, noted, "A lot of people don't expect Black kids to get a high score on the test. So when they do, it's a surprise to 'em and it might change their mind, ah, clear up some misconceptions they have." They also

believed that it was unusual that students of color would have access to such test preparation to help them get into college, and they appreciated the attention to the test that teachers like Ms. Cross showed, convinced that the attention represented the faculty and administration's faith in students' ability to compete with more affluent, White students in the metro area school districts. In exchange for this faith, the students at Metro High trusted that the faculty and administration were doing what was best for them in emphasizing the test. Consequently, the students perceived that a good score could be exchanged for social capital in the form of the earned respect of their teachers and other school personnel. Students recognized that their access to various forms of capital was at stake with their performance on the government-mandated standardized test, and their Signifyin(g) on hierarchies of literacies reflects their cognizance of the relative value of multiple literacies in relation to this traditional, test-driven literacy.

Valuing Signifyin(g)

Conveyed in the form of verbal dueling, the significance of the discursive work participants performed in this interaction could easily be overlooked. To make visible the nuances of this complex relational and political work, I examine what is at play and at stake for students and teacher in this interaction, invoking Signifyin(g) as an interpretive framework for reading the social interaction. This consideration of play and stake demonstrates how these negotiations around legitimacy and literacy reflect the ways in which authority relations from beyond the classroom can influence what counts as literacy in the classroom.

What's at Play

Mike seemed to initiate this playful interlude of Signifyin(g) to cut the tension arising from the pressure to perform well on the test. As a reprieve from this pressure, Mike's instigation of play performs relational work. However, considering interaction around the million dolla novel through the lens of Signifyin(g) implicates the role of play in critiquing global or macro level authority relations. From this perspective, Mike's initiation of play also represents a critique on the privileging of traditional literacy by the primacy placed on the standardized test. To explain how play can facilitate such critiques, James Mullooly and Herve Varenne and (2006) construe moments of "play" as students' acknowledgement of classroom and societal authority relations as well as their position within those relations. They examine how middle school students play with authority by inserting into pedagogical discourse jokes that operate as "improvised political cartoons that provided instant comments about what was going on" (p. 70). In this way, Mike's Signifyin(g) on the word "write" and Ms. Cross's inability to do so can be read as not only a critique of her handwriting and a critique of her authority as an English teacher, but also as a critique of the standardized test that determines what counts as writing: revision skills decontextualized from students "own writing."⁶⁹ Neither of the literacies he identifies with—rap and Signifyin(g)—count as writing in the context of the test preparation, and the implication of the perpetual pep talks and endless test preparation is that students need them because *they* can't write. Because Signifyin(g) allows for

⁶⁹ In Chapter IV Ms. Cross speculated that she would be teaching students a different kind of writing, "their own writing," if not for the pressure to prepare them for the test.

multiple interpretations, Mike's play performs a critique of the authority relations that define literacy narrowly and privilege test-driven literacy within their classroom.

Operating *as* play, Signifyin(g) created a verbal sparring interlude to relieve pressure from the test and enabled Ms. Cross and students to read and critique the hierarchical power relations that configured the authority of the test-driven literacy that dominated their discourse.

A somewhat different, but related, conception of play demonstrates how additional relational work was conducted through verbal sparring. Signifyin(g) offered Ms. Cross and students a way to save face as they negotiated the legitimacy of their home-based literacies. This is because Signifyin(g) operates *through* "play" (Morgan, 2002) that differentiates the real from the serious by focusing on that which is socially or culturally significant, such as the struggle for legitimacy, and placing it in implausible contexts. In this case, the implausibility is that Ms. Cross is going to make a million dollars from her novel and that Mike is going to make a billion from his rapping. This play offers stake inoculation that gives Ms. Cross and Mike the appearance of disinterest in the negotiations for legitimacy, but interest in the Signifyin(g) battle (Wetherell, 2001). In this way, Signifyin(g) offered teacher and students a non-threatening way to negotiate what counts as legitimate language and literacies in society and critique the authority relations configured by the imposition of the test.

What's at Stake

The relational work participants performed was crucial because for students whose language and literacy practices have historically been marginalized, negotiations

characterized by competitions for which and whose literacies count in society could be extremely high stakes. That is, students may place a heightened emotional value on such negotiations and show an increased concern for the outcome (Rex, 2007; Wetherell, 2001). The content analysis of this interaction makes visible how students and Ms. Cross engaged in a negotiation over whose and which literacies are more highly valued in society. These negotiations mirror debates at the heart of English subject matter, such as who is represented in and who authors the texts that comprise the literary canon (Gates, 1992), to what degree and in what way digital writing should be incorporated in English teacher preparation (Grabill & Hicks, 2005), what forms of English count as “standard” (Curzan, 2002), and why and how hip hop literacy should be reflected in the “New English Education” (Kirkland, 2008). Literacy holds particular significance in African American history in its gatekeeping function and role as conveyor of cultural codes that have historically determined access to capital and configured societal authority relations on the basis of race (Ladson-Billings, 1992b; 1994; 2005). Students have the capacity to read these authority relations in society as well as in the classroom and recognize their positions within these hierarchies (Carter, 2006).

Considering students’ stake and interest in the negotiations illuminates the important role Signifyin(g) plays in facilitating the conversation about the values of multiple literacies. For students like Mike and Mack, who take seriously the college and career plans they forged around sound engineering and producing rap music, devaluing the literacy skills associated with rap and hip hop could represent powerful threats to their social face. What’s at stake in these negotiations for Mike, Mack, and other students whose identities are intertwined with their hip hop literacies is their engagement in

classroom literacy learning. Like shop-talk, hip hop, and Signifyin(g), students' out-of-school literacies are often invisible in classrooms; making them visible requires intention on the part of teachers (Moje, 2002). Because literacies are closely linked to cultural identities (McCarthy & Moje, 2002), literacies can serve as sites of resistance for students if their out-of-school practices are not validated in schools (Lenters, 2006), or as sites of resilience that help them succeed academically while fostering their cultural identity (Carter, 2006). For Mike and Mack, hip hop literacy functioned as a strategy of resilience: viewing school-based literacies as resources for cultivating their hip hop literacies sustained their engagement in the English disciplinary literacy, regardless of the narrow definition of literacy prescribed by the standardized English subject matter test.

Similarly, Signifyin(g) as play served as a source of resilience, enabling students and teacher to challenge the authority of the standardized test without compromising their goals for achieving on it. This points to the pivotal role conceptions of literacy as multiple literacies can play in simultaneously promoting students' academic success while critiquing global or macro-level authority relations.

Complicating What Counts

The analysis of classroom interaction in this chapter illuminates how hip hop literacy can function as a strategy of resilience; how Ms. Cross validated students' verbal dueling and rap, aspects of Signifyin(g) and hip hop, as legitimate multiple literacies; how verbal dueling afforded participants stake inoculation to engage in critical conversations about the legitimacy of literacies; and how playing with Signifyin(g) and authority seem critical to creating the space for validating students' *and teachers'*

multiple literacies in the context of pressures from high stakes testing. These results hold implications for teachers about how to align themselves as allies with their students against institutional practices they consider, perhaps tentatively and ambivalently, to be oppressive, exclusionary, or biased in some ways.

While it is crucial to acknowledge the value of Ms. Cross and students' discursive efforts, it is also necessary to note practical challenges they face in their strides to perform the complex work of negotiating legitimacy. In interviews Ms. Cross identified the task of validating students' literacies while promoting test-driven literacy a problem of practice—a recurring dilemma she faced in the classroom. Ms. Cross's ambivalence was made visible as I sought patterns in terms of what counted as legitimate literacy in this classroom. Reflecting on her interactions with students, Ms. Cross described a critical moment in which she constructed the boundaries of legitimacy around students' culturally-based literacies, making visible the competition between multiple literacies and traditional literacy approaches.

This critical interaction occurred on a day I was unable to observe the classroom: It took place during April, after students had taken the high stakes standardized test and were in the midst of a curricular unit on language as part of a college application portfolio. What I relay is a reconstruction of Ms. Cross's narrative as conveyed in her interview. A female student in 3rd period brought in a "poetry book" (*n'nocent 7age* by Kweisi⁷⁰) that uses texting: "to" is the number "2" and "straight" is "str8." Ms. Cross

⁷⁰ This book has received critical acclaim. As described on Amazon.com: "N'nocent Rage is a book of urban poetry that was propelled by the untimely and violent murder of the author's brother, Lemont. Kweis's book offers acute insight on the meaning of finding good in a world of poverty, death and other

lamented the challenge this book of poetry presented to her as an English teacher: “I’m all about expression. I’m really an artistic person as well. [But when] she said she read it in school – and I said read it *in* school, or read it *for* school? – From an English teacher’s standpoint, that helps me out. [Sarcastically] ‘Thank you, whoever you are: you just made my job much, much easier.’” By aligning herself with expression and artistry, Ms. Cross construed her interest in promoting those ideals for her students. However, she viewed the poetry’s language of expression as a challenge to her responsibility and authority as an English teacher, whose job it was to prepare students for the test. She viewed “texting” as competing with the “proper grammar” she was trying to promote as a test-driven literacy skill. She continued, “On the other hand, the ACT is there, saying there is a need to talk proper.” In this case, Ms. Cross portrayed this student’s literacy practice of reading poetry with “texting” language and phonetic spellings in competition with test-driven literacy, yet she was not reconciled as to how to legitimize both literacies.

Conclusion

I attribute Ms. Cross’s privileging of “proper grammar” in part to the pressures imposed by high stakes, government-mandated, standardized tests that define narrowly what counts as literacy. This raises additional questions about how teachers can create space in classroom discourse for engaging students’ multiple literacies when these literacies are deemed illegitimate and irrelevant by global or macro level forces that privilege test-driven literacy as a singularly valuable literacy. What discursive resources

unexplainable events. The book is a volcano of emotions that at times leaves you crying from utter joy or shaking from an unidentifiable rage. In Kweisi’s book he truly depicts the meaning of art reflecting life.”

were available to aid Ms. Cross and students who do *not* engage in Signifyin(g) in negotiating whose and which literacies counted in this classroom?

Although the weight of the test loomed over the shoulders of the participants, their episodes of Signifyin(g) as play constituted a reprieve from the pressure and subtle critique of the test's imposition. In these moments of play, I see traces of syncretism as Ms. Cross and students adapted in response to the routine-ness of test preparation rather than adopt it without modification as normative. I also see evidence of cultural hybridity as they used verbal dueling to do so, assimilating Signifyin(g) as a new cultural form with playful functions within the standard form of test preparation while making accommodations within test preparation to make room for this play. As I explained in Chapter III, "seeing" how discourse at the local or micro level holds the potential to challenge or disrupt global or macro level discourses is a difficult task for researchers, but made possible by microethnographic approaches to discourse analysis that examine the relationships between local/global/micro/macro discourses and processes.

Ms. Cross's marginalization of Black lyrical poetry may have been influenced by the curricular context of language instruction so that legitimizing texting language and phonetic spelling seemed incongruent with her instructional goals. Still, this encounter with Black lyrical poetry raises questions about the boundaries of literacy practices and identities. How was Black lyrical poetry so different from rap such that rap was legitimate and the poetry was not? And what can be said about the relationship between whose literacies count and which literacies count? How did gender affect Ms. Cross's decision to rank this female student's literacy practice of reading Black lyrical poetry less

valid than the boys' hip hop literacy? I wondered about how Ms. Cross made those decisions about whose and which literacies counted in the classroom.

Finally, I contemplated the enduring problem of practice Ms. Cross identified as the challenge of balancing the validation of students' home-based practices with school-based practices, a problem I raised in my introduction and address in the next chapter as I re-engage multicultural education literature and education literature on authority in conversation.

Chapter IX: Negotiating Language and Race

Previous chapters illustrated how Ms. Cross and the students in 3rd and 4th period built over time positive authority relationships: as Ms. Cross legitimized students' culturally-specific discourse practice of Signifyin(g), students authorized her to engage them in the curriculum and instruction of standardized test preparation. The prior seven episodes of interaction provided representations of classroom discourse through which Ms. Cross and students established these enduring relationships. Demographically-defined racial difference served as the context for the interaction, while the culturally-based discourse practice of Signifyin(g), highly marked as African American, made the talk available for analysis as cross-racial interaction.

In this chapter I illuminate more prominently the issue of race in teacher and students' authority-informing interactions by making vivid how participants preserved their positive authority relationships when race emerged as the main text of classroom talk. Analyses of "marking" and "reading dialect," African American discourse practices, demonstrate how teacher and student generated shared understandings about when, how, and toward whom Signifyin(g) was appropriate. Specifically, politeness analysis makes visible how Ms. Cross performed relational work to preserve relationships among her students, and subsequently, students discursively worked to ensure it was understood that Ms. Cross was *not* the target of marking, which in some circumstances can be interpreted as serious, confrontational Signifyin(g), unmitigated by play. As participants performed this relational work, they constructed boundaries for Signifyin(g) that allowed them to

preserve their authority relationships, and in doing so, circumscribed what counted as Signifyin(g) in this classroom.

While the preceding chapter illustrated negotiations around the legitimacy of literacies, this chapter highlights negotiations for the legitimacy of cultural practices and language within a curricular context of preparing college application portfolios. These negotiations involved what counts as legitimate language and pastimes in the eyes of a college admissions panel. My analysis explores the relationship between language, race, and authority, raising questions about the affordances and limitation of particular conceptions of race, how the authority of Whiteness can be reconfigured in classroom discourse, and the import differences of racial understanding might bear on cross-racial classroom interactions.

Marking and Reading

Examining the subtle distinctions between marking and Signifyin(g) highlights the importance of constructing shared understandings about the boundaries of Signifyin(g) for the teacher and students in this classroom. Claudia Mitchell-Kernan (1972) defines marking as a “mode of characterization” in Black narrative in which the marker affects the voice and mannerisms of a speaker to indirectly comment on their background, personality, or intent. Marking calls attention to not only what a speaker says, but how they say it by imitating or parodying grammar, prosody, language, and dialectal pronunciation. Mitchell-Kernan elaborates, “A marker wishing to convey a particular impression of a speaker may choose to deliver a quotation in a style which is felt to best suit what he feels lies underneath impression management or what is obscured

by the speaker's effective manipulation of language" (p. 177). The function of marking, then, is to use this mode of characterization to highlight meanings embedded in a speaker's discourse. For instance, marking is often used to convey or challenge the legitimacy of a speaker's membership in a cultural group, such as to call into question an African American person's racial identity if they adopt practices associated with White culture. To do so, the marker might exaggerate particular characteristics that are usually associated with White cultural or linguistic practices. Marking with a falsetto tone is frequently used to characterize individuals who "talk proper" (Mitchell-Kernan, 1972, p. 177), and this is how Mike used the discourse practice in the featured interaction.

While a marker may replicate a language variety to imitate a "type" of person who is different from those present, "reading" involves maligning a target to their face (Morgan, 2002). Marcyliena Morgan (2002) explains that a target may "get read" when they are perceived to be falsely representing themselves or their ideas. This is how Mike gets read in this interaction.

In some contexts, reading may key conversational Signifyin(g) (Morgan, 2002). However, because it functions in an obvious manner and the target is unmistakable, reading seems as if it could lead to confrontation. Marking, too, may lead to confrontation, under certain conditions. Thomas Kochman (1981) explains that when the speaker who is the target of the characterization is present, the marking may be understood as Signifyin(g). In such a case, the characterization can operate as a "fronting off," an insult that may be taken up as playful or serious. If the insult is interpreted as playful, then a verbal duel may ensue, involving negotiations for status, woofing, and the

playful exchange of threats to participants' "cool social face." However, if the marking is taken seriously, it may constitute a serious face threat and lead to real confrontation.

Considering the fine distinctions between how marking, reading, and Signifyin(g) operate within African American discourse contexts is informative for making sense of this classroom interaction. In this episode, politeness analysis made vivid the discursive work participants performed to generate a shared understanding that Ms. Cross was not the target of marking. This entailed de-racing her—disassociating her from a White identity and neutralizing the threat racial difference posed to authority relationships that furthered teaching and learning subject matter. Tracking politeness moves that mitigated the threat of racial difference illustrates the relational work Ms. Cross and students conducted to maintain their enduring authority relationships. As Ms. Cross and students aligned and distanced themselves and each other in relation to cultural groups with shared practices variously situated within societal structures of power and privilege, the discursive construction of racial identities became observable. Incorporating the perspectives of Ms. Cross and students, gleaned from individual and focus group interviews, illustrates how they interpret the multiple meanings of race circulating in the interaction and sheds light on how race matters in their classroom relationships and goals for teaching and learning.

Curricular and Instructional Context of the Interaction

In this episode of interaction, Ms. Cross and the 11th graders are in the midst of compiling a college application portfolio. As part of that portfolio, students were preparing for a mock college admissions interview by planning their answers to

questions, which included rehearsing what to say in response to questions as well as how to say those responses in a way that was appropriate. This provided Ms. Cross with the opportunity to provide language instruction using an imagined rhetorical situation in which students needed to persuade a college admissions board that they were good candidates for acceptance into that school. A component of Ms. Cross's instruction was a lesson on how students should present their pastimes appropriately for a "professional" audience. She framed this instruction with the concept of presenting yourself differently for different audiences by guiding students through a comparison between how they would introduce themselves to peers versus "professionals." It was established that one would "talk proper" to "professionals" and "talk slang" to friends.

Because these terms "talking proper" and "slang" represented locally-meaningful terms that shaped how the meanings participants made of the featured interaction, it is important to understand their interpretations of the term. Although Ms. Cross and students shared understandings about what "slang" was, their understandings about what counted as talking "proper" were less aligned. For Ms. Cross slang consisted of "words or phrases that people who make up proper grammar don't consider proper." Similarly, for students slang meant "words that may not be in the dictionary" and "when someone uses words that others don't understand." Both Ms. Cross and students construed that what constituted "slang" was established by authorities, far removed in time and space from their classroom, who determined what counted as legitimate language. However, they also viewed "slang" as legitimate in the classroom: Ms. Cross explained, "Everyone talks slang. But not everyone talks slang everywhere."

Understandings about what counted as “talking proper” were more tentatively shared. Students in the focus group were in agreement that “talking proper” meant “having the right pronunciation of all the words.” They provided the example: “ ‘Dat’ is short for ‘that’,” wherein “dat” represents the African American pronunciation of “that” (Green, 2002). Ms. Cross at first defined “talking proper” as “the opposite of slang,” but then admitted that “talking proper” to her meant “standard English.” While Ms. Cross presumably perceived “talking proper” as referring to the combination of features that characterize the dialect of standard English—the lexicon or vocabulary, grammatical structure, and pronunciation (Green, 2002)—students conceptions of “talking proper” were limited to pronunciation as the primary dialectal distinction.⁷¹ This point of difference in racial understanding helped explain the tension around language legitimacy that contextualized this interaction.

Episode VIII

The episode begins with Ms. Cross posing a question that positions students with the authority to co-construct knowledge by inviting them to describe appropriate pastimes for a “professional” audience, such as a college admissions board. Many students responded at once with a variety of suggestions, including, “go to the library,” “go to church,” and “go to the movies.” Amidst the considerable overlapping speech, Ms. Cross called on Mike, whose hand was raised. From Mike’s turn, the episode I present lasted about 25 seconds with considerable overlapping speech, which was available for analysis

⁷¹ In Chapter IV, I noted that Ms. Cross corrected students’ verb use to agree with the subject and students’ lexicon use of shibboleths such as “aks.”

because of the strategic use of four data collection tools: two audio recorders, a video recorder, and my observations.

Transcript: “The Perfect Guy” “Act like he White”

1 Ms. Cross: Now if a profess[↑]ional asks you (.) what do you like[↑] to do[↑] (.) how
2 do you [answer them]?”
3 [...]
4 Mike: I sound like the perfect guy - like – ((After I take my morning walk, I (.) I
5 eat salad, then I (.) go to the library)) (in a deeper voice)
6 Students (laughing): =(@@@@)
7 Ms. Cross: Whats that about [sa[↑]lad[↑]]
8 Shaniah: He ain’ ↓gon’ talk[↑] like that↓ [in a’ interview]!
9 Cassandra: [‘Act like] [he’[↑] White↓]=
10 Tina: [He e::eats salad]
11 Ms. Cross (smiling): =Is there something wro::ong with being[↑] White[↑]=
12 Students (laughing): =(@@@@)
13 Brad: =You’ not White, you’ pale=
14 Ailey: =You’re not White=
15 Mike: =You’re red=
16 Tina: =You’re pink
17 Ms. Cross: What’s the main point I’m trying to make[↑]
18 Uniq: You present yourself a certain way when you’re around certain people

The Discursive Construction of Race

Characterizing “the Perfect Guy” as White

Relying on both content and form of discourse to construe its messages, marking can make discernible the marker’s sentiments toward language. Claudia Mitchell-Kernan (1972) elucidates: “Because marking relies on linguistic expression for the communication of messages, it is revealing of attitudes and values relating to language. It

frequently conveys many subtleties and can be a significant source of information about conscious and unconscious attitudes toward language” (p. 178). Analyzing Mike’s characterization of “the perfect guy” as marking affords an exploration of Mike’s conscious and unconscious attitudes about language as construed in and through the discourse.

Mike’s sentiments toward talking to a “professional” audience about his pastimes are displayed through dialectal features he uses to paint a portrait of “the perfect guy.” He imitates or parodies the grammar, prosody, language, and pronunciation associated with “talking proper.” To explain, Mike’s speech lacks the features of African American English that characterize his usual speech. Instead, his voice becomes a deep falsetto; his tone is monotonous, lacking its usual dramatic variation; his speech is punctuated with dramatic pauses around the stressed word “I,” perhaps reflecting an affect of condescension, arrogance, and self-importance; and he clearly enunciates each of his words in an exaggeration of “talking proper.” Mike’s use of “talking proper” stands in stark contrast to his more frequent discourse practices characterized by qualities of African American English.

According to Mike’s characterization, not only does “the perfect guy” “talk proper,” but he also likes to do things students considered White cultural practices. Although Mike does not explicitly racialize “the perfect guy,” students in focus groups understood walking, eating salad, and going to the library as distinct from the pastimes of the Black people they know. Chelsea explained: “The morning walk and eating salad then going to the library—see Black people don’t do that. They take care of their kids. They eat salad, but they don’t go for no walk. [...] My mom would be too tired. She gotta go to

work.” Mack added, “They just getting home, let alone go walkin’.” Based on their families’ experiences, Mack and Chelsea implied that for Black parents, work and family obligations would preclude leisurely pastimes as morning walks and visiting the library in the afternoon, pastimes which are, by default, reserved for the economically-privileged and White people who have sufficient resources to avoid working and to outsource childcare. Mack and Chelsea’s ascription of morning walks, eating salad, and going to the library to entire groups of people indicates their understanding of these pastimes as anchored in shared cultural practices that represent membership in a particular cultural group. Although Mike does not explicitly refer to race, Mike characterizes “the perfect guy” for a professional audience as engaging in pastimes students associated with privilege and White cultural practices.

In this case, the target of Mike’s marking appears not to be a specific person, but an archetype: “the perfect guy.” Mike’s marking of this archetype with hyper-White speech and pastimes enables Mike to indirectly challenge what counts as legitimate pastimes in the “professional” world. By affecting the voice, mannerisms, and pastimes students associated with White people, he illuminates the meaning that lies underneath Ms. Cross’s question about what would constitute appropriate pastimes to describe to a college admissions board. His response indicates that for him and his classmates who identify as African Americans, describing appropriate pastimes requires them to “talk proper” and claim they engaged in White cultural practices.

Given Mike’s response to Ms. Cross’s question, it could be interpreted that by asking such a question, she was the target of his critique. If this were so, Mike’s marking would be face threatening for her. However, this face threat is mitigated by the discourse

practice of marking, which involves indirection, and in this instance, seems to operate as a politeness move that makes the target ambiguous, if not a figment of the imagined rhetorical situation.

Acting White

To at least two of Mike's classmates, saying that he would present himself as talking proper and engaging in what local participants understood as White cultural practices implied that he was presenting himself or his ideas falsely. As a result, Mike gets read. Showing a willingness to be associated with White cultural membership made him vulnerable to their accusations that the authenticity of his racial identity was compromised.

Shaniah and Cassandra employ dialect reading to convey the contrast between African American English and "talking proper." "Reading dialect" entails juxtaposing obvious features of language varieties to make a point. Contrasting Mike's "talking proper" with Shaniah and Cassandra's use of highly marked African American English (Green, 2002; Smitherman, 1977) suggests that they were invoking culturally-specific language to challenge the authenticity of Mike's cultural group membership as African American and index their own. In contrast to Mike's exaggeration of "talking proper," they drop letters, syllables, and words as indicated by the apostrophes in the transcript: Shaniah drops the ending "n" in "an" and the "na" in "gonna;" Cassandra drops the "'s" in "he's" and the subject of her sentence, "He." Shaniah says "ain't" instead of "isn't." In the classroom, I observed Shaniah and Cassandra using various language varieties, including standard, general, and African American Englishes, but in this case, their

deployment of African American language seems particularly purposeful. Their intonation is far more dramatic than Mike's monotone falsetto, conveying a quality of incredulity and condescension. Contrasted with Mike's "talking proper," their invocation of African American English distances Mike from and aligns them with an authentic African American identity. They effectively transform the status of African American English grammatical structures into a framework that exploits the incongruities of the two dialects (Morgan, 2002).

Even though Cassandra and Shaniah both employ dialect reading to construct solidarity as co-membership in African American culture, they challenge Mike's authenticity in the content of their discourse in qualitatively different ways. Shaniah holds up "the perfect guy" as inauthentic or unreal. In doing so, she questions Mike's authenticity in the sense that he would "talk proper" and engage in White cultural practices in an interview, using a vague pronoun, "that," to avoid referring to race. In contrast, Cassandra names race, saying that Mike "act White" without situating her meaning in any particular context. Outside of the context of verbal sparring, in which challenges to competitors' authenticity are playfully exchanged, Cassandra's challenge to Mike's authenticity functions as a potentially-real face-threatening insult. By suggesting that he *is* Black but *acting* White, Cassandra challenges the legitimacy of his racial identity and questions his cultural group membership.

By naming race, Cassandra demonstrates that she is willing to confront Mike directly about acting White by making visible what she perceives as his false representation of himself and his ideas. Such reading could make her own social face vulnerable (Morgan, 2002) and lead to a serious confrontation.

Cassandra's naming of race could also function as reinforcing Mike's indirect challenge of the authority of Whiteness in the professional world beyond the classroom: by naming Mike's characterization of "the perfect guy" as acting *White*, she makes explicit the target of the societal critique embedded within his marking. Cassandra's use of the term "White" could be face-threatening for Ms. Cross because she is the only White person in the room, and naming race in this moment draws attention to the racial difference that contextualizes the enduring authority relationships she and students have built.

To diffuse these face threats and minimize the potential for conflict among her students, Ms. Cross employs humor that positions herself as the target of marking.

"Being White"

When Ms. Cross asks if there is something wrong with being White, the students erupt in laughter, a discourse marker of humor. Humor represents one of the strategies Ms. Cross identified that helped her build relationships across their racial difference.⁷² In an interview, she explained that at first, she had taken the advice of her African American colleagues and tried "going hard on [students]" and "being mean" to them, but found that this approach "completely turn[ed] them away." She attributed the ineffectiveness of this strategy to their racial difference because students would not authorize a White person to

⁷² Students saw Ms. Cross's use of humor as a strategy that engaged them in teaching and learning. In Chapter 4 I described how when I asked students in focus groups why they found Ms. Cross's class engaging, they explained that "She makes it fun," "She makes us laugh," "She's funny," "She jokes around with us though" by going "back-and-forth" with them.

approach them that way.⁷³ Ms. Cross continued: “So you know, that’s difficult, and there had to be a way to get by that. So trying to relate to them – I started to relate to them more and joke around with them more.” Ms. Cross also saw her use of humor as a strategy for minimizing tension that could arise from their racial difference. She elaborated that as she began to joke around with students, “They start to see you not so much as a threat as a person of no color at all. It makes it easier to teach ‘cause first they have to want to learn from you before you can even teach them. So it’s very important to build those relationships with people.” To Ms. Cross, joking around with students enabled them to neutralize their racial difference, which she perceived as potentially impinging on their relationships, and allowed her as a White teacher to build positive relationships that served as preconditions for teaching and learning with students who were different from her. By mitigating the threat of racial tension and performing relational work, Ms. Cross’s use of humor functioned as a politeness move.

In order to function as a politeness move that builds solidarity, minimizes face threats, and enhances a speaker’s status, humor needs to be deemed appropriate in its specific context (Locher, 2004). Students in a focus group agreed that Ms. Cross’s use of racially-explicit humor in this interaction was appropriate. Tina explained that joking around about race in Ms. Cross’s classroom was appropriate, but acknowledged that in other classroom contexts, it may be not be. She reflected, “I think joking around like this [about race] is OK, if you’re mature about it and you’re not the type of person who will be like, ‘Oh, you’re calling me Black or White or whatever.’” Chelsea elucidated that because of the relationships teacher and students had built over time, boundaries were

⁷³ Ms. Cross’s words were that students said or thought, “Here’s this White person who’s gonna boss me around. *My mama* don’t boss me around like you, let alone a White person do it.”

established that made such racially-explicit jokes socially-acceptable: “And everybody knows how far they can go with Ms. Cross, so ain’t nobody gon’ say anything out the way.” This illustrates that teacher and students held shared understandings about how Ms. Cross’s racially-explicit humor functioned in this episode and in this classroom: as a means of building relationships.

Ms. Cross’s question functions as a politeness move in another way. By replacing Cassandra’s word “acting” with the word “being,” Ms. Cross diverts the target of Cassandra’s accusation that *Mike is acting White to herself being White*. In doing so, she diffuses the threats to both Cassandra and Mike’s social face. Moreover, shifting the language from “acting” to “being” changes the subject of the discourse so that it is no longer about someone with Black cultural membership *acting White*, but someone *being White*. In a literal sense, asking if there is something wrong with being White seems self-effacing in that it *appears* to make Ms. Cross’s social face vulnerable, the legitimacy of her White identity subject to negotiation, and the power differential between her and her students minimal; she appears to invite students to critique what it means to be White.

Yet, the opportunity for students to negotiate the legitimacy of White power and privilege is limited by Ms. Cross’s question, which Ms. Cross launches as an invitation to engage in a verbal spar. She elongates the word “wrong” dramatically for emphasis, and her tone conveys a challenge as if she were *daring* students to answer her. For the students, a positive answer, that there *is* something wrong with being White, even in the context of verbal dueling, could be seriously face threatening for Ms. Cross because it would highlight the racial power dynamics that contextualize their teacher-student relationship in the classroom. As a result, students’ opportunities to challenge the

legitimacy of “being White,” through Signifyin(g) or otherwise, are foreclosed, unless they are willing to incur the risk of threatening their teacher’s face and jeopardizing their relationship with her.

Being “Not-White”

Brad and Ailey explicitly deny that Ms. Cross is White, dissociating her from a White identity. Students in focus groups interpreted this dissociation as an attempt to distinguish her from their conceptions of typical White people. Ryan articulated his understanding of White identity as a stereotype produced by residential racial segregation and misconceptions, and he speculated why his fellow students may have disconnected Ms. Cross from this typecasting:

It’s mainly a stereotype. Mostly Black people – they don’t grow up around White people – so they think they [White people] talk proper and explain everything, they [White people] talk like they pronounce every letter of every word. So [students] think Ms. Cross is supposed to be like that. When they see her in the classroom, after they get to know her, they start thinking that she’s not acting like a typical White person.

For Ryan dissociating Ms. Cross from being White distanced her from students’ oversimplified conceptions of White people.

Referring to stereotypes related to language, Ryan noted that Ms. Cross did not act like the typical White person who “talks proper,” offers elaborated explanations, and enunciates. The “typical White person” Ryan described resembles the archetypal “perfect guy” Mike portrays, implying that as Brad and Ailey dissociate Ms. Cross from the “typical White person” who “talks proper,” they also separate her from Mike’s hyper-White characterization so that she is not construed as the target.

In addition to distancing Ms. Cross from stereotypical White language use, separating Ms. Cross from a White identity disconnected her from asymmetric racial power dynamics that students perceived frequently characterize Black/White interactions beyond the classroom. Adding to Ryan's interpretation, Mack explained that Ms. Cross "don't act stuck up like most White people." To Mack most White people act as though they are better than Black people, but Ms. Cross constituted an exception because she did not, implying that Ms. Cross's relationships with her students were atypically egalitarian because Ms. Cross did not wield her White power and privilege over them. In addition to dissociating Ms. Cross from Mike's hyper-White portrayal of "the perfect guy's" language use, de-racing her also set her apart from a position of condescending power and privilege that stereotypical White people automatically assume in relation to Black people. By describing Ms. Cross as "not White," Brad and Ailey position her outside the target zone of the marking, which could lead to confrontation.

De-racing Ms. Cross also neutralized the racial difference that contextualized teacher-student interactions. Minimizing language differences and power differentials attributed to race helped Ms. Cross and students form and maintain positive relationships. In performing this relational work, de-racing Ms. Cross functioned as a politeness move that constructed solidarity between the teacher and students. Ms. Cross perceived the interaction as doing just that: when I asked her if being told she was not White made her feel "like part of the group," she replied, "Oh, absolutely. Yeah." In this sense, de-racing Ms. Cross from being White operated as a politeness move that helped participants preserve their positive rapport across racial difference and their enduring authority relationships through which students authorized Ms. Cross to guide their learning.

Ms. Cross saw Brad and Ailey's discursive work as a way of building relationships across racial difference. Like Ryan she perceived such work as necessary to clear up racial misconceptions arising from residential and school segregation. When I asked her how she felt about being told she was not White, she replied,

It's building positive relationships, um, because, you know, in our school, there's just the two different races. A person who grows up in White neighborhoods has misconceptions about Black people; people who grow up in Black neighborhoods have misconceptions about White people.

To Ms. Cross and students, disidentifying her from being White constituted relational work that reflected the importance of disrupting stereotypes, clarifying misconceptions, and redefining race in the local context of classroom interaction.

Being “pale,” “pink,” and “red”

When Brad, Tina and Mike add that Ms. Cross is “pale,” “pink” and “red,” they may be commenting on the deepening color of Ms. Cross's face as a result of her increased emotional engagement in the interaction, discomfort, or self-consciousness as the racial tension mounted when race was explicitly referenced, then defused through politeness moves.⁷⁴ By referring to this change in facial hue, they effectively reconstruct her racial identity using terms that denote skintone, but do not seem to connote racial categories. This has the effect of reconstructing her racial identity as race-less, or

⁷⁴ I suspect my “consequential presence” may also have played a role, enhancing Ms. Cross's awareness that this episode would be selected for my analysis because of the explicit reference to race: after the interaction, she caught my eye, signaling she knew I would be interested in the exchange. Unfortunately, because of the angle and quality of the video I recorded, I am unable to say for certain that Ms. Cross was indeed blushing.

alternatively, as an altogether new racial classification of not-White, “pale,” “pink,” and “red.”

Multiple Meanings of Race

To navigate this potentially volatile moment, new ways of thinking and talking about race were needed to discursively construct the racial identity of this self-identified White teacher who, in students’ eyes, belied a stereotypical racial categorization as “White.” Discourse analysis illustrates the series of discursive moves by which those abstract and linguistic innovations emerged through classroom interaction. Retracing the discursive construction of racial identities and incorporating the perspectives of participants illuminates the multiple, shifting definitions of race operating in this interaction.

Race conceived as a set of practices shared by members of a cultural group served as the basis of students’ mutual understandings that Mike was construing “the perfect guy” as White. To explain, students perceived “the perfect guy’s” pastimes of going for morning walks, eating salad, and going to the library as cultural practices White people engaged in. By associating these practices with White people, students posited a direct relationship between race and culture, such that cultural practices were conceived as natural outgrowths of racial identity. This view construes race in essentialist terms. Sociolinguist Mary Bucholz (2003) explains, “Essentialism is the position that the attributes and behavior of socially defined groups can be determined and explained by reference to cultural and/or biological characteristics believed to be inherent in the group”

(p. 400). In other words, if one is White, he or she will necessarily engage in “White” cultural practices because these practices define one’s race.

A concept of race as shared practice also served as the foundation for Cassandra’s claims that Mike was acting White. The word “act” rings with a connotation of race as a performance so that choosing to “act Black” or “act White” is a matter of choice. However, the notion that there is such a way to “act Black” or “act White” operates through claims of authenticity. A *real* African American would do things Black people do, such as take care of their kids and go to work, as Tina and Mack explained—not go for morning walks, eat salad, then go to the library as “the perfect guy” does. A *real* African American would talk like a Black person, that is, use African American English as Cassandra and Shaniah did—not “proper talk” like “the perfect guy.” Such claims to authenticity are grounded upon essentialist notions of culture as innate and inalienable practices shared unequivocally by members of a particular group. Bucholz (2003) elaborates,

The idea of authenticity gains its force from essentialism, for the possibility of a ‘real’ or ‘genuine’ group member relies on the belief that what differentiates ‘real’ members from those who only pretend to authentic membership is that the former, by virtue of biology or culture or both, possess inherent and perhaps even inalienable characteristics criteria of membership (p. 400).

For sociolinguists like Bucholz (1997), language use has represented a way to index and complicate authentic cultural affiliation. Mike, Shaniah, and Cassandra employed racialized dialects to convey cultural group membership. By marking “the perfect guy’s” language with exaggerated characteristics of “proper talk,” Mike projected White affiliation. To construe their membership in African American culture, Cassandra

and Shaniah accentuated features of African American English. Mike, Cassandra, and Shaniah's use of language to convey cultural affiliation without explicit reference to color was afforded by a mutually understood essentialist concept of race as shared linguistic practices.

Although interpreting the classroom interaction required students to hold shared understandings about essentialist notions of race as cultural practices, they also apprehended that those racially-marked cultural practices may be diverse. In a focus group, Raven, Chelsea, and Tina deconstructed essentialized notions of race, acknowledging that members of racial groups engaged in a variety of cultural practices, which may or may not be attributed to their race. Highlighting the diversity of White cultural practices, Tina explained, "There's a lot of ways to act White, like, not just the proper side. Like people who keep sayin' 'like' in their sentences. That's another form of acting White, not just the proper style." Unraveling the foundation of authenticity, Raven contended, "I don't believe there is a certain way to act Black or a certain way to act White. You just act like you choose." While Raven emphasized race as a choice, Chelsea complicated this by saying, "Act like who you are," as if acting culturally was a natural offshoot of racial identity. Participants acknowledged that as racial categories, "Black" and "White" were more complex than essentialist notions of uniformly-shared cultural practices that undergird claims to authenticity.

In addition to a complicated sense of race as cultural practices, a construct of race as a biological trait surfaced in this interaction when Ms. Cross indirectly referred to herself as "being White." Whereas *acting* White resonates with a tone of *performance*, *being* White invokes a sense of *existing* or *living* as White. This connotation was

mediated by humorous deconstructions of biological conceptions of race conveyed through jokes about skin tone. As a visual marker of race, skin color plays a significant role in racial categorization. For people of color, skin hue can operate as social capital (Lewis, 2001), especially for African American women (Hunter, 2007). However, in this interaction, consideration of race as skin tone did not signify as race—it signified as race-less.

Discursively constructed as race-less, Ms. Cross's sentiments about race, especially *her* race, are important. In an interview, she elaborated a meaning of race as situated and shifting according to context to describe herself. She explained that her racial identity “shifts all the time. I don't identify when I'm here. Because when I'm here and I'm with my students, I identify with them. I don't feel that I'm any color. I'm White, but I don't feel that there's any color. I don't see color when I'm around here.” In contrast, Ms. Cross admitted that she did see race outside the school walls, particularly in her neighborhood, which was a short distance from Motivated High, yet she did not expound on how her own race shifted in this landscape. As a result, the degree to which she saw herself as raced in relation to her students was unclear. For Ms. Cross, conceiving of race as shifting and situated allowed her to dis-identify racially in the classroom and to feel comfortable being deraced in the episode of interaction.

It is understandable why Ms. Cross would identify as color-less given that her understandings of race are situated in an era of “color-blind racism” in which race is not supposed to matter, racism is taken-for-granted as natural, and racial inequalities are attributed to non-racial dynamics (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). Ms. Cross and students' efforts to disassemble stereotypes and misconceptions reflected goals of making race not matter: by

rendering preconceived notions about members of racial groups irrelevant, they were able to build working relationships that were productive for learning.

Disrupting stereotypes was also useful in combating racial prejudices configured by sociopolitical and historical forces beyond the classroom walls. To recognize those sociopolitical and historical forces in the context of color-blind racism requires a conception of race as a politically-meaningful category of analysis. When Ms. Cross and Ryan noted how trends in residential and school demographics shaped stereotypical expectations of racialized cultural practices, they invoked a concept of race that refers to a population of people. If conceptually situated within sociopolitical and historical contexts that have shaped Black/White race relations, demographic data could become politically-meaningful. Thinking in such collective terms could be useful for students and teacher for interrogating, for example, how it came to be that their 11th grade English class comprised of students who identified as Black or African American were taught by a White woman or how cultural practices and language associated with particular groups have been privileged while others marginalized. Viewing race as a politically-meaningful category of analysis could make visible the consequences of race in the broader society as they impact teacher-student relationships and how the authority of Whiteness was replicated in this episode of classroom interaction characterized by demographically categorized racial difference.

The Authority of Whiteness

Although teacher and students' enduring authority relationships were preserved, their momentary authority relationships were reconfigured so that racial power dynamics

from beyond the classroom were reconfigured within the classroom. That is, the privilege and power of Whiteness was reproduced as the real target of Mike's marking and the significance of acting White became lost in the discourse. What became obscured was the critique of Whiteness as a system of power and privilege that requires Mike and other students to "talk proper" and engage in what they understood as White cultural practices in order to be deemed appropriate for a "professional" audience and admission to college.

In this sense, the discourse in this interaction could be interpreted as power-evasive discourse. According to Ruth Frankenberg (1993), power evasive discourse enables a speaker to attend to racial difference when it is comfortable, "allowing into conscious scrutiny—even conscious embrace—those differences that make the speaker feel good but continuing to evade by means of partial description, euphemism, and self-contradiction those that make the speaker feel bad" (156). In this episode of classroom interaction, Ms. Cross employed racially explicit humor to call attention to her White identity, while deflecting with humor the significance of the racial difference that contextualized their relationship. Even though Ms. Cross's humor was racially explicit, it represented only a selective engagement with race that was comfortable for her. Students responded with another power-evasive move as they de-raced Ms. Cross, disassociating her from her White identity and denying her complicity in Whiteness as a system of power and privilege. These power-evasive moves resulted in obscuring the classroom power dynamics that could, as Frankenberg describes, "generate hostility, social distance, and 'bad feelings' in general" (p. 156). By ameliorating interactional tensions that could threaten local relationships, power-evasive discourses perform relational work (Locher, 2004).

By selectively engaging in race, but not the power dynamics constructing and contextualizing race, Ms. Cross was able to comfortably contemplate difference. She seemed at ease with being de-raced.

Um, it actually – I don't know, it doesn't make me feel bad at all. I'm comfortable with it. It makes me feel that there is actually no racial tension at all. And it actually makes me feel surprised that a lot of teachers have trouble with the same kids that I have – you know, whether [the teachers are] White or Black. You know, it certainly doesn't make me feel bad. It doesn't make me – I don't know, it doesn't make me feel proud. It's interesting, and it's comfortable.

This quotation implies that Ms. Cross may be comfortable with issues of race when talk about racial differences are limited to differences in skin color, decontextualized from racial power dynamics. As a power evasive move, being de-raced allows her to deny complicity in global structures of power, indicating that she may have trouble with or be confused about reconciling her role as a White person in racist system.

It is understandable why Ms. Cross may have been uncomfortable with discussing her White identity and racism with African American students. White racial justice educator Paul Kivel (1996) points out, “Whatever our economic status, most of us become paralyzed with some measure of fear, guilt, anger, defensiveness or confusion if we are named as White when racism is being addressed” (p. 11). He explains that White people often deny their Whiteness in order to avoid accusations of being racist or avert feelings of guilt, shame, embarrassment, or hopelessness. In this interaction, it is the students who disassociated their teacher from her self-ascribed White identity and denying her complicity in Whiteness. This disassociation and denial reconfigures teacher-student authority relationships in the moment so that racial authority relations from

beyond the classroom were reproduced within the classroom, safeguarding the power and privilege of Whiteness as a system of power and positioning Ms. Cross's location within that system as unavailable for discussion. At the same time, students' dissociation of Ms. Cross functions as a politeness move that preserves their enduring authority relationships that were productive for teaching and learning English subject matter.

Politeness analysis illuminates how in this classroom, preserving local classroom relationships trumped a societal critique so that conversation about the legitimacy of Whiteness as a system of power and privilege was foreclosed. Students and teacher engaged in explicit race talk, yet they colluded to head off a discussion of racial authority relations in order to neutralize risks to their authority relationships. If the sub-textual critique of Whiteness underlying this indirection had been taken up as the main text of classroom discourse, subtextual issues of social justice could have been pursued. Ms. Cross began exploring this subtext when she asked for clarification as to what Mike meant about a salad, to which Tina answered that "the perfect guy" *eats* salad. However, after race was explicitly referenced, Ms. Cross did not pursue the cultural significance of salad eating.

Boundaries of Race Talk and Signifyin(g)

In this interaction, students and teacher generated shared understandings about the conditions under which Signifyin(g) was appropriate. Some of those conditions are illuminated by examining the boundary between Signifyin(g) and marking in this interaction. Mike marked "the perfect guy" as White. Ms. Cross positioned herself in the line of fire of Mike's marking by drawing attention to herself as White. In order to keep

Ms. Cross from becoming the target of Mike's marking, students needed to make her not-White. This was important because if students had allowed Ms. Cross to become the target, she would have been implicated in the critique of White power and privilege, which would have threatened their positive relationship.

Allowing Ms. Cross to become the target of Mike's marking would have been dangerous in another way. Because marking has the potential to lead to confrontational verbal dueling when a target is present, students needed to head off serious Signifyin(g). This required them to decline Ms. Cross's invitation to engage in verbal dueling. They avoided answering Ms. Cross's self-effacing question, "What's wrong with being White?" Instead, they repaired her social face by dissociating her from being White. This prevented the discourse from evolving into Signifyin(g).

Examining these boundaries between Signifyin(g) and marking clarifies what constitutes *appropriate* Signifyin(g). Analysis of this episode indicated that Signifyin(g) was not appropriate when it could 1) lead to serious confrontation around issues of race and spotlight the racial difference that characterized this teacher and students' interactions, 2) align this self-identified White teacher with White power and privilege, 3) seriously threaten her social face (or to put it more colloquially, make her feel uncomfortable) or 4) jeopardize their previously established authority relationships that were productive for learning subject matter.

Considering the boundaries between dialect reading and Signifyin(g) in this interaction also highlights what counted as appropriate. Ms. Cross's move to become the target of Mike's marking saved his and Cassandra's face, which were both threatened by

Cassandra's reading. In doing so, she prevented the reading from sparking confrontational Signifyin(g).

Comparing the discourse features of this interaction with other episodes of Signifyin(g) further delineates what counted as Signifyin(g) in this classroom. As was the case during other Signifyin(g) interactions, this episode was marked by heightened levels of student engagement. The participant structure afforded students considerable opportunities to participate in classroom talk, which featured enthusiastic, overlapping speech. Raucous laughter indicated that humor permeated this brief but significant interaction. However, this episode did not include extended verbal exchanges that characterize Signifyin(g) battles in the African American community, nor did it include the rhetorical strategies, competitions for status, or verbal artistry that comprise the normative practices of verbal sparring in this classroom. Ms. Cross's challenge was met with neither insult nor boasting. The prosody did not reflect the rhythmic stresses that characterized Signifyin(g), and although tonal semantics were employed to some extent by all participants, tonal variation seems to have been used less for dramatic effect than to construe meaning, as in Cassandra's condescending tone and Shaniah's disbelief. And although students were creative and innovative in their word play around skin color, this word play operated literally rather than figuratively.

Differences in Racial Understandings

What is not clear from my analysis is the degree to which participants made sense of the interaction in the same way I have. My account represents only one perspective, and that is the perspective of a researcher who is not a native speaker of African

American English and may not be privy to the shared cultural knowledge upon which the language variety is based (Green, 2002; Morgan, 2002). Considering alternative renditions entails, for example, considering whether or not Ms. Cross's relational work was necessary to prevent confrontation, or if the students held some shared understandings about marking and reading dialect that Ms. Cross—also a non-native speaker of African American English who has relied heavily on classroom-based experiences to generate her knowledge of her students' discourse practices—does not.

Analyses of Signifyin(g) interactions in previous chapters demonstrated how shared understandings about Signifyin(g) enabled Ms. Cross and students to distinguish between serious and playful messages, minimizing conflict and confrontation. Because African American discourse is based on shared cultural knowledge, such shared understandings seem equally important for discerning between serious and playful messages when marking and reading are at play. Marking tends to be most conducive to contexts in which the marker and the audience hold a mutual framework that allows them to interpret the multiple meanings embedded in the characterization (Mitchell-Kernan, 1972), while reading dialect relies on shared understandings about the conventions of language systems and their status in society (Morgan, 2002). This raises questions about opportunities that may be missed by researchers and teachers who may not participate in African American speech communities beyond the classroom.

Examining interpretations alternative to my analysis also involves considering the implications of students' relational work. Their efforts to de-race Ms. Cross so that her White identity did not become problematic, combined with her comfort with this dissociation, suggest that it may be productive to distance White teachers from structures

of White power and privilege in order to build or maintain productive classroom relationships. Is such de-racing and dissociating necessary? Thomas Kochman (1981) narrates how in a Black history course taught by three White instructors, when Black students indicted White society for racism, the instructors became defensive until a student told them, “Cool it, man; we weren’t talking about you.” The instructors were excluded from the critique of “White” or “White society” because they had already “proved themselves” or established themselves as legitimate in some way to the Black students” (p. 91). The Black students Kochman describes considered their accusations of racism toward White society as generally true, but not *categorically* so; they allowed some White people exemptions. Having already established her legitimacy with students through ongoing relationship building and by validating students’ culturally-based discourse practice and other means, perhaps Ms. Cross earned an exemption from Mike and Cassandra’s indictment of White power and privilege.

This interpretation begs the questions: What alternative approaches might White teachers take to address their Whiteness? Could positioning herself with a White identity and admitting the power differential that exists between Whites and Blacks in society have enhanced or undermined Ms. Cross’s authority? According to Thomas Kochman’s (1981) observations of multiracial classrooms, Black students do not expect Whites to admit to being racist themselves, but want Whites to acknowledge that racism affects everyone. However, he notes that a White male student garnered status among Black students by admitting that he grew up in a racially-segregated, White, working-class area and that he was working on overcoming his racist beliefs. Yet the effectiveness of any

discursive strategy to garner authority would be socially determined and contingent upon the context.

That multiple definitions of race were employed by participants in this interaction raises questions about pedagogies that advocate synchronizing teaching and learning with students' race and culture. If teachers are encouraged to provide instruction that responds to students' race, but that definition of race is always shifting, temporary, and elusive, then how are teachers to conceive of their pedagogy as responsive to students' race? What are the implications of conceiving of race as discursively constructed in interaction? These questions are important, especially because culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies are premised on assumptions that racial groups and highly ethnically-affiliated students have diverse but distinct cultures that require tailoring pedagogy to students' races and ethnicities.

Chapter X: Re-Envisioning Authority and Race

To theoretically frame this study, I situated this research within the “linguistic turn,” articulating how language “discourses into being” realities, worlds, race and authority. In concluding this research, I emphasize the critical role language has played in this study and in the classroom studied, and I highlight the critical role language could play in preparing teachers.

In the classroom, language has served as the crux of legitimacy and the means by which legitimacy was achieved. It was through discourse as language-in-use that students and teacher’s authority relationships were constructed and reflected, that commoditized authority was exchanged for other forms of capital, that negotiations for legitimacy were waged. This language-in-use has served as a resource for performing relational work, for conveying subject matter and literacy instruction, for critiquing authority relations, and for play. A particular form of language, the culturally-specific discourse practice of Signifyin(g), made the discourse available to be analyzed as cross-racial classroom discourse.

In this research, language has been both the object of the study and the means by which the study has been realized. Language continues to play a pivotal role as I “discourse into being” new visions of authority that could help White teachers build productive authority relationships with students of color, as I discourse through definitions of race, and as I make intertextual connections among literatures. Through these endeavors with language, I hope to make this case study “matter.”

Revisiting Problems of Authority

This case study of classroom interaction and relationship-building between a self-identified White teacher and Black or African American students tackled a critical issue facing majority White educators—racial difference and its practical manifestation of cultural incongruence. To address cultural asynchronization, multicultural education scholars have proposed pedagogies that entail validating students' culture as viable resources for learning, fostering academic achievement that aids in the acquisition of capital, and cultivating a sociopolitical consciousness that addresses racism and other forms of oppression.

Central to such culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies is the process of mutual accommodation through which teachers and students negotiate the legitimacy of students' home-based, cultural practices and school-based practices. How to preserve students' racial identities while pursuing educational goals represents a practical challenge that involves a sort of “balancing act” among the facets of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies. When faced with the challenge of how to legitimize a student's reading of a poetry book that incorporates “texting” language and phonetic spelling in the context of standardized test preparation, Ms. Cross identified this “balancing act” as an enduring problem of her practice.

My framing of this problem in the introductory chapter posits student-teacher authority relationships as essential to the enterprise of cross-racial teaching and learning, and literature portrayed three problems with authority particular to White teachers:

- 1) Garnering authority from students of color tends to be a problem for White teachers because of differing cultural conceptions of what counts as legitimacy
- 2) Authority issues with respect to knowledge and discipline seem intensified in classrooms with White teachers and students of color when cultural incongruence is a factor
- 3) How authority is socially negotiated as legitimate power through classroom talk can determine students' access to participation and engagement in teaching and learning

This case study has addressed these three issues of authority and illuminated the process of mutual accommodation with representations of classroom practice. Exploring the nuances of what it means for White teachers to construct authority relationships with Black students entails resituating Ms. Cross's approach to authority within warm demander approaches that were conceptualized through studies of effective Black teachers of Black students. This illuminates the nuances of cross-racial, White-to-Black teaching. Positioning Ms. Cross's classroom as a theoretically significant case for study, I elaborate a new vision of authority that includes practical forms, construing what authority may look like as enacted in the classroom. Next, I complicate the seeming seamlessness of these forms by touching on sticking points of negotiation in which issues of legitimacy remained unresolved.

To further consider how race matters for teaching and research, I articulate the multiple definitions of race that operated in the classroom studied and throughout this study, while examining politics of essentialization and authentication around the relationship between race and language. By considering the importance of cultural

knowledge and political relevance to Signifyin(g), I elaborate a useful distinction between culturally congruent and culturally responsive/relevant communication.

Situating Ms. Cross's case within literature on culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies offers insight into how previously articulated forms of authority could be enhanced in order to help teachers envision and enact their authority in ways that are more culturally responsive and relevant. By embellishing the forms of authority that emerged as salient to establishing Ms. Cross and students' productive authority relationship, the shape of a previously unarticulated vision of authority becomes discernible—a vision of what culturally relevant and responsive authority might look like as constituted in and through discourse and the legitimization of a culturally-based discourse practice.

Revisiting Warm Demander Approaches to Authority

In my review of literature in Chapter II, I described the image of the teacher as a warm demander who provides a highly structured learning environment for African American students through strict discipline and insistence that students meet her high expectations, mediated by caring relationships. That the warm demander's approach to authority is grounded in shared history and culture warranted consideration of *how* and *where* these approaches might be applicable for White teachers. This case study complements and complicates the transferability of warm demander approaches to authority to a classroom comprised of a White teacher and African American students.

Exploring the nuanced and situated nature of warm demander approaches involves teasing apart the subtle differences between Black and White teachers' authority

by resituating this case study within multicultural education literature on authority and culturally responsive classroom management, which I reviewed in Chapter 2. As my review indicated, multicultural education literature favors an “authoritative” approach for African American students that is frequently characterized as a direct discourse style (Cooper, 2003; Delpit, 1995; Obidah & Teel, 2001; Walker-Dalhouse, 2005). Depictions of classroom interaction in this study complicate this picture: Signifyin(g) offered Ms. Cross an *indirect* way to effectively enact authority while avoiding conflict, yet did not resemble portrayals of soft-spoken, non-confrontational, indirect speech often attributed to White women’s communication styles (Brantlinger, Morton, & Washburn, 1999; Thompson, 2004). This is not to say that Ms. Cross never employed a direct discourse style with positive results, or that an indirect discourse style would necessarily be effective in other classroom contexts. Yet it troubles prescriptions that teachers should employ more direct ways of communicating with African American students (Delpit, 1995) and as part of warm demander approaches to authority (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007; Brown, 2003).⁷⁵

The results of this study also complicate what culturally responsive and relevant care might look like between White teachers and African American students, particularly in relation to social justice (Parsons, 2005). Ms. Cross’s discussion of the possibility of the standardized test being biased could have lead to conversations about social inequalities and how schools can play a role in perpetuating or disrupting them. Yet her attention was drawn to how racially safe students may have felt having these

⁷⁵ Ms. Cross’s persuasive use of indirection also disrupts essentialist notions of race, gender, and communication styles, a point I return to in this discussion.

conversations in her classroom, demonstrating her concern not only about social justice, but also for how students may be injured by discussions about racism. This raises questions about how White teachers can facilitate what may be painful and injurious conversations around social inequalities in ways that are caring and sensitive to students' emotional and psychological needs. The intricacy of such an endeavor was illuminated in Chapter IX in which teacher and students' relational work was prioritized at the expense of a sociopolitical critique. Ms. Cross and students performed discursive work to preserve their positive authority relationships at the local level of face-to-face interaction instead of interrogating the global authority relations that required students who identified as African American to talk and claim they act in ways they interpreted as White in order to be considered legitimate in the eyes of a college admissions board. This points to the complexity for White teachers in facilitating conversations about social inequalities and justice while preserving relationships that are productive for learning.

Research indicates that Black teachers tend to be more comfortable having conversations with students about racial politics and that White teachers may avoid such conversations because they perceive that a color-blind stance is the most equitable approach in classrooms with African American students (Cooper, 2003). Although the propensity for color-blindness to reproduce racial inequalities in schools is well documented (Bolgatz, 2005; Lewis, 2003, 2004; Pollock, 2004), Ms. Cross's situated and selective color-blindness complicates what it means for a caring White teacher to be color-blind. Ms. Cross claimed that she did not see race when it came to building relationships in the classroom with her students, yet she acknowledged that racism existed beyond the classroom walls, reflecting a selective and situated color-blindness

and color-consciousness. She explained how building positive relationships with students served as a precursor to conversations about race, such as the talk about the test being biased:

I'm able to say things [about racism] that are true that people don't like to hear in the classroom and [...] get them to agree and see it [racism]. There's no way I'd be able to teach the tests and subjects people don't like to talk about. There have been times, I'm like, "You know, I hate to say this, but I can say this because you guys know me, this is what people see." It's a touchy subject. They accept it from me and they learn, whereas from another teacher who might not have built that relationship, they'll just view him as "whatever" [dismiss him or not take him seriously] and they'll just see him as being White and prejudice, that he doesn't like Black kids anyway.

Ms. Cross recognized that students read her as White, and she emphasized how vital it was for her to construct positive relationships with students so that they would authorize her to engage them in conversations about race. Her emphasis on students' racial safety and relationships may inform how White teachers engage students of color in critiquing social inequalities and injustices.

This case study intimates that a White teacher's authority to facilitate such critiques may be grounded in such relationships that are built over time through momentary but momentous face-to-face interactions. White teachers may need to overcome whatever experiences and perceptions students of color may have or have had with White people (Howard, 2006). In the absence of authority legitimized by the institutional role as teacher, without seeking social legitimization for their authority, White teachers may rely by default on their Whiteness and the privileges it affords to garner their authority. In contrast, because African American teachers share with African American students the experience of being read as Black, they may be conferred more

trust on the first day of school: their authority is grounded in these shared experiences. In order to become teachers themselves, teachers who identify as African American may have negotiated the challenges of maintaining their affiliation while excelling academically. These experiences could be extremely advantageous in making decisions about when to accommodate students' cultural practice and when to privilege school-based practices. Moreover, they can serve as examples that construct the teacher's authority: "I did it, so you can, too." This authority is grounded in shared experiences, just as warm demander pedagogies are grounded in the shared history and cultural traditions of African Americans (Irvine & Fraser, 1998). In building relationships with African American students, White teachers are unable to draw from these shared experiences, history, and traditions as sources of legitimacy. This is part of what it means for them to teach across racial difference.⁷⁶

Envisioning Authority

Although I intended this study's primary contributions to be practical, Ms. Cross's innovative approach to relationship-building across racial difference allowed me to take steps toward elaborating a new vision of authority, constituting a theoretically-significant case (Patton, 2002). Spiraling out from a basic construct of authority as socially legitimated power, I elaborated four overlapping constructs of authority as a process, product, relationship, and forms of practice. Because they span the multiple

⁷⁶ Although White teachers may not be able to fully identify with African American students' experiences, they have the capacity for empathizing across racial difference, a point which I explore in this discussion.

facets of classroom life, these constructs can take into consideration how authority is socially constructed in and through normative, everyday practices.

Tracing the evolution of this study’s research questions illustrates how these constructs were instrumental in addressing the problems with authority White teachers face. (See Figure X-1.) The questions were shaped by the problems I identified around authority and racial difference in the introduction, the theoretical framework I derived based on how scholars have conceived of authority and race as discursive, and what I identified in the classroom discourse as significant for illuminating issues of race and authority, namely Signifyin(g).

Figure X-1 Evolution of Research Questions

Construct	Chapter I Introduction of the Problem	Chapter III Theoretical Framework	Chapter V
Authority as Process	<i>How do a White teacher and students of color negotiate authority across racial difference?</i>	<i>How does power become socially legitimated as authority? How do teacher and students construct and negotiate authority across racial difference?</i>	<i>How does Signifyin(g) function?</i>
Authority as Product	<i>How can White teachers garner authority from students of color? How can they conceptualize legitimate sources of authority?</i>	<i>How is authority as a product garnered and accumulated?</i>	<i>What counts as Signifyin(g)? For what commodities can Signifyin(g) be exchanged?</i>
Authority as Relationship	<i>How can White teachers and students of color build productive authority relationships that engage students in curriculum and instruction, create access to classroom discourse, and minimize power disparities?</i>	<i>How do teacher and students build and construct across racial difference authority relationships that are productive for learning?</i>	<i>How does Signifyin(g) build authority relationships?</i>

<p>Authority as Forms of Practice</p>	<p><i>How can culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies be clarified through representations of classroom practice?</i></p>	<p><i>What forms characterize authority in a classroom in which racial difference is a factor?</i></p>	<p><i>What forms does Signifyin(g) take?</i></p>
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Conceiving of authority as product, process, and relationship allowed me to illustrate the process by which Ms. Cross accumulated authority and built with students authority relationships from one moment to the next in ways that evolved as normative. The analysis in Chapter VI illustrates how Ms. Cross used Signifyin(g) to manage the classroom and discipline students' misbehavior. Barbed compliments, barbed praise, and capping operated through indirection that allowed students to preserve their social face during moments of reproach. Through these momentary interactions, Ms. Cross and students negotiated authority over process in ways that appeared seamless (Oyler, 1996a). It was through the moment-to-moment interactions that Ms. Cross accumulated authority: when the class re-engaged in the lesson, Cindy put away the mirror, and Calvin sat down and brought his own paper to class. Each time students authorized Ms. Cross to shape their behavior and cooperated to create a productive classroom environment, they allocated her authority that accumulated to more firmly establish their enduring authority relationships.

This analysis warrants new ways of thinking about classroom management and discipline so as to highlight their educational purposes. Instead of approaching them as means of controlling students' behavior, teachers can envision them as *cooperative* methods of fostering students' resilience (Bondy, Ross, Gallingame, and Hambacher, 2007). Reframing discipline and classroom management as shaping students' behavior and co-creating with students a productive learning environment is enabled by a vision of

authority as socially-legitimated in classroom interaction, rather than being grounded in the institutional role of teacher (Cothran & Ennis, 1997) or the threat of sanctions (Pace, 2003a).

Conceiving of authority and race as product, process, relationship, and forms of practice aids in envisioning how authority and race permeate the multiple facets of classroom life. Combining these four constructs with conceptualizations of race and authority as symbiotically and socially constituted through discourse generated a theoretical framework that yielded innovative understandings about authority. The alignment of this theoretical framework with a methodological approach that considers discourse as language-in-use, reflective and constructive, and situated within multiple layers of context comes within reach of the theoretical coherence for which I strived in Chapter III.

The fitness of this theoretical framework appeared in Chapter IV as facets of the “It Factor” became distinguishable through critical moments. When Ms. Cross facilitated a class discussion to expose the racial bias in the government-mandated, standardized test, she guided students toward a sociopolitical critique of racialized authority relations, positioning herself as an ally alongside her African American students against racism. Although this critique represents a single pedagogical moment, its impact was enduring. Another critical moment flashed by when Ms. Cross reproached Calvin because of his miscued “response” to her “call” and immediately sought him out to repair their relationship, demonstrating a preference for *addressing conflict* in relationships over *avoiding confrontation*, a communication style attributed more to African American culture than to White (Teel & Obidah, 2001; Kochman, 1981). The notion that particular

communication practices are an inherent outgrowth of racial identity was disrupted by contrasting students' interaction with Ms. Cross with that of the CEA Prep instructor. The importance of the discursive work Ms. Cross did to construct and maintain positive authority relationships with students was illustrated in her silence on a particular Thursday as students received test preparation from the instructor who had no knowledge of the classroom norms or opportunity to establish her own. These critical moments gave substance to the tacit, invisible practices that comprised the "charisma" of the "It Factor." Because these practices were part of participants' everyday interaction, participants may not have recognized them as constructions of raced authority. This project endeavored to make such constructions of authority visible and recognizable as cross-racial authority by presenting episodes of classroom interaction that depicted authority as practiced in forms.

Ms. Cross's authority as a White teacher competent in communicating with African American students was constructed as she displayed her tacit understandings of the complex rhetorical situation of Signifyin(g) in the forms of verbal dueling and encoded messages. She validated students' culturally-based discourse practice in the classroom; in exchange, students authorized her to engage them in teaching and learning. Through this process of legitimization, multiple forms of authority—constructed in some ways that aligned with the principles of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies—emerged as important for understanding how this White teacher built positive, enduring authority relationships with students of color.

Enacting Authority

Ms. Cross and students' engagement in Signifyin(g), a discourse practice unique to the African American community, was vital to the construction and negotiation of authority relationships across their racial difference. They employed Signifyin(g) in various ways to construct overlapping, multiple forms of authority that represented the character or mode in which authority took shape. Some of the forms reflected the grounds upon which their legitimacy was based while others implicated what teachers and students were authorized to do once they garnered that authority. Assembling these forms across the discourse analyses of eight episodes of classroom interaction construes how Ms. Cross's use of Signifyin(g) enabled her to earn and enact authority as a White teacher of African American students.

Ms. Cross's authority as communicative competence in Signifyin(g) was socially-constructed as the students applauded her deployment of the rhetorical strategies, verbal artistry, and figurative language that garnered status in verbal dueling. Status accrued as a sparrer was exchanged for the authority to influence the flow of interaction and participate in classroom discourse. The participation structure engendered in episodes of verbal dueling included prosodic, rhythmic, overlapping speech patterns that reflected students' engagement in Signifyin(g). Because this participation structure replicated patterns of discourse in African American speech communities (Lee, 2007), it increased students' access to and engagement in classroom discourse. During verbal dueling, students were invited to engage, no matter what role they played in the interaction: verbal dueler, audience, or something in between.

As Ms. Cross demonstrated knowledge of literary devices students recognized as English subject matter, her communicative competence and status translated into professional authority as an English teacher (Pace, 2003). When describing Ms. Cross's influence as their English teacher, Mike explained that she was good with words. Mack elaborated with a story about how he had walked out of another class because he deemed the teacher incompetent, saying that he could never walk out on Ms. Cross's class because "she know what she' talkin' about." Although these students did not explicitly identify the elements of Ms. Cross's verbal artistry, they recognized it as part of a rich, engaging English class. Because verbal dueling operates through figurative language and poetic features, Ms. Cross's familiarity with literary devices accrued through her English background likely afforded her an advantage in verbal competitions compared with teachers who may be less-versed in literary conventions.

In addition, Ms. Cross's use of Signifyin(g) positioned her professional authority as pedagogical knowledge. To summarize the main point of a lesson, Ms. Cross used hyperbole, metaphor, and imagery, keying students' performance frame in the midst of standardized English subject matter test preparation. Using Signifyin(g) in this way heightened students' engagement in learning by signaling that they needed to listen attentively in order to understand how language was being used and make sense of the multiple layers of meaning embedded in the Signifyin(g) (Lee, 2007). For African American students familiar with Signifyin(g), this represented a culturally congruent mode of communication.

Authorizing play similarly enhanced students' engagement. Inviting students to play a game about which they held extensive everyday knowledge positioned them as the co-producers of knowledge. This dynamic is most apparent in the verbal duel "Who Are *You*?" in which Mike and Ms. Cross negotiated the role of the audience in Signifyin(g) and in doing so, oscillated between the positions expert and novice. Playing with institutionalized authority relations in that moment allowed them to reconfigure local teacher-student dynamics from the teacher as "all-knowing" and students as "know-nothings (or at least as know-very-littles)" (Ladson-Billings, 1994). During these playful interactions, authority disparities with respect to knowledge that characterize many classrooms of minority students were minimized. Play operated as both a source of legitimacy that constructed Ms. Cross's authority and as an enactment of authority through which she authorized students to engage in Signifyin(g).

Ms. Cross's use of Signifyin(g) operated as a cultural frame of reference that allowed Ms. Cross and students to address what they considered racist or oppressive

practices. Critiquing the test's potential bias and resisting the pressures it imposed constituted moves toward a sociopolitical critique of the authority relations that made the test seem vital to the students, teachers, and administration at Metro High. In the local context of "pep talks" at the school site, Signifyin(g) afforded students and teacher temporary release from this pressure and the opportunity to play with authority relationships. Ms. Cross's authorization of Signifyin(g) as play enabled her and students to negotiate the societal value of her "million dolla" novel and Mike's "billion dolla" rap, spurring a competition between hip hop and disciplinary literacy. In this verbal duel, Signifyin(g) operated as an interpretive lens through which Ms. Cross and students "read" and critiqued the hierarchical authority relations surrounding the test-driven literacy that dominated their discourse. Authorizing Signifyin(g) marked another move toward an alliance: with the qualities of an "improvised political cartoon" (Varenne & Mullooly, 2006), Signifyin(g) enabled participants to read and critique power relations between their multiple literacies and the "traditional," government-mandated test-driven literacy. By initiating and authorizing sociopolitical critiques, Ms. Cross positioned herself in alliance with her students against what they perceived as an oppressive and potentially racist policy.

Paradoxically, another way Ms. Cross constructed her authority through alliance-building was by *engaging* students in the test. In and through the classroom discourse, the politics of the test and its traditional conception of literacy became understood as racialized in ways that engendered students' engagement in test preparation. Performing well on the test was viewed as a way to challenge people's perceptions of Black students and garner cultural and economic capital in school and society. By allying with students

to challenge racist perceptions and increase their access to educational and occupational opportunities in the broader, social context, Ms. Cross garnered authority as an ally

This depiction of how Ms. Cross earned authority through alliance-building adds to representations of White teachers who engage students of color in critiques about how racial groups were portrayed in the curriculum (Hyland, 2005) and explicitly confront issues of racism and oppression in community-based action projects (Schultz & Oyler, 2006).

Negotiating Legitimacy

In some ways, Ms. Cross's use of Signifyin(g) made her authority appear seamless as students authorized her to teach them. However, embedded in these episodes of Signifyin(g) interactions were the accommodations students and teacher made to achieve their common interests of teaching and learning while allowing students to maintain their culture. At times, these negotiations went smoothly, representing mutual accommodation; at other times, interactions were characterized by negotiations for legitimacy that remained unresolved. Illuminating how the legitimacy of students' home-based cultural practices and school-based practices were negotiated entails identifying patterns that span the results generated through discourse analysis and interpretive ethnography.

Mutual Accommodation

Spanning the three critical moments and eight episodes of interaction is woven a common thread that depicts how Ms. Cross made decisions about when to accommodate

and when to ask students to accommodate, decisions that are difficult in practice (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, and Curran, 2004), momentary but momentous. The principle by which Ms. Cross made such decisions seems to be that she accommodated students' cultural practices when they aligned with or did not disrupt her instructional goals, and she required students to accommodate when she deemed their practices in conflict with her goals. Generally, Ms. Cross accommodated students' cultural practices within certain boundaries that promoted their academic learning. Mack's rap was acceptable, but not as the introduction to an essay. Verbal dueling was acceptable, when it was authorized through contextualization cues. Play was OK, when it functioned as a strategy of resilience. And when students initiated verbal duels as Mike did in the Million Dolla Novel episode, Ms. Cross seized the opportunity to incorporate her educational goals and amplify the value of disciplinary literacy.

In contrast, Ms. Cross required students to make accommodations for school-based practices when their behavior, language, or literacy practice was not aligned with her goals. For example, behavior that prevented students from engaging in teaching and learning was reproached—Cindy checking herself out in a mirror; Calvin socializing and unprepared with paper; and the class not recalling what they were supposed to have learned in a prior lesson. It was appropriate for students to joke around with Ms. Cross, but not when she was facilitating a conversation about a “deeper,” more serious issue, such as the possibility of racial bias in the test, because it undermined her goal of motivating students. Literacy practices like reading Black lyrical poetry with its texting language and phonetic spelling that did not align with her instructional goals of promoting “proper grammar” were deemed illegitimate in the classroom.

Students made accommodations to preserve their positive authority relationships with their teacher. This entailed establishing boundaries for Signifyin(g) that precluded aligning Ms. Cross with an undesirable White identity associated with power and privilege. In prioritizing this relational work, they sacrificed voicing the tensions they experienced when required to talk in a way they perceived incongruent with their racial identity. Their accommodation expressed not only the care and appreciation they felt for Ms. Cross, but also their shared commitment to her instructional goals.

Most of Ms. Cross's requests for accommodation were met with cooperation rather than conflict. What minimized the conflict in the moment-by-moment interactions was the way Ms. Cross mitigated students' threats to their social face and stake in the interaction using Signifyin(g) as a politeness move that made her exercise of power palatable (Pace, 2006). Over time, she legitimized students' discourse practice of Signifyin(g), and in exchange, they made the accommodations she requested, authorizing her to set the agenda for teaching and learning.

Ongoing Negotiations

Generally, these principles of practices seemed to work for Ms. Cross and the students. Despite Ms. Cross's legitimization of students' discourse practice of Signifyin(g), the legitimacy of language constituted an ongoing site of negotiation. Ms. Cross wrestled with how to legitimize the grammar of African American English when she perceived it conflicted with her instructional goals of preparing students for standardized test and the world beyond the classroom, which privileged Standard English. Instead of using terms such as Standard, General, or African American English

that portray language systems as dialects, Ms. Cross and students relied on two locally-meaningful, but limiting categories of language: “slang” and “talking proper”. Examining participants’ discourse and understandings around the local terms “slang” and “talking proper” illuminates the tensions and problems of practice that can surface around negotiating the legitimacy language.

Part of the tension around what counted as legitimate language may be attributed to participants’ lack of shared understandings about the meanings of talking proper, which would have made it difficult for students to meet Ms. Cross’s expectations for standard language use. To students, “talking proper” referred to pronunciation, while to Ms. Cross, “talking proper” meant “standard English.” For students, translating from African American English to standard English would require far more than modifying pronunciation: it could involve adapting the vocabulary and grammatical structure (Green, 2002). Clearer, mutual understandings of “talking proper” could have enabled conversations around what was involved in translating from one dialect to the other.

“Slang” and “talking proper” were meaningful in that they reflected degrees of formality. Yet approaching the transition from “slang” to “talking proper” as a register shift, or a movement along a continuum of appropriateness, overlooked the tension around identity students of color may experience in switching from one language or dialect to another. Students in 4th period raised this issue when they characterized what it meant to talk to “professionals” as acting White, while students in 3rd period described this code switching as acting fake. Ms. Cross recognized how closely tied students’ identities were to African American English: “You know, the language they use is so much a part of their culture, and they’re connected and attached to it.” Yet she was

reluctant to talk with them about their affinity for their home-based dialect. Ms. Cross felt doing so would undermine her instructional goals of teaching students to code switch for situations such as interviews. When I asked her if calling language a dialect might be helpful in ameliorating some of the tension around language, she responded,

I don't know. I almost think it would create more [tension]. I think it would make them view more White versus Black. [...] I almost think that would add fuel to the fire instead of just [saying], "It's all slang," and making sure that it's not just *African American* slang because White people use slang, too. Not all Black people do. But you can never use slang on an interview no matter what color you are. [...] You know, I never thought of actually calling it African American Vernacular English because that sort of divides it – I don't know – in my mind, that sort of makes it enough to make more divisions.

She speculated that defining what counted as "slang" in terms of African American English could be divisive, contributing to what she perceived as students' resistance to code switching.

This represented another point about which students and teacher held misunderstandings. In focus groups students unanimously agreed that it was necessary to change how they talked for different audiences. They just wanted it acknowledged that code-switching for them meant more than adapting their language to an audience or situation—it meant shifting their image to mask their everyday practices and cultural identity. Mike conveyed this sentiment when he characterized "the perfect guy" as not only "talking proper," but engaging in cultural practices students understood as associated with Whites. Because non-standard grammatical forms of English, such as African American English, were lumped under the term "slang," Ms. Cross and students

were limited in their ability to use classroom discourse as a resource for engaging in conversations around the significance of code-switching from students' culturally-based dialect to standard English. Talking exclusively in terms of register as degrees of formality made addressing the issue of what counted as legitimate language in society difficult.

Avoiding terminology that would define language use in terms of dialects also made it difficult in some moments for participants to discuss what counted as legitimate language in the classroom. For instance, obscuring the relationship between language, literacies, and racial identity may have prevented Ms. Cross from considering the literary value of the poetry book *N'nocent 7age* (Innocent Rage). "Dialect-rich," Kweisi's book of poetry not only includes texting language, but also phonetic spellings, lexicon, and grammatical structure that characterizes urban poetry (Bornfield, 2009). Inspired by the tragic murder of his younger brother, Kweisi's poetry reflects his desire to use art to cope with adversity, and his topics range from relationships to politics (Bornfield, 2009). By discounting the poetry because of its "illegitimate" grammar, opportunities were missed to highlight for students the value of what has been called "The New Black Poetry" (Smitherman, 2007) and how literary works can serve as a strategy of resilience. If students and teacher could talk about the affordances and limitations of dialect in literature, then they may have been able to have conversations about what counted as legitimate language in the classroom.

Instead, using the terms "slang" and "proper" allowed participants to avoid addressing the racialization of dialects. Yet this racially neutral terminology represented participants' racially-imbued understandings. Chelsea explained how slang served to

mark membership in cultural groups: “It’s just like going in a White neighborhood and using words that we use. They don’t know what we talkin’ about.” Ms. Cross told a story that illustrated the fine line she danced as a White teacher in terms of her cultural group membership: “Mack was using slang and I didn’t get it [...] I’m like, ‘Time out. I’m having a White moment.’ Oh, of course. Come back. I’m Black again.” These examples point to students’ and teacher’s understandings of “slang” as racialized, although the term masks the role race plays in determining what counts as legitimate language and what is categorized as “slang.” The normative practice of using racially-neutral terminology to describe language that was racialized in society constrained how Ms. Cross and students could discuss what counted as legitimate language and how what counted became legitimate.

The two terms “slang” and “talking proper” enabled Ms. Cross and students to discursively maneuver around the role race played in determining what constituted legitimacy in the classroom and in society. Despite Ms. Cross and students’ ability to use Signifyin(g) to build productive authority relationships across their racial difference, race represented a confounding factor in their ongoing negotiations around what counted as legitimate language. Students discursively maneuvered to avoid Signifyin(g) when it held the potential to make race matter in ways that threatened their authority relationship with Ms. Cross.

Making Race Matter

Tracing the discursive construction of race as students and teacher negotiated the legitimacy of language and cultural practices illuminated how in this moment students

de-raced Ms. Cross in order to preserve their positive authority relationships, rendering demographic categories of race and racial difference temporarily meaningless. As subtextual understandings about race surfaced explicitly in this talk, students made race irrelevant by creating a new, locally-meaningful racial category to describe their teacher as “not-White,” “pale,” “pink,” and “red.” In discursively constructing a new category of race to suit the exigencies of the situation, the students troubled what it meant to act or talk Black and act or talk White. In doing so, they disrupted essentialist conceptions of authentic language as a natural outgrowth of racial identity and notions of culture as innate practices shared unequivocally by members of a particular race. These assumptions were reflected in the dialectal features of language they used to align and distance themselves and each other in relation to racial groups. For students these essentialist understandings of what constituted Black and White cultural and linguistic practices served as a framework for making sense of this interaction and were useful for them in this way.

The Ethics and Politics of Essentializing Race and Language

Like her students, Ms. Cross performed discursive work to make race not matter, and the way she used classroom discourse to overcome challenges associated with demographically-defined racial difference became the focus of this dissertation. She described how “joking around” with students neutralized their racial difference, which she perceived as potentially impinging on their relationships. What Ms. Cross referred to as “joking around” with students enabled her as a White teacher to “relate” to and build positive relationships with her students, who were different from her. Students identified

this “joking around” as a highly engaging and motivating aspect of Ms. Cross’s classroom, and their enthusiasm was observable in the discourse as laughter, overlapping speech, and choruses of exclamations. For Ms. Cross and students, this particular way of “joking around” represented a culturally congruent discourse practice that discursively constructed solidarity across teacher and students’ demographically-defined racial difference.

To participants, the discourse practice was so normative that it seemed unremarkable. Students talked about “going back and forth” as practices they had engaged in at home, in their neighborhood, and with each other since they were children. In other words, they characterized it as a practice in which they had engaged over time and across contexts and as a home-based discourse practice. They did not define this “going back and forth” as Signifyin(g). Nor was Ms. Cross familiar with the term Signifyin(g). But she had heard yo’ mama jokes. When I described Signifyin(g), she looked puzzled and shrugged, noting that all you had to do to perform a yo’ mama joke was say, “Yo’ mama,” with a challenging tone and confrontational gesture when someone launched an insult at you. Ms. Cross and students did not realize the important role this culturally congruent discourse practice played in the life of the classroom and building their authority relationships.

Yet Ms. Cross’s language crossing—her use of language not typically affiliated with adult-aged White women—was quite remarkable, requiring a deep understanding of language socialization (Lee, 2007). Being able to “read” what students said and did when they were Signifyin(g) entailed interpreting students’ ways of thinking, feeling, and communicating, while employing Signifyin(g) for classroom management necessitated a

deep understanding of how to use language appropriately in different rhetorical situations with different conceptions of audience⁷⁷. Making visible such taken-for-granted, often invisible, but remarkable practices as they operated to construct authority in this particularly cross-racial context was the goal of this project, especially because what constitutes culturally congruent communication between White teachers and students of color is an unresolved issue in the multicultural education literature.

Conveying the value of what this teacher and students were doing when they engaged in this culturally congruent discourse practice required me to temporarily invoke an essentialist concept of racial identity pre-deterministically linked with language. Racializing the discursive practice participants described as “joking around” and “going back-and-forth” by naming it “Signifyin(g)” discursively constructed their “verbal banter” as a culturally-based, uniquely African American discourse practice as portrayed in literary theory (Gates, 1988), English education (Lee, 1993; 2007) and sociolinguistics (Mitchell-Kernan, 1972; Morgan, 2002; Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 1977). Racializing the discourse practice was important for unpacking the “It Factor” and highlighting the value of Ms. Cross’s aptitude for relationship-building *across racial difference*.

Making my use of essentialist discourses explicit clarifies my assumptions and conveys reflexivity in how I have articulated the relationship between language and race. Sociolinguist Mary Bucholtz (2003) explains how essentialism may be useful for promoting a shared identity for challenging inequalities by highlighting the value of

⁷⁷ See Chapter VI for an elaboration of the sophisticated concept of audience needed to Signify.

stigmatized dialects. Such “strategic essentialism” (Spivak, 1988) served as the foundation for sociolinguistic studies of African American Vernacular English dating back to the 1960s. These studies were vital in validating the legitimacy of a dialect that had been considered substandard, unsystematic, and not even a language. In these studies, the dialect patterns of inner city African American youth were analyzed to represent the language of the entire African American community, resulting in over-simplifying the relationship between racial identity and language. Subsequent studies have raised questions about what constitutes authentic dialect use by “real speakers” of “real language” (Bucholtz, 1999; 2003; Sweetland, 2002).

The Ethics and Politics of Authenticity

Although Bucholtz (2003) acknowledges that such strategic essentialization is still an important tool for addressing inequality, she advocates that sociolinguists view authenticity as socially constituted in interaction through a process of authentication. Recent research has examined authenticating practices around European Americans’ use of AAVE. In one study, a European American male youth tended to use the most emblematic features of AAVE such as lexicon and used few of the systematic grammatical features (Bucholtz, 1999). In contrast, a European American female deemed authentic among African American native speakers consistently and naturally used AAVE speech patterns in unremarkable ways, distancing herself from “inauthentic” users by avoiding aspects of the language variety that were considered stereotypical (Sweetland, 2002). The important contribution these studies make is that what counts as authentic use of AAVE by White speakers is contingent upon the interactional context of

the use, and the process whereby language use is authenticated operates through a social process of legitimization, complicating essentialized notions of race and language.

The ethics and politics of authenticity that characterize teachers' language use which seems to defy their racial designation are important considerations. Teachers who identify or are read as African American are less likely to face questions about authenticity associated with their use of African American English and Signifyin(g). Instead, they may face issues of authenticity associated with their exclusive or frequent use of standard or general English and "White" ways of communicating (Kochman, 1981). In contrast, because White people have historically engaged in practices of cultural domination (Howard, 2006), White teachers who employ African American discourse practices may be subject to accusations of imitation, appropriation, oppression, or colonization if they are not deemed authentic (Hyland, 2005). For White teachers, the fine lines between acceptable use, appropriation, oppression, colonization, and imitation may lie within historical and cultural power dynamics that contextualize the interaction and the intricacies of students' authenticating practices. This involves exploring the intersection of global processes that rely on essentialist concepts of race and the local discursive construction of race and the legitimacy of language use in face-to-face interaction.

Authenticating White Use of Black Language

Whereas in "White culture," "imitation is the highest form of flattery," creative duplication is considered an insult in the African American community. African American students may be especially sensitive to portrayals of their spoken language

because of the primacy placed on originality in verbal artistry and performance (Kochman, 1981). In addition, imitation is often associated with marking, a mode of characterization in Black narrative in which the marker affects the voice and mannerisms of a speaker to indirectly comment on his or her background, personality, or intent (Mitchell-Kernan, 1972). As the analysis in Chapter IX illustrates, marking may be employed to challenge the legitimacy of a speaker's membership in a cultural group and indirectly convey critical or antagonistic underlying attitudes toward language. Because imitation is socially unacceptable in the African American community, it is especially important for a White teacher of African American students to be deemed authentic when using culturally-based discourse to legitimize students' cultural practices.

Because African Americans have struggled for the legitimacy of their language (Perry & Delpit, 1998; Smitherman, 1981), they may be especially aware of selective appropriations of African American discourse practices by people who can try on "the skin that they speak" only to take it off when it becomes burdensome (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002). Some allege that when Whites appropriate Black language as a cultural art form, they participate in a historical practice of cultural seizure for capital gain as reflected in the usurpation of art forms not their own (Johnson, 2003). Read against this backdrop of cultural appropriation, oppression, and colonization, a White teacher's use of African American discourse may incite the indignation of African American students (Kochman, 1981).

Authenticating Ms. Cross's Use of Signifyin(g)

Ms. Cross's use of Signifyin(g) was deemed authentic by her students, and illuminating the process of authentication entails examining the nuances of her discourse with attention to the local interactional and contextual factors that made her language crossing socially acceptable. One reason why Ms. Cross's use of Signifyin(g) may have been deemed appropriate was because she cultivated her communicative competence through authentic means: she learned to "go back and forth" with students through classroom interactions with native speakers. Her process of learning through trial and error this African American discourse practice probably made her appear vulnerable, imperfect, and willing to accept feedback—an intentional strategy she employed to create a safe environment for students to receive her feedback on their writing.⁷⁸ Learning to Signify from students positioned them as "experts" and her as a "novice," which ultimately garnered her authority to provide writing instruction.

Like a White female whose use of the dialect of AAVE was deemed authentic, Ms. Cross's use appeared natural to students rather than contrived because she acquired it through teacher-student interaction. To elaborate, Ms. Cross's use of Signifyin(g) may have seemed aligned with her identity, and with students' expectations of her, as a teacher. When Ms. Cross used Signifyin(g) to discursively construct an identity as an English Language Arts teacher; she was not using it for the purpose of claiming an

⁷⁸ When I met Ms. Cross, she minimized the risks associated with participating in this research, acknowledging that it would serve as an opportunity to develop professionally and learn. She described how she modeled this approach to risk-taking with her students as part of writing instruction. The risks Ms. Cross took in participating in this research reflected the pedagogical risks she was willing to take in the classroom.

identity as an African American. She tended to stay within the boundaries of her repertoire of practice in which she had engaged for an extended period of time. Ms. Cross did not try to imitate the grammar of African American English (Green, 2002), only the prosody, some pronunciation, and verbal artistry—features of Signifyin(g) that align with English Language Arts curriculum and her identity as an English teacher.

Another reason why students may have authorized Ms. Cross's participation in Signifyin(g) as authentic may be because of the nature of Signifyin(g). The stakes of being deemed (in)authentic may have been mediated by Ms. Cross's engagement in *this* particular discourse practice among the many oral traditions of African Americans, home-based language practices, and multiple literacies. Presenting and challenging claims to authenticity constituted normative practices in teacher and students' verbal sparring so that boasting and insulting related to assertions of (in)authenticity were understood as false and exaggerated as participants constructed, through the performance of verbal art, an *image* of authenticity, rather than an *authentic identity*. Because Signifyin(g) affords such stake inoculation, it may have been the ideal discourse practice with which she could experiment safely, especially given her familiarity with verbal performance, rhetorical strategies, and poetic and figurative language. Relying more heavily on the rhetorical strategy of boasting as opposed to insulting, as Ms. Cross did, may have offered her an enhanced experimental safeguard as she tested the boundaries of what constituted Signifyin(g) in this classroom with these students.

In addition to the features of the discourse practice, the previously established relationships Ms. Cross and students had built over time may have played a role in authenticating her use of Signifyin(g). Ms. Cross's language use operated in the context

of her approach to resolving conflict through open discussion, discussions of issues of race and oppression related to the test, and a visiting teacher's communication style that was remarkable in its cultural incongruence when contrasted with Ms. Cross's style. Using students' home-based modes of communication enabled Ms. Cross to tap into students' social network and establish solidarity so that her socially-legitimated authenticity constructed through Signifyin(g) served as a source of legitimacy for her classroom authority.

Authenticating Methodologies

Situated in the interactional context, authenticity may operate as means of earning authority for White teachers who engage students in ways of communicating they consider part of students' repertoires of practice. Because of the politics around language appropriation, colonization, imitation, and oppression, a White teachers' use of language "not their own" may be an especially convoluted issue. In order to assess the authenticity of a White teacher's use of "students'" language, it is important to consider the global and local context of the interaction. When language crossing is separated from its interactive context, it is more likely to be deemed inauthentic by researchers who use objective linguistic criteria to identify "real" speakers of "real" language, regardless of the participants' authentication of the discourse (Bucholtz, 2002; Sweetland, 2002).

The view that what counts as authentic language use by authentic speakers is situated and contextual raises ethical and methodological questions for researchers. For instance, what are our ethical responsibilities as discourse analysts when examining the relationship between race and language? Students deemed Ms. Cross's use of their home-

based discourse practice of “going back-and-forth” as authentic with respect to their teacher-student identities, but seemingly unrelated to their racial identities. What are our obligations as researchers in pointing out markers of racial difference and processes of racialization that contextualize interactions which employ language participants do not recognize as raced? Although times may have changed making essentialist versions of race less important (Bucholtz, 2003), teachers are still developing their ability to legitimize students’ language while providing them access to the dominant culture (Delpit, 2002). In a parallel wrestling match with legitimacy, researchers may struggle with legitimizing the perspectives of participants while rendering the work they do as politically meaningful, even if they do not recognize it as such. Bucholtz (2003) advocates a “reflexive sociolinguistics” that considers how language, history, and culture contribute to social inequalities, acknowledges that discursively constructed social identities are temporary and positional, and conveys a “healthy suspicion of an unexamined notion of authenticity as the standard” of research (p. 411).

Revisiting Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogies

In this study, “culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies” has referred to the combination of distinct but complementary approaches that connote the political significance of racial categories as well as the diversity within those categories as conveyed through the complex, fluid, and dynamic qualities of ethnicity and culture. Situating Ms. Cross’s case within literature on these approaches illuminates how race and cultural knowledge matter in culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies.

Culturally Congruent versus Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy

Although Ms. Cross was a White, non-native speaker of African American English, she was able to learn by interacting with students how to engage in a version of classroom Signifyin(g) that was socially authenticated by her students and productive for their learning. She employed the discourse practice effectively enough to engage students in curriculum and instruction and create opportunities for them to participate in classroom discourse. She used Signifyin(g) to include as productive members of the classroom students who may be considered “problems” by other teachers. Positioning them with the autonomy to change their behavior without losing face and authorizing their modes of communication minimized the potential for conflict and confrontation that might have resulted in disciplinary action. By legitimizing a form of communication at which students were proficient, Ms. Cross minimized authority disparities with respect to knowledge.

In these ways, Ms. Cross’s version of classroom Signifyin(g) enabled her to navigate the three challenges White teachers typically face with authority. In this sense, Ms. Cross’s legitimization of students’ home-based discourse practice reflected culturally congruent communication, which multicultural education scholars have identified as a helpful way for a teacher to earn authority with students of color.

However, because the culturally-specific discourse practice of Signifyin(g) is based upon shared knowledge of African American culture (Morgan, 2002; Smitherman, 1977), a white teacher’s version of classroom Signifyin(g) is likely to look drastically different than an African American teacher’s. As I noted in Chapter 5, representations of

teachers Signifyin(g) in classrooms with students are scarce but noteworthy. A pioneer in this field, Dr. Carol Lee (1993; 2007) has provided rich representations of her own culturally responsive teaching with African American students, illuminating the value of Signifyin(g) as a meaningful discourse practice and a useful resource for literary analysis and classroom management. Ms. Cross's use of Signifyin(g) differed from that of Dr. Lee's in critical ways, creating another opportunity to tease apart the nuances of cross-racial teaching.

While Ms. Cross's "joking around" was a strategic effort to relate with students across their racial difference, her use of Signifyin(g) did not reflect cognizance of the cultural and political significance of the discourse practice. To explain, Ms. Cross's discourse practice more closely reflected a color-blind approach that rendered race meaningless than a color-cognizant approach that would portray race as meaningful. In this regard, Ms. Cross's pedagogy may be representative of that of majority White teachers who have little exposure to or experience with culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies prior to assuming a teaching position in a cross-racial environment. This suggests that distinguishing between culturally congruent communication and culturally relevant and responsive communication could be productive for teacher educators endeavoring to prepare teachers for cross-racial classroom environments.

Engaging Ms. Cross's case in conversation with literature on culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies clarifies and elaborates this distinction. Shared frames of reference, understandings about participation, and normative discourse practices may be components of "good teaching" (Gay, 2000). More than "good teaching," culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies involve using students' language and culture as

resources for learning. To make academic learning relevant, accessible, and effective for students, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogues draw upon students' cultural knowledge, frames of reference, history, experiences, and practices to foster students' cultural competence so that they recognize and value their culture (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; 2006; Nieto, 1996). This implies that to practice such a pedagogy, a teacher would need to recognize a student's home-based practice as culturally-based and have the cultural knowledge to guide students in understanding the practice's cultural significance.

Beyond "good teaching," culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies emphasize the importance of cultivating students' sociopolitical consciousness in order to challenge social inequalities and combat prejudices, racism, and other forms of oppression (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Teachers, the majority of whom are White, tend to struggle with this facet of the pedagogy, largely because they have not developed their own sociopolitical awareness and racial consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2006). To reflect culturally responsive and relevant communication would require a strategic effort to relate to students' culture and race as a politically meaningful category.

For teachers, being able to recognize students' discourse practices as culturally-grounded and politically-saturated seems far more complex than noting students' demographic data or assessing their skin color and reading books about the culture and history of people with those racial designations. It would require a complex framework for "reading" students' race and language as discursively constructed in classroom interaction. Reading students' race and language in this way would involve considering how students' observed discourse practices might be interpreted against a backdrop of

their cultural history and community-based language-use. Acquiring knowledge about the shared history and practices of cultural groups would require teachers to employ a temporary, strategic essentialism that links race closely, but not pre-deterministically, to linguistic and cultural practices. This cultural knowledge could usefully serve as the interpretive framework for “reading” students’ race and language as discursively constructed in classroom interaction.

Highlighting the political significance of students’ culturally-grounded discourse practices entails thinking about race as a demographic group located within structural relations of power. This requires teachers to understand social inequalities as structural, that is, configured and replicated by institutions that privilege some groups of people over others, rather than attributable to the character or actions of individuals of those groups (Lopez, Gurin, Nagda, 1998). A conceptualization of inequalities as structural serves as a platform upon which to build teachers’ sociopolitical awareness and racial consciousness.

The complexity of validating students’ discourse practices as cultural and politically meaningful warrants definitions of race as a demographic group; as closely linked with linguistic and cultural practices, but not pre-deterministically so; as a politically-significant category; and as discursively constructed in face-to-face interaction. It would seem that envisioning culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies is contingent upon teachers’ ability to operationalize these multiple definitions of race. Enacting culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies seems equally complex as teachers need to wield their classroom discourse for a variety of purposes—to foster students’ cultural competence by legitimating and conveying the value of students’ language and culture, to engender students’ sociopolitical awareness and race

consciousness, and simultaneously promote academic learning, which may in some cases seem at odds with the goals of the pedagogies.

Culturally Responsive and Relevant Authority

As pedagogical models, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies provide a theoretical and philosophical foundation for enacting practices that are relevant and responsive to students' race and cultures. Thinking like a culturally relevant pedagogue is more important than "doing" culturally relevant pedagogy because adapting strategies across classroom contexts requires conscious, principled reflection (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Pedagogical vision is crucial to productive planning and implementation, yet privileging theory and philosophy at the expense of practical application seems an academic's luxury when prospective and new teachers struggle with "what to do on Monday." Godley and colleagues (2006) highlight the importance of allowing teachers to apply sociolinguistic knowledge because teachers are likely to disregard information they do not find practically viable. Moreover, we expect culturally relevant and responsive pedagogues to be able to break down complex concepts with which their students may not be familiar in order to make academic learning more accessible to them. In the same way, is it not incumbent on teacher educators to demystify complex theories and philosophies for teachers to make them more comprehensible? Incorporating representations of classroom practice into teacher education could be useful for unpacking the nuances of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies. For instance, the representations of practical forms of authority articulated in this dissertation could aid

teachers in envisioning how authority permeates the multiple facets of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy. Elaborating two particular forms of authority could help clarify how we might “do” culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies in the classroom.

In the classroom displaying knowledge about students’ culture could enhance a White teacher’s professional authority by serving as a source of legitimacy. The salience of this cultural knowledge for culturally relevant and responsive teachers warrants expanding the construct of professional authority to not only represent pedagogical expertise and subject matter knowledge, but also cultural awareness. How might Ms. Cross’s authority relationships with her students have been enhanced by talking about the particular significance within the African American community of Signifyin(g)? of “acting White”? of “talking proper”? of Black lyrical poetry?

By integrating cultural knowledge with pedagogical and subject matter knowledge, students and teacher could collaboratively explore the political significance and poetic value of the language and literacy practices in which they engage. Validating students’ ways of communicating as more than discourse practices—as cultural practices—by historically contextualizing them could foster in students a stronger sense of their racial affiliation and identification. For instance, breaking down the rhetorical moves, verbal artistry, and language deployment of Signifyin(g) could have helped students in Ms. Cross’s class build a bridge between students’ home- and culturally-based discourse practice and school-based practices. Making explicit how Signifyin(g) and English subject matter intersect could have made academic learning even more accessible, relevant, and engaging to students.

In addition, articulating Signifyin(g) as a culturally-grounded, African American discourse practice that evolved as a “counterlanguage” in the face of slavery, racism, and oppression could have helped students in Ms. Cross’s class see their language as a resource for navigating and addressing contemporary inequalities and injustices. Making visible the historical and political significance of students’ discourse practice could have strengthened Ms. Cross’s authority as a political ally, the seeds of which were planted when she pointed out the potential racial bias of the test. By consciously and explicitly legitimizing students’ discourse practices as culturally and politically relevant, a teacher could construct her authority through alliance-building.

For White teachers, building a cross-racial alliance involves positioning themselves as allies with students against racism and other forms of oppression by engaging them in sociopolitical critiques and activism. In my literature review, I portrayed White teachers who constructed their authority through alliance-building as “White allies” because they demonstrated awareness of how their Whiteness positioned them in relation to their students (Hyland, 2005; Schultz & Oyler, 2006). For a teacher to build authority as a White ally would entail such an acknowledgement of Whiteness as well as the situation of White identity within global social relations and a history of White dominance (Howard, 2006). Situating White identities within systems of power relations is a step in constructing an “authentic” White identity, which is important for teachers’ integration of their passion for social justice and cultural competence in ways that lead to culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (Howard, 2006).

To summarize, a foundational vision of what culturally relevant and responsive authority might look like takes shape when the forms of authority practiced by Ms. Cross

and her students are elaborated to reflect principles of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies. While this envisioning of authority as produced through Signifyin(g) is particular to the White teacher and African American students in this classroom, the forms of authority and the manner in which they were produced—through classroom discourse and the legitimization of students’ home-based discourse practices—may be transferable to other contexts. This points to the importance of teachers being knowledgeable about language and able to use classroom discourse adeptly as part of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy.

Making the Case (Matter)

This study has demonstrated how classroom discourse was instrumental in constructing authority relationships in culturally congruent ways—shaping students’ behavior and co-creating productive classroom environment while minimizing conflict; constructing participation structures that afforded students’ access to classroom discourse and engagement in curriculum and instruction; performing relational work that mitigated threats to social face and the exercise of power; positioning students as the co-producers of knowledge; and building alliances across racial difference.

The results of this case study are intrinsically linked to the context in which they were produced, yet hold implications that span disciplines, grade levels, and teacher-student racial configurations and cultural dynamics. Because language is the means through which all subject matter is construed, even in disciplines in which the language is numerical or graphic, all teachers would benefit from a deep understanding of multiple forms and functions of language. Preparing all teachers to effectively use classroom

discourse to accomplish educational goals and validate students' cultural practices could enhance their capacity to envision and enact culturally relevant and responsive authority.

For Teacher Preparation

As the critical link between theory and practice, classroom discourse represents the connection between the forms of authority as enacted and visions of culturally relevant and responsive authority. To help prospective teachers use classroom discourse to envision and enact their authority in culturally responsive and relevant ways, teacher education could create opportunities for prospective teachers to thoughtfully consider how they use (or might use) classroom discourse to build productive relationships with students. This could be accomplished by inviting teachers to study representations of classroom interaction, such as the episodes showcased in this dissertation, to foster their “interactional awareness” and highlight the critical role language plays in the process of socially-legitimizing power (Rex & Schiller, 2009). Guiding teachers through analyses of their own talk would allow teachers to examine their discursive choices and consider alternatives that may be more culturally responsive and politically relevant. This would enable teachers to facilitate the circulation of power and “discourse into being” the classroom relationships they envision (Bloome, et. al., 2008; Rex & Schiller, 2009). Grounded in classroom practice, a repertoire for practicing authority, a toolkit of forms from which to draw when planning and implementing their practice, along with a conceptualization of authority as socially legitimated rather than presumed in their institutional role as teacher could take shape.

In the context of studying language-in-use, prospective teachers could also explore the implications of language variation on their practice. Teacher education could incorporate a sociolinguistic approach to dialect diversity. Highlighting how language varieties can be associated with particular social groups is important for seeing how language use is culturally-based. This case study demonstrated how language instruction that is limited to conceptions of register as degrees of formality impeded a teacher's ability to view language as a culturally-grounded practice, suggesting that language awareness needs to extend beyond register instruction. For White teachers who are native speakers of general and standard English, this involves appreciating that shifting between an informal register among friends to a formal register among work colleagues, as they may do, is very different than a person of color shifting dialects according to different audiences and situations. While understanding how language use shifts according to context is necessary, an understanding of how those shifts are situated within and reflect racialized power dynamics is more aligned with culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies.

A sociolinguistic approach that includes the study of dialect diversity is important for helping White teachers view discourse practices as culturally-based, racialized, and politicized. Fostering teachers' dialect awareness so that they are able to see that all dialects are structured and logical, yet unique with respect to pronunciation, lexicon, speech events, and grammatical structure could help teachers value and validate students' culturally-based languages (Wolfram, Adger, & Christian, 2004; Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006). In addition to cultivating teachers' dialect awareness, teacher education could provide teachers with opportunities to explore issues of language, identity, and

power (Godley, Sweetland, Wheeler, Minnici, and Carpenter, B. D., 2006). One way to do this is to follow the path of this research, that is, study the classroom discourse, noting dialectal features of language, and explore the origins of that dialect by investigating its historical and cultural significance. This could foster teachers' cultural knowledge that could be used as the backdrop for discussions about language varieties in the classroom. Another approach could involve learning dialectal features by interacting with students, as Ms. Cross learned about the speech event Signifyin(g). Probing students' experiences with and knowledge about such speech events could elicit joint-production of knowledge. Another viable, perhaps more culturally responsive and relevant approach is to engage students in studying their own language varieties, positioning students' cultures and communities as the sources of learning (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006).

Adding to teacher education social justice pedagogies from intergroup dialogues that cultivate cross-cultural empathy and awareness of structural inequalities could foster teacher's capacity for practicing culturally responsive and relevant authority. Rooted in frameworks for studying oppression (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997) and social psychological theories of intergroup contact (Allport,), intergroup dialogues are courses designed to engender conversations across identity groups. Cultivating awareness of structural inequalities and fostering the agency to transform them through dialogues could enhance teachers' sociopolitical awareness and racial consciousness.

Intergroup dialogue pedagogies employ interpersonally-generated emotions and empathy as educational resources for learning how inequalities among groups of people are caused by systemic or institutional factors rather than individual qualities (Lopez, Gurin & Nagda, 1998). These pedagogies include facilitation techniques that involve

establishing mutually-agreed-upon norms to create a safe atmosphere for learning and talking, while acknowledging that talking and learning about difference is not always comfortable. Paying close attention to the discursive moves employed in dialogues could provide teachers with useful facilitation tools to guide their students in conversations about social justice. The ability to apply these facilitation skills in various classroom contexts would enable teachers to garner authority through discursive alliance-building and socially just care while preserving students' "racial safety" in the classroom.

Some may argue that adding such opportunities for exploring issues of discourse, culture language, and authority to teacher preparation seems redundant. After all, preservice teachers already take courses on literacy that teach them how to provide language instruction to their students and multicultural education courses that teach them about tailoring curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of a diverse student body. Some prospective teachers even take courses on classroom management in which they discuss issues of authority and discipline. I am suggesting that how teachers use language be foregrounded as a means of cultivating their communicative competence. Incorporating features of intergroup dialogues could extend the work of multicultural education by furthering the construction of an "authentic White identity," so critical to preparing White teachers to teach successfully across racial difference.

For Research

In addition to teacher preparation, this study bears import for research, offering theoretical and methodological insight into studying classroom authority relationships. Conceiving of authority as a process, product, and relationship offers a comprehensive

framework for considering the complexity of classroom life. Using a microethnographic approach to discourse analysis to examine authority as discursively constructed in everyday practice makes visible the invisible, tacit processes through which power becomes socially legitimated. It illuminates how authority relationships are built over time and through moment-to-moment interactions. It brings to light aspects of equity and access by allowing the exchange of authority to be traced as garnered and accumulated capital.

By contributing a representation of a White teacher Signifyin(g) with African American students, this case study adds to existing studies of Signifyin(g) in classroom interaction (Lee, 1993; 2007; Rex, 2007), representations of effective White teachers of students of color (Bondy, Ross, Gallingame, & Hambacher, 2007; Cooper, 2003; Hyland, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Rex and Jordan, 2005), and studies of cross-racial classroom authority (Crawford, 2008; Pace, 2006; Shultz & Oyler, 2006). Situating this case study within this growing body of literature begins the work of generating common principles across those cases (Dyson & Genishi, 2005) that inform how White teachers can use language to envision and enact authority in ways that are culturally responsive and relevant for students of color. Adding more case studies of teachers who deliberately and strategically aim to practice culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies could further elaborate areas of growth for teachers who employ culturally congruent communication practices.

In addition, exploring the role intergroup dialogue pedagogies and sociolinguistic approaches to language diversity could play in cultivating teachers' sociopolitical and language awareness in teacher education warrants investigation. Although discourse,

language, authority, and race represent significant concepts for teaching cross-racially, they comprise some of the multiple dimensions of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies and classroom life.

This study focused on race as a primary means by which access to opportunities and capital are structured in society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). However, the methodological approach of employing multiple definitions of race could apply to other social identities. This would require viewing gender, social class, ability, or citizenship status as discursively constructed, shared cultural practices, and a demographic category, all of which are politically-meaningful and useful for different purposes in teaching and in research.

Considering how these various social identities intersect with each other as well as with personal identities would also be a productive line of inquiry. For instance, investigating Ms. Cross and students' interactions around Signifyin(g) as gendered practices could illuminate how masculinity may be variously discursively constructed through launching insults, as Mike did, and saving the social face of a woman teacher, as Brad, Calvin, and Smooth did during the verbal duels. Considering the absence of representations of girls who engaged in Signifyin(g) also warrants inquiry. It may be that the girls engaged in forms of Signifyin(g) or other culturally-specific discourse practices, such as "reading dialect" that I, with my lack of firsthand experience, was unable to recognize.

Intersections of social class and personal identity also warrant investigation. Students' affiliation with hip hop culture and rap holds great potential to illuminate the complex relationship between race identity, social class, gender, and language because

youth's interest in the music, culture, and lifestyle seems to span categorical boundaries (hooks, 1996; Kirkland, 2008). For example, middle-class African American youth are drawn to rap, despite limited socialization with African American English in their homes (Quinn, 2002, cited in Rex, 2006). Moreover, Whites purchased more than 70% of contemporary hip hop CDs (CNN, cited in Rex, 2007; Kirkland, 2008), and through music, White youth are acquiring elements of AAVE in a particular way Bucholtz (1999) refers to as Cross-Racial AAVE (CRAAVE). Pursuing lines of inquiry around intersecting personal and social identities holds the potential to complicate the relationship between identity and language even further, with implications for culturally responsive and relevant language and literacy instruction.

Reframings

To make this case matter, I have situated this study within related literature to generate new understandings about authority, race, and culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies that are productive for addressing challenges associated with cross-racial teaching and learning between White teachers and students of color. By rendering a rich, detailed description of the classroom interaction and context, I tried to convey to readers an experience of “being there” so that they may integrate what they learn from this study with their existing understandings (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). To determine how this case study matters, I invite readers to engage in a highly self-conscious and selective process of generalization and essentialization to determine how to assimilate the results and filter their applicability to their own situated work.

I conclude this work by reflecting on how this dissertation has reframed my understandings of the problem of racial difference and my role as a White teacher educator in a field dominated by Whiteness. Lesley Rex and Laura Schiller (2009) define “reframing” as a way of seeing the world that offers renditions of events or phenomena not previously considered. This dissertation has reframed how I “see” the “problem” of racial difference and cultural incongruence. Reframing racial, cultural, and linguistic difference as a resource for learning and the problem as one of how teachers can best utilize these resources models a reframing that may be useful for teachers who aim to provide culturally responsive and relevant instruction.

Reframing the problem of “racial difference” can also be useful for teacher educators preparing White teachers to be culturally responsive and relevant pedagogues. Karen L. Lowenstein (2009) notes how circumscribing the “problem” of diversity with “the demographic imperative” or “demographic divide” constructs deficit, essentialist, and homogenous views of White teacher candidates. Staying true to my expressed purpose in conducting this research—to describe, rather than to evaluate—allowed me to bring to the foreground what is missing from these perspectives on White teachers: representations of effective classroom interaction with students of color. Portraying Ms. Cross as a culturally congruent communicator facilitated the articulation of a useful distinction between cultural congruence and cultural relevance and responsiveness.

Educating teachers who seem racially similar presents its own unique challenges for teacher educators, the majority of whom are also White (Lowenstein, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lowenstein, 2009; Sleeter, 2001). One of these challenges White teacher educators face is how to garner authority to prepare teachers to be culturally responsive.

The resistance we perceive on the part of prospective teachers who defend their White power and privilege may be attributed to teacher educators' lack of credibility (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The challenge of how to construct my own authority as a White teacher educator became most acute to me as I was about to present a classroom demonstration as part of a campus interview for an assistant professorship at a predominantly White institution.

I paused before entering the classroom of 25 prospective teachers and talk with them about race, language, and teachers' professional obligations to uphold the Equal Education Opportunity Act. How could I build productive authority relationships with these students in 30 minutes so that they would take seriously the imperative of providing equitable access to teaching and learning through language? I was especially concerned because 30 minutes leaves little time for establishing the highly contextual shared ways of being, doing, saying, and knowing that comprise norms of interaction.

As the students and I analyzed a transcript of classroom interaction from my dissertation data (the one in which Mike is accused of "acting White" and Ms. Cross is de-raced as not-White), I sensed students' discomfort—and my own. Conversations about race can be intensely face threatening, even in what appear to be homogenously White classrooms. To diffuse the face threat of the explicit race talk, I employed a self-effacing politeness move I learned from Ms. Cross: I made myself vulnerable by talking about my own Whiteness and discomfort with talking about race. This politeness move constructed solidarity between my audience and

me that told them, *If I can do this uncomfortable and difficult reflective cultural work, you can, too.*

I laid out what was at stake for me in the demonstration, too, saying, “Here I am in a school I don’t know, with students I’ve never met, in front of a panel of college professors who are evaluating me for a job I desperately want. And I’m talking about race and language because if I only have 30 minutes with you, I want to make it count.” Revealing my passion and articulating my stake and interest in the demonstration made it possible for students to open up and learn, in spite of their discomfort.

Interpreting this event through my invigorated frame of reference requires me to reframe one word in the last line from “in spite of their discomfort” so that it construes students’ learning as possible *because* of their discomfort. Such re-framing holds the potential for perpetual learning and re-seeing through our cultural eyes.

Appendices

APPENDIX A Teacher Consent Form

October 8, 2007

Dear Ms. Cross:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation research study entitled *Constructing Classroom Authority across Difference*. The study will be conducted in your English classroom at Inkster High School October, 2007-June, 2008. Although there is no financial compensation for you for participating in this research study, your contribution to improving the caliber of teaching for our students is greatly appreciated. This letter describes the study, including the purpose, expectations for participation, risks and benefits of participating, and use of the data, as well as important contact information for your reference. The researcher's signed agreement follows, along with space for your signed agreement to participate.

Purpose: This study will investigate how a white teacher talks effectively with African American students to promote teaching and learning in the high school English Language Arts classroom.

Benefits of the research: This study of classroom instruction and interaction will contribute to our knowledge about how teachers talk effectively with students, especially white teachers with African American students. As the participating teacher, you will have more opportunities to reflect on your instructional practice with a researcher who is a UM teacher educator and former high school teacher. You will also observe the process of conducting a research study, which may enhance your ability to utilize empirical data to make instructional decisions or become a teacher-researcher.

Participation: By agreeing to participate in this study, you grant me permission to

- Videorecord your classroom on a daily basis October-December, 2007. My preference is to record each day in order to capture the continuity of instruction and relationship-building; however, if you prefer that I not attend or record on a given day, I will honor your request.
- Record fieldnotes as I observe in your classroom October-December, 2007. These fieldnotes will be observational, not evaluating, and no one else but me and my faculty advisor will have access to them.
- Collect classroom artifacts, including teaching materials and student work October-January, 2007. You may ask that I omit any of your materials or students' work.

- Interview you informally for 30 minutes at least once per week and at your discretion with open-ended questions that prompt reflection on your instructional practice and classroom events. You may decline to answer any questions I pose.
- Conduct focus group and one-on-one interviews with your students after school
- Consult you for feedback on my analysis of classroom events to confirm or disconfirm my findings.

Risks of the research: I will take the following precautions to protect my participants in the study.

Participants will not be evaluated

My purpose in this study is to describe “everyday” classroom interaction and learn more about how *you* conceive of your instructional practice, so my goal is to prompt your reflection. Data I collect will not be shared with the Principal, Superintendent, or other administrator or educational professional other than my faculty advisor. To minimize your risk related to (mis)representation, you are invited to “member check” my analysis and (dis)confirm my findings.

Participants’ identities will be carefully protected during the study.

I will use pseudonyms for all students, teachers, and staff and will remove all identifying information about participants and their contexts from any transcripts or notes that I make. No one will have access to the video or audio tapes, or any other collected materials, except for me and my faculty advisor. I will keep all data in a locked office or in my possession at all times so that only I will have access to the data.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary.

There is no penalty for declining to participate, or for withdrawing from the study. As the teacher, you may withdraw from the study at any time by speaking to me or the Superintendent. You may also ask that the video camera be turned off at any time, or that recorded portions be deleted. Similarly, you can ask to have any of your materials withheld from collection for the study or decline to respond to any questions I may ask.

Use of data collected: Data collected in this educational research study will be used by Amy Ford for dissertation, publishing, and teaching purposes. All data will be kept in a locked office or in my possession at all times. The data will be available for sharing with teacher educators, teachers, and teacher education students. I will keep the data for publication purposes for 3 years after my dissertation is published and for teaching purposes for 7 years.

APPENDIX B Recruitment Oral Script for Students

Hi. My name is Amy Carpenter Ford. I used to teach high school English in Oakland, CA and I am now a PhD student at the University of Michigan, where I work as a teacher educator, training teachers. I am conducting a research study on how teachers and students talk to each other in ways that promote teaching and learning. I will be working with your teacher, Ms. C., on a research project this year. She and Mr. Richmond have allowed me to come into your class to observe the teaching and learning that goes on here.

If it's okay with you and your parents, I'd like to sit in class and take notes on your school days. Just in case my notes don't catch everything, I'd also like to videorecord the class. I'll also want to make copies of the assignments your teacher gives you and the work you complete for her. No one else but me will see these copies. It would not be to grade you in any way, but to see how you respond to school assignments and to see how your teacher adapts lesson plans based on how you are doing.

It is fine if you do not want to participate in this study – it won't affect your grade or your relationship with your teacher in any way. You can also agree to just do part of the study, like be on the video but not have your work copied. You can also decide at any time that you no longer want to be part of the study. No matter what you decide, there is no penalty of any kind to you, your teacher, or anyone!

You should also know that I will protect your identity throughout the study. I will let you pick a pseudonym – a fake name – that I will call you, and I will not reveal any information that could identify you or your school. My only use of the information I collect would be for sharing it with other teachers and teacher educators (including my own teacher) to help them improve their teaching by learning from you. And, as I said, I will not use your real name, your school's real name, or anything else that could identify you.

I want to ask you if this is okay, and I also need permission from your parents. Let's read through the parent letter, project description, and consent form I distributed so that I can answer your questions in each section. [Read and answer questions, stopping at the end of each paragraph to clarify.]

I'd like you to take another couple minutes now to re-read the form and see if you have any other questions. Then I'd like you to take it home and share it with your parents. I will be back tomorrow, so that you can return the forms to me. I will make a copy for you to keep so that you and your parents can get in touch with me at any time. Your teacher will also have extras in case you need them.

My name, number, and email are on the letter, the project description, and the consent form. Please feel free to call me at any time if you have questions about the form. I will be back tomorrow to talk more with you about this and would be glad to meet with you in person at your convenience or to call your parents or guardians to answer any questions you may have.

APPENDIX C Calendar of Instruction

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
10/8/07	10/9/07	10/10/07	10/11/07 3 rd & 4 th CEA Prep w/Tamberlyn	10/12/07 All school practice ACT Test
10/15/07 Do Now: Explain in 2-3 sentences how well you think you did with the ACT practice test last week. Discuss Interview each other to reflect. Homework: Summarize data from conclusions	10/16/07 Do Now: How well do you think you use commas? Went over comma rules: direct instruction with examples and recitation. Homework: Punctuate story with commas.	10/17/07 Do Now: Explain in 2-3 sentences why the ACT is unfair or biased. Went over comma homework. Discussed Do Now. Homework: Write a letter to the state Board of Education telling them why you think the test is unfair or biased and how it should be changed.	10/18/07 9 th grade test: Sub 3 rd : CEA Prep ACT Test Prep (w/Tamberlyn) 4 th CEA Prep ACT Test Prep (w/Sandra)	10/19/07 3 rd : Student Government Assembly 4 th : Do Now: Read the strategies on the front board. Then explain how well you think you would do on the English ACT test you will take today. English ACT Practice Test Homework: Describe in ¾ page how well you did or did not do on the practice test today and why or why not.
10/22/07 3 rd : Do Now: Reflect on how well you will do on this English test. Take test. Homework: Reflect on how well you did. 4 th : Do Now: Reflect on how well you did on your test. Checked test. Whole class. Homework: Reflect on how you	10/23/07 Do Now: Explain in 2-3 sentnces how often you use semicolons in your writing and why or why not. Semicolons, dash, apostrophe rules Homework: Finish editing the semicolons,	10/24/07 Sub: Preston Worked with students, on homework of editing story about dog and applying semicolon, apostrophe, and dash rules	10/25/07 3 rd : CEA Prep ACT Test Prep (w/Sandra & 2 other classes in cafeteria) 4 th CEA Prep ACT Test Prep (w/Sandra)	10/26/07 Professional Development Day No school for students

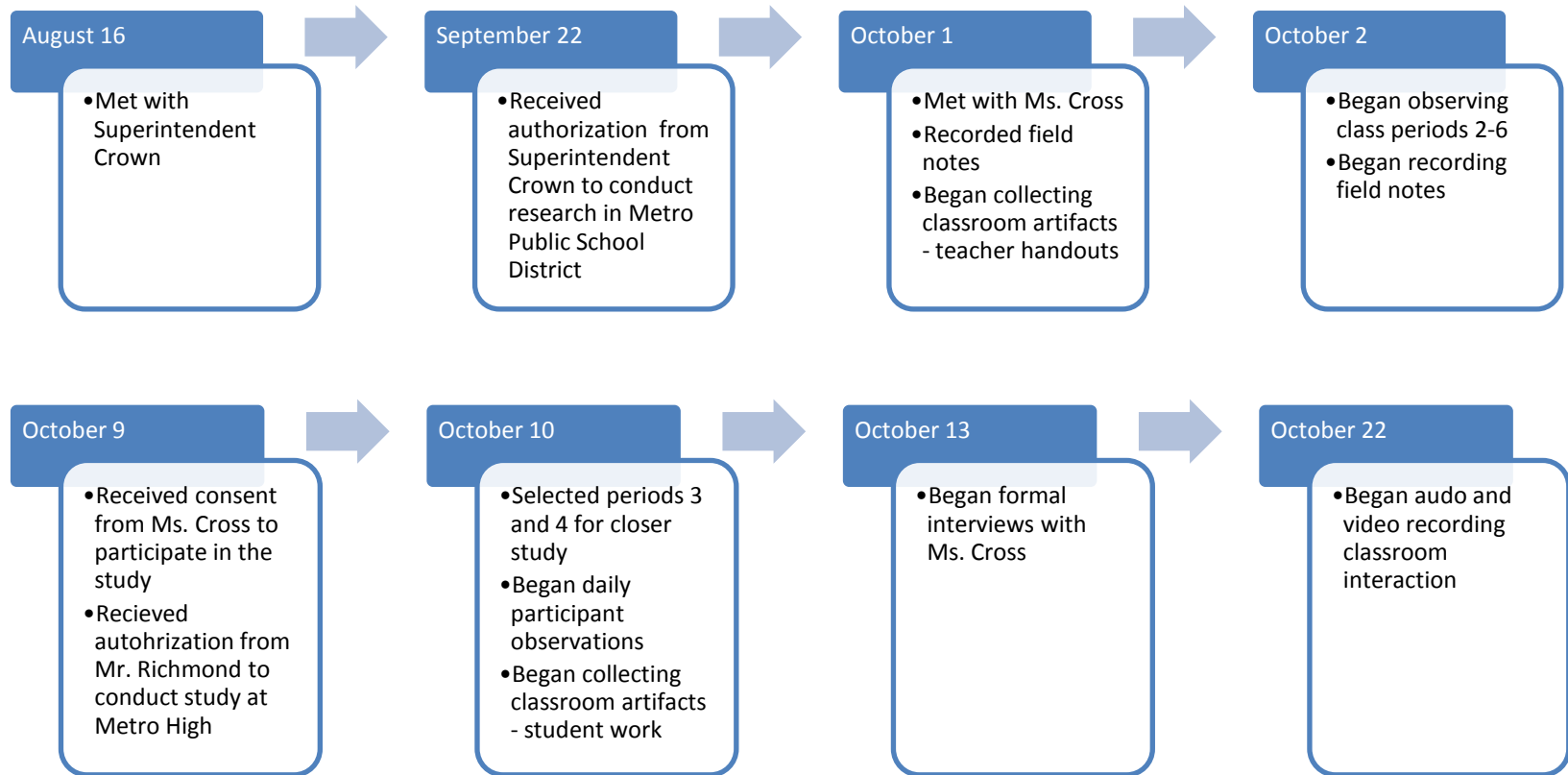
can improve.	apostrophes and dashes in the dog story.			
10/29/07 Do Now: Explain in 2-3 sentences Homework: Finish draft of “Spooky Halloween Story” in 2 pages. Use all semi-colon, colon, and dash rules.	10/30/07 Substitute Comma rules Scary stories	10/31/07 Substitute ISD writing test	11/1/07 3 rd : CEA Prep ACT Test Prep (w/Sandra) Ms. Cross intervened/co-taught	11/2/07 Do Now: Explain in 2-3 sentences how well you think you would do on a comma, semicolon, colon, and dash quiz if you had to take one today. Scary story presentations Homework: Study for final quiz.
11/5/07 Do Now: Explain in 2-3 sentences how prepared you are to take the semicolon, colon, comma, and dash quiz today. Take test Homework: Reflect in 2 pages how well you think you did or actually did on the quiz. Comment on all 4 facets of punctuation in a ½ page on each.	11/6/07 Half day for students: End of 1 st quarter Do Now: Explain in 2-3 sentences the value you see in doing puzzles and logic problems. Jigsaw Squares Homework: Complete the remaining 2-3 logic problems.	11/7/07 Do Now: Explain in 2-3 sentences whether or not you view downloading music as an unethical thing to do. Took ISD test (again) Homework: Score your essay 1-6 and explain why you gave it that score in ¾ of a page Give at least 5 specific reasons.	11/8/07 3 rd : CEA Prep ACT Test Prep (w/Tamberlyn) 4 th CEA Prep ACT Test Prep (w/Sandra)	11/9/07 Do Now: Explain in 2-3 sentences what it means to revise an essay. Review and practice ACT writing Test criteria: strategy, style, organization Homework: Using Lesson 4: Find 5 places where you can insert information, 5 places where you can add style. Mark your revisions. Rewrite the essay including your changes.
11/12/07 Substitute	11/13/07 Town hall meeting Do Now: explain in 2-3 sentences what you did to revise the essay from Friday. Organization	11/14/07 Whole school 11 th grade ACT test	11/15/07 CEA Prep	11/16/07 ISD 30-minute timed writing

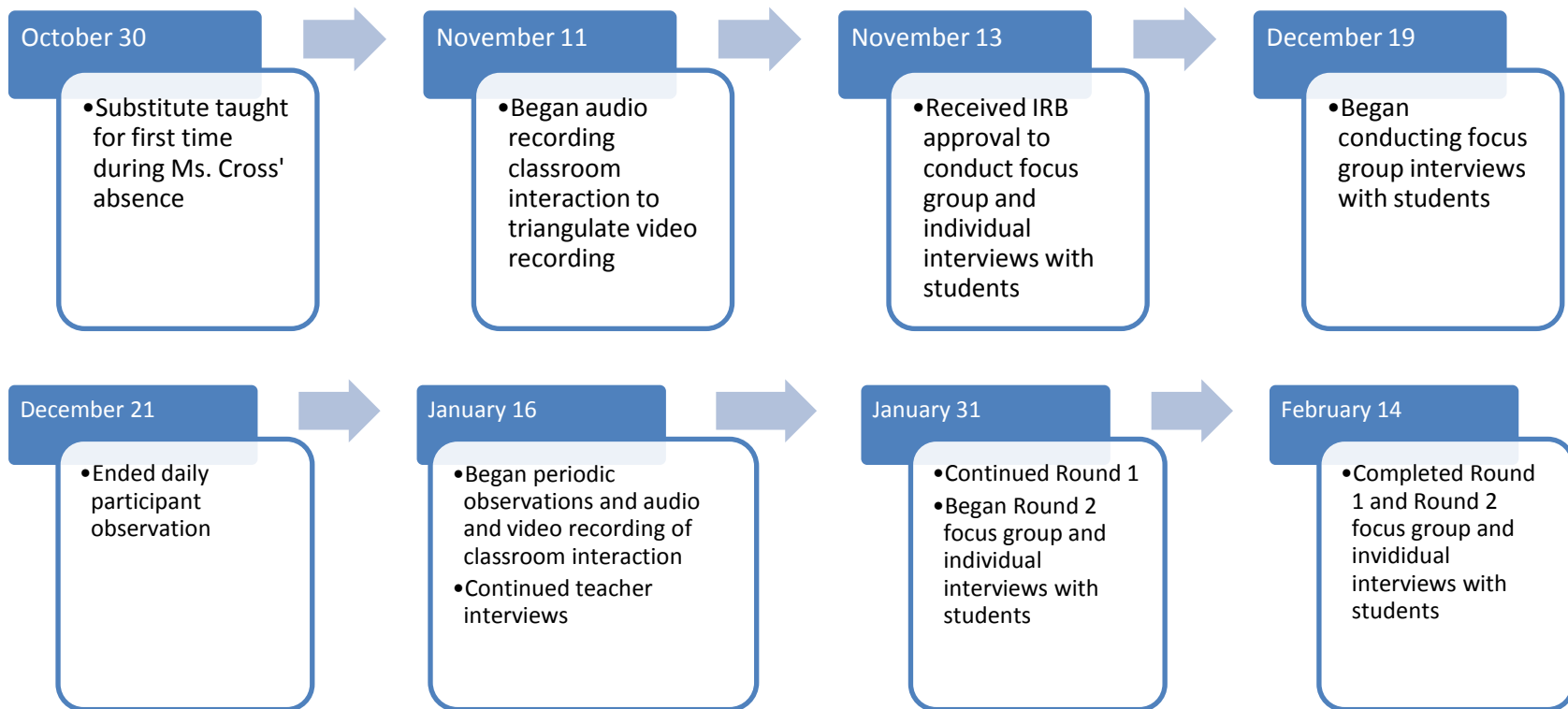
	Homework: Using lesson 4: reorganize the paragraph and entire essay by moving around at least 1 paragraph + 3-5 thoughts inside paragraphs. Rewrite the essay including your changes.			
11/19/07 Do Now: Writing Conferences w. Amy Homework: Revise essays	11/20/07 Do Now: List 3-4 comma rules and give examples Review in groups, take quiz Homework: Write a letter to an authority figure out something you believe needs to be changed. Use the comma rules in your 1/1/2-2 page letter.	11/21/07 Half day for students and staff Logic Puzzle	11/22/07 Thanksgiving holiday	11/23/07 Thanksgiving holiday
11/26 Observed 3, 4, video & audio Do Now: List 2-3 ACT English strategies you can use when taking the English test Review strategies using a practice test Homework: Practice the English ACT passage using the strategies from class.	11/27 Substitute	11/28 Substitute Logic Puzzle	11/29 3 rd : CEA Prep ACT Test Prep (w/Tamberlyn) 4 th : CEA Prep ACT Test Prep (w/Sandra)	11/30 Do Now: Explain in 2-3 sentences how well you are catching on to using the strategies for the English test. Finish going over English test from Monday. Homework: Use the 5-6 strategies to answer the questions of the ACT ELA sample passage. Take no more than 7 minutes.
12/3	12/4	12/5	12/6	12/7

<p>Do Now: Explain in 2-3 sentences how well you think you will do on the English ACT today. Take English ACT Homework: Answer the 13-15 English ACT questions in 7 minutes</p>	<p>Do Now: Explain in 2-3 sentences the strategies or processes you used to take the ELA ACT test and how well you think they helped. Review English ACT test in groups of 4-6 (but didn't work in groups; did whole class) Homework: Use the 5-6 strategies to answer the question of the ELA sample passage. Take no more than 7 minutes.</p>	<p>I missed it?</p>	<p>Half Day</p>	<p>Professional Development Day for Teachers</p>
<p>12/10 Do Now: Explain in 2-3 sentences how well you read and how fast. ACT Reading practice tests Keywords Homework: Write a summary of an internet, book, article, newspaper article. Read quickly</p>	<p>12/11 Do Now: Explain in 2-3 sentences what you can do to be sure you finish your essay today in 30 minutes. Take timed writing test for ISD. Homework: Use the ACT writing writing rubric to score yourself. List 5 reasons you gave yourself the rating you did.</p>	<p>12/12 CEA Prep</p>	<p>12/13 Half Day Conferences Logic puzzle</p>	<p>12/14 Half Day Logic puzzle</p>
<p>12/17 Snow Day: No school</p>	<p>12/18 Do Now: In 2-3 sentences, explain how you can increase your reading ACT scores. Practice Reading ACT with diagnostic charts Homework: Write a ¾ to 1 page journal reflecting on the</p>	<p>12/19 Do Now: Explain in 2-3 sentences what you can do to increase your reading speed. Practice ACT reading passages Homework: Read sample passage 1, p. 132 and answer the 10</p>	<p>12/20 CEA Prep</p>	<p>12/21</p>

	assignment in class. What did your diagnostic charts tell you? How well did you do? Improvements?	questions that follow in about 5-7 minutes		
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APPENDIX D Timeline of Field Work





April 21 - 28

- Resumed daily observations and audio and video recording of classroom interaction
- Began Round 2 focus group and individual interviews with students

May 5-8

- Resumed daily observations and audio and video recording of classroom interaction

May 28-29

- Completed Round 3 individual and focus groups with students
- Completed teacher interviews
- Completed observations

APPENDIX E Calendar of Data Collection

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	8/16/07 met with superintendent at district office	8/23/07 hand delivered proposal to district office		
10/1/07 Observed school	10/2/07 Observed school Met with Ms. Cross	10/3/07 Observed 3-5 Met lunch, 6 th	10/4/07 Observed 1-4 CEA Prep	10/5/07 half day: pds. 1-3 only Observed 1-3
10/8/07 Observed 2-4 Met Lunch	10/9/07 Observed 2-4 Met Lunch Met principal	10/10/07 Observed 2-4 Met Lunch	10/11/07 Observed 3-4 Met Lunch CEA Prep	10/12/07 Observed AM All school practice ACT Test
10/15/07 Observed 3-4 Met Lunch	10/16/07 Observed 3-4 Met Lunch Coach from ISD observed	10/17/07 Observed 3-4 Met Lunch	10/18/07 Observed 3-4 Lunch w/other teachers and CEA Prep 9 th grade test: Sub	10/19/07 Observed 3-5, Met Lunch Interview 6th 3 rd : Student Government Assembly
10/22/07 Observed 3, 4, met lunch Video 4	10/23/07 Observed 3, 4 Audio 3, Video 4	10/24/07 Observed 3, 4 No audio/video Sub: Preston	10/25/07 Observed 3, 4 No audio/video CEA Prep	10/26/07 Observed No audio/video Professional Development Day No school for students
10/29/07 Observed 3, 4 Video 3, 4	10/30/07 Observed 3, 4 Substitute - Ms. Lewis Video 3, 4 Me teaching; Ms. Cross personal	10/31/07 Observed 3, part 4 Substitute Mr. Fillar Ms. Cross – personal ISD writing test	11/1/07 Observed 3, 4 No audio/video CEA Prep	11/2/07 Observed 3, 4 Video 3, 4
11/5/07 Observed 3, 4 Video 3, 4	11/6/07 Observed 3 Half day for students: End of 1 st quarter	11/7/07 Observed 3, 4 Video 3, 4	11/8/07 Observed 3-4, Video 3, 4 CEA Prep	11/9/07 Observed 3, Subbed 4, Video 3, 4
11/12/07 No observation Substitute	11/13/07 Observed 3, 4 Video 3,4	11/14/07 Observed AM Whole school 11 th grade ACT test	11/15/07 Observed 3, 4, No audio/video CEA Prep	11/16/07 No observation Out of town

11/19/07 Taught 3, 4, 5 Substitute	11/20/07 Observed 3, 4, video & audio backup 3,4	11/21/07 No observation Half day for students and staff	11/22/07 Thanksgiving holiday	11/23/07 Thanksgiving holiday
11/26 Observed 3, 4, video & audio Interview w/ Ms. Cross lunch	11/27 Substitute No observation	11/28 Substitute Observed 3, 4 Presented focus groups	11/29 Observed 3-4, Video 3, 4 CEA Prep	11/30 Observed 3, 4, 5; Video 3, 4, audio backup 3, 4 Interview Ms. Cross 6th
12/3 Observed 3, 4, video and audio	12/4 Observed 3, 4, video and audio	12/5 Observed 3, 4 CEA Prep	12/6 Observed 3 Half Day 1,2,3	12/7 Professional Development Day for Teachers
12/10 Observed 3, 4, video and audio	12/11 Observed 3, 4, video and audio	12/12 Observed 3, 4, no video or audio CEA Prep	12/13 Half Day 4,5,6 Conferences	12/14 Half Day 1,2,3
12/17 Snow Day: No school	12/18 Observed 3, 4, video	12/19 Observed 3, 4, video Focus groups after school	12/20 Observed 3, 4, video CEA Prep Focus groups lunch and after school	12/21 No observation
				1/18/08 Observed 3, 4, video Schedule focus groups
			1/31/08 Observed 3 & 4 CEA Prep Focus Groups Lunch and After School	
			2/7/08 Observed 3 & 4 Focus Groups Lunch and After School	

		2/13 Focus Groups Lunch and After School	2/14/08 Video Intearction	
	4/22/08 Observed 3, 4, video	4/23/08 Observed 3, 4, video	4/24/08 Observed 3, 4, video Focus Groups Lunch and After School	
4/28/08 Observed 3, 4, video Focus Groups Lunch and After School				
	5/6/08 Observed 3, 4, video	5/7/08 Observed 3, 4, video	5/8/08 Observed 3, 4, video	
5/12/08 Observed 3, 4, video Focus Groups Lunch and After School				

APPENDIX F African American English Linguistic Tools for

Discourse Analysis

	Definition: Discourse Modes (Smitherman, 1977) Speech Events (Green, 2002)	
Signifyin(g)	“Verbal art of insult in which a speaker humorously puts down, talks about, needles—that is, signifies on—the listener” to make a point or for fun (pp. 118-119). Capping is a “lightweight” form of signifyin(g), which can be “heavy” when instructional, although not preach-y or lecture-y (p. 120). Signifyin(g) is characterized by indirection, circumlocution, metaphor, imagery, humor, irony, rhythm, directed at present audience, puns, plays on words, “introduction of the semantically or logically unexpected” (p. 121).	Smitherman, 1977
Narrative sequence	Talk register that employs story-telling and a narrative structure as a rhetorical strategy to explain, persuade, and garner status	Smitherman, 1977
Call and response	A process of communication consisting of, “Spontaneous verbal and non-verbal interaction between speaker and listener in which all of the speaker’s statements (‘calls’) are punctuated by expressions (‘responses’) from listeners” (p. 104). The subject or content of the communication may vary (p. 105). Different types of responses include co-signing, encouraging, repetition, and completer (p. 107). Call-response functions to “synthesize speakers and listeners in a unified movement” as the communication becomes interactive and interdependent (108).	Smitherman, 1977
Tonal semantics	“use of voice rhythm and vocal inflection to convey meaning,” “the voice is employed like a musical instrument with improvisations, riffs, and all kinds of playing between the notes” (p. 134) It’s impossible to represent in print. Tone functions within a particular sociocultural context as a relationship between content, form, speaker, listener and situation (p. 136). Tonal semantics are represented as talk-singing, intonational contouring with stress and pitch, repetition, alliteration, and rhyming. Talk-singing may be particularly useful as an attention-getting device. Words carefully selected for sound effect (p. 99).	Smitherman, 1977
Indirection Circumlocution	Rhetorical strategy that employs the power of suggestion and innuendo to circumvent counter-arguments; meandering around a point (Smitherman, 1977, p. 98).	Smitherman, 1977 Morgan,2002
Exaggeration	Uncommon words and rarely used expressions that function in various ways per context (p. 94).	Smitherman, 1977
Punning	Plays on words grounded in a collective Black experience (p. 95).	Smitherman, 1977

Marking (A verbal strategy and speech event for Green)	An indirect discourse strategy in which “The speaker dramatically imitates the words and perhaps the actions of a person and makes some comment about him or her in the process” (p. 136). Resembles mocking conceptually and phonetically. As exaggerations of the words, mannerisms, body stances and gestures of a target, functions to make a commentary about a target’s position in relation to a social group. Example “speaking proper” to show dis-identification with vernacular gp.	Green, 2002 Mitchell-Kernan, 1972
Mimicry	“A deliberate imitation of the speech and mannerisms of someone else” that function to ridicule or question authenticity (p. 94). (Sounds like marking.)	Smitherman, 1977
Spontaneity Improvisation	Capitalizing on linguistic resources of the situation, “taking advantage of anything that comes into the situation” (p. 96).	Smitherman, 1977 Spears, 2007
Imagery	Use of images, metaphors and other imaginative language that function aesthetically to give language a poetic quality	Smitherman, 1977

	Features of rapping (Green) verbal strategies; Smitherman a language style)	Source
Braggadocio	Boasting which functions to construct an image of self as fearless and powerful (Smitherman, 1977, p. 97).	Green, 2002 Smitherman 1977
Loud-talking	Bringing in an outsider as audience. Represents a violation of the communicative norms. Results in the target losing face.	Green, 2002 Mitchell-Kiernan, 1972
Woofing	Verbal intimidation, boasting	Green, 2002
Give dap	Pound fists	Green, 2002
Semantic license	Freedom exercised by Black Americans in making up new words	Spears
Neologism	Making up new words	Spears
Augmentation	Augmenting words to make new meaning	Spears
Phonological play	Playing with sounds for poetic purposes	Smitherman, 1977

	Definition Discourse Markers of Tonal Semantics	Source
Prosody	Stress and intonation; rhythm, emphasis, pitch Serve a communicative function May be a defining feature of what is meant by “sounding Black.”	Green, 2002 Rickford & Rickford, 2000

APPENDIX G Transcription Scheme

Symbol	Meaning
=	Contiguous utterances – when there is no interval between adjacent utterances, the second being latched immediately to the first without overlapping or when different parts of a single speaker’s utterance constitute a continuous flow of speech that has been carried over to another line, by transcript design, to accommodate an interruption
[]	Overlapping utterances
↑↓	Rising and falling intonation
!	An animated tone, not necessarily an exclamation
.	Short pause
...(N)	Longer pause
-	Self interruption with glottal stop
<i>Italics</i> Or á	Emphatic stress
CAPS	Higher volume, louder utterances
Degree sign	Utterance that is quieter than surrounding talk
—	Abrupt cut off
::	Extension of the sound or syllable it follows
hhh	Audible aspirations and inhalations
@	Laughter
(())	Characterizations of the talk
°	Quieter speech

APPENDIX H Focus Group Interview Guide Round 1

1. I'm going to start by asking you to draw a picture of your fantasy English teacher. If you could create your own English teacher, what would that teacher look like? Below the picture, describe the teacher. [5 minutes]
 - Now that you've drawn your picture and described your teacher, I'd like you to present your picture to the group and explain what you were thinking when you drew it. As we go, feel free to ask each other questions if there's something you don't understand or would like to discuss. [30 minutes]
 - I noticed that many of you drew women. or Some of you drew men and some of you drew women. Do you think the gender of your teacher matters?
 - I also noticed that many of you depicted your fantasy teacher with brown skin color or white. Do you think the race of your teacher matters?
2. Describe a negative experience you've had in an English class. It could be a time you got in trouble, felt treated unfairly, got a bad grade, felt clueless like you didn't understand, got angry at the teacher, etc. Please don't use teachers' names. Say Ms. or Mr. X. [25 minutes]
3. When you talked about your fantasy teacher, you said things like... and when you talked about your bad experiences, I heard you describing teachers who did ... Can you clarify? [15 minutes]
4. On the back of your notecard, please finish the following sentence starter: A teacher who has authority in the classroom... [5 minutes]

Conclusion: Thank you for participating in my focus group. My next step as researcher is to listen to what we talked about here and write it up. As I observe your classroom, I will have a better idea of what to look for because I will be able to better see from students' perspectives. You may be invited to participate in Round 2 of focus groups. Here's your \$15. Thanks again. ☺

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