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Teacher Inquiry Group: The Space for (Un)packing Representations of Discourses of Achievement Gap and the Possibility of an Institutional Transforming Practice

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TEACHER INQUIRY GROUP: THE SPACE FOR (UN)PACKING
REPRESENTATIONS OF DISCOURSES OF ACHIEVEMENT GAP AND THE
POSSIBILITY OF AN INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMING PRACTICE

Dissertation Presented

By

Floris Wilma Ortiz-Marrero

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DEDICATION

To my mom Floris, a woman who overcame many hardships in the 1940s - my first teacher, guide, and eternal friend. Alberto, Lisa, and Alejandro for their unconditional love, support, patience, companionship, constant push, many sacrifices, and faith in me. Alejandro and Lisa's school and social struggles and successes reflect the experiences of many Latino/as in the United States. To my relatives in Puerto Rico - my sister Wandy, who could not wait to get her sister "back." And to my former, and current students, and their families; their lives and stories have taught me precious lessons – For their trust, opening their homes, and their hearts. They are the reason why I continue to walk the talk for justice.

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation explores implications about teacher inquiry group (IG) practices

through the representations of achievement gap (AG) discourses. The study draws from

the challenges, struggles, and accomplishments of a middle school inquiry group of

teachers and staff that worked collaboratively, as an institutionalized practice, with the

intention to develop recommendations for closing the AG. After five years of

collaborative work, the group did not get to develop an action plan. This longitudinal,

ethnographic, qualitative study unveils multiple and contested representations of AG

discourses and unpacks three assumptions about teacher inquiry group practices as a

strategy for institutional and/or individual change: 1) that the group can resolve the issue

at task; 2) that members embody the role of researchers; and 3) participation in the group

can provide opportunities for transforming discourses. Critical discourse analysis

provides the lens for analyzing four years of data collection: field notes, audio and

written records from monthly sessions, written feedback and reflections, as well as interviews. My dual role, as member and teacher-researcher, and the use of CDA allowed me to identify critical moments. I describe critical moments as instances in which discourses of AG changed, reproduced, but not necessarily transformed. The analytical tools facilitated intertextual and discourse meaning connections. Data analysis indicated relevant findings: that the inquiry group provided opportunity for discourses to reproduce and change; that critical moments provided possibilities for transformation; that members did not always recognize these moments for which transformations may have eluded them; that inquiry groups have the potential to be a transforming intuitional practice. In general, findings suggested the need for structures that support, encourage, and engage members in "Self" reflection *praxis* for personal, and collective transformations, if the status quo is to be interrupted.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

An academic achievement disparity among students from different economic,

cultural, and racial backgrounds (e.g., African Americans, Latinos, among other groups

established by the US Census), primarily focused on African American, Hispanic, and

Native American students when compared to their White counterparts, has occupied and

preoccupied the public and private sector for decades (Anderson 1988; D'Amico, 2001,

Portes 2005). Despite the implementation and mandates of many national educational

reforms and initiatives, for instance the No Child Left Behind Act, Title 1[1], and the

Turning Points model, a disparity commonly known as the *achievement gap* still exists

(Jencks and Phillips 1998; Ladson-Billings 1994; Ogbu 1994).

Inevitably, a debate on achievement gap (AG) has transcended the academic field,

possibly for its complexity and the need for locating the issue within a social, political,

economic, and historical context (Landson-Billings, 2006). Although many recognize its

complexity, others continue to streamline the causes and the way in which the academic

gap can be resolved. As a result, the academic landscape of accountability, high stake

testing, and standardization has forced many stakeholders to ascribe the issue of AG

solely to the school context, thus dismissing other influential contexts outside the school.

It can be said that an overwhelming number of research studies concerning issues

of achievement gap have increased over the past twenty years (Portes, 2005). Often time,

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[1]   Title 1- was a federally funded program called The Elementary and Secondary
Act, signed on April 11, 1965 by President Lyndon B. Johnson to improve the education
of children from low-income families and assist educationally deprived children with
their special educational needs. (Kosters, M.H. and Mast, B.D. 2003)

results and findings from these studies have created one school reform or initiative after another, always with the intention of closing the gap. Allegedly, some initiatives may have even resulted in the narrowing of the gap at its best, not necessarily in the closing of the gap (Gebhard 2004; Kozol 1991; Noguera 2006; Sleeter 2007). With the concern of finding ways to resolve this problem, a progressive Turning Points middle school in Western Massachusetts decided to address the issue of achievement gap (AG) through an institutional practice called Inquiry Group (IG). Establishing inquiry groups in this middle school was part of a reform adopted in 1999.

Every year teachers and staff in this school are expected to choose an inquiry group of their interest in order to work collaboratively. As an ESL teacher in this middle school, I chose to be in the inquiry group investigating the issue of achievement gap because I felt closely connected to the issue, personally and professionally (discussed in Chapter 3).

The Grassroots Middle School (pseudonym), located in a college town, created the *Middle School Inquiry Group* (MSIG pseudonym) in 2003 after an English teacher presented to the school leadership team the reality that a group of Puerto Rican students were not doing well in school. The discussion continued for several consecutive meetings, until the leadership team decided to form a new inquiry group. The charge of this new inquiry group, MSIG, was to investigate the issue of AG through the lens of race. They also hoped to develop school wide recommendations that could resolve this issue.

The practice of implementing inquiry groups in schools for institutional change responds to the notion of teacher leadership, empowerment, and collaboration. Turning

Points 2000 fosters in the designed model these notions (Jackson & Davis, 2000). With this approach, inquiry group work presumes teacher-involvement in decision-making as a democratic practice that contributes to empowerment and collaboration. Darling-Hammond (1996) and other scholars report that, when teachers participate in democratic principles such as decision-making processes for structural and institutional change, it helps promotes teacher inquiry/research as a way of learning about learning, teaching, and research. At the same time, it provides the possibility of individual and/or collective change/transformation. It is under this premise that I place the work of the MSIG, investigating the achievement gap, at the center of my dissertation study. I wanted to better understand the institutional practice of teacher inquiry groups as a strategy for change/transformation.

Two particular literature reviews foreground the study for this dissertation. The review of the literature on the issue of achievement gap satisfies the charge of the group, synthesizes the understanding of the issue, and provides a framework for exploring representations of achievement gap (AG) and the changes over time within the context of the MSIG. Meanwhile, the literature on teacher inquiry groups I explored intends to inform the practice of inquiry groups as an institutional strategy that promotes change, in addition to considering particular assumptions about inquiry groups.

From a selective literature on achievement gap (AG), I acknowledge the phenomenon as a pervasive issue that could also be understood for its rhetoric of *blame*; as a distinct discourse pattern always blaming someone or something. Simply blaming the other(s). Identifying blame as a discourse pattern in the literature is one way of representing general views of the issue of AG at the macro level of society, which

preserves the status quo. The same discourse pattern of blame could also be recognized at the micro level of this particular MSIG, whether collectively as a group during the monthly sessions, or individually during the interviews.

A theory foregrounding the collaborative work and decision-making displayed by this MSIG is supported by specific literature on inquiry groups in schools. In the process of reviewing selective literature on this topic, I identified several assumptions, some of which parallel three (un)established assumptions of this group: First, that teachers and staff embody the role of researchers; second, that the group can resolve the issue at task; and third, that the collaborative work that characterizes inquiry groups can provide opportunities for transformation/change (See Darling-Hammond, 1998; 1997; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Up until this point, this MSIG has not consistently reflected, examined, or unpacked these assumptions. It is worth noticing, however, that the group may have unknowingly addressed some of these assumptions at different times through different venues.

An example of how members of the group may have explored the assumption of embodying a researcher's role can be described when co-leaders asked members to provide feedback about the type of data the group needed to use or collect in order to research the achievement gap in the school. This question was asked after the group had explored a series of quantitative sources. Asking members for considering relevant data parallels the type of processes researchers engage in when designing and conducting experiments/studies. It means that many researchers follow inquiry-based practices that fall under a variety of methods and approaches in the field of qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln et al., 2003).

Although the group engaged in a particular inquiry process established in the Turning Points model for conducting research, not all the members looked at themselves as researchers. Actually, one of the members claimed not to be a researcher because collecting and analyzing data required specialized skills - some of which she claimed not to have. Similarly, another member ascribed the researcher's expertise to the teacher in the group who was affiliated with the university and completing her dissertation. To emphasize, another member even suggested outside consultation by asking, "Could some expert outsiders - like Sonia Nieto - go over our work?" (Feedback, 11/14/03).

Nonetheless, the MSIG followed an inquiry process similar to scientific-based research methods. From conducting observations (e.g., looking at MCAS results, disciplinary referrals), formulating questions (e.g., "speculate what and why is this happening," based on specific data), creating an hypothesis (e.g., formulate hypothesis based on specific data), and deciding on data collection - "what kind of data should we look and collect, besides quantitative reports," to the analysis that could support or not support the hypothesis. Reasonably, an implicit assumption from this process was to create a report containing recommendations or an action plan. This could account for finding a solution to the problem or testing a null hypothesis - comparable to reaching scientific assertion(s) or explanations regarding a particular issue/phenomena.

In terms of the second assumption - inquiry groups can provide opportunities for transformation/change - it can be supported by sociocultural understandings of interactions. For instance, sociocultural theories describing people interactions can shape discourses, while discourses shape the interaction of people (Vygostky, 1986). It is in the social event of interactions when change among and within the participants can occur,

and then transformation may be a possibility. Bloome et al. (2005) argue that when

people interact they communicate and act on their ideas and ideologies, while defining,

shaping, and influencing each other, hence producing opportunities for transformation.

Conceivably, when members of an inquiry group engage in a variety of interactions (e.g.,

monthly sessions), interactions could then be understood as opportunities for influencing

discourses, whether transforming and/or reproducing.

The following is an example of the way an inquiry group could provide

opportunities for transformation as a result of people interactions during the monthly

meetings:

> "I believe the inquiry group process, which relies on
> positivistic/empirical/quantitative data, is flawed.
> We need qualitative method & evidence to fill in the gaps."
> (Anonymous, written feedback 11/13/03)

This member strongly suggested the type of data the group needed to examine:

qualitative data, as opposed to quantitative. The entire group carried out her idea as they

agreed upon shifting attention from looking at reports on scores and percentages to

conducting interviews for case studies. I considered this change a critical moment of

transformation.

Other examples of transformation were attributed to the responses given by two

other members of the MSIG: "[I am] concerned with quality & meaning of all this

quantitative data. Frances (pseudonym for the principal) recommends self study Middle

School National Data"; and "Our group would like more qualitative data" (Feedback

Sheet 11/13/03). In this manner, discourses of AG could possibly shift, transform, and/or

change. Therefore, when discourses shift, it presupposes a shift on ideas and ideologies.

Presumably, when people interact in inquiry groups, their interactions could provide

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possibilities for effecting and transforming the issue in discussion. In other words, when people participate in collaborative inquiry groups, it may possibly transform and change the issue being discussed, the people in the discussion, and/or the outcome. Or possibly it maintains the status quo. Some statements - "Can we get data from the elementary schools concerning discipline referrals?" "Can we get other academic achievement information besides MCAS Math scores"; or "Data on psychological mental health counseling referrals" - perhaps correlate academic success/failure with discipline/behavioral matters (Feedback Sheets from various members, 11/13/03).

Unless there is a process in place for reflecting and unpacking responses or interactions, whether collectively or individually, then the information gathered from the Feedback Sheet of November 13, 2003, continues to narrowly fulfill its main purpose. In this case, it helps co-leaders plan the next inquiry group session and guide the work of the group. The information from the participants' feedback did not go beyond the immediate work of the group; for instance, into a more critical and conscious awareness of what the responses meant for the individual, the group, and the connections to the issue of AG, not only for displaying what is written, but also what is not being said. In such cases, transformative and/or reproducing moments were not directly recognized.

The literature on inquiry groups addressing teachers collaborative work points to the assumption about the members' ability to establish/adopt protocols, explore a particular question to investigate an issue/problem/situation, and determine the next steps or model of inquiry to follow, which will ultimately produce an action plan to address the issue/problem/situation (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Leonardo, 2003). The literature also highlights the effectiveness of teachers working in

groups, because "Teachers learn best by studying, doing, and reflecting; by collaborating with other teachers; by looking closely at students and their work; and by sharing what they see" (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p.8). However, after five years of monthly sessions and collaborative work, this particular MSIG has not produced the kind of action plan or recommendations expected for solving the problem.

Nonetheless, this MSIG was able to synthesize all the findings from the case studies. In addition, at the end of the academic year 2007-2008, the co-leaders presented a quasi-final report to the school Leadership Team. This report included a summary of the analysis from the student's transcribed interviews and a brief history of the last four years. It also contained several recommendations for continuing the work: 1) continue working on the issue; 2) maintain the same members in the group for the following year; and 3) Maria (pseudonym) is willing to continue as a co-leader. To emphasize, the report did not include a school-wide action plan for implementation, especially one that could have consisted of ideas based on students' responses to better address the issue for closing the gap.

Since the group formed in 2003, I have been a member and researcher interested in understanding the role of inquiry groups as an institutional strategy for change or transformation.

Statement of the Problem

The study explores a realization that, after five years of monthly sessions and collaborative work, the group (we) has not unpacked representations of discourses of achievement gap, the assumptions about inquiry groups, or any other aspect of their

work. But why should they? The charge of this group has been narrowly focused on investigating the issue of AG in order to make school-wide recommendations for helping specific students become more successful in school (e.g., increase MCAS scores for some and *pass* the MCAS for others). Initially, the MSIG targeted Latino, African American, and Cambodian students to be interviewed for case studies. However, the Cambodian students were not interviewed because of misunderstandings between the school and the community liaison - parents verbally agreed on their kids' participation but did not send the written consents on time.

During the first year in which the group was established in 2003, I began my ethnographic study. While the group's collaborative work focused on the issue of achievement gap, my focus was mainly on the group's discourses about AG and the way the group constructed the students' identity. I collected and analyzed mostly qualitative data, and the findings from recursive data analysis shaped and re-shaped my ongoing study. The process of engaging in recursive analysis, informed by critical discourse methodology, allowed me unexpectedly to unveil my own representations of minority within the discourses of achievement gap. I considered these critical moments of reproduction. Then I realized that the inquiry group as an institutional strategy for achieving an identified goal could also provide opportunities for reproducing the same issue the group intends to resolve, or better yet transform it.

That is, unless intentional practices of reflection are structured within the work of inquiry groups, representations and transformations of the issue in discussion could go unnoticed. The lack of awareness of individual and collective transformations may limit the possibility of transferring transformations, from the immediate context in which they

occur, to other daily practices. Possibly, this lack of awareness is the reason why the status quo of the achievement gap in the school context continues to be unresolved. Nonetheless, the complexity of this issue transcends the school context, because inequities exist in social, economic, political, and cultural contexts, among others. To emphasize, the MSIG has not explored the representations of AG, the changes of these representations, or the possible transformations. This dissertation study serves as a vehicle for the exploration of these issues.

The Study

The dissertation study branches from an ethnographic study conducted in 2003-2004, which I refer *as an early study*. In this early study, the analysis of members' interactions about the students not doing well in school, the possible reasons for their failures, and the kind of data they needed to collect in order to investigate the problem showed discourses of AG as a binary construct. These findings were later challenged in 2005-2006, when I conducted further microanalysis of a transcribed interview from 2003-2004, which unveiled specific tensions between a member of the group and me. These tensions resulted from a conversation about the diversity of the MSIG. In this excerpt, our different opinions led to representations of diversity within a framework of assumed alliances and discourses of minority. In this case, assumed alliance refers to my own perception of alliance with my colleague and member of the MSIG; my ally for sharing characteristics traits of being in the minority group. For example, we taught minority students: he worked with students with special needs, and I worked with English language learners; I am Latina, and he is African American; I came from Puerto Rico,

and he came from the South. But, regardless of my presumed similarities of minority,

our different understandings regarding the diversity of the group lead to unresolved

tensions.

During an interview, we both represented discourses of diversity within a

framework of alliances and the context of minority, thus challenging the binary construct

of discourses of AG from my early study. Later, in 2006-2007, I decided to revisit these

tensions and the assumed alliances between us. As a result, the binary representation of

discourses of diversity from my early study shifted from a binary construct (reproducing

or transforming) to evolving discourses, reproducing and transforming simultaneously

within an interlocutor. The shift of discourses then was metaphorically represented with

an infinite symbol.

That is, in the early study I used a line in a continuum to conceptualize the binary

construct of discourses of AG as either transformation or reproduction. This analysis was

informed by the way the issue was discussed among the members of the MSIG, during

the meetings and the interviews, and supported by a literature on AG described by

rhetoric of blame.
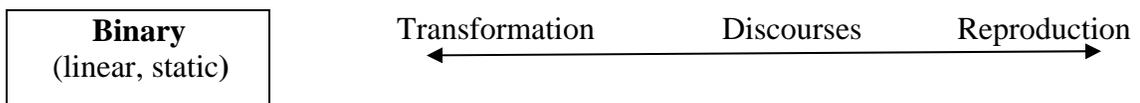
Figure 1: Discourses: T and R Binary

However, new insights from re-examining an excerpt of an interview in 2006-2007

prompted me to reconstruct this binary concept of discourses into an infinite symbol.

Figure 2: Discourses: T/P Infinite

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The infinite symbol as a metaphor allowed me to represent the constant shift of discourses within an interlocutor, in this case myself. Consequently, other questions surfaced for exploring this concept at the macro level of the inquiry group. In other words, I wanted to explore the kind of representations taking place during the monthly sessions. Based on my own representations of minority, could it be possible for the group to reproduce discourses of achievement gap, transform it, or simply maintain the status quo? What kind of implications would representations have on the way inquiry groups operate?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify and examine the way teachers collaboratively or individually represent, reproduce, and transform discourse of achievement gap, and to propose the possibility of the IG as a strategy for changing these representations. The dissertation study is threefold. First, it establishes a pattern in the understanding of the pervasive issue of the achievement gap, through the review of particular literature, and the way the MSIG represents this pattern. Second, it explores the work of the group in light of the challenges, struggles, and accomplishments in their effort of developing school-wide recommendations for closing the achievement gap. And third, the study unpacks and challenges specific assumptions about inquiry groups.

The context of the dissertation study is the Middle School Inquiry Group (MSIG) that meets once a month during a ninety-minute session. The group has completed five years of collaborative work and is currently into its sixth year. Until now, the group has

not produced the action plan for recommending effective practices for closing the AG. The following are broad research questions guiding the study:

1) How do members or the work of the MSIG group represent discourses of AG in transformative or reproductive ways according to society at large?

2) In what ways have the representations of the issue of AG, whether individually or collectively, changed over time?

3) How has the MSIG provided opportunities and support for transformation (individual and/or collective) and/or reproduction of representations of AG?

This study intends to increase awareness and understandings of the way collaborative groups may contribute to the reproduction and/or transformation of discourses in view of a particular issue. It also draws implications for inquiry groups in schools and other institutions concerned in supporting collaborative groups for becoming more critical of their work, while also creating opportunities for transformation.

Even though the study pertains to a particular inquiry group in a particular middle school, the lessons learned may illuminate others interested in creating inquiry groups or other types of collaborative groups as strategies for finding ways to transform particular issues more effectively. In addition, the study contributes to existing strategic practices in determining the kind of support groups needed to sustain collective or individual change and transformation.

Methodology

The approach for answering the research questions is through snap shots and data samplings from data collected between 2003-2007. Data corpus includes field notes, interviews, audio and written documents of the monthly sessions, and other artifacts (e.g., written text read at the meeting, participants' feedback) to verify analytical assertions. The methodology underpinning the analysis is informed by the tenet of critical discourse analysis and the understandings of (D)discourses and the representations of these discourses, AG, in a particular context, MSIG (Gee, 1999; Fairclough, 2003). This methodology provides the tools for unpacking the language used during interviews and at the monthly sessions. In addition, the study is informed by Geisler's (2004) systematic analysis approach for organizing, choosing, and reducing data (see Analyzing streams of language).

The purpose of reducing data is to establish some necessary boundaries for identifying critical moments of representation and change, namely AG discourses of transformation and reproduction. Reducing data does not mean minimizing data; rather, it is a way of establishing boundaries for choosing relevant text from a vast selection of material gathered over the years. Decisions are part of the many choices researchers made from the way data is collected and analyzed within a time frame mostly influenced by the researcher, but not exclusively. There are many other determinant factors that affect the research as well, and may contribute to its limitations.

Theoretical Framework

Informing the study is a theoretical framework that relies on the work of scholars like Cohn and Kottkamp (1993), Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993; 1999), and Paugh (2004) on teacher research/inquiry, and that of Freire (1970; 1998) and Nieto (2000; 2002; 2004), and Shor (1987) on critical pedagogy and the work of teachers that theorizes teachers' work as being instrumental in school change for considering teachers as "critically thinking" in relating their actions and experiences to the world and life of others (Shor, 1987, p.34). In following the work of these scholars, I also draw on sociocultural theories of interaction and critical ethnography in order to move my study beyond ethnography from the postmodern era (Vygostky, 1986; Carspecken, 1996). That is, these theories move my study beyond an ethnography that engages the researcher in reflective dialogic practices with the data, self, and with participants, in this case, members of the inquiry group as collaborators (Brown and Dobrin, 2004).

Critical ethnography provides researchers with approaches for addressing an issue from multiple angles and layers. It also aids the connections between the micro and macro contexts and the combination of different processes for data analysis. I refer to critical ethnography as a practice and methodology that allows the researcher to question her "motivations, practices, and interpretations" for unveiling elusive findings that often lead to new questions (Horner, 2004, p.26 in Brown and Dobrin).

In the case of this dissertation study, critical ethnography allows intertextual connections for connecting the micro context of the MSIG with the macro contexts of other organizational structures in society through a critical discourse analysis (CDA) methodology and theoretical framework. Such a process not only facilitates the

understanding of representation of discourses of AG and its intersects with the wider society, but also the intersects between collaborative principles sustaining the inquiry group's work, and collaborative practices in other organizational structures (see Phillip Kraft's study, 1999, on new management theories and Joan Greenbaum, 1999, on the new work design and organization of white-collar workers). The overarching goal is to examine the possibility of IGs as an institutional strategy that provides opportunities for transformation and/or reproduction of representations of AG.

In general, the theoretical framework supporting this dissertation is rooted in several paradigms: critical discourse analysis as an analytical tool and theoretical frame for constructing meaning that is focused on members' use of language and discourse; critical pedagogy as being *reinvented* and collectively inclusive rather than individualistic or context exclusive; and an umbrella that includes a post-structural perspectives in order to conceptualize and unpack discourses of transformation and reproduction as always shifting rather than binary (Fairclough, 1992; Gee, 1999).

Overview of the Chapters

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters. Chapter 2 includes two literature reviews, one on the achievement gap (AG) and the other on inquiry groups (IGs), to establish a theoretical frame for interpreting data and conceptualizing the understanding of these two concepts. The chapter also includes *Key Concepts* to establish a theoretical framework and a working definition of the way particular concepts are used in this dissertation: *discourses, transformation and reproduction, interactions and representation.*

The selective literature on achievement gap recounts a social, historical, and political context of the issue to establish a precedent from the past. It emphasizes the issue as a phenomenon that has been mostly centered on ethnicity and race, without excluding class differences, among other factors. The literature provides a framework for understanding the way in which this issue has been narrowly constructed as rhetoric of blame, whereas determinant factors are mostly based on *what* or *who* is to blame. Blaming someone or something justifies an array of educational initiatives, practices, or programs that have been implemented in schools as measures taken for solving the achievement gap. In general, the literature on achievement gap suggests its complexity while it confirms the pervasiveness of an unresolved issue. In fact, Singham (1998) argues that some explanations seem "to depend on where one stands on the ideological spectrum," and "there is no single magic bullet that is going to take care of it" (pp.10-11). In other words, subjective views may place the issue in a continuum discourse, and it may indeed require multilayered and multiple approaches, not only in academic structures, but also in other institutionalized practices in the wider society.

The literature on inquiry groups explores the collaborative work of the group as one that is primarily motivated by its members. Specific intentions and purpose(s) often drive the work of the group, processes of collaboration affect the people in the group, and ultimately an action plan is the outcome. The literature also aligns the institutional practice of inquiry group with the principle proposed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (1989), which recommends for schools to engage the faculty in collaborative work, to share knowledge - they are considered experts, and can learn best when exploring issues important to them.

Chapter 3 includes the study design (i.e., rationale, research questions, critical ethnographic approach) and the methodology used for collecting, organizing, and analyzing qualitative data (e.g., interviews with focal teachers; field notes of monthly meetings; and audio records of monthly meetings). This section contains a brief detail of the way field notes and research journals were gathered. The chapter has a section that describes the method for data analysis verification. It also includes a summary of the prior study that includes three years of data collection and analysis to establish the background for the dissertation study.

Chapter 4 contains a description of the setting, *Context within Context*, in order to situate the context of the inquiry group within a Turning Points model school, which is part of a three tier district located in a liberal community in the Northeastern part of the country. It brings about a theoretical framework for understanding the practice of inquiry groups in a Turning Points school that is trying to address the issue of AG. It also includes a physical sketch of the room in which the MSIG spent the first three years of its work, and what happened after that. This chapter also includes the procedures used for gathering field notes and conducting field observations. In addition, it is mentioned here the fact that not every year the same type of qualitative data was collected, which also refers to some of the challenges of the MSIG regarding its inconsistent membership. Every year new members joined the groups and others members left.

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 contain data analysis and findings. Data analysis and findings in Chapter 5 emphasize not only the way the MSIG represented the issue of AG, collectively and individually, but also the changes of these representations. It is here where the research questions are answered, and new questions surface for future studies.

Chapter 6 answers the third research question as data analysis explores the promise of inquiry groups, and the three main assumptions of inquiry groups get unpacked. Findings in this chapter also unveil the challenges, struggles, and accomplishments of the MSIG. It considers relevant lessons learned that could not only illuminate the work of inquiry groups, but also opens doors to further this research study.

The last chapter in the dissertation is Chapter 7, which is divided into three sections. The first section, *Summary of Findings*, uses the analysis form Chapter 5 to discuss the way the MSIG provided opportunities for transformation and reproduction of discourses of AG. It also examines the possible reasons for the elusiveness of these representations, whether collectively or individually. Finally, the section displays my role as a participant observer along with my bias.

The second section of the chapter, *Limitations*, recapitulates the findings in light of the lessons learned that could be drawn from the study. This section also states what the study addressed and did not address. In addition, it raises the new questions that emerged from the study. This suggests areas for future work. The third and last section of the chapter, *Implications,* explores recommendations for supporting the work of inquiry groups as an institutional strategy for change and transformation. Specifically, it draws from the findings and areas that the study did not address. To discuss the role of inquiry groups as an institutional strategy for change. This chapter also includes a discussion about the need for incorporating critical "Self" reflection tools in collaborative work

Furthermore, institutions that support the work of inquiry groups and are committed to create systematic change must also allocate resources; for example, time

and opportunities for professional growth in the flexible manners necessary to support

transformation in a continuum. However, the sole recognition of critical moments for

transformation and reproduction does not create long lasting changes. It requires

individual and collective commitment and desire to engage in processes of critical

reflection as praxis for transformation. This practice may be called *critical reflection*

consciously and purposefully as a transformative and liberating process for revealing,

understanding, and contesting one's and others biases (Freire, 1985; Gee, 1999; Giroux

& McLaren, 1986; Johns, 2006; Rosatto et al. 2006; Shor, and Freire, 1987).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: A THEORETICAL LENS

Achievement Gap (AG)

The issue of the achievement gap is not new; Professor J. D. Anderson, from the

Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Illinois, recounts in the

essay *The Historical Context for Understanding the Test Score Gap (1998):*

> The first achievement gap that African Americans had to overcome
> was the "Literacy Gap." Indeed, the African American illiteracy
> rate of approximately 90% in 1800 was the exact opposite
> of the White literacy rate of 90%. (p.3)

He argues that a rhetoric of 'gap' has haunted African Americans for more than two

decades; from a "Literacy Gap," "Elementary School Attendance Gap," "High School

Completion Gap," "College Graduation Gap," "Graduate and Professional Degrees Gap,"

to the most pervasive of all, the "Income Gap" (Anderson, 2004, 1998, p.2). It is

astonishing to look at the past and realize that in spite of today's intellectual,

technological, scientific advancements in so many areas and levels, conditions of

inequities in society have not changed much for certain groups, particularly for African

Americans and Latinos/Hispanics (interchangeably). Indeed, an education/academic gap

along racial lines is not a new discovery: One must not forget a history that produced a

'black-white' issue in the 1800s and long before that. In 2008, more than two hundred

years later, the "gap" still persists.

For this reason, concern and controversies about the causes and ways to address

the academic achievement disparity between Asian American, Hispanic, and African

American students when compared to their White counterparts (racial categories)

continues to be the focus of discussion, research, and reform in the field of education and in political platforms. Since the 1960s, researchers have documented how "black children" lag behind "white youngsters" in their performance on standardized tests. Moreover, for the slowly rising tide of U.S. students, *achievement isn't lifting minority children enough to catch up with their white classmates* (Hoff, D., 2000)[2].

Researchers, scholars, policymakers, administrators, and teachers amongst other people have been trying to find "solutions" to the "problem" in an attempt to close the gap. For example, over the last forty years there have been extensive initiatives and efforts to address what some refer to as a crisis in education (Berliner and Biddle, 1995; Kozol, 1991). Some of the approaches intended to address the so-called education crisis include compensatory programs like Title 1, Head Start, and most recently the No Child Left Behind Act. These and other academic approaches designed to alleviate academic disparities are mostly informed by results from standardized assessment tests such as MCAS and pre-school screenings. Standardization thus constitutes standard programs and practices presumed to improve students' academic and school outcomes. These standardized programs may equate to a one-size-fits-all approach that inevitably leaves some students behind. Nieto (2004) points out quite clearly that schools have been unsuccessful academic institutions in educating particular students, "primarily those from racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse, and poor families" (p.2).

The number of studies and reports defining, describing, and debating the issue of the achievement gap is in the thousands (a web search I conducted in 2003). Therefore, findings and interpretations largely "depend on where one stands on the ideological

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[2] Education Week. Vol.20, No1. September 6, 2000

spectrum" (Singham, 1998, p.10). Some studies report findings showing that the gap has narrowed, and others that the gap that has widened. The way research studies are constructed, data analyzed, and findings and academic discrepancies among students reported depends on researchers, reviewers, and policy makers who are influenced by political, philosophical, ideological, and experiential views and foci.

To illustrate this, a report from the National Center of Education Statistics (US Department of Education, NCES) in 2001 indicates:

> The performance of African American and Latino youngsters improved dramatically during the 1970s and 1980s. The 1990s, however, were another matter. In some subjects and at some grade levels the gaps started growing.

Other reports in 2004 and 2005 from the United States Department of Education (US DOE), Institute of Education Sciences (IES), and the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) revealed that the reading and math gap between Whites-Blacks and Whites-Hispanics narrowed. The *Long-Trend Reading Assessments, 1971-2004* (Appendix A and B), is a comparison of reading scale scores. The trend is represented by number points to demonstrate improvement over time, when 'Black' and 'Hispanic' student's scores are compared with that of the 'White' students. Graphs in Appendix A and Appendix B show a test score gap based on points differences. Although Black and Hispanic students improved, they still scored below their white counterparts in the reading test at the particular age groups: 9, 13, and 17 year old. To synthesize these trends from statistical graphs, I created two charts that simplify the reading score trends.

Table 1: Reading Score Gap Trends

Reading Score Gap Whites-Blacks

Age group	Year 1975	Year 2004
9 yr. Old	35 points	26 points
13 yr. Old	39 points	22 points
17 yr. Old	53 points	29 points

Reading Score Gap: Whites-Hispanics

Age group	Year 1975	Year 2004
9 yr. old	34 points	21 points
13 yr. old	30 points	24points
17 yr. Old	41 points	29 points

These trends, from 1975 to 2004, on the average Reading Score Gap reported by the US DOE, IES, NCES, in conjunction with the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), suggest that the gap will eventually be closed. However, it is also important to recognize that when African American and Hispanic/Latino students' test scores increased over the years, the scores of White students also increased. One could say that White students do not wait for African American and Latino students to catch up with them. In other words, ups and downs in the data show that the possibility drawn from one set of data, indicating that someday the academic gap will be closed may be an illusion.

It is imperative to emphasize caution with research studies, not only for the way results on academic performance are constructed, but also for the way in which the results are analyzed and interpreted. Often, data is analyzed and reported to support particular views. It depends on who designs, proposes, and funds the study; which also impacts the methodology used for collecting and analyzing data and for constructing a final report. In other words, where one stands in a debate influences how studies are understood, reported, and used (Rolstad, Mahoney and Glass, 2005).

For this reason, the process of synthesizing the literature on Achievement Gap was problematic, due to the lack of consistency in handling the students referred to in the discussions. For example, in some studies, Asian and Native America students were

included with other "minority" students, while in other studies they were totally invisible or excluded. What dominated the discourse in most studies is a *black and white* contrast; comparisons of African American students to "their White counterparts" in the same manner in which Latino/Hispanic students were compared to "White counterparts." In all cases, the term "counterparts" refers to White students as the common measuring stick for comparing subgroups. When these types of generalizations are made, they imply that African American and Latino/Hispanic students do not achieve for the same reasons. This presumes that all African American students and all Latino/Hispanic students not only learn the same way, but also have the same academic difficulties. Such unwarranted assumptions totally disregard the possibility of different learning styles and other factors that may influence the teaching and learning processes.

Many studies referred to Latinos and Hispanics in terms that were used interchangeably and without distinction, as though they all constitute one ethnic and cultural group. And even when low income or economic status were identified as an influential factor in student low academic performance, White students were usually generalized as the achievers against whom deficiencies of other students were based on. Therefore, there is an assumption in these studies that poor African American and Latino/Hispanic students are the only ones who are underachieving. It was noticeable in the literature I reviewed that White students from poor economic backgrounds were rarely mentioned, as if none of them could be included in the achievement gap. Whatever the reason, studies that recognize high achievement for at least some African American and Latino/Hispanic students are not the norm, but rather an exception., in many of these studies. In general, the achievement gap is pervasively represented in the

literature as a problem that resides in particular subgroups, and then particular solutions

are geared towards fixing the problem represented by these subgroups.

There is an extensive body of literature that places ethnicity and race at the center

of the issue that highlights specific factors influencing students' academic performance. I

use rhetoric of *blame* for unpacking determining factors that are mostly based on *what* or

who is to blame. This literature of *blame* will be discussed further in the dissertation.

But in terms of the literature on the issue of Achievement Gap, there seems to be a

pattern of discourse that invokes the rhetoric of blame to explain the features of

Achievement Gap. The most common forms of blame discourses blame the school,

teachers, students, parents, and sometimes a much broader category involving

sociocultural, racial, and economic factors. A brief account of these discourses follows.

Blaming the School

Studies have shown that the way schools are organized and structured influences

the academic performance of many students, as well as contributing to the construction of

social identity in the affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of the individual (Byrne,

1966). With the best of intentions, policymakers and educators during the 20th century

have created multiple categories and labels in order to establish remedial practices and to

allocate resources to address students' needs. The main justification for educational

labels such as "at risk," "under-performing," "low readers," and "language limited" is to

find and allocate funding for particular programs. This engages the implementation of

the Elementary and Education Act, the Individuals with Disability Act, and Chapter 71A,

as well as others policies. It is worth noting that many of these policies have been
amended.

The way in which schools construct students' identities can be identified as a
form of *school cultural pedagogy.* Kincheloe and McLaren (2003) refer to this as,
". . . ways particular cultural agents produce particular hegemonic ways of seeing and
acting" (pp. 442-443). In this process of constructing and co-constructing student
identities, it can be mistakenly assumed that knowledge of the self is being gained from a
mere label (Foucault, 1977a). If a student is identified as being "unsuccessful," for
example, this might seem by itself to warrant membership in a particular group of
learners. Belonging to this particular group in turn assumes a set of shared and
homogeneous characteristics of being unsuccessful. With identification in a group comes
an inherent oppression, a fact that may be unrecognized by all those involved (Yon,
2000).

Historically, Shor (1992) has described schools as ". . . one of the several agencies
to reproduce the dominant ideology . . ." that mirrors society's economic and political
agenda (p.175). Bourdieu and Passerson (1990) argue that schools have become an
economic product like any other resulting in the domination of the economic interest of
those in power. With an agenda of accountability and high stakes testing that drives the
current public education politics, schools become 'competitive marketplaces,' for which
schooling turns to be a *retail product* (Bastian, 1986; Giroux, 1983).   If schools are
places of social reproductions of inequity, what role does the inquiry group play, as
members work collaboratively to find solutions to the AG, especially when the charge of

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the inquiry group is to look at the issue through the lens of race, and to make

recommendations?

Other scholars have described the reproduction of inequities that occur in schools

as manifestations of what happens in the larger sphere of society (Bordieu, 1986; Freire,

1970; Giroux, 1983, 1981; Rothstein, 2004). In other words, the education system serves

as a tool for justifying the social arrangements that sustain a capitalist society. In the case

of the United States, a capitalist economy maintains inequalities among classes and

groups in order to keep and retain great wealth among a few. "There will always be far

more workers than owners, and far more people who are poor than rich" (Ferguson,

2006). In other words, eradicating inequalities in society, including those that take place

in public schools, may seem an impossible task, given the past and present political,

economic, and historical context of the United States. An alternative would require the

establishment of a shared philosophical view about the way in which public education

should be structured. In order to ensure the academic success of "all students," access to

resources and material capital should be the right of all students (Nieto, 2004, p. 2). It

may be necessary that not only the people in power, but also the general public, must

support such ideology.

The apparent impossibility of reaching such a view should not be an excuse for

simply accepting the idea that a disparity of achievement among students in American

schools, which has existed for more than four decades, is the " way things are"

(Leonardo, 2003, p.173). Such acceptance contributes to an educational normalization

perceived by many as an unfortunate situation in which nothing can be done. Leonardo

(2003) identifies this form of justification or "rationalization" as a negative appraisal

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rather than as a negating discourse; the latter would remove the linguistic tensions that

exist in the contradictions of the discourse.

Nieto (2004) suggests that a worthwhile educational philosophy or program

should be one concerned with "raising the achievement of all students and providing

them with an equitable and high quality education," and with "giving students an

apprenticeship in the opportunity to become critical and productive members of a

democratic society" (p.2). If public schools are the primary focus in the issue of AG, in

terms of what schools can do to help improve the test score gap, Ferguson's study (1988)

of experimental and non-experimental research points to six main possibilities:

1. preschool programs - strong preschool programs to enhance students IQ
2. student ability grouping - more opportunity for African American students to enroll in advanced placement classes with supporting and engaging teaching practices
3. instructional interventions for students at risk of failure - effective programs staffed by experienced and talented teachers (i.e., Success for All programs)
4. matching students and teachers by race - not in all cases, but it is relevant for students to see people like them
5. selecting teachers with strong test scores - teachers that master their subject matter and know how to make content comprehensible
6. smaller classes - provides more individualized attention and help develop a stronger teacher-student relationship

Blaming Teachers

Many studies suggest that teacher's perceptions, expectations, and behaviors

toward "Black" and other minority students have directly impacted academic outcomes

(Ferguson, 1998a, 1998b; Ladson Billings, 1994; Roscigno, 1998; Gay, 2000; Delpit,

1995). When Bacharach (1990) talked about an academic crisis, he warned not to put the

blame exclusively on teachers, partly because narrow views about teachers can obscure

other contributing factors. Nevertheless, when teachers have low expectations of minority students it can result in a *self-fulfilling prophecy* and thus contribute to significant achievement gaps between minority and non-minority students (Ferguson, 1998; Goodlad, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Delpit (1995) argues that teachers' preconceived notions of minority students may account for misreading and misinterpreting students' "aptitude or abilities as a result of . . . cultural differences" (p.167).

If teachers' perceptions of students can impact students academic performance and teaching practices, as some studies show, then engaging in critical reflection could allow teachers to become aware of counterproductive perceptions that tend to reproduce dominant ideologies. Freire (in Shor & Freire, 1987) claims "that the dominant ideology 'lives' inside us and also controls society outside" (p.13). If one can understand the way one is conditioned by distancing oneself from a situation as a conscious act and being *reflective,* then one can aim to transform and change. Shor claims, "the irony of consciousness ... makes liberation possible" (in Shor & Freire, 1987, p.14). In other words, if teachers have the time for distancing themselves from their teaching conditions and the students, then could distancing, as a reflection practice, produce transformation? Questions about whether or not intentional critical reflection enables the unpacking of representations associated with issues of achievement gap, as a promise for transformation, is a central thread of my dissertation.

Strong teacher-student relationships influencing students' performance are among the factors specifically addressed in other studies. For instance, a student in Nieto's (2000) book entitled *Puerto Rican Students in U.S. School* states, "The only thing that

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helped me succeed from a lot of things [in school] is one teacher that I know . . . She

loves kids. She goes to my basketball games, she goes to my volleyball games." (p.154).

In the same book, Rolon's (in Nieto, 2000) case studies of Puerto Rican girls affirms the

importance of teacher-student relationship. When students talk about teachers who made

a difference and their ideal teacher, these are among the things they share: "caring";

"who were involved with the students like they were our mothers"; "loves kid"; "she is

not Hispanic but she says she has a heart for Hispanic students"; "who loves Hispanic

culture"; "if I feel depressed, they're always there" (p.154-155). Moreover, students'

perception of school as a "second home" is an influential factor in the students'

educational lives; a fact also mentioned in Rolon's case studies (Rolon in Nieto, 2000,

p.154).

Blaming Students

Studies blaming students for their academic failure often claim that this failure is

an inherently impossible condition to change. According to Ferguson (1998) and Nieto

(2004), the findings for supporting a deficit model are grounded on unsustainable theories

about students' low academic performance as based on students' deficiencies. Other

studies claim peer relations as influential factors for students' academic failure or

success. For example, Kaplan (1999) reports on studies of Black and Latino students that

show the way peers could be influential in students' attempt to do well in school. The

study concluded that within the school context many students pay attention to what peers

perceive as 'acting white' for assimilating societal behaviors of being studious, or for

having a desire to succeed (Kaplan, 1999). This type of identity behavior is what Julia

Wyatt, a member of the MSIG, referred to as "studentship behavior" (Interview, 5/7/04).

Other factors for blaming students include students' poor perception of self, poor

attitude, lack of motivation, as well as the absence of good role models. Poor or low

perception of self in many cases results in students either misbehaving or dropping out of

school, and is thus explanatory of the reasons for not succeeding academically (Ferguson,

2002; Rosatto, 2005).   If students are to blame for bad behavior or dropping out of

school due to low self-perception and levels of frustration, then the context in which

these occur cannot be left out of the equation. In this case, the school is to blame. Then,

questions should be asked about the kind of institutional practices that may contribute to

students' low perception of self in the context of the issue of achievement gap.

Another factor that appears in the literature refers to the school readiness of

students. Some schools have established programs to address the issue of inadequate

preparation for academic performance. For example, a program that tries to address these

issues in the preschool context is the Head Start Program. This program and other

remedial programs (such as Reading Recovery and Title I) see students as problems to be

fixed: if the students can be fixed, then the problem gets fixed. The design and

establishment of academic programs that focus on student deficiency mostly follow

straightforward, linear, and scientific procedures: first, a problem is identified, then

factors related to a supposed solution to the problem are identified, so that a solution is

almost expected to take its own course. This simplistic linear approach could be

mathematically represented with a simple formula: *Problem + Factor = Solution*, thus

Blaming Parents

Another set of blames' studies are those that attribute students' failure to their parents. Studies that highlight parents as the primary factor for the achievement gap point to poor parenting skills, parents' educational background, unstable family situations, single parent homes, and the lack of parental involvement in their children's education (Ceci, S. & Williams, W., 1998; Phillips et al. in Jencks and Phillip, 1998). What does it mean when schools and policymakers insist on the need to increase parental involvement? Does it mean that they should attend open house, parent-teacher conferences, PTO meetings, or volunteer to participate in committees, engage in reading or tutoring practices during times that many parents are either working, caring for younger children, an elder, a sick family member, or simply unable to participate in the way expected? Furthermore, does this blame game imply that schools or society should determine the way parents raise their children? William Raspberry (1996) from the Washington Post Writers Group suggests this about parental involvement: "Shouldn't we spend at least a part of our resources and energy helping those parents learn how to do their jobs better? Then maybe we could save the threats of punishment for those who know what to do, but refuse to try."

Sociocultural, Racial and Economic Blame

Roscigno (1998), Rothstein (2004), and Kozol (2005), among others, put the blame on social and economic class as the major reasons for academic disparities. However, Ogbu (1994) contests the explanation on class or economic factors, because according to him "it does not work" (p.265). He attributes the gap to *racial stratification*

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and to the inequality that exists in the United States, noting that "... black children at every class level do less well than white children" [in the same social/class level] (Ogbu, 1994, p. 265-291). For this reason, an emphasis on the sociocultural interactions between "Whites and Blacks" may explain academic gaps, and not just differences in class or economic factors, because "of the ways that whites treat blacks, but also from the ways that blacks have responded to that treatment" (Ogbu, 1994, pp. 271, 283).

Ogbu's (1994) sociocultural perspective on the issue is a study that shows African-American, Latino, and Native American students performing at lower academic levels when compared to their White and Asian counterparts (College Board, October, 1999), regardless of socioeconomic status and parental education background. The complexity of the issue lies in multiple factors operating in specific and different contexts at multiple levels.

But if one were to capture pervasive understandings of issues of AG, under the race and ethnic line, three main theoretical categories summarizes this phenomena. I created a flow chart to indicate a relevant framework that facilitates the placing of some influential factors under particular paradigms. That is, looking at the issue of AG in certain ways allows research and the understanding of this phenomenon to be addressed in particular ways.

Race/Ethnic Lens

Sociocultural economic & political

Social, Emotional Pathology Model

Genetic

IQ

i.e., legacy of slavery, poverty, racism

i.e., oppression inequities (Ogbu, 1994; Nieto, 2004)

i.e.: lack of motivation poor parenting unstable family (Raspberry, 1996)

e.g. Bell Curve (Bernstein and Murray, 1994)
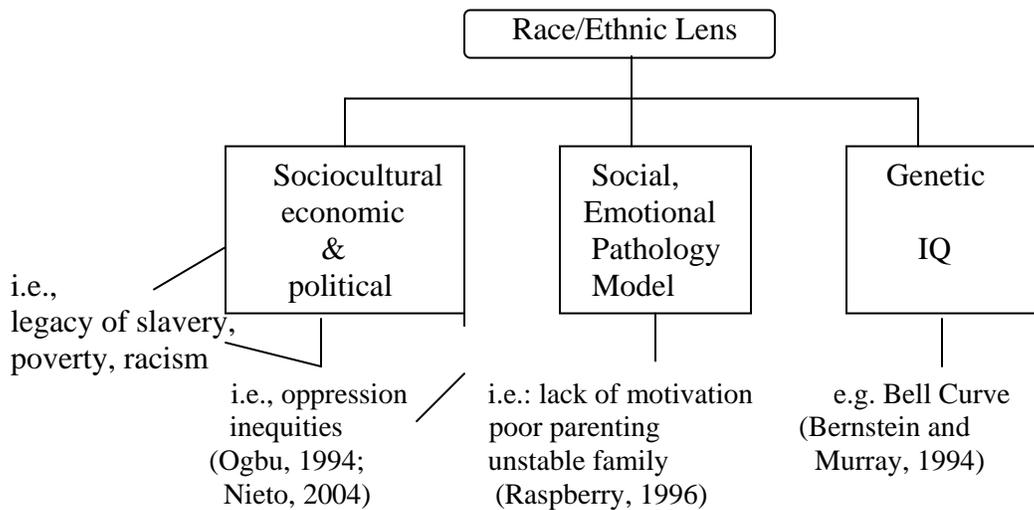
Figure 3:Achievement Gap Paradigm

The inequities that transcend the academic sphere are fundamentally grounded in a racial construct that produces racism (Sleeter, 2007; Tatum, 1997; Williams, 2003). This is a racism that needs to be acknowledged as pervasive in daily lives, either explicitly through obvious acts, or implicitly hidden in and within underlying texts (Bennett, 1995; Nieto and Bode, 2008). Unveiling the hidden spaces in which racism resides may be extremely constraining. Consequently, de-racializing the achievement gap phenomenon could become an undoable task.

Lopez (2003) attests to the narrow understanding of the pervasive racism in schools when most education programs across the nation often limit the topic of racism and race to special courses or seminars that are not part of the core curriculum of leadership preparation. Young and Liable (2000) directly implicate many "White educators and educational leader" in reproducing issues of racism in schools due to their lack of understanding and recognizing the racial issue (p. 375). To emphasize, Lopez (2003) suggests that in order to interrupt institutional practices of inequality that translate

into racism, it is necessary to confront and struggle: "we . . . must not only be able to successfully navigate . . . cultural divisions, but must also have a thorough understanding of political systems, intergovernmental relations, micro politics, community participation, interest groups, and theories of power and conflict" (p.72). She adds, "Indeed, today's educational leaders must not only be culturally savvy but politically savvy as well" (Lopez, 2003, p.72).

After all, issues of AG must not be viewed utterly as a racial phenomenon. Nor should it be solely bounded to academic contexts, rather it should be understood as a more pervasive, multilayer, complex, and integrated societal phenomenon. Specifically, inequities do not only occur in the academic context, they are also reflected in other societal strata such as employment, health, and income, among others, thus indicating a social, economic, political, and historical context beyond the educational field (Bernstein in Apple, 1982).

The social conditions in which low income homes struggle have been another predominant factor in the literature that defines social class differences for influencing students' academic performance (Nieto, 2004, Portes, 2005; Rothstein, 2004). It is also necessary to name other differences that create divisions among groups. I do not discuss these differences, but omitting them from the context of the achievement gap discourses would deny that they exist.

Poverty rate, low income, and unemployment, among others, place African American and Latino students' households at a disadvantage, when compared to middle class white counterparts. Research has found that students living in poverty have fewer family background advantages based on the kind of literacy required in schools: limited

access to books, computers, and extracurricular opportunities (Ferguson, 2002). In addition, many children from poor or low-income families do not enjoy the social experiences that come from vacations, visits to museums, theaters, and other types of recreational/educational activities that are ingrained in middle class Americans' value system. Rothstein (2004) argues, "The influence of social class characteristics is probably so powerful that schools cannot overcome it, no matter how well trained are their teachers and no matter how well designed are their instructional programs and climates" (p.6).

To summarize, when the rhetoric of blame uses indicators for blaming "students," "schools," and "poor parenting" among single factors, it dismisses other factors outside of the school context. Focus on any one given factor in isolation obscures the ability of connecting the inequities reproduced through institutional hegemonic practices, thus the issue of academic gap gets unchallenged. As a result, blame has long served to draw people's attention away from the roots that constructs economic, political, and social gaps. On the other hand, focusing attention on certain factors results in the establishment of initiatives and efforts that are intended to address the very inequities created in society. For example, the Affirmative Action, Bilingual Education Act, and American Disability Act have been established to address unfair, unjust, and oppressive practices (Portes, 2005). However, addressing particular factors detached from a bigger context eludes conditions that may have originated the targeting factor.

Chubb and Loveless (2002) in the book Bridging the Achievement Gap state that efforts around the country show

> "that the achievement gap can be bridged. If the achievement gap could be reduced, the fortunes of blacks and Hispanics would not only be raised, but

the social and economic differences that intensify the country's racial

tensions would also be ameliorated." (P.1)

In a similar way, Bryan Goodwin (2000) reports that when more Americans become full

participants in the economy, everyone will benefit from increased economic productivity,

which in turn will decrease existing social tensions.

Inquiry Groups (IG)

For this dissertation study, I focused my attention on specific literature discussing

inquiry groups as a strategy or a method for a group of people with a common interest or

concern to inquire or investigate, improve, and perhaps solve a particular issue.

Specifically, the literature on inquiry groups commonly shows an intention to organize

members (e.g., teachers, school staff) into collaborative groups in order to work

collectively. Another feature of inquiry groups is fostering structures for democratic

governance and leadership, which is a particular goal in the Turning Points model

(*Turning Points 2000*[3]*).*

When teachers and other constituencies participate in democratic governance

structures, such as inquiry groups, a collaborative culture, as well as empowerment and

leadership among all stakeholders in the school, can develop (Jackson and Davis 2000).

Jackson and Davis (2000) claim, that inquiry groups in Turning Points middle schools

provide a democratic structure and process that ensures the voices of stakeholders "in

planning and implementing school improvement efforts" (p.146). They add, "the most

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[3]   Turning Points 2000 draws from the original Turning Points: Preparing American Youth
for the 21st Century (1989) sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, which
established the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development in 1986 and in turned it established
the Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents.

significant improvement in student achievement occurs when all members of the school community focus simultaneously on transforming instruction, and on developing the skills and practices of strong democratic leadership" (Jackson and Davis, 2000, p.147).

In addition, in the Turning Points model inquiry groups "are important vehicles for maximizing direct participation from throughout the school community in school governance," specifically for decision-making (Jackson and Davis, 2000, p.148). Said governance forms the foundation for building democratic principles "in the purest of high academic achievement and bright future for all young adolescents" (Jackson and Davis. 2000, p. 146). In this way, Jackson and Davis (2000) describe the inquiry group model as a practice that takes into account the knowledge of teachers and educators as they engage in "data-based inquiry" to inform decisions on "how to best meet the students' needs" (pp.148-151). This notion brings about the assumption that teachers embody knowledge about what is best for the students as well as the school community at large, and that teachers can make the necessary changes in schools if they participate in democratic practices such as inquiry groups.

In fact, the idea of teacher's knowledge and the need for providing the mechanism for teachers to participate in inquiry work in academic institutions aligns with the principle proposed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (1989). This principle presupposes teachers as experts, knowledgeable in their fields, who can also learn best when investigating an issue relevant to them. Consequently, this notion supports the idea that an inquiry group of teachers can facilitate this type of work. More specifically, that the role of inquiry groups in schools can foster learning communities

that engage its members in collaborative processes in order to create institutional changes.

In fact, Nancy Barnes (2001) sees inquiry groups this way: "Participatory school-based research, like other forms of action research, can actually make changes and fix things as well as document and evaluate. It brings about concrete results, in addition to building a democratic community" (Barnes in Education Week, April 25, 2001, p.40). Furthermore, she asserts that when teachers work in inquiry projects and get to exercise *power* as they make decisions, then their voices are included, thus creating "a new form of accountability and leadership development in small schools" (Barnes, 2001, pp. 42-43). The presumption is that participating in inquiry groups not only creates possibilities to transform and change things in schools, but also the members can develop leadership roles in which to exercise *power* (Barnes, 2001).

I have found that when teachers and school staff form collaborative groups, for example inquiry groups, they are driven by some type of intrinsic and/or extrinsic force. I refer to the types of force that either flair up from within, as personal motivations that are influenced and situated outside the self (i.e., a majority of students fail a teacher's test), or those forces extrinsically outside the self and situated within the institution (i.e., school not achieving AYP). Influencing forces underlying a group's work are not always expressed, nor are they exclusively defined or described. Some may be operative guiding assumptions that influence inquiry groups in particular ways, and the recommended solutions do not necessarily address the deeper root of the problem/issue. Perhaps these hidden forces are the reason why long lasting changes in schools and other institutions are difficult to maintain: They are multifaceted and multilayer. Nonetheless, support for

collaborative work continues to permeates the education field, for which the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE, 1999) describes inquiry group practices as ". . . a deliberative process in which teachers, administrators, students, parents, and other community members examine and analyze a range of data relating to problems and challenges, and develop action plans to address them" (p.2).

Missing in this vast literature is an exploration of the intersection among the discourses of the issue of AG within an IG through a critical lens. How are discourses represented in the context of an inquiry group in which members are not precisely identifying the inquiry group as a vehicle for transformation? Therefore, this study intends to bring into the dialogue discourses of Achievement Gap (AG) and Inquiry Groups (IG) in order to contribute to the body of literature in educational research for connecting the self more explicitly to the context of group collaborative work. Unless explicit practices are in place for recognizing the self within an issue, then opportunities for transformation may be situated and not necessarily an ongoing process.

Key Concepts
Discourses

In order to identify and unpack IG members' representations of issues of the AG and how these representations change over time, I draw on the way James Gee (1999) describes discourses as a tool for crafting meaning, constructing identity, connecting texts, and integrating values, beliefs, and other forms of "non-language" (p.13). In other words, "*Discourses*" with a capital "*D*" are:

> " . . . different ways in which we humans integrate language with non-language "stuff," such as different ways of thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, believing, and suing symbols, tools, and objects in the right places and at the right times so as to enact and recognize different identities and activities, give the material world certain meanings" (Gee, 1999, p.13).

Discourses with "little d" refer to "language-in-use," in terms of the use of language in a particular context (Gee, 1999, p.7). And, in the case of the interviews around the topic of achievement gap, language can be considered "Discourses" with a capital 'D,' thus revealing points of attachment for data analysis in this study (Gee, 1999, p.7). That is, whether 'Discourse,' or 'discourse,' both consider language not only to codify experiences, to empower its users, to contest issues of power and identity, but also to be understood as a " . . . weapon for critique" (Leonardo, 2003, pp. 71-72). Moreover, language use constitutes expressions of power, gender, and identity, which are constructed in and through discourses and in the ideological significance of the choices authors make during conversational interactions, and in the patterns in those choices.

The word *discourses* refers to the utterances that not only situate individuals within a historical, social, and political context that reflect specific ways of being, acting, and knowing for legitimizing oneself as authoritative, but embody contentious and conflictive relationships (Fairclough, 2003, 2005; Gee, 1999). Fairclough and Wodak (1997) define discourse as " . . . socially constitutive as well as socially shaped" (p. 257). It constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identity of people and their relationships. It is also constitutive in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in that sense it contributes to its pervasive state of maintaining itself. Unless people participate in discursive practices of reflection to play an active role of interrupting enacted inequities, the status quo will remain unchallenged.

Multiple discourses in the dissertation study do not respond to a discursive world in which people's interactions are detached from the abstracts of self and the world, nor do they limit them. Rather they are discursively intertwined. By a discursive world, I refer to the multiple discourses in which people draw upon during interactions, which are also complexly interrelated with different elements of society (Fairclough, 2003).

Representations of discourses of transformation and reproduction were first explored in my yearlong ethnographic study (2003-2004). This early study focused on the different ways in which the IG members participated in co-constructing students' identity of failure, while reproducing and transforming discourses of the achievement gap. Discourses, in this case, not only referred to the utterances present in the data situating individuals within a historical, social, and political context that reflects specific ways of being, acting, and knowing, but also displayed as contentious and conflictive (Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 1999).

Furthermore, understanding discourses in terms of language use discloses a social identity construct when talking about the kids, and the reasons for their low achievement or failure. Here, I make reference to Fairclough's (2003) concept of *language* as a semiotic system, "dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life," which also constitutes social structures that determine certain possibilities and excludes others, similar to whether one succeeds academically or not (p.2).

Transformation and Reproduction

In a discursive world, where multiple texts are intertwined in people's interactions, then interactions could be places in which discourses are not detached from the people and the institutional hegemonies in which the discourses operate.

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Consequently, the tensions that occur in discursive interactions may be understood as possibilities for transformations.

Transformation here refers to the way language is used and the critical moments in which the status quo is interrupted (individually or collectively). Interrupting the status quo provides the opportunity for change and transformation that can be extended beyond the moment in which it occurs for a greater impact. Rossatto (2005) proposes the idea of "transformative optimism" to achieve collective transformation. He uses a spiral representation "to show collective effort toward upward mobility" (Rossatto, 2005, p. 81).

Figure 4: Transformative Optimism

In this sense, people's vision of what it means, to have "a better future" for example, presumes a collective consciousness and consensus in which individuals and structural systems are in agreement for reaching that vision (p.81). However, determining a vision of a common good may have different consequences for people; the so-called "common good" may be advantageous for some and disadvantageous for others.

That is, the notion of a "common good" assumes a utopian representation of upward mobility within the spiral. It also assumes a unified collective view in which all parts involved are in agreement. If so, who defines and determines what is the common good and who benefits? In other words, what if a particular view does not benefit everyone? To whom and for whom would it be acceptable? Perhaps considering this

duality could explain the reason why issues in society are often discussed mostly in particular and specific ways, and why certain people get to understand certain things in certain ways. Paradoxically, a grand narrative speaks to a universalized intention for establishing truth or reality for all. Foucault (1980) alerts people to the implications of the term "truth," for it is often enforced and not discovered (in Leonardo, 2003, p.70):

> Truth is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements. Truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power, which produces and sustains it, and to effects of power, which it induces and which extend it (p.133).

Therefore, a spiral representation of discourse could also be understood as binary in the sense that it assumes all things on the same path for everyone, always progressing upward, and in constant transformation or reproduction. I decided to appropriate, rather, the symbol of the infinite to describe the discourses of transformation and reproduction not as binary, but as being progressive, regressive, and both at once (Ortiz, F.W., 2007 unpublished). Internal and external forces (i.e., policies, individual interests) in constant interaction contribute to the establishment of boundaries. The following diagram is a visual representation of this construct.

Transformation   Reproduction

Figure 5: Infinite Construct of Discourse

The symbol of infinite as a metaphor allows me to represent the fluidity of discourses of transformation and reproduction as multidirectional, dynamic, and in

constant motion. In order to capture the shift of the discourses in particular contexts: in

the case of this dissertation study, within the MSIG context. Therefore, the dynamics of

discourse as transformation and reproduction are metaphorically illustrated with this

symbol, for discourses transcend spaces, texts, and contexts in which they are produced,

consumed, and captured.

In terms of discourses of reproduction, the study aligns with a reproduction theory,

which *is concerned with how existing social structures are reproduced through either*

social or cultural reproduction (Bourdieu and Passerson, 1997). This is closely related to

deficit theory, a theory forcefully criticized by Sonia Nieto (2004) because deficit theory

explains the achievement gap as a deficiency based on a lack of intelligence rooted in

genetic inferiority due to racial background or cultural deprivation. Transformation

theory aims not only to unveil practices that sustain the reproduction of inequities as

natural, but also to disrupt and interrupt reproductions (Freire, 1995; Nieto, 2004; Shor,

1987; Torbert, 1976).

Interactions and Representations

Interactions in discursive practices may be understood as possibilities for

transformation or for reproduction of the status quo. According to Freire and Macedo

(1987), human interactions are the act of "*reading the word and the world,"* and the

interpretation of language for its potential in transforming people's consciousness by

interrogating one's view of the world, one's position in it, and one's participation in it

(p.8). Interactions are mediated through language use and discourses in action.

Therefore, language-in-use (i.e., intentions and functions) and word choices (i.e., lexical choices) function as tools for negotiating tensions and disclosing some aspects of self, *others*, and the world. Language-in-use can thus potentially unveil new insights in these three contexts (Freire and Macedo, 1987). Language-in-use with word choices could be understood as the way interlocutors interweave different texts into their discourses while also relying on specific utterances to achieve particular goals, whether consciously or not (Bakthin, 1981; Fairclough, 1992).

Bloome and Clark (2004) remind us that when people interact in discursive social practices, in this case the inquiry group, issues of race, social identity, and power relations are revealed. That is, "not only in what is included in a world view [as being said] but also what is left out and silenced" (Giroux, 1985, p.35). In other words, if one pays close attention to the language used by members during interactions, then representations and ideologies could be unveiled. When representations are made visible, they create opportunities for change. Therefore, inquiry groups may be possible sites for transformation if participants engage in critical reflection to unpack their own representations.

For this dissertation, interaction focuses on the way members of the IG interact during the monthly meetings and during interviews. It is during these interactions that representations, choices, and consequences are entwined with negotiated tensions. For this reason, I pay careful attention to language and word choice used during interviews and at monthly sessions in order to unpack representations of the issue of AG. I make reference to Fairclough's (2003) concept of *language* as "dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life," which also constitutes social structures that determine

"certain possibilities and excludes others" (p.2). In other words, representations are

realized through the use of language and discourse that can also be manifested in ways of

acting and behaving, through non-verbal interactions.

CHAPTER 3

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study can be defined as longitudinal qualitative research that uses a critical ethnographic approach in the way the study is designed, the questions it aims to answer, the method of data collection, the analysis is processed, and the research is reported. In the subsequent sections of this chapter, I explain and describe the approach to ethnography, the purpose of the study, the specific questions the study addresses, the design, and the rationale for choosing the particular site. But, first, I intend to negotiate some of the critiques of ethnography, which have risen in the postmodern era and placed my study within an evolving framework (for more information see *Ethnography Unbound* in Brown S., and Dobrin, S., 2004). I combine a general understanding of ethnography using "Qualitative Research as an umbrella term" and "critical ethnography" (Ely et al., 1991, p.3), for moving the study beyond traditional ethnography (Carspecken, 1996; Creswell, 2007; Wolcott in Spindler & Spindler, 1987). I end this chapter by describing the methodology employed for collecting, organizing, and analyzing data and the criteria considered for the evaluation/validation of the study.

Approach

According to Creswell (2007), the dissertation study displays the characteristics of *ethnography* in the way it focuses on the interactions of "an entire cultural group," in this case the MSIG, over a period of time (p.68). Moreover, he attests that ethnographers study the "meaning of the behavior, the language, and the interaction among members of

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the culture- sharing group" (Creswell, 2007). Yet, Ely et al., (1991) and Carspecken (1996) consider a different view for the dilemma some researchers face when asked to identify or label their research study. They argue that ethnography is more accurate when it is referred to as "qualitative research," because ethnography is "a term that has historically risen as a particular form of qualitative research," and for its "conflicting claims" often grounded in the many levels and forms of ethnography that exist in the field (Carspecken, 1996, p.22; Ely et al., 1991, p.3). Furthermore, Harry Wolcott in Spindler & Spindler (1987) devotes an entire chapter on differentiating between what ethnography is, and what it is not. In summary, ethnography is not (pp. 37-56, 43):

1. field techniques in-and-of-themselves
2. length of time in the field, in-and of-itself
3. good and detailed description, or the recounts of events
4. development of tight and compassionate rapport with the subjects

Rather, ethnography is:

1. complexly an dialogic in its processes of data collection and
2. interpretation
3. fieldwork
4. reflective interpretations
5. informing
6. suggestive to further inquiry of cultural behavior

I acknowledge the limitations of traditional ethnography, in which the researcher detaches from the realm of the subjects as partial and objective. For this, I employed a tactic for lessening subjective data analysis and interpretation by making the effort of inviting particular members interviewed to verify data analysis and interpretations, and also to include their voices in the study. Along with members' verification, I used the method or practice of triangulation for checking interpretations against other texts (i.e., literature) as a verification technique but not exclusively (Horner in Brown and Dobrin,

2004; Ely et al., 1991; Guba and Lincoln, 1989). In general, the method of triangulation in which "researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence" is a landmark for critical ethnography (Creswell, 1998, p.202).

Purpose and Research Questions

The study intends to make visible representations of achievement gap (AG) at the micro level of the Middle School Inquiry Group (MSIG), the changes of these representations over time, and the way representations correlate to AG discourses at the macro level of society, changing, reproducing, and transforming. The study also explores the assumptions about inquiry groups as an institutional strategy for change. Specifically, it considers how inquiry groups in schools can better assist in transformations when instances of transformations, or the possibility of such, are not taken up, recognized, or celebrated by the members. This lack of awareness or recognition of transformative moments could be problematic and result in sustaining and maintaining the reproduction of the status quo, in some of the issues of AG, in this case.

The study focuses on the interactions (discourses) of members in the MSIG who met once a month, during ninety-minute sessions, for four academic years. Although the group continues to meet, and it is currently in its sixth year, this particular study only considers data collected from 2003-2006 and 2007-2008. The following are broad research questions the study intends to explore:

> 1) How do members or the work of the MSIG represent discourses of AG in transformative or reproductive ways according to society at large?

2) In what ways have the representations of the issue of AG, whether individually or collectively, changed over time?

3) How has the MSIG provided opportunities and support for transformation (individual and/or collective) and/or reproduction of representations of AG?

Design

The design for the dissertation study resulted from the data I collected and analyzed during four academic years. Over the years, my research questions and foci evolved; expanding in some ways, and narrowing in others. It was during the third year of my study that I became aware of my own reproduction of discourses of minority; the result of using microanalysis and systemic functional linguistic as tools for data analysis in combination with self-reflection processes. My new insights guided the exploration of zooming into my own reproductions of minority. During the third year of data collection, I also unpacked some of the decisions I made, as a participant observer, throughout the study in general, and in particular during the interviews. For this purpose, I used an excerpt from a specific transcribed interview. This was an interview from the first year of the study, 2003-2004, with a particular member of the MSIG.   Consequently, new questions and findings emerged, thus giving rise to this particular dissertation study.

To reduce and intertwine new and old data for data analysis (e.g., field notes from 4 years of monthly sessions, audio recordings of the meetings, and a variety of documents, participants' feedback, and interviews from 2003-2004 and 2007-2008), I used sampling strategies. Sampling can also be viewed as a process that happens a priori for deciding the type of data to collect, while setting up boundaries for determining which

data to analyze. It is a data selecting strategy researchers can adopt for making decisions

about the amount of text to read, the number of units to code, and the variations of the

phenomenon to consider for data analysis (Geisler, 2004). Sampling can also be

perceived as a strategy for reducing data to identify critical moments, in this case

representations of AG and the possible changes over time. Geisler (2004) clarifies that

the process of reducing data is not intended to minimize data for analysis rather, it

maximizes selection of data that can provide relevant information for the phenomenon

being investigated.

Rationale: Why this MSIG?

Choosing this particular inquiry group as a site for my research study was a

natural outgrowth from nineteen years of experience as a public school teacher. The

group's work on the issue of AG was important, and rooted in my professional and

personal self and my ongoing struggle for equity. In almost two decades of teaching in

public schools, I have witnessed the loneliness and isolation of many of my students,

labeled as English language learners. As an ESL teacher, it has been disheartening and

frustrating to overcome the many obstacles in their way, for example the national

mandated Act of 2001, No Child Left Behind endorsing MCAS.

In the recent years, much attention has been given to the way in which English

Language Learners (e.g., ELLs/ ESL/LEP) are taught and assessed. It is the result of

high stakes testing that permeates the educational landscape in the United States. The

culture of high stakes testing has come with a high price, not only for teachers who are

mandated to take a series of trainings such as Sheltered English Instruction (SEI),

undergo various re-certification processes, and pass a standardized teacher certification test (MTEL), but also for ELLs who have to take other standardized language tests (e.g., MEPA R/W in the fall for new students and in the spring all ELLs). Besides, ELLs who have been in the country one year or more must take the MCAS Math, science, and technology, and social sciences (Massachusetts Comprehension Assessment System). Only ELLs who have been in the USA less than one year are exempt from the English Language Arts exam, but not from the math, science, and technology or the social science test. In fact, most recently the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education created a new MEPA R/W Field Test for the fall 2008. It created lots of confusion, not only because of the poor coordination, but also because of the lack of information available to the public and the improper accommodations available for ELLs with special needs. When these and other mandates required by the state are top to bottom decisions, and either under-funded or not funded at all, inequities continue to be self-evident of an achievement gap on the verge of immortality.

According to Portes (2005), "the NCLB Act of 2001 is not addressing the enormous disparities in the quantity and quality of resources expended on those left behind." (p.12). Moreover, inequities continue when English Language Learner cultural and language experiences are often forgotten in the curriculum and have been subjected to disproportionate and unjust cuts in services and program resources. Thus, we are denied comparable administrative leadership and representations in decision-making processes that affect the way ELLs are taught and assessed (current situation in a particular school district)

To emphasize, I must recount an anecdote from 2001. It was the time when a particular group of Puerto Rican boys, enrolled in Spanish classes, was repeatedly sent out of the classroom for misbehaving. The boys were also getting failing grades (e.g., D's and F's). Eventually, they withdrew from the Spanish class and were assigned to study halls, diminishing their educational opportunities without a hearing.

Years later, a fluent bilingual Spanish- English speaking student shared with me her frustration in the Spanish world language class. It was not during a formal meeting, rather a quick hallway talk between classes. She described her Spanish class teacher as not being "fair":

Hallway Talk - Spanish

" Yo sali mal en mi examen. La maestra me marcó la palabra traje con una X porque de acuerdo a ella yo conteste mal. Era la parte de vocabulario y teníamos que escribir palabras debajo de unos dibujos. Yo escribí traje y ella me dijo que la palabra correcta era vestido, lo que habíamos aprendido en clase. You know Mrs. Ortiz, cuando yo voy shoping yo no pregunto por un vestido, yo busco un traje."

Hallway Talk- English translation

I did badly on my test. My teacher marked the word traje with an X, Because, according to her, I answered it incorrectly. It was the vocabulary part, and we had to write words under some pictures. I wrote traje and she said that the correct word was vestido, what we have learned in class. You know, Mrs. Ortiz, when I go shopping, I don't ask for a vestido, I look for a traje.

The previous example is the kind of cultural language discrepancy/incompatibility that not only shadows many Spanish-speaking students in schools, but also other bilingual individuals in other contexts. According to Nieto (2004), the cultural difference between students and that of the school results in "cultural clash" and "begins to function

as a risk factor" (p.261). But, she argues that reported school failure of Latinos when solely attributed to cultural incongruence based on a cultural mismatch theory is inadequate: "the cultural mismatch theory fail to address other conditions that influence students learning, and it also leaves unanswered the question of why students from the same cultural background fail and others succeed" (Nieto, 2004, pp. 262-263). If the research topic seemed a given, I knew that there was much to learn. For this reason, as a bilingual Spanish-English speaker, my connection to the issue of AG was deeply rooted in my own observations and experiences.

Another reason for choosing the IG for my research site comes from a personal story. In the fall of 1985 I became socially and consciously aware of being 'Puerto Rican' as the 'other'. This was the year in which my husband and I moved to the United States. It was by choice, and not a material or intellectual necessity. We left behind most of our riches: family, wealth of memories, material possessions, social capital, and the social position of being 'majority' in many of the Puerto Rican cultural contexts in the island.

The excitement of being in a seemingly 'foreign' country screened out the unforeseen obstacles that would arise in the years to come. Certain privileges (i.e., a sense of ethnic majority, college degrees, and savings) carried from our homeland facilitated a reasonably fast social mobility, while at the same time unexpected invisible forces pushed us into the 'minority' world, in which we were coined as "Latinos/Hispanics/Puerto Ricans' and 'people of color.'

These conflicting forces in the United States shaped and re-shaped our identities. They have also influenced the identity of our two children, who were born and raised in

the United States. Raising kids in a Spanish speaking Puerto Rican household sustaining

incredibly strong ties to our roots has not being an easy task for various reasons. The two

worlds often collide and leave deep imprints of copious bittersweet memories and stories,

particularly those from the school experiences of our children. For example, how could I

ever forget the day my son, who was in fourth grade at the time, was counseled out of

"regular education classes." (I knew this was wrong – he is now about to graduate from a

major state university with a grade record of As and Bs).

The notion that his problems in elementary school were related to a lack of

intelligence was deeply hurtful. When I asked what "not regular education classroom"

meant during our first special education evaluation meeting, one of the specialists

explained to me that my son was going to be in a "different" class, a "self contained

classroom," to address " being below grade level in math and writing," and also to deal

with his "distraction and attention problem." At the same meeting I was also told not to

teach him writing at home. "Let us do that here," added another member of the

evaluating team.

Confused and disturbed by what the team proposed for our son, my husband and I

requested to take home all of the documents. We wanted to process the meeting and

think about and analyze the proposed plan before signing and approving what was

presented to us. It was after consulting with friends and making phone calls when we

decided not to accept the plan and suggested changes to what we considered an extreme

measure for educating our son. As a result, we rejected the Individual Educational Plan

(IEP) as it was designed, which displeased some people in the school. However,

assertiveness in our decision came from being informed of our rights. We also learned

about the overrepresentation of Latino students in special education classes and wanted to be extremely cautious about this. Of course, such information did not come from the school personnel; it came mostly from outsiders. Nonetheless, we agreed on our son's needs for services that not only included math tutorial sessions (provided at home by my cousin - a science major at that time), but also specific classroom accommodations under a 504 Accommodation Plan.

In addition to classroom accommodations, a diagnosis of attention deficit disorder (or ADD, given for his inattentiveness, lack of organization, and easy distractibility among other behaviors) was presented to us, not from the school diagnostician, but from a local developmental pediatrician. In other words, besides the classroom accommodations, if we wanted our son to succeed in the kind of classroom structure that characterizes most public schools (i.e., factory model), the use of medication was another decision we had to make. Later on my husband and I felt the pressure to start the process of medication trials. Conflicting as it was, we decided to give our son medicine for ADD. This was one of the hardest decisions we have had to make: a story on its own.

Another recollection of memories comes from my son's high school years. While he was in ninth grade, I remember calling his guidance counselor to inquire about a C grade he got in woodworking class. The C in what is considered a non-academic class impeded him from being on the "honor roll list" and hence from having his name listed in the local paper as a good student (much valued in society).

When I brought my concern to his guidance counselor during a telephone conversation, she responded, "Oh, a C is not a bad grade, that is average. Don't worry about it." After I hung up the phone, I realized that it was not the C in woodworking

class that struck me, it was mostly her assumption that a "C is not a bad grade" for my Latino boy. I wondered if she would have said the same thing to another parent? It is a question I never asked, but it still lurks in the back of my mind. These and many other experiences grounded my interest in the issue of the achievement gap, more precisely in this particular inquiry group. To summarize, my interest is infused by a personal and professional commitment to make sense of my experiences by correlating the school experiences of my son and daughter and the experiences of my ELLs to those in the achievement gap. I want to be the change I wish to see in the world, at least in my surrounding world (Gandhi 1869-1948).

Method of Data Collection and Organization

The method employed in this study is guided by a strategy of not separating issues of methods and procedures from issues of theory. I use Bloome et al., (2005) understanding of methodology as a framework to inform my study: "We use the term *methodology* to refer to the integration of theoretical and methodological issues, reserving the word *method* for the techniques, tactic, and strategies of data collection, analysis, and reporting" (p. xviii).

It is important to keep in mind that "qualitative research is extremely hard work and "requires clear criteria for maintaining its relevance and reliability: for being reflective and for being in constant dialogue between the researcher and the data" (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, pp.190-191). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggest, "Nobody should adopt a particular approach . . . [or] buy into a particular approach and then stick with it obsessively" (p.190). Rather, decisions should always be carefully informed, documented, and explained (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

For these reasons, I have combined a variety of methods for collecting and analyzing data. Nonetheless, as a longitudinal ethnographic study it follows some standard procedures related to gaining entrance to the site and obtaining written consents from the members of the inquiry group, as well as the school principal (consent forms were issued every year of the study). The signed consents facilitated data collection in the form of audio taping of the meetings and the interviews. I issued two types of consent forms: one for audio taping the monthly meetings and writing field notes, and the other for requesting individual interviews with members of the inquiry group. I included a sample of the consent form in Appendix C.

During the four years of the study, I collected a variety of data that consisted of audio taping the meetings, recording field notes and journal entries, audio taping the interviews with members of the group, and transcribing particular interviews with particular members. Other written texts available for this study are: (a) documents used during the meetings, including agendas, handouts, published articles, readings; (b) school documents, including results from MCAS scores, Ds and Fs lists, disciplinary referrals, and a high school study on academic failure; (c) documents generated at the meetings, including feedback notes, interview questions, students' case studies, consent forms/letters for the parents of students to be interviewed, student surveys, inquiry group progress reports/summaries; (d) notes from informal conversations with members after the monthly sessions; and (e) other school and district wide documents connected to issues of AG, some of which are published articles distributed during school curriculum days, in addition to a document that focuses on the district's commitment to Becoming A School System of Tolerance (pseudonym 2003), the school's mission statement, and a

letter from the Minority Student Achievement Network Conference (MSAN). The

previous list of written text collected was mainly used to inform assertions during data

analysis.

Before I describe the method for collecting and organizing data, it is important to

mention my inherently *emic* or insider perspective in this study, for I am not only a

member of this group and a colleague, but also a friend to many of the participants.

Reasonably, the task of gaining trust and developing relationships with members of the

inquiry group was often achieved before I began my research study. In fact, the process

of obtaining permission from the school's principal and the members, for collecting data,

and audio-recording the meetings was fairly easy. Every year of the study, I repeated the

process of requesting permissions, and this was always granted. In other words, my

reality of "working and living in the field as a member of the group over an extended

period of time" allowed me to hold two distinct participant-observer roles: an active

participant, as well as a privileged observer (Ely et al., 1991, p.45).

This privilege of being an insider who was trusted afforded me with the

opportunity of accessing every meeting, as well as certain documents. However, gaining

access to the monthly sessions did not mean that all the members of the inquiry group

agreed on being full participants in my ongoing study (e.g., interviews). Nor did it mean

that members agreed with my request to videotape the meetings. Rather, they all gave

permission for audio recording and only a few agreed to be interviewed. Furthermore,

there were occasions in which members that agreed to participate requested temporary

exclusion. This type of circumstantial exclusion was related to specific meeting day(s)

when a particular topic was discussed. In fact, at the end of one of the meetings, one member asked me to exclude her comments from the tape recording.

Therefore, I found it necessary to clarify some of the reasons for including and excluding certain data/information, which was perhaps available, but not necessarily accessible. In a similar way, other restrictions about accessible data relate to specific field notes of a few informal conversations (the kind I considered critical insights) I had with another member. This particular member specifically asked me not to share the conversation with anyone - ". . . this is between you and me," she insisted. These, among others, are examples of situations I encountered in the field when conducting my qualitative research, which Ely et al., (1991) call the "unexpected snags" (p.45).

Furthermore, the seemingly *unexpected snags* are ethical issues that need to be taken into consideration in order to guarantee and protect not only the anonymity of the participants, but also their rights to withdraw from the study without personal consequences (Creswell, 2007; Ely et al., 1991; Spradley, 1980). Spradley (1980) reminds ethnographers to be mindful, sensitive, and responsible in protecting the privacy of informants by keeping texts "off the record" whenever requested (p.22). For this reason, the Council of the American Anthropological Association established ethical principles "to guide ethnographers when faced with conflicting choices" (Spradley, 1980, pp.20-23).

In general, restrictions of data collection for this study varied from time to time: from the inaccessibility of audio-taping some of the meeting sessions, to the unavailability of particular text. One example of unavailable documents is the transcripts of students' interviews for the case studies. Focus groups within the inquiry group were

created to read, code, analyze, and write reports. These were based on data analysis from the interviews. The transcribed interviews were strictly used by the group, thus becoming confidential material and therefore unavailable to me as a researcher.

Audio-Taping the Monthly Meetings

From the beginning of my study, I decided to use audio-taping as an essential tool for data collection, not only as a recording method, but also as a way of "checking against" written notes (e.g., field notes, transcriptions), and for "triangulation and close [data] analysis." (Ely et al., 1991, pp. 83-85). Furthermore, I purposely used a tape recorder as my additional set of ears for capturing members' discussion during the monthly sessions (also to compensate for my hearing disability). This method of data collection brought a painful discovery, because audiotaping signifies a level of hearing capacity, which in some ways is out of my range. As a result, my hearing loss as a condition meant additional financial and human resources necessary to engage not only the transcriptions, but also the triangulation process for verifying written text with audio records.

Nonetheless, I relied on audiotaping the monthly sessions and the interviews since the beginning of the study. By the end of the study I collected a total of 42 cassettes. I used three tape recorders during the first year of the study. I tried to arrive at the meeting room between 7:45-7:50 in the morning, ten to fifteen minutes before the meeting started. I strategically set up the recorders.

I have included a description of the room in which the group conducted its first three years of monthly meetings to establish the context for the dissertation study.

Having a description of the physical location responds to one the components suggested

by Carspecken (1996) under *Components and Quality of Thick Description*: "Create a

simple diagram to help describe the site" (p.47). In addition, the sketch helps readers

visualize the space in which I collected most of my data for this dissertation. The

following sketch is a representation of this 8th grade English classroom.
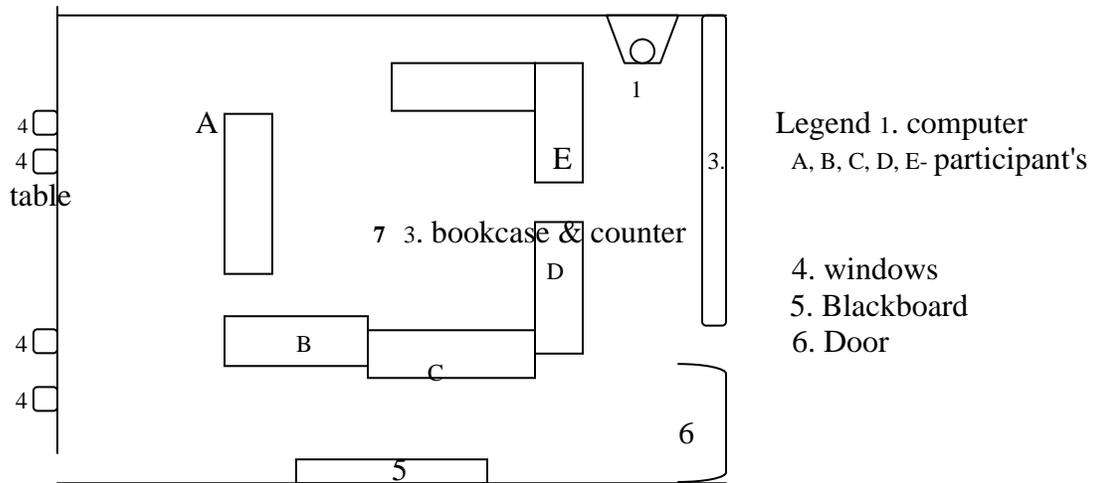
Figure 6: Research Room

The three tape recorders in the room were placed on three distinct places: on area

number 7, another one on the counter underneath the windows in area number 4, and one

on the counter next to the bookcases on area number 3. The good-sized meeting room

had white bright fluorescent light bulbs in the ceiling. On one side there is a wall covered

with long windows overlooking the hillside of the school. The wall across from the

windows had three tall bookcases that went up to the ceiling, and a long counter

underneath with doors for storage. The books on the bookshelves were classified by

genres (i.e. poetry, folktale, to mention two). In addition, there were some bilingual

Spanish books and books written by multiethnic writers. The room had four rectangular

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tables in the center. Tables for participants were arranged in a wide-open rectangular shape, with an empty space in the middle.

Although we routinely conducted our meetings in this classroom, on occasion smaller groups went to other rooms to work on particular tasks, thus often making audio recording of the meeting sessions challenging to achieve. When groups divided, I had to make quick and on the spot decisions about re-locating tape recorders: I had to decide which small group to focus on and ask for individual consent. Most of the time, I chose to audiotape my group for practical reasons (e.g., managing the equipment in case something happened with the machine). As a result, audio-taping these divided meetings limited the recording to my own group, instead of the entire group. This limitation was lessened, however, when on occasion members voluntarily offered to take a tape recorder to audiotape their own group discussion. It is worth saying that the number of tape recorders used for audiotaping the meetings varied throughout the four years of my research study.

During my last year of the study, 2007-2008, audiotaping took place in one of the computer rooms. Members came in, socialized for 5-10 minutes, and went off to their designated places (e.g., partners typed individually or collectively on a computer). I recorded the beginning of most sessions and placed the tape recorder on the floor, underneath a different computer station: members read, typed, and talked to their partners. Most of the time, the room was filled with a soft buzzing that came from partners sharing, reading, and discussing their pieces. But, in spite of this relatively quiet atmosphere, one that is ideal for audio taping small talk, I discovered inaudible tapes due to technology malfunction. It was not until a specific meeting was over when I realized

this misfortune. Even after changing tape recorders and troubleshooting audiotaping, partial audio of an entire session was not achieved, a true mystery to me, which could contribute to some of the limitations of the study.

Recording Field Notes and Journal

I recorded three types of field notes: *condensed, expanded, and fieldwork journal* (Spradley, 1980). Taking copious detailed field notes did not last for a long time. As a participant observer, I participated actively in all the group's activity, while taking notes in my blue composition field notebook. While participating in group activities and taking field notes, coupled with my hearing loss and attention difficulties, I realized how complicated fieldwork was. I opted to do what Spradley (1980) suggests by recording "quick notes" and "key phrases" (p.69). These *condensed* notes were later *expanded* with details and descriptions of what I remembered had occurred during the event, whether it was a meeting or an interview (Spradley, 1980).

I experienced being both an outsider as well as an insider, alternately at some times and simultaneously at others. The constant shift of insider/outsider made the fieldwork of recording field notes quite challenging, one that is characteristic of ethnographic studies. Creswell (2007) reminds researchers that the types of challenges encountered "during observations will closely relate to the role of the inquirer" (p.139). However, this dynamic provides unique opportunities for the researcher to be in both worlds in a continuum of changing roles.

Many times, I found myself passionately involved in a group activity while neglecting the writing of field notes and negotiating with myself whether to do one thing

instead of the other, all at the same time. This kind of tug-a-war was later reflected upon in my *fieldwork journal,* during a seemingly reserved, uninterrupted time at home. This moment was my sacred time for releasing frustrations and other types of feelings, clarifying preliminary meanings, and (re)establishing direction in the research path. Reflection indeed becomes critical in ethnographic studies for being instrumental in the process of data collection and analysis in the overall study. Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1993), Creswell (2007), Freire (1987), and Johns (2006) among other scholars, refer to a praxis of reflection, one that is essential not only for realizing what is visible, but also for what may be elusive.

The field journal evolved, and later became the place for, metaphorically looking at myself in the mirror as a way of critically reflecting on my work. Here, I refer to critical self-reflection within the context of a particular issue, in this case the AG. According to Torbert (1976) "a self-questioning attitude and behavior which laces openings for unimaginable kinds of self-development (p169). In addition, engaging in critical self-reflection is a process of *praxis* for transformation. According to Paulo Freire (1970), it can be a liberating path towards a world of possibilities. Critical reflection can help to develop a greater understanding of self and relations to others, for the possibility of a better world (Freire, 1998). The work of scholars like Cohn and Kottkamp (1993) and Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993; 1999) on teacher research, and that of Freire (1970; 1998) and Nieto (2000; 2002; 2004) on the work of teachers, theorizes the interaction of "critically thinking" in relating one's actions and experiences to that of the world of others (Shor, 1987, p.34).

The field notes were organized in binders, which contained different sections for organizing other data collected. For each year of the study I had one binder, one field notebook, and a journal. In addition, I kept all school and district documents co-related to the issue of achievement gap in a separate binder for cross-reference.

Observations as part of data collection were documented in the field notes for not only describing processes and interactions during the monthly session, but also for taking notes on my own behaviors, and interactions, experiences, and hunches.

Conducting Interviews

An awareness of the relevancy of interviews in the field of ethnography and qualitative research supported my decision on conducting interviews as data collection during the first and last years of this study. Interviews as relevant data collection provided "dialogical data," distinct to everyday conversation or dialogue (Carspecken, 1996, p. 154). Moreover, interviews signify a kind of interaction in which people involve all that constitutes the self, including their ideologies. In other words, interviews provide face-to-face interactions that are influenced by internal and external forces such as social, political, economic, and historical ideologies, as well as *subject positions* (Bloome et. al, 2005; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1997; Fairclough, 1995; Foucault, 1980).

This study recognizes the relevancy of conducting interviews, not so much for the large number of participants, but rather for their significance in qualitative research. Interviews with participants allow the interviewer to "connect their experiences and check the comments of one participant against those of others," and they can "understand

and make meaning of their experience" (Seidman, 1998, p.17). In this case, their participation in the inquiry group directly linked to issues of the achievement gap.

The relevancy of using interviews in the ongoing study also resides in the idea of having a semi-structured setting, in which the researcher, in this case me, pays a much closer and focused attention to what the interviewee says, in contrast to unstructured daily talk. Cameron (2001) reminds researchers that if something "is there in people's talk, then it must be there for some purpose" (pp.20-21). In this case, interviews as a method for data collection allowed me to better understand inquiry groups as a tool for change, and as a place for reproducing or transforming representations of AG. For this reason, interviews make visible word choices in the language used by members of the MSIG, as well as the function of language, whereas people's experiences and thoughts are recounted in the social practice of the interviews and the monthly meetings (Carspecken 1996; Fairclough 1995; Vygostky 1986).

In the first year, 2003-2004, I interviewed eight members of the group with the intention of developing case studies in the near future. My focus then guided the questions I asked about how they became teachers, reasons for joining this group, ideas about the process of participating in the group, and the format/structure of the monthly sessions. I also asked about their experiences in working with students assumed to represent the AG, ideas about school/schooling, and reasons for students' failure. Finally, I asked about their expectations and hopes for the group.

Over the course of the years, this longitudinal study took many turns and shifts, some of which resulted in new questions, and a change of scope that implicated new considerations for conducting future interviews. Some of the shifts in the study are

partially due to the lack of consistency in membership, as members moved in and out of the group, which became problematic for my projected plan. The constant mobility of members presented a challenge for exploring the way representations of AG changed over time more accurately, and for examining the possibility of inquiry groups as a strategy for school change. For this reason, I developed a criterion for choosing focal members to observe changes of discourse pattern over time in a different way.

After much thought, consideration, and deliberation, I decided on three main criteria that illuminated the process of selection: (1) being in the MSIG for three consecutive years, since 2003; (2) being among the eight people interviewed in 2003-2004; and (3) being able to participate in the interviews of 2007-2008. As a result, three members were chosen. Said criteria limited the number of teachers, for which my initial idea of conducting case studies was abandoned. I recognize the implications of these constraints, some of which are addressed in Chapter 6, the *Limitation* section.

The process for requesting participation in the interviews varied from 2003-2004 to 2007-2008. For the first interviews, I distributed a short questionnaire/consent form to ask members if they were willing to be interviewed or not. I also asked them to specify three choices of dates, places, and times for the interviews. Final schedules for the respondents were confirmed through e-mails, and the reminders were written notes in teacher's mailboxes. Some of the interviews took place during each teacher's prep time, and others were held after school. Locations varied, from the interviewee's classroom and my own classroom, to the teachers' lounge. Although a limited time set of 60 minutes was agreeable among the teachers, some interviews took 90-110 minutes.

The request for the 2007-2008 interviews, however, was slightly different. I personally approached two of the teachers in the hallway during their free periods. This was a verbal and less formal request, to which they both accepted immediately. A consent form was signed and accepted before the interviews. Both of these interviews took place in the teacher's classroom right after school. We chose quiet spots in the rooms to connect the tape recorder and talk freely. However, on the day of the interview, one of the teachers had students after school for help, which created frequent interruptions along the way.

To contact the third teacher, who is no longer in the school, I used a different process. I first sent a request by e-mail, and days later followed up with a telephone call; a consent form was issued and signed on the day of the interview. For this teacher, the interview took place in the comfortable space of her home. In essence, interviews for the first and last year of the study were very similar in terms of the questions asked, but also different in the way I approached the teachers.

<u>Data Organization</u>

Data collected was organized in a way that settled some of the tensions I experienced in the process of working with the data *en masse*. All written texts were filed in three-ring binders with specific sections: field notes, agendas, articles, after-meeting notes, and miscellaneous. Some notes from the field journal were incorporated into the binder. As said before, I also kept a separate binder for district wide documents related to the topic of achievement gap.

It is worth noting that my focus and work, and that of the inquiry group, have been fairly different, although interconnected. The group itself kept a separate but similar collection of data that it organized and stored electronically, as well as individual red pocket folders with members' names on them to store written documents. After every session, the red folders were left in the room and co-leaders stored them in a crate.

Data from my fieldwork was organized in a way that helped maintain vast record of the four years of data collection. This particular system, in the form of a chart, also facilitated a visual and more concrete representation of the variety of texts collected over the years. Although the chart I created might appear simple, its function fulfilled the purpose of organizing and facilitating the labeling of data.

Therefore, organizing data collected on a table allowed me to take inventory of data corpus, which also influenced the process for data sampling and selection of a methodology for the analysis. Table 2 has five distinct organizational categories: *Year* of the study indicates its longitudinal nature. The *Pha*se captures the main event in the study at a particular year. In the *Focu*s column I identify foci for data collection and analysis. The *Data Collection* section summarizes main data considered for addressing the foci for a particular year. This mostly consists of interviews, documents, audio recording, and field notes. And the last category is *Data Findings*; on this section I recorded a simplified version of data analysis that reports on the major findings that influenced consequent years of the study.

Table 2: Ongoing Ethnographic Study 2003-2008				
(T= Transformation R= Reproduction)				
Year	**Phase**	**Focus**	**Data Collection**	**Data Findings**
Year 1 2003 2004	Phase 1 Ethnographic Study: Data collection/ analysis Analysis: Broad Analysis, Coding, Intertextual connections	Members' participation Identity construct Understanding AG	audiotapes of monthly meetings, field notes, agendas formal and informal interviews, reports, records, documents, articles, journal	Participation looks different. Discourse as a binary construct: **T**ransformation or **R**eproduction.
Year 2 2004 2005	Phase 2 Data collection/ analysis Analysis: Broad Data Analysis, Coding, Intertextual connections	Members' participation understanding AG	audiotapes of monthly meetings, field notes, informal interviews, reports documents, articles, journal, agendas	Discourse as a binary construct- **T** or **R.** Tensions on diversity was contested not exactly resolved
Year 3 2005 2006	Phase 3 Data collection and analysis Analysis: Broad and Coding, Microanalysis Intertextual connections	Tension, group's diversity	field notes, journal documents, agendas, and reports	Discourse- constant shift **T & R** Infinite construct Researcher reproducing discourses Tension negotiated not resolved

Continued on next page

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Year 4 2007 2008	Phase 4 Analysis: Broad Data Analysis, Coding, Triangulation, Intertextual and Microanalysis	Representations of AG; Changes overtime; Assumptions of IG and the IG for institutional change (T)	audiotapes of meetings field notes, reports interviews, journal documents	Members' discourses did not change; Instances of transformation were not acknowledged or explored any deeper. Conformity to maintain the status quo; Grand Narrative of AG.

In general, Table 2 not only served as an organizational tool, and strategy for

mediating corpus data, but also as a mechanism for choosing a methodology that it is

conducive to data analysis and data sampling strategies.

Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study has been an ongoing process. It began on the first

year of the study in 2003-2004 and continued throughout the end of the fourth year.

Nonetheless, established boundaries helped determine a seemingly endless process for

reaching the point of answering research questions from a particular stance that resulted

in particular interpretations, which also prompted new questions for future research.

In the following section, I explain three main methods used for analyzing data:

Broad Data Analysis (Ely et al. 1991), Coding (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996), and

Intertextual Analysis (Fairclough, 2003). I begin this section with the strategy of data

Sampling and end with the cycle of Systematic Recursive Process. These methods were

interwoven at different stages of data analysis. Therefore, data analysis is a recursive

process in the cycle of data collection, analysis, and interpretation, in which one process informs the other.

Sampling

The focus of the study on representations of achievement gap and the inquiry group as a strategy for change (e.g. transformation) drives the analysis, and thus the methodology for selecting data to analyze (Geisler, 2004). For this reason, I chose data-sampling techniques as a process method in the data analysis. Moreover, sampling provides a framework for establishing boundaries in the study by determining: a site and a particular *cultural group* – the MSIG in this particular middle school; the *actors* to interview – teachers; and the *event and process* – monthly sessions, interviews, and certain decisions made by the group. These specific boundaries are not randomly chosen, but rather they are primarily informed by the research questions (Geisler, 2004).

In addition, sampling is fundamental in qualitative research, and also in managing the vast data collected during the four years of the study. Creswell (2007), Miles & Huberman (1984), Ely et al., (1991) and Geisler (2004) remind researchers of the importance of establishing initial parameters in ethnographic studies, and the essence in maintaining a level of flexibility, because "one cannot study everyone everywhere doing everything" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p.36). Furthermore, Miles & Huberman (1984) raise a warning signal by saying, "Unless you are willing to devote most of your professional life to a single study, you have to settle for less" (p.36).

Among the numerous sampling strategies for data analysis in the field of qualitative inquiry, I chose a combination of strategies from Creswell's (2007) *Typology*

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of Sampling strategies in Qualitative Inquiry (p.127): *maximum variation sampling* for choosing a variety of data samples to identify common patterns. I chose *criterion-based sampling* for developing relevant criteria to choose data that met the specific criteria, in order to highlight discursive features (e.g., key terms) that seemed relevant to representations of the AG discourses and the changes over time.

Broad Data Analysis

Broad Data analysis can be considered the first stage in the analytical cycle that occurs at the beginning of the fieldwork (Ely et al. 1991). It is one way of making sense of the data in the process generating interpretations, which can help researchers to "form larger meanings of what is going on in the situations or sites" (Creswell, 2007, p.154). The use of broad data analysis allowed me to create general understandings of my data from early observations and field notes. These broad themes were consolidated later in the coding process, explained in the *Coding* section.

Guided by the research questions in year 1 (Y1/Phaase1), I observed the way members of the inquiry group participated and engaged in activities, as well as the discourse they used during these activities, and the meeting discussions. For example, during the meeting sessions, I observed members' body language. Looking at the co-leaders and following directives for activities indicated participation, while reading a book, correcting papers, or not contributing orally would indicate no participation (Field notes, 10/09/03). From this observation, participation was narrowly defined and binary constructed. However, when these same members contributed orally to discussion and raised critical issues, or made personal connections through comments such as "this is a

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personal issue for me" (Field notes, 10/09/03), it was an indication of instances of transformation, as opposed to reproduction. At this point, I noticed that the analysis of these data samples needed to be brought to a deeper level. In other words, I needed to move the narrow binary findings of participation and the idea of transformation and reproduction beyond these general categories into subcategories.

While my involvement in the group continued as a member and participant observer and the study evolved, I noticed how the cycle of data collection and analysis forced me to re-conceptualize participation. Thus, my scope in determining the multiple ways, levels, and meaning of participation expanded as I recognized the way discourses of AG transformed and reproduced discursively. In this way, the binary construct was investigated in Y2/Phase2, and later again in Y3/Phase3 of the study. Consequently, the broad data analysis I used involved the *sketching* of *ideas* that highlighted vital information, while it also facilitated the writing of notes on the margin of my field notes; all of which enabled me to generate new questions and make decisions for this dissertation (Creswell, 2007).

Therefore, the use of broad data analysis assists the researcher in moving away from fixed linear processes, while it also provides researchers with the ability of combining other analytical tools/strategies, for example *Data Analysis Spiral* for in-depth analysis (Creswell, 2007, p.150). In general, data analysis is a recursive process in the cycle of data collection, analysis, and interpretation, in which one process informs the other.

Coding

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) describe the process of coding as an analytical

strategy for "providing ways of interacting with and thinking about the data" (p.30). This

process enables the researcher to label, create categories and sub categories, reduce and

complicate data, and conceptualize data for "raising questions, providing provisional

answers . . . and discovering new data" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996 p.30-31).

Furthermore, coding supports comparison across data and provides opportunities for

moving beyond the coding as a mere process of labeling. Creswell (2007) suggests

researchers use codes that can:

> 1. represent information that researches expect to find before the study
> 2. represent surprising information that researchers did not expect to find;
> 3. and represent information that is conceptually interesting or unusual to researcher (p.153)

For this reason, I used a coding scheme that allowed me to create categories and

subcategories, as well recurrent themes, of the field notes and transcribed interviews.

Some initial coding prior to reading the data came from the literature review on

achievement gap. These were supported in the way members identified the issue of AG

as a racialized problem, and how failure and success were constructed based on test

scores. Examples of broad categories from these codes are family, school, society, and

students as rhetoric of blame; for blaming someone or something. During this process,

other underlying subcategories emerged as a response to the questions I asked during the

interview. For example, issues of discrimination in the workplace, similar to

discriminatory practices in the school, were shared by Julia Wyatt (pseudonym for a

science teacher in the MSIG), thus contributing to representations of AG - intertextual connections to the general context of society.

From this step, changes of discourses over time were also analyzed. This was achieved through the comparison of the interviews conducted in 2004 with those from 2007-2008. This served not only as a verification process, but also as part of the findings for addressing the second research question: *In what ways have the representations of the issue of AG, whether individually or collectively, changed over time?* As a result, some recurrent themes emerged, which supported the verification of the way representations changed or did not change over time.

The mechanism used in coding transcribed interviews relied on color coding the text under five main topics: 1) The color pink for text related to personal information of the interviewees for identifying and describing their ways of teaching; 2) sky blue for text that referred to the structure, process, and ideas about this MSIG; 3) yellow was used to highlight institutional structures, practices of the school, and the personal ideas about schooling connected to self as teachers and learners; 4) the color orange represented discourses of achievement gap and the students in discussion; and 5) green was used to identify issues related to assumptions about the inquiry group in general.

Color-coding text for data analysis also served as a verification technique. Although this technique seems a straightforward process, text crossed the color-coding lines for discourses interconnected and intertwined within text. Nonetheless, coding is part of an analytical system that allows the visibility of cohesiveness and patterns in the lexical choices (e.g., adjectives, pronouns, clauses, and sentences) made by the members of the inquiry group during the monthly sessions and at interviews.

Intertextual Data Analysis

Intertextual connections as a framework for identifying discourses of AG as a dialogical pattern were achieved through a review of selective literature on AG. The process of connecting the monthly session and the interviews began in the first year of the study. Fairclough (2003) describes this process as "a matter of intertextuality" bringing the "outside text into the text" to make visible "how texts draw upon, incorporate, recontextualize, and dialogue with other texts" (p.17). He makes clear that intertextuality is also a matter of the "assumptions and presuppositions people make when they read and write" (Fairclough, 2003, p.17). Intertextual analysis elucidates what is said in text that is always in reference to what is left out. For this reason, adopting the use of intertextuality facilitates the broadening of connections and interconnections of different and similar texts and the assumptions for "reducing and assuming common grounds" (Fairclough, 2003, p.41).

The intertextual analysis in the dissertation supports the intersects of discourses occurring and relating to the micro level of the monthly sessions, as well as in the interview, in comparison with discourses at the macro level of society, as depicted in the literature of AG.

Recognizable discourses of AG used by the members during interviews and the monthly sessions parallel the blame rhetoric I identified in the review of the literature on AG. When a teacher talked about "parents do not care" during an interview in 2003, or when the curriculum is to blame for not being relevant to the students' backgrounds, as was mentioned by another teacher from the MSIG during an interview in 2004, then

consistency exists with the literature referring to these particular factors as affecting

students' academic achievement and not succeeding in school.

During intertextual analysis, a first step of coding took place. Sample texts from

the paragraphs were brought into clauses. These clauses were organized into meaning

units. The main units were organized under three subcategories: Students in the AG,

Definition of AG, and Reasons for the AG (Appendix H). At this level of coding, I used

two colors as an analytical strategy for making intertextual connections between the

interviews in 2003-2004 and 2007-2008. The color green identified a new discourse

introduced, which could also be considered a change of language that indicated the same

way of representing AG: New or Change/Same. The color yellow highlighted the same

discourse of representation.

Once this analytical step was completed, the analysis moved into a third level.

This is when I developed a micro intertextual analysis (Appendix I); one that is informed

by Fairclough (2003) and Bloome et al., (2005) as a way of identifying different

discourses within a text to establish assertions for interpretation as: " (a) representing

some particular part of the world, and (b) representing it from a particular perspective"

(Fairclough, 2003, p.129).

In order to conceptualize the way discourses are intertwined and interconnected in

the third level, microanalysis, I designed Figure 7 to show these interconnections: a) the

dialogic relations and intersections of multiple discourses; b) the interactions of texts,

inside and outside of the school, all within the context of the inquiry group at the center

of these interactions and the forces the discourses. These forces are basically

contextualized at the micro level (interviews), meso level (MSIG), and the macro level (school and outside of the school context).
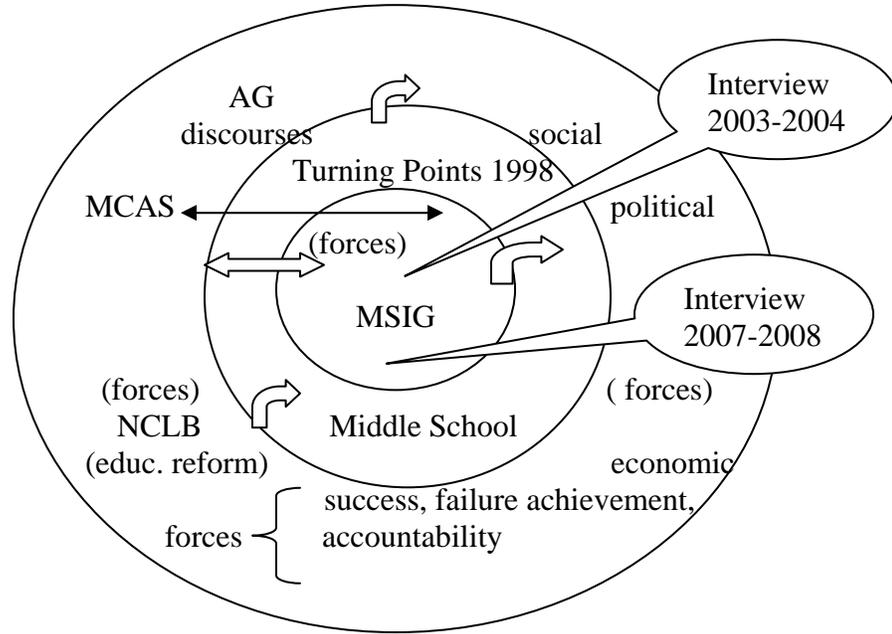
Figure 7: Dialogic Relations: Multiple Forces

In Figure 7, the diagram shows the interactions with arrows and concentric circles. The arrows represent educational mandates, such as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), and the institutional practice of inquiry groups as part of the Turning Points initiative. This also includes the interactions that take place in the MSIG during the monthly meetings. Each of these components is considered a driving force for not only influencing issues of achievement gap, but members' discourses in the MSIG. People interactions and forces' interactions shape and reshape multiple texts and discourses in the same way discourses and texts shape and reshape the interactions (Fairclough, 2003).

Outside of the concentric circles, on the right, are the interviews with particular

teachers (selected members for the interviews in 2007-2008). The interviews are

depicted in the diagram as micro level contexts that allow the visibility of representations

of achievement gap, and the changes or no changes over time. To find intersect with

other discourses is considered an intertextual analysis. Critical to this diagram is the

conceptualization of the circles to be understood not as solid lines, but rather as dotted

and impermeable, to allow the mobility of forces and interactions in all directions,

influencing texts and discourses in multiple ways.

Cycle of Analysis

Systematic and recursive processes of analysis are informed by literature in order

to make visible recurrent statements on the issue of AG and the changes over time. The

idea of engaging recursive processes allows the researcher to go back and forth by

looking at the data (e.g., field notes, monthly meetings audio recordings, interviews),

checking assertions, developing more questions, and making decisions throughout

(Erickson, 1985). It also allows the connections between the macro level of society with

the micro level of the inquiry group. Systematic and recursive processes are achieved

through discourse analysis of the language used during the monthly sessions and at

interviews, confirmed with other samples of data.

In other words, assertions based on data analysis are tested and retested against

data samplings from data corpus. In reviewing the data corpus, one can establish

evidence to disprove any assertions; in this case, teachers' representations of AG that

blame others and not themselves. This process allowed me to revise and confirm my

assertions. In general, recursive analysis is a process that can be used to establish the validity of theoretical assertions generated in qualitative ethnographic research methodology (Erickson, 1985).

Validation/Verification

Controversies among researchers about the concept of validation in qualitative research continue to be negotiated but not necessarily resolved. For Wolcott (1990), validation tries to convince, and it does not capture its intentions of understanding a particular issue. For Carspecken (1996), it is a validity claim, one based on assertions derived from a truth claim, that it is also culturally bound. And for Creswell (2007), it is a strategy for accuracy, and he prefers the term "validation" instead of "verification" (p.207). Moreover, aware of the variety of validation types researchers can choose from, I decided to incorporate concepts, verification, and validation to assert a level of credibility to the researcher's claims.

Verification in the study is considered a strategy for making visible my assertions, while the validity is achieved through various techniques, for example, the use of interviews. It was explained before that the use of interviews responds to a paradigm that recognizes interviews, not so much for the number of participants, but rather for their significance. Interviews with participants allows the interviewer to "connect their experiences and check the comments of one participant against those of others," and they can "understand and make meaning of their experience," in this case, their participation in the inquiry group in relation to the issue of the achievement gap (Seidman, 1998, p.17).

In this section I describe three validation/verification strategies I used in the study, which are Prolonged Engagement and Participation, Triangulation, and Members Check (Carspecken, 1996; Creswell, 2007; Ely et al., 1991; Miles & Huberman, 1984)**.**

Prolonged Engagement and Participation

Immersing oneself in the field for a reasonable length of time provides the researcher with opportunities to experience firsthand the life and experiences of members in the environment called the MSIG. As I said before, I have being a participant observer in this group since 2003-2004. This accounts for prolonged engagement and participation. The living experiences were recorded in field notes, while being considered a valid tool for verifying data analysis. Creswell (2007) captures the perspective of this strategy from many scholars in his book *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (chapter 10, pp.202-211). He argues that prolonged engagement helps in "building trust with participants, learning the culture, and checking for misinformation that stems from distortions introduced by the researcher of the informant" (Creswell, 2007, p.207).

By the time this dissertation is completed, the MSIG will be into its sixth year of collaborative work, but my study only includes the first four years, even though I will continue the in group until the group no longer exist.

It is important to mention that only two of the original members continue in the group since it was created in 2003. Reasons for this type of commitment and persistence provoke new questions worth for future exploration.

Triangulation

Scholars have reached very little consensus on defining triangulation because it is not just considered a practice for validation, but also an approach that speaks to the rigorous process, which is characteristic of qualitative research in particular, but not exclusively. Therefore, triangulation, in terms of its meaning and practice, can be considered complex and multipurpose. For example, triangulation could be understood as a verification strategy that uses "members check" (Carspecken, (1996, pp.88-84), or as a strategy for "contributing to trustworthiness" (Ely et al., 1991, p. 97), or a strategy "to build a confirmatory edifice" or "cross-check", (Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wong in Denzin & Lincoln et al., p.187), and for supporting validity claims (Creswell, p.204).

Furthermore, triangulation could also serve as a methodology for checking data collected by a variety of methods, or checking data collected by the same method but gathered over a period of time, or even for checking different data sources of the same event - for example different reports written by different researchers examining the same issue (Ely et al., 1991).

I used triangulation in this study as part of the methodology of data analysis to compare interviews from 2003-2004 with those from 2007-2008. This method allowed me to identify recurrent themes in several sources for cross-reference, and the comparison of the findings helped investigate the way representations of the issue of AG within the MSIG context changed over time. I also invited three of the teachers interviewed to participate in this process of triangulation when I met with them to look at the coding chart. I asked them look at the clauses I chose in the coding process under the three main categories. Then I asked what they saw as being accurate or not. I wanted to

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ask if my assertions were closed to what they said, meaning what they wanted to mean. Much discussion and clarification took place during this triangulation sessions. Once themes were identified, triangulation was used to double-check findings for corroborating, contrasting, and linking information from multiple sources (Miles & Huberman, 1984). In other words, it helped connect findings from the micro context of the MSIG and the teacher's interviews to the macro context of society represented in the literature of AG and IGs. This is what many scholars like Bloome et al., (2005) and Fairclough (2003) identify as intertextual analysis or juxtaposition of text.

Members Check

Requesting the participants' viewpoint, as being the main actors in a particular context to examine findings and interpretations, not only contributes to the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, but it also embodies participants as collaborators and insiders. It is intended to lessen unavoidable unequal power relations that exist between the participant observers as researchers, and the people in a particular discourse community that is being studied. *Members check* as a verification process simply means "sharing your notes with the people you are studying to see whether or not they agree with your record (Carspecken, 1996 p.89). That is exactly what I did once the transcribed interviews were coded, and the analysis shed light on the way particular members represented discourses of achievement gap, and the way representations changed, or did not change, over time. This process intersects the triangulation technique. The three teachers took time away from their busy schedule to work with me as collaborators. I

met two of the teachers in school, and the teacher who is not longer in the school came to my house.

CHAPTER 4

CONTEXTS WITHIN CONTEXTS

Prism Town

Grassroots Middle School (pseudonym) is located in a college town in Western Massachusetts. The town I call Prism Town (pseudonym) dates from 1658, when an American colonist merchant, who immigrated to the Massachusetts Bay colony in 1630, bought the land from three native inhabitants. When the first permanent English settlement began in 1727, it was known that this land, along with other surrounding land, belonged to a nearby town. Shortly after the colonies declared their independence in 1776, the land gained its township status. Once Prism Town was incorporated, the colonial governor gave the town its name after a French and Indian War hero. Its actual name has created controversies among the people in town ever since disturbing information about the presumed hero was disclosed that he was an officer of the British Army and Commander-in-Chief of the Forces, who fought on the American side and used blankets covered with smallpox in warfare against the Native Americans. The desire to change the town's name has generated much discussion among the residents, without further resolution.

The town's original industry was mainly brick manufacturing and hat making, but today the main industry is education, since it is the home of one state university and two private/prestigious colleges, in partnership with three other private colleges. This town is commonly known as The Five College Town. An interesting fact about Prism Town is that it maintains a traditional Town Meeting (legislative) and Select Board (executive).

The Town Meeting is made up elected representatives of each precinct (approximately 254 members) and the Select Board that hires a Town Manager to manage the day-to-day town businesses. Prism Town, in contrast to other towns its size (population density of 1, 258.2 people per square mile) that have moved to a type of mayor-council, continues to preserve its original form of government. However, in 2003 and again in 2005, the town attempted to abolish its local government and replace it with a charter model; one that consists of an elected mayor and a nine-member Town Council. On both occasions, voters rejected the idea of a charter model.

Another attractive point of interest of this town has always been the home for a large number of poets, writers, filmmakers, music producers, actors, and congressmen, along with other locally and nationally recognized celebrities. In addition, I consider this town a strong supporter of social services, public education, the liberal arts, recreational leisure, and local/family businesses, among other public services. This town is noted for maintaining closed community ties with committed residents investing in, and preserving, the town's traditions and local programs. Among the traditions, one can find a variety of town fairs, an annual farmers market, and hot summer night events. The town also has many amenities: a cinema and one main public library with two smaller branch libraries that provide services to residents in the northern and southern part of the town. The town also has four bookstores, several museums, small galleries, theaters, historical sites, a soup kitchen, a food and clothing pantry, a senior center, two public swimming pools, soccer fields, and many other community service organizations, as well as sports/recreational public areas.

In addition, the town embodies a sense of activism in local, national, and international social, economic, and political issues such as immigration laws and the war in Iraq (e.g., demonstrations and informational meetings are common events). Furthermore, Prism Town displays a profound sense of individual rights and free expression, in which everyone has something to say about everything. Thus, its free speech culture has made local and national news (e.g., the Vagina Monologue performed by High School students in the school auditorium).

In terms of its inhabitants, the town is considered culturally, socially, and economically diverse, with a population of 34,874 people, according to the US Census Bureau in 2000. During the census of 2000, the per capita income was $17, 427, as compared to the national per capita income of $21, 587. The median household income was $40,017, and the median family income was reported around $61, 237, which is much higher than the national family income of $57, 480. With the town featuring a family income higher than the family income reported nationally, it is ironic to read that in the year 2000, 7.2% of the families, and 26.5% of female-headed households, were living below the poverty line (http://www.townma.gov/DocumentView.asp?DID=117).

Although the town has intended to address affordable housing, real estate currently continues to rise from an average of $180, 000 in the year 2000, to the million dollar homes in today's market. Nationally, in the year 2000, the mean assessed home value was around $143, 370. In terms of rent, however, the median rent in 2000 was $637, and for people with mortgages, their homeowner monthly cost was approximately $1,391. As a result, affording a house or living in this town has become almost

impossible, particularly for many of the middle class working families, as well as college undergraduate or graduate students living with their families.

In terms of the town's diversity, the census of 2000 reported 7,209 minorities,representing 20.7% out of the total population of 34,874 people. Asian, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders comprised 3, 177 people, equal to 9.1 %, followed by Black population of 1,780 or 5.1%. The multiracial population recorded in 2000 was 1,169, equal to 3.3%, and the category labeled as *Other* had a population of 1,009, or 2.9%. That was much bigger than 74 American Indian and Alaska Natives combined, which represented 0.2% of the total population. Interestingly, *Hispanic/Latino was reported on a separate category for ethnicity. This is according to the statistics; *they should not be counted on the total data for demographic under race*. In general, the largest percentage of the population is under the category of White, with 27, 665 people, and equal to 79.3%. (*Hispanic/Latino: Total Pop. 2,159 = 6.2%)

Table 3: Census 2000

Category by Race (Census 2000)	Total Pop. 34, 874	Percentage 100%
White	27, 665	79.3%
Black	1, 780	5.1%
American Indian & Alaska Native	74	0.2%
Asian	3, 144	9.0%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander	33	0.1%
Other	1, 009	2.9%
Multiracial	1, 169	3.3%
SUB TOTAL of minority population	7, 209	20.7%

Table 3 captures the town demographics according to the 2000 Census. Although demographic projections have already been made for 2010, I chose to use the US 2000 Census, because this year is closer to the year in which the longitudinal study began, 2003.

The following information refers to the academic and educational attainment for the residents in this town. It is important to keep in mind that five colleges comprise the range of higher education available for those who can afford it.

- 41.7 % of the people age 25 or older graduated from higher education or earned a professional degree,
- 9.4% graduated from high school and obtained a high school diploma
- 3.1% did not complete high school and do not hold a high school diploma
- 11.4% of the population holds some college level of education without completing a degree
- 74% of the total population obtained a degree:
  - 5.5% hold an associate degree
  - 27.0% had bachelors degree
  - 41.7% have a graduate or professional degrees/status

    Among professional status are:
    - 50.1% hold management or professional positions
    - 24.9% are in sales or office positions
    - 16.9% are employed in the service sector:
      - The largest segment holds jobs in education, health, and the social services, thus representing 51.9% of the total population in the town.

The information above reveals the impact of the local universities on the town's level of education for its inhabitants. Although the above statistics emphasizes a predominantly educated community, the town's international community of immigrants is actually heterogeneous and displays significant differences in terms of income, occupations, and academic attainment.

<u>School District</u>

The school district educates an academically, linguistically, socially, and economically diverse population of approximately 4,000 students, with an estimate of 25 different languages spoken in the district. The seven public schools and two alternative campuses comprise pre-K to 12 grades. These schools are organized into three distinct school committees in charge of establishing operational educational policies, reviewing and approving budgets, and selecting, appointing, and evaluating the Superintendent of Schools. The three entities of school committees and their individual fiscal budgets for 2007-2008 are as follow (pseudonyms are given):

- The Main School Committee represents four elementary schools with a budget of $19,456,715

- the Small School Committee represents students from one adjacent town with a budget of $1,475,035 budget

- the Secondary School Committee, which includes the 7-8 middle school and 9-12 high school had a fiscal budget of $27,567,000

The school district is a member of the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN), a national coalition of multiracial schools, in predominantly affluent suburban districts. This network is committed to intensive research about the academic achievement disparity between white students and 'students of color.' The purpose of the network is to identify, develop, and implement strategies to support high academic achievement of minority students (http://www.msanetwork.org).

The graduation rate is one of the district's points of pride for the high number of students who not only graduate from high school, but also proceed to a post-secondary education. In fact, the ELE department head at the high school level has reported year after year that almost all ELLs pass the MCAS, which is a high school graduation

requirement (NCLB). An example of the seniors' academic success is the year 2007, in

which 91% of the students who graduated from high school attended colleges or post

secondary programs. But, in spite of the town's many school initiatives and surrounding

colleges, the state department of education has identified the district as in need for

improvement (NI), in the sub-groups category (e.g., special education and/or

Hispanic/Latino and/or Low Income) for the MCAS English Language Arts or

Mathematics, both in alternative years. In other words, since 2004 the district's

Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP) has reported, almost every year, on the need for

improving category. Schools achieving AYP is part of the No Child Left Behind Act that

sustains a high stakes testing and accountability culture in public education.

　　　　For this reason, the identification of NI has placed the Grassroots Middle School

(pseudonym), along with other two elementary schools, under the state's education

watch. The needs improvement (NI) status requires districts to develop a two-year

improvement plan to demonstrate an acceptable yearly progress, according to the state

standards. In general, after schools or districts are reported for not achieving AYP in two

consecutive years, the school/district can be placed in correction action. If correction

action takes place, and AYP shows no achieved goals, then more outlined improvement

activities follow at the school and district level. Specific improvement activities required

by the state, for schools and districts to implement, can be found in the state's website

(http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/schoolimprovementguid.doc). By this stage, the

school/district moves into the restructuring path, which is the current status for this

particular middle school (2008-2009). Then, if the school/district continues not to

improve, according to the guidelines established by the department of education, a

determination of being underperforming could lead to more serious actions, or to be taken over by the state.

It is important to mention that, in order for some of the schools to address the NI status and improve test scores, particular institutional initiatives and practices get interrupted. For example, in 2006-2007 the Grassroots Middle School involved its entire faculty in actions that caused the work of all IGs to be interrupted for almost five months. Another district-wide initiative geared towards improving academic progress is focused on developing the language of *Every Student Every Day.* The superintendent, at that time orchestrated this initiative. The emphasis on individual students' success seems to accentuate the overall district's commitment on increasing test scores for the subgroup category, and for closing the achievement gap.

On the one hand, the language of *Every Student Every Day*, along with *Success for All*, has been the driving force behind many initiatives implemented throughout the district. Among the initiatives is the publication of a social justice manual. This particular manual describes an action plan for local schools in the area, not only to adopt the philosophy, but also to infuse institutional practices with such ideology. On the other hand, streamlined budget cuts undermine full implementation of this manual because implementing a social justice agenda requires more than an articulated manual (i.e., professional development). Given the reality of the existing budget situation, it is not surprising that many of the programs that support students under the subgroup category, as being identified on MCAS reports, have been jeopardized.

An example of the impact on the budget situation relates to class size: classroom size drastically has increased at all grade levels, K-12, with limited resources (e.g., less

instructional and human resources, elimination of outreach services). Meanwhile, a new extra math class at the middle school to support students with low math skills found its way through this budget crisis.

Furthermore, budget cuts that infused administrative re-organizational structures not only affected individual schools, but also the higher level of Central Office. Some of the most recent developments of centralized protocols involve a tighter system of control and consolidation of tasks. Some of these sustain the pervasive modus operandum of top to bottom decision-making processes. For example, programs and services get reduced or eliminated (e.g., a reduction of 20% to the district wide ELL director/coordinator position in 2005, and again another 20-25% reduction in 2008), with little or no input from the affected constituencies (e.g., students, teachers, parents), while recently a director of professional development and math coach positions in the district were created (e.g., *Director of Curriculum, Evaluation and Professional Development*).

Grassroots Middle School

Grassroots Middle School has gone through multiple institutional changes not only for budget reasons, but also as a result of a school reform adopted a decade ago. This particular reform, called Turning Points, was adopted in 1999 and has evolved over the years. Even after the originator of its implementation retired from the school in 2006, the reform endured in this middle school.

An unpredictable component in this school is the student population, which varied from approximately 700 seventh and eighth grade students in 2000, to approximately 570 in 2008 (based on school records). The economically diverse student body of at

Grassroots Middle School comes from low-income families, entitled to free (15%), reduced-price (5%), and low cost (20%) fee lunches, to more affluent and wealthy families.

The Grassroots Middle School student population mostly resides in the immediate and surrounding towns. They often come from five to six elementary schools within and outside of the district. In addition, school choice is available in grades 7-12. However, the limited seats available at each grade level are granted to applicants through a lottery system. For example, in the year 2007-2008, only five school choice seats were available for incoming 7th grade students. The number of school choice seats available is contingent upon the projected number of students going to the middle and high schools. However, the Superintendent of Schools at the time of the study stressed at one of the school committee meetings that one main goal for the district is to fill up school choice seats and accept new applications every year.

Some of the financial support comes from federal funds. That is, the Grassroots Middle School is a Title I school (at the time of the study), which provides federal funding to serve two distinct student populations: 16% receive special education services, and 3% are in a specialized English Language Education Program. All the students in the middle school are placed into one of the six different teams; three teams for each grade level.

Demographics of students in 2008 displays a diverse school that is based on the category of race, as a determinant token used by most statistics in the US, when reporting on and representing students identity:

Table 4:Demographics: Students 2007-2008

Students by Race	Number
Black, Non-Hispanic	64
Hispanic	47
Asian/Pacific Islander	47
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2
White Non-Hispanic	410
Total	**570**

(http://www.stateuniversity.com/MA)

Turning Points Model

In 1998, Grassroots Middle School adopted a research-based school reform blueprint called *Turning Points2000* to access a set of guidelines for transforming the former Junior High School, 7th - 9th grades, into a 7th - 8th middle grades school. The reform began one year after a new principal was hired with a strong middle school vision. Some of the motivations in adopting the Turning Points reform were to address the needs of early adolescents, as well as the recognized academic gap of students identified in MCAS results under the category of *Needs Improvement* (NI) or *Warning*-failing (W). In simplistic manners, the subgroups referred to the category of race/ethnicity naming African American/Black and Hispanic students. However, the school was also paying close attention to the low scores of students with disabilities, Limited English Proficiency, and low-income (http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/mcas/subgroups2).

Turning Points, as a 2000 national model for school change, was presumed to be a fine choice because it focuses on improving learning, teaching, and assessment of early adolescents. However, this reform lacks of any in-depth plan for addressing the particular needs of language minority students, for example. More specifically, the book used for transforming the school, Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century by Jackson and Davis (2000), only has a short section, in pages 86-87, that explains how to address the needs of language minority students.

It is important to understand that this educational model requires a three-year commitment by the adopting school for implementing and assessing the new philosophy of governance and decision-making, among other practices. An overall school structure includes a self-study for teachers and students that it is primarily intended to inform and assess the school progress, as well as areas of improvement.

Each three-year commitment involved a new phase in the implementation process, some of which included extensive professional development initiatives, the establishment of an on-site coach (es), new partnerships with the community and parents, and participation in a new network of Turning Points schools at the state and national levels. These are a few components among other delineated practices. The principles and practices of this model are drafted in a manual called Turning Points Guide, and Design Overview Manual, which was distributed to the entire faculty in 2001. A summary of practices and the components sustaining the reform is available on line: (http://www.turningpts.org/pdf/overview.pdf). I have also included basic diagrams of the principles in the appendix section.

What is Turning Points[4] model? It is an educational design that recognizes the emotional and intellectual needs of students, in their developmental stages of early adolescence, who are in the process of reaching what is considered the "turning points" between childhood and adulthood (CCAD, 1989). The Carnegie Council of Adolescent Development (CCAD) released a landmark report in 1989 by its Task Force chaired by David W. Hornbeck, a former superintended of schools in Maryland. This report described the risk of young adolescents in the United States, while it established specific recommendations for strengthening middle schools. After the release of this report, hundreds of schools around the nation implemented Turning Points, or similar practices, through grants from the Corporation of Middle Grade School State Policy Initiative (MSGSSP). Then, in 1998 the Carnegie Corporation approached the Center for Collaborative Education in Boston (CCE) to develop a new school reform, which was based on research and its own work with many middle schools around the country, and its use of best practices. By 1999, CCE created the National Turning Points Network, an outgrowth of the original 1988 Turning Points. This network was already working with a few schools in a few states. Then, in the year 2000, Carnegie Corporation decided to publish an in-depth, and more updated, 1989 report, which was called *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents for the 21st Century.*

The designed and coordinated model by the Center for Collaborative Education in Boston (CCE), Massachusetts, contained six areas of practices and actions that facilitate the implementation of eight guiding principles (Appendix 5). Each designed principle

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[4] *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century-* a comprehensive approach to educating young adolescents. A report issued by the Carnegie Corporation, N.Y., 1989.

matched an area of practice and action. For example, the principle addressing teacher

empowerment and inquiry groups related to decision making is manifested under the

synthesized practice/action called *Data-based Inquiry and Decision Making* [to]

"*Empower teachers and administrators and to make decisions . . .*" [2] (Appendix 6).

Although the Turning Points (TP) design aims to help schools set a systematic

autonomous vision (involving leadership committees, inquiry groups, and team

structures), one that it is informed by data-based inquiry, not all teachers and staff of

Grassroots Middle School supported its implementation. In reality, the TP model only

requires 80% approval/support from their entire school body in order for the reform to be

adopted and implemented. For this reason, the entire faculty did not need to be in favor

of this reform. Consequently, by the end of 1999, the year in which a new principal was

hired, the reform was adopted in its fullest capacity: teams were re-designed, a block

schedule was created, and a comprehensive school reform grant with Turning Points was

written, among other new practices and initiatives. The grant was intended not only to

establish membership within the TP organization, but also to support its full

implementation (hhtp://www.turningpts.org/XXXXprofile.htm). It is worth noting that

after the third year contract, the district had to allocate money for its continuation.

In general, it only took this middle school one year to implement the seven

guiding principles and six areas of practices and actions. The adoption and

implementation described in *Turning Points Transforming Middle Schools: Design*

Overview (Center for Collaborative Education, 1999) drastically changed the school in

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[2] This practice challenges a prevalent condition of schools in which decisions are driven by crisis or external pressure, and based upon instinct. As a school works on data-based inquiry and decision making, it engages in an ongoing process of setting its vision, collecting and analyzing data from a variety of sources in order to identify strengths and challenges, creating and implementing action plans . . . . (*Turning Points transforming middle schools, design overview.* Boston, Ma: Center for Collaboration Education, 1999, pp.5-7).

ways that created a degree of anxiety and tensions among the faculty and staff (informal conversations with colleagues). Some of this tension related to rapidly adopted initiatives that collided with different philosophical views among the members of this school community (e.g., no bells, advisory program, inclusion, structured team meetings, exhibitions, leadership team, inquiry groups).

I personally experienced a sudden rotation of 180 degrees, institutionally and professionally. In my view, the lack of time to reflect provoked a level of uncertainty around the effectiveness of each of the new initiatives (i.e., inclusion, differentiation), in addition to all the additional responsibilities we were expected to fulfill within a short period of time or all at once. With limited understanding of the three-year commitment/contract, by the third year in 2001, we were named the first Turning Points *demonstration school* by the Center of Collaborative Education (CCE). It implied that our school suddenly adopted an open door policy to welcome visitors from the national Middle School Network and other prospective TP schools. In fact, any school interested to see what we were doing could call one of the two in-school coaches and schedule a day of visitation. This was a mechanism for outsiders to witness the claimed successful implementation of the reform, in addition to showcase the variety of practices and programs adopted under the TP model.

Benefits and challenges of this model dominated conversation among the school community, which included the faculty, staff, parents, and students, as well as people outside of the school in the surrounding towns. Everyone was talking about our Turning Points Middle School model. Nonetheless, philosophical differences around pedagogy,

curriculum, and other institutional practices emerged, along with issues of equity. During those years, tensions and conflicts permeated the school atmosphere.

Over the years, however, many things have changed the pillars that sustain the institutional governance and structural framework of the model, meaning primarily on the Leadership Committee Team. This team's fundamental function is to determine most school-wide policies and internal changes. Also, participating in inquiry groups (e.g., one of the eight principles of TP) continues to be a required practice that aims to engage teachers, administrators, and other support staff on issues that concern the entire school community – for decision-making, collaboration, and empowerment.

To conceptualize the school governance structure, I constructed a flowchart. The flowchart intends to represent protocol processes inquiry groups follow once an issue of concern, which has been identified a priori, is explored, studied, and results in an action plan. This plan is then presented to the Leadership Team. If recommendations have direct effect on the entire school community, that also affects the school budget, then the protocol path continues to a higher level of governance. In this case, approval from the superintendent is necessary. If the superintendent approves it, then the proposed plan needs to be presented to the school committee. Once an action plan has reached this autocratic level, valid and sustainable arguments must persuade the members of the committee. Reasonably, these last two steps involve a series of bureaucratic protocols and much scrutiny.

In other word, the flowchart intends to represent the organization governance for most decision-making processes in the Grassroots Middle School. Again, every step of

the process requires particular protocols, which also produce specific outcomes. These

outcomes sustain implications for individuals, as well as the entire school community.

(Ortiz, F.W., 2007)
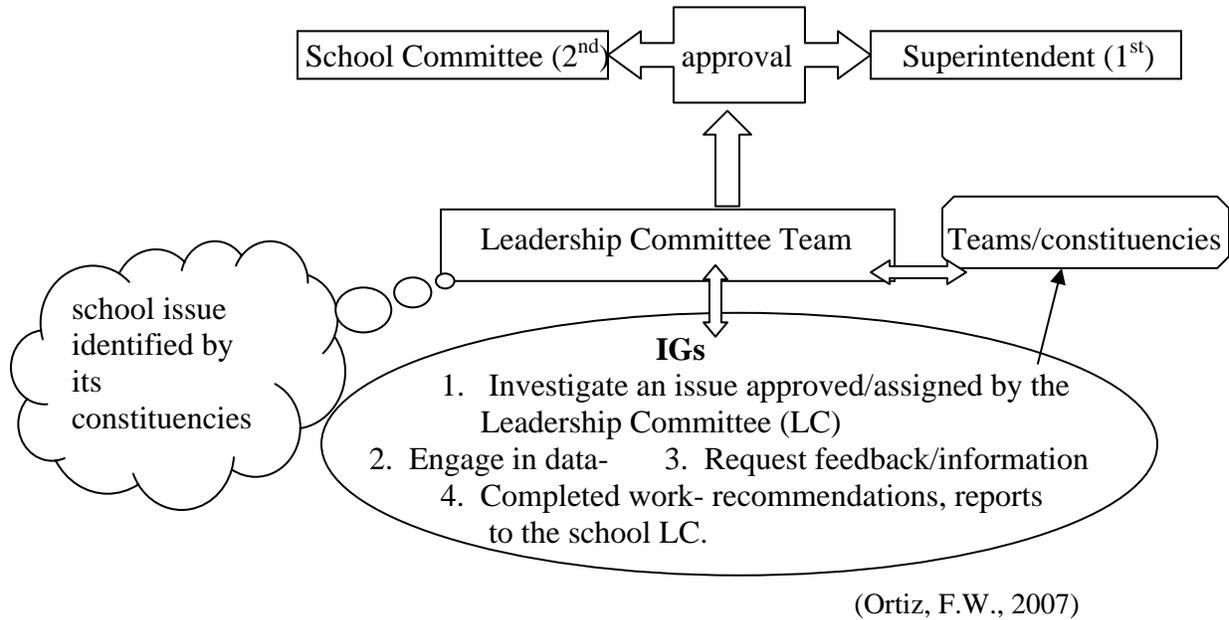
Figure 8: Grassroots Middle School: Decision Making Processes

It is within this hierarchical establishment that most decisions in the school claim

to be democratic and inclusive of its members. However, the principal of the school who

led the implementation of Turning Points made it clear: Scrutiny and final decision-

making was up to the principal. To summarize, the establishment of inquiry groups in

Turning Point schools responds to one of the eight designed principles of this reform. On

the one hand, it claims democratic practices, but, on the other hand, its pseudo-autonomy

rests in the power of those in charge (e.g., principal, superintendent, school committee).

Inquiry Groups

To emphasize, instituting IGs in the school was one of the practices of the Turning Points (TP) reform packet. This sustains a philosophy of creating democratic schools with strong leadership and decision-making practices "vital to the functioning of an effective middle school as it is to the governance of our nation" (Jackson and Davis, 2000, p. 145). Therefore, inquiry groups have established decision-making practices that provide members with opportunities to grapple with different ideas, consider options, and reach consensus democratically. Jackson and Davis (2000) from Turning Points refer to the engagement of democratic processes as "an effective and equitable way of making decisions" (p.145). This is ultimately considered a fundamental element for leadership and empowerment in the TP model.

In essence, an inquiry group is considered a leadership practice that includes teachers and other school staff in decision-making processes through collaborative work. The collaborative work that characterizes inquiry groups responds to a paradigm of collaboration that includes participants in collective work to accomplish a common goal.

Collaboration then could be understood as a form of interaction in which members engage cooperatively in a particular task. A combination of Cohen's (1994) collaborative approach with Kagan's (1990) cooperative learning practices in the school setting could explain the way members participate in inquiry groups: cooperatively and collaboratively. In similar ways, Gail Bush (2003) refers to inquiry groups as a practice that "provides stepping stones from practice to directed reflection, from action research to improved practices" (p.52). However, the teachers in this particular middle school have never reached a consensus about what it means to collaborate.

The notion of institutionalized collaborative work practices can be traced to the industrial revolution era, although not exclusively. The late 18th and early 19th century can be ascribed to the factory line workers model, in which people worked together with a common goal – the production and consumption of material goods. In similar ways, this time period impacted the way schools and schooling were organized and delivered (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1981; Ogbu, 1978). Later on, the post-industrial era brought a new way of organizing learning, thus changing schools' hegemonic structures. Emphasis was given to democratic principles, such as collaboration and teamwork, for decision-making, which not only impacted schools, but also the organization of corporations and other aspects of industry (Hough, 1997).

The era after the Sputnik satellite was launched by the Soviet Union (Russia) in 1957, which resulted in the 1928 National Defense Education Act (NDEA), could be considered a historical, political, educational, and economic turning point in the United States. The NDEA was federal education legislation with specific guidelines for schools in connection with higher education institutions. It was the goal to improve the quality of math, science, and language education in the USA. A focus on excellence in education, new social programs, and the Civil Rights movement, along with the Vietnam War and other national and international events, affected educational intuitions in the United States (Portes, 2005). A myriad of education reforms shaped, and continues to shape, public education and schools in general

With new global political and economic demands, among other demands in society, Peter Senge (1990), one of the nation's leading expert on relations of production

and organizational behaviors, suggests a team player approach in schools, as well as in the marketplace (in Jackson and Davis, 2000; Gebhard, 2004).

According to Senge (1990), a team approach "enables professionals to learn together and to take advantage of collective thought that goes beyond any one individual's understanding" and also "fosters joint learning and problem solving"(in Jackson and Davis, 2000, p.128). That is, a collaborative work that intends to engage members in inquiry and research practices can also empower those involved in the work. In other words, members' participation in inquiry groups could be an empowering and transformative experience, because interactions in this way could be understood as a *liberating pedagogy and pedagogy of dialogue* (Freire, 1970). Furthermore, the collaborative work and inquiry process of the inquiry group parallels to what Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (1993) identify as teacher action research.

Historical Account

When inquiry groups were originally established in this middle school, they were intended to be an after-school activity for only one hour a month. Assignments on a particular issue to be discussed were given to the facilitator of each group, along with guidelines that included inquiry process protocols to follow.

At that time, the principal handed out the charges for the groups. Many of the facilitators and members did not have a clear understanding of what they needed to do or accomplish. In fact, I still remember the first year of inquiry groups at the school and what the facilitator of my group said: I am not exactly sure what we are supposed to do with this. She referred to copies of an article and some questions regarding the article.

The "not sure what to do with this," was beyond the assumption of reading and answering the questions. But she assured us that after the meeting she was going to talk to the principal and ask more specific and concise instructions. Nonetheless, members of my group were also frustrated because we were told to do "this" work after school, without compensation of any kind. Eventually, inquiry groups began to meet during school time on late start dates.

Reasons for people to join a particular inquiry group vary: some are curious about a particular topic; others are tired, and frustrated, or disinterested in the work of their previous groups; some are looking for ways to resolve a particular issue; some are in search of finding ways to improve their teaching practices; and some just do it because they have to (Interviews in 2003-2004 and 2007-2008, and informal conversations). But, regardless of the reasons, everyone in the school is a member of an inquiry group.

Over the years, the work of inquiry groups has become not only clearer, but also standardized with protocols that lead to more focused outcomes/products. That is, IGs remain active until they accomplish their final goals by submitting school-wide recommendations, which are also considered the action plan. When goals are achieved, the group either dissolves and a new group is created, or the group takes another step/level into its inquiry. This could include an evaluation period for the particular group to determine the effectiveness of their recommendations, which may also include support for adequate implementation of the recommendation.

In general, six to eight IGs work per year work collaboratively. A total of six to fourteen members per IG meet every month during the school year. The groups follow research-based activities for engaging members in processes of interaction and collective

work in order to reach their goals. An assumption for instituting inquiry groups in Turning Points middle schools is that they are "important vehicles for maximizing direct participation from throughout the school community in school governance" and for also impacting critical issues affecting the school (Jackson, A. and Davis, G. 2000, p.148).

Research Site: The Middle School Inquiry Group (MSIG)

The MSIG has been working collaboratively on the issue of achievement gap for five consecutive years (2003-2004). The group is composed of mixed-grade teachers, specialists, and other school staff (e.g., guidance counselors, vice-principals, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals). It is expected that all members attend all the monthly meetings, which take place on the second Thursday of every month.

In general, inquiry groups meet on late start dates, eight times a year, from October to May. That is, school staff dedicates twelve hours a year to do inquiry group work. Membership varies because every academic year people choose an inquiry group of their choice, with the freedom to either stay in their current groups, or change to a different one. This in a way presents a challenge for inquiry groups in their process of achieving their goals. Inevitably, inconsistent membership affects the group in various ways. In fact, one of the members addressed the issue more directly during an interview in 2008. The issue of membership is discussed in Chapter 5 under *Challenges.* When Edward Killings (pseudonym) was interviewed in May of 2008, he felt the loss of confidence in the group due to "much turnover." The following is a snap shot of an interview for the dissertation study:

> EK: "I don't have great confidence in our recommendations is that I feel like we have lost quality because we have had so much turnover."

WO: Turn over in terms of?
EK: "People involved in the group. The leadership
(EK- Interview, May 10, 2008)

However, a core group of ten people maintained their memberships in the MSIG by attending the meetings for three consistent years, but, by the time this dissertation is completed, only two of the ten original members will continue in the group. I am one of them.

A particular protocol established in 2004, the year after its formation, frames the first meeting of every year. It consists of members' introductions; a summary or review of the work accomplished in the previous year (s), and the establishment of goals for guiding their work during the current year. Group norms are established on the first and second day of the first year. These are always established at the beginning of every new academic year with no further discussion. In addition, on this first day, a brief history of the group is presented to new members because each year two to four members join the group. In terms of leading the group, it is a tradition to share this responsibility between two of the members. They are either chosen by the principal or volunteer to co-lead. In the past, co-leaders have stayed in their roles as long as two to three consecutive years, or until they express to the principal their desire to step down, move to another group, or some simply move out of the school.

In terms of coordinating the group's work, the co-leaders plan and run every meeting; they set up agendas and consult with the principal when needed. The principal and co-principals do not lead the groups; rather they participate as ordinary members. However, during the first years of the implementation of IGs, the principal provided direct guidance to co-leaders, in particularly the ones in charge of the MSIG. Actually,

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she attended few of the monthly meetings as a participant or presenter. She provided a lot of guidance and focus to the group. In general, members in the group have engaged in a variety of activities, from whole group work and discussions, to cooperative groups in pairs and small groups, to individual work, all within the ninety minutes sessions.

One can say that a relaxed atmosphere permeated the MSIG sessions because students are not in the building while the group meets, and, although the work has been extremely focused, there is always time, mostly at the beginning of each meeting, to socialize. People come with drinks: coffee, tea, water, and a food snack, some of which was provided by the school administration during the first years. But, most recently, members coordinate the snack on a rotation schedule. For the most part, members sit in different places, but after awhile they subtly claim particular seats. Although most people attend almost all the meetings, attendance varies. It is reasonable to say that every member is absent at least once or twice a year. As a result, absences could contribute to the lack of consistency in the work and could also interfere with the group's progress, a point of frustration for some of the members that it is also an unresolved challenge (Interview with Edward Killings, 2008).

In the following section, I describe the monthly meetings during the four years of data collection for this dissertation study. Each meeting began with an agenda, whether copied on paper, written on the board, or on the overhead projector. During the four years of my study, the co-facilitators organized and conducted the meetings, guided by a series of protocols and inquiry processes.

Presently, the MSIG continues to meet, and within the six years, the meeting rooms have changed quite a lot: For 2003-2006 (first three years) we met in an English

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classroom (previously described) that did not belong to any of the members of the group. During 2006-2007, the group used a science lab that belonged to one of the science teachers, who later became a co-leader of the group. In 2007-2008, we met in one of the computer rooms because we were typing case studies based on transcribed interviews of focus students. These interviews became the MSIG qualitative data collected in 2005-2006. It is important to clarify that members of the group did not interview the middle school students, nor did they conduct data collection for the research; graduate students from the local university did the interviews.

Actually, the university graduate students conducting the interviews were recruited and trained by one of the co-leaders in 2004-2005, Rose Morley (pseudonym), who was considered the research "expert" of the group. At least, this was the opinion of Edward Killings (EK), who, on a reflection sheet I prepared with the question "What has worked for you?" responded, "structured process (yellow, green, pink sheets), working in small groups, having an expert . . ." (Reflection Questions sheet, May, 2006). And again, his opinion was confirmed in the second interview in 2008. This was the year he was a co-leader and felt unqualified to lead the group through the qualitative research of case studies. "…We [the other co-leader] are sort of stumbling along trying to follow this plan that was sent in motion . . . I actually don't know if we are doing a good job or not because I don't know what a good job is...and I'm not qualified to help my colleagues learn that" (Interview, Edward .Killings, May 10, 2008). Edward blamed the loss of quality in the findings from the interviews on the loss of our expert, Rose Morley: "Cause qualitative, doing real research is complicated and it takes a long time and people who have experience aren't' here." Furthermore, he lost trust in the analytical process:

EK: Template that we created

WO: That took a year

EK: It took a year to create. Just about. Yeah.

WO: Wow, I see where you feel kind of frustrated in the sense (unclear) of the whole year.

EK: Well, yeah. That's it. The saddest part (pause) is I'm just not sure, I'm not sure how valid are the results are. You know? Talk about bias three of four years ago, you know how to recognize your bias and we have a whole new group this year that never talked about bias. .
..
.
EK: I feel like we need to finish and part of me feels like that we need to just, not try to carry on beyond this, cause it's not, it's not the quality, is lost, we lost, the quality eroded

WO: We lost?

EK: Rose Morley

WO: Yeah, who was keeping us?

EK: Who spent a lot of time outside of the group and who knew how to do this?

WO: Yeah and she was keeping us focused and clarifying questions of what we are doing on this process and what it meant….

EK: And learning about qualitative research. And I m not qualified to help my colleagues learn that.

In reality, I supported the establishment of Rose Morley as an expert who possessed the knowledge of doing qualitative research. When the group started, she was one of the members who later became a co-leader while working on her dissertation. During the meetings, Rose demonstrated a vast knowledge of conducting scholarly qualitative research, case studies, interviews, and overall university knowledge. This is why many, including myself, recognized and trusted her expertise, which is one reason the idea of

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doing case studies was accepted by the group. We counted and relied on her for this work.

By the fourth year, 2007-2008, of this dissertation study, the MSIG met in a computer room. We were writing case studies using a template created by the group at the end of 2007. The meetings were less formal and seemingly without many protocols. Actually, at the beginning of each session we would take at least 15 minutes to eat and socialize. Soon after the social time partners, would go to their assigned computer stations to work on their pieces - each partner had one transcribed interview to write a case study. A crate stored red folders, which had individual names, and all the materials saved from the very beginning. This was all we needed to do our work, and because we did not have structured meetings, when questions aroused, these were answered informally by any of the members in the group. During the last two meetings, however, we gathered more formally around two rectangular tables to process the information from the interviews and select sample statements from the interviews to support common themes. These two meetings were intended to help prepare the final report for the Leadership Team, in May of 2008.

The work of the MSIG

The work of the inquiry group could be narrowly described under two different categories: 1) the work of the group in a particular year; and 2) the final report presented to the Leadership Team. That is, at the end of every academic year, every inquiry group in this middle school presents a final report. This report mostly includes a proposed action plan to implement. It is worth noting, however, that the MSIG in 2008 reported a

summary of its work, a working plan for the following year, and the findings from the case studies. The reality is that after five years the group did not present a proposal with an action plan for the school to adopt or implement.

In order to contextual and correlate my research work within the micro context of the MSIG, I decided to summarize the work of the group as yearly processes were engaged and accomplished. The subsequent paragraphs summarize the five years of the MSIG work, year by year.

In the first year 2003-2004, the group began by establishing the groups charge: The Diversity Committee felt that it was spinning its wheels, so it set a challenge forth to Leadership, who in turn voted to create this inquiry group. The challenge is: We believe it is our challenge as a school to examine the educational experience of all students through the lens of race. We know inequity is occurring. Where and how? Before we formulate an action plan, we need to know where and how (Agenda, 9/11/03).

In addition, a variety of activities shaped our common understandings of the issue of AG. Some of these activities included the reading, reflecting on, and discussing of articles. Many of the activities were thought-provoking and prompted the unfolding of members' ideologies about racism and the issue of achievement gap. The following is an example in which participants shared their thoughts during a fish bowl activity, after reading an article by Michael A. Fletcher, editor from the Washington Post: Survey discounts attitude in races' education gaps.

> Member 1: There's a long history in this country of racism and segregation. It is ridiculous this has be going on for too long. It doesn't seem like a very insightful statement on his part". This kind of committee can continue some of the work that's going on. But we are not going to be the end of it either. We can't solve it in one inquiry group. (11/20/02, p.A12)

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Member: The 50s are significant for me because in the 50s I was in a segregated school district. Teachers and students looked like me. There was an expectation of achievement and I think those adults could make demands without those demands being misinterpreted. Demands and encouragement were together. After integration, the gap began to get wider. I was confused.

Ishamel: It is nothing new. Once I left Georgia I was never, ever in a classroom or school where there were an abundance of people who looked like me. I experienced things that I can't express and that I have a lot of emotions for. I still resent that. I sometime don't' now how t react when they talk about this since 1950. I have to sort things out for myself.

(Transcript from a MSIG meeting, 11/26/03)

By the end of this year, the group determined that the data regarding achievement disparity needed to go beyond MCAS test results, disciplinary record, report cards, and two internal surveys given to students in the middle school (one was given on the first day of school, and the other one on the last week in June of 2004). The group agreed on doing case studies. This is the reason why the second year, 2004-2005, was primarily devoted to organizing qualitative data collection through interviews.

It took the group part of the spring semester and the entire fall of 2004 to write the interview questions. These questions were organized under six main topics: self, home and family, community outside of school, school environment, relationship with teachers, and school administration. Also this year, students for case studies were chosen, consent letters for the parents were written, and phone calls were made to the parents. Rose Morley, who was just a member at the time, drafted the letter, and the group took one of the ninety minutes session to edit it.

During the third year, 2005-2006, Rose Morley coordinated everything that entailed the interviews: from buying the tape recorders, to training college students who

were going to conduct the interviews in the fall of 2005. Once all the interviews were

completed, Rose found the people to do the transcriptions.

In the spring of 2006, members in the inquiry group began preliminary readings

of the transcribed interviews. This activity was done with partners: reading and taking

notes were part of the analytical process. Soon, we discovered that reading and taking

notes to find common themes was a tedious and lengthy process. By the fourth year of

the groups' work, 2006-2007, the reading became more focused as the group developed a

template to organize common themes and a process of coding. It took almost an entire

year to accomplish the process of coding the interviews.

Writing the case studies began more focused in the fall 2007. By the spring of

2008, the MSIG had identified common claims done by the students in relation to what

helped them do well in school: *students know when teachers care, teacher takes the time

to explain things*, and what they valued: *students, want to feel respected, students want to

be known as an individual, students want to feel safe, and students want to feel

successful.* These were included in the final report, which also included a work plan for

the following year. The MSIG did not however present recommendations or an action

plan to close the achievement gap. It was merely a summary report on the work done in

previous years and the plan for continuing the group's work into the new academic year

2008-2009. It meant that the group was moving into its sixth year of collaborative work.

I remember how, in the last meeting, the group lamented not having a concrete

action plan with concrete recommendations for the school community to adopt. Edward

Killings, who was one of the original members and co-leader in 2007-2008, and was also

planning to move out of the group at the end of the year, expressed his feelings about the

whole process. The following excerpt is from an interview with Edward Killings. It

shows Edward's sentiment and some conclusions about the group's work. His feelings

about being in the group had changed over time. First, he was optimistic and

enthusiastic, and now he was not confident in the work of the group:

> WO: And you stayed
>
> EK: Because I put a lot of effort into these case studies and I wanted to see
> what was going to come out of them. I didn't want to leave it hanging. I was
> surprised other people did …I was optimistic …
> WO: It looks like it's moving ahead …
>
> EK: Um, I'm not terribly optimistic at this point of what our
> recommendations that they are going to have something substantive, um
> substance for Leadership
>
> WO: At this point?
>
> EK: And that will have an action plan and help our school work in this
> area I don't think that's going to work for this inquiry group… I'm thinking
> we're going to come up with some lessons you know that these students have
> for us. And then I think it's kind of just going to end there. The next step
> would be who wants to help our school, how do we learn these lesson and
> improve our practices? And that's a huge next step. (Interview, 3/10/08)

During the last meeting in 2008, however, the group was hopeful for the coming

year. The members talked about developing useful recommendations for the entire

school, or an action plan for implementation. The group was certain that

recommendations needed to be directly informed by the case studies. More specifically,

the focus was based on "what we have learned/what we hear the kids saying?" (Field

notes, 4/10/08).

In order to present a summarized history of the work done by the MSIG, since

September 2003 to May 2008, I created the following organization chart. This chart

intends to capture five year of collaborative work by a group of middle school teachers

and staff, committed to investigating the issue of achievement gap in their own school:

"We believe it is our challenge as a school to examine the educational experience of all

students through the lens of race" (MSIG handout, 4/15/05).

Table 5: MSIG: Collaborative Work

Years of Work	Members(after 2004) *new + same from previous year	Work (summary)	Final Report For Leadership Team (LT)
Year 1 2003 to 2004	Total 16	establish norms; Look at different quantitative data; hypothesize; problematized data; decide to collect qualitative data; Dr Nieto visits the group; create working groups; report to LT	Conduct case studies; Request money (grant proposal) for conducting interviews (i.e., equip, food etc....). Summary of the work done.
Year 2 2004 to 2005	Total 13 * 2 + 11 Y1	review norms; create interview questions; choose students for case studies; write consent letter; translate letters in Spanish and Khmer; call parents for consent; contact Cambodian outreach worker; co-leader trains college students for interviews; conduct interviews; report to the LT	Create time line for next year: plan of "Big picture", conduct interviews, plan phase after interviews. Summary of the work done.
Year 3 2005 to 2006	Total 11 * 1, + 2 from Y2, + 8 from Y1	conduct Interviews; read one transcribed interview and take notes; workshop on analyze data; analyze interviews; identify common themes; report to LT (partners)	Develop case studies; read transcripts. Summary of the work done.
Year 4 2006 to 2007	N/A	establish common themes; create a template for data analysis; use template to categorize students responses based on common themes; develop case studies; report to LT (small groups)	Create template for case study write up, read transcripts
Year 5 2007 to 2008	Total 10 *3 + 3 from Y1+ 4 from Y4	Analyze transcribed interviews; use common themes; identify students' common threads under 4 categories; write narratives of what we heard the kids say; create case studies (small groups)	Findings about what kids say; maintain the same group; leader wants to continue; want to create action plan for next year. Summary of work

My Research Work

Following is a description of the four years of my research study as opposed to

the MSIG collaborative work. My work is identified and organized in years and phases

to identify the data collection and analysis. Data organization and analysis were

presented in Chapter 3, in the *Data Organization* section. The data has the year and

phase of the longitudinal study and data analysis, the focus of each year and all that

constitute the data, and the summarized findings. I used the letter Y to abbreviate Year,

followed by a number to represent the Phase. The intention supporting this decision was

mainly to separate the MSIG collaborative/research year, and the years of my research

study. For example, the Y1/Phase1 referred to the first year of my research study.

Again, Chapter 3 contains a summary my research study from 2003-2008.

During the first year, Y1/Phase1 developed a pilot study, *Deconstructing the*

discourses of the achievement gap: in a middle school inquiry group that focused

primarily on members' participation and the construction of students' identity. My two

primary roles, researcher and member of the group, warranted critical reflection for

realizing my influences and biases, while examining my struggles and experiences within

a discourse community, in this case my inquiry group (Carspecken, 1996). A deeper look

of these dual roles furthered my research study, while it forced to be more critical of my

work. When I engaged in critical reflection practices in 2006-2007, the tenets of critical

ethnographic study (Carspecken, 1996; Gee, 1999), my data analysis eventually turned

into a reflection paper (comprehensive exam) for reporting new insights.

Engaging in self-reflection prompted me to look at myself within the context of

data analysis and even closer. A body of literature on teacher research and teacher

reflection supported this process. Critical reflection also foregrounds the idea that, when

teachers focus on a particular issue, whether collaboratively or not, they can also engage

in reflection practices for individual transformation (Darling-Hammond, 1998; 1997;

Little & McLaughlin, 1993). For, it is unlikely not to engage in critical reflection when

talking about teacher research work in general, and in particular, when one is a teacher, a

researcher, and a participant in the study. Moreover, Darling-Hammond (1998; 1997)

and Little & McLaughlin (1993) highlight the practice of teacher reflection as one that

provides an opportunity for transforming the perception of self and for transforming

teaching practices in a direction that can open possibilities for affecting students'

academic performance in a positive way.

Could a diverse (e.g., diverse in terms of gender, race, and field of expertise)

inquiry group that has been working collectively on the issue of achievement gap through

the lens of race be the site for individual and/or collective transformation? Or, could the

inquiry group be a place where the status quo gets reproduced individually and/or

collectively? Could interviews serve as a critical tool for revealing and unpacking

individual and/or collective representations of the issue of AG, and in what way? How

do representations change over time? Furthermore, what are the implications of critical

reflection for teachers, institutions, and individuals committed to impact academic

inequities and create long lasting changes?

These are among the questions that emerged as the research study moved into

deeper levels. They also inform my dissertation study, which intends to explore

transformation and reproduction within the context of individual and/or collective

representation of issues of the AG, while making visible the way representations change

over time, within the context of an inquiry group. For the purpose of this study, I consider the interviews with specific members a reflection tool for investigating the research questions.

Teachers Interviewed

The interviews helped unpack representations of discourses of AG and the assumptions about inquiry groups for this dissertation study. Three teachers were chosen as a result of three specific criteria: 1) being in the MSIG for three consecutive years, since 2003; 2) being among the eight people interviewed in 2003-2004; and 3) being able to participate in the interviews of 2007-2008. Two of them were science teachers, and one taught art classes. They are identified in this study under the following pseudonyms: Rose Morley (art teacher, co-leader), Edward Killings (science teacher, co-leader), and Julia Wyatt (science teacher).

Julia Wyatt and Rose Morley have been teaching for almost 20 years. Edward Killings, who taught at a charter school for 4 years before coming to this middle school, has being a science and math teacher in this middle school for the last 6 years. That is, Mr. Killings has been a schoolteacher for a total of 10 years. In terms of their career path into teaching, each of them had a different story to tell. For example, Julia describes her teaching path as an accident: "I accidentally stumbled into teaching. I was never going to be a teacher, never" (Interview, 5/7/04). Majoring in science to become a scientist in a male dominated field exposed her to numerous episodes of discrimination: "sexual discrimination that occurred to me … they were concerned about a woman's ability to do the job in the field" (Interview 5/7/04).

Rose's teaching path into teaching, however, was shaped by her low income, because "I came from a very poor inner city family … of nine children … and first generation college-bound" (Interview, 5/6/04). Her economic hardship forged a long journey before she achieved a teaching certification at the age of 30. She was a painter and print maker before obtaining a scholarship to go to an art school, which got complicated by an unexpected event in her life. Rose juggled school, work, and childrearing while trying to become an Art Therapist: "I was interested in special populations. I have an aunt who is mentally retarded who stays with us, who is like my sister" (Interview, 5/6/04). Rose ran a program for kids with Down's syndrome and obtained achievement awards during her high school years. She assumed that this experience would afford her entrance to a therapist program. However, to her surprise, the Art Therapy Association of America told her, "…in your situation the best thing to do is get an art education degree and then you can go to graduate school, eventually, and become an Art Therapist" (Interview, 5/6/04). Reluctantly, and shadowed by the assumption that "…students who aren't real artist take Art Education," she did proceed to explore the Art Education Department at Kent State and "fell in love with it. I fell in love with the classes" (Interview, 5/6/04).

Edward Killing's journey to be a science teacher began with his college path toward becoming a NASA employee; for which he studied aerospace engineering. During his years in college, he realized that he wanted to do more than solving technical problems. His desire to help others, along with his humanitarian inclinations, influenced his decision about obtaining a religious degree. He worked nine years for Outward Bound, while being an environmental educator and skiing instructor. Although his

teaching career cannot be described as a lineal path, he was always involved in the

teaching field: from an educational context; tutoring recreational activities like teaching

swimming and ski lessons. Because Edward always liked math and science, he knew he

needed to go back to school and obtain a master's in education to be a certified teacher.

Even though Julia's, Rose's, and Edward's teaching paths may have been

different, they all shared similar concerns about a particular group of students who were

not succeeding in school, including some of their own classes in particular. Answers to

the question about "Why did you join this inquiry group" reflect their common concern.

It is worth noting that answers to the question have not changed much over the years.

Table 6 captures the first level of data analysis to compare discourse change over time.

This intertextual analysis for comparison and connections moved to deeper levels of

analysis. Appendix H includes a complete microanalysis at the third level of Edward

Killing's interviews, followed by two sampling tables from Rose Morley's and Julia

Robert's microanalysis.

Table 6: Intertextual Connections: changes over time

Member	Interviews 2003-2004	Interviews 2007-2008
Rose Morley	"I wanted to do things now cause I see kids suffering now, (she left the other IG) "… I said we needed to do something	"I felt this was the kind of work we needed to do" I felt this was meaningful work"
Edward Killings	"I've been struggling in the past with um kids of color not achieving in my class and um, I'm not happy with that and I'm curious about changing that"	"trying to figure out what would be helpful for those kids, the kids that aren't succeeding" "I put a lot of effort into these case studies and I wanted to see what was going to come out of them" … I wanted to be a part of it"
Julia Wyatt	"…I am most interested in this topic"… why within my classroom, why some kids engaged and achieving by the measures that we call school and why are some kids not. I'm interested in that as a teacher"	"I was interested in why people do well in school, particularly there are kids of color that aren't doing well in school" "…kids who are underperformance I am fascinated by why…" "… what's happening in school, where is the mismatch…" "…what can I do to then support those kids to do well?"

Another interesting fact about these members is that Edward is the only one, besides me, who was still in the MSIG during my last year of the study, in 2007-2008. In addition, the last year of my study Edwards was the co-leader in the group. Julia, on other hand, left the group at the end of 2006-2007 after four years of being in the group. She decided to join another inquiry group because she felt the need "for a break" (Interview, 1/11/08). However, during her last year in the group, in 2006-2007, she played a quasi co-leader's role, which only lasted part of the year.

Out of these three members, Rose, was the most instrumental of all, not only because she was a co-leader in 2005, but also because she played a critical and direct leadership role in the overall process of the group's research. Rose embodied the researcher expertise as she was connected to higher education institutions - teaching courses while completing her dissertation and later co-authoring a book.

Rose's involvement in the group's work was beyond simple participation. During the first year of the MSIG, 2003-2004, she presented a theoretical framework to help us understand the relevancy of qualitative research, when compared to quantitative research. She facilitated materials such as readings and a video named *Skin Deep*. In addition, she helped coordinate the visit with Doctor Sonia Nieto, a retired professor from the local university, to talk about case studies. As a co-leader, in the fall of 2005, she coordinated all the work around students' interviews (e.g., selecting interviewers, training interviewers, buying audio recorders, circulating consent forms). In the spring of 2006 Rose left the school after receiving a doctoral degree and obtaining a new job as a director of the art teacher education program in a prestigious higher education institution. However, her work with the group did not stop. Rose volunteered to attend the monthly meetings as a co-chair until the end of 2006.

My Role

I conclude this chapter by explaining my participation in the group as a member and researcher conducting a four years study. When I began with the IG in 2003, I was in the doctoral program making decisions about my ethnographic study. Coincidentally, this was the year in which the MSIG was created. Specific reasons for joining this

particular inquiry group to anchor my research study can be found in Chapter 3, under the section *Rationale: Why this MSIG?*

As a participant observant, I first wanted to focus my attention on the group's process in charge of investigating the issue of AG. I wanted to know *how was my school going to solve this complex issue through the work of an inquiry group*? Idealistically, would the inquiry group be able to find a solution to this problem? More specifically, how would members' participation influence the work and final outcome? I was extremely curious to see who would join this group and their motivations for doing so? I therefore decided to explore these questions through members' participations in the monthly meetings. Research questions and focus morphed throughout the years.

After three years of participation and collecting data, I took a professional leave to advance my doctoral work. During the year off from teaching, in 2006-2007, I did not detach from the school altogether. My involvement in the school continued. I volunteered in a district-wide action group that focused on the achievement of Puerto Rican students. Although I did not participate in the MSIG, I did attend two of the meetings, in addition to attending ELL departmental meetings for re-designing the program at the middle school level. To my return in 2007-2008, data collection and analysis continued to conclude the last year/phase of the dissertation study.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS: REPRESENTATION, TRANSFORMATION

AND REPRODUCTION

In this chapter, I examine the potential of an inquiry group as an institutional practice to provide opportunities for members' understandings of achievement gap to transform as discourses change and reproduce. When critical moments of change and reproductions occurred, the group did not identify them, nor did the group explicitly celebrate its accomplishments or transformations. The group, however, acknowledged its work and effort in trying to reach its goals. But the members of the group did not have specific mechanisms in place to unpack critical moments of change or reproduction. These instances went unnoticed, and opportunities for transformation became elusive.

Throughout this chapter, I rely on data sampling and snapshot techniques to address the research questions in the data analysis. As a result, data analysis shows the way members' understanding of AG, through representations, shaped the work of the group, while assumptions about inquiry groups are unpacked, and challenges, struggles, and accomplishments are highlighted. In addition, new questions emerged regarding critical instances, perhaps recognized by some; critical moments that did not go beyond the instance in which they occurred. And if they did, a new question emerged: what kind of impact did it have on teaching practices and students performance. Ultimately, changes and transformations are not examined outside the inquiry group context in this study.

I divide the chapter into three distinct sections. In the first section, I discuss critical discourse analysis as a theoretical and methodology tool for analyzing data and to

validate the findings that resulted from the use of specific analytical tool. In the second

section, I examine representations of achievement gap through the discourses available to

the members of the MSIG, both during the monthly sessions and at interviews.

Representations are organized under three main subtopics: 1) Black and White, On the

Racial Line, to explain the way members defined AG; 2) Students in the Achievement

Gap, to describe and identify the students in the AG; and 3) Rhetoric of Blame, to address

the reasons why an AG exists. The latter presents the way members' understanding of

AG, which is informed by specific literature, contributes to rhetoric of blame, especially

for blaming someone or something. Recurrent themes of blame pointed to: a) students;

b) parents and family; and c) school culture. A subsection here addresses *Shifting the*

Blame to illustrate moments in which discourses of blame moved away from the students.

Shifting attention from blaming the students does not preclude focusing on them. Rather,

it allows teachers, in particular, to look at students closely in relation to the teachers, the

curriculum, the classroom culture, the school community, and communities outside of

school. In addition, findings from data analysis show how representation of AG as a race

discourse is consistently echoing through the data sampling. To better understand the

echoing of race throughout this chapter, it is important to mention that the MSIG was

given the charge of looking at the issue of AG through the lens of race: "We believe it is

our challenge as a school to examine the educational experience of all students through

the lens of race" (Field notes, 10/9/03). Ironically, the idea of looking at the "academic

experience of all students" in this case served as a self-prophecy for framing a black and

white issue because the group did not end up looking at "all" students, rather they

narrowly focused on African American, Latino, and Multiracial students (narrowly defined).

The third section illustrates critical moments that provided opportunities for the transformation and reproduction of discourses of AG. When discourses of reproduction shifted, the study identified the shift as a critical moment. Findings from data analysis point to limited mechanisms for members in the IG to identify moments in which group's discourses changed, reproduced, and transformed.

Critical Discourse Analysis

The dissertation study challenges a binary construct of discourses of transformation and reproduction and the preliminary findings from an ethnographic study. I also explore the role of inquiry groups as an institutional strategy for change and the dialectic between practice and theory instilled in "critical teacher researchers' reflection and practices" (Freire, 1998, p.79; Carspecken, 1996, Kreisberg, 1992). For this reason, a critical lens not only allows teacher researchers to explore people's struggles in social and discursive practices in quantifiable and "nonquantifiable features of social life," but it also upholds the examination of the researchers' struggles and experiences within particular discourse communities (Carspecken, 1996, p.3; Gee, 1999). In other words, the question of who we are and how we see the world in relation to others is embedded in the way we communicate during interactions and thus warrants a closer look, particularly in the field of critical discourse analysis.

The reason why I chose critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a multidisciplinary approach is to provide a theoretical lens and tool that could help me analyze language in-depth. The tenet of CDA and the understandings of (D)discourses (Gee, 1999) allow

language to be examined at the level of lexical choices used by members of the group during interviews, at the monthly sessions, and in written texts collected throughout the study. This approach does not only focus on specific language use, but also in "… the dialectic relationships between discourse and other elements of social practice," a form of intertextuality within and outside of the MSIG context, and connects to a larger narrative in the literature (Fairclough, 2003).

In essence, CDA is primarily concerned with the way power and social identities are constructed in and through discourses and the ideological significance of choices made specifically by people through interactions. I use this understanding as a lens to investigate members' discourses during the monthly sessions and the interviews through their collaborative work on issues of achievement gap. In the case of this dissertation study, the issue of achievement gap is dialogically represented and enacted by the members in the MSIG (Bakhtin 1981; Fairclough 1992; Gee 1999; Wodak 1996). I have done this research with a special interest in considering inquiry groups as an institutional strategy, or a mechanism that can provide opportunities for discourses to transform. In this way, inquiry groups can provide institutional space for interrupting discourses of reproduction.

In this study, the use of CDA to examine members' discourses provides the tool for scrutinizing oral language to the smallest details of talk. Cameron (2001) reminds researchers that if something "is 'there' in people's talk, then it must be there for some purpose" (pp. 20-21). Moreover, when people interact, their experiences are recounted as a mode of inquiry, often unconsciously. When this happens, critical discourse analysis serves as a methodology and tool to view word choices in language use, language

functions, social practices for co-constructing social identity and knowledge, and negotiating power relations, among other things (Carspecken 1996; Fairclough 1995;Vygostky 1986).

Although critical discourse analysis in the study recognizes power relations, the dissertation study does not wrestle with issues of power per se. However, it does not preclude the understanding of power relations in the social interactions of the monthly meetings and interviews. This could be understood in the way interlocutors interweave different texts into discourses and rely on specific utterances to achieve their goals, whether consciously or not (Bakthin, 1981; Fairclough, 1992).

Language and discourse in this way function as a tool for negotiating tensions, co-constructing knowledge, and achieving individual and/or collective role. CDA in the dissertation is used as a means to codify experiences through language, to empower its users, to contest issues of representation, and to understand language as a ". . . weapon for critique" (Leonardo, 2003, pp.71-72). In other words, CDA is concerned with the ideological significance of the choices *authors* make during interactions and the patterns in those choices, particularly within the context of the MSIG, as representations of AG change, transformation and reproduction (Fairclough, 2003).

The use of a lexical grouping model to identify repetitions and parallelism in the language, along with the lexical choices and the patterns in the choices made by the members, allowed me to identify representations of AG and instances in which these representations changed, transformed, and reproduced (e.g., tenets of SFL- Eggins, 1994). Coding language in this way facilitates the process of data analysis by identifying

recurrent themes to demonstrate representations of discourses of AG under rhetoric of blame – already established in the literature review.

Representation of Achievement Gap

In 2006, studies continue to show that many Latinos and African Americans continue to underperform on standardized tests. This trend gets intensified when students are under-represented in advanced/honor classes, while being over-represented in remedial classes, special education programs, and discipline-related behaviors (NCES, 2001; Noguera, 2006). This situation has come to be known as the "achievement gap" (Ferguson, 1998; Jencks and Phillips, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Noguera et al., 2006; Ogbu, 1994;). Although the test-score gap for reading and math almost disappeared between the 1970s and 1990s, some backslide happened after the 1990s (Chubb and Loveless, 2002; Jencks and Phillips 1998; Jacobson, Ralph et al. 2001: NCES, 1999). Furthermore, Ferguson's (1998, 2002) studies on achievement gap in suburban schools indicate that the achievement gap may even start before students enter kindergarten. He has referred to this most recently as a "racial difference in lifestyle" (Ferguson, 2007, p.18). Therefore, initiatives to address early literacy and home/parent strategies, among other reforms, are recommended for readiness (Ferguson, 2007).

'Black and White': On the Racial Line

I examined the way members talked about the issue of achievement gap during the interviews, monthly meetings, and on written text. These interactions aligned pervasive discourses of AG in society as a 'black and white' issue, located on the racial

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line as rhetoric of blame, and as an academic failure. Instances for challenging this black and white discourse within the MSIG context are illustrated in the third section of this chapter, *Transformation-Reproduction*: *Critical Moments.*

I used intertextual analysis to compare interviews with particular members between 2003-2004 and 2007-2008 to illustrate the way representation of AG was mostly discussed as a racial issue, the way members connected to discourses outside of the inquiry group, and changes of discourses over time (Appendix I). This comparison addressed the first two questions of my study. How do members or the work of the MSIG represent discourses of AG in transformative or reproductive ways, according to society at large? And in what ways have the representations of the issue of AG, whether individually or collectively, changed over time. Three main subcategories emerged from Broad Data Analysis: 1) identifying the students; 2) defining achievement gap; and 3) reasons for the gap. From here, intertextual connections were made, another level of sub categories emerged, and comparison for discourse change was achieved.

Bloome et al., (2005) address the use of language in discourse as a tool for people to "name, construct, contest, and negotiate social identities" and to bring cultural ideologies into the event, in this case the interview (pp.103, 46). When language is considered a tool for discursive interactions in communicating and acting ideas and ideologies, it defines, shapes, and influences people. In other words, what constitutes people is what Bourdieu (1986) refers to as *habitus*, the cultural structures that exist in people's very makeup and are reflected in their daily practices as an entire domain of life; ways of being in the social daily world of individuals, groups, societies, and even entire nations.

I used interview excerpts to illustrate the way members' discourses represented the AG on the racial line. The following samples capture Rose's, Julia's, and Wyatt's response to the interview question: "What is your definition of achievement gap, how do you define achievement gap?"

(a) Rose: She used what she called the *Grand Narrative* as the common language used in society and research to respond. In 2004, she said, "In my mind I think of the AG between mostly white population and children of color." Again in 2008, she referred to "a gap of achievement or measurement." Her definition did not change much from 2004 to 2008. She problematized the typical way of talking about the AG: "academic status between many students of color and many non minority students." In both years she expressed the need for changing the language of achievement gap, and using instead "opportunity gap or resource gap," because the term AG "puts the onus on the student that they are not achieving as if they are not trying enough." Rose indicated that a change of language helps "to look at the socio political implications of why the gap is there" (Interview, 2007). She added, "It's really easy to get teachers, principals, and policy makers off the hook and say 'well, that gap is there, we are over here doing our work, we are working really hard and that gap is there.' We can't do anything about it other than it being a gap in practice." She acknowledged the individual factor that also plays out in the way students perform academically: "I don't ever want to diminish individual effort or say that is not important. Of course it's important, of course, so is individual motivation." Rose recognized a factor not always addressed in the literary of AG: learning differences, learning difficulties, health, and other more innate and individual factors affecting the

individual. Rose emphasized changing the language of AG in order to look at other factors: "Rather than looking at all the socio political structures that are in place, that push in that direction and position that" (Interview, 2004).

(b) Julia: She talked about AG from the idea of academic success. In 2004, she established the school model based on expectations: "we expect kids to be doing [school work], and where they [school and teachers] expect they should be going, and when they do that, and they go where we expect them to go, we say that's achieving. And when they do not they are not achieving" (Interview, 2004). In 2004, she referred to the way assessment is determined in school by "using grades, their achievement or not doing school is assessed by grades. And we [who is "we": the school, the group, she, and I?] find that there is a gap between kids of color, and not kids of color, in that." She used a typical school model in the way schools measure success: "academic output…those standards" (2008); "college acceptance rate and high graduation rate, high engagement in the school process rate… SAT score…using grades" (Interview, 2004); "students of color and not kids of color," not exactly because she solely aligns with this notion of race, but because this is the way, generally talked about" (2004). Again in 2007 she said, "People don't do well in school, in particularly kids of color." Julia expressed disagreement with the general concept of AG as it is talked about: "So it begs the question when you say the AG… it's a very narrow view of what achievement is." She called it "this [a] very narrow lens . . . its complex" (Interview, 2008).

(c) Edward: He used a more general definition in 2004 to include students not achieving

based on quantitative data: "report cards and referrals to QLC" (a place originally for

kids with behavior problems), to refer to "group of students in our school who are

successful and a group of students who aren't, based on MCAS scores" (2008). He

talked about how data (e. g., report cards, test scores, disciplinary referrals) indicate

certain patterns that fit in particular group of students: "one of the patterns is kids of

color under-represented" in the group that is successful (2008). Edward

acknowledged the complexity of the issue when he said, "it's huge…we are not going

to solve it …it's beyond us . . . but we can take steps" (2004).

Responses across members were similar in how they acknowledged the complexity of

the issue: "it's complex"; "it's huge"; "I don't like the term." They used academic success

discourses in the same way they are commonly regarded, and their discourse did not change

greatly over the three to four years span. Julia and Edward agreed that the issues and factors

creating the AG are "too complex; lots of reasons; a variety of reasons" (Julia- 2004, 2007).

And they are "huge; we are not going to solve it; it's beyond us; too many things to list; you

can't separate" (Edward-2004, 2008). Their discourse of AG also echoed a race discourse

as a 'black and white' issue. In general, Rose, Julia, and Edward referred to students of

color, in addition to economic status.

Another excerpt in which achievement gap was represented as a racial issue

relates to Peter's (the Physical Education) dialogue about the way the MSIG identified

the issue as a "black and white issue" to define the students:

> (3) It seems like we are just looking at one group like the black students to xxx we
> don't really talk about the Khmer kids we don't talk about the Puerto Rican kids,
> it seems like a black white issue xxx. … from the first day [the first meetings] it
> was not a leveled playing field for everyone ...it seems like a black white issue

and nothing else….It seems like it's the tone of it ... a purposeful thing…I don't know if it's meant to be that way. I feel kind of sad for the other kids that we aren't talking about it (Interview, May, 2004)

Peter's perception was that "we are just looking at one group like the black students." At the same time he remembered how the MSIG originally included everyone who was not succeeding, but eventually the focus turned on the "Black kids . . .as a black white issue" (Interview, May, 2004). This excerpt shows how Peter intertextually connected with the vast literature that has the tendency to refer to race as a common perception of black/white equals race. That is, constructing a black and white issue mirrors the general discourses found in the wider scope of society, in which race is pivotal in the relation of social, economic, political, and historical inequities that reside beyond the field of education and continue to be reproduced institutionally (Farley, 1984; Bernstein in Apple, 1982).

It was between the spring of 2004 and the fall of 2004 that a designated group within the MSIG decided to identify students for case studies under racial categories. The selection resulted in a list of twenty-one students for the interviews. It is worth noting that at only seven African American, Latino, and Multiracial students from the original list were interviewed, and none of them were Cambodian students. This group of students was discussed as a group falling through the crack (Meeting, 2004). Decisions about choosing the students and the final interviews brought controversies and healthy tensions among the members. In a discursive world in which people interactions are not detached from the abstracts of who they are and the institutional hegemonies in which discourses operates, nor are they limited by them, healthy tensions that occur as the effect of these interactions could also be understood as possibilities for transformations. I

examine some of the points of controversy and healthy tensions later in this chapter in the *Challenges, Struggles and Accomplishments* section.

Nonetheless, proposing students of color as subjects for investigating the issue of AG parallels the way in which this issue is commonly talked about in society, thus reproducing discourses of AG as a "Self" issue. This also relates to what Rose Morley referred as the "Grand Narrative" (Interview, 5/6/04). On the one hand, the use of race as a social construct reproduces a deficit model to target the students in the achievement gap, which continues to dominate the literature as a 'black and white' issue (Johnston, R. C., & Viadero, D., 2000). On the other hand, silencing the race construct that influences the conversation about AG could lead to color blindness. In this debate is Gloria Landson-Billings (2006) suggests a shift of discourse. She claims that, when achievement gap is "Self," it "unfairly constructs students as defective and lacking [and] admonishes them that they need to catch up." She re-defines the issue as an "education debt," moving the pervasive historical, political, and social components of the issue at the center of the conversation, thus forcing discourse to "hold us all accountable" (Keynote address at the 2006 AERA). Notwithstanding, in 2001, NCLB Act created an enormous shift of discourse by locating the blame on schools and teachers and thus establishing a high-stake testing and accountability culture.

To summarize, the identifications used by members indicated that the students in the AG are the "black students" (Peter, Interview, May, 2004). Peter's excerpt, along with Rosa's, Julia's, and Edward's excerpt, illustrated the way their discourses parallel that of society in general about the AG (Nieto, 2004; Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1983). The comparison addressed the first two questions of my study. To achieve this comparison, I

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chose three main subcategories from Broad Data Analysis: 1) definition of achievement gap; 2) students in the achievement gap; and 3) reasons for achievement gap. The first two subcategories are interrelated, since they both conceptualize and contextualize the issue of achievement gap. The complexity of the issue was evident in the data presented in this section: "[it] crosses racial, socioeconomic or class" (Julia, Interview, 2004). Rose, Julia, and Edward spoke about its magnitude, while problematizing the way is talked about in society.

In the following section, data illustrate a pattern of trends for identifying the students in the achievement gap as: "African American and Latino kids in the Ds and Fs list"; "black students"; "students where there's linguistic issues in addition to culture issues"; "kids with difficult family situation"; "students of color"; "kids of color not achieving"; "students not achieving based on academics"; "students of color and not students of color." An array of identifiers was used by members of the group when talking about the students in the achievement gap.

Students in the Achievement Gap: Who are the Students?

When the MSIG had to define students for case studies, students' identities were co-constructed mostly along racial lines, and academic achievement was based on standard ways of measuring success (e.g., report cards, MCAS scores). First, I used four excerpts from interviews to show a pattern in discourse: "African American and Latino kids in the Ds and Fs list"; "black students, a black white issue"; "students where there are linguistic issues in addition to culture issues"; and "kids with difficult family situation." The factors used to identify the students in the AG can also illustrate causes for the gap under rhetoric of blame.

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For this reason, the process of creating categories to analyze data was an extremely exigent task. In a way, this is an example of how discourses permeate multiple texts that can also lead to multiple interpretations. Cognizant of this limitation, I chose selected excerpts to demonstrate a common discourse pattern of racial representations that tends to point to African American and Latino or Hispanic (used interchangeably) students, and family situation in the AG. When common patterns were observed, I negotiated the location of these representations under a specific category to move forward the process of coding in data analysis. The result of this process is highlighted in subsequent sections under *Parents and Families, School Culture, and Multiple Factors.*

The main focus in this section is to illustrate the way members identified the students in the achievement. Guiding the conversation is the following question: "When we talk about achievement gap, who are the students that come to mind?" It was my intention to find out members' understanding of the issue through the language used for talking about the students. In other words, when interlocutors use verbal language, but not exclusively, during interactions, elements of their social life are reflected, and, through a strand of discourses, historical and social processes are uncovered for co-constructing and negotiating knowledge (Fairclough, 1992; 2003).

Jacqueline was a member and co-leader during the first year of the MSIG, which was also the first year of my study. She was also the teacher who shared her concerns about this issue to the school Leadership Team in 2002-2003. The following is an excerpt from Jacqueline's response to the question about "who are the students that come to mind":

> (1) There is a D and F list where we have African American and Latino kids over represented…I like Sonia Nieto's definition but for the sake of parity we should do academically too, for the sake of consistency, you know. That's a really good question, that's what we got to have to resolve (Interview, April, 2004).

Jacqueline pointed to African American and Latino students as being over-represented in the Ds and Fs list. She used the Ds and Fs list to define the students in the achievement, because this report was used in the monthly meetings. She also aligned her understanding with Sonia Nieto's (2004) definition about students for case studies. This information came from an article read in one of the meetings that was prepared by the co-leaders.

To include Sonia's definition of the students, I created a lexical chain to condense couple of pages of information: *minority=people of color=* (e.g., *African American, Latinos*) *= immigrant students=spoke a language other than English= those who live in poverty=* students of color, as well as *from a number of racial, ethnic, linguistic and social class groups* (pp.13-14). In the interview, Jacqueline proposed to adopt Sonia's definition because she liked it: "I like Sonia's definition." And besides liking the definition to connect academic issues, she reasond"for the sake of parity we should do academically too, for the sake of consistency" (Interview, April, 2004).

The idea of focusing on academics for consistency was never addressed in the interview: What did she mean when she said, "to keep consistency?" With whom, and for what? In any case, this example represents intertextuality for connecting the meso discourse of the group with the macro discourse of society. This, in turn, is a narrow view of achievement and academic performance. Jacqueline also made it clear that defining the kids is an issue that the group "needs to resolve." And the group did resolve it when it decided to create a subcommittee/small group to work on this. Meetings and discussions on creating categories for selecting students was a challenging task that generated what I call healthy tensions. These are the kinds of tension that often times result when engaging race.

The following is a snapshot of the conversation with Ishmael, an African American special education teacher who was in the small group looking at categories and ethnicities for choosing students for the case studies:

Ishmael: We had to decide which ethnicity we wanted to take a look at. I think they came out with Hispanic and something else, and that's where I said

Wilma: (interrupts) So, we go back to the same way everybody else, the stereotyping that you said

Ishmael: Yeah, there is the hidden stereotype right away. And I mean that tells me right away. Okay, we want to research this ethnicity, which happens to be Hispanic. That statement tells me right there the Hispanic kids are failing tremendously in the school already, just from that statement.

Wilma: (raises her voice, interrupts) I know1

Ishmael: And right away (giggles, nervous laugh)

Wilma: (interrupts) and now, once we accept that, we believe that is normal (mocking). In a way its normal that they are not doing, you know, the poor kids, because they're Latinos let's study them.

Ishamel: Yeah, exactly (trying to speak over Wilma's comments). Yeah then that's when I said, I'm really glad it wasn't the black people that you (referring to his small group) put down, because I would have had a fist, I've had a fist."

Wilma: And I'm glad I wasn't in that group because I would have done the same thing.

Ishmael: So, that's why I

Wilma: (interrupts) were there any Latinos in that group?

Ishmael: No, myself and Edward, and uh, Peter, and uh Robert

Wilma: Robert? Ah, I mean, what did he say?

Ishmael: I believe at that point in time he was looking at, ahh. I believe he was acknowledging some flaws, but wasn't interested in verbalizing.

Wilma: Ah, so aha you noticed it (Interview, May 2004)

In this excerpt, Ishmael presented the idea of "hidden stereotype" when Hispanic as an ethnic group was chosen for the study, because "that statement tells me right there. The Hispanic kids are failing." However, he did not refuse when Hispanic students as a group were chosen, as opposed to selecting "black people," because he "would have [had] a fist." On the one hand, he clearly noticed a hidden stereotype when a particular ethnic group was used to conduct research studies. On the other hand, he did not seem to mind that the Hispanic group, in this case, was the group chosen. Actually, he seemed relieved that African American was not a category considered when he said, "I'm really glad it wasn't the black people that you (referring to his small group) put down."

Unaware of his position, I joined his criticism of the small group for choosing the Hispanic group, presuming an alliance between us. I said, "So we go back to the same way everybody else, the stereotyping that you said." Then I added, "And I'm glad I wasn't in that group because I would have done the same thing" I was referring to "have a fist," just like him. Ishmael dismissed my comment and tried to continue with his story when I interrupted him to ask, "Are there any Latinos [in your group]?" Interestingly, there was a teacher from the Caribbean who was considered Latino that did not speak up. The silence from this teacher, along with Ishmael's dismay about choosing African American students but not saying anything about Latino students, is one example of the representation of AG along the racial line. Silence however does not mean lack of participation; on the contrary, it is a loud statement of ideology, representation, disagreement, or the lack of ownership in this matter. Instances of silence are later explored in the *Assumptions* section of this chapter.

During the interview with Ishmael, I interpreted his position as holding double standards when issues about Hispanics and African Americans were discussed. My

assumption of alliance was dispelled when he and I shared conflicting discourses of diversity. Tension developed when I asked about whether the MSIG was diverse or not. Analysis on these tensions was achieved the third year of my study, which brought to surface bigger tensions around social, economic, political, and historical issues between African Americans and Latinos in the United States (Morris and Gimpel, 2007; Vaca, 2004). Morris and Gimpel (2007) attest that " periods of peaceful interethnic relations in the United States may stand out as exceptions rather than the rule" (p.1).

Another way to identify students in the achievement gap was through lens of success and race. In this case, Julia stressed the way success is narrowly defined to bring a new discourse on creative and gifted children who are not achieving: "they are not achieving," according to the standards measure of achievement (2004).

(a) Julia: She named the kids of color when I asked a question, not about the students in the achievement gap specifically, but about the reasons for joining the group: "people don't do well in school, particular if they are kids of color that aren't doing well in school." (Interview, 1/11/08). When talking about the AG in 2008, she referred to the students "academically matching what the school is asking them to do" in the same way she talked about it in2004. In other words, when students comply and do what the school wants them to do, she called that "studentship…acting like a student" (Interview, 2004) or "studentship behavior" (Interview, 2008). Therefore, "studentship behavior" translates to achievement. At the same time, she introduced three new categories based on an article she read about kids not being challenged in school. Julia said, "There are three kinds of kids that are different…high achiever, the kid who does everything you ask them to do…the gifted kid and then there is the

creative kid, and those kids are very different and have very different profiles and

when you ask them to do something they process it in a very different way." She

even mentioned how a "gifted talented piano player, Latino, with some severe special

needs is not achieving," based on the standard measurements of achievement (e.g.,

grades, MCAS tests). Another time, she said this about high achieving kids: "The

kids that sit straight, they fill in the blanks, they get all their work done, sometimes

they do not have the ability to do [a creative science project], so would you say they

are low achieving students?" (2008).

Julia's example highlighted the way academic achievement is talked about in limiting ways

to emphasize "narrow view of what achievement is." Perhaps the narrow view that Julia

refers to connects to the way society continues to reproduce discourses of AG. This is

possibly a reason why an achievement gap in school continues to persists. On the one hand,

Julia's critical way of challenging the issue of AG could be understood as a critical moment

of transforming discourse. On the other hand, she reproduced discourses when she

reinforced the idea that students of color are not succeeding when she said, "people don't do

well in school, in particularly kids of color" (Interview, 2008). One has to remember that

using race as a lens for looking at the achievement gap has been the charge of the group since

the beginning. And the group has only mentioned White students for comparing academic

performance.

Another sample of defining students on the racial line is Rose's understanding of the

students in the AG:

   (b) Rose: She described the kids as "… children of color; achievement gap among class,

       plenty of poor white kids in there; I tend to think of Cambodian kids and some

Vietnamese refugees much more that I think of our other kids" (Interview, 2004); and

in 2007 she referred to "African American, Latino and I would say Cambodian

[students]."

To summarize, Rose identified children of color as Cambodian= Vietnamese refugees=

African American and Latino kids. In a way, the use of race reproduces discourse of AG as a

Black and White issue: "of color" (Interviews, 2004, 2007). She also recognized that there

are "plenty of children of color who are achieving" (Interview, 2004).

Once again, race has been a constant thread binding the conversation about the

students and the achievement gap throughout. Here is another snapshot of an excerpt from

Edward's interview, comparing discourses from 2004 and that of 2008:

(c) Edward reproduced discourses in the way he referred only to students of color in the

context of AG: "kids of color not achieving in my class"; "the group [MSIG] started

with students of color"; "specific students of color not achieving" (Interview, 2004).

Once more, in 2008, he said, "Kids of color underrepresented in groups of not being

successful"; "those kids, the kids that aren't succeeding"; "we [MSIG] selected kids

of color." However, Edward, like Julia, brought a new category to his list of students

when talking about the students in the AG. Julia talked about "gifted students," and

Edward talked about "Asian students." Edward mentioned "Asian students that are

successful and some that are not" (Interview, 2004). Furthermore, he incorporated

students with different background knowledge and language (Interview, 2008). It

seemed as if his way of identifying students in the AG broadened to include a more

diverse student population and avoid the narrow understandings of African American

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and Latino students. Nevertheless, he did not explain the meaning behind "students of color," nor did I ask him specifically.

The examples above show the way Rose, Julia, Edward, and Ishmael identified students in the AG primarily on the racial line. But they all acknowledged *that plenty of children of color are achieving*. In fact, Rose and Julia during the interview of 2004 expressed the problems with "labels" because of the influence on kids' perception of self. But they both agreed that *labels are helpful* in certain contexts (e.g., identify resources, "describe some things like whiteness"- Rose, 2004). In general, data showed that most members typically identified students in the achievement gap under a race category. Again, race was the primary criterion used to talk about the students, besides acknowledging other issues related to the students' life.

Rhetoric of Blame and Shifting the Blame

In this section I illustrate the way members' understandings of AG signified rhetoric of blame through reproductions, changes, and transformations of these representations. During the interviews, particular questions were asked about reasons for the gap. What do you think causes this gap? Do you have an idea what are the reasons for the gap? While, during the monthly meetings, attention was given not only to the reasons for the gap, but also to the way members talked about the kids, particularly students not achieving.

The use of Broad Data Analysis to explore representations of AG brought the analytical process to another level. Subcategories were created and thus sub-themes facilitated coding language and lexical choices under the following overwhelming factors: blaming students; blaming teachers; blaming parents; blaming the curriculum; blaming the

school; blaming social and economic situations. Although findings from data analysis contain a large number of examples that indicate each of these factors, I included the most compelling ones for the purpose of this dissertation. Rhetoric of blame included in this section are: 1) blaming students - to locate the issue on the student but not necessarily for being totally responsible for the AG; 2) blaming parents and family situations - similar to the students in the sense that some of the issues are social conditions out of their reach; 3) blaming the school culture as an institutional mismatch to address objects, practices (e.g., curriculum, books), and the subjects (e.g., teachers). Here, I use sampling and excerpts from data collection to illustrate the way the inquiry group represented rhetoric of blame.

For this particular section, I use intertextual analysis after coding Rose, Julia, and Edward's interview to facilitate the identification of representations of AG under a rhetoric of blame. In addition, the methodology of intertextual analysis contributes to the validity and verification of data findings. Findings from data analysis are based on a general understanding of the issues of achievement gap as it relates to factors that impede the academic performance of students. First, I present findings from the interviews with Rose, Julia, and Edward to compare discourses between 2004 and 2007-2008. These are not separated under sub-themes rather these are presented as discourse patterns and lexical choice to illustrate few changes of discourse over time. Second, I present findings under three distinct categories mentioned before: students, parents and family situation, and school culture. This section ends with *Shifting the Blame* to illustrate a shift of blame away from the students in particular. This shift is also considered an opportunity for transformation.

When reasons for the AG were discussed, Rose, Julia, and Edward coincided on issues related to students, home situations, school, curriculum, and society (e.g.,

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economic and social class), in addition to the concerns they raised about the narrow

concept of achievement as being established in schools/society. Some of the issues

included: students' school culture, literacy, and background experiences "mismatch."

Julia referred to the "mismatch between the school, e.g., school organization and

structures, mission, expectations, focus, assessment, curriculum, books," and that of the

students (Interview, 2008). Edward shared dissatisfaction for the students' lack of

interest and disconnect in science: "They don't see a connection between themselves and

what they are learning" (Interview, 3/10/08). In addition, he talked about not feeling

confident in working with English Language Learners (Edward, 2004, 2008), for which,

he suggested the need for professional development, and having me, the ELL teacher in

his team, to work fulltime in order to work collaboratively, and more directly, with him

(Edward, 2008).

From the intertextual analysis of the six transcribed interviews with Rose, Julia, and

Edward, one can say that they emphasized a variety of social and economic conditions that

create home issues and circumstances that ultimately affect students' academic performance.

One example relates to economic hardships: "[name of kid] got Ds in the winter… they

didn't have heat in the house" (Rose, 2007). Another factor of blame is parental educational

experience: "parents that are very driven so their [students] model is studentship behavior"

(Julia, 2007). In addition, Edward mentioned other factors such a household and emotional

conditions that are intrinsically related to academic success: "lots of things, single mom and

grandma; going through divorce; kids moving into homeless shelter; adoption" (Edward,

2008). These are among the other factors they shared during the interviews.

Another way of representing rhetoric of blame is when Rose and Julia talked about the role of "school and schooling" as influential elements in the achievement gap. That is, Rose mentioned historical, social, political, and economic issues in society influencing what happens in schools and described schools as "factory models…reproductive, constricting, oppressive… it's hard not to participate in that." In similar ways, Julia talked about educational reform and the school model of success to be limiting. She referred to having opportunities for students that could demonstrate their ability, but also noted that today schools still foster "racism and discriminatory practices" in the way in which they favor "verbal and logical versus creativity" (Interview, 1/11/08).

Furthermore, Julia extended this idea of schools as centers that foster discriminatory practices at macro and micro levels: "nation, and worldwide." She continued the conversation by saying that oftentimes schools prepare students for a society that is structured on unequal access and opportunities for all members (Julia, 2008). Julia said that the purpose of school has ended up being a "factory model and power equalizer" (Interview, 2008). While Edward brought the economic and class issue to the discourse during both interviews, he did not emphasize the role of school very directly. Rather, he emphasized class as being a big issue that, if looked at, can be "messy" (Interview, 2004, 2008).

In general, comparing interviews from 2004 with those of 2007-2008 illustrated that the way members represented discourses of AG did not change significantly; rather, different lexical choices were used, and a shift of blame away from the students could be perceived as transformative. The shift then could signify a different focus on students by looking at ways to enhance, validate, and honor what students bring to the school context or work on areas of improvement and provide scaffolds that can help students reach their

highest potentials. In the following section, data illustrate rhetoric of blame organized into three recurrent themes: students, parents and family situation, and school culture.

Blaming Students

Academic success and achievement are intrinsically related to high-test scores, good grades, number of referrals for behavior problems, and graduation rates, among other quantitative measurements. In similar ways, members of the MSIG used school reports to discuss the issue of AG during their first year of collaborative work. Co-leaders of the group, during their first year, made available a variety of resource data to frame the issue in our own school. Most disaggregated data were based on racial groups: American Indian, Asian, Black, Hispanic, and White.

In other words, the group used a variety of quantitative reports from our school: 2003 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System results (i.e., standardized test scores), divided by race and lunch status; Discipline Data record; Ds and Fs List Analysis; grades for all classes; and a 2002 high school academic failure study. When members looked at these reports, they noticed the relatively high representation of students of color, when compared to their white counterparts in some areas, and under-representations in others. These data correspond to what research shows on academic disparities and achievement gap (Ferguson, 1998, 2002; Jacobson, Ralph, NCES 2001; Jencks and Phillips 1998; Ladson-Billings 1994; Noguera & Wing, Eds. , 2006; Ogbu 1994). Even though the information from report cards, the Ds and Fs list, and discipline referrals were the primary resources used by the group, to confirm the existence of the gap in the school, the group also realized the need for collecting new data (interviews).

Over the course of several meetings, members studied these reports, formulated questions, and created hypotheses using the following guiding question: "Where and how is inequity occurring?" (Agenda, 10/09/03) The following are observations written (verbatim) by members in small groups after studying the Discipline Data:

> (1) Black & Latino students are receiving referrals considerably higher than their % of the total population. Black & Latino students very disproportionate (Group 2, I was part of this group, Field notes, 10/09/03)

> (2) greater increase in discipline referrals [for Black] at the beginning of this year (Group 1, Field notes 10/09/03)

The two samples highlight the high percentage of "Black and Latino" students receiving disciplinary referrals disproportionably when compared to their White counterpart. Members' analysis echoes discourses in the literature and reports on AG in the way the Discipline Data is constructed as a black and white racial issue. It assumes that obtaining more disciplinary referrals correlates to race - for being "Black & Latino" misbehaving more than White students.

Intension to lessen the blame placed on students is demonstrated by some critical questions raised by Group 2 after sharing its observations from the discipline report:

> (3) What kind of behavior are considered appropriate for referral by the overall faculty? Are there different sets of behaviors viewed acceptable by different groups? Is there an acceptance of one behavior code by all groups? What % of the faculty generates the total number of referrals? (Worksheet- Group 2, 11/13/03)

Members in Group 2, while analyzing the discipline reports, brainstormed the questions above. These were read aloud and written on the blackboard. However, no further analysis was done to investigate the reason why Black and Hispanic students received higher behavioral referral numbers according to the report. Perhaps, the format

of the meeting was focused on sharing and reporting observations, not so much on analyzing members' observations. In terms of this dissertation, moments in which members questioned data or changed their minds on key issues were considered critical moments of opportunities for transformation. Some of these moments were acted on, and others were dismissed, such as the case of sharing observations of the patterns in the discipline report. It may be reasonable to say that the reasons why members did not act on each of the critical moments relate to the allocated time for the monthly meetings, the structure of the meetings, the lack of ownership, or the lack of mechanisms to process these moments. Maybe a ninety-minute monthly meeting was not enough time to accomplish the work the group set forth, let alone to unpack critical moments for transformation. Some of these constraints are discussed in the *Challenges, Struggles, and Accomplishment* section. However, a question that remains unanswered is whether members recognized the critical moments for transformation or not?

During the first four meetings, in 2003, the group used low MCAS scores, bad grades, and discipline-referral discrepancies to make observations, create questions, and formulate hypotheses. They co-constructed fourteen different hypotheses in order to establish preliminary reasons for the gap. This tendency is similar to what many research studies on AG try to achieve - establish influential factors for the gap. At length, educational studies report on the significant number of Latino and African American students underperforming in standardized tests, in addition to being significantly under-represented in Advanced Placement (AP) advanced/honor classes, when compared to their white counterparts (Jencks and Phillips 1998; Jacobson , Ralph & NCES, 2001).

To construct hypotheses, members used the following guiding statement: "Speculate about why this is happening" in terms of disciplinary referrals, bad grades, and low MCAS score disparities among students (Field notes, 11/13/03). People first worked individually, then in smaller groups. To conclude the activity, one person from each group reported to the larger group. But, before reporting, Laurie, the spokesperson from Group 3, alerted the entire group about hypothesizing: "There is a difference between hypothesized based on data and speculate, they are not quite the same thing." Laurie told us that "we [her group] did a little bit of both" (Meeting 11/13/03). Laurie then read aloud her note from the index card with some elaboration. She began with a direct statement that hypothesized the reason why more students of color get a higher number of referrals than the white counterparts:

> (4) Laurie: Lack of engagement in school is a cause of higher discipline referrals. Fewer people like you in the school population (in your team)… maybe is an issue for some people… but if you got only 67 kids spread across eight teams there's a fewer people like you on your team some may feel isolated whatever those kinds of issues are when you are part of a minority I numbers. Higher number of discipline referrals comes from some level of anger and frustration, but not necessarily just for students of color. (Group 3)

Laurie's group speculated that the students with more disciplinary referrals were "not engaged in school, felt a sense of isolation for the lack of diversity in the school, and experienced a level of frustration" (Meeting, 11/13/03). Laurie's group connected the bad grades, low MCAS scores, and disciplinary referrals to construct a hypothesis. Connecting these reports assumed that some students of color "feel isolated" for being "part of the minority number," which may inflict "some level of frustration" that can influence "lack of engagement." As a result, students misbehave and get a "higher number of discipline referrals." Laurie's group assumed that anything could create a "level of frustration" and

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result in a discipline problem. Paradoxically, the lack of diversity in school and level of frustrations are influential forces working against students, but students are the ones who get blamed. In general, their hypotheses for blaming the students' behavior for producing disciplinary referrals are not aimed at the students, but rather forces outside of them.

In other words, if students misbehave for feeling isolated in school, and this in turn causes the lack of engagement, then what is the role of the institution that contributes or creates the factors affecting the students? For this reason, blaming students for the lack of diversity among students, teachers, administrators, and staff in the school is unwarranted. This relates to a question raised by one of the members at a previous meeting when reflecting over an article read as part of an activity: "Do I want my daughter to go through this district and not see teachers that look like her? I didn't have that. My teachers looked like me. This is a personal issue for me" (Field notes, 10/09/03). This teacher made intertextual connections between the lack of diversity in the school and personal life experience. He expressed concerns in anticipation of what could happen to his daughter if she was to attend this school: She would probably be in the minority group. He did not have to endure this experience because "My teachers looked like me" in his school (Meeting, 10/09/03). This particular moment of connecting the self to the issue was not further explored by the members of the group. Perhaps, this was another possible moment for change and transformation that went unnoticed. Doing intertextual connections of the dialogues that occurred at different meetings allowed representations to be coded across data. This in turn allowed patterns for representing AG on the racial line to be more evident than any other factor throughout.

Statements like Laurie's (Group 2) and the teacher that connected her school experience with the issue of AG are examples of the kind of dialogue that occurred in the MSIG monthly meetings. Members shared their views, which were often critically discussed and clarified, but not directly unpacked. These meetings were organized and structured in ways that encouraged the group and the co-leaders to reconsider additional items for furthering particular discussion. In general, co-leaders prepared concrete agendas with specific goals in mind for every meeting. However, some flexibility was available when consensus was necessary to accomplish a particular goal. In this case, the group would engage in longer discussions until a particular issue would be resolved. For example, after the students for the interviews were chosen, Rose brought a parent consent letter to request permission for their child to participate. During that meeting, members found problematic language in the letter and decided to revise it collectively. The revision of the letter and distribution of phone numbers to call the parents took the entire meeting. In similar ways, it took the group an entire semester to construct interview questions for the case studies. A few questions remain. When, who, and how it is decided how much, or how little, flexibility the group has to accomplish a particular task? What does it mean that this MSIG has worked collectively for five years and has not produced a school-wide action plan? Or, is the apparent flexibility to spend more time on certain things (e.g., a semester for writing interview questions), and not enough time on others (e.g., unpacking representations), part of the group's agenda? If so, whose agenda?

For example, when the task was to construct hypotheses to explain reasons for a variety of school reports, the group spent several meetings on this. But, once members completed this task, hypotheses were read aloud and written on the board in the form of

synthesized statements, without unpacking them. Except for clarifications requested by the

co-leader who took notes on the board, no further discussion occurred regarding the

hypotheses. This was simply a time to report back and gather information from individual

groups. Possibly, the reason why soon after Laurie reported another speaker shared their

group's hypothesis, without delay:

> (5) Lucille: Assuming that all kids act out at the same rate the response is different for the students of color. That is essential our hypothesis if it's that what is happening. If all kids act out, is our constant, I guess we have to demonstrate that. Then the response they receive from adults may be different …the flip side is that students of color carry with them experiences from before. Well everybody does (Group 4).

Lucille's group began by making a general assumption that "all kids" in school act out as a

natural and expected behavior of early adolescents. Based on the assumption that "all kids

act out at the same rate," her group established the hypothesis that different students get

different treatment from different teachers. Lucille's group mentioned the fact that they

"have to demonstrate that," which referred to getting more information about "all" kids

acting out. Nevertheless, her group still wrote a hypothesis. Her group did not question the

assumptions that can influence readers when looking at school reports. But, it did recognize

that different students received different treatment regarding discipline. In this case, placing

blame on the adults in the school instead of the students shifts the blame away from the

students. Once again, this is a critical moment for possible transformation that did not move

beyond the instance in which it occurred.

Lucille's group contributed to a critical moment that provided an opportunity for

members of the MSIG to look at themselves more critically. In this case, members could

have either reflected or talked about possible communication differences, different

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perceptions about what are acceptable behaviors, and other cultural and experienced-based issues. Instead, they questioned the reports, but nothing else happened, at least in the MSIG. However, there are few places in the school in which issues about behavior/consequences tend to standardize treatment and understanding: Advisory initiative of CPR (Cooperation, Participation and Respect); and the Parent and Student Handbook that contains specific information regarding behavior and consequences. Nonetheless, having a handbook or advisory initiatives does not guarantee consistency in the institution.

Based on the two excerpts presented, Laurie's excerpt (4), and Lucille's excerpt (5), it is reasonable to say that the discrepancy in the number of referrals among students is ultimately a racial issue, because the focus is on "students of color." That aligns with the charge of the MSIG since the beginning: to look at the issue of AG through the lens of race. Neither the hypotheses constructed, nor the explanations and questions raised, were discussed any further from the moment in which they occurred.

To finalize this activity, members were asked to write "…what other sources of data we can look at to continue our hypothesis." Members suggested a variety of possible data to look at. The following excerpts are samples from individual feedback sheets:

> (6) "other data=home, environment, support," "data on psychological mental health, counseling referrals," "…data on elementary school discipline referrals"; "data on students' participation in activities beyond academics…" "data should include several years, class data,"
> "Since anger &frustration & out of school issues are variables- should we consider such aspects as divorce- single- parent, pre-school attendance, medical issues, depression or?" (Feedback, 12/13/03)

Responses varied, but the majority suggested the need to obtain more quantitative data about the students and their lives. The analysis suggests that members' understandings

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of the issue could be interpreted as reproducing discourses of AG in the way in which

members suggestions were mostly focused on blaming individuals: blaming the students –

"data on psychological and mental health;"; student's behavior - "data of elementary school

discipline referrals"; or blaming parents – "other data=home, environment support."

The next excerpt is about ways of representing the achievement gap through students'

identification, from Lucille, a special education teacher:

> (7) I think there is an issue because we sort of talk globally about. I think there are
> a number of issues within the issue. The students that I am more concern about
> are the students where there are linguistic issues in addition to culture issues.
> Students with second languages, students that are in between students, and were
> are not really effectively educating them. My personal focus is [definition of
> success] very much a belief in themselves as students. When students perceive
> themselves as capable, as valuable as able to express themselves that's
> achievement (Interview, 4/16/04).

Lucille identified the students with cultural and language differences as impediments

influencing students achievement. She called them "students that are in between students,

and we are not really effectively educating them." As a result, the practice of blaming

students for their academic failure establishes an inherently impossible condition to change,

grounding findings on unsustainable theories about students' deficiencies (Ferguson, 1998;

Nieto, 2004).

Blaming Parents and Family Situations

Blaming parents or family situations was apparent in members' discourses when

talking about reasons for the gap. When I interviewed Peter, a physical education (PE)

teacher, he talked mostly about the students who tend to fail his class. He claimed that they

either forget gym clothes, or do not want to participate. He indiscreetly blamed the parents

for influencing student's attitude about not participating in PE:

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> Peter: So uh, but I think the, the reason that the majority of the kids fail …is that they just don't like physical activities and their parents don't really (silence) emphasize it at home so it's not a big deal like a lot of times kids, will say oh my mother or my father don't believe in phys in PE class so, I don't have to do anything. (Interview, 1/26/04)

It appears that Peter made parents accountable for the kids' lack of participation and interest in PE classes when he said, "A lot of times kids will say oh my mother or my father don't believe in physical, in PE class so I don't have to do anything" (Interview 1/26/04). The idea that kids "don't have to do anything" translated into parents not encouraging their kids to participate, and therefore students not bringing their gym clothes to class. As a result, this type of behavior produces a bad grade in PE class.

Blaming parents parallels the rhetoric that explains why some students succeed in school and others do not; based on parents/home situation. This in turn echoes studies that highlight parents as the primary factor for the achievement gap. Such studies focus on poor parenting skills, parents' different educational background, unstable family situations, single parents, and the lack of parents' involvement in their children's education (Ceci, & Williams, 1998; Ferguson, 2007; Phillips et al., in Jencks and Phillip, 1998).

Once again, Peter's preconceived idea about why students fail PE class indirectly placed the blame on students' parents, because he was convinced that he has "tried to make the classes more fun… the course is more participatory… I am an inclusion type person, I don't want people to just participate, I mean just you know in one way or another, and then I grade on that way" (Interview 1/26/04). He explained that his grades do not depend on how well students perform a particular skill learned, rather emphasis is placed on effort and participation.

In a way, Peter placed the blame on the parents as responsible agents for students'

lack of participation: "I mean, I think, I pretty much know why our kids fail PE [but] it is

nice to know the perspectives of the other subjects" (Interview, 1/26/04). Peter's hesitation

about why kids fail in this statement was asserted through the hedge that "I think, I pretty

much know." According to van den Berg (2003), Peter's hesitation, "I think," gets affirmed

with "I pretty much know." This is a common strategy used in interactions that function as

face-saving devices, as well as a tool for talking about a particular topic with particular

intentions: ". . . contradictions are ultimately apparent" (van den Berg, 2003, p.122-123).

The face-saving strategy, in this case, may have been prompted by the fact that a significant

number of ELLs (many of whom are my students) have had low/failing grades in the past.

And some of the reasons have been related to cultural norms that collide with that of the gym

culture in the school. For example, students are encouraged to take showers after class in

shower stalls without curtains, or they have to wear bathing suits during swimming season

(e.g., a student from Yemen could not ware that type of attire). Later in the interview, he

talked about the parents of students who need to come to Open House and do not attend. He

acknowledged, however, that many of these parents work two or even three jobs and cannot

come to the school. This is a typical view of recognizing parents' economic conditions, but

the school continues to conduct parent nights from 7-9 pm, a time in which many of the

parents are at work

Another sample of focusing on students' parents and family situations was

Andrea's (home economics teacher) way of identifying students in the achievement gap:

> (8) Kids that have a difficult family situation whether is simply that mom and
> dad aren't home, or it isn't a mom or a dad, you know no one's home in the
> afternoon when they get there. . . .families that are not comfortable in the school

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setting. Maybe they didn't finish high school and if they finish, they feel like everybody else is a professor or you know for various reasons. Maybe they don't speak English too well. They are not comfortable coming in to the school…There are some teachers that are more or less comfortable with parents…maybe nobody went to college from that family. You know, gee, you do well. People think that just because someone gets straight As, I mean kids not teachers, kids think, just 'cause someone gets straight As must be smart, and if you don't get straight As you must be dumb. …it has to do with how they learn, and the experiences that they had, what they've seen in their life, and their families, and their neighborhood, and so forth. I don't know those are some [affecting factors] at risk for not achieving. I just feel like to say, well race is the only thing we are going to talk about its kind of narrowing in terms of really figuring out what it is. (Interview, January, 2004)

Andrea's excerpt shows a wide range of factors affecting students in school. She mentioned families as the origin of many difficulties: "difficult family situation…mom and dad aren't home, or it isn't a mom or a dad… no one's home in the afternoon." In addition, Andrea introduced the tension between school and parents: "not feeling comfortable in the school setting… they are not comfortable coming in to the school." The uncomfortable-feeling parents may experience, along with student cultural differences, illustrates the way school culture is to blame. In addition, she made references to the problem of focusing on race when talking about the AG. Findings from the above excerpt reiterate the issue of race that pervades discourses of AG and is overwhelmingly echoed in the data:

> Andrea: (8) People think that just because someone gets straight As, I mean kids not teachers, kids think, just 'cause someone gets straight As must be smart, and if you don't get straight As you must be dumb. …it has to do with how they learn, and the experiences that they had, what they've seen in their life, and their families, and their neighborhood, and so forth. I don't know those are some [affecting factors] at risk for not achieving. I just feel like to say; well if race is the only thing we are going to talk about its kind of narrowing. In terms of really figuring out what it is. (Interview, January, 2004)

One more time, the issue of AG is being problematized not only by Andrea, for being a narrow racial issue, but also by other members in the MSIG: Rose, Julia, Edward, Ishmael, Lucille, and Peter.

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Blaming School Culture

Andrea also mentioned that some parents may have felt at one time or another alienated from the school based language, education, and other cultural differences (Interview, January, 2004). She even talked about the "teachers being more or less conformable with parents." Andrea highlighted many factors that contribute to school-home cultural mismatch. The school-home cultural mismatch Andrea referred to is one of the reason why many parents to do not participate, attend, or get involved in school events such as parent nights. In many cases, the school structure impedes parent involvement, if parent-teacher conferences and other events are scheduled during working hours. This is a problem for which a variety of school-parent partnerships initiatives have been successful, because most of these programs take into consideration parent/family situations. It is worth noticing that the group did not address the factors mentioned by Andrea on the previous excerpt (8), nor did she bring up her views for group discussion. These factors became apparent when students read the interviews with the students. A question about why Andrea or I did not bring these factors to the meetings still remains unanswered.

Another example representing blaming the school was addressed by Rose, when she talked about a problematic situation regarding the curriculum. She referred to a Cambodian student who was doing a research project on Michael Jordan. In response to a research project on heroes/heroines:

> Rose: They got Pedro doing Galileo and Lu is doing Michael Jordan and I said, you know I could have provided Lu with some fabulous Cambodian heroes, fabulous. I could have given Pedro many number of Puerto Rican politicians, writers, doctors, lawyer, political activists….this is a disservice to these children. [Pedro] doesn't care about Galileo. Lu does care about Michael Jordan and

Michael Jordan does have some heroic qualities, but he's a basketball player! I am sorry! I am sorry! It is a stereotype. That's what you can be?

Wilma: And Lu is a person of color

Rose: And he can't be that, he will never be in the NBA.

Wilma: Yeah, So guess what? So, is the false self the false image of reaching something that is out of the …unreachable.

In this interview excerpt (2004), Rose criticized team teachers who either assigned, or let the students select, heroes/heroines for their projects. These heroes/heroines were not related to students' cultural backgrounds. She called this situation a "background disconnect" that it is "a disservice to these children." Rose assumed that Lu, the Cambodian student, who is an amazing soccer player, "will never be in the NBA." Although Rose did not recognize the possibilities for this boy, she did criticize the teachers for assigning an African American athlete to a Cambodian student for being "a stereotype." Apparently, she reproduced a deficit discourse when she said, "he will never be in the NBA." This could reflect similar discourses in society that connect race, economic, and social status. But instead of interrupting this notion, I joined in by saying, "something that is out of the… unreachable" for this boy (Interview, 2004). It was as if thinking about being in the NBA is an impossible dream to attain for this Cambodian student. This in actuality is the opposite of what I tell my students when I say, "to always reach for the stars." Clarification on this exchange took place during the triangulation process. I asked Rose to check data coding (second level of analysis). She clarified extensively that giving Michael Jordan to a Cambodian student for research was not the problem, because Michael Jordan as an athlete "possesses heroic qualities." The problem, however, was in the notion that the heroes and heroines were not directly connected to the students' lives. During this triangulation process,

Rose did not talk about the idea that Lu "will never be in the NBA." It means that Rose's comment did not get unpacked collaboratively. In retrospect, pursuing any further action would imply both professional and ethical consequences.

With the dynamic of school-student cultural differences, whether connected to the curriculum, the teachers, institutional practices, or structures, comes the notion of self that plays out in the academic performance and behavior of students (Nieto, 2004). In a way, Lucille blamed the school-student cultural differences for the academic gap.

When Lucille, in Excerpt 7, talked about the students in the achievement gap, she immediately identified "students with linguistic issues in addition to culture issue." She connected school-student culture difference, while she also problematized the issue: "because we sort of talk globally. I think there are a number of issues within the issue" (Interview, April, 2004). Although Lucille's conversation focused on the students for having "linguistic issues," in actuality she turned the focus towards the school. She blamed the school for participating in the students' construction of self that is limited to language issues. Language issues, in this case, pose a problem located in the student. She firmly believed in students' perceptions of self as an influential factor for academic success: "My personal focus [referring to success] very much a belief in themselves as students. When students perceive themselves as capable, as valuable, as able to express themselves, that's achievement (Interview, 4/16/04).

Therefore, Lucille blamed the school-student cultural mismatch and aligned with Kincheloe and McLaren's (2003) idea of the role of schools influencing students' identity formation: ". . . cultural agents produce particular hegemonic ways of seeing and acting" (pp.442-443). It is in this process of constructing and co-constructing student identities in the

school context that self-knowledge is presupposed (Foucault, 1977). For example, an identity of being unsuccessful in school among a group of students forces them into a membership in a particular group of unsuccessful learners. Belonging to a particular group assumes a set of shared characteristics for being 'unsuccessful.' With a group identity comes an inherent oppression, often unrecognized by the individual (Yon, 2000). Consequently, such membership accounts for shaping students' collective new self-image that causes them to act and think in new ways that also influence the perception of others. The byproduct of holding a membership in such a group may contribute to stereotypes, thus an internalized image of self develops. From my experience of working with students performing "unsuccessful" behavior, it develops into a reputation they are forced to live up to: In some cases, quite successfully.

When Julia (excerpt b in *Black and White* section) talked about the gap and the way success is narrowly defined (e.g., SAT scores, graduation rate), she introduced a new idea about schools. She proposed a different model to determine success: "creative achievement," because "kids achieve in different ways." In fact, she weaved the social context of success into her discourse when she said, "anybody in position of power, except for the president [W. Bush Jr.] has achieved in school at a high level… worked hard, and may [do] not [need to] be gifted ,or talented ,or creative"(Interview, 1/11/08). In the following section, I discuss the way members representations of discourse of achievement gap shifted away from the traditional stance of blaming mostly the parents or the students.

Shifting the Blame

When Peter joined the MSIG, he had ideas of what the issue of AG entailed, and he wanted to confirm his notions by joining the MSIG. This is snapshot of the interview when I asked him about the reasons for joining the group: "It would be interesting to see different perceptions of different people around the building." Peter already knew why kids fail, particularly his class: lack of participation and not changing clothes for PE (reasons for students failing Peter's class were already discussed in the previous section of *Rhetoric of Blame*: parents and family situations). Findings from the analysis presented in the section *Rhetoric of Blame* highlighted the parents for not encouraging their kids to participate in the physical education class. Interestingly enough, three months before the interview of January 26, 2004, he identified other factors affecting students' academic performance. It was during a fish bowl activity after reading an article by Pedro Noguera (2003). The following is a short response to the article about the way children on the island of Barbados, who face many issues of racism and classism, still excel and succeed academically. Peter said, "You can do a lot with a little but we do a little with a lot" (Meeting #2, 10/09/03).

It seems that Peter connected the students who are not succeeding in our school with the students in Barbados. His response may refer to the possibly limited resources available for the students in Barbados, when compared to existing resources offered to students in the school/district. Peter's statement, "You can do a lot with a little but we do a little with a lot," provides multiple interpretations, particularly for the use of the pronoun "we" as an inclusive reference. *We* could be understood in different ways. "We" could refer to himself as a physical education teacher and other school staff, who are not doing what they should be doing to help the students. "We" could also point to the school and the district that are not

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doing what they need to be doing to help the students. Or "we" could mean the students in the AG not doing what they need to be doing. In this way, someone is to blame; the teachers, the school, or the students. The use of "we" in the sentence enables the speaker to ascribe simultaneous meaning even when he may have a specific subject in mind (Eggins, 1994).

Bloome et al. (2005) point to the use of language in discourse, as when Peter said "*we do a little with a lo*t," as a tool for people to "name, construct, contest, and negotiate social identities" and to bring into interactions the cultural ideologies of the members of the group into the event of the monthly meetings (pp. 46,103).

On the one hand, if "we" refers to Peter himself for representing teachers as being responsible for "doing a little" for the students "with a lot" of resources, then an instance for transformation went unnoticed when he shared his opinion in the fish bowl activity, and no further discussion took place. Perhaps the fish bowl model for sharing and responding to the article did not allow in-depth discussion. That is, if he placed the blame away from the students, the analysis points to a moment for transformation, because the rhetoric of blame shifted away from the student. In this way, he indicated a level of ownership that shifted the blame away from the racial line onto himself.

On the other hand, if "we" directed attention to the students in the AG, the same statement is identified as a moment in which discourse reproduced and went unchallenged. Either way, the analysis still highlights a rhetoric of blame for blaming someone, similar to the way in which AG is talked about and represented in society at large. In addition, the critical moment as an opportunity for transformation passed the members without further acknowledgment.

Following is another example of shifting the blame. Julia addressed the narrow view of AG in the way it is commonly discussed, because it does not allow other factors to be considered. For example, she talked about the early adolescent years that many of us teachers in the middle school call the roller-coaster years: "it's really hard to say these kids are or aren't achieving when they are thirteen and fourteen because it is difficult (Interview, 1/11/08).

Rose also presented a *shifting the blame* sample when she introduced a new concept for re-naming the AG in the 2007 interview. She suggested calling it "an opportunity gap or resource gap." That is, she suggested shifting the blame from the micro level of the individual contextualized to the issue as a pervasive phenomenon in the wider society in the economic, political, and historical contexts.

In sum, findings from data analysis from the section of *Representation of Achievement Gap* illustrated that member's representations of AG slightly shifted at different times, while a rhetoric of blame continued, and race dominated the discourse. In terms of the intertextual analysis of the interviews with Rose, Julia, and Edward, they showed the shift of discourse, connections to macro discourses of society, and the meso level of the MSIG. The design of the study, however, does not enable me to determine whether or not participation in the MSIG influenced member's representations of AG to either stay the same or change. Change, in this case, refers to a different or new discourse introduced when talking about the AG, students in the AG, or reasons for the AG. Moreover, change here does not necessarily imply transformation. This may suggest that further research is needed to investigate if participation in the MSIG influenced member's ideas to the level of transformation and impacting classroom practices.

Transformation-Reproduction: Critical Moments

In this section, data illustrates the way the MSIG provided opportunities for discourses of achievement gap to change. Instances of transformation or reproduction are identified as critical moments. Critical moments in this dissertation are considered instances in which representations of AG changed, and in some cases a particular outcome was transformational. In a discursive world, people interactions are not detached from the abstracts of who they are, and the institutional hegemonies in which discourses operate are not limited by them. In that context, then tensions that occurred as the effect of these interactions may also be understood as possibilities for transformations.

This particular section in Chapter 5, however, it is not divided into segments. Rather, the narrative indicates when a critical moment is considered a transformation or a reproduction of discourse of AG. In this section, data analysis addresses the third research question: How has the MSIG provided opportunities and support for transformation (individual and/or collective) and/or reproduction of representations of AG?

Transformation or reproduction of discourses is achieved through the unpacking of language used by the members that represented discourses of achievement gap. Here, language is also considered in the way the collaborative work of the group changed through decision-making processes. Finally, I discuss the fact that changes do not always bring about transformations. I suggest that opportunity for transformation apparently lacked sustainable mechanisms for transcending the moment in which it occurred. I

begin with a brief recount of the groups' work to illustrate the way discourses shifted and thus provided opportunities for transformation. This narrative is immediately followed with a series of sampling and data snapshots to illustrate critical moments of change.

Shifting Discourses

During the first year of the MSIG, the members decided to collect data in order to address their mission. This mission was constructed as a value statement: "We believe it is our challenge as a school to examine the educational experience of all students through the lens of race" (final report for Leadership Team, 5/04). Consequently, the group decided on doing case studies after a number of preliminary activities: looking at a variety of quantitative reports; reading articles on AG, by different authors such as Fletcher, 2002, the MSAN 2003, Noguera, 2002 and Rothstein, 2004. In addition the group watched the video *Skin Deep*; reading *Why the case study approach* and *Case Study: Yolanda Piedra* about a successful eighth-grade Mexican student in southern California (Nieto, 2004); listening to Dr. Sonia Nieto's presentation (she came to one of the meetings) on conducting case studies; and participating in a presentation on history, methodology, and terminology of qualitative research by Rose Morley.

However, the decision about doing case studies took several meetings and much debate. For example, we spent a lot of time reading and discussing an excerpt from *Defining The Case Study Approach, Challenging Stereotypes and Guidelines for Developing Case Studies* (Nieto, 2004) and Yolanda's case study. Members were asked to reflect on the readings and share opinions about "the rewards and challenges of case studies" (Meeting, 1/4/04). It is worth noting that, before opinions were shared, Rose Morley clarified the difference between using a "sample," as it is mostly used in

quantitative research, and an "example" in qualitative research. She accentuated the

challenge of qualitative research: "The challenge is not to use an example and generalize

and make a stereotype" (Meeting, 1/8/04). Although, qualitative research uses a

sampling technique to look at patterns, and meanings behind patterns, the challenge

seems to be that case studies require: thick description, recursive analysis, revealing ones

biases. Rose did mention these challenges to the group at different times. She stressed

the view of bias in research in order to avoid generalization, be able to identify pattern

trends, and cautiously present findings from analyzing the interviews.

While many shared advantages of case studies, Ishmael (African American

special education teacher) expressed mixed feelings about it. On the one hand, he liked

the idea that case studies look at "individual cases as opposed to a whole group," but, on

the other, he posed the problem of looking at "one sample or a sample" that creates the

possibility of generalizing a particular group. He himself admitted to having trouble not

generalizing a group and felt that "a case study in a sense can do that" (Meeting #5,

1/8/04). He stressed his concern over the possibility that people could make

generalizations influenced by their own biases. Ishmael used the information on case

studies to reflect on his own experience and to caution people about making

generalizations based on one person's story – in this case his very own:

> (1) Ishmael: What is like to be from a big family or to be African American
> or to be lesbian or whatever it is…I personally can tell you what my
> perspective is on what it is like to be from a large family, a large black
> family, a large black family from the South. I can tell you what that
> experience is as you are looking at me as an example so you take your
> results from what I passed onto you, and then how will you stop yourself
> from generalizing about another large black family from the South, and how
> do you draw all the stereotype. That individual differences and my
> experiences from the South and your experiences might be a little different .
> . . I think it would be wonderful if we could take each and every case and

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> look at it individually and take generalization and stereotypical attitude out, but I don't think that's possible. (Meeting #5, 1/8/04)

In the above vignette, Ishmael constructed relationships among his personal experiences as an African American from the South, the racism that exists in stereotyping individuals and cultural groups, and the projected work of the MSIG in their quest of doing case studies. This work involved the analysis of transcribed interviews for interpreting what students said. In addition, Ishmael connected the challenges of qualitative research regarding researcher's biases, with the limited experience members may have in doing case studies. According to Bloome et al., 2005), "To claim that an intertextual connection has been constructed, it must have been proposed, acknowledged, recognized, and have social consequences." (p.41). All of these four considerations for intertextuality are illustrated in Doris, and Zioma's responses.

Once Ishmael presented his point, a long silence followed, which was then interrupted by Doris, an African American 8th grade social studies teacher in the group. She not only acknowledged and recognized Ishmael's concern regarding case studies, but she also proposed an explanation for why cases studies could be a good endeavor for the group to take on:

> (2) Doris: [case studies] it allows people to relax your own stereotypes and look at just specific examples… in the event that we have to look at Grassroots Middle School ... and give us a reality check about people own biases… by looking at one particular example… Grassroots Middle School it can show a greater light on, in terms of the nature of the type of students that we have and to the question as far as whether or not they succeed. I think this is a good thing.
> (Meeting #5, 1/8/04)

Reinforcing Doris' comment was Zioma, the home economics teacher, who supported the use of case studies as a way of understanding how "one person helps to understand another person better"(Meeting #5, 1/8/04). In a way, the interaction between the three

members, Ishmael, Doris, and Zioma, illustrated the kind of dialogue inquiry groups

provide. This was an opportunity for discourses to change with possibilities for

transformation. In a way, it provided what I considered healthy tensions for negotiating

their understandings of doing case studies. It was also an opportunity for members'

discourses to change, reproduce, or transform. More discussion about case studies

preceded the following meetings.

Unfortunately, these opportunities were not always evident to the members.

Members in the IG did not reflect or talk about these moments in which discourses

changed, reproduced or transformed. This does not mean, however, that members did not

unpack their own representations, only that this unpacking did not occur regularly in the

group. What it means is that the group did not ask specific questions regarding the work

of the group in connection with member's teaching, professional practices, or

pedagogical philosophies. Nor did the group talk about the implications for the

members' work in their own classrooms.

Another sample of the way in which discourses changed occurred when the group

shifted away from using standardized MCAS test results as the sole measure to report on

students' academic achievement. Even though the focus was on the students, Doris

presented an argument on a written feedback sheet in which she criticizes the MCAS data:

> "It is my belief that the MCAS data is meaningless in being able to assess how
> proficient students are, because it assumes that students test well in one manner.
> We know as educators, and studies clearly illuminate that student are oral,
> kinesthetic, and visual learners. MCAS does not take this into consideration,
> hence their data does not measure true performance."
> (Feedback Sheet, Meeting #3; 11/11/03)

Similar to Doris' feedback was Rose Morley's note about the use of MCAS scores, the

use of labels, and the inquiry process in general. She wrote all in capital letters:

The MCAS data is problematic in multiple levels. Also, all data, which is categorized by government assigned labels is misinformative, due the emerging acknowledgement of race as a social construct and students multiple fluid ways of identifying. We have an enormous number of children who identify as mixed, multiracial & many Europe-Americans who reject white… I believe the inquiry group process, which relies positivistic/empirical/quantitative data, is flawed. We need qualitative methods & evidence to fill in the gaps. (Feedback Sheet, Meeting # 3, 11/13/03)

The way Doris and Rose criticized MCAS supported critics of the use of standardized testing as an exclusive measurement of student academic achievement (Portes, 2005; Sleeter, 2007). Furthermore, Rose's response included MCAS scores, students' labels, and the inquiry group process as being problematic. First, she claimed that the use of MCAS test results was "problematic on multiple levels," although she did not go into much detail in the interview of 2007. Second, she argued that the use of racial labels (in the MCAS report) was "misinformative due to the emerging acknowledgement of race as a social construct" because many students identify themselves as "mixed, multiracial" and "many Euro Americans reject" the category of "white." This implies that many students in the middle school do not fall into a single racial category. She finalized with a third point, a criticism of the inquiry group process because it "relies on positivistic/empirical/quantitative data is flawed" (Feedback Sheet, 11/11/03).

In sum, the arguments presented by Doris and Rose illustrated the way members' discourses of AG shifted with time and changed in the traditional way of discussing the issue based on standardized tests (SAT, College Board, MCAS). The monthly meetings provided opportunities for members to interact, whether written or orally. These interactions, in turn, influenced the collaborative work of the group, even when members did not identify opportunities for transformations or explicitly highlight the way discourses changed when they did. Consequently, critical moments both eluded the members and provided opportunity

for representations of AG to shift or reproduce. In the case of this MSIG, the rhetoric of blame was represented in members' discourses throughout the years, reproducing in some ways and changing in others.

Another sample of critical moments, in which discourses shifted, occurred when members collectively agreed on gathering qualitative data by interviewing middle school students. The group reached consensus on gathering in-house information to investigate reasons why some students in the school fail, while others succeed. This decision shaped the work of the group from this point on; from deciding on selecting the students for the study (small group), and creating questions for interviews (small group), or analyzing transcribed interviews (in partners), to the writing of case studies (in partners) in order to achieve the group's charge - to develop an action plan. Here is where I consider a group's transformation: a total change from requesting more quantitative data during the first meetings, to conducting interviews for collecting qualitative data at later meetings.

When the MSIG decided to conduct qualitative research, specific steps in the inquiry process began to evolve. This decision also involved a level of commitment to engage in qualitative research. The group had to decide on the focus students for the case studies: Who would the students be, and what criteria would they use to select the students? Dialogue immediately turned towards students of color under the following categories: Black, Hispanic, Multiracial, and Cambodian. Once again, discourses focused on race. Also, the group had to create questions that would provide the necessary information to find out what helps, and does not help, students succeed. In addition, the group had to search for resources for conducting and transcribing the interviews. For this reason, three-subcommittees/small groups were created to divide the

task. The division of labor in this way relates to democratic principles, in which all members contributed to the collaborative work of the group.

Another critical moment for transformation that did not go beyond the instance in which it occurred was when Frances Kramer, the principal in the school, raised an important concern during the November 2003 meeting. She challenged the discourse of blaming the kids when we were presenting group norms for the year. By this time, the small groups had finished brainstorming norms intended to support the groups' work.

My Group 2 had written on an index card, "Keep the focus of discussion on the kids." Ms. Kramer, who happened to be at that meeting, raised her hand and asked:

> I have a question, what do you mean when you say keep the focus on the students?

Jacqueline, who had just read the index card and was also one of the co-facilitators, looked at me directly. At that moment, I interpreted her non-verbal expression as if she wanted me to clarify our statement and somewhat save face in front of the principal. This is when I said:

> Wilma: What we mean is not to drift away our attention from the issue and begin talking about other things. This doesn't mean to be restrictive or to avoid bringing other elements important to the discussion of the academic gap (Field notes, 10/09/03).

It was my hope to clarify and justify the position of our small group and avoid misinterpretations from the members, in general, and, in particular, Frances Kramer, the principal. Nonetheless, focusing on the kids could signal a representation of reproducing issues of AG, if the focus located the total blame on them (Field notes, 10/9/03):

> Ms. Kramer: I am afraid that the group will start looking at the kids as the one with the problem, instead of looking at teachers. Do not narrow the discussion; we need to look at many things. When we focus only on kids this way, we begin blaming the kids for what is happening.

> Wilma: You are right and that is not what we want to do

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Rose (from another group): We are going to look at other data

(Meeting 10/9/03)

After Ms. Kramer's comment, "do not narrow the discussion," I appropriated her idea to confirm her statement. "You are right," I said, followed by a clarification remark: "this is not what we want to do" in search of approval and acceptance (Field notes, 10/9/03). This remark, in reality, was the opposite of what my group proposed in the first place, because we proposed to "keep the focus of discussion on the kids." In this sense, the power relations between the principal and me played out in the way I responded, seemingly apologetic and masking the real recommended norm. The purpose of this activity was to create the group's norms.

The clarifying statement, "this is not what we want to do," was an apparent rejection of what my group unanimously decided to have: "the kids, kid's voice…we should focus on the students when we talk about the academic gap" (Wilma, Meeting 1/9/03). This was an important norm my group wanted to be considered by the whole inquiry group. Here, I use Bloome et al., (2005) as an explanation of this interaction. It was a fixed exchange in which "bargaining and compromises" took place within determined structures that are commonly shared and understood by the participants involved, and that also function as a saving-face mechanism and an attempt for negotiating possible tensions (p. 161). While "kids, kids' voices" signaled a critical practice of exclusivity, the suggestion to "focus on the students when we talk about the achievement gap" stabilized the conversation. Both of these utterances aligned with a rhetoric of blame because "When we focus only on kids, this way we begin blaming the kids for what is happening," as Frances Kramer, the principal, wanted the group to avoid

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(Field notes 10/9/03). In this case, my response represented a critical moment in which discourses apparently changed while also reproducing at the same time.

Once again, after Ms. Kramer raised her concern about the risk of focusing on the students the group did not discussed it in depth. Without further discussion, the group proceeded with the activity of small groups reading aloud their norms. The presence of Ms. Kramer in the meeting was not addressed in the meeting thereafter. This critical moment did not transcend the instance in which occurred. Two possible interpretations for this type of silence: First, the limited time could have been a factor; and, second, the lack of ownership the other members, including myself might have been a factor (why didn't anyone in the group say anything after Ms. Kramer left the room?).

Another sample of a critical moment in which discourses shifted related to Julia's discourse of students' developmental age. As she said, "And it's really hard to say these kids are or aren't achieving when they are thirteen and fourteen because it is difficult…Thankfully, I go to the high school and I see these kids who were really struggling, not doing their homework getting D's, whatever and they are these bright kids who are now these bright spots up there, grown up! They say, 'Hey, Ms. Wyatt, I'm finally doing my homework!' And that matters" (Julia's Interview, 2008).

Julia brought an important discourse that refers to academic and emotional development of students. As she noted, "when they are 13 and 14, it is difficult to say [at the middle school level] these kids aren't achieving…it is a hard age to figure out what is going on." (2008). Issues regarding the adolescent years are not exactly explored in the literature of AG. In similar ways, other factors regarding the individual are rarely mentioned. Then, it is imperative also to acknowledge students' individual differences based on their unique

characteristics. For example, consideration must be given to the theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993) and learning styles (Schmeck, 1988), along with physical, emotional among other needs that differentiate, and influence people's performance. These could certainly affect, not only test score results for reporting on academic achievement, but overall school performance.

Edward's apparent shift in discourse can be interpreted from several comments. In 2004, he mentioned very specifically "kids of color," "specific students of color," and "some students are very successful who are Asian and some students are not." In 2008, he noted, "A group of students in our school who are successful and a group of students who aren't," in more general terms. Nevertheless, by the time he completed the sentence, he talked about an existing consistent pattern embedded in particular groups of students. This pattern relates to students not being successful: "… and there are some patterns who fit into those groups and one of those patterns is that its kids of color" (2008). What is noticeable in the transcript of 2008 is the amount of information he shared, when compared to the interview in 2004. It was his fifth year of being in the MSIG when he provided more specific information and shared his thoughts more openly during the interview, not only on the issue of AG, but also on the inquiry group model and process.

Even when transformations were not explicitly displayed at first, the intertextual analysis made possible the identification of new discourses introduced by the members regarding different aspects of the achievement gap (Appendix 7-8). New discourses are understood in the context of this dissertation as critical moments of change that also provided opportunity for transformations.

Findings from the analysis suggest the relevancy for establishing mechanisms for members in the group to critically reflect and analyze what happens at the meetings, how the work of the group may, or may not, affect them, and transcend the time and space of the meetings. Otherwise, inquiry groups as an institutional strategy of decision-making provide limited opportunity for discourses that bring about transformation. This is especially true since change does not always results in transformation. It appears that, unless intentional mechanisms are established to facilitate deeper reflection (Self) and identify critical moments, then representations are not challenged, nor are they recognized as transformative. Possibly, this is the reason why representations of AG reproduced or changed during the monthly meetings without members addressing them more directly.

The subsequent chapter, Chapter 6, focuses data analysis and findings on three main assumptions that resulted from a selective literature review on Inquiry Groups. These assumptions are: 1) inquiry groups can solve problems; 2) members inquiry groups are researchers; 3) inquiry groups can serve as an institutional practice for transformation.

CHAPTER 6

ASSUMPTIONS: THE PROMISE OF INQUIRY GROUP

This chapter is divided in two sections and relies on data sampling and the use of CDA as a tool to discuss relevant findings that resulted from the process of analyzing data at three distinct levels. The first section of this chapter unpacks three main inquiry groups' assumptions: 1) inquiry group can solve problems; 2) members are researchers; and 3) inquiry groups are an institutional practice for transformation. Here, in this third assumption, three subsections address: a) silence, to recognize the limited participation of some of the members; b) transformations, to highlight the potential of the inquiry group to provide opportunities for transformation; and c) elusive transformation, to indicate critical moments in which changes and shift of discourses did not go beyond the instance in which they occurred.

In the second section, I describe the *Challenges* of the group in terms of membership and leadership related to the role of members and their expertise, and the way these influenced the work of the group. In general, some of the challenges in this section are based on members' frustrations with the lack of consistent membership and frequent rotation of co-leaders. The group's *Struggles* are described in terms of the IG structure and culture as democratic practices and decision making. Time as an influential factor in decision-making is also discussed. This chapter ends with a recount of the group's accomplishments and successful activities, under *Accomplishments.*

Three main topics from the literature are framed under the idea of assumptions. According to the Webster's New Riverside University Dictionary II (1988), "assumption" means "a minor premise; something to be taken true without proof or

demonstration; presupposition" among other meanings (p. 132). However, the notion of assumption in this study can be described more specifically as *prepositional assumption,* from Fairclough's (2003) three main types of assumptions:

> Existential assumptions- assumptions about what exist;
> Propositional assumptions- assumptions about what is or can be or will be,
> Value assumptions- assumptions about what is good or desirable (p.55).

Although, these three assumptions are applicable to the inquiry group in this study, because all the members work toward achieving a goal- *existential assumption*; the inquiry group can be an institutional strategy for transformation- *prepositional assumption;* and the inquiry group will resolve the issue at task- *value assumption*. Nonetheless, "propositional assumption" seems to fit better with the promise of the MSIG at the Grassroots School (Fairclough, 2003, p.55).

For this part of data analysis, I began by looking at the interviews under general themes, Broad Data Analysis, regarding the inquiry group. This stage took several steps before narrowing the scope of analysis. First, I identified instances in which the questions seemed to ask members their opinions about the inquiry group in general, and their reasons for joining the group. I color-coded with a blue highlighter all types of responses, from the organization of the meetings, the work of the group, people's participation, and opportunity for all voices to be heard, to their hopes about the group. Second, from this collection of response units, I narrowed the focus to three main topics, or types of assumptions. The three assumptions were: that the group can solve the problem, members are researchers, and inquiry groups could act as an institutional strategy for transformation.

These assumptions resulted from the literature review. Assumptions served as a lens for creating sub-themes or categories. The use of themes allowed me to interconnect the micro context of this MSIG to the macro context of society, regarding inquiry groups in general. Ely et al., (1991) refer to this process as one that "triggers the construction of a conceptual scheme that suits the data. This scheme helps a researcher to ask questions, to compare across data, to change or drop categories, and to make a hierarchical order of them" (p.87).

During the first year, the co-leaders established the goal for the group to look at the issue of AG "through the lens of race." Race has been the lens, as well as the focus, for exploring the problem of AG since the very beginning. That explains the recurrent appearance of race throughout the data. Teachers and paraprofessionals, as well as other school staff, are expected to participate in inquiry groups, but choosing a particular group is totally voluntarily. Members in this MSIG either left previous groups to join this one, or chose this specific group in the first place. Regardless of the circumstances that brought these members together, whether personal experiences or professional concerns, the members all shared an interest in the achievement gap.

Inquiry Groups

Can Solve the Problem: "It's huge-It's beyond us"

Barnes (2001) perceives inquiry groups as a type of "Participatory school-based research, like other forms of action research that can actually make changes and fix things, as well as document and evaluate. It brings about concrete results, in addition to building a democratic community" (Barnes in Education Week, April 25, 2001, p.40).

More specifically, Cushman (1999) defines inquiry in the school context as a type of work that intends to involve all areas of he school community: "Inquiry becomes everybody's work. Teaching, learning, community involvement, leadership, organizational management and change, professional growth–all take place in a continual dynamic of asking good questions and finding evidence that can guide a school's actions" (p.1). Under these premises, members who join or forms groups, especially inquiry groups in schools, share the desire to improve or change something as a solution for an existing situation or a particular issue.

To illustrate the idea that the MSIG could change situations or find solutions, consider Edward's comments about why he joined the group: "…things that will help me there; I think it will be successful, and um you know the next step would be some, um (pause), some offering to our school that this is what we've learned, and how, that can help our school have a better culture" (Interview, 1/20/04). His comments were not just about participating in the MSIG as a requirement; they were also about the possibility of gaining insights that could help him in the classroom. He also mentioned that the group would be able to provide ideas on how to "have a better culture" as "the next step" for improving the school. On the other hand, he acknowledged the complexity of the issue at task when he said, "It's huge …we are not going to solve it… it's beyond us. But I think we can take steps" (Interview, 1/20/04).

In a way, Edward's hope consisted on assumptions from contradictory discourses of assumptions. On the one hand, he talked about the group's ability to accomplish the goal of sharing lessons learned as a way to help the school: "I think it will be successful and, um you know the next step would be some, um (pause), some offering to our school that this is what

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we've learned and how that can help our school have a better culture" (Interview, 1/20/04). On the other hand, he recognized that the issue is "beyond us [school], we are not going to solve it." With his conflicted statement about the group being able to solve a problem that is not solvable, there is a sign of hope that the group could do something about this issue.

A clarifying point to data analysis happened during a triangulation process as a way of data verification and members' check. He said that "us" and "we" referred to the school, not the inquiry group. But, regardless of the magnitude of the issue of AG, Edward assumed that the group at its best can "take steps" towards a possible solution when he said, "But I think we can take steps" (Interview, 1/20/04).

In general, Edward attempted to resolve the contradiction of the assumption about the MSIG's ability to make recommendations when he suggested that the MSIG at its best would be able to identify ways to improve the school by "offering to our school that this is what we've learned and how that can help our school" (Interview, 1/20/04). Even when an inquiry group makes recommendations, what are the possibilities for the suggested recommendations to be accepted and therefore implemented? According to Rose, who was in "*Why do Kids Fail in our School*" group before joining the MSIG said, "This was a good group, but Frances, [the school principal at that time] didn't take [on] one of the recommendations, not one" (Interview, 10/28/07). She explained that, when the principal did not approve her group's recommendations, the group dismantled. Coincidentally, dissolving Rose's group happened around the time this MSIG was created. As a result, many of the members from *Why do Kids Fail in our Schoo,* joined in.

Julia also seemed to assume that the group could solve the problem. When I asked about her hopes for the group, she said: "I HOPE (pause) soon that we do something that is

an action plan" (Interview, 5/7/04). But, different from Edward, Rose, and Julia was Peter's (physical education teacher) skepticism about the group being able to make changes in the school. He said, "Sometimes I wonder if we know… we are looking at this one group [students of color] but it's like, do we really (silence) want to (silence) get to the real answer" (Interview, 2004). In retrospect, I wish I had asked Peter what he meant by "Do we really want to get to the real answer?" Instead, I asked a clarifying question that focused on the students in the AG. "Looking at one group . . . what do you mean by looking at one group?" (Interview, 5/7/04).

Members as Researchers: "I'm not a researcher"

Action research allows teachers to look at their own practice and create changes based on what they find. As a classroom teacher of twenty years, I find that many of us, as teachers, do inquiry instinctively and alone. For the most part, we begin with a big question. Then, we make observations about a specific issue, gather and evaluate information, and formulate answers. These answers are usually in the form of a new idea or an action plan the group wants to implement. We take stock of the outcome and, if necessary, we start the cycle of inquiry all over again. In fact, many of us are self-conscious and critical about our own teaching practices. We know when a curriculum lesson or any other situation does not go right or the way we expect. We know if we are not reaching all the students. And we know that, regardless of the circumstances, there is always something we can improve, refine, and transform. That is one of the reasons why teaching and learning is a dynamic, multidimensional, and never-ending process.

In general, the process for engaging teachers and educators in inquiry is rooted in teacher-action research (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993). That can be traced to practitioner research from the 1950s introduced at Teachers College of Columbia University and later founded and developed by Elliot's Classroom (Collaborative) Action Research Network (CARN) at Cambridge, England, between the 1960s and 1970s. Cushman (1999) claims that teacher research is a form of inquiry that has been around since before the social science paradigm occupied the education departments at the higher levels of colleges and universities. Therefore, the inquiry model is not new, but rather evolved from Dewey's idea in the 1920s that teacher's reflection is an essential part of teaching.

From this perspective, then, inquiry builds on teachers' natural analytical approach to teaching. However, collaborating with colleagues to examine their shared practices both extends their ability to critically examine their own practices (by drawing on their diverse perspectives, knowledge, and skills), and increases the likelihood that they will be able to transform those practices better than an outside expert research can do. In other words, teacher inquiry contributes to our general knowledge based on learning and teaching and thus is a profoundly democratic process, rather than a hierarchical process, in which expert research determines best practices. The next section explores whether the participants, themselves, recognized these assumptions about the teacher inquiry group process.

The members of the MSIG were never asked directly to wear their researchers' hats, and yet, as a group, they engaged in practices that the literature on teacher inquiry groups would recognize as research. They debated underlying assumptions of the

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broader research literature on AG. They used school data and reports to develop preliminary hypotheses about the over-representation of students of color in the Ds and Fs list, the disciplinary referral list, and low MCAS scores (Meeting, 2003-2004). And they raised concerns about the validity and reliability of the reports. Drawing on readings, representations, and one another's research skills and experiences, they developed a case study methodology in which students were interviewed, transcribed interviews were analyzed, case studies were developed, and a final report was written.

Despite their engagement in research practices, the members varied considerably as to whether they viewed themselves as researchers, whether the group had the skills necessary to produce legitimate research, whether they considered the task they engaged in as research, and whether the talks would lead to changes in the practices of the school.

For Julia, the idea of conducting qualitative research to investigate AG was an interesting concept. She was familiar with scientific research methodology, and she originally approached the problem from this perspective. Julia also talked about the process the MISG was trying, because she wanted to find out what was happening with students who were not succeeding in school. "It is fascinating," she said (Interview 2004). Actually, she remembered the meetings devoted to understanding the difference between quantitative and qualitative research as "the most memorable meetings."

The following is a vignette of the dialogue in which I asked Julia about the process, the work, and the activities we were doing during the monthly meetings. It is important to remember that meetings were mostly prepared, organized, and designed by the two co-leaders of the group.

> Julia: What I have found very helpful is to look at the process of going about trying to find out. What is going on? Cause the science part of me finds the,

you know, the whys. Why this happening is a fascinating question to me. And then once we started, I started to become much more interested when we were looking at how we were going to figure out the whys. What's the mechanism? And then we looked at case study is an interesting thing. We had Sonia coming in, looking, comparing and contrasting, qualitative versus quantitative research, and things like that that became very interesting to me.

Wilma: Yeah.

Julia: That was, actually every other meeting was not memorable. (laughs) I don't even remember (loud) which group I was in. (Laughs)

Julia's fascination with exploring the field of qualitative research was provoked by the group's decision to do case studies. Other members, however, did not see themselves as researchers, even after participating in the early stages required for conducting qualitative research, mentioned previously."I am not a "researcher" but I want to be sure that whatever data we collect is valid, meaningful, directed toward why & possible "solutions" or progress" (Anonymous, Feedback, 12/11/03).

The written feedback from this particular member illustrated that, on the one hand, he/she was not a researcher, but, on the other hand, this person understood the importance of the type of data the group should collect. Furthermore, this person regarded data collection as a crucial part in research. For instance, he/she wrote that data collection influenced the "validity" and meaningfulness of the study (Feedback, 12/11/03). In the written feedback, this member also mentioned that data collection should provide information about "possible solutions or progress" (Feedback, 12/11/03).

A Latina social/outreach worker in the group voiced similar concerns. She wrote about her concerns when writing hypotheses to explain reasons for the AG. Members were asked to work with partners and construct hypotheses using quantitative reports from the

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school. This process took several meetings before the group composed a total of thirteen hypotheses.

Social/outreach worker Roberta's concerns were research-related. Actually, she located the research expertise and knowledge outside of the group. She said, "Could some expert outsiders-Sonia Nieto [university professor and educational researcher] go over our work?" She added her "…concerns with quality & meaning of all this quantitative data" (Feedback, 12/11/03). It seems as if the group needed a researcher's check from an outside expert to guarantee the validity of the work.

In addition, Roberta brought another layer of concern regarding the inquiry process: "Concern with inquiry process, limitations by use of a methodology that may be precluding looking at larger picture and/or leading us to limited or biased conclusions" (Feedback Sheet, 11/13/03). She suggested that "Data should include several years- concerns with quality & meaning of all this quantitative data." It seems as if Roberta understood the reliability and validity of longitudinal research, even though she did not say, "I am a researcher."

In a different way, Ishmael did recognize his ability as a researcher during the interview. The following excerpt captured his comment on the group's work:

> Ishmael: There is too much generalization going on. If I had approached this on my own as a researcher, I would've proposed kids [for the interviews], one on one, and analyzed each kid's situation, and then do a cross over racial things or ethnicity type things, or socioeconomic type things. You could categorize them as a group.
>
> Wilma: (interrupts) rather than begin with the categories. We began with the groups.
>
> Ishmael: We began with the categories and we generalized about ethnicity and race, and everything already, whereas if you take individuals and analyze and research it in depth and interviewing and focus you just get a lot further…
> The more case studies you do the more data you can collect.
> (Interview, 5/2/04)

Ishmael's excerpt illustrated his research skills in the way he proposed another approach for the group to collect qualitative data. First, Ishmael suggested the notion of categories as a way to sort out students under a common factor: sorting them by "racial things, or ethnicity type things, or economic type things" after researching individuals without considering categories. Second, he criticized the way the group chose students based on established categories, on race. Third, he seemed to consider his approach more suitable to avoid generalizations, which was one of his primary concerns. But, in reality, his approach and the group's approach of doing case studies (e.g., qualitative research) were similar. What differed was the sampling strategy.

Findings illustrated that, regardless of the activities, discussions, and mini-workshop on research done during the monthly meetings, Ishmael, in this case, seemed not to view the group's research as legitimate. His apparent dissonance of discourses on research was not resolved, because this was his first and last year in the MSIG, not because he joined another group, but because he moved to another state.

Another sampling of members questioning whether or not they were researchers happened when Laurie, as the spokesperson from Group 3, alerted the entire group about hypothesizing: "There is a difference between hypothesizing based on data and speculating. They are not quite the same thing." Laurie told the group that, "We [her group] did a little bit of both" (Meeting 11/13/03). Evidently, her, or her group's understanding and experiences with and about research, could be representative for considering herself, or her group researcher(s).

To summarize, some members acknowledged that they were doing research, while others did not. This assumption was never unpacked, because the group did not ask a direct

question about being a researcher. Somehow, this understanding was subtle. Members indeed engaged in research activities that connected to inquiry processes informed by established protocols in the Turning Points model. Despite it all, some members still claimed not to be researchers. And, even after the group brainstormed thirteen hypotheses and engaged in qualitative research study activities, many did not see themselves as researchers. By the time this dissertation is completed, the MSIG will have been working on qualitative research for six consecutive years: They will have used a series of research processes and steps for developing an action plan.

Institutional Practice for Transformation: "It is hard, it is about me"

In the following section, I explore the assumption of an inquiry group as an institutional practice that provides opportunities for transformation. Even when transformations may have not extended beyond the group, these are some of the promises of inquiry groups. First, data analyses take a glimpse at the silences as moments in which members identified others not participating. Second, findings illustrated the way critical moments provided possibilities for transformation while members were reading transcribed interviews of the students. This section ends with samplings of elusive transformations that members did not recognize for extending a change of discourse to another level – that of transformation.

A common pattern in the literature of inquiry groups is the assumption that collaborative work and inquiry provide opportunities for transformations (Cochran – Smith and Lytle, 1993; Nieto et al., 2002). The MSIG did not exactly conduct what scholars identify as *teacher research* or *teacher action research*, because members did

not research their own practices. However, the group did engage in action research

because the aim was to develop a plan to improve the issue of AG that would affect the

entire school.

It was an assumption by the institution that this group would be able to bring about

recommendations that could resolve the issue of AG. On the one hand, the intuition has

been extremely patient while waiting almost six years to receive an action plan. On the

other, the fact that the institution has waited almost six years with no pressure raises some

questions about its interest and priority for reaching a solution. Or could this lack of

pressure be the institution's recognition or acceptance that this issue is complex and

impossible to solve? If so, the institution reinforced Edward's opinion that "It's huge… I

don't think we are going to solve it. But I think, it's beyond us, But I think we can take

steps" (Edward, Interview, 1/20/04).

The findings confirmed that the group engaged in the design of a qualitative study,

data collection, and interpretations, and they indicated a level of commitment and

ownership. However, individual ownership is not always actively present in discussions,

or in certain decisions made by the group. This could indicate the reason why not all the

members voiced discourse changes to consider the transformative moments.

The group established a question to investigate the issue of AG, based on the

charge given by the school's Leadership Team.

> We believe it is our challenge as a school to examine the educational
> experience of all students through the lens of race.
>
> The achievement gap: academic achievement, discipline referrals are some
> more objective type indicators of where this gap occurs. We will examine the
> how and why this gap occurs" (Final Report, 5/04).

The first statement became, and continues to be, the group's discourse signal in many formal documents. Placing race at the center of the MSIG's work could be considered a transformative move, because a lot of institutions in the public sphere have the tendency to be race-neutral or color-blind. And the avoidance of doing so tends to reproduce the black and white public discourse around issues of AG.

Nonetheless, it was within the context of collaborative interactions in which influential forces, intrinsically or extrinsically, shaped the work of the inquiry group. These forces also contributed to opportunities for transformation. Here, I refer to three interrelated types of forces: micro, meso, and macro forces (Fairclough, 1989). The first type is the intrinsic force, one that resides at the micro level of the individual: what members bring to the table, from reasons, motivations, and specific agendas, to biases. The second and third relate to extrinsic forces at the macro level of institutions, such as schools (e.g., Turning Points model) and beyond (e.g., NCLB Act). The meso level refers to the dynamic and text co-constructed at the meetings in the MSIG (e.g., process, (co)constructing knowledge of AG). These forces are in constant dynamic, always competing, interacting, and colliding with each another. Consequently, discourses in this way reproduce, change, and possibly transform. In the following section, data illustrated the way the inquiry group provided opportunities for silencing people in the sense that members opted to participate or not participate, even when participatory practices were established for all voices to be heard.

Silence

A general assumption about the design of inquiry groups is that sustainability is based on interactions, dialogue, cooperation, and collaboration among the members in the group (Jackson and Davis, 2000). Interactions, cooperation, and collaboration could be considered forms of collective engagement. At this level, engagement also provides people with the opportunity to choose the way and level in which they want to be involved. And, as long as the work for accomplishing common goals is not jeopardized by opposing forces, then cooperation seems to be the basic level of engagement required for the group to be functional. That is, the level of participation in which members in the MSIG are willing to engage, while stepping out of their collective comfort zone, is all up to them. This dynamic is conceivably the reason why opportunities for transformation were recognized and taken up at times, and ignored at other times.

One example related to establishing norms at the beginning of each year. This process ensured democratic practices. The group, to guarantee all members with opportunities to express their opinions, established particular norms. The following norms were developed by the group on October, 9, 2003, and maintained thereafter:

1. Stay on target and identify tangents
2. How people will recognized to contribute: wait till other person finishes, raise hand, wait to be recognized by chair
3. Be open minded, reserve judgment
4. Keep the focus of discussion on the school community

These norms displayed a hierarchical domain of managing discussion that precluded critical moments moving beyond the mere instance. And, although numbers 2-4 related to opportunities for sharing views, they restricted the deeper level of discussion, which is necessary to unpack individual biases on the issue of AG in general, and race in

particular. Similarly, number 4 indicated to "keep discussion on the school community," thus presenting an obstacle for making personal or other type of connections. Despite these democratic norms, many things happened in the meetings that could be considered out of compliance with these norms. Again, the very norms intended to ensure all voices being heard could have silenced some of the members. Data analysis, however, does not allow me to assert findings, but rather to make interpretations based on observations, field notes, and available text (meetings, analysis of data) to sustain particular interpretations (Fairclough, 2003). That is the reason why these norms could be influential factors contributing to the silence of some of the members.

Nonetheless, opportunities for all voices to be heard were achieved though guided reflections. The co-leaders coordinated time during the meetings for writing. Many of the members interviewed considered the reflection time an effective practice for people who would not otherwise voice their opinions. However, the variety of opportunities to express individual views did not guarantee that members would participate in all verbal or written opportunities. For example, during the first year of the group, there were two members, both African Americans, who brought papers to correct or books to read during the meetings (Field notes, 10/03; 12/03). Their reservations about participating might have precluded reproduction or changing discourses.

But, on the other hand, voicing opinions did not always guarantee a change of discourse either. It simply allowed discourses to be more visible and identifiable, particularly with the use of critical discourse analysis (CDA) in this case. The use of CDA allowed data analysis to conceive findings that illustrated race to dominate the discourses and the work of the MSIG. In this way, it is possible to consider reasons why

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some members were silenced. For instance, members from a so-called 'minority race' (African American, Latino) were not regarded as experts in the discussion of AG. On the one hand, it is more reasonable to explain the silence of some (White) members (White) by their perceived lack of expertise (i.e., privileges). But, it is more difficult to explain the silence of African American and Latinos in a group that was talking about AG, mostly on the racial line.

Peter's opinion about members' participation and resistance in the group was that "Everybody participated." He characterized himself as having "diarrhea of the mouth," having no inhibitions, and saying "everything I want to say" (Interview, 1/26/04). Peter indicated that he was "not sure if people are saying what they really want to say." He noticed the way some members asked me, as a participant observer recording the meetings, not to include specific comments they made. This could explain the reason why he thought, "Some people may hold back" (Interview, 1/26/04). Peter's contradictory observations that "everybody participated" and "some people may hold back" reinforced the idea of silence. Cameron (2001) reminds researchers that if something ". . . is 'there' in people's talk, then it must be there for some purpose" (pp. 20-21). Peter, however, did not indicate why some people "hold back."

Another sample of recognizing the silence of an African American member in the group is Julia's comment. She said, "I'm not keeping track of member's participation" (Interview, 5/7/04). Actually, she named this member: "[Name] never participates." When I asked her how she knew, she said, "I never heard her talk in the big group." Then, I asked, "So what happens in small group discussion?" Julia said, "She doesn't have anything to say, because she thinks that the group is not in a solving problem place

and is not a good use of our time" (Interview, 5/7/04). I followed up with another question: "Why do you thinks she is not participating?" Julia immediately responded, "I can't answer that for her" (Interview, 5/7/04). The idea that two members, African Americans, remained quiet at many of the meetings could indicate a way of passive retaliation, because they were not consulted, nor were they considered experts on the issue of race and AG. Perhaps, the group may have been constructed a racial divide among the members without knowing it.

It is important to mention that the issue of participation in the form of resistance was explored in the ethnographic study. This is the reason why it is not the focus in this dissertation, however it warrants recognition in this study. This is the reason why the previous section of Silence is included in the dissertation.

To conclude this section, I include a sampling from a feedback sheet dated December 11, 2003. Here, one of the members anonymously wrote: "I'm sad to see still people resisting some of the process of work." This is similar to data already discussed and analyzed in this section concerning members' participation. But regardless of the fact that some members were not contributing to discussions, Julia still acknowledged that the structure of the meetings ensured that everyone could express their opinions: "If you are not comfortable speaking out, you can at least write something" (Feedback Sheet, 2004). Rose also felt that people had opportunities to express their opinions: "The feedback was useful and the people could feel free to put something anonymously that they just didn't want to say in the whole group (2007).

Transformation

In this section, data sampling illustrates critical moments in which discourses changed and possibly transformed. Findings from the analysis also show that, during the year the group engaged in reading and discussing transcribed interviews, opportunities for transformations were more visible. During this process, members worked in small groups to collaborate with each other and analyze the same transcribed interview. They took notes based on Rose's guidelines: "themes that emerged over and over and create a list under the 6 categories" (Field notes, 1/10/06). The six categories were used with all transcribed interviews. Coding a total of eight transcribed interviews in this way took almost the entire year, 2005-2006.

The process provided structure that allowed self-critical moments for transformation in the way members self-reflected through the students' answers – seeing the achievement gap through the eyes of the students. Self-reflection was achieved in the process of collective analysis of a particular interview as a sample practice for the group. The following excerpt illustrates members' interactions about what a student said in terms of memorization in class (Field notes, 1/10/06):

> Rose: Let's stop and process what [student] said about memorization
>
> Julia: I teach memorization [in science] …it's important…another type of language process
>
> Rose: Our view on memorization and kid's view on memorization may be different
>
> Member 1: This is about teaching and learning.
>
> Member 2: Also, about learning style
>
> Member 3: This is valuable information of great importance

Member 4 [math teacher]: using information to re-shape our teaching
(Meeting, 1/10/06)

As members negotiated what this particular student said, personal connections were made about teaching practices, which were also negotiated as they analyzed the transcribed interviews. The structure for sharing what members noticed from what kids said in the interviews provided a safe place for members to take risks. Members critically exchanged their understandings as a learning process and identified the value of listening to what students have to say.

This was a valuable and powerful experience for the members, because reading the interviews of the students opened the door to look (symbolically) inside the classrooms of many teachers in the MSIG. Member 2, a math teacher, explicitly stated the value of "using this information to re-shape our teaching." In this way, members connected the social worlds of their classrooms with what students said about memorization and made intertextual and discursive connections. Those connections were informed by sociocultural theories about discourse and interactions in the way members used this student's answers to relate to their teaching practices (Bloome, et al. 2005). The interaction provided a critical moment for changing, transforming, and reproducing discourse. Nevertheless, the joint examination of the student's transcripts highlighted a critical moment for self-reflection, thus providing the possibility for transformation. In other words, looking at the classroom world through the eyes of the students forced members to self-reflect, when otherwise they would have been merely sharing opinions, as other members did.

Another sample of transformation was evident when Lucille wanted to share with colleagues the information from the students' interviews. She felt that reading the interviews shed light on the kind of changes that needed to happen, not only in the

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classrooms, but also in the school in general. Which brought an issue of confidentiality

regarding students' interviews? There were some specific names of teachers in the text.

Although student names were covered on the transcripts, the teachers' name were not. Rose

addressed Lucille's desire by saying that we needed to do the analysis first, before sharing

findings with the world outside of the MSIG. Rose even noticed an oversight: "I missed the

fact that teachers' names were not protected. I should have been more vigilant" (Field notes,

2/06). This situation brought a deeper level of conversation, during which members

continued to interconnect the self with the issue of achievement gap almost unintentionally. I

wonder if the same conversation/reflection would have happened if the students and teachers'

names had not been disclosed. Another question that reminds unanswered: Did the critical

moments of self-reflection transfer into the classrooms?

The following exchange illustrated a transformational moment during the same

meeting. The snapshot of the exchange presents the intertextuality created in the interplay of

transformation and reproduction (Bloome, et al., 2005):

> Member 4 [math teacher]: When students come into 8th grade they always say
> how terrible 7th grade teachers were. We stop them and say it is not about the
> teacher is about the subject [e.g., science, math].
>
> Rose: For us, [teacher researchers] to ask the question, what makes this kid say
> that? It is the conundrum of research analysis.
>
> Julia: When students complain about a teacher I want to know if it is the subject
> or [something else]/ I want to know if the subject comes up a lot
>
> Member 3: It's important to look at it. It is hard…it is about me… it is hard, but
> it is good. [this is a special education teacher]:
>
> Rose: One time, one kid wrote anonymously, "This teacher only cares about clean
> up". I felt I needed to find out the way I say things and do things. I changed the
> way I directed clean up.
>
> (Meeting, February, 2006)

At the beginning of this interaction, Member 4 (math teacher) shifted the student's

comment about the 7th grade teachers being "terrible." She relocated the blame from the

teachers to the subject matter of study. She also separated the teacher as an individual

from the subject matter when she told the students, "It is not about the teacher, it's about

the subject." In this way, removing the self from the student's complaint served as a

protecting device. It released any responsibility from the teacher, and located it in the

subject manner. It's as if the subject matter was responsible for the student's difficulties.

Rose very quickly indicated the importance of asking questions: "What makes this kid

say that?"

The four teachers in the above interaction engaged in collective intertextual

connections from the classroom practices to the scholarly world of the university within

the context of the MSIG. Rose first wore her researcher's hat: "For us, [teacher

researchers] to ask the question, what makes this kid say that?" The she put on her

teacher's hat: "One time, one kid wrote anonymously, this teacher only cares about clean

up. I felt I needed to find out the way I say things and do things. I changed the way I

directed clean up" (Field notes, February 2006). Rose reminded members about their

assumed researcher's identity when she said, "It is the conundrum of research analysis."

However, Julia, Member 4, and Member 3 used their collective teachers' hat instead of

the researchers'.

The short interaction served as a place for collective self-reflection. Julia

expressed interest in knowing what kids had to say: "When students complain about as a

teacher I want to know if it is the subject or something else." Julia and Member 3

recognized the advantages of analyzing transcribed interviews because it helped them

connect to teaching practices. As these members continued discussing the students'

answers, Member 4 and Rose made more directed connections to themselves. They both

explicitly talked about the importance of paying attention to what kids say, and what it

means to them. Member 3 said, "It's important to look at it. It is hard…it is about me…

it is hard, but it is good." Rose shared how one student's comment transformed the way

she would "say things and do things. I changed the way I directed clean up." This is an

example of the way interactions in the MSIG provided opportunities for critical moments,

and the way in which these moments could be transformative for some members, and

reproductive for others.

  Even within the tight schedule of the MSIG, the co-leaders found ways for members

to make personal connections to the issue of AG. This activity for connecting the self, and

for thinking reflectively, was considered a transformative moment. It was during the first

meeting in 2003 when members were asked to, "Think back to the time you were a middle

school student. Describe a time when you saw or experienced inequity-how did it make you

feel?" (Meeting No.1, 9/11/03). Members engaged in this activity and opened up to share

their stories. However, this critical moment, which brought personal stories and experiences

of injustices to the center of the conversation, did not go beyond the mere activity. That is,

after compelling stories were shared, we moved on with the agenda. Perhaps, due to lack of

time or particular structures that could have sustained this moment, this critical moment of

connecting the self to issues of AG was not unpacked. The issue of ownership also played

out here, when no one took the initiative to further the conversation.

  The last sample of transformation could be considered in the way Julia's scientific

experience opened up. In the second interview with Julia, she answered the question

about the process of the group in this way: "As a person who usually does quantitative research and not qualitative research, I just wondered what was going to happen to it, because at one point we were instructed not to come up with themes. We as people analyzing should not make judgments on what this means. We should just describe it" (Interview, 1/11/08). Julia articulated the tenets of qualitative research. She clearly stated that we should not generalize observations. That is a different approach to scientific research, where data collection, analysis, and conclusion tend to be a linear process, and conclusive, to report on why things happen.

To summarize, critical moments could be attributed, but not limited, to interactions and dialogue that occurred during the monthly meetings, as well as the written feedback sheets. These moments captured the way members' representations of AG changed, reproduced, and transformed. In addition to these critical moments were also moments in the discourses when members' insights shifted. The change and shift of discourses are often regarded in the literature as transformations. Nieto (2002) speaks to the experience of teachers who participated in an inquiry group for one year: "…the transformative role research and inquiry in general can have on teachers' intellectual development and practice" (p. 8). Transformations of this kind are among the possibilities attributed to the type of collaboration that characterizes inquiry groups. In terms of transformational moments that may have eluded the members, I have included the following section that shows a snapshot of the day the school principal attended the meeting on November 11, 2003.

Elusive Transformation

This section focuses on one particular transformative moment that did not move beyond the instance in which it occurred. It is important to remember that other critical moments for transformation that may have eluded the members have been addressed in this chapter, in particularly, *Transformation-Reproduction: Critical Moments.*

Because the view of reproduction and transformation pervades in the dissertation, my focus here on one sample illustrates the understanding of 'elusive transformation.' It was during the third meeting of the group's first year that the principal of the school came and introduced a Model of Transformation. She wanted the group to think about the four levels of this model as we looked on the issue of AG and framed our work. She used this model in a leadership strand for Turning Points. She also mentioned that the superintendent of schools used an adapted model. Ms. Kramer explained this as a "ladder" for moving the group's work up and down. The following chart is a representation of the ladder to get to transformation:

Fourth: Results- Transformation (homogenous classes)
Third: Program Change-creating after school programs for children of color
Second- Institutional structures- tracking in math
First- Beliefs (individuals, institutions, society)
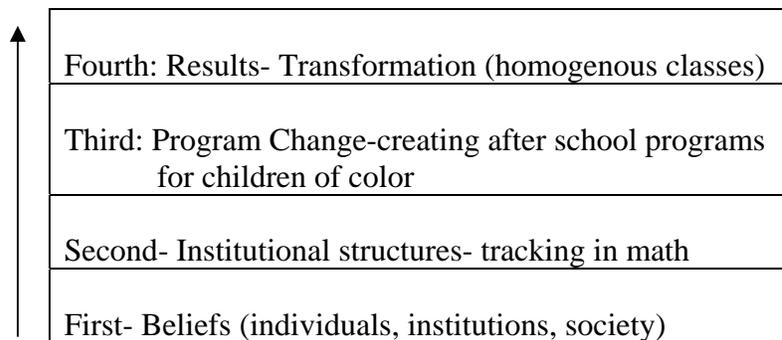
Figure 9: Model for Transformation

While explaining this model, she emphasized the complexity of the group's work, investigating issues related to AG. She trusted this model and wanted the group to use it to frame the work with a particular goal: "The model was created for hoping that people will

shift beliefs, and so you know that from Program Change you get some positive results, but you will never get systemic change and transformation if you don't go in here" (pointing at the first level Beliefs) (Meeting, 11/03). She insisted that "As the work of the group moves up and down the ladder, the group will need to define which of these [steps] it is that we will need to work on. I think it is probably all of them. And what that work is going to look like as you uncover where the problems are, and you are willing to go up and down … and what we like to see in the next couple of years, so real changes happen here [third step]" (Meeting, 11/13/03).

Ms. Kramer did not stay the entire meeting. She left soon after presenting, but, before leaving, she asked, "Does it make sense?" (Meeting, 11/13/93). As soon as she left, the co-leader moved immediately to the agenda for the day. She did not allow time for reflections or discussion about the Model for Transformation. Moving ahead with the agenda illustrated how a critical moment, after the principal left, was not seized. The group missed an opportunity for dialogue and discussion that could have been a transformative moment. One possible explanation for missing this opportunity could be that members may have associated the model with policy and administrative protocols, instead of a teacher created model. This could have also been a representation of competing discourses: teacher-researcher identity vs. policy maker identity. Another explanation for the elusive transformation may be that members did not know that the principal was attending the meeting. Readiness could also be an important factor for transformation. This parallels the readiness of students in learning and participating in the school practices (e.g., Head Start programs, Reading First).

In this case, unpacking the principal's visit and her presentation would have required flexibility in terms of time and agenda. It would also have required ownership for people to initiate a dialogue that would act as a mechanism for them to unpack and transform this moment. In other words, Mrs. Kramer's approach of down to bottom communication of the model may have hindered the possibility of adapting this model into a more suitable one for the group. Once again, the group missed the opportunity for possible transformation. This in a way connects to what the principal said that the model could do: "hoping people shift beliefs" (Meeting, 11/13/03).

The assumption that inquiry groups can serve as an institutional strategy for change was influenced, not only by a theoretical framework that defines and describes inquiry, but also by the interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic forces operating in the interactions of the monthly meetings. Data analysis illustrated that, regardless of established protocols and structures to ensure members participation and reflection, opportunities for transformations and reproductions were at play. In other words, members' discourses paradoxically shifted, not in a binary/linear continuum, but as a multidimensional and multidirectional process. I described in Chapter 2 the dynamic and always shifting discourse with an infinity symbol. Discourses are in state of constant oppositional and similar exchanges. While instances of change, reproduction, and transformation went mostly unnoticed, opportunities for unveiling and reflecting on members' representations also eluded them. The following section illustrates relevant challenges and struggles, in addition to highlighting the accomplishments the group did not exactly celebrate. Frustrations over the lengthy work of the group have become the

primary reasons why so many members left the group. To emphasize, out of the current

membership, only two of its original members remain in the group, and I am one of them.

Challenges, Struggles, and Accomplishments

The work of the group has gradually evolved over the past five years. It has gone

through various stages, different membership, and leadership changes, all within the

format of structured meetings. These meetings have been organized and orchestrated

primarily by co-leaders. But these have also been informed by members' collective input

through guided reflection sheets. In general, the meetings have included agendas with

activities involving the entire group, small groups, and individual work/discussion. It is

worth noting that, during the first and second year of the group, the co-leaders consulted

with the principal, and the principal checked with co-leaders. In the following section I

present some of the challenges and struggles negotiated by the members, and the section

ends with a display of the group's main accomplishments in a listing format.

Challenges

Membership and Leadership

The turnover of people coming in and leaving the group, as well as being absent,

were among the factors influencing the work of the group. Consistently, members cited

turnover, absenteeism, and co-leaders change (e.g., Jacqueline 2003-2004; Rose in 2005;

Lucille in 2006-2007; and Edward in 2007-2008) as reasons for frustration and not advancing

the groups' work. Rose wrote on the feedback sheet, "It is very difficult to keep participants

updated when they have been absent. The nature of qualitative research requires many

protocols that are reviewed and discussed several times. Yet some participants did not follow" (Feedback Sheet, 4/13/06). In a way, inquiry groups may need to take into account the world of teachers and other school staff.

In relation to co-leaders' inconsistency, Julia commented about the group's difficulties in spending too much time in completing certain tasks: "I think it was part of the problem." Having different leaders was problematic because not everyone had the same understanding of the type of research the group was doing. This may have delayed the progress of the group" (Interview, 1/11/08). Julia talked about the time when the group spent hours reading and trying to code interviews, and they ended up changing the system for analysis: "They never really came up with an idea because we started one way and then we found out that by people that were involved in qualitative research, experts in the field at the time felt that was not the preferred way to do it" (Interview, 1/11/08).

Edward talked about his frustration with inconsistent membership and expertise: "We have lost the people who had all the perspective from the beginning, what is it that we were doing, how were doing it. I'm not that interested in doing it any more after this year" (3/10/08). For him, losing one of the co-leaders, whom he regarded as the expert, may have influenced his decision to leave the group. He did not feel competent to co-lead the group and support members in this quest. He did not acknowledge having expertise in this type of work, because he connected expertise with the university.

Edward's optimism changed into skepticism. He talked about being uninterested in implementing an action plan, because the research expert was not in the group. Edward brought an issue of expertise and policy. First, if members like Edward did not recognize innate ability of inquiry that accompany the researcher's view, then teachers either need more

practice and support, or they merely lack ownership when working collaboratively in an inquiry. Second, understanding and unpacking one's role in relation to the institution, the school in this case, may be necessary for inquiry groups to be understand interactions of roles in the institution if the goal is for institutions to transform

The following excerpt illustrates the way Edward may have lost a sense of ownership. When he started with the group, he displayed hope in joining the group (discussed in the *Assumption* section). It is noticeable to see how Edward's opinion changed during the course of the same interview:

> I put a lot of effort into these case studies and wanted to see what was going to come out of the. I was optimistic that we would finally get somewhere and finish this qualitative research, and we'd have something to show for it. I wanted to be a part of it" (Interview, 3/10/08)

> I don't want to start an action plan, you know, and try and maintain or promote changes in our school. I'm thinking we're going to come up with some lessons, you know, that these students have for; going to end there;…it's starting a huge process…who is going to want to pick up and carry forth with that?

The excerpt illustrated a teachers' world as one that is overwhelmingly packed with responsibilities, and following through the plan implied a huge undertaking. He said, "It's starting a huge process…who is going to want to pick up and carry forth with that?" This was possibly one of the many reasons why he decided to leave the group after five years.

An example of inconsistent leadership being one of the group's challenges is Julia's experience of being a partial co-leader in 2006-2007. During her fourth year, when the group was devoting all the meetings to analyzing transcribed interviews, only one person, Lucille, was the leader. Lucille asked Julia to help her co-lead, but Julia, who claimed not to know much about how to do the analysis, grudgingly accepted: "She mostly did it [by herself]. She

asked for my help, but between the two of us, we were not organized, so she ended up taking

more responsibility, and she did most of it" (Interview, 1/11/2008).

Another factor that affected the leadership relates to the lack of institutional support,

particularly during 2006-2007. This was the year that the entire school focused on increasing

MCAS scores. For this reason, the MSIG did not have any prerogative but to work on the

school initiatives regarding MCAS. That is, the group did not work on the achievement gap

in the MSIG for almost six months. During these months, no inquiry groups in the school

devoted their meeting time to finding ways to improve test scores. In general, the turnover of

membership, along with the rotation of leadership (co-leaders), influenced the work of the

group adversely. I wonder what would have happened if there had been specific institutional

or group structures in place to minimize disruption and alleviate the effect of unforeseen

situations.

<div align="center">

Struggles

</div>

Democratic Practices

Principles supporting the work of inquiry groups are established under democratic

practices that guarantee the participation of members in decision-making processes.

Review of selective literature presented in Chapter 2 illustrated the theories sustaining

inquiry group. It was clear that the meetings were shaped by assigned tasks and

particular organizational structures. In terms of the monthly meetings, these were always

organized around different engaging activities with specific focuses or goals. We always

had a particular text to work with and respond to. Such an approach considers research

on teaching and learning as a democratized process. Thus, inquiry groups provide

structures and protocols that facilitate the use, practice, and development of research

skills among its members (e.g., teachers and school staff).

The design of inquiry groups in this middle school followed the Turning Points

Model. A practice that characterizes the group is shared leadership to guide the work of

the group. It is a common understanding in this school that co-leaders plan, organize, and

lead the group, both collaboratively and democratically.

Because everyone in the group was extremely busy and did not want to carry the

work outside of meeting times, everything had to be accomplished within the parameters

of the group. That is, members felt overwhelmed with all the classroom and daily school

responsibilities. They were already committed to advise student's club and provide extra

support to help students with homework after school. This is the reason why they

requested release time to do the work for conducting case studies, but the administration

denied the request. As a result, members collectively agreed on doing data analysis, and

writing the reports, among other work, strictly during the monthly meetings. For this

reason, subgroups were created to distribute responsibilities and guarantee everyone's

participation for accomplishing the group's goals. Some of the major decisions were

channeled through the subgroups, such as acquiring outside funds to pay for transcribers

and other expenses related to the interviews, among other expenses.

It is important to mention, however, that, during the early conversations regarding the

interviews, some members shared their willingness to do them, even outside of the monthly

meeting time. But further discussion helped the group understand the benefit of having

people unrelated to the kids' interview them. The group believed that students would be

more likely to engage in open dialogue with someone unfamiliar to them and not connected

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to the school. This was especially true because the ultimate goal was to hear what students had to say about school, teachers, parents, and their community. These are some samples for illustrating the way democratic practices operated in the structure of the groups.

An important aspect of democratic practices that characterizes inquiry groups relates to the role of the members in the group. Members bring to the group specific roles that are related to their professional positions within the organization. These are ascribed by social positions such as class, economic, and gender, as well as those imposed by the organization that are related to educational attainment. These roles depend on whether one is a teacher or paraprofessional, or, within the MSIG context, whether one is a leader or a member. This is how certain roles are ascribed, whether they are recognized or not

One example is when the issue of bias, and the importance of recognizing ones' biases, was introduced, discussed, and emphasized by Rose Morley, the research expert of the group. Rose's work in the group could be considered above and beyond the call of duty. She got directly involved in every detail regarding the case studies. She was attentive to the group dynamic and discussions. While co-leading the group in 2006, she and the other co-leader built into the limited time of the meetings a special activity to address things Rose heard: "pretty outrageous statements that were very disturbing" (Interview, 11/28/07):

> Rose: I heard, things that we thought were blaming families and not owning their responsibilities, you know, when they would read some of the interviews and have a discussion they would say, "Well, this kid never does his homework anyway so what do you expect."

The above excerpt is the type of comment Rose overhead in one of the small groups during the analysis. This is what prompted her to do an activity for all members to read about research and bias. Evidently, reflection at this time would have functioned as a mirror for looking at oneself in relation to the issue in discussion. Looking back in time, there may

have been more incidences of these "outrageous" comments that members, like me, may have not paid close attention to. In a way, unrecognized "outrageous" comments could contribute to reproducing discourses without knowing it.

The struggle presented in a democratic practice of this MSIG relates to the expertise, leadership, roles, and ownership displayed by the members engaged in decision-making. Otherwise, the practice could turn into top to bottom decisions, leaving it to those leading the group. However, it was clear that co-leaders in this MSIG made a lot of effort to include all the members in decision-making. But, data analysis illustrated factors that may have impeded all voices from being heard. Nonetheless, the group was able to make progress and accomplish some of their goals.

Another aspect that relates to democratic principles guiding the collective work of the MSIG connects to group's organization. Organizing the meetings implies an interconnection of work and time. If a group had the charge to develop an action plan, careful planification may have played out in the way the meetings were organized and structured, and decisions were made. For this reason, it is necessary to establish a system for allocating time for the group to accomplishing its goals. This could explain the elusive moments for transformation, and the absence of consistent reflections, throughout the years.

In terms of doing reflections that supported critical moments during the meetings, the following excerpt illustrated the lack of consistent self-reflections practices. When I asked Rose about having time in the meetings for reflection, she said,

> Not a whole lot…I think we did some. So we would want people to discuss things, and then we would reflect back, that was one way of doing it… in terms of reflection it became clear …people are on different pages … of their own identity of element, their own ability to reflect on their own teaching bias, much less researcher bias or racial bias or whatever. So and it was difficult to address that and go forward with the work, but you can't go

forward with the work without addressing it. So we were in a catch 22, so we used, because Sonia's text was the anchor of our work, we thought that would be obviously in it. So succinctly written. So we thought it would be a good way to hold up a mirror to some of the conversations we were having. And we felt it did shift. We felt like we did some group reflection in that way. Um, but I don't think that there is enough, I don't think the structure allows for enough time for that.

Rose addressed the challenges regarding limited time for accomplishing work during the monthly meetings and doing critical reflections. First, people were on different "pages" or at different stages "of their own identity and ability to reflect on their own teaching biases," to name a few. Second, it was difficult to move on with the work without addressing these issues. Third, our activities and text-reading were intended to help people do reflections: "a good way to hold up a mirror to some of the conversations we were having" or a good mechanism for doing reflection. Last, in spite of a structure that did not allow enough time for reflection, "We felt it did shift [people's ideas] (Interview 11/28/07). This sign of change could be considered transformational. Nevertheless, the shifting that Rose referred to above was not unpacked.

It was evident in the data that time could have been an influential factor in many of the decisions made by the group. In addition, lack of time could be recognized as one of the reasons why change may have not resulted in transformations. But, considering time alone prevents the researcher from looking at other influential factors that may have played out in this democratic group. For example, it is important to consider other influential factors such as the structure and organization of the meetings, multiple forces, and members' representations of AG. For this reason, it is essential to understand what happened at the meetings, why and how things happened, and who were, or were not, involved in the dynamics of the group. For this reason, the study provided snapshots to explore most relevant

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factors that involved this MSIG. Nonetheless, time needs to be highlighted here to address

an important aspect that influenced the group's work. In addition, the issue of time was

discussed in the interviews, as well as in the monthly meetings.

It is relevant to say that time was responsible for inflicting a level of frustration, one

that was related to the long process it took the group to create case studies, among other

rudimentary work. For example, it took the MSIG an entire year, 2004-2005, to select,

group, and write interview questions. The process was long. We used a list of 41 questions

from the *Interview Questions* list taken from the book, Affirming diversity: The

sociopolitical context of multicultural education, (Nieto, 2004). First, we created categories

to organize all the 41 questions. Second, we selected the questions we wanted to use, and,

third, we wrote new questions. In fact, Rose could not believe that it took the group almost

four months to create interview questions: "Well, I was gone on sabbatical and I couldn't

believe that the entire fall the group had been working on those interview questions"

(Interview, 11/28/07). However, taking a little more than a semester to construct interview

questions indicated that the group spent careful time crafting questions relevant to the issue

in discussion. In a way, the strenuous work demonstrated a level of collective commitment

and ownership. This could also be recognized as a transformative moment.

In a similar way, Julia remembered the long years of preparing for the case studies

and the analyzing of data: "We were trying to figure out how to analyze the data, and that

took us a year, and we finally came up with a solution. It took us another year to try to

attempt to start to analyze the data. … The process was so slow" (Interview, 1/11/08). This

long process may have influenced the level of skepticism for Julia (mentioned in a previous

section). Julia said, "I didn't know if anybody would use it in the end; who would use it; how it would be used?" (2008).

The process of reading, coding, and writing the analysis of transcribed interviews took longer than expected. The following are two short samplings that illustrated members' frustration with the process and the time taken to complete a particular task. One member wrote, "We are working at a slow pace. It is unfortunate that we neither can spend more time working on the data, nor streamline our process. Have to watch our own bias in analysis" (Reflection Question Sheet, 4/13/06). Another person responded about how the group was progressing: "very slowly" (Reflection Questions Sheet, 4/13/06).

In another reflection sheet, another member wrote about what had not worked for him/her: "Too much time between meetings and the lack of time outside the group to work on the project." This person said, "… so much time exists between meetings, it's hard to maintain continuity of thought. The long gap of time, between meetings sometimes makes it difficult to maintain the focus" (counselor, 2006). In a similar way, Edward wrote, "meeting so infrequently has not worked for me" (Reflection Questions Sheet, 4/13/06). From these written reflections, one can say that structure and time are pivotal in any type of organizational structure established towards the accomplishment of individual or group goals.

Illustrating time as an essential factor in the group's work was the feedback comment from another member: "We spend a lot of time on reviewing," referring to the beginning of each meeting (Reflection Question Sheet, 4/13/06). This same person added on the sheet, "I wished we had more time. I feel interrupted in mid-process. Work too important." This person referred to the time between meetings.

Another sample was Rose's comment: "Limited time may lead to limited analysis. I am worried about that" (Reflection Question Sheet, 4/13/06). As for Julia, she said, "It is difficult having it only once a month. I forget virtually everything I did in the previous month and have to spend 10 minutes each time reviewing what I did. …slow progress" (Reflection Questions Sheet, 4/13/09). These were some of the frustrations shared among the members regarding the limited time to do the kind of work required to investigate the issue of AG.

Again, a struggle related to the structure of the group that influenced some of the decisions was related to the lack of time. When the group began to delve into the issue of AG, members recognized that meeting once a month, and for ninety-minutes, was not enough. They understood the intensity of engaging in qualitative research and the complexity of creating case studies during the stipulated time. Members wanted to accomplish long- and short-term goals, for which time became a limiting and influential factor in decision-making processes. Perhaps the time factor was the reason why not all the members contributed to group's discussions equally.

> Peter: I think with what we do once a month probably isn't enough. So I mean if you say we're two times a month and I want to say that everybody gets a say in it, but there is the limitation…you can say what you want to say but you can't really get into it. I think is more time constraints problem than it is organization. I think we get it lot done in the time we have. We do what we need to do, and let's move on to the next thing" (Interview 5/3/04).

Peter even suggested a different schedule for meeting: two times every other month. It was an idea that I supported by giving a reason for extending the meeting schedule "to get a little deeper, and process for a little longer." I even shared my own frustrations with the time. I told him that I was extremely aware of giving people opportunity to talk and say what they have to say: "I don't want to take all the time, I don't know about you, but I feel so self-

conscious about the time, you don't want to take over and yet be able to say what you want to say" (Wilma, Interview, 1/26/09).

Decision Making

In this section I present relevant decisions made that influenced the work and direction of the group. In general, the process in which members got involved in decision-making provided opportunities for critical moments of transformation and healthy tensions. Data analysis illustrated some of these tensions around particular decisions made to move forward the collaborative work. One of the most significant decisions related to the type of data the group set forth to collect: the use of case studies to find out why some students' fail and others succeed. Another decision that contributed to the subtle tension related to the way the group of students was selected and the final selection of the students for the interviews. In this case, systems of power behind many of these decisions could be recognized and ascribed to certain members. Rose commented extensively on the systems of power at play during the interview in 2007, and again during triangulation.

Rose's understanding and definition of a "system of power" resided in the way decisions were made and the consequences for these decisions. She talked at length about this notion of "system of power," mostly at the individual level, when she talked about decisions made in the group: "who chose; somebody chose the interviewer, who chose them; interviewers bring a bag, what is that bag; a system of power when you are analyzing data; quantitative data is messy, numbers lie all over the place-who wrote the test; who evaluates the test; they brought Sonia Nieto to speak [who brought Sonia Nieto?]; who returned the form [consents for the interview]; Who are the kids who aren't working at pizza places till three in the morning every night who had time to volunteer [to do the interviews]?" These

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were among the systems of power at play in all types of interactions and decision-making, which Rose referred to in 2007.

Among the systems of power operating in the monthly meetings were decisions made by the collective group, which was always influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic forces. It is important to highlight that most decisions were accomplished through democratic practices. It seemed that the group reached consensus before making important decisions. Nonetheless, some systems of power at play may have justified individual agendas. It was in the name of a common good for using time effectively and productively, and for attempting a final goal or outcome. Regardless of which system of power dominated at a particular time, the outcome was acceptable. For the most part, this is what it seemed, because members went along with decisions made.

In general, decision-making approaches in inquiry groups intend to satisfy the group as well as the members seeking to fulfill their goals. The work of Gramsci, Foucault, and Miller, among other scholars, foreground understandings of power relations and the systems of power that play out in interactions, such as this MSIG: *power with; power over, power-from-within,* that are at play between individuals and the large scope of society (in Kreisberg, 1992, pp 62-89).

One example of a system of power in action was when Rose took it upon herself to accept an incredible responsibility around case studies. When I asked Rose about why she took so much work, invested so many additional hours, and volunteered when she was no longer working in the school, this is what she said: "I wanted this to happen . . . and nobody wanted to do it . . . everybody said we can only do work for at least two hours once a month on a Thursday (MSIG meeting time). I was like okay. I knew I was

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going to leave here [pointing at the year on a timeline she created] so I felt a sense of

urgency here, of getting it done" (Interview, 10/28/07).

Rose's sense of urgency had two basic consequences on the group's work. The

first one was extremely advantageous. She made possible all the work around the

completion of the interviews before she left. The second was not that advantageous,

because the Cambodian students were left out of the study. She expressed her frustration

about this decision, because people like me were displeased with this. Actually, I was

absent on that day. This is what Rose said about "the Cambodian question":

> Rose: {the Cambodian question]…which is a really an important question
> about why it ended up not being included in the case studies. We had a
> whole meeting practically about it, and then people who were absent were,
> like, mad we didn't have it. And I was, like, you know there is only so
> much you can do in a damn two hours by the time everyone gets their
> bagels! You know? (Interview, 10/28/07)

It is important to mention, however, that consent forms from the Cambodian families

were not returned on time. Even when verbal permission from the parents was

communicated to a particular school staff member, it was stated that "We legally had to

have written consent, and we just said forget it."

Rose used *we* to refer to decisions made about the situation with the Cambodia

students. The first "we" implied a collective knowledge on the legal aspect of the

research. In this case, the use of we located knowledge at the group or individual level.

The Cambodian parents did not possess the knowledge that "We legally had to have

written consent." While these parents eagerly gave their verbal agreement, it was not

acceptable in the world of research and protocols. Ironically, this is the same world that

claims democratic and liberating practices for empowering the oppressed.

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The second "we" in the quote linked to the collective decision of "forget it." This "forget it" referred to a collective decision that caused the members to compromise their desire to interview Cambodian students. Even Rose's personal and professional desire to interview Cambodian students had to be compromised. This was one of the lessons learned about not being present when this decision was made This is a price one pays when absent from the meeting.

The "Cambodian question" (Rose, Interview 2007) was an example of some of the struggles the group encountered while making decisions. Who would the students be in the study? What categories would be used for identifying students (e.g., race)? One member expressed being "uncomfortable with choosing certain students over others." Another said, "I don't like when we decide where students belong." Yet another said, "There is always a problem with grouping and categorizing" (Field notes, 9/08/05). These types of hesitations for constructing categories were at the center of the group's work for over several meetings. They thus created tensions among the members and delayed the process for choosing the students. Members' tensions shed light on the inequalities that occur when people are put into categories.

For this reason, a subgroup was created to look at issues of representation more critically. In this particular situation, the distribution of labor and collective decision-making corresponded to democratic principles. These principles were embraced and expected by the members of the inquiry group. When democratic practices were used for decision-making, tensions were more likely to be negotiated. Perhaps, rhetoric of justification sustained such decisions amicably. And, ultimately, short-term goals were achieved.

Accomplishments

There were different levels of accomplishments to report on the work of the MSIG; from the individual and personal, to the collective and collaborative. But for the purpose of this dissertation, I synthesize the group's collective accomplishments primarily through field notes, recollection of agendas, and final reports presented to the school Leadership Team. This work is reported in the form of a list for an easy recount of the group's work. In addition, testimonial accounts from meeting practices as being positive and supportive activities are part of the mosaic of accomplishments.

To emphasize, the accomplishment section in this chapter provides the researcher with an opportunity to unveil and recognize this group's resilience in its commitment to develop a school-wide action plan. By recounting the last five years of this MSIG, based on its accomplishments, I intend to honor, celebrate, and value the group's work. I can attest to the diligent, intense, and focused work this group has accomplished with the intention of affecting the achievement gap at the Grassroots Middle School.

I start with words of appreciation, recognition, and encouragement from three members during the interviews. As Julia said, "They are amazing in the work that they have done…it's a lot of outside work. I commend them in doing that because it's extra, extra, one more thing" (2004). She praised the co-leaders for their leadership at the end of their first year. Peter also recognized the co-leaders' work when he said, "It's organized so when we get in, there's an agenda, and we know where we wanna [want to] go, the class gets split up. I have no problem with it. Actually, those days I look forward to go … is a welcome change" (1/26/04). He liked the meetings because they gave him a chance to interact with other teachers and staff in the building. In addition, the monthly

meetings gave Peter an opportunity to escape from the isolation of the gym and the

routine schedule, and engage in relevant conversations (Interview 5/3/04).

Rose acknowledged that, in spite of the limited time, the group accomplished a

lot. She said, "So in a way it's miraculous that so much did get accomplished." She also

shared her ideas about the monthly meetings and the inquiry group set up in general: "As

a leader, you walk away and I know as a participant you walk away feeling like that was

a waste of time, or I didn't get enough done, and you feel this urgency to try to and it is a

gift to get the time. I think. I really like, ultimately, the overall structure. It is very good

to have, once a month, a time for teachers to just think about a research issue. I think it is

very smart" (Interview, 10/28/07). I conclude this section of recognition with another

member's comment: "You made this meeting very relaxed, focused, and meaningful.

Thank you" (Feedback Sheet, 2004).

The following list highlights most significant thoughts and accomplishments for

the last five years. Although this is not a comprehensive list, it reveals the critical work

the group has accomplished:

Year 1: 2003-2004

(a) up norms
(b) Strong desire to get specific data from the middle school kids
(c) Expressed concern around the difficulty in separating race and class
(d) sorted and examining data
(e) Avoided getting trapped in collecting and analyzing data without getting to an action plan
(f) Examined a variety of quantitative and qualitative data
(g) Problematized quantitative data
(h) Brainstormed possible hypotheses
(i) Interested in attempting case studies
(k) Read many articles and watched a video: Confronting racism- we can make a difference together
(l) Sonia Nieto spoke about case study research

(m) Rose presented information about modern and postmodern constructs in research methods
(n) Created of 3 subgroups: 1) Possible case study questions, 2) Possible students for case studies, and 3) Possible funding for case studies
(o) Wrote feedback sheets
(p) Write and present report to the Leadership Team: request approval for conducting case study research
(q) Write Report to the superintendent's office
(r) Visitors from other schools

Year 2: 2004-2005

(a) Reviewed norms
(b) Reviewed report submitted to superintendent's office
(c) Two subgroups: 1) Work on questions for interviews, 2) criteria for selecting students for the interviews
(d) Reviewed and edit final draft of questions for the interviews
(e) Reviewed speculative statements [hypotheses] about reasons that could be contributing to the AG at the school
(f) Collective decision on the questions for the interviews- categories
(g) Preliminary list of students for case studies
(h) Established a timeline for short term goals this year and long term for next year- To do list
(i) Wrote and present report to Leadership Team
(j) Visitors from other schools

Year 3: 2005-2006
(a) Finalized interview questions
(b) Wrote and edit consent forms for the parents
(c) Made phone calls to parents regarding the research study
(d) Chose students for case studies.
(e) Collected data- in-depth interviews
(f) Rose coordinated all details about interviews
(g) College students conducted interviews
(h) Rose facilitated workshop on transcribing data to transcribers
(i) Rose facilitated workshop on analysis of data
(j) Analyzed with a lens on analytical themes
(k) Created a preliminary list, "What we have learned/what we hear the kids saying"
(l) Looked at First Day of School questionnaire
(m)Wrote and report to the Leadership Team

Year 4: 2006-2007
(a) Create template for case study write up
(b) Read transcribed interviews- work in partners
(c) Analyze transcribed interviews

(d) Write and report to the Leadership Team

Year 5: 2007-2008
     (a) Read and type case studies under three categories- partners
     (b) Use an outline to write case studies
     (c) Collectively identified 3-5 most important things heard from the kids
     (d) Established a chart with what the group heard the kids say
     (e) Brainstormed ideas to response to what kids are saying
     (f) Wrote questions the MSIG still has
     (g) Wrote and presented report to Team Leadership Team

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, LIMITATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

> "Be optimistic… I guess I am just an optimist. I guess all teachers are. I just think the best of the kids, no matter who has come into my room and what kinds of things they have to deal with. I always expect a lot out of them. I really work hard to support them in doing that, and I really appreciate all the different things that they bring into a classroom because that is a wonderful thing that I can enjoy" (Julia Wyatt, Interview 2008).

The primary goal of this dissertation study has been to explore the possibilities of an inquiry group of teachers and school staff working collaboratively as an institutional practice. To accomplish this goal, I focused my attention in the way teachers and school staff collaboratively or individually represented multiple and contested discourses of achievement gap (AG). In particular, the study explores the possibility of inquiry groups through the unpacking of two main foci: members' representations of AG, and the particular assumptions about inquiry group. Those assumptions are: 1) the group can resolve the issue at task; 2) members embody the role of researchers; and 3) participation in the group can provide opportunities for transforming discourses. This qualitative study uses a longitudinal ethnographic research approach to investigate the way monthly meetings provided critical moments for reproduction, change, and transformation of discourses of AG. I use the concept of critical moments as an instance in which discourses shift, or intertextual connections are realized, in term of space and time. In this way, time and space are conceived as momentary and measurable factors in which an event occurred.

Three main research questions guided my data analysis of the four years of data collection. How do members or the work of the MSIG group represent discourses of AG in transformative or reproductive ways, according to society at large? In what ways have the representations of the issue of AG, whether individually or collectively, changed over time? And how has the MSIG provided opportunities and support for transformation (individual and/or collective) and/or reproduction of representations of AG?

To answer research questions, I examined word choice and lexical patterns used by members in the MSIG during the monthly meeting and at interviews. In addition, I examined intertextual connections made by the members. Dividing the text into small message units facilitated an interpretive framework for viewing language as "a strategic, meaning-making resource," and for understanding language functions in multiple contexts (Halliday, 1985, p.3). For this reason, the use of CDA provided me with a tool and methodology to explore language as a function of social practices that allowed me to identify member's representations of AG. The language used by members of the MSIG expanded our understanding of the function and structures of inquiry groups as potential practice for change, reproduction, and transformation.

I used findings from the literature as a resource to establish theoretical constructs and to make intertextual connections between discourses at the micro level (e.g., interviews with members), the meso level (e.g., MSIG), and the macro level of the wider society (e.g., 'black and white issue').

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section is the *Summary of Findings* that synthesizes data analysis presented in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. Findings from data analysis and the interpretations of these findings provide an understanding of

the possibilities and challenges of inquiry groups as an institutional strategy for change and transformation. This section ends with a brief discussion of my dual role: member of the MSIG and participant observer. The second section addresses the *Limitations* of the study in light of future research studies. The Limitations section also intends to establish the difference between what the dissertation study addressed and did not address, and it also poses new questions for future exploration.

The third and last section is the *Implications*. In this section, I draw from the findings presented in the first section of this chapter, lessons learned from the study, and some of the limitations already discussed in the previous sections. The implications present some salient recommendations drawn from the study to engage teachers, principals, and administrators in dialogue and work for transformation. In addition, the implication section intends to illuminate the work of inquiry groups by suggesting a different understanding to the problem-solution approach that is commonly based on a deficit notion, which narrows inquiry work because it focuses on fixing an identified problem. Such an approach simply equates: Problem (what) + Reasons (why)= Solution (how). This linear approach could limit the possibilities for transformation. However, the work of inquiry groups, particularly in schools, is mostly structured and supported by a literature that considers collaborative work as "participatory school-based research, like other forms of action research, that can actually make changes and fix things, as well as document and evaluate. It brings about concrete results, in addition to building a democratic community" (Barnes, 2001, p.40).

Furthermore, the dissertation study reflects on four years of MSIG's work that explores the implications for reframing their work as a learning experience, that could

contribute to the fund of knowledge of teachers and school staff. Implications in this section also suggest the need for reframing discourses of blame when referring to issues of achievement gap. In addition, the study brings forward a critical stance for focusing and refocusing one's attention without subtracting practices in the process of approaching an issue. Ultimately, reframing the MSIG work as a series of accomplishments that did not exactly generate an action plan for closing the achievement gap makes the case for this dissertation study. Perhaps, reframing the blame to focusing and re-focusing individual and collective attention allows for stepping in and stepping out of an issue. It also allows individuals and the group to not only recognize critical moments, but also to move these critical moments into deeper levels of transformation.

Summary of Findings

Interpretation of Representations

Data analysis showed the way members' understandings of the issue of AG which, surfaced in the monthly meetings, during discussions or feedback/reflections, and during the interviews, changed and reproduced. These understandings related to the general knowledge of AG in the larger context of society, as supported by the literature presented in Chapter 2. Representations, in this case, referred to the variety of ways members talked, negotiated, and identified their understandings about the AG, the students in the AG, and some of the causes for the gap. Representations were achieved collectively through various texts: Ds and Fs list, Disciplinary Referral lists, MCAS results, and the First Day of School Questionnaire, among other data reports. Sources showed that achievement is shaped by discourses operating in society based on academic

disparity among students when "minorities," or students of color, are compared with their White counterparts. However, discourses of members in the MSIG changed notably when they decided to interview a selected group of middle school students. The goal of 120 questions was to find out what kids had to say about their school, teachers, parents, and community. The interviews not only allowed students' voices to come across, but also the co-construction of their social identities to be framed by discourses of academic and social achievement (Bloome et al., 2005; Fairclough, 2003; Freire and Shor, 1987, Kreisberg, 1992; Shor, 1987b).

Findings from data analysis in Chapter 5 indicated that members' representations moved into the spectrum of framing academic achievement and school success. Members in the MSIG engaged in defining their understanding about students achieving or not, according to school and society's standards of achievement - 'MCAS scores, graduation rate, college acceptance rate, overrepresentation of disciplinary referrals, under-representations in honor classes, and over-representation in special education, among other measurements (Ferguson, 1998, 2002; Jencks, C. and M. Phillips, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Noguera and Wing,, 2006; Nieto, 2004; National Center for Education Statistics, 1999; Portes, 2005).

For the most part, members' discourses about AG became a racial and cultural issue, as narrowly defined by: "students of color"; "fewer people like you in the school"; "African American and Latino kids over-represented"; "students where there's linguistic issues in addition to culture issues." Members also recognized influential factors affecting the academic success under the rhetoric of blame, or the tendency to blame students, parents and family situations, school culture, and society in general. Some

members reproduced students' academic failure by blaming individuals such as parents: "Some parents do not care." Many, however, problematized the issue by questioning the use of standardized tools, such as MCAS scores and report cards, for being "misleading and limiting."

Different viewpoints brought by members provided a shift on points of view. These shifts were identified in the study as *critical moments*. That is, critical moments provided changes of discourses. For example, the group jointly constructed academic success beyond test results and other quantifiable forms, which resulted in new actions for collecting data. In midyear of 2003-2004, the group decided to do qualitative research through interviews. By the end of the first year, the MSIG made the commitment of doing case studies, and Rose Morely decided to coordinate the whole project.

Throughout the four years of the dissertation study, individual and collective representations of AG contributed to the group's discourses. At the same time, the group's discourses contributed to individual and collective representations that reproduced and changed at different moments. Representations, whether collective or individual, were realized through (D)iscourses as members shared beliefs, opinions, feelings, and personal classroom practices, among other experiences (Gee, 1999). As a result, members relied on discourses available to them, which facilitated intertextual connections almost inevitably. Data analysis illustrated the way individual or collective discourses paralleled the wider society on the issue of AG - mostly under a rhetoric of blame. In general, when people interacted in the monthly meetings through a variety of activities, discourses represented in society permeated the monthly sessions (Gee, 1999).

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Sociocultural theories illuminate this type of discourse permeability that transcends the context in which they are re-produced. Fairclough (2003), Gee (1999), Bloome et al. (2005) explain the way social identities and relations are represented in and by the individual, informed and influenced by contexts outside individuals.

In the time and space of the monthly meetings, as well as during the interviews, members interconnected their personal and classroom experiences into the text of AG: Discourses, in this case, situated members at the macro level, within political, historical and economic contexts, as well as the micro level of the classroom. According to Fairclough (2003), people integrate other discourses and text into an immediate interaction or discussion: "draw upon, incorporate, recontextualize and dialogue with other texts" (p.17). In this way, the MSIG provided opportunities for challenging not only the issue being discussed, but also the methodology employed in the process of understanding and investigating the AG. For example, members recognized the problem with labels when trying to identify students in the achievement gap.

Another example of members challenging the issue related to the inquiry process itself, that according to some of the members it was constraining and limiting. This became more visible when members began reading the students' transcribed interviews. During one of the meetings, a speech and language teacher wanted to share with the rest of the school community what the kids were saying. However, Rose Morley reminded us about the need to follow the process of inquiry in order to protect the students and the teachers in the interviews. These are legitimate factors to consider in qualitative research. Nonetheless, research findings illustrated the need for having a mechanism in place that could have helped members of the MSIG not only to build on their knowledge

and expertise, but also help them identify and recognize their intertextual connections with discourses outside of the group. The absence of such a mechanism is considered one of the reasons why critical moments for possible transformation eluded the members.

Critical Moments- Possibilities of Inquiry Groups

The findings from the first year of the study (Y1), 2003-2004, showed discourses of achievement gap as either transforming or reproducing, more specifically as a binary construct. In a way, findings suggested a binary linear paradigm of discourses as either one way or another, e.g., transformation or reproduction. Such findings were re-examined in the subsequent years of my study. When a microethnographic approach was used in 2005-2006 to analyze an excerpt of a transcribed interview, a painful realization of my own reproductions was unveiled. With the use of CDA and SFL in conjunction with critical (S)elf-reflection, Paulo Freire's concept of *praxis*, a shift of findings took place. My own reproductions of discourses of diversity, in that case, urged me to explore data at a deeper level. As the study progressed, the scope of my research and data analysis seemed to move down through a funnel, narrowing in some ways, and widening in others.

The funnel figure illustrates recursive data analysis, as well as the focus of the research.

Level 1: Broad Data Analysis

Level 2: Coding

Level 3: Microanalysis: Intertextuality
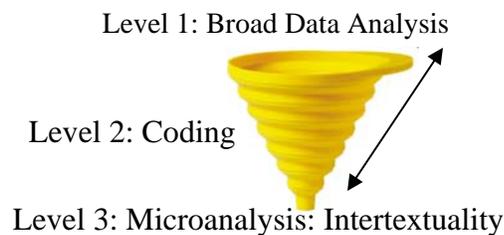
Figure 10: Cycle of Analysis

The funnel metaphor (Figure 10) is a visual representation to indicate the three levels in which data analysis moved from the Broad data Analysis to the micro level of microanalysis (Erickson, 1985), in addition to the way the research focused change over the years.

Narrowing the scope of my research, in a sense, allowed me to scrutinize the four years of data collection at deeper levels. I used my new understandings to embark on the quest of identifying and unpacking critical moments within the context of the MSIG. This was achieved during the last year of my study, 2007-2008. It is worth noting that, even with established boundaries, this process was never linear or a "clean cut." It was complex: It took several twists and turns.

The shifting of discourses illustrated in data analysis was relevant in the study, whether it happened collectively or individually. To describe the interplay and constant shift of discourses in this dissertation, I use the infinite symbol (see Figure 2). Using the infinite symbol allowed me to mediate the understanding of discourses as dynamic. There was evidence presented in Chapter 5, as well as Chapter 6, of that constant shift. Possibly, that was one of the reasons why coding data was extremely challenging in trying to identify the interplay of discourses. It was also evident that language patterns could have been perceived in multiple ways. Ultimately, as a researcher, I felt compelled to make certain decisions for the purpose of this study. For example, when I identified certain language patterns as a system of symbols to construct a particular meaning (semiotic), the same language pattern symbolized more than one thing. This is when decisions were made and supported by theoretical principles. This process required a constant focusing and re-focusing of the lens that CDA allowed me to use (Gee1999).

A critical moment of shifting discourses, in terms of reproduction, was illustrated when the group decided to identify students for case studies. The group moved from including a wide range of factors, such as gender, economic status, race, academic achievement status, and racial categories, to a narrower view of "achieving and not achieving" (based on report cards and MCAS scores), but still based on racial groups. Once again, race was an indicative factor in determining students for case studies. The group reproduced racial and social identity categories influenced by the wider society: African American/Black, Latino, and Multiracial.

Although a subgroup of members was created to choose students for the case studies, categorizing students in the smaller group was contested and problematized. However, this critical moment was not realized as a possible action plan to communicate to the school community the problem with labels. Furthermore, tense moments about defining the students in the AG and the selection of students for the case studies were negotiated, and finally resolved, once again on the racial line. In other words, the group chosen for case studies included African American, Latino, and some Multiracial students, regardless of other factors (e.g., learning abilities). In fact, the group technicality eliminated the Cambodian students, who were originally discussed as a group that was "falling through the crack." This refers to a particular qualitative research protocol that required participants to sign consent forms. And although parents of Cambodian students gave verbal consents, they did not turn in consent forms on time.

Eliminating the Cambodian students furthered the discussion about the problems with labels. Members in the MSIG contested students' categories, which parallels the challenges raised by sociologist and other scholars when addressing issues of race. That

is, labeling people may be an exclusionary practice, similar to oppression, division, and marginalization, that not only persists in the educational arena, but also in the general scope of society (Ogbu, 1994). Instances in which labeling functions as a marginalizing tool in society can be found on a report (policy) from the National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform* (1983):

> Our nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovations is being taken over by competitors throughout the world . . . [The] educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and the people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur- others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments (pp.12, 16).

In this document, the blame of a *nation at risk* lies on *competitors throughout the world.* This notion could imply that competitors, meaning others, perhaps foreigners, are responsible for the condition of the *nation at risk*. And maybe the *rising tide of mediocrity* involves the people "at risk" *that threatens our very future*. It is possible to transfer this economic crisis ideology, created by a market place of *competitors* and *threats,* into the academic context of the schools. Very often, ideologies penetrate social and institutional contexts. For example, when labels such as "students at risk" (similar to "nation at risk") transcend various levels of the academic field, whether local (e.g., schools, districts, states) or national, it always points to students as being responsible for the *mediocrity* of the country's education (NCEE, 1983). In this way, African American and Latino students' low achievement and tests scores would be to blame for academic mediocrity. Extending that attitude into the MSIG was evident when the issue of achievement gap followed rhetoric of blame.

Although members' rhetoric of blame shifted, they still chose African American, Latino, and multiracial (narrowly defined) students for the interviews on AG. It is imperative to mention, however, that high-achieving African American and Latino students were also interviewed for the case studies.

Samplings of discourses shifting, reproducing, and transforming were evident in the data analysis, which highlights the possibilities for inquiry groups in schools. In other words, the way that findings showed how discourses available to the members reproduced and changed brings about the hope that inquiry groups can be institutional tools for transformations. Nonetheless, reproducing and transforming discourses establishes a paradox described by Leonardo (2003) as a "material reality external to Inquiry sessions, which constrains and liberates its possibilities as reform" (p.76). In similar ways, Freire (1995) reminds people that "language-thought-world, is a dialectical, processual, and contradictory relationship' (p.68). Presumably, because of these dynamics people are always mediating relationships, and knowledge through discourses, for which discrepancies among and within interlocutors are not surprising. As a result ideas in general are forged, sedimented, and transformed in and through (D)iscourses (Gee, 1999). That is, participating in collaborative practices of the inquiry group's monthly meetings provided opportunities for discourses to change to the level of transformation, while it also reproduced.

I discussed in Chapter 5, as well as at the beginning of this chapter, how representations of AG, whether collective or individual, changed or shifted from being perceived quantitatively (scores) to qualitatively (students' stories). For example, the Disciplinary Report used by the MSIG to determine the reasons for the high number of

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referrals was challenged and analyzed from the student's contexts: "different treatment students get by different people [in the school]" (Meeting 1/13/03). This was the view of a particular group when constructing hypotheses to explain where and why there was a disciplinary disparity among students. In fact, the reporter from that group, Lucille, highlighted an assumption about the disciplinary disparity by commenting, ". . . that all kids act out at the same rate the response is different for the students of color" (Meeting 11/13/03). In other words, the explanation for the overrepresentation phenomenon regarding students' behavior has been treated differently by different staff in the school, which connects to some of the literature on AG: "teacher/student students' contradictions," as students resisting to comply (Freire, 1970, p.59; Kreisberg 1992,). In this way, members made intertextual and discursive connections during interactions, whether at meetings or during the interviews. This is an example of how discourses of AG at the macro level of society permeated the meso context of the MSIG.

The same topic regarding discipline issues connected to the AG also relates to members' discussion about students acting out or misbehaving as influential factors for interrupting and interfering with their academic and social processes. Therefore, negative consequences seemed inevitable - disciplinary referrals. Referrals to QLC (Quiet Learning Center) are an institutionalized practice of the Grassroots Middle School to handle, primarily, students that misbehave in the school building. If one is to understand the connections between misbehaving students (label) and those in the achievement gap, then it is imperative to examine the factors that may be contributing to students' behavior and ultimately generate disciplinary actions. These factors contribute to students' perception of self in a negative way, at least in the school context. That is, if students are

to be blamed for their bad behaviors, then schools cannot be left out of the equation.

W.E. DuBois's (1969) "double consciousness" how this negative sense of self is

internalized: "this sense of always looking at one's self through the lens of others, of

measuring ones' soul by the tape of a world that looks on with amused contempt and

pity" (p.49).

The type of behavior students display in the school could often times transcend

the school context and carry over into the community. It is possible to say that the MSIG

represented this notion in the questions (for the interviews) formulated under the

categories of *Self, Family/Home,* and *Community.* For this reason, the methodology of

case studies requires questions that include all the aspects of a student's life, if one tries

to understand the individual in a particular context (Nieto, 2004).

Nonetheless, students represented on the Disciplinary List force a construct of self

as a problem kid. Therefore, the social position of self as a "problematic or troubled

kid" could become enacted in the student's daily life. Internalizing this notion of self as a

way of being embodies certain gestures, behaviors, and states of mind - "Foucault's

conception of discourse is indispensable for an understanding of the role of power in the

production of knowledge …self-knowledge" (McHoul and Grace, 1993, p.57). In this

case, the perception of self becomes one's truth. That is, if students are constantly

blamed for their bad behaviors due to low self-perception, then school and society cannot

be left out of the discussion. Misbehaving in school does not happen in a vacuum. That

is exactly what one of the teachers in the MSIG acknowledged by commenting on some

of the frustrations students might experience inside and outside of school context

(Meeting 11/13/03).

Members in the group explored the intersect between students' behavioral issues and academic disparities. They highlighted the school and students' cultural mismatch, lack of diversity in the school in terms of teachers' and students' population, and parents' influences, among other factors. Rhetoric of blame continued to frame the conversation that was set in motion during the first year of the group, because the group was narrowly focused on solving the problem through the lens of race. In a way, finding the causes of the AG in order to develop an action plan that could fix the problem may have caused the five years or so without the expected outcome. Unintentionally, the group did not recognize other actions and accomplishments that occurred in the course of their five years of collaborative work. Perhaps, the inquiry protocol itself may have contributed to the groups' inability to identify their ongoing accomplishments. In addition, the group did not communicate to the faculty at large their findings until the analytical process was completed. Even though, Lucille urged the group to share this information, Rose Morley reminded the group to finish the analysis process and write case studies, before sharing the findings with the staff.

Lucille's suggestion is an example of an opportunity for critical reflection that was unrecognized by the group. Monthly meetings offered members time to reflect which occurred sporadically. Some of the reflections were structured and directed, while others were more informal feedback. For example, members read articles, constructed hypotheses, and negotiated many decisions, and during these activities they engaged in critical conversations that forced deeper understandings of the issue of AG. However, some of the conversations and decisions were not insulated from outside forces influencing them, which were not unpacked or challenged by the members. Data analysis

allowed the visibility of some of these forces operating and influencing individual and collective discourses. In addition, members did intertextual connections with discourses in the wider society. Forces influencing discourses are represented and discussed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5. For example, Figure 7 in Chapter 3 represents the dialogic relations of discourses to conceptualize the forces influencing the MSIG, which are later discussed in more details in Chapter 5: *Inquiry Groups as an Institutional Practice for Transformation*.

Reflections during discussions at the monthly meetings, as well as the focused feedback sheets and reflection forms, perhaps unintentionally facilitated the process of negotiating individual and collective representations of AG. Data analysis indicated that, in spite of these reflective opportunities available to the members, the promise for transformation was not sustainable beyond the critical moments in which they occurred. Perhaps the group would have produced better results by reframing the conversation of finding a solution (e.g., action plan) to a problem (e.g., fixing the AG) and focusing more on exploring questions, relying upon teachers' knowledge (not limited to the classroom) and personal experiences (e.g., African American teachers and staff in the MSIG), and engaging administrators in a dialogue with the data teachers have more control of.

I still wonder what would have happened if self reflection praxis had been part of the inquiry process. It could have facilitated members to recognize and unpack critical moments in order to move discourses beyond change and interrupt reproductions for collective and individual transformations, which is inherent in teacher action research. Further discussion is found in the *Implication* section of this chapter.

In the next section, I summarize three main assumptions as recurrent patterns identified in the literature about inquiry groups that were indirectly addressed by the members of the MSIG, primarily during the interviews.

Unpacking Assumptions

In Chapter 2 and Chapter 6, as well as at the beginning of this chapter, I shared three main assumptions the dissertation study explored, based on recurrent themes from the literature review on IGs. These assumptions foreground the role of inquiry groups in the school context as being democratic practices for decision-making and institutional change. With this notion, data analysis unpacked the assumptions that: 1) the group can resolve the issue at task; 2) members embody the role of researchers; and 3) participation in the group can provide opportunities for transforming discourses.

In this section, I summarize the findings from data analysis that also helped to demystify some of the assumptions about inquiry groups that are based on theoretical groundings for being able to "fix" a problem: "Participatory school-based research, like other forms of action research, that can actually make changes and fix things, as well as document and evaluate. It brings about concrete results" (Barnes, 2001, p.40).

This is not to say that the MSIG failed to accomplish the action plan and resolve the issue, or that members did not display researchers' skills, or that inquiry groups hinder transformation, or that they amount to an inadequate practice for school change. On the contrary, this MSIG overcame challenges, struggles, and did accomplish a variety of tasks. In addition, the monthly meetings provided numerous possibilities for

transformation. Data analysis in Chapter 6 showed the way these particular assumptions were palpable and elusive at the same time.

For example, there is a tacit understanding in the Grassroots Middle School that inquiry groups can develop action plans and improve school conditions for students. In general, inquiry groups in the school context are considered not only a democratic practice for decision-making, but also a mechanism to engage its members in inquiry methodology. Their ultimate goal is to solve particular issues that concern the school community (Jackson and Davis, 2000). In similar ways, this particular MSIG shared these understandings for school change. However, on the one hand, the group was not able to accomplish the expected outcome of developing a school-wide action plan. On the other hand, data analysis showed a series of factors that could have influenced the group's inability to reach this goal. These factors allow us to understand the group's work through a different lens. Some of the challenges and struggles faced by the group are discussed in Chapter 6: *Challenges and Struggles*.

Among salient factors identified in data analysis that could have influenced the group's outcome are: inconsistent membership, rotations of leaders, inconsistent attendance to the meetings, limited time for the group to accomplish their goal, and decision-making. Another factor to be considered is the inquiry process itself. Determined protocols and structures may have influenced the members in the way they did, or did not, recognize critical moments for transformation. The question isn't whether to have structures or not. Rather, the question is whether we need to be cognizant of certain structures that may limit flexibility, time for reflection, intentions, and commitments, among other possible constraints. Even though the group did not

specifically identify these factors as the causes for its inability to reach the goal, the study does uncover these issues and take them into considerations when framing the inquiry group's work. Specific factors such as time and the lack of resources were negotiated at the meetings and pointed out in the reflection sheets. All other factors were mostly shared during the interviews, when members discussed the group's process and some of the areas of concern.

In a way, findings from data analyses do not support the idea that the inquiry group was able to solve the issue of AG. In fact, compared to other groups in the school, this has been the only group that has worked on one issue for so long, five years, without the expected outcome of an action plan. Probably, this emphasizes not only the complexity of the issue as persistent and pervasive, but also points to the way the group originally perceived the issue as a deficit construct in need of fixing. Furthermore, the group examined this issue from the outside of members' realm, locating and relocating the blame.

In other words, the complexity of the issue of AG is supported by decades of research that shows an academic achievement disparity linked to the school performance of Latino and African American students in the United States (Portes, 2005; National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). In spite of many educational approaches and reforms, a gap continues to persist. One example of an educational initiative that focuses on closing the achievement gap is the Tripod Project (Ferguson, 2002). This project has contributed to the improvement of the academic performance of minority students by narrowing the gap, but not exactly closing it.

The promise that IGs can fix a problem was not demonstrated by this particular MSIG, which could relate to another challenge faced by the group. In particularly, this was a challenge connected to leadership. This notion parallels the second assumption of being a researcher and expert that brings about opportunities for leadership. The expertise ascribed to researchers also contributes to a type of leadership that inquiry groups provide to their members. This was evident in the way one of the members participated in supporting and guiding the collaborative work of the group. When the group decided on using case studies to gather information, Rose Morley was crucial in guiding the group throughout the process. She was regarded as the research expert, maybe because she was connected to higher education institutions. Rose had taught courses at the college level, was completing her dissertation while in the MSIG, and was in the process of co-authoring a book. Furthermore, when she left the school all together, Edward Killings lost "faith in the method [of qualitative research]…and people who have experience aren't there…the quality is lost, we lost Rose Morley" (Interview, 3/10/08).

This skepticism about the group's leadership and research expertise was illustrated in the way another member claimed not to be a researcher. This member, who asked to remain anonymous, suggested the group to consult with Dr. Sonia Nieto as an outside expert. On the one hand, the member claimed not to be a researcher: "I am not a 'researcher,' but I want to be sure that whatever data we collect is valid, meaningful, directed toward why and possible 'solutions' or progress" (Anonymous, Feedback, 12/11/03). On the other hand, this member new about the validity and relevancy of research, even though claiming not to be a researcher. This type of dichotomy was resolved when Rose took on the responsibility of coordinating everything regarding the

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case studies. In general, Elliot Killing and the anonymous member associated research expertise with the university context.

Julia, however, talked about being a researcher mostly based on her scientific mind. It was evident, during her interview, that she was versed in the area of quantitative research. This is what she said: "What I have found very helpful is to look at the process of going about trying to find out. What is going on? 'Cause the science part of me finds the, you know, the whys" (Interview, 1/11/08). Nonetheless, data analysis indicated that members had different perceptions about seeing themselves as researchers. Some doubted possessing researchers' skills. Others did not recognize the group's work as valid research. In addition, the yearly accomplishments and knowledge gained were not considered as action plans. These were merely reports on work done and a list of plans for the following year. But, in actuality, the group did educational and action research without acknowledging it.

The research study poses a series of questions: What would have happened if the group used another lens other than race to look at the AG? What if the group re-conceptualized the notion of an action plan as a final product, instead of recognizing their ongoing insights as possible action plans (e.g., the problem with labeling students, the problem with different students receiving different disciplinary treatment)? Then the groups' insights could have illuminated their collective teaching and working practices. Finally, what if administrators would have engaged in dialogue with the MSIG? Thus possibly resulting in a collective decision to systemically address a variety of factors that impacts students' academic achievement.

The third and last assumption relates to the possibility that inquiry groups can provide opportunities for transformations. Findings indicated that critical moments do attest to this notion. Opportunities for transformation were extensively discussed in the previous section of Representation, as well as in Chapter 6. Moreover, data analysis illustrated the way discourses shifted and changed, reproduced as well as transformed. Some of the reasons explaining the dynamic of discourses during interactions were also discussed in Chapter 6, *Challenges and Struggles*. Reasons alluded to the structure and organization of the meetings, limited time, and silences that may also account for the *Elusive Transformations*.

On the one hand, findings from data analysis did not support individual transformations per se, because the study focused on the group, rather than on individual members. Perhaps, this is the reason why transformation in the study is understood collectively rather than individually. On the other hand, intertextual analysis from the interviews with Rose, Julia, and Edward did illustrate some changes in discourse over time.

Furthermore, findings also illustrated that the group indeed engaged in multiple critical decisions, and critical moments could have set in motion transformations outside of the group. The following are examples of critical moments of possible transformation within the group: the group decided to conduct qualitative research after recognizing the problems with qualitative data; the group identified problems with labels used for categorizing students; the process of creating critical interviewing questions and the analysis of data. Finally, narratives were created for case studies. Each and every decision along the way was indented to produce an action plan. Although the expected

action plan was not achieved, many other accomplishments were fulfilled. Once again, accomplished tasks were taken for granted because the group did not display any direct form of celebration or recognition of knowledge gained. The only activity that could be considered celebratory was the monthly rotation of members bringing breakfast to meetings, which was initiated in 2007-2008, and continued thereafter.

I cannot end this section without discussing my role as member of the MSIG and teacher-researcher, while exploring questions somewhat different from that of the group. There is no doubt that the four years of this longitudinal study were extremely difficult and profoundly intense. First, maintaining the focus and determining boundaries were two of the biggest challenges for various reasons. My research interest focused on the dynamic of the IG, which was influenced by my professional and personal investments in issues of academic inequities, which both collided and converged with the group's charge on the issue of AG. Along with these factors were other forces and factors that pushed and pulled me in my study, which indeed is the conundrum of research. Detailed discussion of this tug of war can be found in Chapter 3. Nevertheless, it is my responsibility to explore what it meant to be a researcher and member of this MSIG.

Second, as a critical teacher-researcher situated within a critical spectrum, I found it extremely challenging conducting research in my own backyard. Wearing multiple hats, as a metaphor for multiple social identities (i.e., Puerto Rican form the island, Spanish speaker, minority, teacher of English Language Learners), became a source of tension for me. These were coupled with the complexity of choosing qualitative and ethnographic research, the type of data analysis, and the overall research path. Reinharz and Davidman (1992) argue that to bring ourselves in the field is to construct and

reconstruct oneself. They claim that intentions and motivations for people to participate and interact in, and with, multiple texts (primarily the MSIG meetings) are always purposeful and objectified. Therefore, to recognize the complexity of what it meant to hold a particular role in a particular context was to understand the dynamics and intersects of social identities in the meetings and during the interviews, as influenced by multiple forces. It is necessary to remember that researchers' intensions and purposes are part of the dilemma with research in general.

Furthermore, Carspecken (1996) reminds researchers that critical research is always subjective and biased, from the moment a topic of investigation is selected, through the interpretation of data, to the final claims: It is a subjective process. Choices are constantly being made; from establishing research questions and selecting and organizing data, to creating themes and categories for systematic analysis. Internal and external forces always influence these and other decisions. In fact, many of these decisions are not exclusively determined by the researcher, but are also dictated by a methodology and theoretical framework adopted and adapted by the researcher. Such methodologies are politically, historically, socially, and economically shaped, created, and informed by researchers and scholars in the field; in this case the field of qualitative and ethnographic research.

Particularly important is to understand that most decisions shaping the study are influenced by the researcher's bias, in this case me. And bias is always intertwined with multiple identities and shaped by multiple contexts. In other words, each one of the selves within a particular context in the study affords the inclusion and exclusion of be[ing], not only for belonging to a particular group or context, but also for being a

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complex Self (Bloome et al., 2005; Gee, 1999). In general, a sense of belonging

constitutes institutional hegemonies necessary for maintaining a social order that

structures and legitimizes practices and processes that may benefit some, but hinder

others. For, including certain possibilities and excluding others always influences

decisions about the research work.

In other words, my many roles afforded me with certain privileges that also

provided me with a sense of belonging in multiple contexts (e.g., MSIG, school, teams,

and university). In a way, enacting these roles and privileges is part of social

interactions, which Foucault (1977a; 1980) explains as ". . . life process, the relation of

power, and the production through power" (p.194). In this case, performing at least two

distinct roles, member (insider) and researcher (outsider), may have ascribed specific

privileges that impacted every step and facet of the study. This type of awareness was

negotiated through critical "Self" reflection processes and recursive analysis. This is the

reason why careful consideration was given throughout the study, as well as in the

writing and completion of this dissertation. It is also the reason why I adopted critical

Self-reflection practices to give thoughtful and critical attention to my own assumptions,

biases, and interpretations. Critical Self-reflection allows for directing and redirecting

one's focus by constantly asking a critical question: How does my dual role, worldview,

experiences, and the discourses I draw from impact the study, the analysis, interpretation

of data, and the writing of the dissertation?

In addition, triangulation as a tool and practice also played an important role not

only for intertextual analysis of the interviews, but also to verify assertions. This is one of

the reasons why I invited three of the members interviewed to interrogate the data

interpretation chart in collaboration with me. Affirmations and clarifications took place during members' check meetings.

Any given social position, such as 'teacher-researcher' and member of the IG, may give the sense of permanence and belonging. This is neither fixed nor static. Nonetheless, it is bound to social, political, and historical contexts (Bloome, 2005; Fairclough, 2003; Landson-Billings, 1994; Leonardo, 2003; Nieto, 2004; Yon, 2000). In summary, any of these identities are contested, constructed, negotiated, and mediated through and within language processes during interactions (Bloome et al., 2005). According to Leonardo (2003), one gets to know the identity of oneself "…through discursive interactions with our social world" (p.62). In a way, another level of self-discovery took place during this research study. What I learned about myself is material for another dissertation.

Limitations

My assumptions about inquiry groups as an institutional practice for transformation were grounded primarily in the experience of participating in inquiry groups for approximately nine years. I came to the MSIG with an understanding that most inquiry groups in the school have generated school-wide initiatives. For example, an extra math class was development for students with low MCAS scores. They called it, "double dipping math." Another inquiry group initiated the practice of providing students with healthy snacks during MCAS time. In fact, the parent organization group has taken over this practice since then.

Beforehand, I understood the complexity of the issue of AG, personally, professionally, and through research work. Gravitating towards this group was natural. Detailed reasons for joining and choosing the MSIG as my research site were discussed in Chapter 4.

When I joined the group, I was extremely curious, excited, and hopeful. I was extremely interested in finding out how this group was going to solve such a pervasive phenomenon: Would this group be able to develop a plan that could actually close the gap? Furthermore, could the developed plan serve as a model for other schools to adopt? Soon I realized that not everyone in the group had the same understanding of the issue, but I hoped that something in us and about us would change, and perhaps bring us to another level. It was clear that not everybody was on the same page, which Rose Morley highlighted in one of the interviews. Later on I understood that not everyone needed to be on the same page. Perhaps, there would be understandings that could be collectively negotiated, developed, explored, and supported, if common purposes and goals were established for reaching common goods.

It was my assumption that, when schoolteachers and staff engage in dialogue about issues of race, racism, and inequalities openly and intentionally, this would force inside exploration. My consciousness was inundated with questions about the group and members from the very moment I joined the group. I remember leaving every meeting with many unanswered questions and no place to negotiate my experiencing at these meetings. Coincidentally, the first year of the group was also my first year of doctoral studies. At that time, I needed to develop an ethnographic study, and this context seemed appropriate to unleash some of the questions trapped in my mind.

The initial study supported my underlying assumption of the transformative effect the inquiry group could have on the members. It was my assumption, if we talked about this issue that is so ingrained in society, and more specifically in schools, then members would start changing their minds, and voila! The transformation would happen. This illusion was shattered after I saw and heard specific things during the meetings, including my own reproduction of 'minority' during an interview.

This is when I decided, during the first year of the study, to interview members and ask questions about participation and non-participation. In addition, questions about the student's in the achievement gap became centered in the dialogues. My focus and questions gradually changed. I tuned into the use of oral and written discourse by the members. I paid closer attention as members began to engage in a variety of activities. As a result, my dissertation grew out of four years of listening, documenting, participating, gathering materials, interviewing, talking, reading, and writing about this group. In a way, the research questions and study specifically developed within the boundaries of this inquiry group.

Data analysis from the four years of this dissertation study showed the way members' representations of AG paralleled major discourses in society. And, although intertextual analysis of the interviews with three particular teachers showed some changes in discourse, the study did not investigate the reasons for these changes. In the same way, the study did not explore if the changes that occurred during the monthly meetings transcended the walls of the inquiry group context. These are some of the limitations of this particular research study.

Findings from data analysis supported the idea that the inquiry group provided possibilities for transformation. In other words, data analysis clearly showed that changes occurred during the critical moments of the micro context of the monthly meetings. But the study did not explore the context outside of the group. For example, the study did not rely on classroom data from teachers in the MSIG to explore changes or transformation beyond the group setting. Furthermore, the study did not explore the work context of other group members who were not classroom teachers; for example, that of a guidance counselor. I pose here some questions that could be explored for future research. In what ways could participation in an inquiry affect teaching or other professional practices in the school? How would representations of AG have been different if parents' voices would have been included in the study?

Nonetheless, findings from data analysis did identify critical moments in which discourses shifted, thus opportunities for transformation were available to the members. Data also showed that, when critical moments occurred and discourses shifted, these were not exactly turned into transformations, nor were these moments recognized by the members. The study, however, did not explore or ask the members if they recognized critical moments, and if they did, then why opportunities for transformation eluded the group? For example, after the principal presented a model for transformation, the group went into their business as usual. Why so? Why did the co-facilitator move ahead with the agenda without making reference to that model? Did members recognize this instance as a critical moment? If they did, why did they, and how did they know? And if they did not, why not? Furthermore, who recognized these moments, and who did not? What effect did it have on the group, as well as on individual members, if these moments

were recognized or not? Other questions that the study did not explore deeper with the members relate to some of the decisions made. Again, these unanswered questions are part of the limitations of the study.

It is important also to keep in mind that the study is specific to a focal group of teachers and school staff in a particular middle school, in a particular town, during a particular time. In addition, the study had a primary focus that may have overlooked other dynamics at play, which could also be considered a limitation for the study.

Another aspect that relates to the limitations involves the teachers chosen for the last stage of the study. The members interviewed for exploring more directly the second research question responded to specific parameters established. These, among other boundaries, are necessary decisions one has to make in any type of research. The small number of teachers that resulted from said decisions may be considered a limitation. According to Seidman (1998), "Interviewing fewer participants may save time earlier in the study, but may add complications and frustration at the point of working with, analyzing an interpreting interview data" (Seidman, 1998, p.48). The unforeseen complication that Seidman (1998) speaks about was alleviated with the vast body of data I collected through the four years of my research study. In addition, the use of triangulation and members check was my method for establishing structures "that allow participants to reconstruct and reflect upon their experience (e.g., participating in the monthly meetings) and make sense of the interview" (Seidman, 1998, p.15-16).

The study focused on representations connected to the issue of AG within the MSIG. This could also be perceived as a narrow focus that may have also contributed to the limitations of the study. However, this kind of limitation is implicit in all qualitative

research: 1) the way the study investigates the established problem; 2) the questions guiding the study; 3) the methodology for exploring the problem, and the framework informing it; 4) members chosen for the study; 5) the parameters for choosing the members; 6) the researcher's bias; and 7) the particular analysis that generates particular interpretations and report.

Consequently, limitations such as the ones mentioned above prevent the researcher from considering other factors in her study. Indeed, these are some of the challenges of research. For this reason, the research study does not make conclusive statements or final claims, but, rather, it shares new understandings for approaching inquiry groups in critical ways. If the goal for inquiry groups is to create institutional changes, then structures may be necessary to support long-lasting changes: Changes that interrupt reproduction and provide opportunity for transformation.

Implications

The study focused on the use of inquiry groups as an institutional practice for transformation. It looked at the way members in this particular MSIG represented discourses of achievement gap and the possibility of changing these representations. This study also examined the way the inquiry practice contributed to reproducing discourses of AG while discourses also changed. Findings identified critical moments throughout the study as instances in which discourses changed and shifted. The study also presented the way members of the inquiry group did not always identify critical moments, in which opportunities for transformation eluded them. In addition, members did not consider the

yearly work as a possible action plan that could have informed administrator's decisions making.

In addition, discourses shifting in this dissertation supported the assumption that inquiry groups provide opportunities for transformation. However, the possibility for transformation did not extend beyond the immediate moment and space of the MSIG. For this reason the study opens the door to the possibility and the risk of inquiry groups for institutional and individual change. The risk of unintended reproductions of discourses presents the need for reframing inquiry groups as institutional practices for transformation. Furthermore, the study urges the need for challenging the literature about inquiry groups as strategies, tools, or mechanisms grounded on the idea that they "can actually make changes and fix things" (Barnes, 2001, p.40). Unintentionally, the notion of fixing things is what framed the work of the group in a limited and narrow way. In addition, the group's work, infused by the use of race as a lens to examine the AG, may have contributed to reproducing discourses of AG as a "Black and White" issue.

Recognizing my own nature of finding ways to change and improve things that are not working, particularly in the classrooms, sheds light on the implications of the study. This study illuminates ways in which long-lasting changes can occur without blame being attached. Instead, changes can occur by focusing one's attention critically at the micro level of the classroom, the meso level of inquiry groups, and the macro level of the school/institutions and the community at large. The study does not argue whether inquiry groups are good or not. Rather, it suggests the need for re-thinking the structures sustaining these groups, and it questions those (e.g., administrators, principals, superintendent, researchers, teachers) who understate the collective work of groups. For

this reason, the study provides implications for teachers and individuals in collaborative groups, as well as administrators and teacher preparation programs at higher education institutions.

In terms of teachers and other individuals committed to attaining particular goals through collaborative work, several suggestions can be drawn from this study. Even though the study did not intend to focus on individual members, but rather on the collective group, the study does indicate that a starting point for transformation could be at the individual level. For example, this school provided the time, space, and the philosophy of democratic principles and practices through the structure for teachers and school staff to work collaboratively in inquiry groups. Then, if the goal of inquiry groups is to create long-lasting and sustainable changes in schools, it is imperative for members to have support (e.g., resources) and encouragement to engage in practices that are transformative (e.g., intentional critical reflections).

If teachers and other staff members in schools are considered experts in teaching and learning, then the idea of ownership plays an important role in determining one's level of commitment in attaining particular goals. In this case, it is imperative to focus and build on what teachers and other school staff know, and to take advantage of established structures already in place. Then, teachers and other school members can work together to establish practices for moving forward the collective work with the understanding that structures and practices may need to provide flexibility and constant (re)assessment of individual and collective commitments and intentions. Teachers and other school staff should consider their desire to open up their practices and focus their

attention on the multiple dynamics that involve the students' world as it is affected by these practices.

In this case, attention could be shifted away from solving the problem to focus on understanding a particular issue through critical questions that could encourage collective and individual reflection. When efforts are made to find a solution to a problem, oftentimes the solution itself could distract from considering multiple factors. That may result in reforms, initiatives, or practices that are not sustainable, which impedes transformation. For this reason, the study emphasizes that teachers and other school staff and administrators should engage collectively and individually in critical reflection practices to provide opportunities for transformation.

However, engaging in this type of reflection practice could include a risk factor that needs to be approached in a safe way. One example is Freire's (1970, 1987, 1995) pedagogy of liberation, hope, and possibilities as *praxis*, which provides a framework for educational and individual transformation. It also addresses specific implications for principals and other school administrators. This refers primarily to those individuals given the authority and power to make top-down decisions in schools, with or without the inclusiveness of their constituencies (e.g., teachers, parents, students). Many claim that institutional practices are in place to include the voices of all constituents through staff and departmental meetings, advisory groups, leadership or outreach opportunities, among other structures. However, established mechanisms do not guarantee that all voices will be taken into consideration when final decisions are made. Even with these practices that presumably provide democratic principles, they do not guarantee that individual voices

will be expressed, particularly when individuals have been silenced (personal experience) or have experienced (colleagues in other schools) retributions for voicing their opinions.

Therefore, administrators and principals should give careful consideration when requesting collaborative work and input, but the outcome or response is not exactly the expected one. For this reason, it is imperative to be clear about requesting teachers and other school staff to engage in inquiry practices and giving them time for collaborative work. For example, members in the MSIG had specific data that administrators and principals did not have. Data provided critical information about the students and other related issues about the AG. The group shared the problems with labels, and the school and its administrators needed to know this information. But, because the group was expected to produce an action plan (narrowly defined), it did not find a way to communicate this important information. In fact, some people believe that the action plan should not come from the teachers in the MSIG alone. This should be part of a dialogue with administrators, using the data teachers analyzed and understood (Willett, 2009 unpublished). To conclude the implications directed to administrators and principals, the following factors could be considered to reframe the conversation about inquiry groups in schools:

1) Administrators could engage in critical Self-reflection practices to assess and reassess their intentions and motivations when giving teachers and other staff members the time to address challenging issues. What do they want to know, and for what purpose?

2) Administrators could access existing data from teachers and staff members by engaging in critical dialogue with them as a vehicle for decision-making.

3) Administrators should make transparent their levels of commitment and engagement when allocating resources.

The study also provides insights for teacher preparation programs at the university level in two ways. First, teacher programs must maintain closer ties with local schools to genuinely connect theories and practices, not only through mere observations of classrooms and other passive activities during the last stages of teacher education programs, but through academic dialogues and reciprocal sharing of resources, knowledge, and mutual interest. In terms of lessons learned from the inquiry and the collective work of the MSIG, university professors and prospective teachers should engage in critical Self-reflection practices that support their transformational processes.

In other words, traditional ways of reflection and inquiry, along with course and syllabus design as well as the teaching practices of professors, may need to be reassessed more systematically. To better prepare prospective teachers not only for the classroom, but also for participating in other school practices, teacher preparation courses could provide extensive opportunities for exploring multiple levels of collaborative work. That work might include critical mechanisms to assess and reassess structures established in collaborative groups to avoid reproducing practices of inequities. In addition, pre-service and in-service teachers should be provided with opportunities to experience multiple ideological contexts in schools and surrounding communities. Border-crossing experiences are extremely powerful practices that provide opportunities for challenging the various lenses to view oneself and world. For example, it is important to challenge traditional views of success and deficit, participation, voice, collaboration, partnership, culture, language, power, and democratic practices. For this reason, teacher preparation

programs should be explicit in teaching ways to identify and unpack both dominant and counter-dominant practices. Furthermore, university professors, in collaboration with their students, should adopt critical practices for challenging their own representations of reproducing discourses and other practices.

Another lesson learned from the study that relates to teacher preparation programs is developing sustainable partnerships with schools. When the MSIG decided to create case studies, members expressed their lack of time to embark on this endeavor. This is when Rose Morley reached out to local colleges in search of their support. It took Rose countless hours to contact local professors interested in facilitating the kind of support the MSIG needed. Once the connection was made, she had to buy the tape recorders and train the college students to conduct the interviews. Experienced transcribers were needed for completing the project. For this reason, developing school-university partnerships is necessary to create scholarly work that could transform education in a supportive and sustainable way. Outside researchers and schoolteachers as researchers could become partners in the quest of improving education at different levels.

In other words, the research study considers the possibility of school-university partnerships as an effective practice for supporting sustainable structures in schools and facilitating teacher-inquiry. However, the study also indicates the relevancy of re-examining the university role in society as the fountain of knowledge. At least, this is what Edward Killing expressed when he talked about losing confidence that the process and reliability of the group's work was no longer valid, when Rose Morley left the group. Because Rose was a co-leader for two years Edward did not feel comfortable leading the group. He talked about his lack of knowledge in qualitative research.

Many members regarded Rose as the research expert - especially since she was connected to the local university. In other words, research expertise, as well as scholarly knowledge, were directly associated with the university, and the teachers' knowledge was not identified by the MSIG as being scholarly.

Welcoming school-university and school-community organization partnerships during the time of national and local economic hardships should be the aim of most school districts. For example, when Grassroots Middle School benefited from outside school partnerships, the school was able to level the playing field, particularly for the students identified in the achievement gap. More specifically, the school had a program called "School-to-Career" that provided opportunities for students to understand the job and trade demands of a capitalist society. In this program, the local university also provided numerous opportunities for middle school students to participate in university-sponsored events. But, once the state eliminated the funding that supported this program, the program was also eliminated from the school. For this reason, it is important to carefully design programs that could continue even after funding is no longer available. But, with careful planning and recursive assessment practices, school-university partnerships is an effective reform that can provide opportunities for realizing long-lasting changes in school.

The study in general encourages teachers, researchers, policy makers, community organizers, students, and lay people to engage in deeper practices of reflection. By that I mean the kind of reflection that allows the exploration of the "Self" from multiple angles and dimensions, collectively and individually. In similar ways, it is necessary to examine institutional structures that promote hegemonic practices of reproductions in order to

interrupt the status quo. I refer to "Self" reflection as a springboard for personal change that in turn will influence institutional structures.

The use of Self with capital "S" in this context emphasizes a type of reflection that brings the Self into the critical thinking process of unpacking a particular issue, as well as including the outside world into the self. Capital "S" in a sense resembles Gee's (1999) concept of Discourse with capital "D" as a way to integrate all meanings through language and the language that constitutes meanings (p.17). Furthermore, unless people engage in deep reflection to unpack their own assumptions and biases, they may not be aware of their participation in instances of reproduction that help sustain the status quo.

In a way, "Self" reflection as *praxis* allows participants in a particular context to acknowledge an issue and their own participation in the realization of that same issue. Reflection thus provides opportunities for transformation. In other words, findings from the study illustrated the need for moving beyond changing people's consciousness in order to establish a personal and collective commitment for change. This is the type of change Freire and Macedo(1987), Rosatto (2005), and Cho in Rosatto et al. (2006) refer to as ways to find possible alternatives for bringing the consciousness into notions of solidarity. In this way, some questions may surface in the human mind within the context of change. What is the deeper meaning of solidarity, and for whom, and for what? Who decides, and how would decisions be made, when solidarity is achieved? Are there any sacrifices to be made to achieve solidarity, for whom, and by whom? For instance, what would the motivations be for individuals in any context to locate themselves within a particular issue? What critical questions should be asked for unpacking representations

of any kind? Moreover, what if locating and re-locating the self triggers uncomfortable feelings or jeopardizes one's condition of privileges? What are the consequences?

The idea of Self-reflection intrinsically resulting in transformation could be challenged, in terms of what the study did not explore. Were there any transformations outside of the MSIG? Perhaps, transformations did transcend the immediate context of the group, and therefore impacted the classroom. Members' worlds outside of the group may have attested to transformations. Without drawing final conclusions, I settle for unpacking discourses that unveil representations of AG, and the assumptions of inquiry groups as an institutional practice for transformation. I leave unanswered questions for future research studies.

Another implication for the study comes from the desire to share my experience as a teacher/researcher and the use of microanalysis (Bloome, et al, 2005) in combination with the tenets of systemic functional linguistic (Halliday, 1985). The combination of these two methodologies and analytical tools allowed me to engage data analysis at deeper levels. In addition, critical reflection practices, along with the methodology chosen for the study, forced me to look at my own reproductions that once eluded me during the third year of the study. In other words, engaging in what I called then "critical self-reflection" forced my study into its fourth year of investigation. This decision was influenced by Gandhi's philosophy that promotes self change. In this sense, the process of change could start with the "Self" as a continuum in reciprocity with *others* (e.g., in the collective work of an inquiry group).

Adopting a *praxis* for exploring oneself beyond the boundaries of the individual can be transformative at multiple levels (Freire, 1995). In a way, this means to consider

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oneself as an individual who is also part of the whole group, influencing others, as well as the whole group being a part of the individual and influencing oneself. This type of practice requires more than good intentions, it requires a system that supports, maintains, and sustains change. For schools, it requires institutional structures and administrative commitment to support and sustain the work of inquiry groups, which in turn could influence institutional transformation and educational policies.

I close this chapter with an invitation for deepening the understanding of the role of inquiry groups in schools for institutional change. The study intends to illuminate multiple audiences: teachers, school staff, administrators, principals and teacher preparation programs. In addition, the study informs the work of individuals and collaborative groups that are committed to identify and interrupt practices that tend to reproduce academic disadvantages. This study reinforces the need for teacher education programs to engage new teachers in deeper understandings of the power of actions and language. If the goal is to provide tools that can be transferred into the classrooms, then changes in the way higher education is organized, and instruction is delivered, may also need to be reconsidered. At a micro level, the study informs the work of groups or individuals about how discourses and language can make visible representations of an issue, and how representations contribute to transforming or maintaining the very issue.

Furthermore, the study does not suggest that "Self" reflection is the way to realize and impart changes. The question for future exploration however is: Could this MSIG have extended changes into long-lasting transformation if mechanisms for "Self" reflection would have been in place?

APPENDICES

READING ASSESSMENT: WHITE AND BLACK STUDENTS

Trends in average reading scale scores and score gaps for ages 9,13,17 (1971-2004)

Age 9

Age 13

Age 17
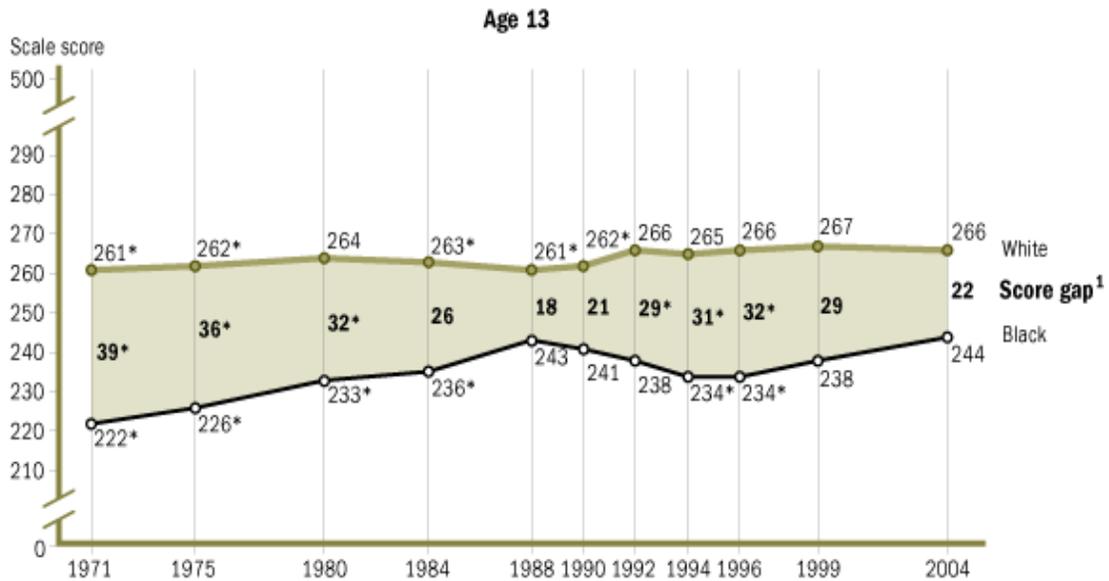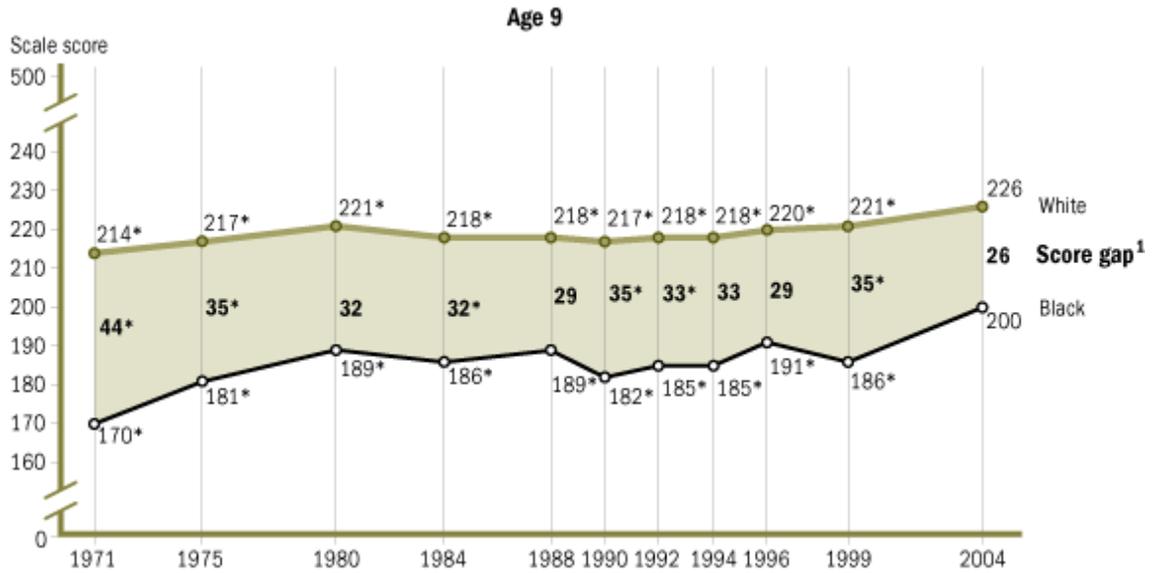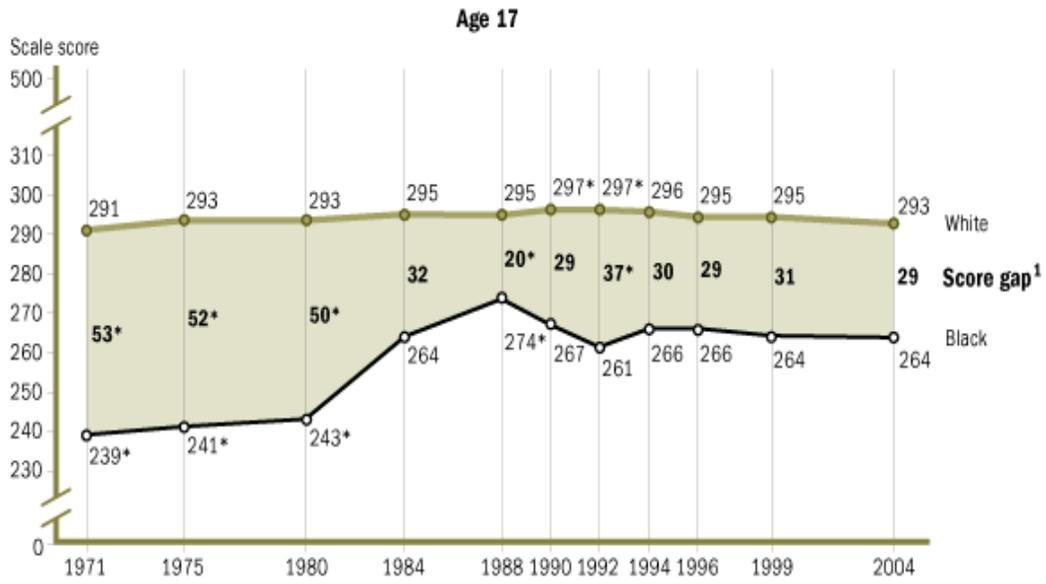
(US Department of Education, IES, NCES)

APPENDIX B

READING ASSESSMENT: WHITE AND HISPANIC STUDENTS

Trends in average reading scale scores and score gaps for ages 9,13,17: (1971-2004)

Age 9

Age 13

Age 13

(US Department of Education, IES, NCES)

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Research Study
Data Collection of Monthly Session

Please, fill out this consent form whether you are willing to participate in this study or not, and put it in my mailbox before our next meeting. Feel free to contact me at ex:. 1929 if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you for considering to be a participant in my study.

Date _____ Your name _____

Whether you agree to participate or not, please complete this consent form:

1 ._____ Yes, I am willing to participate in this study and give permission for my work/words (quoted or paraphrased) to be used. I am aware that a pseudonym will be used to insure privacy. I also understand that my participation is voluntary, and I have the right to reconsider my decision at a later time and withdraw without any consequences. If I decide to withdraw from the study at any point I will communicate with you directly.

_____1a. I want to choose a pseudonym_____.
                                                          (write your pretend name)

_____1b. It is ok with me if you choose a pseudonym for me.

2._____No, I do not want to participate in this study and do not give my permission for my work/words (quoted or paraphrased) to be used at any time

Sincerely,

Floris Wilma Ortiz-Marrero
ELE teacher & member of the inquiry group at _____

CONSENT COVER PAGE

Informed Consent
To: Closing the Achievement Gap Inquiry Group

I am Floris Wilma Ortiz, one of the members of the Closing the Achievement Gap Inquiry Group, since 2003. I am also a doctoral candidate in the program of Language, Literacy and Culture in the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. For the last four years this inquiry group has been my site for research study looking at discourses and members participation. The basis for my dissertation study is to better understand the role inquiry groups have in impacting their members and how participation in an inquiry group provides the space for critical reflection. Data collection includes audio recording of the meetings, field notes, documents related to the meetings, and interviews with specify members of the group. The interviews with members that have been in the group for at least three consecutive years and were also interviewed in 2003 will take place during the academic year 2007-2008.

I plan to continue my participation in this inquiry group as a member and research observer. As a member of the group I will participate actively, and as a researcher I would like to take field notes and audiotape the meetings. Recording the meetings will allow me to document data more accurately, in addition to aid my hearing loss. For this reason, I request your permission to use a tape recorder during our meetings. I will then transcribe and use data from the meetings in my study. These tapes will be totally private but at the same time they will be available at your request. Two exceptions for privacy abide, that 1) the chairperson of my doctoral committee have access to the tapes, if requested, and 2) a hired transcriber, and a listener will listen to the tapes; transcriber will transcribe the tapes from the interviews and the other person will listen to the audio tapes from the meetings with me to help me verify the content of the tapes.

Rights and Confidentiality

To preserve the anonymity of all participants in the study pseudonyms will be used instead of your real names. The name of the school as well as the name of this inquiry group will also be pseudonyms. In other words, I will change names in any written report or articles to protect your privacy. I will make every effort to maintain your anonymity, however due to the release of this document to the public, I cannot guarantee total confidentiality. Any participant is free to withdraw or reject to participate in the study at any time without repercussion. Even if after recoding a meeting you (accepted to participate) wish to be excluded, just let me know at the end of the meeting. In other words, you have the right to withdraw from part or all of the study at any time. You also have the right to review transcribed materials before the final report is released. In addition, you are welcome to contact my advisor Dr. Jerri Willet at willet@educ.umass.edu at any point.

Results
I, Floris Wilma Ortiz-Marrero, will use the information strictly for my doctoral dissertation work, and it may also be included in manuscripts submitted to professional journal articles, workshop, book chapters, or in presentations at conferences.

Benefits
By sharing this information you will be contributing to a body of knowledge about how participation in inquiry groups can impact teachers. The information can also inform our work in the group, the work of other inquiry groups and even institutions to consider the space for critical reflection. Possibly, institutions may create structures to support critical reflection practices and the use of inquiry groups to promote change.

MSIG

Interviewee_____
Date _____
Place _____

Introduction: Tell that my main focus of interest is in the process of the group. The way embers participate or not participate in different activities and how group negotiates meaning, and make decisions. Ideas about AG, students, schools , reasons for the gap.

Insiders eye: identify which are the activities in which members participate or not participate.
Questions:
What does it look when members participate or not participate?
What does it mean to participate or not to participate?
What are the notions around the causes of the achievement gap?
How is meaning negotiated among the participants?
Who are the students we are talking about?

Small talk:
1.   A question about joining this new inquiry group:
 a. How was the inquiry group created?
 b. Why did you decide to join the achievement gap group?
 c. How were the co-leaders chosen?
 d. Why did you volunteer to co-lead it? I(f applicable)

2.   The following questions are about the process of the group:
    a.   How are meetings set and organized?
    b.   How does the way in which the meetings are organized working or not working for you?
    c.   What works and what doesn't work for you?
    d.   Do you think there is space for all the voices to be heard?
    e.   How do you see the process in which members of the group engage at every meeting is moving or not moving forward the work?
    f.   If the work is not moving forward, what do you think needs to happen?

3.   These are questions about participation:
    a.   How do you know if someone in the group is participating or resisting?
4. What's your idea about school and schooling?
5. How do you define AG?
About the students in discussion
    a.   When we talk about the achievement gap, which are the students that come to mind?
    b.   Do you have any notion/idea of what causes the gap?

Personal goals: What is your hope/goal for the group?

APPENDIX F

TURNING POINTS MODEL: DESIGN

**Turning Points Design
Principles and Practices**

APPENDIX G

TURNING POINTS MODEL: CYCLE FOR INQUIRY

Data-based Inquiry and Decision Making

Setting the Vision

Collecting and Analyzing Data

Identifying Challenges

Action Planning

Annual Assessment
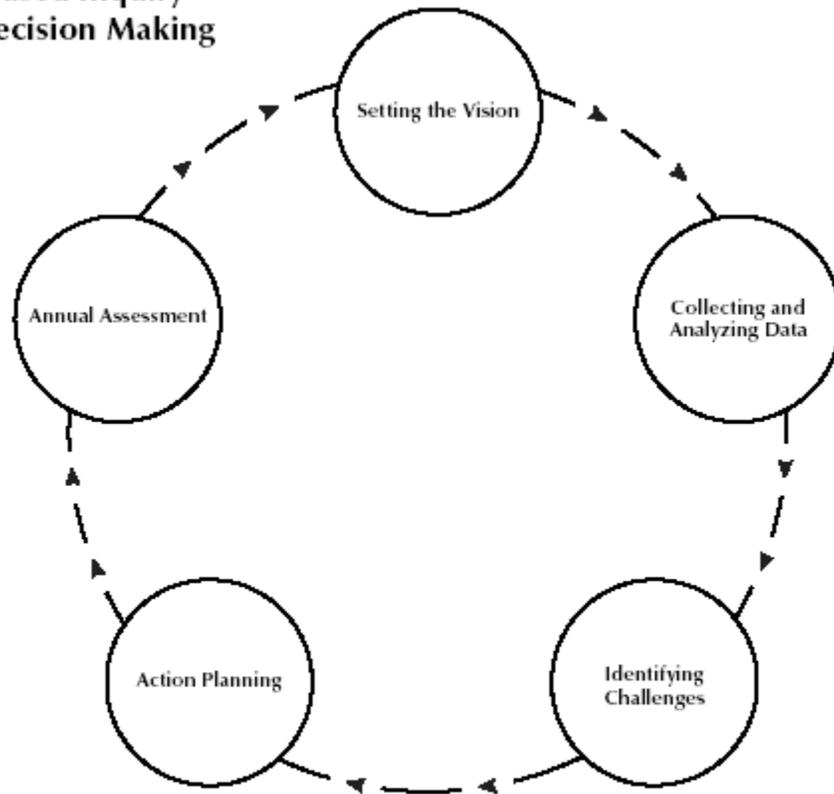
This chart suggests a cyclical process of Data-based Inquiry and Decision Making. Because it is an ongoing process, you may revisit components or conduct them in a different order.

APPENDIX H

INTERTEXTUAL CONNECTIONS: TEMPLATE

Member/Number (pg)	Students in the AG Date (year)	Definition of AG Date (year)	Reasons (Blame) Date (year)	Students in the AG Date (year)	Definition of AG Date (year)	Reasons (Blame) Date (year)
			Blaming **students**			Blaming **students**
			Blaming **School**			Blaming **School**
			Sub-themes **teachers**			Sub-themes **teachers**
			Sub-themes **curriculum**			Sub-themes **curriculum**
			Blaming **parents/home**			Blaming **parents/home**
			Blaming **social/economic**			Blaming **social/economic**
			Blaming cultural **differences**			Blaming cultural **differences**

APPENDIX I

MICROANALYSIS: INTERTEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Elliot Kelly- Change over time

#	Theme	Message Unit 2004 Lexical Choices	Message Unit 2008 Lexical Choices	Function	Intertextual Connections 2004, 2008 and Discourses in Society	Discourses Same New, Changed/ Same
	Students in AG					
30b —— 78d 78e		I've been struggling in the past with um **kids of color** not achieving in my classes	Kids of **color** **under-represented** in the group of not being successful	Definition Description Clarification	Proposes connections race, struggles, not achieving, his struggles with the students that struggles, not being successful	Same
88b —— 80c 82a		Um, my understanding is specific to **students of color** who **aren't achieving**	We [group] selected **kids of color** they are **just kids of color**	Definition Identification Clarification	Recognizes connections race, not achieving., signaling (just), connections with [MSIG]	Same

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90c		**Measurement** in particular **students of color**	Or **trying to figure out** what would be **helpful to those kids.**	Identification Description	Proposes connections with race, not succeeding, wants to help [assessment]	Change/Same
———						
136c			**The kids that aren't succeeding**			
136d						
90a		**Academically** based on **report cards** and **referrals to QLC** [behavior]	What is **Success?**	Definition Comparison	Proposes connection of the issues with school ,assessment, measurement of disciplinary problems, high stakes (MCAS)	Change/Same
———			looking at **MCAS scores**			
80a			**A group of students** who are **successful** and a group of student s who **are not successful**			
80b						
78a						
92g		I think the group [MSIG] started with **students of color** and **not being successful measured** by report cards and QLC referrals. Yeah		Confirmation Identification Naming	Proposes connection with the group [MSIG]	Change/Same

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108		**some** who are very **successful** who are **Asian** and some students are not [successful]	students with **different background knowledge, experiences**	Comparison Description	Proposes connections with another group in the issue, Acknowledges some achieve in the same group, success [racial]	New group of kids
128h						
	Definition of AG					
126a		It's huge		Description Recognition	Acknowledges complexity, Proposes connections with the school inability to solve it, [pervasive issue in society]	New
126c		**I don't think we(school) are going to solve it** (p.10				
126d		It's **beyond** us [MSIG]		Description	Same as above	New
			a pattern who fit in those groups…one of the **patterns is kids of color underrepresented**		Recognizes a pervasive issue, Acknowledges race, under representation	Change/Same
	Reasons for AG- Rhetoric of Blame (Why)					

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90e	[Economic]	And **there is a little bit** of discussion do we [MSIG] want to **bring in economics** and we really haven decided yet		Recognition		Change/Same
92b 130b		**That's going to make it messy**		Affirmation Recognition	Recognizes economic differences [society is messy	New
92c		**Not everybody acknowledges** that's going to make it **messy**	**Kids travel** out o the state and whose **parents have been out of the state,** um **parents bring home** [materials] **school videos**	Affirmation Re-affirms	Recognizes connection economic, opportunities, experiences, accessibilities	Change/Same
90d		Some people [MSIG] say "Well **you can't ignore it**		Acknowledges Affirmation	Brings other voices, [members], connections with the group [MSIG]	New
90e		and some people say, "Well it's **going to be so messy we** [MSIG] **should ignore** it, and you [MSIG] should really focus on…"		Acknowledges	Same as above	New
128f	[Class]		is **a big** one	Recognition	Proposes connections to society, sizeable	Change/same

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128a	[Cultural Difference]	I think is **cultural**		Affirmation [doubt] Identification Declaration	Proposes connection culture, big issue	New
128b 128c		I think there is a lot of **cultural baggage** that we all **bring to school with** Um effect the way **we interact** with each other		Affirmation [doubt] Identification	Proposes connection with all aspects of culture and experiences	New
128d		**Assumptions we make about each other** and our **culture**		Clarification Confirmation	Proposes connections to social interactions and culture, cultural groups	New
128e		**Is racist.**		Affirmation Declaration Clarification	Affirms connections with racism in society [how about school?]	New
128f	[Society]	I mean there are **structural parts of society** that **gets disadvantaged**		Clarification Identification Affirmation	Proposes connection with social structures, inequities in society	New
128g		People who are **white** have many **privileges**		Affirmation Identification	Same as above Recognizes white privileges in society	Change/Same
128h		All of that **stuff comes to school** and all of those things are still going on here		Recognition Affirmation	Proposes connections from past to present	Change/New

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62 ___ 128h 128i	[Students]	Because **people are different**	**background knowledge**, **learning disability**, and **language** and **color** **Too many** things to list	Identification Prediction Listing	Proposes connections between knowledge, learning disability, language, color [race] background	Change/Same
130			**Too many strikes against** you [students] in the gap, **too much to overcome**	Affirmation Recognition Prediction	Proposes the complexity and impossibility	Change/Same
134a 148			**Language** is a huge one. **English is** their second language	Identification Affirmation	Propose the connection with language difference, complexity, immeasurable	New
134b			It's no time for kids to **catch up**	Affirmation Recognition	Proposes connection with limited time to catch up, kids behind	New
142a			So **knowledge, language**	Identification Correlation	Proposes the connection with language knowledge [society what is valued]	New

142b			They **don't see a connection** between **themselves and what they are learning**	Explanation Affirmation Comparative	Proposes the problem on the individual	New
148d			**Language processing**. That's another obstacle	Identification Affirmation	Proposes connection between language as obstacles, deficit	New
168			**They have a history** of not, I think it comes from their **history of its been hard** and **not learning**	Affirmation Description	Implies connection with history of not achieving, proposes connections with the history of society	New
142	**[School]**		You are asking a **big question** [what's the most trouble, what are some of the issue that kids are facing in school]	Affirmation Confirmation	Proposes connection of the complexity of the issue local and nationally	New

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146b 146c 146d 146e			I think is our **text books.** Sometimes the kids have a **hard time reading** them. But is **that a school problem**? But some kids have a **hard time reading.**	Confirmation Identification Affirmation in form of questioning	Explicitly proposes the connection of the object textbooks with kids having a hard time, difference between the school and kids	New
150			Some **kids can overcome** that obstacle [reading difficulties] and **some kids**, its one more thing, that's **too much**	Assertion Affirmation Confirmation	Acknowledges connection between obstacles, race, economic, class,	New
156a			Its, it's the **gap as a result o**f what the **student brings and the school** bring in term of learning	Recognition Acknowledges Definition Affirmation	Recognizes connection between school and students mismatch	New
156b			**…Twenty kids** in my classroom and **they are all different**	Identification	Implicit connection of class size [to many kids] and diversity of the kids,	New
156c			I try to **teach in all different modes**	Identification	Proposes connection between teaching modalities, diversity	New

180a 180b 180c			It's **pretty diverse** [team]. A lot of **two mom** households here. A lot of **multiracial families**. I **think it's wonderful, but in some way it's a hard thing** for some of those kids..	Affirmation Identification Listing Definition Contradiction	Recognizes connection between the diversity in school and society;. Establishes definition of diversity that connects to racial, gender, difficulties in society	New
281			I've **been in the ELL team** three times	Affirmation Recognition Counting	Proposes connection with membership in a group	New
283			...I **think it's problematic**. I think it would be better if um, **if I sort of count on it or not**, rather than no knowing	Affirmation Identification Recognition Proposing solution	Proposes connection between inconsistency and providing support	New
285			Every year of **knowing whether or not** I'm going to be working with the ELL students or not so that's.	Same as above	Same as above	New

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291			**On and off** and on and off. Right! …**it's hard**. Yeah, it's hard	Recognition Affirmation	Proposes connection between things being one way or the other	New
313			One of the things I think **helps a little is to have a textbook in Spanish**, there is not in Portuguese or Japanese	Recognition Identification Affirmation	Explicitly proposes connection between problem and solution	New
315a			I think the **tutors help a lot**	Affirmation	Same as above	
315b			But **they** have been here very **inconsistently** this year [budget]	Declaration	Recognizes inconsistent support	
315e			I don't think **they're at their academic potential**, according to **what' they could be doing** better	Affirmation Clarification	Proposes connection between potential and outcome	Change/Same
315f			I don't **know how to eliminate that**. I don't know if that's really realistic. Yeah…	Affirmation Confirmation Declaration	Proposes connection between a problem and the no solution	Change/Same
30c	[**Teachers**]		I'm **not happy with that**	Confirmation Declarative		New
30d			and I'm **curious about changing that.**	Doubting		

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166a			To **make it engaging**	Affirmation	Proposes connection between problem-solution	New
166m 166n			I **need to make a real personal connection** with that student So they **trust me**	Confirmation Declaration Recognition	Recognizes connection between relationship, academic success	New
166o 166p			I **can't do that for every kid** who has not done well in my class and that's **hard for me** to begin with	Recognition Affirmation	Establishes connection of impossibility, relationship	New
232			I was **accused** of **being racist by African American boys,** that was a first	Confirmation Recognition Accusation	Establishes connection between race and gender and racism	New
237a			Because **they thought** I **was picking on them**	Confirmation Negation	Proposes a connection of mental process and unfounded accusation	New
237b			**I was calling them on the behaviors** that **I wasn't calling white kids**	Affirmation Clarification Justification	Proposes connection between race, behavior	New

237c			An **they were doing the same** behaviors, that's what **they thought** was going on	Confirmation Negation	Implicitly state the disconnect between an action and perception,	New
239			I think **everybody has experienced** that at this school, Wilma	Generalization Affirmation Negotiation Solidarity	Proposes normalization and connection between national and local history, race,	New
241a 241b			Most **teachers have been called racist,** particularly by African American boys.	Same as above	Same as above	New
303d			I **do not know how to** get differentiated content of things **without them feeling different**	Confirmation Recognition	Recognizes connection between being different and deficiency	Change/Same
307c 307d 307e 307f			I can **keep tweaking** it where I **make it a little better** and **keep using** different examples and **getting rid of stuff** that didn't work so well last year	Recognition Affirmation Application	Proposes connection between improvement, intentions, practice	New

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132d	[Home] [Parents]		…whose **parents have been out of state** [as opposed to parents that have not traveled]	Affirmation Exclusivity	Proposes connections between social status, economic, educational experiences of the students	New
174a 174b1 74c 174d			**Single mom** and **grandma,** um **going through divorce**, **kids moving into homeless shelter**, um **those are you know** some of them, **adoption**	Identification Listing Confirmation Recognition	Proposes connection between social status, economic, social positions	New

Rose Morley- Intertextual analysis and change over time

#	Theme	Message Unit 2004 Lexical Choices	Message Unit 2008 Lexical Choices	Function meaning	Intertextual connections 2004, 2008 and Discourses in society	Discourses Same, New, Changed/ Same
	Students in AG					
87m 150e		**I think** of the AG between **mostly white population and children of color**	Between **many students of color** and **many**, um, **non minority** students	Identification Comparison Not countable Affirmation	Proposes connections race, society differences, labels (minority and non minority)	Change/Same
87o 160b		There **are plenty** of **children of color who are achieving**	What comes to mind is **African American and Latino students compared to white students**	Identification Listing-Naming Description	Proposes connection with race, a black and white issue, labels. Recognizes success [students of color achieving]	Change/Same
87q		and **there is plenty of poor white kids in there**		Identification Description Affirmation Location	Recognizes connections race, class, economic in AG [blame]	New

87bb 161c		**I** tend to **think** about our **Cambodian kids and Vietnamese refugees** much more than I think of our other kids.	but hat comes to **mind** is **primarily African American, Latino** and I would **say Cambodian**	Affirmation Identification Listing-Naming	Proposes connection with race	Same
87r 87s		**I have** a **problem with labels**, all labels. But they are **helpful to figure** out some things **too**, and **describe** some things	[problematized labels and AG]	Confirmation Explanations	Recognizes connections between labels, create tensions and benefit [blame]	Same
	Definition of AG					
81b 148		…I heard speak and said **they don't like to call it the** achievement gap	I **don't like the term** achievement gap	Affirmation Alliance	Proposes connections of AG and language	Same
81c 50b 150c		They call something **like the practice gap.** They use other really **good work**	Where I prefer to use something like um **opportunity gap** **Or resource gap** to look at the **sociopolitical implications of why the gap** is **there**	Generalization Application Evaluation Explanation Location	Proposes connections AG, social, economic, political, new language/label [blame]	New

81f 150f 150g 150h		And I **think** that is a very **good question**	So the gap exist but **what do we call it?** That **is an issue**	Questioning [apparent] Affirmation Recognition Evaluation	Recognizes connections AG, complex, society, language	Change/Same
81h 150d 150e 160j		I **understand** what the **Grand Narrative** is of the achievement gap	There's certainly a **gap** of achievement or **measurement of academic status**, between **many student of color** and **many um non minority** student… and his [Gary Orfield] work is really the work that **we all refer** to about **achievement** and **race.**	Affirmation Affiliation Description No countable Positioning Affiliation Generalization	Proposes connection race, academic achievement, society	Change/Same
81i 150k		I think **we should change the language**	…**bring language there** that looks at what is **positioning students** to be in **situation**	Suggestion Identification [blame]	Purposes connections between students and social conditions, [problematic]	Same

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81k 150a		(principals and teachers and policymakers) say, well **that gap is there we are over here** doing our **work really hard**	Because it um automatically **puts the owners on the students** that they are **not achieving**	Location Recognition Description Conditioning [blame]	Proposes connections schools, society, not achieving, [problematic]	Change/Same
	Reasons for AG- Rhetoric of Blame (Why)\s					
166h 166k 174b	**[Economic]**		when the family [Cambodian]didn't have any heat all winter **he got couple of Ds**… this is a kid who typically got A's and B's	Identification Description	Recognizes connections socio economic conditions and academic performance; society and schools	Change/Same
158	**[Society]** **[Political**		Looking at all the **socio political structures** that are in place that push in that direction and position that	Identification Recognizes the issue beyond the school context	Recognizes connections between politics, society, economic, school, education; social structures	Change/Same

176d 176e 176f			Um you can look at **US history** So, it's directly related to **race relations in our country** So if you look at our **disgraceful history** of **enslavement** of people	Explanation Affirmation Identification	Proposes connections of historical context of the past and the present ,social; race, political, historical, with school and disadvantages society (e.g., rights, economic	New
59o 116g	**[Students]** **[What are their challenges/]**	**Complicated lives and issues**	[students of color at the university] Their **challenges** have been **different**	Identification Recognition	Proposes connections of student's live and forces outside	Change/Same
59q 108a 116		They have **brown skin (school is predominantly** white #57) on top of all those **complicated lives and issues**	Well, I think **isolation** is a **huge challenge** [students at the university] and I **hate to make sweeping generalization** [isolation]	Identification Recognition Description	Proposes connection between race, social lives, segregation, minority, institutional structures, magnitude of the factors	Change/Same

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118h			Her **educational experience** prior (below sub standard public education)	Identification Explanation	Suggests connections students background, school mismatch, background academic experience "she really struggles"	New
118i			**cultural** issues and the **language issues** too	Identification Differentiation	Proposes connections of cultural and language differences and obstacles in academic achievement	New
406i 406j 406k 406m			So, **learning style** preferences, **communication style**, **cultural specific** accommodations, That are often blamed for lack of achievement	Identification Justification Recognition\ Differentiation	Proposes connections between culture and achievement	New
	School					
49bc		**Schools are still** operating, and trying to create **factory workers**	[school creating the situations]	Recognition Affirmation Reproductions	Proposes connections schools, society, economy, social status, reproduction	Same
51c		and **we** have to **fight** very hard to **not participated** in that	[teachers need to work harder]	Recognition	Proposes personal struggles in reproduction, connections to society	New (Same to work harder)
51l		Has been **reproductive, constricting, oppressive**	[school, curriculum, practices]	Identifications Recognition Listing	Recognizes society and school practices of unequal access	Change/Same

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57d 57e		To have **a brown face** in this middle **school** must be very **isolated**	[AA students in college minority]	Identification Description Recognition	Recognizes society and school struggles - minorities	Same (college students experiences)
	Curriculum					
63d 63f		I could have **provided** [name boys] with **some fabulous Cambodian heroes**…**many numbers of Puerto Rican politicians**, **writers, doctors,**	[MSIG provided readings and training-expert]	Identification Listing Differentiation	Proposes connections ethnicity, culture, society contributions and school curriculum, heroes success, social status	Change/Same
63g		I think that this is a **disservice to these children**		Affirmation Accusation Confirms		New
65a		They **don't care** about Galileo		Affirmation	Explicitly denounces disconnect between students world and the curriculum	New
65b		Ok, **Lu does care about Michael Jordan** and Michael Jordan **does have heroic qualities**		Affirmation Recognition Attribution Definition	Proposes connections popular culture, students, sports	New
65d		But **he's a Basketball player**.		Affirmation Description	Proposes social differences	New
65e 65f		I am sorry! **It is a stereotype**	[problematized labels and MCAS]	Same above	Same as above	Change/Same

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	Teachers					
59k		I think **we** [teachers, school] **need a lot more education about it**	[I heard them say outrageous things MSIG]	Affirmation Recognition Identification Limitations	Proposes connections of teachers knowledge and the issue [AG]	Same
59l		[teachers] said, **they are all good kids**	[student in college working hard]	Affirmation Identification Recognition Generalization	Proposes connections of social values and rewards	Change/Same
59m		[teachers say] **Those are those kids**	[labels- "problems with all labels"]	Differentiation	Recognizes differences, society,	Change/Same
59n		You know using [teachers] **language** that **describes groups** it's very **Conjugated**	[same as above]	Identification Recognition	Presents, recognizes, and connects the power of language in school and society	Change/Same
59s 59t		I think that **White** [she is] **teachers as well meaning** and **well educated as many of them** are, I think tend to **isolate that kid.**	["well this kid never does his homework anyway so what do you expect"]	Affirmation Recognition Identification Description Attribution Differentiation	Proposes connections with class, race, privilege and consequences,	Change/Same
59v 59w		Someone like Lu [Cambodian] they [teachers] say oh **he's just that way, he's just going to be that way**	[when blaming the family, "not owning their responsibilities"]	Affirmation Deception	Proposes connections between society, teachers,- students, and status quo; hopelessness	Change/Same

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59z		And they [teachers, school] go **into survival mode**	Same as above	Affirmation Deception	Same as above	Change/Same
59aa		And **they** [teachers, school] **say what can I do to get through each day** with each kid.	Same as above	Affirmation Assumptions	Same as above	Change/Same
59cc		If they [teachers-school] **don't do something** now this kid **will drop out in** four years	[talking about school and standardized assessments, factory model]	Affirmation Prediction Deception	Proposes connection with social, school institutions and students drop outs	Change/Same

Julia Roberts- Intertextual connections and change over time

#	Theme	Message Unit 2004 Lexical Choices	Message Unit 2008 Lexical Choices	Function	Intertextual connections 2004, 2008 and Discourses in Society	Discourses Same New, Change/ Same
	Students in AG					
129 —— 06c 06d		kids **of color** and **not kids of color**	People **don't do well in school** in particular **kids of color**	Identification Definition Reproduction/ Transformation	Proposes connections with race, school failure	Same
133 —— 70l 70m 70h		There are **student of color achieving**	**Gifted kid, creative, high achiever** (3 types of kids in this category 70e)	Identification Recognition Listing (labels) Transformation	Proposes a connection between students of color, gifted, creative, and high achiever in the AG	New
137a 137b —— 70d		Test say **minority** [students] **SAT scores**	[according to a study] **kids** are **not being challenged**	Identification Recognition Validation Reproduction	Presents reasons for students not being successful in school; recognizes measurement of success, research based knowledge	Change
143d —— 76b 76c 76e		we [MSIG] are talking about **kids not being successful and** we[MSIG} have been	[name] He is a **gifted talented piano player** [Latino] some **severe special needs not achieving**	Identification Clarification Reproduction	Proposes connection with new group of students, counter idea in society a talented piano player is acknowledged	New

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145 147 149 80j 82a		**Ds and Fs, the report card, and blue slips**	when kids are **getting Ds and Fs** Not getting **A & A pluses**	Identification Description Listing Reproduction	Identifies connection with measurement of success, social values, connecting failure	Same New
106f 106l 106m			[**high achiever** in her creative science project] **don't have the** ability to do that, are they low achieving students?	Description Questioning Transformation/Reproduction	Introduces the high achiever not achieving; shifts idea of AG	New
138f 138g 138h			**write in non standard English, Brilliant kid, brilliant** and she is **Cambodian** [girl] … **there are some other times… write however you want**	Identification Description Attribution Recognition Reproduction/ Transformation	Proposes duality of brilliantness, and not standard language; connects race, social class, brilliant and non standard language,	Change/Same [school standard language]
	Definition of AG					
125b —— 106a 106b		**Our [school] model** and expectations	Need **a different model**-the achievement would be creative achievement	Identification Recognition Reproduction Transformation Suggestion of paradigm	Proposes schools to blame, and a shift [the need for a new model]	New

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125d 125e ____ 68 80h		what do **we** [teachers and school] **expect kids to be doing and where do they expect they're going** (where we want them to go), and **when they do that,** and they go **where we expect them** to **go we say that's achieving**	It is a **whole system** It's **complex**	Identification Expectations Definition Reproduction	Proposes discourses of achievement and the complexity	Change
125j 125k 125l 125m ____ 78d		**high college acceptance rate, and high graduation rate**, high **engaged in the school process rate**, you know studentship **behavior** (acting like a student)	**Achievement gap** is a very **narrow view of** what **achievement is**	Identification Affirmation Definition Reproduction Confirmation	Proposes connections between success, academic measurement, narrow view	Change/Same
86b 86c 88a			**Anybody in position** of **power** except for the president [Bush] they have **achieved in school at a high level**	Affirmation Recognition Reproduction	Proposes connections of school attainment and social positions, and power	Change
	Reasons for AG-Rhetoric of Blame (Why)					

44j 44m 44o —— 08L	**School**	**Education reform…**the goal is **to learn a certain thing**, and it's become **very rigid**	There is a **mismatch**	Identification Recognition Exclusion Standardization Reproduction	Establishes disparities between the school and students background; discourse of reform and mismatch	Change/Same
50f —— 120a 120b		Is **narrowing** the concept of **learning**	School nation wide favor **verbal and logical** strength	Identification Description Recognition Reproduction	Establishes connections between local and global context, research legitimizes findings; the narrow view; proposes magnitude of the issue	Change/Same
116h			If **kids think differently** it's **hard to manage** [teachers, school] **them**	Identification Recognition Reproduction	Establishes cause and effect of students' thinking differently; connections to society, school order	New
128a 136b			**Factory model,** **power** equalizer	Identification Affirmation Attribution Reproduction	Proposes connections between society, politics, and school, place of reproduction; blaming school	Change/Same
56	**MCAS**	**That's been determined** by **people far removed** from them		Identification Recognition Explanation Reproduction	Recognizes connections between school, politics/policies, top down decisions	New
	Students					
223d 223e —— 60 80n		**Some kids are engaged** and **achieving by the measures we call school** some kids not	Variety of reasons **Is not** that **they are not capable**	Identification Description Recognition Reproduction	Proposes the complexity of the issue	Same

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80u 80v 80w			Not **doing exactly what** you want them to do, **perfect little lines, filling in little lines**. (According to our **measurement**)	Identification Description Recognition Reproduction	Same as above; Proposes connections between school and society determining success, limiting	Chang/Same
124e 124f		[measurement of achieving according school]	**We don't have a report card** talks about the **creative of the gifted** piece	Identification Reproduction] Transformation [new paradigm]	Same as above Suggests a new aspect "gifted"	Same
160a 160b 160c			It's hard to say **these kids aren't achieving,** when they **are 13 and 14,** because **it is difficult**	Identification Recognition Description Acknowledge Transformation	Acknowledges developmental stages and the limitation for assertiveness on AG; new blame; suggests a shift	New
162j 162l 162n			**These bright** spots up there [HS] [kids tell her] "I'm finally doing my homework, and that matters	Identification Recognition Description Reproduction	Explicitly acknowledges success; reproduction of school measurement	Change/Same
196a 196b			it's such a **hard age** to try to **figure out what is going on**	Identification Recognition Description Acknowledge Transformation	Acknowledges developmental stages and the limitation for assertiveness on AG; complexity	Change/Same New

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170c 170d			**…teachers,** [students]]like better than others, but it doesn't necessarily **prevent** them form achieving	Identification Explanation Reproduction	Denies reasons for not achieving [student-teachers relationship]	New
225a 225b 225c 225k —— 202g		**…some people goofing off…** acting certain ways;…failing according to what the school say; why isn't homework turned in?	**Kids weren't doing their homework**	Identification Explanation Recognition Reproduction	Explicitly identifies reasons; discourse of blame, (school, students)	Same
260f			There **is not a studentship** in place	Same as above	Same as above	Change/Same
262p			**Starts really early** on	Identification	Proposes connections between students and schools mismatch	New
267s 267r			[do not get support] **they give up. You would too.**	Recognition Confirmation Requesting understanding	Acknowledges students attitude; proposes alliance/understanding with students' situation	New
	Teachers					
08s			Need **to support those kids** to do well	Identification Recognition Definition ("those kids")	Establishes what is needed for the lack of support; reproducing language "those kids"	Same (EK)

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	Parents					
267i 267j			**Parents educated, highly motivated and very driven,** so their **model at home is studentship** behavior	Identification Description Recognition Attribution Reproduction	Proposes connection level of education, experiences, class, influence of parent on students; Identifies reasons; discourses of blame social/academic status	New
267n			**Not getting** the support or not modeling	Identification Affirmation	Proposes connection of parent experiences and students performance; Identifies; discourse of blame- parents; reasons	Change/Same
	Class Economic status					
267e 267f			This really **crosses across racial line…** different **socioeconomic class… there is a class component to it**	Identification Recognition Reproduction [societal]	Identifies reasons and makes connections with economic, class status that transfers to school achievement; blame conditions	Same

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