“IT’S LIKE A PUZZLE WITH A MILLION PIECES”:
THE PRODUCTIVE POSSIBILITIES OF CONFLICT
IN A TEACHER INQUIRY GROUP

by

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ABSTRACT

“IT’S LIKE A PUZZLE WITH A MILLION PIECES”: THE PRODUCTIVE POSSIBILITIES OF CONFLICT IN A TEACHER INQUIRY GROUP

Carmela Gustafson

A large body of recent research calls for expanding what it means to teach literacy in the content areas. This includes movement away from conceiving of content literacy instruction as generic literacy strategies superimposed on content-area text. Instead, the focus is on the discursive literate practices of the disciplines, including ways of thinking, acting, and believing. This disciplinary literacy perspective addresses the literacy demands specific to disciplines such as history and views literacy as socially situated.

Little research has been done to find out how teachers respond to expectations to incorporate literacy in their content area classrooms, and few opportunities exist for teachers to explore the literacy practices inherent in the disciplines, or to collaborate on how these might be taught. Thus, this practitioner research focuses on a teacher inquiry group formed to explore literacy in the middle and secondary social studies classroom. Consistent with practitioner research and an inquiry as stance perspective, the productive and generative potential of tension and conflicts was considered. The talk and activities of teachers were documented as they participated in the group to illuminate the discourses on which teachers drew when they talked about literacy, and to demonstrate how, in this context, teachers might collaboratively interrogate, transform, and generate knowledge around literacy in social studies.
This study contributes to conversations about literacy instruction in subject areas specifically by attending to teachers’ perspectives. The talk was analyzed using a modified discourse analysis approach, framed by perspectives on language described by Gee and Bakhtin. Findings show that the typical discourse patterns of the inquiry group talk were shaped by curricular and institutional expectations that produced normalized notions of what counts as reading and texts in social studies classrooms. Disciplinary discourses were also evident. Additionally, the inquiry group talk was shaped by discourses of student ability that suggested links to racial, socio-economic, and developmental factors, as well as special education labeling. Moments of intensity that arose out of tensions or conflict resulted in the interrogation, transformation, and generation of knowledge around literacy in social studies; it broadened to include discipline-specific practices while continuing to encompass generic ones.
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Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

A large body of recent research calls for expanding what it means to teach literacy in the content areas. This expansion suggests a movement away from conceiving of content literacy instruction as the teaching and learning of generic literacy strategies as tools to extract facts from content-area text. What it argues for instead is a focus on the discursive literate practices of the disciplines (Moje, 2008a; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). This means that literacy includes not just ways of using language, but also ways of thinking, acting, and believing (Gee, 2001). Adolescent literacy scholars have proposed that each discipline has its own specialized language, text structure, and ways of negotiating and interpreting printed text (Draper & Siebert, 2010; Moje, 2008a; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). This so-called disciplinary perspective addresses the literacy demands specific to disciplines such as history, and is based on the belief that deep knowledge of a particular discipline is best acquired by engaging in the literate habits valued and used by experts in the discipline (Moje, 2008a; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Shanahan, 2010). It involves engaging not only in the reading practices particular to the discipline, but also in its ways of thinking which include approaches to investigation, analysis, and critique. From a disciplinary literacy perspective, it is this engagement that allows for both learning and producing knowledge in the disciplines. Thus, as compared to a content-area literacy approach that considers all reading as accomplished with generic reading strategies, a disciplinary perspective holds a view of literacy as socially
situated. This, therefore, suggests a complex view of how literacy might be taught in the context of school subjects.

Much of my life as a middle school social studies teacher is spent navigating the competing demands of literacy learning inherent in these perspectives. Experience tells me that I am not alone. What social studies colleagues talk about, in addition to the constant pressure to “cover the curriculum,” is the often stressful responsibility of teaching literacy, in whatever way that might be defined. On the one hand, teaching and practicing reading strategies can be painstaking and time-consuming. On the other hand, it can be equally frustrating to try to engage students in the literacy and thinking of the discipline when students lack sufficient comprehension required for the critical analysis and evaluation of texts. Dictates of the Common Core Standards, a focus on standardized test scores to evaluate student literacy learning, and the linkage of those test scores to the assessment of teacher effectiveness compound the challenges. Thus, binary theoretical arguments about the advantages of one approach over another are largely irrelevant in classrooms alive with students whose literacy needs must be met in order for learning to occur. It is in these classrooms that a complex, often contentious, but mostly obscured landscape of literacy expectations emerges. Yet what this landscape looks like to teachers and how they themselves think about and navigate it is rarely explored.

Despite both scholarly calls arguing for a “disciplinary literacy approach” to integrating literacy instruction in the content areas, and Common Core Standards that explicitly mandate that reading instruction be “a shared responsibility” among subject areas, little research, and often even less practical guidance, is available to suggest how teachers can and do respond to these expectations, or what discipline-specific literacy learning might actually look like in content area classrooms (Moje, Stockdill, Kim, & Kim, 2011). Furthermore, few opportunities exist for pre- or in-service teachers to explore the literacy practices inherent in the disciplines (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008), and even fewer exist for teachers to collaborate on how to translate these patterns of
disciplinary literacy into our teaching and relate them to student learning. Rather, teachers are most often provided with professional development that positions them as conduits for the implementation of data-driven, so-called “best practices,” and marginalizes the knowledge they possess and with which they engage daily. I responded to this lack of opportunity by creating a space in which social studies teachers could explore and share ideas about what literacy means, both in the context of history as a discipline, and in the context of history as a school subject. Thus, this practitioner research study is situated in a professional development inquiry group focused on literacy in the middle and secondary social studies classroom. As a facilitator, but also a teacher-participant in this group, I simultaneously enacted roles as researcher and practitioner. Consistent with practitioner research and the inquiry as stance perspective that I take, I tapped into the productive and generative potential of the tensions inherent in those roles. Specifically, I documented the conversations and activities of teachers as they participated in the group. Doing so allowed me to investigate how teachers talk about literacy in social studies, and about how they said they approach it in their teaching. I hoped to learn more about the unique constructs of literacy, literacy learning, and literacy teaching that each of these teachers holds, and about the discourses that shape those constructs. Most significantly, however, my goal was to learn more about how, in the context of an inquiry group, teachers might collaboratively interrogate, transform, and generate knowledge and meaning around literacy in social studies. Thus, this study was designed to contribute to current conversations about the call for change in content literacy instruction. It did so by attending to teachers’ perspectives, understandings, questions, and concerns as they collaboratively explored what literacy means and entails in middle and secondary social studies classrooms. The following section describes the background to this problem.
Background of the Problem

Scholarly debates over the pros and cons of content-area and disciplinary approaches to literacy have lingered for decades. On the one side of the debate are those who promote a content-area approach, with its emphasis on cognitive reading strategies. This approach has roots that go back to the early 20th century (Ratekin, Simpson, Alvermann, & Dishner, 1985) and represents the dominant approach to talking about literacy in schools. On the other side is the disciplinary literacy approach, which is based on a perspective on literacy as socially situated. This perspective, which emerged much later, brings to the fore the discursive literate practices of the discipline – the inherent ways of negotiating text, but also the distinctive modes of thinking, writing, talking, and listening in which members of the discipline engage. Thus, rather than emphasizing generic reading skills and strategies, the disciplinary approach focuses on the broader range of practices that defines the various disciplines.

Although neither the cognitive aspects of reading, nor the distinctive literacy practices of the disciplines can be denied, the two approaches are often viewed as binary. Disagreement persists over which approach best serves the literacy needs of students, thus endorsing the assumption that, at least as far as teaching and learning are concerned, the views are mutually exclusive. These disagreements contribute to teacher-felt tensions around how to teach literacy in the content areas. The tensions also result from difficulties content-area teachers in general, but social studies teachers in particular, face as they try to balance their responsibilities to teach content alongside literacy. In order to provide a context for these tensions, a brief outline of the history of the content-area and disciplinary perspectives follows, as well as an overview of social studies as a school subject.
Content-Area Literacy

When content area reading, and the construct of literacy to which it is attached, became a distinct area of research and instruction, researchers assumed that reading skills and strategies were transferable between subjects, regardless of whether they advocated that reading specialists or content-area teachers do the work of teaching literacy. The publication of Herber’s (1970) textbook for in- and pre-service teachers, *Teaching Reading in the Content Areas*, helped promote the use of cognitive reading strategies in content-area classrooms (Mraz, Rickelman, & Vacca, 2009). Its influence gave rise, in many states, to mandatory preservice content reading coursework that focused on Herber’s ideas about reading strategy instruction in subject area classrooms (Mraz et al., 2009). Those ideas are represented by the author as content-specific literacy approaches that provide a structure for “teaching reading skills simultaneously with course content” (Herber, 1970, p. viii). The structure he describes is made up of generalized reading strategies and approaches that are adapted for use in each of the major school subject classrooms. For example, an exercise for social studies that asks students to match the names of figures in American history with statements describing their accomplishments corresponds to an exercise for mathematics that asks students to match geometric figures with their appropriate definitions. Similarly, for social studies, math, and science, students are provided with text page numbers on which they can find answers to fact-based questions such as, “Where is whaling done today?” (social studies); “What are parallel lines?” (mathematics); and “What is an element? (science). Herber also provides what he calls “Reasoning Guides” for each subject. Their purpose, according to Herber, is to function as “simulators of the heuristic process” (p. 139). An example he provides for social studies asks students to associate financial plans proposed by Hamilton with economic problems they might have solved. For a science unit on waves, questions are posed in the format of “If…then what can be said about…?” A series of statements follows each question and students are to determine if the statement is true, false, or
impossible to determine. Although these exercises require students to reason with and about subject matter, they do not engage students in specifically disciplinary thinking.

Although there were scholars at the time who disagreed with Herber’s view that generic reading strategies were both transferable to, and sufficient for, successful reading, and in particular reading to learn in content areas (Mraz et al., 2009), Herber’s focus on vocabulary development, comprehension devices, and study skills became increasingly influential (Mraz et al., 2009). Following the publication of Herber’s book, a proliferation of books for teachers that focused on these strategies specifically intended for use across disciplines appeared (Moore, Readance & Rickelman, 1983; Ratekin et al., 1985). Thus, Herber’s book represents at least one source what became the dominant discourse for talking about literacy learning in content area classrooms, a discourse rooted firmly in a perspective on reading as primarily a cognitive activity.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the scholarly perspective on reading remained heavily influenced by cognitive psychology. The publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), which reported declining literacy rates among adolescents, brought national attention to the issue of secondary-level reading (Alvermann & Moore, 1991), particularly as it applied to content areas. Although there were studies at the time that contradicted or gave more nuanced representations of the claims of the report, they were not widely publicized. One, for example, demonstrated that it was only in the acquisition of particular reading strategies that students were deficient, and that it was certain groups of students, rather than students as a whole, who did not perform well (Stedman & Kaestle, 1987); another more generally problematized evaluating reading achievement against a set of skills to be learned (Langer, 1988). Nonetheless, researchers and policy-makers alike were motivated to discover how to mitigate the presumed weakness (Alvermann & Moore, 1991). As a result, the 1980s saw an expansion of experimentally designed research on strategies to help secondary students learn from text. Examinations of step-by-step procedural
frameworks for approaching both reading and writing, such as graphic organizers, structured overviews, and anticipation guides, dominated this experimental research (Alvermann & Moore, 1991; O’Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995). The effectiveness of study strategies like underlining, paraphrasing, outlining, and comprehension self-monitoring, as well others referred to with acronyms such as SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review) were also a common research focus (O’Brien et al., 1995), and were showcased as keys to successful reading (O’Brien et al., 1995). While literacy research writ large had by this time demonstrated the significant role context plays in defining and learning literacy (Brice Heath, 1983, 2012; Scribner, 1984; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Venezky, 1991), education research still tended to treated literacy solely as a set of cognitive skills to be learned by individuals.

By the time the 1991 volume of the *Handbook of Reading Research* was published, there was some evidence of a shift in thinking. While emphasis remained on experimental research and the cognitive aspects of reading, text structure typical of various disciplines and the effect of those structures on comprehension came under consideration. The assumption, however, remained that the process of reading relies primarily on a set of complex rules, and that comprehension is predictive and driven by expectations (Weaver & Kintsch, 1991). Despite the prevalence of this view, evidence from workplace and military studies had also started to accumulate showing that literacy skills were not as generic and transferable as had been assumed (Mikulecky & Drew, 1991).

By the late 1990s, qualitative studies endeavored to describe classrooms in terms of their sociocultural contexts, and how those contexts influenced the teaching and learning that occurred there (Bean, 2000). This change in the focus of reading research to a sociocultural perspective is reflected in an evolving understanding of literacy as increasingly complex (Gaffney & Anderson, 2000). Critical (Siegel & Fernandez, 2000) and ethnographic (Florio-Ruane & McVee, 2000) approaches to literacy research were brought to the forefront, as were the role of student engagement and motivation (Guthrie
& Wigfield, 2000), and the influence of technology on literacy and literacy learning (Kamil, Intrator, & Kim, 2000; Leu, 2000).

As researchers began during this period to study the sociocultural aspects of learning from text, particularly in content area classrooms, they began to consider the process of reading and learning from text as multidimensional (Alexander & Jetton, 2000). What and how teachers taught and students read and learned from texts were explored through a lens of sociocultural influences such as those rooted in technology, diverse student backgrounds, and student interest, (Alexander & Jetton, 2000), as well as teacher beliefs and school- and classroom-based constraints (Bean, 2000). While this shift in perspective broadened the understanding of literacy, and of the factors that might help or hinder literacy learning, it did not, however, necessarily broaden the construct of content area literacy learning itself. Bean’s review of the literature demonstrates this. All of the studies Bean reviewed were considered from a social constructionist stance, a perspective that foregrounds the experiences and views of the participants in a social context, in this case content area teachers in their classrooms. This had the effect of illuminating the significance of the sociocultural context, yet it was done only in an attempt to understand why content area literacy strategies hadn’t been more successfully infused into content area instruction.

This problem of infusing generic literacy strategies into content area classrooms, as well as recognition of a continued need for reading development among adolescents, aroused skepticism among scholars about the efficacy of a generic approach to literacy in the content areas (Brozo, Moorman, Meyer, & Stewart, 2013). Many of the same strategies Herber outlined in 1970 continued to shape the practice of content-area literacy (Brozo et al., 2013). Researchers noticed, however, that many of these generic reading strategies, made little difference for students on or above grade level for reading (Shanahan, 2010), even if they proved helpful for so-called “struggling readers,” and could be easily taught and used by students. Furthermore, their efficacy in improving
comprehension was only realized when they were broadly and consistently explained, modeled, and practiced (Ness, 2009), and when student improvement was measured by standardized test questions aligned to the same set of skills and strategies (Ness, 2009). Additional challenges to the strategies approach to content area literacy were the reluctance of content area teachers to take on the responsibility of explicit reading instruction, and their skepticism about their own ability to do so (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009; Moje, Young, Readance, & Moore, 2000; Ness, 2009; Vaughn, Swanson, & Roberts, 2013; Wilson, 2011). Contributing to their reluctance was the combination of assessment and curricular pressure that underscores the tension between “covering content” and the responsibility to reinforce comprehension with generic reading strategies (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009; Ness, 2009; Vaughn et al., 2013; Wilson, 2011).

**Disciplinary Literacy**

Gee’s (2000) exploration of situated meaning and its specific application to reading marked an important shift in thinking about literacy, particularly as it applies to the content areas. In his discussion of discourse and sociocultural reading studies, Gee argues that meaning in language is derived contextually through cultural models, and through the communities of practice (Lave & Wegner, 1991) that socialize learners into particular ways of knowing and acting in the world. When conceived as communities of practice, the same logic can be applied to the various content areas or disciplines. This construct, working alongside Gee’s assertion that “there is no ‘reading in general’” (Gee, 2000, p. 204) opened a window through which a disciplinary literacy perspective might be explored.

Scholars began to take note of differences between how the various disciplines approach text, and define and warrant knowledge (see Bain, 2006, 2005; Fang, 2004; Moje, 2010, 2008a, 2008b; Shanahan, 2012; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012, 2008;
These differences form the basis of disciplinary literacy approach. This perspective argues that acknowledging and enacting the particular disciplinary practices is crucial to the development of conceptual understandings of the disciplines (McConachie, 2010). In order to promote this development, students must be given access to the discursive literate practices of the discipline which include the unique ways members of the discipline think, read, write, and listen (Moje, 2010). Inherent in these practices are the tools of knowledge production and critique that from a disciplinary literacy perspective are disclosed, examined, and practiced in content area classrooms (Moje, 2010).

In social studies classrooms in particular, a disciplinary literacy approach allows for a framing of history education in line with how the discipline frames itself: as a space in which knowledge is viewed as constructed, historical meanings and understandings are in a continual process of being revised, and texts are inseparable from context (Moje, 2008; Vansledright, 2010, 2012). In these classrooms spaces, students move away from simply memorizing historical events towards understanding them (Wineburg, 1994). Social studies teachers who tend, like most secondary educators, to identify with their discipline, may be in the best position to engage students in the discursive literate practices of history (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012), thus initiating them into the disciplinary literacy of history. The approach has garnered the attention of both scholars and policy-makers as a way of advancing adolescents’ literacy learning (Brozo et al., 2013; Moje, 2015).

**Social Studies as a School Subject**

As a school subject comprised of multiple branches of the social sciences, which can never be assumed to be ideologically neutral (Thornton, 2008), there has been, and continues to be controversy about what constitutes the school subject of Social Studies and how it should be taught. Since Social Studies itself is not a discipline, the term as it
applies to the school subject remains ill-defined. Questions about its goals and purposes continue to be debated (Powell, 2017), and questions persist about the exact nature of what disciplines should be included under the heading “Social Studies” (Thornton, 2008). In addition to history, for example, middle and secondary level Social Studies curricula often include geography, government, economics and current events (Thornton, 2008). That said, because historical content comprises the most common element of middle and high school social studies classes (Levstik, 2008), and because there has been significant movement to define and reevaluate the epistemological underpinnings of history as a discipline, I refer specifically in this research to how history defines its literacy and thinking.

Social Studies as a school subject has its origins in the social welfare movement of the nineteenth century, which then evolved into the curricular program of the twentieth century (Saxe, 1992) in which was social studies was considered essential in the socialization of immigrant students (Brophy & VanSledright, 1997). Then as now, there are those who claim that social studies serves a purpose beyond academic content (Thornton, 2008) because it provides a practical vehicle through which students might learn to be “good citizens,” “informed voters,” or “loyal Americans.” Thus, the discourse of Social Studies as a school subject becomes intimately connected not only to discourses of literacy, but also to the discourse of what it might mean to be an American.

Unsurprisingly, ideological disputes over the purposes of Social Studies instruction have surfaced over the years. Despite these controversies, however, little has changed in the way social studies is framed and taught in K-12 classrooms (Brophy & VanSledright, 1997; Levstik, 2008; Thornton, 2008). What is known is that up to 90% of instructional time in Social Studies classrooms at the middle and secondary school levels is devoted to textbook reading (Alvermann & Moore, 1991; Bain, 2006; Levstik, 2008), and rote memorization of historical facts as presented by the hidden authority of those textbooks (Alvermann & Moore, 1991; Bain, 2006; Paxton, 1999). Students report that besides
reading and memorizing textbook material, completing related worksheets is the most common Social Studies classroom activity (Levstik, 2008; National Center for Educational Statistics NAEP, 2002; 2007). In short, curricular integration and student inquiry, particularly at the secondary level, are rare (Levstik, 2008; Rosenzweig, 2000). This remains true despite movements over the last hundred years that have attempted to make the school subject of Social Studies more relevant to student lives, to incorporate inquiry and problem-solving, and to expand the use of primary documents (Reisman, 2012a). And it persists in spite of the linguistic turn of the 1980s that made visible the ways that language that renders historical narratives as constructed, not merely written (Wilson & Wineburg, 1993), and inevitably partial and value-laden. Social Studies pedagogy seems to have missed the epistemological shift that the discipline of history underwent in the 1980s when it was forced to relinquish the quest for official and objective stories of the past, detached from, and ignorant of, the convictions of their authors (Wilson & Wineburg, 1993). Thus, what happens in Social Studies classrooms appears to reflect little of the disciplinary literacy described and practiced by the community of historians.

At the same time, Social Studies as a school subject has become marginalized. During a period in which high-stakes testing in math and ELA is emphasized, Social Studies is sometimes viewed as a subject area on which an infusion model of literacy might easily be overlaid. In one example of how this has been accomplished, interdisciplinary instruction in elementary and middle school, most often labeled as “humanities,” was advocated as early as the progressive education movement of the early 20th century. Although less common at the secondary level, this interdisciplinary approach continues to be supported by those who argue that integration of subjects increases student motivation and supports deeper understanding of content (Levstik, 2008). Critics, however, note that the recent increased emphasis on high-stakes standardized testing in reading and mathematics has turned social studies instruction into
little more than reading lessons with historical themes in which generic comprehension skills are the focus (Levstik, 2008; Wills, 2007). Thus, according to Levstik (2008), “claims of integration disguise the elimination of any substantive content aside from reading and mathematics and significantly reduce or eliminate instructional time for social studies” (p. 55). The collapsing of literacy in history/social studies (as well as science and technical subjects), into the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts further serves to drive the school subject of Social Studies into the shadows. The “substantive content” Levstik references might be interpreted as a canon of historical facts, but it might also encompass the habits of mind, or discursive literate practices of thinking, speaking, acting, and interacting, particular to the field of history. Thus, at the same time that Social Studies as a school subject becomes further sidelined, an infusion model of the teaching of literacy, based on generic reading strategies, displaces the sourcing, corroborating, contextualizing, empathizing, and close reading that are the earmarks of the disciplinary literacy of history.

Statement of the Problem

Whether the call is from scholars in social studies and literacy to engage learners in a disciplinary literacy approach or from those who advocate a content-area approach, the focus stems from concern over the apparent difficulties with reading that adolescents face. More than one-quarter of students in grades eight and twelve were evaluated as below “Basic” in reading by the 2007 and 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009; Reisman, 2012a); eighth grade results for 2011, and twelfth grade results for 2013 remained about the same (National Center for Educational Statistics NAEP, 2011; 2013). General readiness of the college-bound population for post-secondary reading, as assessed by the ACT (2014), was about 64% for both 2013 and 2014. Although this represents a significant improvement over the
2006 results which showed a readiness level of just above 50% (at that point, the lowest in over ten years) (ACT, 2006), the results are perhaps lower than might be expected specifically among students whose apparent goal is to attend college.

Setting aside questions about the ability of such tests to fairly and adequately assess readers’ understanding of text, even the perception that students’ ability to read is less than satisfactory, particularly in an age of data-driven instruction, motivates scholars and educators alike to try to do more. In many cases, including in my own teaching context, social studies teachers have been encouraged, or sometimes required, to incorporate generic reading comprehension skills and strategies into their instruction (Moje, 2008a; Ness, 2009; Reisman, 2012b; Wilson, 2011). In other more recent models, like that which is described in the New York State K-12 Social Studies Framework (2014), the push is for a disciplinary approach. At least two problems emerge as a result of these directives: One is that the two approaches are represented as dichotomous. The other is that teachers are represented as lacking agency, expertise, and theoretical understandings of literacy.

Content-area and disciplinary literacy are often interpreted as mutually-exclusive, or even contradictory, a view runs contrary to how literacy works in the real world. While cognition and the basic comprehension of written text to which it is undeniably attached are fundamental elements of literacy, they alone do not fully portray what literacy entails. Similarly, the ways of thinking, acting, and believing that are attached to literacy in the disciplines inevitably also draw upon particular kinds and uses of language. When these language uses involve the comprehension of written text, little can be accomplished unless generic, cognitive skills are at work alongside disciplinarily interpretive ones. Treating the approaches as binary short-circuits both what literacy means, and what it means to teach it. More accurate is a view that holds generic comprehension and disciplinary approaches as co-requisite, coordinated, and concurrent. In this study, I
problematize the way scholars frame content-area and disciplinary approaches to literacy as a binary that calls for choosing one or the other.

Another and more significant problem connected to the push for one or another approach to literacy in the subject areas is how teachers are represented. A key assumption underlying this study is that teachers have and apply authority, agency, and expertise in how literacy is enacted in social studies classrooms. They engage both in and with pedagogical practice at the same time that they formulate and reconfigure conceptual frameworks and theories of teaching, learning, and literacy. Also assumed is that literacy is defined and expressed in a variety of ways and to serve a variety of purposes; this variety may, and in fact often does, involve literacy practices that require more than one theoretical perspective. I further assume that the approaches inherent in the disciplinary literacy of history, including its ways of thinking, talking about, and reading texts, are of primary, rather than ancillary importance to education; uncovered, modeled, practiced, and learned, these disciplinary approaches provide a means by which adolescent learners can evaluate perspectives on issues, examine truth claims, and assess the warrants of those claims (Barton & Levstik, 2004). I see these abilities as essential to informed citizenry and the functioning of democracy.

Very little is known about how teachers themselves understand, engage in, and see their role in enacting, literacy, particularly in their social studies classrooms (Moje et al., 2011). When teachers are the subject of research, they are often positioned as little more than tools by means of which particular practices might be implemented. Studies that frame reading in the generic terms of a transferable skills-set, often characterize teachers as unwilling, unprepared, or lacking the confidence to teach reading (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009; Ness, 2009; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Wilson, 2011). When teachers are considered in research, they are often distinguished from “expert” readers such as historians (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Wineburg, 1991), and are thus represented as inadequately prepared to possess expertise. This presumed lack of
expertise is reinforced by professional development that positions teachers as technicians tasked with receiving and transmitting knowledge through the faithful implementation of pedagogical practices generated by outside authorities (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

If it is assumed, as I do, that teachers in general, and social studies teachers in particular, are agentive, capable knowers with literate, historical, and pedagogical expertise, then teachers’ interpretations of literacy and literacy learning expectations, and of history and history learning expectations, must be made visible and considered. Also necessary to consider and capitalize on is the collaborative intellectual capacity of teachers to generate knowledge and make meaning around literacy, teaching, and learning, a resource that is too often undervalued and left unappreciated. These understandings are consistent with my view that teachers’ underlying thinking, beliefs, and theories, including those about literacy, understood against a backdrop of institutional pressures and constraints, contribute to how curriculum is ultimately enacted (Fickel, 2000; Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1992). Because practitioner research allows me and other inquiry group participants to simultaneously identify with and enact simultaneous roles as researchers and teachers, the knowledge and meanings that are generated have both practical pedagogical and theoretical value. Because the tensions and affordances of the discourses in which teachers engage influence the learning they construct with students, and bound student learning in particular ways, they are also worthy of study. Finally, because of the way these assumptions underpin this study, it may contribute to the body of knowledge about how literacy is expressed in social studies classrooms.

Failing to put teachers’ voices, views, and collective intellectual capacity at the center of research fails to recognize the potential and very real influence of teachers who stand at the intersection of theoretical literacy models, institutional literacy goals, and student literacy learning. It also fails to take into account the possibilities that exist, not in
theory and practice, or in one literacy approach or another as binaries, but as productively intersecting constituents of what it means to teach and learn.

Rationale for the Study

Few opportunities exist for pre- or in-service teachers to explore how literacy practices might be expressed in their disciplines (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008), and even fewer exist for teachers to collaborate on how to translate patterns of literacy, whether framed as generic skills or discursive literate practices of disciplines, into our teaching. Part of why this is true is that social studies as a school subject is viewed as less important than language arts and mathematics (Ravitch, 2000). This reduced priority has resulted in fewer resources and opportunities for curricular and instructional development (Ravitch, 2000). A collaborative teacher development inquiry group focused on literacy in social studies is one such opportunity.

My perspective on curriculum also underpinned the rationale for this study. In my view, curriculum, is not simply implemented or adapted (Snyder et al., 1992), but rather is enacted and experienced both by teachers and by students. This perspective necessarily acknowledges teacher agency and the essential role teacher beliefs play in classroom life. Although there is disagreement about the degree to which teacher beliefs, specifically those about literacy, culminate in enacted pedagogy (Fang, 1996; Snyder et al., 1992), a substantial number of studies support the idea that teachers do possess theoretical beliefs about reading and literacy (Fang, 1996). Also supported is the idea that those beliefs tend to shape, if not teachers’ actual instructional practices, at least their hypothetical planning (Fang, 1996).

Little is known about how teachers understand literacy in the context of teaching social studies, and even less is known about how they navigate often competing local and institutional literacy demands. With its focus on teachers, and taken up as practitioner
research, this study foregrounds the potential of an emic perspective that blurs the boundaries between research and practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), and thereby sheds light on an area and from a stance that has been largely overlooked by existing scholarship.

**Statement of the Purpose**

The main purpose of this qualitative study was to document, describe, and interpret how middle and secondary level social studies teachers talk about, enact, and generate, interrogate, and transform constructs of literacy in a collaborative professional development teacher inquiry group. It will also describe the discourses on which teachers draw as they talk about literacy in social studies. Working within a discourse studies framework, and from an inquiry stance perspective, I documented the perspectives of, and interactions between, teachers as they participated in an inquiry group focused on literacy teaching and learning in social studies.

Thus, one purpose of this study was to contribute to an awareness of the ways teachers personally take up, remix, or resist the competing and complementary discourses that circulate around literacy in schools. Bringing to the fore teacher perspectives on literacy as it pertains to history as a discipline and as a school subject, I hoped to learn more about the unique constructs of literacy, literacy learning, and literacy teaching that these teachers hold. A related purpose was to bring attention to how, in the context of a collaborative inquiry group, these or other constructs of literacy and the knowledge to which they are attached might be interrogated, transformed, and generated. Finally, and of particular interest to me, was to explore how teachers negotiate the tensions and affordances inherent both in teacher inquiry as a site for collaboration and critique, and in the presumed dichotomy between content-area and disciplinary literacy approaches. Increasing awareness and appreciation of the capacity of teachers to theorize practice and
construct knowledge might be a first step in considering its role in shaping how literacy might be represented and most productively enacted in middle and secondary level Social Studies classrooms.

**Research Questions**

This study was designed to explore the following research questions about how a group of middle and secondary school social studies/history teachers talk about literacy, and the teaching of literacy, in social studies.

1. How do middle and secondary school social studies teachers talk, think about, and represent literacy as it applies to their social studies classrooms?
   a. On what discourses do teachers draw as they talk about literacy in social studies?

2. What knowledge and meaning is interrogated, transformed, and generated as teachers interact in a teacher inquiry group focused on literacy in social studies?

**Significance of the Study**

This study may be significant in the field of literacy education, specifically as it applies to literacy in Social Studies. While the discursive literate practices associated with the study of history have been outlined, and research has been done to describe the ways and degrees to which both historians and students engage in these practices (see Afflerbach & VanSledright, 2001; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Vansledright, 2004; Wineburg, 1991; 1999), very little research has focused attention on teachers’ perspectives on literacy in the disciplines. Pedagogical literacy practices, framed from both content-area and disciplinary perspectives, also have been extensively investigated.
and analyzed. Even the question of why literacy may appear to be inadequately addressed in subject-area classrooms has been examined. However, literacy as it pertains to the teaching of history and social studies has been researched least often from the perspective of teachers.

This study may also be significant because it seeks to problematize the way content-area and disciplinary approaches to literacy are often framed as binary in literacy research. This view may not adequately take into account the reality of classroom life, specifically in terms of how social studies teachers perceive, interpret, and by extension express and enact, literacy in their classrooms. It also fails to fully consider the institutional and local conditions viewed by teachers as complicating their implementation. First, social studies curricular demands often include coverage of broad historical periods, student understanding of which is still assessed predominantly through multiple choice tests (VanSledright, 2004). As a result, a “parade of facts” approach to history (VanSledright, 2012) tends to dominate, constraining teachers’ ability both to address the generic skills of the content-area approach, and the discursive practices of disciplinary literacy. Second, although research has highlighted the positive effects of incorporating more primary and secondary sources into social studies education (see Bain, 2006, 2005; VanSledright, 2012, 2002a, 2002b), the perception that such sources are too difficult for students often makes teachers reluctant to do so (Levstik, 2008; Reisman, 2012b); yet it is these historical texts with which disciplinary literacy practices are most meaningfully applied. Third, how literacy is framed in social studies classrooms is impacted by the ubiquitous talk, text, beliefs, and actions around standards, the high-stakes student assessments to which they have been attached, and teacher evaluations subsequently tied to those assessments. In spite of calls by scholars of both literacy and social studies to reconceptualize how disciplinary learning and literacy instruction is enacted in social studies classrooms, school literacy frameworks emphasize generic strategies across content areas. The ways and extent to which literacy is expressed and
enacted in social studies classrooms must be understood not only in the context of these conditions, but also in the context of how teachers interpret and respond to those conditions. Acting as “gatekeepers” (Thornton, 1989), teachers make decisions about pedagogy and curricula that are answerable to often competing demands (Lampert, 2001). These decisions may produce pedagogical amalgams reflective of the discourses that circulate in both schools and scholarship.

Finally, the significance of this study may be its focus on, and attention to, the tensions and complications around literacy expectations. It does this by focusing on those tensions and complications that teachers themselves identify, and on moments of emotional intensities that emerge during the talk. It attends to the potential of tensions, complications, and conflict within a teacher inquiry group to interrogate and generate knowledge, and construct meaning. Unpacking the discourses around, within, and with which social studies teachers talk and interact about literacy in their classrooms might serve as a first step in understanding the influence these discourses have on pedagogical practice and theory related to literacy in social studies classrooms.

**Theoretical Framework**

In this research, I draw on intersecting theoretical traditions that enrich my perspective on literacy, its teaching and learning, and the value of teacher knowledge. The primary theoretical perspective that informs this study is inquiry as stance. This perspective is relevant because it foregrounds teachers, teacher knowledge, and teacher interactions with students, positioning these at the center of change in education (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). It is also relevant because it is the overarching framework within which practitioner research, as described by Cochran-Smith and Lytle, operates. Among the characteristics shared by the various genres of practitioner research are that local knowledge is valued, that the professional context functions as the site of
the study, and that boundaries are blurred between research and practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). These are all salient aspects of the research I am proposing, and are consistent with an inquiry as stance perspective. Thus, I take inquiry as stance as my primary framework because it allows me to acknowledge and mobilize my own emic perspective at the same time that I foreground the insider knowledge generated by the inquiry group.

The other theoretical perspective from which I draw in this study is discourse studies. As both a researcher and a middle school classroom teacher, I approach this research with broad and deep exposure to some of the widely varying discourses that circulate in schools. These include, but are not limited to, discourses about literacy and how it is defined, understood, and expressed both in and outside of schools. At the same time, discourses around teaching, learning, assessment, and adolescence, to name but a few, also circulate. These discourses are made evident in what and how social studies teachers talk about literacy. I take discourse studies as part of my theoretical framework because it is a productive lens through which to describe how social studies teachers talk and make meaning about literacy in their discipline.

What follows are more in-depth discussions of these theoretical constructs, and how each individually, but also conjointly, contributes to the design of the study and to my interpretation of the data that is produced.

**Inquiry as Stance**

Inquiry as stance is a perspective distinct from, but connected to, practitioner or teacher research. Like inquiry as stance, practitioner research focuses on teachers and the “inside-out” knowledge they possess and are capable of generating. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) point out, the concept of practitioner or teacher research has come to be frequently associated with programs of professional development or teacher training that recommend sequential steps or strategies to improve outcomes or solve educational
problems as perceived by those outside the context of teaching practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009); teachers are recognized for the essential role they play in student learning, but are nonetheless assumed to be primarily technicians through whom received curricula must be faithfully implemented (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

In contrast, inquiry as stance encompasses a critical perspective in which prevailing ideas about teaching, research, and knowledge might be challenged. It views teachers as “deliberative intellectuals who constantly theorize practice as part of practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 2), intentionally blurring the concepts of theory and practice, and of the roles of researchers and practitioners. Inquiry as stance views these concepts and roles not as distinct elements that have to be translated into one another, but rather as dialectically interwoven (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Because inquiry as stance views knowledge both about teaching and subject matter as mutable, universal teaching knowledge and universal “best practice” are impossible. Rather, collaborative, joint construction of knowledge by small groups of teachers creates learning and understandings that are contextualized and situated. Practitioners and the knowledge they collectively generate are positioned at the center of educational transformation. At the same time, inquiry as stance supports questioning dominant views of education and critiquing research as part of the learning process. Teachers who involve themselves in critical questioning can foster similar questioning in students. In doing so, this orientation has as its overarching purpose providing education in the service of a more just and democratic society.

When Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) first coined the term inquiry as stance, they did so to emphasize the perspectival and conceptual elements of inquiry and to signal “a worldview and a habit of mind” (p. viii). Regarding inquiry not as a method, but as a stance, it becomes “a way of knowing and being in the world of educational practice that carries across educational contexts and various points in one’s professional career and that links individuals to larger groups and social movements” (p. viii). Educators who
take an inquiry as stance perspective work collectively to problematize assumptions about dominant educational goals and practices (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). They pose purposeful questions about instruction, curriculum, and assessment that challenge the status quo, and aim to transform classroom practice. Inquiry as stance is an appropriate theoretical framework for this study because it is viewed as a “theory of action … that positions practitioners’ knowledge, practitioners, and their interactions with students and other stakeholders at the center of educational transformation” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, pp. 123-124). It is an orientation that provides a meaningful lens through which to understand both how literacy is conceptualized, constructed, and enacted by social studies teachers, and how they both problematize and problem-solve the literacy demands and expectations of their classrooms.

An inquiry as stance perspective guided my research methodology as I facilitated and participated in the teacher inquiry group that is the site of this study. It also guided my descriptions, interpretations, and analysis as the data from teachers’ talk around literacy teaching and learning in social studies classrooms is produced. Inasmuch as inquiry as stance blurs the boundaries between researcher and practitioner, it allowed me to tap into the potential inherent in the tensions between them and examine the dialectic between theory and practice. Because this perspective values interactive knowledge generating and meaning making, it offers a lens for exploring and describing teachers’ perspectives and experiences as a part of a local collaborative community. Because teacher questioning is valued as a way of learning, and because the professional context of teaching is positioned as source of valid research questions, inquiry as stance provides a framework within which I can describe how teachers talk about, theorize, question, and construct literacy, literacy teaching, and literacy learning in social studies. And because inquiry as stance positions educators as knowers who have both expertise in their discipline, and local knowledge of their school context, and assumes that knowledge generated in one context cannot be unquestioningly be generalized, this framework will
be useful as a way of foregrounding the significance of teacher agency and expertise. Finally, because this stance has as its purpose drawing on the collective intellectual capacities of teachers to create a more democratic and just society, it provides a lens through which I can describe how teachers may or may not question the purposes and consequences of institutional and other literacy demands and expectations on both teaching and learning.

**Discourse Studies and the Literacy Practices of Social Studies**

Discourse studies is the study of language in use and its associated meaning-making. Discourse research argues that all talk comprises other talk, conversations, texts, and voices, and that internal states like beliefs and understandings are realized, or constructed, as entities in discourse; thus, language does not merely function to neutrally express thinking, but instead is constituted by discourses (Wetherell, 2005). Considered in this way, the discourses teachers (and others) use to talk about literacy and teaching literacy simultaneously help to define what counts as literacy, and help shape how they (and others) mobilize those meanings (Wetherell, 2005). A discourse studies perspective establishes a foundation from which the influence of biographical, institutional, historical, and political references, and the discourses those suggest, might be recognized and described.

How literacy is understood differs across communities and contexts (Blommaert, 2005), and how and what meaning is derived through literacy practices is influenced both by these situational understandings, and by the way individuals interpret and apply those understandings. Just as the place from which we speak plays a significant role in both what we say and how we say it (Bakhtin, 1987), the place from which we engage in literacy does so as well. Seen in this way, talking and meaning-making in general, and about literacy in particular, draw on discourses that describe, shape, and are shaped by transactions between multiple layers of speakers and texts (Bakhtin, 1981).
Because this study focuses on teachers’ participation in a collaborative inquiry group, the data is teachers’ talk, and the unit of analysis centers on the social interactions of the teacher inquiry group. I apply theoretical concepts described by both Bakhtin (1986) and Gee (1991, 1999, 2005) to my analysis. A Bakhtinian approach to meaning is based on three fundamental issues. The first is a rejection of the idea that individuals can act independent of the society of which they are a part. Because meaning is based in sociocultural situatedness and involves at least two voices (Wertsch, 2005), individuals are not credited with independently creating or owning meaning. The second is a problematizing of a transmission model of communication in which language functions as a unidirectional conduit of information. From a Bakhtinian perspective, as voices come into contact they interanimate each other, influenced at the same time by past voices (Wertsch, 2005). Finally, there is a rejection of the assumption that all meanings are fixed, unable to be modified through interaction with other meanings or voices. Although Bakhtin (1981) acknowledged the existence of authoritative texts and discourse, such as certain religious, political, and moral writings whose meanings are, in fact, fixed and “cannot be represented…only transmitted” (p. 344), most language cannot be understood in this way. Instead, all language is dialogic, or in conversation, be it with the self, with other present voices, with perhaps hidden past or concurrent meanings, or some combination thereof.

According to Bakhtin (1986), the utterance is the basic unit of study of speech. Utterances refer in this study to the words teachers use to talk about literacy, about literacy learning, and about teaching literacy in social studies classrooms. Bakhtinian theory assumes that at the same time that utterances are to some degree individual and creative, they are also, “filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which [they are] related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 91). Thus, every utterance is linked in complex ways to other utterances that precede, follow, presuppose, build upon, or disrupt it. These links, or interrelationships,
between utterances are referred to by Bakhtin as dialogism. Although Bakhtin wrote mainly about the dialogic and heteroglossic nature of the written novel, he also included speech in his notion of text. Since the talk in the teacher inquiry group involved discussion, Bakhtin’s (1986) notion of dialogism will be useful in the analysis of the speech data that is produced.

The pattern of utterances that constitute the way language is used in different contexts forms what Bakhtin (1986) refers to as “speech genres.” Just as there are speech genres of everyday conversation among friends, there are also speech genres of talking about history, literacy, teaching, and learning. In this study I analyze the utterances of teachers in the context of the speech genres in which they participate. Speech genres, which structure all varieties of speech, are products and expressions of spheres of relatively stable and normative language use (Bakhtin, 1986). At the same time that they are distinct from one another, however, they can also be interconnected and malleable.

Gee’s (1989, 2005) notion of discourse is similar in that it describes patterns of language that are also distinct, and often interconnected and malleable, but according to Gee, discourse is more than just about language. Discourses both express and structure dominant beliefs about the world, about our perception of reality, and about our identities (Mills, 1997). They are articulated through talk and are acquired through socialization (Gee, 2001). Socialization into particular communities involves acquiring socially situated identities and cultural models (Gee, 2001; 2005). Gee refers to these identities and models as “identity kits” (Gee, 2001, p. 719), or Discourses (capital D) that include ways of thinking, believing, and acting. Thus, at the same time that beliefs about the world are expressed in discourse (small-d), these beliefs themselves also produce Discourses (capital D). Gee (2001, 2005) conceives of Discourses (capital D) as systems of power and knowledge that produce the objects they purport to describe. For example, social studies curricula that prescribe generic, skills-based literacy practices are produced by a linear and standardized Discourse of literacy. Through discourse (small d),
individuals can speak within several Discourses (capital D) at once. These Discourses (capital D) can be in alignment or in tension with one another (Gee, 2001). While I analyze teachers’ talk, I attend to both the discourses (small-d), and Discourses (capital-D) on which teachers draw.

These perspectives form the framework within which I describe how teachers talk about what literacy means and how literacy works in their discipline and in their classrooms. The notion of discourses shaped by a multiplicity of layers of transactions has particular relevance to a study focused on the discipline of social studies. Seeking to describe how social studies teachers talk about and interactively make meaning around literacy in their discipline, mirrors how historians define the literacy in which their discipline engages: one in which readers of history and authors of history engage in a “conversation” (VanSledright, 2010). In this way, the discourse of the disciplinary literacy of social studies recognizes the reading of historical text as dialogical, in much the same way that Bakhtin (1981, 1986) views all language that conveys meaning as conversation. Thus, layered within teachers’ talk and knowledge generation about literacy, are “thousands of living dialogic threads” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 77) that are infused with intended, suggested, and suggestive meanings.

In this study, I use the framework of discourse studies to help me describe the “conversations” teachers have with themselves, with each other, and with any pedagogical, historical, or other texts, documents, or sources that they may contribute to the inquiry group. This perspective allows for provisional or ambiguous interpretations or understandings of literacy, literacy teaching, social studies, and social studies teaching revealed in teachers’ talk, an epistemological stance consistent with that which is embraced by the discipline of history itself. Ambiguity and intertextual dissonance is not only tolerated, but also expected in a context in which history is viewed as an argument about the past that can never fully be resolved. A discourse studies perspective also allows me to describe teachers’ talk about literacy and teaching literacy in social studies
as “shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 116) with talk that came before, and to acknowledge that the talk may “assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 116) meanings of literacy and teaching in potentially new ways.

Inquiry as stance and a discourse studies perspective intersect in ways that are meaningful to this practitioner research study. Both privilege situated meanings and understandings, and both also recognize dialectical relationships across concepts otherwise viewed discretely. From a discourse studies perspective, teachers’ meaning making about literacy draws on discourses shaped by multiple layers of texts and readers (Bakhtin, 1981); all language is understood as a kind of conversation suggestive of and gesturing to other talk and text. Similarly, inquiry as stance blurs distinctions between theory and practice, researcher and practitioner, and leader and learner, seeing each as intrinsically connected and mutually dependent on the other. Most significantly, both perspectives privilege ways of knowing that may be contrary to dominant social, cultural or political understandings. Discourse studies rejects the concept of language in general, and acknowledges that language has the capacity to reformulate or generate new meanings; it positions situated individuals at the center of language meaning. Inquiry as stance questions notions of generalized of knowledge and positions teachers as knowers with the capacity to both critique knowledge and generate new knowledge. Therefore, these perspectives complement each other as the theoretical framework for this study.
Chapter II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Teachers of history, like all teachers, function within shifting and often competing discourses. Considering how these discourses impact the way teachers conceive of and frame literacy in history, and the content of historical knowledge that they are tasked to teach, creates a broader context within which literacy, and its classroom enactment, might be understood. It also allows for consideration of the multiple understandings and expressions of literacy that shape the practice of Social Studies teaching.

My purpose in this chapter is to synthesize the literature on the ways literacy is understood, framed, and taught in school subject areas, and specifically in middle and secondary social studies classrooms. This chapter is organized into four main sections. In the first part of this chapter, I unpack the content-area literacy approach to adolescent literacy. This approach focuses on reading and comprehension as components so key to literacy as to become synonymous with it. It emphasizes and is dependent upon instruction in generic cognitive reading strategies, and is the dominant approach to subject area literacy in schools, and in literacy research. In the second part of this chapter, I turn to the disciplinary literacy approach. This approach recognizes the important role reading plays in literacy, but broadens its definition to include a wider range of discursive literate practices. I begin by reviewing the research on how historians read, think about, and make sense of historical texts because it is this research that establishes the foundation upon which the disciplinary literacy approach in the school subject of social
studies is built. In this approach, the focus is on the social and therefore discipline-based ways of thinking and negotiating text. These discipline-specific practices express and delineate how literacy is defined, and guide how literacy is taught in content-area classrooms. In the third part of this chapter, I integrate research on how teachers think about and make sense of what literacy means in social studies. Embedded in the sense-making of these actors are indications of how they perceive historical knowledge is constructed and warranted. For teachers in particular, these perceptions are relevant to how literacy might be framed and expressed in classrooms. A synthesis of this literature allows me to recognize and put in perspective how the various discourses on which teachers draw compare to those of historians, and how those may influence the knowledge and meanings teachers generate about literacy in social studies. Again, although little research exists that focuses explicitly on teachers, I selected studies conducted in middle and secondary school contexts. Finally, in the last section of the chapter, I examine the literature connected to teacher inquiry, specifically as rooted in Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (1999) notion of inquiry as stance. This construct provides a lens through which the various relationships between knowledge and practice can be understood. It also opens a window into understanding how inquiry might generate knowledge, how it connects to practice, and what teachers might learn through collaboration. One important feature of this learning is teacher talk. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1992) consider what they refer to as “conversations” as the means through which teachers establish and maintain meaningful collegial relationships. These conversations “provide rich information about [teachers’] day-to-day work and the ways they construct their worlds inside and outside their classrooms” (p. 310).

Reviewing the related literature required that I make certain choices. Because it aligns with the grade level my study addresses, I narrowed my selection of literature to that which pertained specifically to middle or secondary school literacy in content areas, with a particular focus on literacy in social studies. Because my own stance on literacy is
that it is multiply defined, multifaceted, and socially, and therefore disciplinarily rooted, my emphasis is on literature that identifies itself with a disciplinary literacy perspective. But because, like literacy itself, the construct of disciplinary literacy is complex and contested, the distinction between literature that reflects a content-area or disciplinary perspective is not always clear cut. Therefore, I chose to organize this review based on how the literature defines itself, and then critique that definition where necessary. I did not limit the research I reviewed to a single methodology, but read the literature through the theoretical framework I outlined in Chapter I. This means that in my examination of the literature, I attend to the discourses suggested by the various approaches, techniques, tools, and perspectives being studied, and discuss the literature through this lens. I also attend to the presence, absence, or assumption of teacher views in the research.

An Overview of Literacy in Content-Area Classrooms

The bulk of research on literacy in the subject areas, both in general and as it pertains specifically to Social Studies, focuses predominantly on generic cognitive reading strategies, text structures and academic language, and study strategies or systems. These are presumed to transfer across disciplines, and to comprise the key aspects of literacy. Some of the more recent research in this vein nonetheless either gestures to, or explicitly purports to align itself with, a disciplinary literacy perspective, even while simultaneously, and often exclusively, emphasizing generic literacy approaches. Cognitive processes are clearly at work during reading. Therefore, it makes sense, and research has shown, that modeling, teaching, and having students practice generic reading skills can be helpful in particular circumstances in improving comprehension, and thereby promoting at least one aspect of literacy.

Early work in literacy dealt mainly in reading, which was understood linearly: as a set of complex yet discrete cognitive processes. It was presumed that once students
reached the secondary level of education, the comprehension associated with reading as a key component of literacy, shifted from a skill to be learned to one that was put to use in the service of learning. It wasn’t until the early 1970s that the idea was recognized that “learning to read,” in contrast to just “reading to learn,” continues to develop into adolescence. It was also recognized at that time that middle and high school students need a set of reading skills different from the ones that are useful for the predominantly narrative texts of the lower grades (Brozo et al., 2013; Moje, 2007). Those skills, however, continued to focus on cognitive text processing strategies, the difference being that they were geared specifically toward the non-fiction texts to which middle and secondary level students are typically exposed in their subject area classrooms.

Alvermann and Moore’s (1991) review of the literature on reading in secondary schools reflects this dominant approach to literacy in content areas at that time. While subject area teachers are acknowledged by the authors as specialists who are “bound to the contents and skills related to their disciplines” (p. 952), the research they examine evaluates the use and efficacy in content area classrooms of strictly cognitively-based reading strategies. These studies experimentally test the efficacy of a variety of classroom routines that focus on generic strategies like questioning, summarizing, and visualizing; on academic language and text structure, like outlining and text mapping; and on procedural techniques such as guided reading and reciprocal teaching. According to the findings of this review of the literature, most reading strategies are moderately effective in improving comprehension in content area classrooms, but only in the decontextualized conditions in which they were tested; almost two-thirds of the studies reviewed tested the effectiveness of the strategies under conditions that were outside of either the regular classroom routine, or the curriculum itself, and the texts that were used for the evaluations were either borrowed from other sources, or written for the express purpose of the research.
Alvermann and Moore (1991) specifically acknowledge these limitations, and express concern over the low input from teachers in the design and implementation of the studies. As they point out, those experimental comprehension treatments that had the most teacher input and involvement, as opposed to those that relied mostly or exclusively on the researchers, demonstrated the most positive effects, based on assessments established by the research itself. In taking the position that research should not dictate classroom practice, but rather contribute “to the belief systems that teachers develop as they observe their own students in their own classrooms” (p. 964), the authors of this review gesture to the significance of teacher agency. In keeping with the emphasis on cognition and experimental studies that was prevalent in reading research at the time (Bean, 2000), their review is limited to research that tests sets of procedural or strategic reading techniques. These techniques, however, do not adequately address the range of practices beyond reading alone that comprise literacy, nor the plurality of literacies themselves, specifically as they are enacted by the disciplines.

As Alvermann and Moore’s review of research on secondary reading suggests, generic reading strategies continue to be emphasized and employed in schools even today because of their promise to improve general comprehension and optimize content area knowledge acquisition. Bean’s (2000) review of the literature on reading in the content area was specifically undertaken with a view towards understanding whether and how the landscape of literacy research had changed since Alvermann and Moore’s 1991 work. He notes in particular a shift in approach during this decade from mainly experimental and quasi-experimental, to a more qualitative approach to research, and remarks on the important role classroom social context had come to play in understanding literacy in the content areas. He argues, however, that textbooks and teachers continue to be the sole authorities and sources of knowledge in classrooms, thus reinforcing a transmission model of teaching and learning. Although content area teachers express a desire to develop in students the kinds of disciplinary thinking and reading associated with the
literacy of their field, various constraints—from pressure to cover content, to a lack of sufficient pedagogical content knowledge—result in classroom practice that is most often text-based and teacher-centered (Bean, 2000). As a result, literacy in content area classrooms continues to be framed in terms of generic reading strategies, and at the expense of student-centeredness and collaboratively constructed meaning (Bean, 2000).

Levstik’s (2008) review of the literature lends further support to the finding that little appears to have changed during the last decades in content area classrooms, including Social Studies classrooms. While textbooks persist in dominating patterns of instruction, some teachers draw on additional resources, and involve students in varying levels of historical inquiry (Levstik, 2008), thus hinting at some engagement with disciplinary literacy, although Levstik’s review does not address it as such. The increased emphasis on high-stakes testing and mandated Social Studies curricula seem to impact social studies instruction, although to differing degrees, depending on context. In a study of secondary level elective history courses offered in New York (Gerwin & Visone, 2006) and not subject to state testing, researchers found broader and richer use of primary documents, as well as the implementation of historical analysis, although the nature of this analysis is not specified by the review; on the other hand, history courses in the same schools that were subject to state tests, were less likely to use historical documents or engage in disciplinary analysis. Levstik (2008) nonetheless points out that other studies conducted in New York (e.g., Crocco & Thornton, 2002; Grant, 2004) point to teacher experience, goals, and attitudes about the purpose of Social Studies in schools, rather than the presence or absence of state testing, as predictive of the kind of instruction that is expressed. In these studies, experienced teachers were more likely than inexperienced ones to adapt mandated curricula and the constraints of state tests to which they were attached to “meet their own instructional styles” (Levstik, 2008, p. 53). Here again, literacy as practiced by historians is not specifically addressed, nor is the idea of what it might mean when teachers adapt curricula to be more in line with their own “styles” of
teaching. Several case studies Levstik reviews, like Wade’s 2007 study of the integration of history and service learning, and Grant’s 2004 research on the choices two secondary history teachers make in their classrooms, point to inquiry-based, student-centered learning in Social Studies classrooms that again suggests, but does not explicitly refer to, engagement with the discursive literate practices of history.

Content-Area Literacy: Generic Strategies, Structures, or Systems

Snow’s (2002) extensive and oft-cited RAND report on reading comprehension defines reading as a process of “simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language [which] consists of three elements: the reader, the text and the activity or purpose for reading” (p. xiii). The report goes on to describe the interrelatedness of these elements, and acknowledges that literacy is acquired through social interaction, and as such is a representation of “how a specific cultural group or discourse community interprets the world and transmits this information” (p. 20). Thus, in addition to discipline-specific vocabulary and syntax, the report suggests that students must learn the methods and perspectives of the disciplines, and proposes that research on reading instruction include exploring the use of inquiry-based methods and authentic reading material. That said, much of this lengthy report draws on data from the National Reading Panel (2000). As a result, it emphasizes explicit but generic reading instruction that it contends enhances reading fluency and provides students with a repertoire of strategies that promotes comprehension, particularly when “deeply connected within the context of subject matter learning” (Snow, 2002, p. 39). According to this report, these connections are best made through the integration of cognitive reading comprehension strategy instruction into content area classrooms by teachers who balance such instruction with content area learning. Thus, literacy in these
classrooms is equated with a pairing of basic reading comprehension with the transmission of a canon of subject matter information.

Despite its apparent prevalence in schools, at least one recent large-scale study has demonstrated that although a focus on generic cognitive reading strategies by themselves may improve student outcomes, as measured by standardized or other norm-referenced testing, in the short run, they may not do so over the long-term. The 2010 Enhanced Reading Opportunities Study Final Report, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education evaluated two supplemental literacy programs targeted to ninth grade students who were reading two or more years below grade level. The two programs, Reading Apprenticeship Academic Literacy, and Xtreme Reading, were implemented in 34 high schools for a period of two years. Close to 3000 students were assigned each year either to receive instruction for one period per day in one of the programs, or to serve as the control group and receive no intervention. These two programs were selected for the study because they represent a class of intervention that uses a “cognitive apprenticeship” approach to instruction which aims to help students learn and adopt reading strategies and routines used by proficient readers (see Greenleaf, Cribb, Howlett, & Moore, 2010; Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009; Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, & Mueller, 2001). This approach emphasizes student-teacher interactions during which the teacher makes explicit and models particular reading strategies, and then gradually increases the amount of responsibility students have for independently demonstrating their use of these strategies. The goal of these programs is to improve reading comprehension, as well as student motivation and enjoyment of reading. Although RAAL and Xtreme Reading vary somewhat in their philosophy (RAAL allows for more flexibility in instruction, whereas Xtreme Reading prescribes a more systematic sequence of lessons), both emphasize reading strategies such as thinking aloud, talking to the text, self-questioning, visual imagery, paraphrasing, and inferencing. In addition, both RAAL and Xtreme Reading claim to target both general reading skills and content literacy, defined as “identifying,
modeling, and explaining content-specific strategies that are most applicable in English language arts, science and social studies texts” (p. ES-5). This definition, while loosely linked to a disciplinary approach, dilutes its significance by collapsing content specificity into that which applies across multiple subject areas.

Nonetheless, in the Reading Apprenticeship framework, developed by Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko, and Hurwitz (1999), teachers make disciplinary discourses and practices visible and explicit to students through modeling, and facilitate their gradual engagement with them. The Enhanced Reading Opportunities Study, however, did not directly measure this particular aspect of literacy learning on the participating ninth graders. Instead, the study used standardized reading comprehension scores to measure the programs’ effect on students’ reading comprehension, and relied on grade point averages and the accumulation of credits toward graduation to measure students’ overall academic achievement. The decision to measure student literacy and learning through test scores, grade point averages, and credits accumulated is an explicit but problematic assumption. It fails to recognize the complexity of literacy in general and disciplinary literacy in particular. First, since the programs were implemented as a separate course, there is no evidence that disciplinary literacy practices were emphasized, or even made evident, in social studies classes themselves. Furthermore, the study gives no indication that the assessments that produced the grade point averages in any way reflected disciplinary literacy practices. The discourse of literacy thus produced is one of linear and generalized skills; the discourse of education includes an expectation of direct, predictable, and stable outcomes that can be reliably measured.

Both RAAL and Xtreme Reading had the effect of improving student comprehension test scores from, on average, the 15th percentile to the 25th percentile, but 77% of the students who participated were still reading at least two years below grade level at the end of the year. In the year of implementation, the programs also had a small positive impact on students’ academic performance in core content area classes. It is
significant, however, that the programs showed no effect either on reading comprehension or on academic performance in the year after the programs ended. This result is consistent with findings by Willingham and Lovette (2014) which demonstrated that while the application of cognitive reading strategies may improve results on standardized tests of reading comprehension, extensive and sustained practice with these strategies through the secondary level does not continue to produce improvement; in other words, in addition to broader discursive limitations, the often-touted effectiveness of a strategies approach to literacy has an “upper limit” (Willingham & Lovette, 2014).

Another recent study that was undertaken with over 400 eighth grade students showed similar results. Vaughn et al. (2013) worked with twelve experienced secondary Social Studies teachers to help them implement a “content approach” program of study for students. Its goal was to simultaneously improve content learning and text comprehension, but the authors make no claim that the program addressed any specific disciplinary concerns beyond social studies knowledge acquisition. In fact, they explicitly position historical content as the center of social studies learning, thus endorsing a discourse of teaching, and specifically the teaching of history, as the transmission of information. According to the authors, a content approach uses content-area text as the vehicle for reading instruction, as opposed to a “strategies approach” that focuses on cognitive processes such as self-monitoring, summarizing, pre- and post-reading activities, and that the authors claim teachers have difficulty employing because of a lack of sufficient time and training. In the content approach, students learn “essential” vocabulary, read text to gather information, ask questions of the author, engage in “meaningful discussion” about the text, take notes, summarize what they have read, and answer quiz questions. Although the authors frame this approach as a text-processing, as opposed to a cognitive processing perspective, in practice the differences are moot. Previewing vocabulary, questioning, note-taking, and summarizing, for example, are indistinguishable from a strategies approach except in this study students are using these
strategies in the context of social studies texts. While the approach this study evaluates also includes an element of Team-Based Learning, in which students work in heterogeneous groups to re-take comprehension quizzes and support their answers with information from the text and their notes, the emphasis is on identifying and monitoring gaps in understanding and in knowledge acquisition, features that are also a focus of a strategies approach. While students who participated in the program scored higher in measures of content acquisition, content reading comprehension, and standardized reading comprehension than those who had not, the differences, though statistically significant, were small. Because the circumstances and conditions of both learning and the demonstration of learning are complex, these small differences may not represent educationally significant outcomes tied to the implemented program. Furthermore, there was no follow-up to determine if these results were long-lasting. Also left unexamined are teacher views of this approach to literacy in social studies classrooms. The authors make a point of claiming, as past research has demonstrated, that teachers often feel they lack the time and/or expertise to teach literacy, yet they fail to describe, or appear not to have inquired about, teacher responses to what they suggest is a different type of approach.

To summarize, a content-area literacy approach, defined as incorporating generic strategies, structures, or systems into the disciplines, suggests that literacy is defined solely by reading comprehension, and assumes teaching and learning to rely primarily on transmission, rather than on participatory, processes. The rationale for explicit instruction in reading—defined by generic reading techniques alone—continues to be reinforced by reports that assert that “comprehension can be improved by teaching students to use specific cognitive strategies or to reason strategically when they encounter barriers to comprehension when reading” (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 14). On its own, however, a strategies-based approach, whether employed within or without content-specific texts, has not proved to have long-lasting positive effects on student learning. In
terms of the school subject of social studies, the problem is compounded. At the same time that students continue to struggle with comprehending both narrative and discipline-specific texts (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011), students also retain little of the historical knowledge to which they’ve been exposed in schools (Brophy & VanSledright, 1997; Rosenzweig, 2000). One area that has been identified as affecting students’ comprehension across grade levels that were tested is text complexity (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011). Teaching students to navigate complex texts must certainly include helping them understand and use cognitive strategies, and implementing disciplinary approaches to literacy is not the definitive solution to facilitating adolescent literacy learning. However, it has been demonstrated that members of a disciplinary community use literacy practices specific to their particular discipline (Monte-Sano, 2011; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). According to Moje (1996), “domains are imbued with social practices and purposes that shape the knowledge constructed in them” (p. 191). These social practices and purposes include the way literacy is expressed and enacted in the disciplines. Thus, Moje (1996) explained that literacy in content-area classrooms can be viewed as an “organizational tool” that can help students to adapt their thinking and learning in ways that both help them build foundational knowledge and engage in domain-specific literacy practices. This in turn can help facilitate the growth of students’ independent thinking with and about content area material. In this way, a disciplinary literacy approach may be crucial to adolescent literacy development (International Reading Association, 2012; Rainey & Moje, 2012).

**Disciplinary Literacy: Socially Situated Discursive Practices**

While neither the role of cognition in reading nor the significance of basic, literal comprehension of text can be denied, a disciplinary literacy approach asserts that these aspects alone fail to account for the particular and distinct discursive literate practices of
the disciplines. Based in sociocultural theories, a disciplinary literacy perspective considers texts not in isolation, but rather in relation to who readers are, and how the contexts of the disciplines mediate text comprehension (Moje et al., 2011). In doing so, it defines literacy more broadly than as relating only to reading and writing, and includes the modes and styles of thinking, reasoning, questioning, problem solving, and claims warranting that are endemic to the discipline (Moje, 2007, 2012; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Providing access to those disciplinary literacy practices recognizes the significance of accumulated knowledge, but also makes visible the process of how such knowledge is constructed, warranted, and interrogated, thereby affording students with the means and opportunity to challenge, redesign, or elaborate on what is known (Janks, 2009, 2012; Moje, 2007). From this perspective, while content is not ignored, learning in the content areas involves more than the simple transmission of knowledge from teacher or text to student; it considers as essential a developing understanding of the disciplinary norms of practice for producing and communicating that knowledge (Moje, 2008). It also concerns itself with the rhetorical processes in which the discipline engages (Paxton, 1999). These are goals accessed through a disciplinary literacy approach.

**Historical Thinking**

Inherent in the discourse of literacy produced by the disciplinary norms for producing and communicating knowledge of history is that textual meanings remain ever tentative, contingent, and elusive (VanSledright, 2010, 2012). The reasons for this, and what is called historical thinking, are rooted both in the texts themselves and the readers of those texts. First, texts are written by individuals whose predispositions, commitments, motives, and choices cannot be disentangled from the version of history those texts describe (VanSledright, 2012; Wineburg, 1993); further, as all possible perspectives on events are unknown and likely unknowable, no single text can enduringly anchor, or fully describe historical meaning (VanSledright, 2012; Wineburg, 2010); and finally, because
of the discipline’s norm of reading text as a conversation with the author, historical meaning, within the constraints of evidentiary norms, is open to interpretation (VanSledright, 2010, 2012). Also at play are two other components of historical thinking. One is the notion of history as inter- and hypertextual, rooted in what VanSledright (2010, 2012) calls historical imagination, or the ability to fill in potential gaps in evidence. The other is historical empathy, which is contextualized understandings and interpretations of language and rhetoric.

As a socially situated way of thinking and talking about, as well as enacting the process of reading (Gee, 1999), the discourse of history is derived from an epistemological stance that foregrounds the contextual and temporal assessment of sources; judgment as to the reliability of such sources is based on criteria established, but also continually debated, by the community of historical inquirers (VanSledright, 2010; Wineburg, 1993). Historians also view history as provisional, and historical text as value-and purpose-laden accounts of history with an intended audience, rather than history itself (Moje et al., 2011; Wineburg, 1993). Social Studies pedagogy that takes a disciplinary literacy perspective seeks to make visible and accessible to students the discursive literate practices – the acts of sourcing, contextualizing, corroborating, and intra- as well as intertextual close reading – applied by members of the discourse community of historians, and referred to as historical thinking.

**Research on How Historians Read, Think About, and Make Sense of Historical Text**

Consistent with the notion that literacy is socially constructed and disciplinarily defined, research has been done to explore how so-called disciplinary experts in general, and historians in particular, read, negotiate, and make sense of disciplinary texts, as well as how they produce and warrant knowledge. Some of this research addresses literacy in multiple disciplines (Jetton & Shanahan, 2012; Langer, 1989, 2011; Lee & Spratley, 2006; Moje, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, 2012; Shanahan, Shanahan, &
Misischia, 2011; Snow, 2002), and some focuses on a specific discipline. I limited my reading to those that direct attention to literacy as it applies to social studies/history (Afflerbach & VanSledright, 2001; Reisman, 2011, 2012a, 2012b; VanSledright, 2002, 2004, 2010; Wineburg, 1991, 1999; Wineburg & Martin, 2009), and although sometimes framed differently, all of these studies identify some form of sourcing, contextualizing, corroborating, and close reading as significant aspects of the disciplinary literacy of history.

As the earliest of these investigations, Wineburg’s (1991a; 1991b) study is seminal to the topic. Providing a glimpse into the “breach” between how historians and high school students read and interpret a variety of historical texts both written and pictorial, the research sheds important light on some of the particular disciplinary literacy practices associated with the community of historians. Wineburg’s (1991a) description of what he calls “the skilled reading of history” (p. 497) is derived by asking eight historians, four of whom specialized in American history, to think aloud as they “read” eight print and three pictorial texts related to the Battle of Lexington. They were then asked to rank the texts according to their historical trustworthiness. In order to provide a rough measure of background knowledge, the participants were also asked to correctly identify at least six of twelve Colonial period names, events, and concepts. Wineburg followed the same procedure with eight college-bound high school seniors which allowed him to compare the reading processes of historians to those of students.

Before beginning the study, Wineburg first taught the think aloud procedure to all participants, both historians and students. Although he doesn’t specify the nature of the instruction, he does say that the participants practiced the procedure by thinking aloud anagrams and three-digit multiplication problems. The participants then completed think-alouds of historical texts which were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded based on separate coding schemes for the text-based and pictorial documents. The coding was completed by both the author and a disinterested second rater. Wineburg used the
historians’ think-alouds as a means by which to describe the literacy practices in which historians engage as they read and interpret historical texts. He then compared those practices with the ones students described in their think-alouds of the same texts. The historians’ and students’ rankings of trustworthiness were also compared.

The descriptions Wineburg (1991a, 1991b) develops of what it means to expertly read, negotiate, think about, and interpret historical text might be summarized as acts of what he calls “historical problem solving” (Wineburg, 1991b, p. 73). These descriptions correlate well to the findings of Leinhardt, Stainton, Virji, and Odorof (1994) who interviewed seven historians about how they established and explained historical events. More habits of mind that reflect historical reasoning than straight-forward strategies, these distinctive literacy practices are enacted recursively. Regardless of whether or not they specialized in the period of the American Revolution, the historians in Wineburg’s (1991a, 1991b) study, paid attention to the biases and perspectives of the text authors (sourcing), sought to corroborate and dis corroborate key features of the texts (corroborating), contextualized the texts temporally, geographically, and politically (contextualizing), and, perhaps most significantly, puzzled over, rather than sought solely to resolve the discrepancies among the texts that became apparent. As they “tried to represent what could and could not be known” (p. 83) about the events in question, they revealed an epistemological stance on historical knowledge as contingent and often indeterminate. By integrating exhaustive evidence with its chronological organization and establishment of causality, historians read with an ultimate goal of constructing historical cases (Leinhardt et al., 1994). Literacy in history, then, becomes more than a straight-forward act of reading comprehension. Rather, it includes aspects of self-reflectivity that inevitably involve layered and contextual interpretation, infused with historical empathy and imagination (Leinhardt et al., 1994; Schoenbach & Greenleaf, 2009; VanSledright 2010, 2012). Seen as an act of interpretation, history becomes less about details, and more about the arguments made about those details from which historical cases are
constructed (Jetton & Shanhan, 2012; Leinhardt et al., 1994; VanSledright, 2002). Seen as a way of knowing, literacy in history becomes less about drawing superficial meaning from written text, and more about interrogating and warranting meanings that are less obvious.

It is also significant that the discursive literate practices Wineburg (1991a, 1991b) describes are not merely strategies that are deployed, but, rather, are a set of socially constructed ways of thinking, acting, and believing (Gee, 2001), i.e., manifestations of the disciplinary literacy of history embodied by a belief system about the nature of historical evidence, about authorship and its relationship to reliable and valid evidence, and about the meaning of historical knowledge itself. Wineburg (1991a) concludes his research by questioning the value of teaching students to read history by simply teaching them reading strategies; lacking an understanding of the broader set of beliefs historians typically hold about the nature of historical inquiry, he questions whether strategies alone can suffice to help students engage in the disciplinary literacy of history.

Important as this research is, it is not without its limitations. Despite the influence this study has had on the field of disciplinary literacy, one of its obvious limitations is that it reflects the practices of only eight historians. Furthermore, the fact that half of those specialized in American history in a context in which the documents they read aloud were all related to that historical focus, is also problematic since their familiarity with the subject matter would likely have influenced their readings. The think aloud approach used by Wineburg (1991a, 1991b) also has its limitations, although it has roots as far back as Aristotle and Plato who encouraged verbalized thinking as a way of exposing mental events (Ericsson & Simon, 1999; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). The purpose of more modern applications of the approach has been to obtain insight into the thinking that happens concurrent to reading, or other activity or problem solving (Ericsson & Simon, 1999; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). In the case of Wineburg’s (1991a, 1991b) and other similar studies (e.g., Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Shanahan
et al., 2011), the goal is to improve understanding of how readers negotiate and make sense of texts attached and relevant to a particular discipline. Earlier versions of this process used by experimental psychologists asked participants to report their thinking after solving a complex problem or reading a text. Since they are performed concurrent with reading, these think-alouds are something of an improvement, but the validity of the results obtained through this method is still questionable. For one, there is the question of how accurate any access to, or account of, thinking can be. Particularly in the case of reading, the think-aloud process relies on language essentially to describe itself.

Assuming that individuals have the capacity to truthfully and reliably verbalize their thinking, there also remains the question of what effect the act of producing the think aloud itself has on the act of reading it aims to represent. To further complicate matters, the think-alouds Wineburg used were completed in the presence of a researcher whose effect on the process remains unexamined by the study. Although Wineburg specifies that other than being questioned about what they were thinking if they fell silent, participants were given no specific prompts about when or when to speak their thoughts, the mere act of making public private thoughts may have had some effect on the outcome. Although the think-aloud has made possible the development of rich descriptions of both affective and cognitive aspects of reading (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995), they are necessarily limited in terms of accuracy and exhaustiveness.

Notably, Wineburg’s (1991a, 1991b) research, while it includes exploring how high school students read historical texts, fails to include, and indeed never directly mentions, teachers. Wineburg (1991a) expresses the desire that students learn to read “historical texts differently” (p. 519), suggesting that in order to do this, “we will have to change our lesson plans [and] reexamine our notions of what it means to acquire knowledge from texts” (p. 519). While teachers are clearly implicated by this statement, the possible significance of their discursive literate practices is nonetheless overlooked. Wineburg (1991b) concludes that high school students, “know a lot of history, but still
have little idea of how historical knowledge is constructed” (p. 84). A similar criticism might be leveled at this research: It provides a lot of insights into how historians read history, but reflects little idea of how social studies teachers, conceptualize and construct historical literacy and knowledge with their students.

In related research, Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) and Shanahan et al. (2011) sought to “identify specialized properties of disciplinary reading” (Shanahan et al., 2011, p. 396). Like Wineburg (1991a, 1991b), the authors used think-alouds to accomplish this goal, but they also include in their methodology interviews, and focus group discussions. Three think-alouds of discipline-specific texts, totaling about 1.5 pages, were completed by each of six university professors, two in each of history, chemistry, and mathematics. One think-aloud was an excerpt of a self-selected disciplinary text, and the other two were excerpts of texts chosen by the researchers as typical of ones that would be used in a content-area class. As a follow-up, based on their think-aloud comments, the authors interviewed these “disciplinary experts” by probing them for further details about their reading process. Six teacher educators, who also were full time university faculty members representing each of the disciplines, and six high school teachers, two each from history, chemistry and math, all with more than three years of experience, also participated in the study. Their role was limited to focus group meetings during which they met with the disciplinary experts to review the think-aloud transcripts, consider the relevance of the reading approaches disclosed by the think-alouds to high school texts, and describe the reading difficulties students sometimes have. The think-alouds, interviews, and focus group meetings were all audio-recorded and transcribed, and then coded by one of the authors. The coding was reviewed, discussed, and refined during focus group meetings.

Like Wineburg’s (1991a, 1991b) study, this one, as acknowledged by the authors, is limited by its size. The inherent limitation of think-alouds as a way of understanding the process of reading, however, is somewhat mitigated by the interviews and focus
group meetings that the authors also include in their methodology and allow for triangulation of the data. However, even though the study specifies that the meetings were audio-recorded and transcribed, there are no quotes or paraphrases of quotes by either the teachers or the teacher educators included in the research. The authors point out that “engagement around the think-aloud transcripts was ongoing and included input and insight from other focus group members” (p. 405), but as described by the research, the primary role played by the teacher educators and content area teachers was to identify appropriate instructional approaches and supports. In other words, the teacher educators and classroom content area teachers functioned primarily as consultants on pedagogy; their perspective on the discursive literate practices of their disciplines was not considered. If the goal of exploring disciplinary literacy is to find ways to make it accessible to K-12 students, then developing an understanding of teachers’ perspectives on literacy is at least as important as describing the disciplinary literacy of university professors. Since no insights about teachers are provided by this research, the role of teachers is rendered as ancillary at best.

Similar to Wineburg’s (1991a, 1991b) findings, Shanahan et al. (2011) and Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) found that sourcing, contextualizing, corroborating, and close reading are significant aspects of how historians read historical documents. Shanahan et al. (2011) and Shanahan and Shanahan (2008), however, elaborate further by adding to their description of the disciplinary reading of the historians in their study consideration of text structure and graphic elements, critiquing, and interest. Another limitation of this study, however, is in its rendering of these practices. The reading processes across the disciplines studied are collapsed by the authors into these very same seven categories. They are presented as common to all three of the disciplines on which these studies focus, although the authors suggest they are variously emphasized and enacted in each of mathematics, history and chemistry. By limiting their descriptions of the reading processes to these seven categories, differences between the disciplinary
reading practices are understated, and more discipline-specific discursive literate practices, beyond those which are primarily connected to reading alone, are elided. Sourcing, for example, while used explicitly and extensively by the historians in this study to help situate text authors’ perspectives and identify possible biases, is also associated by the authors with the readings of mathematicians for what the researchers call an “active effort not to use source as an interpretive consideration” (p. 406). Corroboration, defined by the authors as consideration of agreements and disagreements across texts, is described as being employed by chemists to “identify material differences that could explain outcome differences” (p. 406). In other words, the presence, redefinition, or absence of a reading process category are claimed to serve equally well to validate its inclusion as part of the disciplinary literacy of the content area. Discursive literate practices crucial to literacy in mathematics are facility with multimodal and symbolic representations, pattern recognition, and critical numeracy (Wilson & Chavez, 2014). Of these, Shanahan et al. (2011) discuss only and briefly the mathematicians’ use of symbols in the form of equations, noting that these were “treated as unified” (p. 418) with prose in the think-alouds. The fact that the mathematicians’ think-alouds indicated that they most often handled equations and prose simultaneously in their readings, combined with the researchers’ decision to categorize mathematical symbols and equations as forms of graphic elements, and define prose and graphical features as separate texts, allowed the researchers to sidestep the significance of mathematical symbolic representation, and its role in what it means to think and read like a mathematician.

Like other researchers (e.g., Wineburg, 1991a, 1991b), Shanahan and Shanahan (2008), and Shanahan et al. (2011) assert that historians read with the conscious and verbalized assumption that history is an interpretation, emphasizing the temporal, situational, and authorial context of the source of the text with the purpose of evaluating its credibility; in short, they extensively use processes of sourcing, contextualizing,
corroborating, and close reading. Unlike Wineburg (1991a), however, Shanahan et al. (2011) do not question whether such discursive literate practices can be represented as strategies at all, or further, whether doing so alone would help students learn to read and think like historians. Notably, the purpose they set forth for their research is to identify differences in disciplinary reading practices as the basis for developing strategies for fostering, not disciplinary literacy itself, but “disciplinary literacy instruction” (italics added, p. 400). Without questioning the possible limitations of this framing, and noting with dismay the reluctance of the disciplinary experts, teacher educators, and teachers alike who participated in their research to embrace strategy instruction (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008), they go on to describe the development and implementation of what they refer to as discipline-specific classroom strategies. However, what the authors describe are little more than basic graphic organizers for summarizing and note-taking that account only in minor ways for disciplinary differences. In mathematics, for example, they describe the development of a note-taking organizer that includes columns headings for the “big idea,” an explanation, an example, and a formula or other illustration; the same format is described for use by chemistry students, but with headings for substances, properties, processes, and interactions (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). These adjustments, according to the authors, mean that readers who “paid attention to these elements would be engaging in a disciplinary-focused reading” (p. 54), thus equating a procedural technique with the complex systems of reasoning that comprise disciplinary literacy. Interesting to note is that elsewhere (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012), these same authors make a point of describing content area literacy as a stance that “prescribes study techniques and reading approaches” (italics in original, p. 8) without regard to text genre or discipline, and distinguish it from disciplinary literacy which “emphasizes the description of unique uses and implications of literacy within the various disciplines” (italics in original, p. 8).
This study is valuable for its contribution to what is known about how text is read and negotiated in the disciplines, and in its corroboration of Wineburg’s (1991a, 1991b) description of how historians read disciplinary texts. However, Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) and Shanahan et al. (2011) frame these practices as essentially consistent across disciplines, which belies their stated purpose to “identify specialized properties of disciplinary reading” (p. 396).

Research on Disciplinary Literacy in the Teaching of Secondary School History

Much of the literature that purports to affiliate itself with a disciplinary literacy perspective does so only superficially. Lee and Spratley’s (2006) review of research on reading in the disciplines, sponsored by Carnegie Corporation’s Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, is one major research example. This, like other reports, reviews of the literature, and research on the subject of literacy with reference to how it might be enacted in school subject areas (e.g., Alvermann & Moore, 1991; Bean, 2000; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Shanahan et al., 2011), uses the lens of content areas to focus attention on the difficulties adolescent readers (often so-called “struggling” ones) face in reading comprehension.

Two of the programs discussed by Lee and Spratley (2006) are Read 180, and the Strategic Literacies Initiative at West Ed, the target audience of which are students whose reading is below grade level. Because the assumption of these programs is that generic reading strategies can help improve comprehension, the emphasis is on teaching skills that focus on fluency and vocabulary, on facilitating the development of students’ identities as readers, and on helping content teachers incorporate reading strategies into their instruction. While important, these approaches alone may not be sufficient, particularly for students who read at or above grade level. Furthermore, in the case of the Strategic Literacy Initiative, although the authors claim that 9th graders “gained 2 years of improvement in 7 months of instruction” (p. 18), how far below grade level these
students initially were, how the improvement was measured, and whether the improvement was maintained all remain unexamined. Other studies of approaches to literacy, specifically in social studies, on which Lee and Spratley’s (2006) conclusions are based, such as the Disciplinary Literacy Project, and Content Enhancement Routines, are intended to address the literacy needs of students at all levels. These approaches are only briefly described by the authors. Content Enhancement Routines are described as placing emphasis on helping students understand disciplinary text structure, acquire background information, and build “knowledge of critical concepts that underlie a body of discipline specific content” (Lee & Spratley, 2006, p. 18). The Disciplinary Literacy Project is described as incorporating “Accountable Talk” which encourages students to “explain their thinking as they problem-solve, including problem-solving in reading” (p. 18). Neither the particular “critical concepts” of the Content Enhancement Routines approach, nor the specific kind of problem solving suggested by the Disciplinary Literacy Project is fully elaborated, however, so it remains unclear whether these include disciplinary approaches to reading and interpreting disciplinary texts.

Nonetheless, the report notes in its section on Reading in History that primary source documents are viewed by the discipline as rhetorical constructions that produce only partial representations of the past, and that historians seek corroboration across texts. Lee and Spratley (2006) also suggest some of what they call discipline-based questions that “good readers” of such texts might pose. These include questioning the “self-interest” (by which I assume the authors mean bias) that might be expected from a text, and determining the presumed audience of texts. Thus, Lee and Spratley (2006) acknowledge some of the disciplinary literacy approaches associated with history, but make a rather weak argument for their implementation. Their own descriptions of the studies they cite link only superficially to disciplinary literacy, and their ultimate recommendations for improving adolescent reading in history consist of paying “explicit attention to text features, prior knowledge, vocabulary, [and] comprehension monitoring”
Also included are suggestions for double-entry journals as a place for summarizing, questioning, and making connections, K-W-L charts for activating prior knowledge, and annotating texts for making predictions and identifying main ideas. While valuable, none of these addresses the particular discursive disciplinary practices of history that define literacy in that field. Instead, they suggest that literacy is defined by reading comprehension, and that reading “deeply” in one discipline looks much like reading deeply in another.

Invoking disciplinary literacy, Lee and Spratley (2006) acknowledge sets of specialized practices associated with each of the disciplines and recognize reading as dynamic rather than static. At the same time, the review establishes as its starting point, “the fact that the major difference between reading in grades K-5 and reading in grades 6-12 is the transition from learning to read to reading to learn” (p. 2). The “fact” to which this statement refers may be intended to reflect what the authors view as a practical reality of many secondary level subject area classrooms, rather than a theoretical stance on literacy. However, by beginning from this premise, and describing disciplinary literacy as “more advanced” (p. 2), the authors reinscribe approaches to literacy as binary. At the same time, they validate a view of literacy as primarily a method of extracting, rather than constructing, meaning. In the case of the nonfiction text fundamental to the study of history, this portrays reading as a process of successful mining of “facts,” a portrayal that sidesteps the inevitably value-laden nature of historical knowledge. It also marginalizes the transactional conversation with text in which expert readers of history engage (VanSledright, 2010), and through which students of history might be ushered. Although the role of cognition in reading cannot be ignored, and cognitive strategy instruction may in fact help facilitate comprehension, marking disciplinary literacy as “more advanced” disconnects language and literacy from the content areas. In doing so, it ignores the integral and integrated role they play in the function and expression of how knowledge is constructed, maintained, argued, and warranted in the disciplines.
One reason Lee and Spratley’s (2006) recommendations may fail to address the “literate habits of thinking (Moje, 2007, p. 10) associated specifically with the reading of history may be as a result of their implied skepticism about the ability of history teachers to address these habits of thinking. In their view, it is only “the content area teacher who is also well versed in what a reader needs to know to understand content area texts” (p.9) who is in a position to do so. It is certainly true that those who may not routinely engage in the discursive literate practices of a particular discipline, including teachers, may become less fully aware of them (Rainey & Moje, 2012). However, to frame as an exception the teacher who is “well versed” in the literacy of his or her discipline discounts the multiple forms of knowledge and areas of expertise, both pedagogical and disciplinary, in which teachers must inevitably engage. Particularly since this report does not cite studies that examine the engagement of teachers in the disciplinary literacy of history, it unreasonably devalues teachers as agentive, expert knowers.

Concluding that “content learning and reading to learn are deeply intertwined” (p. 20), the authors reproduce a discourse of literacy fixed in generic cognitive processes. As much as they pay lip service to a disciplinary epistemological perspective by submitting that students “need to be taught how to read deeply in the disciplines” (p. 18), the studies they reference and the recommendations they make are primarily focused on generic strategies to help students overcome difficulties with text.

An important question, then, is whether it is sufficient to frame disciplinary literacy solely in terms of helping students learn to read like members of the disciplinary discourse community. At its most basic, doing so involves making students aware of the text structure and features of historical documents, building background knowledge, and expanding academic discipline-based vocabulary. These are the practices to which much of the literature that purports to reflect a disciplinary literacy approach refers. In this view, literacy is represented not as inherent and integral to how disciplines define, engage with, and understand both texts and knowledge, but as a separate and distinct means by
which knowledge in the disciplines might be accessed and acquired. The practices associated with this view are necessary, but perhaps not sufficient, to what disciplinary literacy means. Facilitating student ability to think like members of the disciplinary discourse community of historians, in contrast, suggests a view of literacy as necessarily and intimately defined by and connected to the discipline. Disciplinary literacy viewed in this way includes teaching reading practices specifically relevant to historical texts, but also building student thinking capacity in the sourcing, contextualizing, corroborating, close reading, and knowledge interrogation and warranting methods in which historians engage.

Reisman’s (2012a, 2012b) study examines an attempt to reconcile both the reading and thinking aspects of disciplinary literacy in history through an approach called, “Reading Like a Historian.” Beginning from the premise that attempts to “revolutionize” entrenched classroom norms and practices are likely to be unsuccessful (Reisman, 2012a, 2012b), a high school American history curriculum was designed to promote disciplinary literacy as well as content knowledge through an approach that integrates discipline-specific reading strategies with discipline-aligned inquiry that reflect the epistemological framework within which historians work. Textbooks, as well as primary source documents are used, the former interrogated alongside the latter which are modified through a process of excerpting, simplifying, and reader-friendly presentation in order to make them more accessible to students. Structural elements typical of Social Studies classrooms, such as lectures, seat-work, small-group work, and classroom discussion, were retained, and classroom-ready materials such as modified documents and graphic organizers were provided to teachers participating in the study.

This study involved 236 eleventh grade students who were taking a class in U.S. History in five public urban high schools. In each school there was one control and one treatment classroom. Teachers of the treatment group attended four days of summer training, plus two three-hour follow-up workshops, in the Reading Like a Historian
(RLH) approach. The goal was for these teachers to use the approach with students from September to March during a total of 105 school days. The purpose of the study was to measure whether the engagement of discipline-specific reading approaches improves student reading of both disciplinary and general texts. In order to accomplish this, pretests in factual knowledge, general historical reading strategies and thinking, and reading comprehension were administered to students before the beginning of the study. These assessments were all in multiple-choice format, except for the historical reading strategies and thinking test which consisted of 22 multiple-choice, plus 8 constructed response questions. The historical thinking pretest was given again at the end of the program, as were parallel forms of the reading comprehension and factual knowledge assessments; a fourth post-test, all multiple choice, in application of historical thinking to contemporary topics was also administered. Treatment classroom teachers were observed twice weekly, but only on days they reported they were using the RLH curriculum. Two observers independently rated the teachers’ fidelity to the treatment. On the other days, teachers reported which, if any, lesson from RLH they used. Control classroom teachers were observed four times over the six-month duration of the study. Field notes were taken, and lesson materials were collected. The control teachers were also asked to explain what they expected students to learn, why they used the materials they did, and whether the lesson was typical of their method of instruction.

Fidelity to the materials and approaches inherent to the RLH curriculum varied significantly between teachers; rated on a scale of 0-3, four out of five of the treatment teachers had an average fidelity score below 2. By the author’s own admission, this lack of fidelity may reflect teachers’ lack of comfort with the curriculum. The training they received may have been insufficient to thoroughly familiarize them with what may have been an approach vastly different from that which they were accustomed. Although participating teachers were selected on the basis of their ability and willingness to attend the summer training sessions, the study does not specify to what extent the participating
teachers engaged students in disciplinary practices prior to the use of the RLH curriculum. Results seemed to indicate that teachers may have only engaged students in document-based lessons when they were being observed. That said, students in the treatment classrooms were found to have outperformed those in the control group on the two measures of historical thinking, as well as on the measures of factual knowledge and reading comprehension.

Unlike Wineburg (1991a), Reisman (2012a, 2012b) does not hesitate to refer to the sourcing, contextualizing, corroborating, and close reading typical of expert readers of history, as strategies. Nor does she shy away from having teachers model, and students practice, using them. As representations of the kind of historical thinking in which historians engage, these practices reflect the discursive literate practices of the discipline. What distinguishes the curriculum described by Reisman (2012a), in an article focused on describing the pedagogical particulars of the study, is that these strategies are taught, not in isolation, but in the service of historical inquiry. Documents that present contradictory views of historical events or issues are purposefully selected for students to read and evaluate with respect to a central question. Classroom discussions about the central question in relation to the documents are meant to disrupt facile narratives of the past. In this way, students are provided a means by which to develop an understanding of history as reconstructions of the past based on interpreted evidence.

Reisman (2012a) notes, however, that there were few examples during class discussions, of students developing an awareness of the roles perspective and interpretation play in historical accounts. She points to a lack of teacher ability to move students away from presentist judgments and towards an awareness of their own and authors’ subjectivities, and suggests that four days of training was insufficient to familiarize teachers with the discursive literate practices of history, specifically with reference to the epistemological underpinnings of historical thinking. Although it is inevitable that teachers affect intended classroom outcomes, the author does not address
other factors that might have also been at play. These include, but are not limited to, the selection of questions and documents, the amount of time spent working with them, the classroom and school context. Another significant factor is the way in which historical thinking is measured by this study. On the one hand, predominantly multiple-choice assessments of a practice as complex as historical thinking are of questionable value. On the other hand, while the use of classroom discussion may be a more meaningful approach, it is by its nature an activity that privileges talk. Used as a proxy for evaluating the presence or absence of historical thinking, it necessarily overlooks students for whom class discussions are difficult or objectionable for a variety of reasons ranging from speech or language barriers, to social dynamics, to personal traits or preferences.

Evaluation of historical thinking might more meaningfully be accomplished through a combination of classroom and small group discussions alongside a portfolio of written work aligned to disciplinary practices. What distinguishes this study is its attempt to foster disciplinary literacy in a way that is both mindful of the realities of classroom life, and faithful to the epistemological underpinnings of historical thinking. What undermines it is its reversion to quantitative measures to evaluate the complex qualitative potentials inherent in what it means to engage in the disciplinary literacy of history.

Unfortunately, as Levstik (2008) points out, there seems to be little institutional support for approaches like the one described by Reisman (2012a, 2012b), and even research that overtly purports to take a disciplinary literacy perspective, often falls short. The current emphasis on content standards and high-stakes assessments leads perhaps inevitably to expository teaching and learning tasks that are easily measured; curricula that lean more towards problem-solving and interpretation do not fit well into this model. Despite claims at the beginning of the 20th century that the highest aim of learning history was learning judgment, an arguably admirable goal not only for social studies education, but also for public education in general, the place and importance of history in the context of K-12 schooling appears less than secure (Wineburg, 1999).
Research on Teachers’ Understandings of the Disciplinary Literacy of History

In whatever way effective teaching is defined, research shows that effective teachers have an impact on student learning (Adler, 2008; Van Hover, 2008). Exactly what this means, however, continues to be up for debate. In whatever way it is construed, teachers, and particularly teachers of social studies, are often viewed as mere conduits of information, with the school subject of history entrenched in a didactic model of teaching that amounts to little more than the dissemination of historical “facts.” It is against this backdrop that the paucity of research on teachers’ engagement in, and understanding of, disciplinary literacy in general, and more specifically disciplinary literacy as it pertains to history, must be understood. While a good number of studies exist that focus on student and so-called “expert” understandings and enactments of literacy in the disciplines, studies are rare that look directly at how teachers understand and negotiate the disciplinary literacy of history. Of research that specifically refers to teachers’ perspectives on and engagement with the discursive literate practices of history, much of it is done in the context of studies the expressed purpose of which is to examine student growth in or understanding of historical thinking; teacher understandings of disciplinary literacy are often included in these studies to provide context (Adler, 2008; Levstik, 2000).

When studies attempt to directly examine in-service content-area teachers’ understandings of literacy in the context of particular disciplines, they often do so with an understanding of literacy as generic reading comprehension. Some of these only obliquely reflect how teachers think about literacy in their subject areas by inquiring into the attitudes and practices of teachers of various content areas about reading (Gillespie & Rasinski, 1989). Others that focus on in-service content-area teachers often use a lens of professional development through which content-area teachers’ understandings of literacy, although ultimately defined as transferable between disciplines, might be
suggested (Cantrell, Burns, & Callaway, 2009; Curwen, Miller, White-Smith, & Calfee, 2010; Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2011). Likewise, Shearer, Lundeberg, and Coballes-Vega (1997) set out to explore the “domain-specific professional reading” of twelve K-12 teachers by using a combination of interviews and think-aloud verbal protocol analysis, but analyze their data in terms of generic reading strategies.

Some research does exist that explores teacher beliefs and epistemology around what it means to do and teach history (Brophy & VanSledright, 1993; Hochstrasser-Fickel, 2000; Maggioni, VanSledright, & Alexander, 2009). Because these constructs are ill-defined, however, the findings are difficult to compare. The effect of professional development specifically geared towards expanding teachers’ understanding of the nature of history and historical thinking is explored by Maggioni, Alexander, and VanSledright (2004) and Maggioni et al. (2009). A study by Stoddard (2010) contributes a different perspective on teachers’ epistemological understandings of history and their historical thinking by exploring two high school history teachers’ use of media other than printed word text as historical sources. One study (Yeager & Davis, 1996) used think-alouds of historical texts to directly explore how teachers engage in the discursive literate practices associated with historical thinking and the disciplinary literacy of history.

**Research on In-Service Teachers’ Professional Development and Attitudes about School Subject Reading**

Gillespie and Rasinski’s (1989) review of the literature on the attitudes and practices of content-area teachers towards reading, specifically as it occurs in content areas, reflects a singular view of literacy as generic reading comprehension. The studies they reviewed all used survey instruments in attempts to measure teacher attitudes only, teacher attitudes as suggested by the teaching practices in which teachers reported they engaged, and attitudes before and after professional development. Consistent with more recent research, secondary level content-area teachers were found to have more negative attitudes towards reading instruction, and less confidence in their ability to provide such
instruction, than middle level teachers, although as a whole, the review concludes that content-area teachers do not have an altogether positive attitude about teaching reading.

One problem with the studies included in this review is the limitation inherent in the use of surveys. Not only can the wording, placement, and offerings of answer choices skew results, but what is reported as teaching practice not only may or may not accurately reflect what happens in classrooms, and is simultaneously constrained by the practices to which the survey refers. A further and more troubling limitation is the lack of clarity about the meaning of teacher attitudes, a muddiness that persists in more recent studies around the same concept (Adler, 2008). Only a few examples of specific survey questions are provided in the review, but all seemed to focus either on content-area teachers’ perceptions of the degree and kind of responsibility they have for teaching reading and literacy, or on the reading and literacy practices in which they engaged, from which their attitudes were extrapolated. Far from a straightforward construct, teacher attitudes about content-area literacy, like attitudes about anything else, are likely intertwined with, and embedded in, a system of beliefs, values, and knowledge, all of which operate in particular institutional, historical, and personal contexts. None of this complexity is addressed by the studies covered in this review.

Only one study reviewed by these authors attempted, in fact, to corroborate what in this case were both attitude survey and teacher reading skills test results with on-site observations. Given both that the providers of the professional development were themselves observing participants’ classrooms, and that the evaluations compared implementation of the approaches at the beginning stages and towards the end of the training, it is unsurprising that the workshop methods were ultimately found to be consistently applied.

Gillespie and Rasinski (1989) also report with optimism that according to their review, not only were teachers willing to enroll in a content-area reading course, but also that teachers themselves recommended that such a course be required of all content-area
teachers. Interestingly, Gillespie and Rasinski assert that these middle and secondary level teachers know less than they need to both about reading in general, and about “reading skills unique to their content area” (p. 45). Although throughout this review, reading is framed as skills-based and transferable between disciplines, the authors pose the question whether such training should be “generic across academic areas, or should it deal with issues and problems that are specific to those areas” (p. 61). No further elaboration is provided about what those particular issues and problems might be, but given when the review was written, what is suggested here may be a nascent notion of discursive differences in how literacy is defined and enacted in the disciplines.

Throughout this review the teaching of reading is referred to only in terms of literal comprehension, vocabulary, locating information, and reading for details. Setting aside the limited view this provides of what reading in the disciplines entails, among the studies that examined teacher attitudes before and after professional development, the actual training of teachers in these areas was explicitly secondary to changing teacher attitudes. For one study, the authors report that professional development was provided “to convince recruits that reading instruction is worthwhile beyond elementary school” (p. 53); for another, “a change in attitude was considered of primary importance by the investigators” (p. 54). Gillespie and Rasinski (1989) justifiably assert that investigating the attitudes of content-area teachers about reading is a logical first step in looking at their practices in that regard. However, the studies they review ostensibly offer professional development for training in pedagogy, but seek primarily to manipulate attitudes, an approach that seems disingenuous at best, and self-fulfilling at worst. Under these circumstances, the authors’ conclusion that training in content-area reading, even in the limited way that is framed by these studies, “generally results in positive attitudes and a willingness to apply techniques learned” (p. 58), is questionable. Therefore, neither unmediated teacher attitudes about reading and literacy in the content-areas, nor their
perspectives about how literacy might be defined or taught in the disciplines, is revealed in this review of the literature on the subject.

More recent research that focuses on professional development also investigates teacher attitudes, through which content-area teachers’ understandings of literacy might be suggested (e.g. Cantrell et al., 2009; Curwen et al., 2010; Fisher et al., 2011). Like the studies reviewed by Gillespie and Rasinski (1989), these also have an expressed purpose of helping teachers in the content areas develop more positive attitudes about teaching literacy. The data they use is broadened beyond the survey to include both interviews and classroom observations which were conducted by peers, researchers who were unaffiliated with the professional development, or researchers who themselves provided the training. How these studies differentiate themselves from earlier work is that they purport to move beyond the goal of simply changing teacher attitudes by explicitly showing teachers how to infuse literacy strategies into their lessons, and by creating space for them to experience and practice doing so. Thus, the perspective of these later studies promises a broader look at teacher beliefs and attitudes about literacy in content-areas, including how they might operate as barriers to the implementation of those strategies. What the perspective does not acknowledge is that the construction of literacy produced by a strategies-only approach may itself act as a barrier for content-area teachers whose understanding of literacy may be disciplinary in nature. What it also fails to acknowledge is teachers’ agency and capacity to themselves generate both theoretical and practical knowledge about literacy and the teaching of literacy in their subject area.

Cantrell et al. (2009) stress that effective professional development helps teachers inquire into their own literacy practices, which in turn develops a deeper understanding of reading that can then be translated into pedagogy. Their research, however, involved an evaluation of the effectiveness of a year-long Content Literacy Project (CLP) in which content-area teachers were trained in particular pedagogical approaches to literacy, and were not themselves asked about their personal interpretations of literacy in their subject area.
area, or about the pedagogical practices in which they engage. These approaches in which teachers were trained addressed vocabulary development, reading comprehension, reading fluency, writing to learn, and writing for knowledge transfer, and included familiar strategies such as word walls (vocabulary), double-entry journals (note-taking), and anticipation guides (reading comprehension). The program included working in discipline-specific, as well as interdisciplinary groups, the purpose of which was to determine how the teaching of the strategies would be implemented in classrooms and allocated between subject-areas. The twenty-eight teachers, from the disciplines of science, social studies, math, ELA, and reading, who were selected for this study had all been required to attend the CLP professional development, and were all determined to be implementers of the approaches, albeit to varying degrees.

The results of this study show that when asked about the literacy skills students needed to be successful in their content-area, more than 80% of participating teachers mentioned reading comprehension skills and content-specific vocabulary; furthermore, their reported use of content literacy strategies was limited to ones taught during the professional development. The authors find both outcomes troubling, both in light of the extended training these teachers received, and because participants expressed a belief in the importance of engaging students in multiple literacy activities. Referencing Gillespie and Rasinski (1989), Cantrell et al. (2009) note that this research corroborates “teachers’ limited understandings of the ways in which literacy can be content-specific” (p. 84), and suggest that content-area literacy strategies need to be addressed more specifically. Given that the focus of the professional development under study emphasized generic rather than disciplinary literacy, and that the participating teachers were both observed and interviewed against the backdrop of the CLP training they had received, the results of this study are unsurprising: teachers reported actions and understandings consistent with the framework of literacy in which they had been trained. The researchers, in a sense, had reaped what they had sowed. More telling is that rather than recognize the effect the
context of the study likely had on the results—the purpose of which, admittedly, was to evaluate the effectiveness of the CLP—the authors chose to frame those results in terms of the limitations of teachers and not the limitations of the professional development. The question remains whether teachers’ understandings of the literacy of their content-area might have been differently expressed outside of the constraints of the CLP.

Similarly, Fisher et al. (2011) investigated the effect of coaching and providing professional development to teachers on thinking aloud interactively with students as they read texts. The focus of the think-aloud approach was on negotiating text features and structure, making predictions and connections, asking questions while reading, and using context clues to determine meanings of unfamiliar words, thus assuming a broad definition of literacy as skills-based and transferable between disciplines. Eight middle school teachers of math, science, social studies, English, art, and health comprised a group that received both the professional development and were involved in weekly discussions about their implementation of the think-aloud technique in their classrooms. A control group of an additional eight middle school teachers from the same content areas participated only in the professional development, but not the weekly discussions. There was no overlap of students between teachers in each of the groups.

Using observations both by the professional development/researcher coaches and peer-coaches, as well as pre- and post-reading assessments of students, the authors found that teacher awareness of their own reading expanded, teacher use of think-alouds in the classroom increased, and student achievement as measured by a standardized reading assessment improved. They conclude, therefore, that since students performed better on comprehension tasks, conducting shared readings with think-alouds can improve student comprehension. They further point out the impact that teacher collaborative learning through the use of peer discussions had on these results since those who participated in the weekly discussions showed more classroom use of the think-aloud techniques than those who did not.
One obvious limitation of this study is its small sample size, but more relevant to this discussion is that a majority of the students at the target school not only read below grade level, but also spoke a language other than English at home; as a result of poor assessment scores, the school had been placed in a condition of “program improvement.” It is unsurprising that modeling generic reading strategies that parallel reading assessment tasks might help improve student scores, particularly among students whose English language skills are weak. It is also unsurprising that teachers at a school under pressure to improve student assessment scores would be motivated to implement strategies that are presented in a professional development context as useful in facilitating student literacy learning. At the same time that the focus placed by the professional development on generic reading strategies detracts from this study’s usefulness in revealing how teachers understand literacy in their discipline outside of this context, it also highlights a condition in which what is assessed drives what is taught, both in the case of the design of the professional development, and in the case of the design of the study. Taught to ask questions, make predictions and connections, and talk through context clues to determine the meanings of difficult words, teachers reported, and were observed, doing exactly that. One Social Studies teacher said,

I really learned how often I use these comprehension and vocabulary strategies as I thought out loud about them…. I really was predicting, imagining, figuring out words, making connections, rereading, reviewing, and summarizing as I read. (p. 238)

While this isn’t to say that generic strategies like these aren’t useful, the teacher think-alouds of disciplinary texts discussed in this study offer little insight into how teachers understand literacy in their discipline outside of the context of professional development that defines literacy in a particular way.
Research on In-Service Teachers’ Beliefs and Epistemology about the Nature of History and of Teaching History

Recognition of teacher knowledge of the discursive literate practices of history is revealed in a case study that examined the connection between personal theories, life experiences, and teaching contexts with regard to enacted Social Studies curriculum. With a specific focus on questions of educational equity and social justice, Hochstrasser-Fickel (2000) conducted semi-structured interviews and observations of a high school social studies teacher, Mr. Franklin, over a period of one year. Interview questions centered on, among others, the aim of social studies education, the nature of knowledge, and the influence of life experience on personal theories. Classes observed were in general freshman social studies, state studies, and global issues.

Asked about his understanding of the nature of knowledge, Mr. Franklin remarked that “there are all kinds of truths to all kinds of answers” (p. 371). Speaking at a deliberation for the allocation of financial resources at which the researcher was present, Mr. Franklin is also quoted as saying, “These issues are messy. Life is messy, and democracy is particularly messy” (p. 359). Suggested by these quotes is an acknowledgement of multiple perspectives. Mr. Franklin’s stated commitment to providing students with multiple sources through which to understand historical issues and events is consequential to this acknowledgement. Hochstrasser-Fickel (2000) concludes that this teacher’s personal beliefs, including his understanding of the nature of history, were both consistent with, and guided and helped shape, his pedagogy. Corresponding to these understandings, the teacher routinely chose primary source over textbook readings, and structured his lessons around student inquiries. In doing so, he guided students through complex and diverse ideas and perspectives to a construction of historical knowledge. These stated beliefs and attitudes, as well as demonstrated classroom approaches, while not explicitly so, are consistent with a disciplinary view in which issues and history are provisional, and historical text is construed as value- and purpose-laden accounts of history (Moje et al., 2011; Wineburg, 1993). Although the
beliefs and attitudes expressed by the participant of this case study must be taken at face-value, a limitation of the research is that classroom observations occurred over the course of a total of only twelve classroom hours. Left open to question is whether this teacher’s pedagogy was equally reflective of disciplinary thinking during times when the researcher was not present.

Echoing other research on social studies teachers, Mr. Franklin reported that he sometimes felt “confined by having too much history to cover in the time allotted” (p. 380). Nonetheless, the researcher concludes that the teacher remained committed to his personal beliefs and theories about teaching social studies; rather than approaching his curriculum planning as a dilemma, he attempted to prepare students for state exams, and at the same time prepare them to be “active, critically thoughtful citizens for a democracy” (p. 381). What Mr. Franklin specifically means by “critically thoughtful” is not made clear, but the instructional practices described by the research reflect approaches that emphasize components of both critical literacy, and literacy as it is described by the discipline, such as reading for subtext, corroborating accounts, and questioning the claims texts make. Although the goal of this study was not specifically to examine how this social studies teacher understands literacy in his discipline, Mr. Franklin’s perspective on the nature of truth and knowledge, his characterization of how issues are deliberated, and his focus on “critical thoughtfulness” suggest a way of framing and thinking about history that is consistent with disciplinary norms.

Although it provides some insight into what is possible, as a case study limited to a single teacher, this research does not allow for broad generalizations about how social studies teachers understand literacy in their discipline, or think about and negotiate literacy demands in their classrooms. Furthermore, as a study that sought to examine how teachers’ explicit, rather than tacit, personal theories function as a framework for their pedagogical decision making, it was important that the participant have both explicitly stated beliefs about social studies teaching, and instructional practices that paralleled
those beliefs. Mr. Franklin was selected by the researcher to participate in this case study based on Hochstrasser-Fickel’s (2000) familiarity with his identification with Dewey’s philosophy of education, his frankness about his theories about social studies teaching, and his commitment to problem-centered, inquiry-based pedagogy. He was also selected specifically because he appeared to Hochstrasser-Fickel to be atypical of teachers of Social Studies, someone with “explicitly held beliefs whose practice did not suggest the traditional transmission model” (p. 365). Given these conditions, it is unsurprising that the study would describe a teacher whose discursive literate understandings and practices are consistent with a disciplinary approach to literacy as it pertains to history.

**Research on In-Service Teachers’ Engagement in Historical Thinking**

Although there has been some relatively recent research into the epistemological beliefs of teachers with regard to history (e.g. Levstik, 2000; Maggioni et al., 2004, 2009), little research exists that concerns itself specifically with exploring how social studies teachers understand literacy in their discipline. Taking an approach of studying how teachers think about, engage with, read, and analyze historical text (Moje et al., 2011) is one possible way to shed some light on such understandings. One study that attempts to do this is based on Wineburg’s (1991a, 1991b) research on the historical thinking of historians and high school students.

For this study, Yeager and Davis (1996) individually interviewed fifteen secondary social studies teachers and asked them to read and think-aloud the same eight documents on the Battle of Lexington that Wineburg (1991a) used in his research. Of these fifteen participants, the researchers selected three who they determined represented three distinct ways of approaching historical thinking that they noticed among the fifteen teacher participants. It is only these three participants whose think-alouds are discussed in the study.
One of these participants, Meredith, demonstrated a kind of historical thinking that paralleled that in which the historians in Wineburg’s (1991a, 1991b) study engaged. As she attempted to construct historical meaning from the texts, this teacher attended to evidence of the authors’ assumptions and perspectives, the time and place context and circumstance of the texts, the audience for which the texts were intended, and their ultimate purpose. Although both of the other two teachers acknowledged the value of using multiple sources in the classroom, only Meredith recognized this as a way of corroborating historical evidence, and of providing a deeper understanding of events through multiple perspectives. Her think-alouds represented to the researchers a teacher whose historical thinking construes understanding history as constructing meaning.

Julie, in contrast, viewed the textbook as the most authoritative source, and saw the use of other documents simply as a way to “liven up the story” (p. 158); most important to her was the potential of various documents to engender enthusiasm and interest in her students. Because Julie seemed to overlook the authorship and context of the documents she read, and did not often attend to possible sub-text, the researchers characterize her readings and think-alouds as most closely aligned with those of the high school students in Wineburg’s (1991a) study. The quotes provided portray Julie as struggling with the language and meaning of the documents, and she is said to “equate credibility [of sources] with interest and readability” (p. 157). As a result, the authors characterize her engagement with historical thinking as “History as Entertainment.” Since the quotes from Julie’s think-alouds are much shorter than those provided from Meredith, this somewhat derogatory designation is suspect. Many of Julie’s remarks, while not strictly in line with the discursive literate practices of the discipline, could reflect thinking that is rooted in pedagogical and contextual concerns. As a junior-high school teacher, Julie’s focus on narrative structure and student interest and engagement is warranted by the literature (Yeager & Davis, 1996), and her concern for clarity of language may have been rooted more in her anticipation of student needs than in personal ones.
Jordan, the third teacher in the study, represents to the authors another perspective on historical thinking that the authors call, “History as a Search for Accuracy” (p. 158). As he read and thought-aloud the documents for this study, Jordan repeatedly referenced evaluating their “accuracy,” and in fact said he incorporated the use of different historical documents into his own teaching, specifically for this purpose. At the same time, however, Jordan also seemed to view the evaluation of historical evidence, not so much as a way of constructing a reasoned account of the past, but as a matter of taking sides on an issue. Referring to documents used in this study that present colonists’ and British perspectives on the event, Jordan says he would tell students, “This is American history class…so we’re going to go along with the American, and if people don’t like it, that’s just our prejudice” (p. 159). Like Julie, Jordan is portrayed as less-than fluent in the processes of historical thinking, but he is also portrayed as doubtful about his students’ capacity to learn to think this way, saying that most would find it “too difficult [because] if it’s not cut and dried, I’ve lost them” (p. 160).

The value of this study, despite its very small scale, is in its focus on teachers and how they understand literacy in social studies. Despite their somewhat negative portrayals, both Julie’s and Jordan’s approaches to the documents might play a role in the teaching of historical thinking. Determining the accuracy of documents is one aspect of the disciplinary literacy of history, and selecting texts with student interest in mind is one aspect of good pedagogy. Nonetheless, only Meredith’s think-alouds, as represented by the quotes provided in this study, demonstrate robust engagement with discursive literate practices specific to the discipline. This study is limited, not only by its small size, but also by its framing of these three individuals as representative of three distinct patterned approaches to historical thinking among the larger group of teachers who participated in this study. Although the search for patterns is a valuable goal for researchers, they are more meaningful when set against a backdrop of a full range of responses, and when understood in the context of the interplay between and among discourses of literacy. This
study seems to have missed an opportunity to shed light on an area so lacking in rich and detailed descriptions of teachers’ thinking.

**Teachers, Literacy, and Social Studies: Summary**

Because teachers form an obviously inevitable and significant link to students’ learning in general, and disciplinary literacy in particular, it is somewhat puzzling why so little research exists to inquire into the understandings and knowledge-generating capacity of social studies teachers around literacy in their discipline. One answer lies in the way teachers are often positioned as technicians whose role is to implement practices developed by outside “experts” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Another may be connected to the fact that while research continues to grow supporting the importance of developing the kind of critical thinking associated with the discursive literate practices that encompass what it means to think historically (VanSledright, Alexander, & Maggioni, 2004), textbook reading continues to dominate instructional time in middle and secondary social studies classrooms (Alvermann & Moore, 1991; Bain, 2006; Levstik, 2008). This reliance on textbooks may be a consequence of the pressure created by a focus of social studies assessments, both local and national (e.g., NAEP), on rote recall of “facts” (Levstik, 2000), which itself serves to reinforce a transmission model of teaching and learning. Another barrier may be rooted in the fact that even seasoned teachers report that they themselves have little experience with historical inquiry and the discursive, disciplinary thinking and practices that define that process (Levstik, 2000). These interconnected factors, as well as others, may create a blind spot for university-based researchers who may view the exploration of teachers’ thinking as, if not irrelevant, a kind of dead-end. Whatever its source, the influence of various discourses of literacy and pedagogy in social studies that circulate in schools, and are mixed and remixed by teachers, is left mostly unexamined. Understanding these influences might help untangle the knot of literacy and the teaching of literacy in social studies and other
disciplines. Doing so from an outsider perspective, however, as evidenced by the literature reviewed here, is of limited value.

If a commitment to inquiry and document-based learning, and a historical thinking framework are assumed to reflect a view of history that corresponds to a disciplinary approach, then these studies provide some, albeit weak, evidence of historical thinking in some inservice teachers. Many of these studies are limited, however, not only by their generally small size, but also by the often ill-defined constructs of teacher beliefs, attitudes, and conceptions that are used (Adler, 2008), constructs to which beliefs about literacy in social studies and historical thinking are intertwined. Beyond these limitations are the difficulties inherent in self-reporting. This is particularly problematic in the context of questions posed and studies organized and constructed by researchers outside of the teaching context on which they are focused.

Research over the last two decades that references various notions and aspects of disciplinary literacy is evidence of its significance to scholars. Many studies exist that focus on student and so-called “expert” understandings and enactments of literacy in the disciplines. Yet, studies are rare that look directly at how teachers understand, interpret, and generate knowledge around literacy in social studies. As a result, little is known about how teachers theorize and pedagogically enact the discursive literate practices of the discipline; even less is known about the discourses of literacy that produce, or are produced by, those theories and practices. Of research that specifically seeks to explore how teachers understand and engage with the discursive literate practices of history, much of it is done in the context of studies the purpose of which is to inculcate teachers in particular literacy practices that may or may not reflect a disciplinary view; others do so with an eye mainly on examining student achievement, albeit as evaluated by problematic measures. Important as some of these studies may be, they suggest cases of somewhat misguided effort. Lacking thicker descriptions of how and to what degree teachers themselves understand and interpret literacy and the teaching of literacy in social
studies, it is impossible to consider ways to bring those practices and ways of thinking to students. The lack of teacher perspectives on these issues in the form of teachers’ knowledge and meaning making, particularly as generated through the collaborative intellectual efforts of teacher inquiry, leaves a broad range of questions unexplored and, indeed, inaccessible.

Alongside of this, and perhaps to some degree as a result, is the fact that little seems to have changed in the past hundred years in the way history is framed and taught in K-12 classrooms (Brophy & VanSledright, 1997; Levstik, 2008; Thornton, 2008). As the gatekeepers (Thornton, 1989) of both curricula and instruction, it is teachers whose historical understandings and thinking make possible the enactment of the disciplinary literacy of history in classrooms. It is perhaps, then, teachers to whom attention should be turned. Movement away from a textbook approach to history, already hampered by political, institutional, and social forces beyond the scope of this review, is further thwarted by ignoring both the agency, and the disciplinary and pedagogical expertise of teachers. Without such movement in the way history is understood and taught, students may be denied access to the discursive literate practices that comprise, not just what it means to think historically, but what it means to think critically. Essential as this way of thinking is to the functioning of any democratic society, it is even more so in a world in which sources of information have dramatically increased. The disciplinary literacy of history, its discursive literate practices, and the kind of thinking it suggests, offers the means by which those sources might be wisely negotiated.

**Teacher Inquiry**

In traditional professional development models, teachers are most often positioned as receivers of knowledge that is generated by outside authorities (Mills, Jennings, Donnelly, & Mueller, 2001). Teachers often position themselves in this way as well,
looking to researchers, professional development providers, or administrators to initiate, provide, and evaluate teacher learning opportunities (Clausen, Aquino, & Wideman, 2009; Mills et al., 2001). This positioning is informed by an autonomous perspective on knowledge in which discrete pedagogical skills are viewed as transferable from expert providers to teachers, from whom students ultimately derive educational benefits. Thus, knowledge is viewed as a product that is dispensed, and teachers who acquire more knowledge are assumed to be better teachers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). As a result, traditional perspectives on professional development focus on helping teachers “come to know what, generally speaking, is already ‘known’—at least already known by university–based researchers or other outside experts” (Cochran-Smith, 1999, p. 259).

Much of the research into teachers and their professional development focuses on how the professional development is structured, and how that structure impacts its effectiveness. Definitions of effectiveness include faithful implementation of particular pedagogical practices and demonstration of direct links to student achievement, but mostly exclude consideration of the interactions and perspectives of the teacher participants. Thus, although a wide range of professional development options are available to teachers, and participation rates are high, very little is known about how teachers construct knowledge about teaching (Wilson & Berne, 1999).

Despite calls from researchers to establish more collaborative structures for teacher professional development, the aforementioned assumptions and perspectives about teacher knowledge and learning have proved difficult to disrupt (Clausen et al., 2009). Doing so involves reconceptualizing teachers as professionals rather than technicians (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). It also involves taking up Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (1999) notion of “knowledge-of-practice” in which teachers “treat their own classrooms and schools as sites for intentional investigation” and “treat the knowledge and theory produced by others as generative material for interrogation and interpretation” (p. 250). The knowledge-of-practice perspective rejects the idea that
pedagogical problems are “ready-made and full blown” (p. 260). Instead, teachers are positioned as “competent professionals [who] pose and construct problems out of the uncertainty and complexity of practice situations and … [who] make new sense of situations by connecting them to previous ones and to a variety of other information” (p. 260). It is on this view of knowledge that collaborative teacher inquiry is based and from which Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (1999) construct of “inquiry as stance” is derived. This construct “permits closer understanding of knowledge-practice relationships as well as how inquiry produces knowledge, how inquiry relates to practice, and what teachers learn from inquiry within communities” (p. 250).

This notion of knowledge as generated in community with others is essential to the goals of collaborative teacher inquiry. In the context of collaborative inquiry groups, rather than seeking to produce an articulated set of findings, teachers work toward “understanding, articulating, and ultimately altering practice” (p. 279) in order to improve education. This is accomplished by means of “rich conversations about students’ work, teachers’ classroom observations and reflections, curriculum materials and practices, and classroom and school-related documents and artifacts” (p. 279).

Wilson and Berne (1999) reviewed the literature on teacher-centered professional development approaches. Specifically, they examined professional development that was characterized by opportunities for teachers to talk about and engage in subject-matter, to discuss students and learning, or to have conversations about teaching. These scholars identified three common themes among teacher-centered models that they considered successful. First, the participants met regularly, sometimes even over a period of years, to study and discuss their work as teachers, affording opportunities for participants to redefine their instructional practices. Second, successful teacher-centered professional development groups rejected the notion of teacher knowledge as a product to be disseminated, and instead adopted approaches in which teachers engaged in collective inquiry both into their disciplines, and into the instructional practices of that discipline.
Finally, according to Wilson and Berne (1999), successful models privileged teacher interaction and emphasized building collegial relationships among participants. Summarizing their review, the authors note that while teachers often report enjoying the chance to talk about their work, developing a meaningful sense of community takes time, particularly since “teachers have very little experience engaging in a professional discourse that is public and critical of their work and the work of their colleagues” (p. 181).

Establishing viable teacher inquiry requires developing an atmosphere where professional discourse, including critique, is encouraged at the same time that trust and collegiality are established. To whatever extent teachers report valuing opportunities to talk about what they do, whether framed as successes, struggles or uncertainties, teachers often find that there are few spaces in which they can openly engage in conversations about issues that are important to them (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Mehta, 2009). At the same time, however, the tensions inherent in simultaneously encouraging critique and maintaining trust can threaten to undermine the work of teacher inquiry.

One study of teacher-centered professional development that examined these tensions was conducted by Thomas, Wineburg, Grossman, Myhre, and Woolworth (1998). Acting simultaneously as participants, facilitators, and researchers, these scholars helped organize monthly day-long meetings of high school teachers of English and Social Studies, supplemented by bi-weekly meetings after school, and a five-day summer retreat. Although initially there was no set agenda other than to provide an opportunity for interactions and continued learning across the subject areas, the teacher participants expressed desires to develop an interdisciplinary humanities curriculum and engage in discussions about literature and history. Over a period of three years of doing both, the participants began to recognize differences in how teachers of the two subject areas approached and responded to the readings and to the construction of curriculum. The talk around these topics opened opportunities for the participants to recognize and examine
epistemological differences between the disciplines as they surfaced and named assumptions. Thomas et al. (1998) considered the concept of “distributed expertise” central to the project. This concept views thinking “not as the product of an individual mind, but as emerging from the discourse and dynamics of a group” (p. 23). According to the analysis of these researchers, the ideas contributed to discussions by particular teachers were augmented and elaborated by the group in ways that might not otherwise be possible. One social studies teacher, for example, reported that group discussions provided her with a new perspective on what it means to know history; another reported that as a result of inquiry group conversations about how historians evaluate sources, she had begun to engage her own students in questioning the perspective and credibility of texts. This potential for intersubjective knowledge production is one essential quality of teacher inquiry (Campano, 2009).

At the same time, however, Thomas et al. (1998) noted that even after a year of regular meetings, school politics and interpersonal histories sometimes caused tensions to flare. Although the authors note that in group settings individuals have a tendency to “play community” (p. 24). During these episodes, the researchers made note of openly hostile and sarcastic remarks, negative body language, and facial expressions such as eye-rolling. Although subsequent to some of these episodes, certain teachers involved in the group elected to absent themselves from several meetings, or withdraw entirely from the group, at other times teachers were able to acknowledged and grappled with the conflict. The perspective of these researchers is that collaboration necessarily entails conflict, and that establishing a community such as a teacher inquiry group carries with it not just a potential to generate knowledge, but also “a venue where pre-existing conflicts can be enacted in a public forum” (p. 27). The key is for participants to manage to work through the tensions in such a way as to become sensitive to differences and learn how to productively negotiate conflict.
This is not always easy, however. For example, in work at the Center for Inquiry, a professional development school administered cooperatively by K-12 and higher education partners in Columbia, South Carolina, Mills et al. (2001) framed inquiry-based professional development as “inquiry as reform.” In this model, the objective was to shift school culture through teacher collaboration. Inquiry was framed as both a stance for classroom instruction, and as a way to investigate teaching and learning. Small groups of teachers organized around topics of inquiry and worked together to create instructional changes as part of larger accountability measures related to student performance. They used video segments and transcripts of their own classrooms to initiate discussions and consider multiple perspectives by “slowing moments in the classroom down enough to inquire into their meaning” (Mills et al. 2001, p. 4). Although inquiry was foundational to the group’s work in that teachers used inquiry-based instruction in their classrooms, they found it difficult to incorporate those approaches in conversations with their colleagues. Describing the evolution of the group’s work, Mills et al. found that initial efforts were spent building an atmosphere of care, trust, and respect. Although the researchers saw this as essential, like Lewis and Ketter (2004), they reported that teachers often engaged only in polite disagreement, and that only over a sustained period of time did teachers engage in the risk-taking inherent to conversations that might generate collaboratively constructed knowledge.
Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I will describe my methodology for exploring how middle and secondary level social studies teachers talk about literacy and about the demands of teaching literacy in social studies. I will outline the research design, as well as the context of the study, and discuss my strategies for producing and analyzing data. In addition, I will describe how I will present my findings, and disclose and discuss my positionality as a researcher. Finally, I will problematize the methodology and research design I have chosen and discuss the issues of trustworthiness raised by those choices, and the possible limitations of the study I conducted.

Research Design

This practitioner research was situated in the context of a collaborative inquiry group of middle and secondary level teachers, the purpose of which was to study and discuss issues relating to how literacy is represented and enacted in social studies classrooms. The main goal of this study was to describe and interpret how middle and secondary level teachers talk about literacy in social studies. These descriptions include how they talk about navigating literacy expectations and demands in their social studies classrooms, the tensions and affordances they identify, and how they say they manage those tensions or affordances. Most significantly, this study was focused on understanding how knowledge is generated and meaning is made through the social
interactions and collaborative intellectual deliberations of teachers as both theorizers and practitioners of teaching and learning.

The inquiry group had eight weekly two-hour meetings, and all meetings were audio-recorded, and transcribed. After the first meeting, I interviewed each of the participants in order to gain initial insights about these teachers’ perspectives on the contexts in which they teach, on their understandings of literacy, and on the tensions and affordances they identify as they endeavor to teach literacy in their social studies classrooms. Near the end of the 8-week inquiry group session, I interviewed each of the teachers a second time. The purpose of this interview was to gain further insights into their perspectives on literacy as a result of their inquiry group participation, and on their views of the knowledge-generating around literacy in which the inquiry group engaged. Both sets of interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Teachers’ own understandings of what it means to do and teach literacy and history served as a starting point for these explorations. In order to contextualize these teachers’ perspectives on literacy in social studies classrooms, I first asked teachers about their motivations for joining the inquiry group. On more than one occasion, I also provided a series of “invitations” that served to promote engagement in collaborative inquiry around social studies literacy. Although some of these invitations were pre-established, others were added by participants in alignment with the interests and concerns of the group.

**Practitioner Research and Inquiry Stance**

I conducted this study as practitioner research grounded in an inquiry stance; it takes a discourse studies perspective with a focus on literacy in social studies/history. Practitioner research is appropriate for this study because the questions it asks arose organically from my own teaching context (Campano, 2009). These questions seek to shed light on the knowledge teachers generate about, and the meanings they attach to, literacy in social studies and the teaching literacy of in social studies. Practitioner
research also assumes that all participants in an inquiry group are simultaneously teachers, learners, and researchers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This is consistent not only with the framework of inquiry as stance, but also with my choice to acknowledge and make visible the multiple identities I inhabit in this research as teacher, scholar, and inquiry group facilitator and participant. Another assumption of practitioner research is that the focus of study is on an inquiry site that is also the professional context (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). As an offering through the Teacher Center of the district in which I work, the questions and concerns that arose in the inquiry group derived from local needs and perspectives. These, and the knowledge those needs and perspective generated, reflect, as interconnected and contextualized, the interpretive, theoretical, and practical perspectives of the participants, which are interconnected and contextualized.

The qualitative methodological approach of practitioner research was also appropriate to my research questions because they align with the overarching goal of qualitative research which is to attempt to “make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In this study, teachers’ interactions around, and perspectives on, how they make meaning of their experiences with literacy in social studies are foregrounded. These meanings are assumed to be socially constructed and derived from the interaction of individuals with their world (Merriam, 2002). The reality of that world is assumed to be subject to interpretation, and as such is subject to change over time (Merriam, 2002). Taking an emic, insider perspective privileges an “understanding of the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118).

Furthermore, practitioner research complements a discourse studies approach because together they allow me to explore, describe, and thereby make visible discourses as expressed through language and other means that circulate in a disciplinary and institutional context. An inquiry stance resonates with this research because it positions teachers as agentive knowers by embracing the idea that “practitioners are deliberate
intellectuals who constantly theorize practice as part of practice itself” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Taken in concert, these approaches help me to position teachers as intellectually capable and foreground their lived experiences as teachers of literacy and social studies, at the same time that I attend to the complexity of how they might understand and collectively generate knowledge about the literacy of their content area.

Since I take the perspective that teachers are capable and agentive knowers, and because I see literacy and discourses as complex, I designed this as practitioner research focused on a teacher inquiry group. As an inter- and transdisciplinary field, practitioner research, like all qualitative methodologies, cuts across the humanities and social sciences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In this study, I attend to social interactions that occur in the inquiry group. In particular, I try to capture the movement of ideas by identifying talk events that exhibit heightened attention, excitement, or generative potential. These included moments of debate, agreement, tension, conflict, cooperation, complication, and clarification. As I do so, I also document, interpret, and note variations and/or similarities in the discourses invoked and engaged in by the participants. As Denzin and Lincoln (2008) point out, "The researcher does not leave the field with mountains of material and then easily write up his or her findings. Qualitative findings are constructed” (p. 34). Thus, the acts of analysis and interpretation in which I engage are necessarily filtered through my biographical, cultural, and social perspective, complicated further by my multiple roles as teacher, researcher, facilitator, and inquiry group participant. These situated perspectives mediate the knowledge and understandings that I produce through this research; therefore, the knowledge, understandings, and sense-making are themselves socially, culturally, and historically situated.

As a cultural practice (Dyson & Genishi, 2005), a collaborative teacher inquiry group focused on literacy in social studies suggests assumptions about values, ideas, and relationships. These include the assumption that time is well-spent working to improve teaching practices, that literacy and social studies are connected, and that collaboration
between teachers is meaningful and productive. The interactional talk in which the group engages is produced by, and therefore bears traces of historic, biographic, institutional, policy, and other forces that shape the participants’ teaching context (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). These intersect in the context of the teacher inquiry group, informing who speaks, influencing what gets said, and shaping the public meaning that gets established (Bakhtin, 1981; Dyson & Genishi, 2005).

To summarize, the focus of this research to understand the complexity of teachers’ perspectives on literacy in the context of social studies teaching, and the potential of collaborative teacher inquiry in generating knowledge and meaning around literacy. I designed the study as practitioner research, but because the data produced was teacher talk during inquiry group discussions and semi-structured interviews, I paired the practitioner research design with D/discourse analysis tools (Gee, 2011b) framed by Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism. As in all inquiries, the results of this study are constructed through my choices and interpretations, rather than found (Reybold, Lammert, & Stribling, 2012). The decision to engage in practitioner research and bring a discourse lens to the analysis of data strengthen the study’s trustworthiness by considering both the context for the talk and the talk itself. While qualitative research in general tends to treat language as a transparent window on participants’ perspectives and on the social world, a discourse perspective allows me to problematize this view by interpreting the interactive talk of the inquiry group and interviews as a means through which identities, meanings, knowledge, and social worlds are constructed.
Table 1

*Aligning Research Questions and Methods of Data Production*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiry group discussions, actions &amp; interactions</th>
<th>Semi-structured interviews</th>
<th>Contributed Documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do middle and secondary school social studies teachers talk, think about, and represent literacy as it applies to their social studies classrooms?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1a. On what discourses do teachers draw as they talk about literacy in social studies?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What knowledge and meaning is interrogated, transformed, and generated as teachers interact in a teacher inquiry group focused on literacy in social studies?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Context of the Study**

**School District**

This study was conducted among teachers employed by the Long Oak School District (pseudonym) in suburban New York State. The inquiry group was offered as part of the district’s voluntary workshops and courses for teachers. According to the New York State Department of Education, as of the 2015-2016 school year, Long Oak operated nine elementary schools (grades K-5), two middle schools (grades 6-8), and one high school (grades 9-12), attended by a total of just over 7000 students. Eighty percent of these students identified as white, 11% as Hispanic or Latino, 6% as Asian, 2% as Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, 2% as African-American, and 1% as multiracial. Students with disabilities accounted for 16% of the total student population, and 2% were English Language Learners. A total of 23% of students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. Of the 517 students who completed high school in 2015-2016, 96% of graduates earned a Regents diploma, and 62% earned a Regents diploma with advanced
Of the 30 teachers in the district, 77% have at least 30 credits beyond a Masters degree or a doctorate. No teachers in this district teach without or out of their certification, and 97% have more than three years of teaching experience.

As required by New York State, the district administers annual assessments in Math and English Language Arts to students in grades three through eight; science assessments are administered to grades three and eight. The district also participates in the National Assessment of Educational Progress which is administered in Reading and Math to students in grades four and eight.

Collaborative Teacher Inquiry Group

The inquiry group that was studied for this research met on eight consecutive Wednesdays beginning the first Wednesday in May of 2017 and ending on the Wednesday of the last week of school in June of 2017. With the exception of the 6/14 and 6/21 meetings that began earlier, the inquiry group met from 2:45 to about 4:45 pm. Since the meetings were held in the library of the building in which I work, and student dismissal is at 2:35, I enlisted the help of the librarian to set up the tables in advance. My initial plan was to video- as well as audio-record the sessions, but after experiencing technical difficulties with the video recording equipment, and being unable to secure a substitute camera, I had to abandon the collection of video data. As a result, I relied only on audio recordings.

Teachers usually sat at three large wooden library tables that were arranged adjacent to each other. This allowed for a total of sixteen chairs. Since, including me, there sometimes up to were fifteen participants, one chair was generally left unoccupied, or was set to the side. As soon as I arrived for the meetings, I placed an audio-recording device in the center of the table and opened the resident audio-recording software on my laptop computer to serve as a backup recording method. I placed this computer on a separate, nearby table.
I anticipated that I would occupy multiple roles in the inquiry group, acting simultaneously as researcher, facilitator, and teacher-participant. However, by the end of the first meeting, Meg, a colleague who had participated in both pilot studies, primarily took on the role of facilitator. This allowed me to focus my attention on my roles as researcher and teacher-participant. I describe the impact of this shift and these multiple roles on my positionality in a section that follows. The organization, activities, and goals of the group were initially guided by those of two earlier teacher inquiry groups that I ran on a pilot basis in July and August of 2015, and then again in February and March of 2016. In keeping with inquiry as stance, however, the questions, concerns, and interests of the participants around literacy in social studies were the dominant driver of the content and direction that the inquiry group on which this study focuses took up.

Teachers’ own understandings of what it means to do and teach literacy and history were the starting point for the inquiry group discussions. In order to contextualize these teachers’ perspectives on literacy in social studies classrooms, I first asked teachers, both during the first meeting and during the first interview, about their motivations for joining the inquiry group. On more than one occasion, I also provided a series of “invitations” that served to promote engagement in collaborative inquiry around social studies literacy. Although some of these invitations were pre-established, others were added by participants in alignment with the interests and concerns of the group.

As an offering through the teacher center, a teacher inquiry group was unusual, if not unique; other than this and my pilot studies, the coordinator could not recall any other offerings during her eight years in this position that were organized as teacher inquiry groups. Courses and workshops that are offered typically position teachers as receivers of knowledge, often from other teachers, but also from technology and other “experts;” few opportunities exist for teachers to frame and pose their own questions about practice, or to problematize the terms or topics of professional development. This lack of exposure to an inquiry group format presented some challenges. Mostly unfamiliar with the premise
of collaborative teacher inquiry groups, a number of participants initially came to meetings expecting that as the facilitator, I would dispense knowledge and provide worksheets and other resources that they could use in their classrooms. Although six of the fifteen participants had been involved in one or more meetings during my pilot study, and had been exposed to the notion of an inquiry stance, explaining, establishing, and seeking to maintain this within the group was an on-going process of modeling and reminding. At the beginning of the second meeting, Meg and I explained to the group that she would be taking on the role of facilitator, and that this would allow me to focus my attention more on the research I was trying to do. Despite this, I repeatedly had to refrain from slipping into the authoritative role participants seemed drawn to confer on me, both because I had organized the group, and because I am a doctoral student and aspiring researcher. Although responses to the inquiry group format were generally positive, there were a few participants who, during interviews, expressed some discomfort or uncertainty with the inquiry group structure. My interpretation of at least some of this is that teachers aren’t often encouraged to share pedagogical doubt or failures (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This might be particularly true in the unfamiliar context of a teacher inquiry group that, in its valuing of collaborative deliberation of issues over quick and easy “solutions” to “problems,” may appear to teachers, at least on the surface, to involve too much risk for too little of what they perceive as concrete benefit (e.g., “make-and-take” classroom resources). Individuals who participated in some of the pilot study inquiry group sessions were especially helpful in this regard, but there were also several steps I took to try to meet this challenge.

After explaining the basic ideas that underpin teacher inquiry, my goals as a teacher, facilitator, and researcher, and the focus of this group as literacy in social studies, I asked participants to share what motivated them to join this group. Based on their responses, we created a list of tentative questions, concerns, and issues that the group might explore. Based on these, and on the movement of the group as the meetings
progressed, Meg and I discussed, and then we offered, “invitations” with respect to possible activities or contributions that we thought might help the group continue to be productive. As time went on, other participants made their own “invitations” as well.

Those Meg or I made were introduced by saying something like, “Perhaps we could think about bringing __________ to our next meeting. We could then work together to revisit, discuss, think through, ask questions about, or otherwise grapple with it.” My original list of suggestions included the following:

1. a teacher resource or other relevant book
2. a teacher resource provided by the district or through other professional development
3. an example of student work (essay, short answer, journal entry, completed graphic organizer, notes, etc.)
4. a worksheet you found, developed or are developing, used or would like to use
5. a note-taking format
6. an example of notes you provide
7. a graphic organizer for writing (or other than for note-taking)
8. a historical document (printed text or other medium) you are interested in using or have used
9. an individual “think-aloud” of a historical document, written or audio-recorded
10. a textbook excerpt
11. a video or video clip (for teacher or student use)
12. a PowerPoint presentation
13. a relevant newspaper or journal article (not necessarily related to pedagogy)
14. a relevant school-, district-, or state-produced document

Of these, I personally invited participants to contribute worksheets they were using, developing, or considering using; Meg invited participants to bring graphic organizers for writing. Other participants either individually contributed or suggested that the group contribute the NYS Framework for Social Studies, the state-authored description of the new format for questions for the NYS Regents Exam in Social Studies, print-outs and online viewings of inquiries from the C3 Teachers website (www.c3teachers.org)
including related historical documents, and teacher-created or other classroom posters. Although I tried to be sure my participation in the group did not dominate the discussions, I did contribute my own relevant materials, including on two separate occasions, a book by Sam Wineburg on teaching historical thinking, and a transcript from a previous meeting. The latter was selected on the basis of an apparent need to clarify the content of earlier discussions; it allowed the group to revisit turns of talk during which there was a grappling with meanings and knowledge around literacy in social studies, and simultaneously reinforced the group’s ownership of the talk they produced. The transcript also provided an opening through which the group could reframe, sharpen, expand, and otherwise modify the ideas that were being discussed. Recursively revisiting the group’s talk had the effect of unearthing some of the biographical, historical, institutional, and other discourses that circulated through and around that talk. As such, it was also one way we as a group, including I as a researcher, were able to begin to problematize the idea that language is a transparent reflection of thinking. In addition, Debbie, a group member whose habit it was to take notes at all school and district meetings, one more than one occasion brought to the attention of the group notes she had taken during earlier meetings.

Descriptions of the pilot study inquiry group, as well as the inquiry group I facilitated for this study, as they were presented by the Teacher Center to teachers in the district via email, are included in Appendix F.

One underlying assumption of teacher inquiry groups is that teachers are not only agentive knowers, but also that they are lifelong learners (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This perspective affords opportunities for teachers to pose their own questions about teaching theory and practice. It also creates a space in which teachers can identify, examine, and critique their own as well as institutional assumptions and beliefs about particular topics (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Goswami & Lewis, et al, 2009;). One goal of teacher inquiry groups, then, is to “work collaboratively to construct and
reconstruct subject matter and curriculum” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 141) using a variety of resources. Another is the joint construction of knowledge achieved by working and sharing with other teachers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Goswami, Lewis, Rutherford, & Waff, 2009; Noffke & Zeichner, 2006). As noted above, part of my role as facilitator involved communicating these underlying assumptions to the group.

**Participants**

One characteristic of practitioner research is that the professional context is the research site. In this study, I organized a teacher inquiry group that was offered and met in the same district in which I teach. This selection reflects a tension that existed between the time constraints of my personal situation as both a researcher and a full-time teacher, and my research agenda. I recognize that this choice complicated both my relationship to the inquiry group as a researcher, and my participation within it as a facilitator. I also recognize that, like all qualitative research, this choice frames in particular ways who and what counts as data by opening certain opportunities for learning and closing off others (Reybold et al., 2012). Because participation in the inquiry group was voluntary, the group was self-selecting, limited to those who were interested in a teacher inquiry group focused on literacy in social studies. This voluntary aspect of participation, however, was complicated by other local factors. After having attended a workshop I conducted on the topic at a regional conference on social studies, the department chair in my district promoted the value of the inquiry group to teachers. As a consequence of his position of authority, some teachers may have interpreted this recommendation less as a suggestion than an expectation of behavior. Practitioner research nonetheless recognizes and values the generative potential inherent in these tensions and creates a structure in which I can transparently grapple with the dissonances and affordances tensions like these suggest.
Six of the fifteen participants in this study inquiry group attended at least one of the meetings associated with my pilot studies in 2015 and 2016. This provided them with varying degrees of familiarity and comfort with the goals of teacher inquiry. Meg, a 7th grade teacher at Oakwood, was the only teacher, however, who had attended and participated in all of the pilot study meetings. Because of this experience, and because she and I have an established relationship of collegiality and collaboration, Meg was both willing and able to take on most responsibilities of facilitating the group. This allowed me to observe and record notes, as well as sometimes participate, in the group’s activities and discussions.

I did not ask participants to identify themselves by race, but based on my own evaluations during our interactions, I determined that all of the participants in the inquiry group for this study are white. When asked, the district office claimed that it neither records nor requests the race of its teaching staff. However, it is informally understood that the only black teacher in the district (a 6th grade social studies teacher) retired several years ago. Although approximately 78% of teachers in New York State identity as white (Gais, Backstrom, Malatras, & Joo Park, 2018), a teaching staff with no or few teachers of color is significant to note in a school district with a student population that is 9% black or Hispanic (New York State Education Department, 2015).

Although information about the group was distributed by both email and hard-copy announcement district-wide, eleven of the fifteen participants were from the two middle schools; only four were from the high school. Therefore, while teachers of grades seven through ten were represented, most were teachers of grades seven and eight, and no teachers of eleventh or twelfth grade social studies participated in the group. At the time that the study began, more than half of the teachers were completing at least their tenth year of teaching, with no teacher-participant at fewer than four years of experience, creating an average of 12.8 years of teaching. Following are a table description of the participants, and brief profiles of each. All names are pseudonyms.
Table 2

Descriptions of Inquiry Group Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>M/F</th>
<th>Course/Grade(s) Assigned 2016-2017</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Pilot Study?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joe *</td>
<td>Oakwood</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>American History 8</td>
<td>10</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>American History 7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meg</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>American History 7/ICT</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carly</td>
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<td>American History 7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>American History 8/ICT</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>American History 8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>American History 7/ICT</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Rockville</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Paula</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>American History 8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Rockville</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>American History 8/ICT</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Global History 9 /9 Honors</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Debbie</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Global 9 Spec. Ed./Resource</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Global History 9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marty</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Global History 10 / 10 Honors</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Dropped out after the first three meetings.

Participant Profiles

Joe majored in history at a small, local private college. He spent his first six years teaching 7th grade, and his most recent four teaching 8th grade. Joe didn’t get tenure until his 5th year of teaching, which at the time was generally granted at the end of year three. Joe is easy-going, but he has a somewhat negative reputation among colleagues for sometimes acting unprofessionally. He is well-liked among students because, by his own report, he does not assign homework, does open-book tests, and by some student accounts, jokes around a lot in class. Joe dropped out of the inquiry group after the third meeting for personal reasons.

Karen is triple-certified in social studies, special education, and reading, the last of which she obtained at a Masters level. She started her career in the district as a special education teacher, but after three years of teaching small-class social studies and Resource, she switched tenure areas to Social Studies, and has taught 10th, 8th, and most
recently, 7th grades. Karen is a co-advisor for the newspaper club at Oakwood. She is generally well-respected by students and colleagues alike, but is often criticized by parents for being too tough, specifically in terms of her heavy emphasis on writing. As a result, there have been multiple instances of parents successfully lobbying to have their children removed from her class.

Carly has been a 7th grade teacher at Oakwood for the past ten years. For the prior four years of her career, she taught 9th grade Global Studies. Carly both lives, and went to school in, the district, having herself attended Oakwood, and perhaps somewhat as a result, is rather outspoken about school and district policies. Both she and her husband (who also teaches at Oakwood) are active members of the school and greater community. As a result, Carly is often seen as having “inside knowledge” of district policies and actions. She and her husband regularly chaperone school events, attend board meetings, and between them advise several clubs.

Ron is a 15-year veteran of teaching 8th grade Social Studies at Oakwood. He is a graduate of the school district and attended Oakwood. Ron’s outspoken and sometimes arrogant nature has often resulted in conflicts with colleagues, and also with the district, most notably over a baseball coaching position which he felt he had been unjustly denied. Ron is respected for being vocal about the district’s antiquated technology and technology policies, but he is also criticized for being antagonistic towards colleagues in ways that some see as unprofessional.

Pam’s career began as a 9th grade teacher which she did until a district realignment shifted 9th grade from the middle schools to the high school. Pam opted to move to 8th grade in order to stay at Oakwood. Her undergraduate major was American history, and she received a Masters in Social Studies Education. Pam is co-advisor for the school’s newspaper club and the 8th grade Student Council. She is actively involved in spearheading and helping to organize school events.
Jerry’s career has been exclusively as a 7th grade teacher. During the year before he got a permanent position with the district, Jerry was a five-month medical leave replacement for Meg. He credits this experience, as well as the strong recommendation he received from Meg as a result, for his being hired by the district. Since that time, he and Meg have maintained somewhat close contact, despite working in different buildings. It was Meg who initially encouraged Jerry to participate in one of the pilot inquiry groups.

Ruth is one of the few relatively new teachers who participated in the inquiry group for this study. She received an undergraduate degree in Adolescence Education in Social Studies at SUNY Oneonta, and a Master of Science degree in Childhood Education and Special Education at a local university. She has New York State certification in each of these three areas. Ruth is the advisor for the Yearbook Club at Rockville, and also coaches the girls’ junior varsity lacrosse team.

Paula has worked in the district for ten years, seven of which were spent at the high school where she taught 10th grade. Paula’s undergraduate degree is in Political Science, and she has a Masters degree in teaching Social Studies. Paula travels widely, which she says helps to inform her teaching. She has spent summers teaching in Australia, travelling with a scientific expedition to Antarctica, and visiting Vietnam with PeaceTrees, an organization that works to remove unexploded ordnance and promote peace. Paula says she uses videos and photographs from her trips as part of her classroom instruction.

Ray has taught 8th grade for most of his career, having taught 7th for his first five in the district. Ray is regarded by his colleagues as something of an intellectual, at least to some degree because he is an avid reader. He is known to have a book with him at all times, often recommends books at department meetings, and mentioned during his first semi-structured interview his particular interest in biography and historical fiction. He is generally soft-spoken and by all accounts, is well-respected by administrators, colleagues, and students alike.
Rachel is one of the few younger teachers in the department who participated in the inquiry group. She is dual-certified in Social Studies and Special Education and received both her undergraduate and graduate degrees from a local state university campus. One of the reasons Rachel said that she joined the inquiry group was to “get more ideas about making history interesting for kids.” She also mentioned that her friend and colleague, Ruth, had told her about the pilot studies, so they decided to do it together.

Sarah’s long career includes experience teaching grades 10-12, Advanced Placement and Honors courses, and electives in Criminal Law and Civil Rights. Sarah explained that she decided to join the inquiry group because Meg had talked to her about it at a professional development day. During the first interview she said, “At this point, I’m pretty disgusted with any of the PD the district forces us to do and I respect Meg...I figured it couldn’t be any worse. Anyway, I’ll be retiring soon and I’ve been thinking about running some PD myself. I thought this might help me get ideas.”

Debbie is certified to teach both Social Studies and Special Education. Her fifteen-year teaching career has spanned grades 4-12, and she has taught in one of the elementary schools and Rockville, as well as the high school where she is now assigned. Debbie is known for her prolific note-taking at both department and general faculty meetings. When asked about this, Debbie says it helps her to concentrate, and also “comes in handy when the principal contradicts himself.” Debbie decided to participate in the inquiry group because she felt there was a lack of communication between general and special educators. As she remarked in her first semi-structured interview, “gen ed teachers, a lot of them anyway, don’t really get it.”

June is a young teacher who said she wanted to join the inquiry group to “get ideas from people with more experience than me.” She did her undergraduate work at an out-of-state university in History Education, with a concentration in World History, and got her Master of Arts in history at a local state university. June was enthusiastic about participating in the inquiry group because although she had heard of them while an
undergraduate, she never saw opportunities to join one before. June also mentioned the heavy load of state- and district-mandated annual professional development hours that are required of newer teachers. She said she was “glad to find something that really seems interesting and worth-while.”

Marty, another new teacher, has already earned a positive reputation among his colleagues. In addition to co-advising the Habitat for Humanity Club at the high school, Marty is also the Boys’ Wrestling coach. Since he began teaching at the high school, Marty has been assigned to sections of Global Studies, but he also teaches what was a new elective in Sociology, the curriculum for which he helped to design.

Meg has been a 7th grade social studies teacher in the district for the past 18 years. Before that, she taught for five years at a small private school that focused on interdisciplinary learning, a position she left because the local public-school district offered substantially better pay and benefits. She obtained her Masters degree in Social Studies Education at Teachers College, and is also a certified reading teacher. Meg often talks fondly about her private school experiences in which teacher collaboration between subjects and grade levels was not just encouraged, but mandated by the school’s express mission and philosophy. According to Meg’s accounts, class sizes were small, scheduling was block-style and flexible, and teachers were treated, in her words, “as intellectuals, not robots.”

Meg and I have developed a strong relationship on both a personal and a professional level. Because our approaches to teaching and our views of students and learning are so similar, we work well together, and do so often. As a result of our collaborations, we have presented several workshops at the local Council for Social Studies, and we co-authored an article that was published in NYSUT’s Educator’s Voice, a Spring, 2017 volume that focused on content-area literacy.

Meg’s participation was crucial in both the pilot studies and in the inquiry group that is the subject of this study. She was instrumental in encouraging teachers to join the
group, and her willingness to facilitate it reduced my already complicated positionality as the organizer of the group as well as a researcher and teacher-participant. Because Meg and I had spoken at length about my doctoral studies and my dissertation plans, and because she had participated in both of the pilot study groups, Meg was well-positioned to act as facilitator. We spent time before and after each meeting discussing how things had gone, and where they might be going. Although she understood that the focus and direction of the talk would mainly be determined by the participants, she also had the experience, capacity, and respect of our colleagues to keep the group moving and on-task.

**Methods of Producing Data**

The methods of data production that I used in this study included teacher inquiry group discussions, two semi-structured interviews, and the collection of documents and other media contributed by the group. The following section describes in more detail each of these methods of data production.

**Collaborative Teacher Inquiry Group Meetings**

The teacher inquiry group met weekly for eight weeks. Each meeting was scheduled for two hours, but some lasted up to twenty minutes longer, and others ended up to fifteen minutes early. Except for the last two meetings that were held from 11-1, meetings were scheduled on Wednesdays beginning in May of 2017 from 2:45 to 4:45 and were held in the library of the middle school in which I teach. The meetings were audio-recorded transcribed. This data was supplemented by a researcher journal in which I wrote my impressions of the group interactions, to a limited extent during, but to a greater extent after each meeting. Activities during the meetings included discussion of issues participants raised about literacy in general, about literacy as it pertains to history/social studies, about literacy as part of their teaching of social studies, and about
school, district, and state mandates and policies about literacy. With the help of a colleague, Meg, who is a 7th grade social studies teacher in my building and who participated in all of the pilot inquiry group sessions for this study, we encouraged participants to share issues they recognize, assumptions they make, understandings they exercise, and challenges they experience teaching literacy and social studies. As it became relevant to these discussions, we offered several “invitations” to participants to contribute documents or other media artifacts in which the group might be interested. These documents and artifacts included several teacher and student resources and worksheets, examples of student work, primary source documents teachers had used or were thinking of using, classroom posters, and state-authored and district-sponsored documents. On one occasion, I proposed that participants revisit previous discussions and supplied excerpts of transcripts from previous meetings to do so. Closely and collaboratively engaging with these documents or other media provided an additional lens through which meanings and knowledge around literacy in social studies and its teaching were explored and generated.

As much as possible, I encouraged, but avoided dominating, these activities through my own active participation in the inquiry group. Thus, I occupied multiple roles as inquiry group participant, facilitator, and researcher. These concurrent roles are consistent with inquiry as stance which frames leaders as learners and recognizes the potential in the tensions between research and practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Although Meg took on the role of facilitator, I sometimes suggested readings, websites, or other resources in which the group might be interested; other members of the inquiry group, and Meg in particular, also did the same. Throughout, the focus was on pursuing and engaging with relevant issues raised by the participants.

I recognize that the interactional talk in which participants engaged was produced by historic, biographic, institutional, and other forces (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). These forces intersected in the context of the teacher inquiry group. Because they informed who
spoke, influenced what got said, and shaped the public meaning that was established
(Bakhtin, 1981; Dyson & Genishi, 2005), I recognize that the data that was produced
does not fully or with complete reliability reflect the participants’ perspectives on literacy
or the teaching of literacy in social studies classrooms. Accordingly, it is through the lens
of the multiple forces at work during inquiry group discussions that I dialogically traced
the interactive language that was produced.

Documenting Inquiry Group Meetings

Audio-recording. I audio-recorded meetings of the inquiry group using both a
stand-alone digital recorder and the resident voice recording software on my laptop
computer which served as a backup. Except in cases where there was a lack of audio
clarity, the recording from the stand-alone audio recorder was used for transcription
purposes. Participants were aware of being audio-recorded, and agreed to it by signing
the Informed Consent form found in Appendix A.

Researcher journal. I took notes in a researcher journal throughout the research
process. In it, I recorded my reactions, thoughts, feelings, questions and concerns both
about what was happening in the inquiry group, during the interviews, and about the
research itself. Specifically, I wrote memos concerning my own uncertainties about the
data that was being produced, and about my representation of the teacher-participants and
their perspectives and interactions, particularly when tensions surfaced. These memos
helped me to explore, clarify, shift, and renegotiate my thinking and analysis. The more
personal notes were the raw feelings and emotions I experienced as I engaged in the
research process.

At minimum, at the beginning of each meeting I noted who was in attendance, the
seating arrangement, and any documents teachers shared. Because I recognized the
potential of gestures, body language, and facial expression to more fully elaborate on the
meanings generated through talk, during the meetings I focused on recording as much of
my impressions of these as possible. I was able to accomplish this more easily because one of the participants, Meg, had been involved in the pilot study groups and was willing and able to effectively facilitate many of the meetings. My journal entry goal after meetings ended was to elaborate and reflect on moments of tension or other affective intensities that I had recognized and recorded during the meeting. These included instances of debate, dissonance, conflict, and certain personal and ideological complications that were expressed through the group’s social interactions.

Similarly, I jotted notes during the two semi-structured interviews. These were often little more than single words or phrases, but they proved helpful in jogging my memory enough to permit me add more extensive thoughts after the interviews ended. The interview memos I wrote provided opportunities to fill in gaps, and reflect more fully both on the interviews and on the group meetings by making connections, posing questions, and formulating hypotheses based on these two sources of data production in relation to one another. I used my researcher journal to help construct and contextualize the transcripts of audio-recordings of the meetings and interviews, which in turn helped inform my analysis.

**Document Collection**

The documents I collected and analyzed for this study included written texts and other media participants and I contributed to inquiry group meetings. Some of these documents were collected as the result of an invitation that I, or another group member made, but others were contributed outside of any invitation. These documents helped provide further insights into how teachers perceive, construct, and enact literacy in social studies, the issues they recognize, and the knowledge and meanings they construct. In turn, these documents helped me do my analysis to elaborate on the discourses around teaching and literacy that circulate. Documents collected during these inquiry group meetings included classroom posters and teacher-created student hand-outs, teacher and
student resources, examples of student work, district- and state-authored documents, and primary and tertiary source historical documents that teachers had used, or were considering using in their classrooms.

**Semi-structured Interviews**

I conducted two semi-structured, individual interviews of 30-45 minutes each with all but one of the teachers who withdrew from the group before the last session due to a family emergency. Both sets of interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed with the permission of the participants (Appendix B). The first of the two interviews occurred between the first and second inquiry group meeting; the second interview was conducted during the last week, but not in all cases before the very last meeting. Conducting the first interview after the first meeting gave participants an opportunity to become acquainted with the work and purpose of the inquiry group. Doing a follow-up interview at the end of the inquiry group cycle helped provide a narrative of teachers’ sometimes modified constructs of literacy and literacy teaching in social studies.

Although I took some notes during the interviews, I tried to keep these to a minimum in order to give my full attention to the participant’s responses. I did, however, include my impressions of the interviews in my researcher journal immediately after they concluded, and where appropriate looked to connect, correlate, or contrast interview responses to segments of inquiry group talk. I also reviewed the audio recordings each evening after the interviews and jotted additional notes and questions about comments that were made that I felt needed further clarification or explanation.

Using a semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions allowed me to inquire into how participants talk about literacy in social studies and as part of their social studies teaching. This interview format was appropriate for my study because an established set of questions helped provide a structure within which I could compare the responses of the participants. At the same time, using a semi-structured interview allowed
me the flexibility to probe for further information from participants, and to pursue relevant lines of discussion that participants raised. In this way, I was able to guide the conversation without forcibly controlling the dialogue. For the second interview cycle, I used my post-session notes to help guide some of the questions. I also modified the interview protocol to continue to pursue relevant issues raised by data from the first interviews and from the inquiry group meetings. These approaches honor teacher voices and concerns, and allowed the participants to reflect on and more fully express their views.

The semi-structured interview as a source of data is appropriate for a study with inquiry as stance, a discourse studies perspective, and practitioner research because it simultaneously privileges teacher perspectives, and provided me with an opportunity to engage in collegial conversations that suggest a relationship of equivalence. Nonetheless, I recognize that my multiple roles as teacher, inquiry group originator, and researcher complicated the establishment and maintenance of this equivalence. Acting in the role of interviewer further complicated my relationship with the participants, but as a departure from my role as a researcher-teacher-facilitator in inquiry group meetings, provided the potential for deeper insights that helped to answer my research questions. In interviews, “meanings and understandings are created in an interaction, which is effectively a co-production involving the construction or reconstruction of knowledge” (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p. 10). Thus, the situated knowledge produced by inquiry group discussions was enriched by the situated knowledge of the interviews. Open-ended questions gave teachers opportunities to highlight their perspectives and understandings of literacy and the teaching of literacy in social studies classrooms in ways that were not always tapped during inquiry group discussions. Their responses elaborated on the discourses that circulate around literacy in schools, and specifically around literacy in social studies, and highlighted tensions and affordances those discourses create for those teachers. Thus, collecting data through interviews coincided with my theoretical
framework, and reflects my goal of describing and understanding, rather than explaining (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Interviews provided a further means by which to answer my research questions.

Throughout the eight-weeks during which the meetings occurred, I also had several informal conversations with participants about issues brought up in the inquiry group, or about the inquiry group itself. These were either initiated by participants directly with me, or were initiated in my presence between teachers who both were and were not participants in the group. These typically took place during the regular school day during common preparation periods, or before or after teacher inquiry or other meetings. Since I began to find that these informal conversations often elaborated, or shed a different light on those that occurred during regularly scheduled meetings, I began recording notes about these as well. Given the time constraints of my own teaching schedule, however, I sometimes couldn’t record my impressions of these informal conversations until several hours after they had occurred. As a result, these notes were likely sometimes incomplete.

**Methods of Data Analysis**

The audio-recorded and transcribed inquiry group discussions and semi-structured interviews constitute the major aspect of my data. The document and other media artifacts contributed by me and other participants whether or not in response to invitations were also part of the data considered in my analysis, as were entries from my researcher’s journal.

Using multiple sources of data provided me with a foundation for rich description of teachers’ talk about literacy and teaching literacy in social studies. I frame this practitioner research in a discourse studies perspective with inquiry as stance to find out more about teachers’ perspectives on, understandings of, and meaning- and knowledge-generating process around literacy in social studies, and the discourses they suggest.
Therefore, I sought data rich enough to reflect the complexities involved. Using multiple methods allowed me to describe the tensions and affordances associated with the teaching of literacy in social studies classrooms that teachers identified, as well as the generative potential around those issues that were reflected in inquiry group discussions.

Analyzing data involves a “systematic search for meaning […by] examining, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise recombining the evidence” (Yin, 1994, p. 102). Through the process of data analysis, this “search” involves not the discovery of meanings, but rather their construction, which are produced as the data is filtered through the researcher’s multiple lenses, including the theoretical framework that has been established. These constructed meanings can help answer the research questions. Because this was qualitative research, the analysis of my data began as soon as they were collected and continued throughout the study, helping to guide the study as it proceeded. Thus, the organization and categorization of data were essential throughout the research process, and ultimately served to support the final analysis of the data (Merriam, 1998).

The approach I took to analyze the data in this study was multifaceted and recursive. My theoretical framework guided this process as I read and reflected on the data in relation to my research questions. One level of my analysis was done in light of Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism, which I applied to the data produced in the form of audio-recorded talk during the teacher inquiry group meetings, and interviews with teacher-participants. I used these audio-recordings in conjunction with my notes and reflections in my researcher journal to help me dialogically trace the social interactions that expressed the movement, generation, modification, or elaboration of ideas. This approach allowed me to analyze teachers’ language, not as reductive, but as interconnected and synergetic. In doing so, I attended not only to what teachers said, but also to how they said it, and to the multiple meanings that talk often acquires and produces as it is taken up, interpreted, and used by others.
Thus, the first phase of my analysis was to identify language events during individual inquiry group discussions that reflected socially interactive dynamic intensities. These included turns of talk that coincided with occasions of tension, debate, dissonances, conflict, consensus, complications, confusion, heightened attention, or excitement. I then worked to capture the movement of ideas encompassed by these occasions through relevant turns of talk during inquiry group discussions across time, and across initial and second interviews. Next in this phase of analysis, I sought to connect documents and other media that played a role in creating, sustaining, or subduing the movement of ideas. Finally, I also worked to use my researcher journal notes to further expand and enhance my analysis. This approach provided the framework within which I was able to recognize and discuss the hybrid discourses and intermingled constructs of literacy that teachers represented in their talk. It also allowed me to notice and elaborate on the knowledge generation and meaning making that often coincided with or resulted from the various occasions of intensities. Within this framework I also took into account and made visible my own participation in, and responses to, the social interactions of the inquiry group.

On another level of my analysis, consistent with a discourse studies perspective, I also made use of Gee’s (2011) discourse analysis tools. It is sometimes argued that because discourse analysis tools require that talk be broken into small units, complex and significant contextual elements might be overlooked (Gee, 2011). For this reason, rather than using these tools in the service of a detailed, line-by-line discourse analysis, I used them as a means by which to reiteratively explore those particular turns of talk, or moments, that revealed dynamic intensity. These were signaled through the expression of tension, debate, dissonances, conflict, consensus, complications, confusion, heightened attention, or excitement. I addressed the potential weakness suggested by the use of discourse analysis tools by involving participants in revisiting excerpts from transcripts of sessions that included such moments. My purpose in doing this was two-fold. First, the
participants’ interpretations of, and elaborations on, those turns of talk helped inform my analysis. Second, revisiting earlier talk events allowed me to consider how the issues or ideas revealed in those moments of dynamic intensity were sometimes reframed in subsequent talk over the course inquiry group meetings. A discourse studies perspective helps make visible discourses that are expressed through data in the form of teachers’ language. I addressed the potential weakness of discourse studies by combining this method with inquiry as stance as I analyzed interactive teacher talk about literacy in social studies.

Inquiry as stance values collaborative questioning, meaning-making, and learning by teachers. This stance provided a way for me to think about and answer my research questions around teacher perspectives on literacy in social studies, around the tensions and affordances of navigating literacy demands teachers identify, and around the knowledge and meanings teachers generate. Using inquiry as stance as a tool for data analysis offered ways to explore and describe how participants think about, theorize, and enact literacy in social studies, while foregrounding teachers’ learning and knowing about these topics. It also helped illuminate how teachers engage with other teachers in the inquiry group to socially construct meanings of literacy, and knowledge around literacy in social studies. Shedding light in this direction helped me examine and challenge the dialectic between theory and practice. Together, these approaches to data analysis brought me closer to answering my research questions.

**Researcher Positionality**

My experience and identity as a full-time teacher with a background in teaching both Social Studies and English influenced the topic, as well as the theoretical framework, and methodology, I chose for this study. As a teacher with twenty-one years of experience working with students in grades 4-12, I’ve developed particular
understandings of literacy as multifaceted, of teachers as expert knowers of disciplines and pedagogy, and of teaching and learning as co-constructed enactment of curricula. As both a teacher and a researcher, I find myself most comfortably and productively occupying a space at the intersection of these understandings. It is also at that intersection that my conceptual commitments to the significance of teacher voices, to a broad interpretation of literacy and what it means to teach it, have been shaped.

Thus, I began this research at the same time acutely aware of some of the assumptions and preconceptions I was bringing to it, and unaware of how much I would learn about the teachers who participated, and about myself as a teacher, a researcher, and a person. Engaging in this research encouraged me to reflect more fully on my research and teaching practices in ways that would not have otherwise been possible. For one, it brought to the foreground the racial disparities between the two middle schools of the district in which I work, and the fact that to my knowledge the district employs no teachers of color. According to a Rockefeller Institute report, 78% of New York State teachers are white or non-Hispanic (Gais et al., 2018); the percentage for the suburbs overall is higher, and teachers of color tend to be clustered in districts with larger populations of black and Hispanic students. Although I’d been vaguely aware of these conditions for most of my years working in the district, it was not until I began this research that I began to recognize its significance and its potential impact on the teaching and learning that go on there.

As indicated in earlier sections, I played active and multiple roles in the inquiry group that I studied. Although my personal role as an inquiry group member was not the primary intended focus of this study, acting simultaneously as researcher, and to some degree a facilitator, and also taking a practitioner research approach, required me to examine and describe my own participation alongside that of the other teachers in the group. While this presented challenges, it also produced affordances that are consistent with the emic perspective that is inherent to practitioner research. Because practitioner
research contradicts traditional conventions of distance and objectivity in the analysis process, I not only openly acknowledge, but also make analytical use of my insider status and the experience and consciousness that it encompasses (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Embracing an emic perspective, however, did not eliminate the dilemmas of attempting to justly represent the group as a whole, as well as the participants and their perspectives. For this reason, I made efforts to ask participants to review my interpretations and analysis of their perspectives as represented in group discussions and in interviews, and to provide me with feedback. The willingness of several of them to do so openly not only helped broaden my understandings, but also helped develop my analysis.

As both a teacher and as a researcher, I have conceptual commitments to multiple interpretations of literacy, to the significant role played by teachers’ own perspectives and interpretations of literacy in how literacy and social studies are framed in classrooms, and to the power of collaborative teacher inquiry to guide and improve both teaching and learning. I see this research as a response to the view that generic literacy approaches and disciplinary literacy approaches are diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive (Brozo et al., 2013). Although theoretical discussions abound in scholarly circles about the advantages of one approach over another, these are largely irrelevant to teachers whose classrooms are alive with a diversity of students whose literacy and learning needs cry out to be met. Therefore, I also see this research as reflective of my advocacy for an increased recognition of the value of teachers’ voices in negotiating the ways that might be accomplished most effectively.

In a qualitative research design, the researcher engages in ongoing analysis of data as it is being produced, with a goal of understanding the perspective of the participants (Hatch, 2002; Wolcott, 1992). Being involved on a personal level with both the research and the participants presents a challenge to any qualitative researcher, making neutrality impossible to achieve. Rather than being viewed as a challenge, however, in the case of
practitioner research, neutrality is not only impossible, but also contradictory to the value of an emic perspective. The facts of my positionality is complicated by my simultaneous roles as researcher and facilitator of the teacher inquiry group that I studied, and by my identity as a middle school social studies teacher-participant in that group, have generative potential that practitioner research foregrounds. My interpretation of the data that is produced by this study was necessarily filtered through these roles and identities that I occupy, and my various orientations toward this research, the conditions of which I have defined, had an inevitable effect on the way I see, think about, and represent the participants. It also had an effect on how I interpret and present the data. That said, practitioner research creates a space in which I can capitalize on the tensions inherent in these multiple identities, thus making my overlapping roles a strength of this study.

Likewise, my commitment to inquiry as stance reinforces the strength and potential inherent in the multiple roles I occupy. Inquiry as stance blurs the boundaries between research and practice, viewing them not as opposed, but as in necessarily interrelated tension. Because inquiry as stance taps into the productive and generative potential of those tensions (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), and contradicts the idea that research purposes, like researchers themselves, can ever be neutral, my insider-activated and generated purposes for this study were also an asset. From an inquiry as stance perspective, teachers are continually “working the dialectic” of inquiry and practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), generating insider knowledge that is simultaneously deliberative, contextual, social, and political (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Thus, my positionality as both researcher and practitioner in the context of the inquiry group I facilitated is integrated in much the same way the work of teaching itself integrates these roles. My inquiry as stance perspective allows me to take advantage of the experienced insider insights and understandings that I bring to this study by expressly informing my analysis and interpretation of the data that is produced.
On the other hand, a limitation of this study resulting from my positionality is that while participants in the inquiry group might have felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas about literacy on the basis of our shared professionalism, the fact that I am pursuing my doctorate may have had the effect of their positioning me as an expert. Teacher development in general, and in my district in particular, takes an almost exclusively “top-down” approach with teachers positioned as receivers of knowledge generated by outside “experts” and detached from their own teaching contexts. Thus, teachers are rarely encouraged to ask questions, express uncertainty, or share lessons or classroom activities that were less than successful (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This presented a challenge for me in particular as a doctoral student, but also for inquiry groups in general, a context in which teachers collaborate based on problems they face and tensions they identify. For my part, I did my best not to let my own commitments about literacy lead me to promote my own beliefs at the expense of others, or to make assumptions about the participants’ perspectives and understandings. Meg, who took on the role of primary facilitator, understood this as well. At the same time, I also spent time both explaining and modeling the workings of a collaborative inquiry community, and am grateful in particular to Meg, whose help in this regard was invaluable. Although ultimately I understand that I could not completely control how the participants perceived me, I took several steps to try to reduce the effect of these limitations.

First, I began the initial inquiry group meeting by clearly explaining my goals in creating the teacher inquiry group. I emphasized my view that being a researcher is synonymous with being an active learner, and that although I have personal views about literacy in social studies, and would contribute those as appropriate, I was not seeking to promote them. Rather, I explained that I hoped to learn more about the ways social studies teachers think, talk about, and negotiate literacy in the content area, and about the ways teachers might collaboratively generate knowledge and make meaning around that topic. I also explained that one of the goals of any teacher inquiry group is the joint
construction of knowledge pertinent to our own teaching practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This is consistent with my inquiry as stance perspective that blurs the boundaries between “theory and practice, knowing and doing, conceptualizing and studying, analyzing and acting, researchers and practitioners” (p. 3). In order to begin to establish an atmosphere consistent with an inquiry as stance perspective, and to distance myself from a role as “outsider-expert,” as it became appropriate, I contributed my own questions, uncertainties, and perceived tensions around literacy and teaching literacy in social studies. By establishing this foundation, I took a first step in creating a space in which my hope is that teachers felt comfortable talking, not only about literacy and teaching literacy in social studies, but also about their questions, and possible tensions they experience. Throughout, I remained attentive to the ways my perspective might have shaped my interactions with the participants, and tried to ensure that it was their voices, and not my own, that were dominant in our discussions. For this reason, I gave priority to the resources suggested by the participants for use in the group and used discretion in providing my own. Finally, I worked with my colleague Meg, with whom I’ve spent a great deal of time collaborating and who participated in all of the earlier inquiry groups, to have her take on the role of facilitator for most of the meetings. With her help, we encouraged others who were interested to facilitate meetings as well. Although no one officially took up this offer, as the meetings progressed, different participants took the lead on discussions. Not only did this give participants more agency and authority in the context of the inquiry group, but it also allowed me some flexibility to focus on observing and writing notes in my researcher journal.

**Trustworthiness**

In this study, I sought to understand teacher perspectives on, and knowledge generating and meaning making about literacy in social studies. In doing so, I analyzed
the experiences of the teachers participating in a teacher inquiry group with a focus on their interactive talk around literacy in their discipline. The traditional view of trustworthiness depends on the extent to which findings are “objectively true.” In contrast, qualitative researchers assume that multiple realities co-exist with knowledge of those realities in a social world. Thus, because in qualitative research, the researcher is the primary means by which data is analyzed, it is assumed that the reality of what is being studied is developed, defined, and communicated by the researcher’s interpretations of the data. As a result, qualitative researchers acknowledge that their own positionalities affect both the production and analysis of the data. This is particularly true in practitioner research in which the researcher’s positionality is not only acknowledged, but tapped for meaning-making. Nonetheless, I used several approaches to strengthen the trustworthiness of the data and my interpretations. First, by using audio-recorded teacher inquiry group meetings, interviews, and the collection of documents and other media contributed to the group, I have more than one source of data (Stake, 1994). To support these multiple sources of data, I provide rich descriptions of both their content and context by including quotes from each of these sources, as well as from my researcher journal, in my analysis (Merriam, 2002). I also engaged participants both in checking my interpretations of the talk and document data they produce, and in themselves reflecting on and analyzing talk events from previous meetings. And finally, because I am using the talk of teacher inquiry group discussions, interviews, and any print or other texts encompassed by these activities, this study combines multiple methods. This combination of methods and materials is a strategy that has the potential to expand and deepen the meanings that are constructed by this research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

In order to attend to multiple, textured, and nuanced perspectives, and to approach accurate renderings of the participants’ intended meanings, I had participants who were willing and able, review the transcripts of the inquiry group meetings, and the interviews. I gave the participants open-ended opportunities to discuss any aspect of the transcripts
about which they have questions or concerns. Similarly, I notified participants that if during the process of gathering data or writing my findings, I needed clarification or further information I would contact them personally or by email. I invited the participants to read drafts of chapters as they were completed so they could offer feedback. Since only Meg did so, I made it clear to her that she should feel free to challenge my findings or question any descriptions or characterizations. I considered the few issues she raised, and then make my best judgment about the final submitted version.

What I hope to have produced in this research is new insights about teacher perspectives on literacy in social studies, and about the role of conflict in knowledge-generating and meaning-making, specifically in the context of a teacher inquiry group focused on this topic. I have worked to develop richly-layered interpretations and descriptions of teachers’ interactional talk to help me highlight the significance and value of teacher voices in education.

**Limitations of the Study**

I recognize the limitations of these methods of data production to accurately or completely reflect teachers’ understandings of and perspectives on literacy in social studies. One major limitation of this study was that the inquiry group itself met for only eight weeks. Practitioner inquiry literature most often describes inquiry groups that meet over a period of many months, and sometimes years. This limitation means that the data produced outlines a necessarily incomplete picture of the way knowledge about social studies and literacy might be interrogated, transformed, and generated by the teachers who were involved. Another limitation is that the data that were produced did not adequately address nonlinguistic means of facilitating thinking about literacy and social studies. Because this study relies primarily on written and spoken language, what was available for me to analyze was limited by what written and spoken language can capture
and make understood. Although I made an effort to use my researcher journal to record non-verbal cues like gestures, body language, and facial expressions, I recognize that neither my gaze nor my note-taking was sufficient to represent the broad range of expression beyond spoken and written language that could contribute to an understanding of teachers’ perspectives on literacy in social studies.

During this study, I had easy access to the teacher-participants at Oakwood, my home school building, and because of my on-going involvement in district-sponsored curriculum writing and mandated professional development over my twenty-one-year career, I was known at least in passing to all of the participants. As a result, the social studies faculty saw me as a colleague, a veteran social studies teacher, and someone who understands what it means to teach public school, even as I was simultaneously working on my doctorate. In some sense, this close identification could be viewed as a limitation to the design of this study; the participants were well aware of the significant professional and personal stakes I had in establishing and maintaining the inquiry group, and despite my best efforts to counteract it, might have conferred authority to me based on my identity as a doctoral student and researcher, conditions that may have influenced the talk. That said, practitioner research highlights the idea of teachers simultaneously occupying roles as learners, legitimate knowers, and generators of knowledge, as well as researchers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). It was explicitly against this backdrop that I brought the inquiry group together. As we collaboratively inquired into, theorized about, and generated knowledge around our teaching practices, each of us took up simultaneous roles as researchers, teachers, and participants. It was through this approach that the group negotiated and mobilized ideas around literacy in the school subject of social studies.

Because I used an interpretive approach to interviewing, I view the talk data as a co-construction between me as the researcher and the individuals being interviewed. At the same time, asymmetry of power is inherent in the interview process; as the researcher
and interviewer, I defined the circumstance and framed the issues of the interview and chose which lines of thought to further pursue. In this way, the participants’ perspectives were inevitably filtered through my own. Furthermore, although on the basis of our shared experiences as social studies teachers I had some established rapport with those I interviewed that in some cases may have allowed for more candid responses, it also has potential drawbacks. As may have occurred in inquiry group discussions, making assumptions about my knowledge, experience, and understanding of our shared profession, participants may have provided less detail about their perspectives on literacy and the teaching of literacy in their social studies classrooms.

I further recognize that the physical location in which I conducted the interviews also suggests issues of power and positionality. Although it is impossible to entirely mitigate these, wherever it was practically possible, I left the choice of interview location to the participant. All of the teachers from Oakwood, my home school, chose to complete the interviews either in their own classrooms, or in mine. Two of the Rockville teachers chose to meet in the Oakwood library, but the other three asked me to visit them in their classrooms at their home school. All of the high school interviews took place in the classrooms of the high school teacher-participants.
I approach this research from my own perspective as a middle school social studies teacher who was also an undergraduate English major. This perspective is what initially drove my interest in the intersection between literacy and social studies and led to my first research question. Thus, in this chapter I focus on considering how teachers talk and think about literacy as it applies to their work as secondary level social studies teachers. When I met with the participants individually during the first semi-structured interview, I asked about how they viewed literacy in social studies. Although most of the participants mentioned something connected to what one person called “basic reading comprehension and vocabulary; writing essays that make sense” (Karen), others’ responses suggested aspects of disciplinary literacy as it applies to history and the school subject of social studies. Ron mentioned having been to a professional development day focused on historical literacy, and Ray said, “It’s reading for sure, but in social studies, every subject I think really, they all have their own twist, the things you look for, when something was written, who wrote it, all that is part of it.”

This talk was produced in an inquiry group that met once a week over a period of eight weeks. The participants had volunteered to join the group, so as part of the first semi-structured interview, I asked participants why they decided to do so. Responses like, “I wanted to help you out” (Karen), “We work together, so of course I’d do it” (Carly),
and “Hey, you’re a colleague, right?” (Ray) were the most common. These answers indicated that most of the participants had joined at least in part as a result of their relationship to me, and perhaps even as a favor since they knew I was forming the group as part of working on my doctoral degree. In addition, however, participants also expressed a need for more opportunities to collaborate, specifically across grade levels. Sarah, for example, said, “Really, we have no idea up at the high school what you guys are doing. As far as I’m concerned, we need more of this kind of thing;” Rachel said, “We’re always in our own little worlds, really no one has time to talk about this stuff.” A few also expressed a general interest in the topic of literacy in social studies. For example, Jerry said, “Literacy is the big thing now, for all the subjects, right? And, honestly, I struggle with it;” Ruth said, “So many of them can’t read and write, it gets overwhelming. Maybe I can get some ideas.”

The inquiry group talk segments that are examined in this chapter offer a glimpse into the complex interrelationships between teachers and their chosen content area, their views of teachers in buildings other than their own, their perceptions of the students they teach, and the institutional structures within which they experience their professional lives. They also make evident some of the affective relationships inherent to collaborative efforts, and how the course and range of such collaborative efforts can develop over time in connection with these relationships. Since each of these contexts is socially constructed, they are useful in attempting to making sense of the larger, complex, and often competing discourses that influence how teachers think and talk about literacy, specifically as it applies to their work as social studies educators. These discourses become visible through analysis of the multiple aspects of collaboration, both practical and theoretical, in which the group engaged. In terms of practice, the collaborations led to modifications of pedagogies (e.g., student inquiries) and teacher-created learning materials that became classroom resources. These concrete reflections or precursors of teaching practice, however, consistently emerged alongside what were often contentious
theoretical discussions around definitions of reading, literacy, social studies teaching and learning, and professional responsibility. It was often during moments of emotional intensity that discourses of literacy in social studies were made evident.

Bakhtin (1986) argued that a “dialogical” understanding of talk involves recognizing that all utterances, like all thought, are “born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle” (p. 92) with the utterances and thoughts of others. This perspective allows conflict to be treated, not an obstacle or problem to be overcome, but as a characteristic unavoidably and actively embedded in language. Thus, the productive possibilities of the conflicts and tensions that emerge in these talk segments are made visible. Beyond these productive possibilities, however, there also emerges a strong sense of the complex nature of teaching both embedded in institutional norms and mandates and influenced by overlapping concerns and motivations inherent to what it means to be human.

My approach to interpreting the talk data that was produced involves a modified discourse analysis. Following both Gee and Bakhtin, I consider the discursive, rather than individualistic nature of talk. Although both theorists elaborate on this idea, they do so from somewhat different angles. Gee focuses his analysis of talk on both the socially acquired discourses that express our view of the world, and the overarching Discourses, or systems of power and knowledge, that are produced by discourses. I used some of Gee’s (2011) tools of discourse analysis to help me think about the talk in terms of assumptions, intentions (what utterances were attempting to do), activities, topics and themes, and figured worlds. I also attempt to identify the tensions in the Discourses cited by the participants in their talk. Doing so required me to analyze local, or what Gee (1985) calls “situated,” meanings of words/Discourses that were contested and thereby created tension, or moments of intensity. I looked closely at what individuals said, and how others interpreted that talk, thus making visible possible differences in meanings. Since such differences in meanings did not necessarily signal or initiate tensions, I also
paid specific attention to meanings that were revisited by participants across inquiry group sessions, and how those meanings might have shifted. While doing so, I looked moments of intensity during which meanings were produced. These kindlings and rekindlings of meanings allowed me to explore the differences that made a difference to the participants.

Looking for moments of intensity also allowed me to consider the talk through the Bakhtinian lenses of dialogism, addressivity, and speech genres. Bakhtin (1986) emphasizes the interconnectedness of all talk in which individual communications are inevitably “developed in continuous and constant interaction” (p. 89) with the speech of others; at the same time, all talk is also constrained by the particular “speech genres,” or generic forms, that are understood and expected in any given social situation. I not only thought about what was said as it was being discussed, who was speaking and to whom the talk was addressed, but also to the contextual relationship between the speaker and the addressee. This contextual relationship allowed me to think about the ideological representations, such as education, the nature of teaching, social studies, and literacy, against which speakers believed they would be evaluated and understood. It simultaneously allowed me to consider utterances that elicited no reply from the immediate addressees since, according to Bahktin (1986), all utterances presuppose “a higher superaddressee (third) whose absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed” (p. 126). Similarly, I looked at how the talk emerges, responds to, and is shaped by what has been articulated earlier, and what participant attitudes the talk suggest towards the topics and themes of the talk.

Several of the issues raised during the segments of talk I analyze in the following sections are recurrent. For example, talk about what it means to teach social studies, talk about what literacy means in social studies, and talk about student ability emerge and reemerge. These iterations of talk sometimes revisit earlier talk without further elaboration, but often also reveal modified or expanded understandings. I selected the talk
segments that follow on the basis of my perception of emotional intensity. These intensities sometimes revealed themselves in overtly expressed tension or conflict. These segments illustrate the results of my analysis in relation to my research questions.

Following is a chart that maps the movement of ideas and issues that are raised in each of the talk segments.

Table 3

*Map of the Talk Across Inquiry Group Meetings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiry Group Meeting 2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A “question” of literacy in Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. How should teachers do it?  Why should teachers do it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Questions of what it means to teach Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Content + reading + writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Content only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Content + reading + writing + study skills + organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Questions of student needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Lack of student ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Questions of teacher responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Whose responsibility is it to meet student needs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Which student needs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Time constraints and curricular pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Lack of teacher ability/willingness to meet student needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. More questions of what it means to teach Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Learning history (content) requires reading and writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Teaching content and how to use it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. More questions of student needs/ability – what students “should” be able to do</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiry Group Meeting 3: segment 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is reading? Pictures, words, and meaning-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. “Real” reading: quantities, qualities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Whose literacy? Students who can, students who can’t; issues of race</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiry Group Meeting 3: segment 2</th>
</tr>
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**Inquiry Group Meeting 2: Initial Conflicts over the Meaning of Literacy and the Teaching of Social Studies**

I selected this early segment of talk because it illustrates some of the initial tensions and conflicts around literacy that emerged in the inquiry group. Some of these
tensions and conflicts arise from uncertainties and ambiguities around the definition of literacy and around what it means to teach social studies; these uncertainties and ambiguities create both obstacles and opportunities to talk. Other tensions and conflicts arise from the context of these teachers having had varying degrees of previous and ongoing interactions, both professional and personal; and still others can be traced to the physical context of the inquiry group itself as situated in the institutional setting of the district in which all of these teachers work. The influence of these uncertainties and contexts on the ways they talk, think about, and represent literacy in social studies begins to be made visible in this segment through a series of questions both posed and parsed, with provisionally posited answers that nonetheless engender varying degrees of tension, conflict, and controversy. As this happens, a baseline understanding of how these teachers think about literacy, and the discourses on which they draw to do so, begins to be established.

There were a total of fourteen participants in attendance during the second of eight meetings that took place on May 10, 2017. In addition to myself, there were five other Oakwood teachers in attendance at this second of eight meetings that took place on May 10, 2017. Among the 8th grade teachers were Ron, Joe, and Pam; the 7th grade teachers were Meg and Karen. The teachers from Rockville included Rachel, Paula, and Ray, all representing 8th grade, and Jerry, a 7th grade teacher. The high school participants that day were Debbie, Sarah, and June, who all taught 9th grade, and Marty, who taught 10th.

In addition to deciding to work on selected grade level inquiries, the use of which had been mandated by the district and the department chair, the group had created a list of topics to take up during meetings as a kind of warm-up. After some discussion about what they wanted to accomplish that day, Meg checks the list of questions they had created. For this meeting, the group starts by taking up a question that had been posed the previous week: “How can we teach both literacy and social studies?” She turns to Sarah to confirm that it was she who had posed it.
1) Sarah: So, what I wrote, first, when we did that, I think, was not so much a question as an observation.

2) Meg: But that’s yours though, right, your question? Let me get that down here...

3) Sarah: Well...yes, I guess it’s a question, but I really meant it as a comment. I majored in American history, not reading or writing or literacy.

4) Jerry: We’re all in that boat, aren’t we? Now it’s not just about the content, but also teaching kids how to read and write –

5) Joe: and how to study, and how to organize their s**t

6) Rachel: Blow their noses –

7) Ron: That’s the problem. You take this crap on yourselves. It’s not my job to teach 8th graders basic reading, how to study, how to get organized.

8) Rachel: But sometimes – you know, there’s always kids who –

9) Ron: Yeah, sure, kids need a lot of things. That’s fine, true, yes. So get people who are trained to teach reading, or studying, organizing. I don’t have time. 42 minutes a day. That’s all I’ve got. Can’t do it all. Maybe you guys can -

10) Meg: I guess this was a good question Sarah – (laughter)

11) Ron: Yeah, but really, you know, it’s only a question if you don’t have an answer. How can we teach literacy and social studies? That’s the question, right? The answer is don’t. Stick to what you were hired to do. Teach social studies. Period. No more questions.

12) Ray: I know what you’re saying, Ron. You’re right. Presumably we were hired because we know history and we know how to teach it. Not because we know how to teach reading and writing. But what does that mean, teaching history? They have to read and they have to write, and now we’ve got these inquiries –

13) June: Yeah, actually, I brought one of them, all 25 pages –

14) Ray: No, I know that’s a whole other issue, but the point is, isn’t reading and writing part of it? I mean, they can’t learn much history if they can’t read, right? Or, better, if they can’t understand what they’re reading?
15) Ron: Frankly, I can’t be bothered. It’s not my job to teach them that. I teach content. Content and how to use it. That’s it.
16) Pam: But what does that mean, “how to use it?”

17) Ron: How to look for bias, holes in people’s version of what happened, for their agenda, what’s at stake, all that.

18) Pam: Okay, so you’re talking about really working with the content, right? Teaching it so it’s about how things fit together? That’s what you mean, right?

19) Ron: Right. That’s our job, history. Not teaching kids to read.

20) Pam: So, but --

21) Rachel: So, okay, but obviously we all have students who struggle, every year there’s at least a few.

22) Jerry: Oh yeah, and more than there used to be for sure.


24) Ron: And I already answered. It’s not my job.

In this talk segment, a series of questions are posed around literacy and social studies, as connections and disconnections between them are delineated and debated, and possible answers are proposed. While no conclusions are drawn, the issues that are raised are clearly of consequence to these teachers and suggest some of the complexities involved in classroom teaching. Specifically, and most significantly, the talk returns twice to the question of what it means to teach social studies. In doing so, it demonstrates a movement of ideas that begins to point to how these teachers think about their discipline in the context in which they teach.
A “Question” of Literacy in Social Studies

Sarah’s first two turns of talk work to establish that while her “How can we teach both social studies and literacy?” was both understood and recorded the previous week by Meg as a question, her meaning was neither an appeal for answers, nor a bid to open a discussion. Rather, Sarah makes a point of clarifying that her intention was to state an “observation” or a “comment.” Further clarifying with the statement that she “majored in American history, not reading or writing or literacy,” Sarah positions her background and training in history as antithetical to teaching literacy. This works to represent a discourse of literacy as separate and distinct from the discipline of history, but simultaneously works to position her as a social studies specialist. By choosing to structure her contribution as a question, but simultaneously shifting its sense from interrogative to declarative, and then contrasting her expertise with that which she perceives as necessary for teaching literacy, Sarah makes known that her “how?” of teaching literacy and social studies was not intended as an inquiry into in what ways or means this might be accomplished. Rather, Sarah frames her “how?” as asking the rhetorical question of “for what reason would social studies teachers be expected to teach literacy?” During the first meeting, Meg explained teacher inquiry this way:

Well, you know we hardly ever have a chance to collaborate, especially across grade levels, and this is a place for us to do that. And it’s really for us – not for any administrator who wants to, you know, look good…. The questions, issues we want to talk about, whatever – what we think is important. It’s a way for us to inquire into our own teaching, kind of pick each other’s brains, you know? And learn from each other. So maybe we can start by taking a few minutes coming up with some questions or concerns, issues, or whatever – things we want to discuss about teaching literacy, literacy in social studies. (Talk Turn 4, Inquiry Group Meeting 1)

Here, Meg makes clear that this is a professional development structure neither mandated nor attended by administration (“And it’s really for us - not for any administrator”). Doing so provides a way for her to give a kind of “permission” for participants to pursue what she frames as open-ended paths to talk (“the questions, issues
we want to talk about, whatever – what we think is important”). These paths, however, are not as open-ended as they initially seem. First, because the inquiry group meets in the institutional setting of a school library in the district in which all these teachers work, the talk is framed by the unspoken constraints of discourses around teacher professional development, and of teacher-professional social language. Discourses around teacher professional development privilege practice over theory, leaving assumptions inadequately examined, or not examined at all; the teacher-professional speech genre privileges consensus over conflict, obstructing from view the potential of productive paths to generating knowledge. Furthermore, by limiting the talk to discussions “about teaching literacy, literacy in social studies” (a limit that is reinforced by the naming of the group itself), Meg reinforces, from a Bakhtinian perspective, an authoritative discourse that works to bind participants to its constructs (Wertsch, 2005, p. 227). As a result, when Meg brings Sarah’s question to the group in this segment from the second session, she does so with the expectation that it will result in a kind of collaborative problem-solving effort over the what and how of literacy in social studies. Sarah, however, moves to use the space not to engage in theoretical or pedagogical discussions about the topic, but to express, and perhaps obtain validation of, her view that literacy doesn’t belong in social studies. These first three lines of talk are especially significant because they set in motion a tension that runs throughout the segment over how the activity of inquiry group talk will be built: whether the discussion will be framed as proposing answers to the explicit question of “how?” as in “by what means?” or whether it will be framed by an assumption that talk about literacy in social studies has no practical worth.

At its root then, the talk in this segment reveals conflict over the meaning of what it is to teach social studies. From a Bakhtinian perspective, these turns of talk introduce a language struggle between an authoritative discourse, and a divergent one (Maybin, 2005). Specifically, the inquiry group itself was established based on an assumption that literacy can and should be discussed by teachers of social studies. In the context of the
inquiry group, this assumption is embedded with a particular kind of dominant knowledge that works to frame the talk and fix its meanings. Working in opposition to this authoritative discourse, however, are the voices in this segment of participants like Sarah and Ron most prominently, whose talk works to resist, contradict, or undermine this authoritative voice and the knowledge and meanings around social studies teaching that it sanctions.

To Sarah and Ron, this meaning is defined and circumscribed at this point more by what it is not than by what it is. For Sarah, it isn’t reading, writing or literacy; for Ron (at talk turn seven), it isn’t his job to teach particular topics that he sees as outside of social studies. As I noted in my researcher journal on that day, Ron’s aggressive tone and language during this exchange escalated the tension within the group. More significant than what these two participants say, however, is the effect of what their talk does. Considered together, both Ron’s, and to a lesser extent Sarah’s, turns of talk in this segment push to close off a discussion of “how,” e.g. “in what ways,” literacy and social studies are linked and might be taught, while the talk turns of other participants pull to open it up. This push and pull is evident in the subsequent turns of talk that alternately create opportunities and obstacles to talk about literacy in social studies.

Questions of What it Means to Teach Social Studies

In response to Sarah’s talk at turn three that produces an obstacle to talk in its suggestion that literacy is not part of social studies teaching and learning, Jerry creates a new opportunity to talk at turn four. When he says, “We’re all in that boat, aren’t we?” he invites the group into the figured world of teaching that they share, a world the connection to which Sarah’s use of the first-person pronoun in her talk worked to sever (“I majored in American history, not reading or writing or literacy”). Adding, “Now it’s not just about the content, but also teaching kids how to read and write,” Jerry reflexively restates Sarah’s question (for which she isn’t seeking answers) as a comment that does in
fact seek answers (as in, we all have to do content plus reading and writing, so how do we do it?). Doing so shapes the context in such a way as to create an opportunity in which talk about literacy in social studies again becomes possible. It also reflects an understanding on Jerry’s part that one way of looking at literacy (“teaching kids how to read and write”) is part of what teaching social studies is about, at least in the “now.” Jerry’s placement in time of this observation situates it in contrast to a past in which at least one of three conditions existed. Either reading and writing weren’t addressed in the social studies classroom because historical content was all that mattered, because students didn’t require this kind of instruction, or both of these. These possible interpretations notwithstanding (although as recent research demonstrates, a focus on content in fact continues to dominate in secondary schools), Jerry positions this approach as no longer relevant. His view of literacy, as reading and writing defined generically, is that whether by design or necessity, it has become part of what it means to teach social studies.

Using Bakhtin’s notion of intertextuality to analyze Joe’s and Rachel’s follow-ups at turns six and seven brings yet another shift to the surface. Using Gee’s Fill-in Tool reveals in their talk a notion of the complex responsibilities of teaching that extends to skills separate and distinct from those directly related to content. Joe’s use of the word “shit,” and Rachel’s reference to helping students learn to “blow their noses,” however, also introduce into talk that up to this point might be characterized as “teacher-professional,” a speech genre of less inhibited familiarity. This shift in speech genre highlights the deficit discourse of student ability on which their talk draws. Ron’s response that, “You take this crap on yourselves” echoes Jerry’s use of the word “shit,” but does more than simply sustain the more familiar speech genre. First, it suggests that such talk about literacy in social studies is unworthy of, or irrelevant to, professional talk. From a Bakhtinian perspective, it also bolsters a juxtapositioning of the teacher-professional and familiar speech genres in such a way that the speech genres themselves are briefly entered into a dialogic relationship through which worldviews about what
social studies teaching entails are expressed. When Ron continues at turn seven with, “It’s not my job to teach 8th graders basic reading, how to study, how to get organized,” he moves the talk back out of the familiar speech genre and away from the subject of student deficit, and echoes, but also repurposes Sarah’s talk about “reading or writing or literacy.” Like Sarah’s talk, Ron’s talk creates an obstacle to talk that specifically works to preclude discussion of literacy in the social studies classroom. While Sarah uses her own background and training to allude to what she sees as contradictory expectations, Ron’s language attacks those expectations directly. In fact, his talk disrupts the very premise of the inquiry group and works to create a kind of “emotional-evaluative attitude” (Bakhtin, 1986) that positions discussions about the “in what ways” of literacy in social studies as irrelevant.

**Questions of Student Needs. Questions of Teacher Responsibility**

At turn eight, Rachel makes an unsuccessful move to create yet another opportunity for talk about literacy in social studies by attempting to build significance around student needs, and a teacher’s responsibility to address them. Gee’s Fill-in Tool provides a way to recognize that when she says, “yeah, but there’s always kids who -” she begins to frame a rebuttal of Ron’s claim that “basic reading” study skills, and organization are not his job. At turn nine, however, Ron cuts Rachel off, anticipating that she is about to reference student needs. Although he acknowledges that such needs exist, he simultaneously diminishes the significance Rachel was trying to build. His talk accomplishes this by framing student needs, not in terms of the specific reading, study, and organizational skills most recently referenced in the flow of talk, but as an inevitable, amorphous given (“Yeah, sure, kids need a lot of things”). His follow-up, “That’s fine, true, yes,” works as a dismissal of the topic, disrupting talk about literacy in social studies.
Echoing Sarah’s opening topic and theme around training, but reconstituting it in a new way, Ron calls on the preparedness of others to accomplish a task he feels is beyond the scope of his responsibilities. He extends the argument by inserting a concern about the time constraints imposed by secondary level scheduling (“42 minutes a day. That’s all I’ve got”). Rob’s follow-up statement, “Can’t do it all. Maybe you guys can” is especially interesting because it works on multiple levels to build significance and reveal the social ideological and evaluative struggle around the teaching of social studies that this segment of talk represents. First, Ron’s “Can’t do it all” works to frame the complex responsibilities of teaching, and specifically those of teaching literacy, that Joe’s and Rachel’s talk introduced earlier as a burden that is impossible to bear. Ron’s omission of the first-person pronoun in that phrase, however, while grammatically denoting through ellipsis a reference to his own inability to “do it all,” also takes on the deictic-like property of referring in context to other participants who might likewise feel that they, “Can’t do it all.” Ron’s follow-up of, “Maybe you guys can,” reinforces this situated meaning by attaching a sense of unlikelihood that “you guys can [do it].” Simultaneously, this phrasing continues the process of significance-building by creating ambiguity around Ron’s meaning of “can’t” to include unwillingness as well as inability. This double-edged sword of attaching doubt to the ability to teach literacy in social studies (be it by lack of time and/or training) and also suggesting unwillingness to do so, works to deepen dissent from the authoritative discourse of the group that assumes that talk about literacy and talk about social studies are connected. Thus, Ron’s talk works to manipulate the context of the talk to exclude the talk about literacy that other participants might expect to be relevant.

While the effects of Ron’s talk at turn nine are not explicitly recognized by the group, the tension it creates is made visible in Meg’s jocular interjection at turn ten. Her contribution, “I guess this was a good question, Sarah,” produces nervous laughter, but also reasserts the authoritative discourse by reinserting the notion of literacy in social
studies as a question to be explored. Rob, however, immediately redoubles his effort to prevent that contextualization of the talk. In contrast to Sarah’s comments at turns one and three in which she seeks to reframe her question as a “comment” or an “observation” in an effort to recontextualize the talk, Rob’s comment that “It’s only a question if you don’t have an answer” dismantles the situated meaning of “question” as an opening for discussion (as Meg originally presented it and intended it to be taken up by the group), and redefines it as a simple interrogative. This clears a space for Ron to once again dissent from the meanings fixed by the authoritative discourse. By supplying an “answer” to his interrogative, he closes off talk by inviting participants to recognize any further discussion as irrelevant: “Stick to what you were hired to do. Teach social studies. Period. No more questions.” Here Ron echoes, but also repurposes, Sarah’s words in turn one when she claims her talk isn’t actually a question. Rather than rejecting the situated meaning of “question” as a bid to open a discussion, he reiterates his divergent meaning as interrogative, and reinforces that meaning by providing the “answer” that he frames as extinguishing any possibility for discussion (“Period. No more questions”).

**More Questions of What it Means to Teach Social Studies**

At turn 12, Ray makes a move to shift the talk once again by agreeing with Ron’s premise that they were hired to teach social studies, but then challenging his attempt to close off discussion by reframing the talk. Although Ray teaches at 8th grade at Rockville and Ron teaches the same grade at Oakwood, they have known each other since college, live in the same school district, and have children who are about the same ages. As a result of this long-standing relationship, Ray can typically push back on Ron in ways that others may feel uncomfortable doing. Ray’s successful challenge to Ron’s attempt to obstruct the talk illustrates his influence. When Ron references social studies as their common content-area specialty, Ray refers to it as “history” instead (“Presumably we were hired because we know history and we know how to teach it”). This move refocuses
the talk and allows Ray to invite Ron and the group to engage in a somewhat different question that ultimately moves the talk forward: “what does that mean, teaching history?” Ray counters Sarah’s bids in turns one and three to disassociate social studies from history and instead asserts the embeddedness of literacy in history when he elaborates with “They have to read and they have to write.” The question thus is no longer one of whether or not to teach reading in social studies, but one rather of, “what is teaching history and in what ways does that intersect with reading and writing?” Ray offers a partial answer to that by referencing student inquiries, an approach that involves significant reading and writing, and that the department chair made clear he wanted teachers to use. This reference reinforces an assumption that a particular kind of literacy resides in the teaching and learning of history and has the effect of moving the talk in knowledge-generating direction.

June interjects a comment at turn 13 that has the potential to sideline Ray’s move, but it simultaneously relieves some of the tension produced by Ray’s challenge to Ron and to the group. Somewhat wryly, June mentions that she “brought one of them, all 25 pages.” The situated meaning here is that the inquiries as described on the website that the department chair had directed teachers to use were too long and complex to be classroom-ready. Although her statement is understood as expressing a grievance with which others in the group communicate their agreement through laughter, it also works as an attempt to move the talk away from Ray’s theoretical question of what it means to teach history, and instead build the activity of addressing the more practical one of how to manage using the inquiries. Ray, however, immediately shuts that line of talk down; he affirms the problematic nature of the inquiries, but sets it aside (“that’s a whole other issue”). By structuring his subsequent reassertion of the embeddedness of reading and writing in history as a conditional (“they can’t learn much history if they can’t read…or if they can’t understand what they’re reading”), Ray rebuilds the activity of discussion around literacy in social studies. This grammatical choice makes clear Ray’s goal of
moving the talk back to literacy in social studies, illustrating how “all words and forms are populated by intentions” (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 293-294).

Gee’s Fill-in tool helps interpret Ron’s rejoinder that he “can’t be bothered” to refer to students’ reading comprehension and is yet another attempt to close down talk about literacy. The intention of Ray’s “if-then” proposal, however, moves Ron to elaborate that what he does teach is “Content and how to use it.” Here, Ron is building his identity with social studies as a field and is positioning others to take up this identity in response. His talk also provides an opening for Ray’s retort, “But what does that mean, ‘how to use it?’” that works to further challenge Ray to provide details. This challenge brings to the table overlapping concerns of theory (“what does that mean”), and practice (“how to use it”) and opens a new path to discussion about literacy in social studies. At turn seventeen, Ron takes up Ray’s invitation to move the talk down that path by providing a knowledge-generating response. The details he provides, “How to look for bias, holes in peoples’ version of what happened, their agenda, what’s at stake, all that,” remove the deadlock in which the talk up to this point had been mired. Pam, Rachel, Jerry, and Debbie participate in the several turns of talk that follow, continuing to challenge Ron’s proposal that literacy and social studies are separate and distinct.

**More Questions of Student Needs and Ability**

Although at this point, the group is not explicitly recognizing as aspects of literacy those goals of teaching history content that Ron proposes, the talk does express that achieving those goals with students is predicated on their ability to read and comprehend. Pam restates Ron’s definition of teaching history content at turn 18, and he confirms her understanding. Pam’s response, “So, but—” suggests that she is about to further the argument that Rachel interjects, bringing up “students who struggle.” Using Gee’s Making-Strange tool begs the question of whether her meaning is students who struggle with those activities of looking for bias that Ron enumerated, or students who struggle in
Debbie’s talk at turn 23 describes her understanding of struggling students as ones who “can’t read the way they should,” but her use of air quotes as she says “should” suggests that Debbie is skeptical of a norm-referenced discourse of reading ability. Despite Debbie’s strong challenge, Ron’s refusal to engage further in talk ends the segment, and his participation in this inquiry group session. Following talk turn twenty-four, Meg suggested that the group take a break, during which Ron indicated that he had to leave to pick up one of his children from sports practice. It was unclear whether this was as a result of dissatisfaction or discomfort with the way the session had proceeded.

The central questions raised by the group during this talk segment, around literacy and social studies, literacy in social studies, and how these intersect with student ability, student needs, and teacher responsibility, continue to reverberate and expand through the talk of later sessions. The movement and development of ideas around these issues find their roots in the tensions and conflicts brought to bear on the lived experiences of these classroom teachers.

Inquiry Group Meeting 3, Segment 1:
Conflicts over the Meaning of Literacy in Social Studies

I selected two segments of talk from this session because they illustrate some of the ways these teachers talked, thought about, and represented literacy in social studies. At the onset, the talk in segment one centers on the seemingly straight-forward task of selecting and possibly modifying documents to be included in a student inquiry. At one level, this is the task in which these teachers continue to engage throughout both segments of this session, but at another, the talk quickly turns to the question of what constitutes reading. It is through this talk that some of the tensions that exist within and among these teachers about what literacy means, both in general and in the context of
developing students’ understanding of history, are revealed. Some of the discourses on which teachers draw as they talk about literacy in social studies also become evident as they grapple with this question, as are some of the tensions and conflicts those discourses produce. Underlying some of these tensions are issues of student ability that serve as a proxy for race, through which are revealed discourses of literacy as defined in different ways for different students. A more in-depth analysis of the talk follows this excerpt.

There was a total of eleven participants in attendance during the third of eight inquiry group meetings that took place on May 17, 2017. Teachers from Oakwood included Karen, Meg, and Carly (7th grade). Teachers from Rockville were Ruth and Jerry (7th grade), and Rachel, Paula, and Ray (8th grade). Participants from the high school that day were Debbie and Sara, both 9th grade teachers, and Marty, a 10th grade teacher.

At this meeting, the group decided to look at the inquiries available on a teacher-resource website. The department chair, who was the administrator in charge of all middle and high school social studies teachers, had made it clear at previous department meetings that teachers should be using these inquiries. Meg, who had taken on the position as facilitator, reminded the group that he had asked each grade level to select at least one inquiry to do with students before the end of the school year. Although there had been some push-back at the last department meeting about the length and difficulty of the inquiries, the chair had indicated that since someone else had already “done all the work,” there was no reason for teachers to “reinvent the wheel.” He wanted each grade to send him the title of the inquiry that it had chosen, but he hadn’t given a firm date for doing so. Since it seemed that no one had as yet given this much consideration, when Meg mentioned that this meeting might be a good time to accomplish the task, and the participants agreed.

After some discussion about whether or not to break up by grade level, the group decided that since there were mostly 7th grade teachers in attendance that day, they’d
tackle a grade seven inquiry together. Only three 8th grade teachers, both from Rockville, made this meeting, and, after the tensions that emerged during the last meeting, the question arose as to whether Ron would return. Debbie, Sarah, and Marty, who taught at the high school, agreed that this would be helpful for them too since they had very little exposure to what students were doing at the middle school level.

The participants moved from the tables to a section of six computers set up next to one another in the library. Karen, Carly, Ruth, Jerry, Debbie, and Paula sat at the computers. Ray, Meg, Sarah, Marty, and I pulled up chairs between and behind them. Carly suggested they consider an inquiry that centered on the Wampanoag. The segment of talk analyzed below occurred as they began to look through the documents together.

1) Meg: So maybe we should start with the documents and see which ones we like? We said we were going to try to modify these, right?

2) Ruth: There’s a ton here. More excerpts it looks like. More to read.

3) Carly: So there are images and text.

4) Ruth: Picture, picture, picture, picture, and then an excerpt, a long one. But you know, it’s a lot.

5) Karen: No, well, we don’t have to keep it that way, have that many.

6) Ruth: No, look, honestly, looking at this, I would just give them the pictures, the maps or whatever, because it gives them a little blurb.

7) Jerry: Right. The blurbs are there, but they don’t say much. Just, like, “this is an aerial view.”

8) Debbie: And then they won’t know what that means necessarily, would they?

9) Ruth: No, maybe, but it’s better than these diary entries. Wow.

10) Carly: So forget the excerpts?

11) Karen: Wait. No real reading?

12) Ruth: There’s reading. There’s the blurbs. It’s just not as much.
13) Jerry: Half of them won’t read it anyway.

14) Carly: True.

15) Debbie: And there is such a thing as photo essays.

16) Ruth: Yeah, right. The blurbs at the bottom of the pictures. That should be enough at this point.

17) Debbie: And they do have to look at the pictures carefully. It’s not exactly reading, but-

18) Jerry: Exactly. The have to pay attention, think –

19) Carly: Yeah, that’s the hard part –

20) Jerry: -- connect it to the question.

21) Karen: Okay, right, but we have to include something, like, really written. They have to, I mean, really read. Maybe not all of this. Maybe just one or two of them.

22) Jerry: The blurbs could be good though. we could add to them if we think they’re too short.

23) Karen: That’s fine, but it doesn’t replace something like a diary entry. We have to have some reading too. Something substantial. Not just a bland description of a picture.

24) Jerry: Well, it doesn’t have to be bland…

25) Karen: You know what I mean. There are diary entries here for a reason. There’s a personal perspective. How’s a caption going to do that?

26) Sarah: Yeah, look, I never taught 7th, but I have to agree. They have to build some endurance for reading, and not just a sentence or two. These blurbs, captions, whatever, just don’t seem like enough.

27) Carly: So we could just get some of our own that aren’t so complicated.

28) Ruth: The images are good. The maps and all. I think it’s enough. I like them, but maybe not so many.

29) Meg: So what do you mean, Ruth? Only do the picture documents?

30) Ruth: For my kids anyway, it’ll work better. So many of them, you give them a page to read, they just blank it out, turn off.
31) Sarah: I hear what you’re saying, but it’s really a problem. When do they get over that?

32) Carly: Maybe we could just google some other texts, or we could find some of our own to replace these, some of them, if you think they’re too difficult.

33) Ruth: Well, we can do that if you want, but I probably won’t use them. Not with our kids. Am I right, Jerry? You know what I mean.

34) Jerry: These would definitely be over their heads, not all of them, but a lot. Kind of overwhelming I think.

35) Debbie: Kids need to read maps too, to get information, look at pictures, figure out what’s there.

36) Karen: I guess, sure, but it’s not the same as reading words, figuring out point of view, or just plain reading for the facts, to answer questions.

37) Carly: No one is saying to leave the maps and pictures out, I don’t think. Just not to leave the other written documents out. Like we could do one of each so they practice both.

Consistent with my theoretical framework, I drew on several of Gee’s (2011) tools for discourse analysis in developing my analysis of this segment of talk. The following tools were especially useful in this process: Situated Meanings, Topics and Themes, Deixis, and Fill In tools. Less far-ranging than the talk from the second session, this talk segment focuses in on three fundamental questions and issues around literacy: what kinds of texts define reading, what kind of processes are involved, and which students can or should have access to them.

**What is Reading? Pictures, Words, and Meaning-Making**

At the onset of the talk, the topic is selecting and modifying documents for a student inquiry. This is made clear by Meg’s opening statement. The following five turns of talk refer generally to this topic by focusing on the number and types of documents included in the original version of the inquiry found on the website. Almost immediately, however, a somewhat different theme begins to emerge. Ruth’s initial comment concludes with the phrase, “More to read,” thereby marking a bid to shift the talk to the
theme of reading. Karen’s talk does not respond to that theme, but rather continues to elaborate on the topic of the number and type of documents. Ruth’s talk, “Picture, picture, picture, picture, and then an excerpt, a long one,” reinserts the theme of reading by setting the picture documents apart from the printed word document with the phrase, “and then an excerpt, a long one.” The reference in her closing phrase, “But you know, it’s a lot,” is ambiguous, however. Gee’s Deixis tool allows context to be tied to what is said, but in this case, is the “it” to which she refers the length of the written excerpt or the inclusion of the excerpt, or the sheer number of documents as a whole? Karen’s follow-up comment interprets it as the latter, but Ruth goes on to clarify that her objection was not to the number of documents but to the inclusion of the written excerpt.

At talk turn six, Ruth defends her perspective on the picture documents, and in doing so pursues the theme of reading, saying that they include “blurbs.” What is left unsaid but can be filled in as assumed to be known by the other participants is that “blurbs” include the written word, and thus require reading. Using Gee’s Fill In tool allows Jerry’s talk to be seen as the first to pick up and further elaborate on the theme of defining reading that Ruth has been proposing in her talk. His comment points to the unspoken understanding that they include written words and thus might require reading, but at the same time, he undercuts their legitimacy as material to be read. Jerry’s phrase “but they don’t say much,” proposes a way to define reading in terms of written word text of length longer than a typical “blurb.” Using Gee’s Fill In tool, Debbie’s question about whether students would understand the blurb (“And then they won’t know what that means necessarily, would they?”) suggests that reading means deriving meaning and understanding from printed word text.

“Real” Reading: Quantities and Qualities

As the theme of defining reading carries through the segment, these teachers continue to grapple with literacy both in terms of what kinds of texts qualify as requiring
“reading,” and what kinds of processes and activities define reading itself. When Ruth suggests using only the “picture” documents, Karen constructs these as something other than “real reading.” Her introduction of this phrase quickly becomes a point of contention when Ruth immediately pushes back with “There’s reading. There’s the blurbs.” While in some sense the meanings Karen and Ruth ascribe to reading seem to be at odds, the situated meaning upon which they agree rests on an underlying assumption that reading necessarily involves printed word text. While Ruth does not attempt to insert a definition of reading that might include the interpretation of images, Debbie does. Her comment that “There’s such a thing as photo essays” counters the situated meaning of reading as applying only to written word text by suggesting that reading might also apply to documents that contain no words at all. Debbie doesn’t specifically elaborate further on photo essays, and nor is it clear why she brings up that particular genre at this juncture, but the suggestion that reading might be applied in contexts other than ones that include many, or indeed any, printed words continues be debated throughout the segment. Debbie offers some defense of the idea of using pictures by saying that they must be “carefully” considered, but then qualifies her defense by saying, “It’s not exactly reading.” Jerry picks up on the defense by adding that interpreting pictures requires students to “pay attention, think…connect it to the question.” As Jerry’s utterance reflects his understanding of Debbie’s talk turn 15, it is simultaneously evaluative (Bakhtin, 1981) in its implied support of Debbie’s perspective. Thus, as Jerry perceives the language meaning of Debbie’s speech, he is engaged in “actively responsive understanding” that is actualized in the response that he articulates (Bakhtin, 1981, p.68). As an aspect of literacy, one definition of reading being proposed here is as careful consideration and focused attention to a range of documents, both inclusive and exclusive of printed word text, in the service of connecting to, and presumably answering a question that guides the inquiry presented on the website.
Karen uses the phrases, “really read” and “really written” as the conversation continues, defining text as that which contains printed words, elaborating further with the phrase, “something substantial.” Karen becomes more specific when she equates substantial reading with text that isn’t “bland,” or merely descriptive (“Not just a bland description of a picture”), providing the example of diary entries that give a “personal perspective,” and later, “point of view.” Thus, using Gee’s Fill In tool, the meaning Karen ascribes to texts that demand reading is narrowed to texts that have particular, and by extension more enhanced and advanced qualities; furthermore, by describing the captions associated with picture documents as “bland,” she is also representing them as having less value as text than diary entries. Karen’s talk suggests a Discourse of literacy that distinguishes between objective (“bland”) and subjective (“point of view”) meaning-making. Doing so allows Karen to construct a socially recognized identity of herself as a teacher who makes higher-level demands of her students. Her use of the word “bland” to describe the blurbs the use of which Ruth defends, simultaneously positions Ruth as a teacher who holds her students to lower (e.g. “bland”) standards.

Sarah’s comments continue to build on the theme of defining reading. She elaborates on Karen’s notion of reading as applicable to printed word texts, she constructs “something substantial” as the amount of text (“not just a sentence or two”), reverting to the length of the printed word text, rather than its subjective qualities, as a defining characteristic. Here then, another definition of texts that require reading is being proposed: as extended printed words, and as communicating meaning beyond the merely descriptive.

In another thread of this talk segment, some of the discourses on which these teachers are drawing as they discuss literacy are revealed. One of these discourses concerns teacher perspectives on student ability, and on what opportunities are appropriate to offer to students to demonstrate, practice, and further develop their ability.
Whose Literacy? Students Who Can, Students Who Can’t

Throughout this thread, a deficit discourse of student ability is represented. Fairly early on in the segment, in turn 13, the second comment contributed by Jerry, he says of the blurbs that “Half of them won’t read it anyway,” to which Carly responds, “True.” In light of the fact that Jerry teaches at Rockville and Carly teaches at Oakwood, these two turns of talk have the effect of positioning students in general, not just those at one school or another, in a negative light. Why students “won’t read it anyway” is left unsaid, but in the context of this group of teachers, what is assumed to be known is that students in general tend to either be inattentive or lazy about their schoolwork, or simply not interested. A few turns later, when Jerry talks about interpreting pictures saying, “they have to pay attention, think,” Carly interrupts with, “Yeah, that’s the hard part,” again reinforcing a figured world of unmotivated students.

Ruth’s talk also suggests a deficit discourse of student ability, but focuses on her students in particular, and simultaneously helps her construct a socially recognized identity for herself. Much of her talk in this segment focuses on the amount of text students should be expected to read. The meaning of phrases she uses such as, “it’s a lot,” and “that should be enough” is crystallized when she says at turn 30, “For my kids anyway, it’ll work better. So many of them, you give them a page to read, they just blank it out, turn off.” The figured world (Gee, 2011) Ruth is communicating invites the group into the assumption that her students at Rockville are different (less able?) than those at Oakwood, an assumption under which teachers at both schools generally operate. She further presses the existence and significance of this figured world when she appeals to Jerry for corroboration with her comment, “Not with our kids. Am I right, Jerry? You know what I mean.”

Several things are happening here. For one, Ruth is distinguishing Rockville students from Oakwood’s, and the Discourse of student ability that she is representing is one influenced, and perhaps determined by the intersection of socio-economic status and
race. As compared to students at Oakwood, students at Rockville are generally less well-off. Although the Oakwood side of the district includes one apartment complex, many of the private homes are waterfront properties, and parents of students there tend to be professionals or business owners. In contrast, in addition to inland private homes further to the north, the Rockville section of the district includes two apartment complexes, a trailer park, and a hotel, part of which is designated as a homeless shelter; although there are some professionals, parents of Rockville students tend to be blue-collar workers.

When Ruth says she “probably won’t use” longer texts, she expects it to be understood that the student population with which she works is the reason. She reinforces this when she uses phrases like, “for my kids anyway,” and “not with our kids.” Using Gee’s Fill in tool (2011) allows me to understand these phrases as oblique references to race. Jerry supports both Ruth’s claim about the students they teach, and the deficit discourse of student ability they attach to those students, by passing judgment on the texts as “definitely over their heads” and “kind of overwhelming.”

What is revealed, and yet left unspoken, is a perspective that race, social status, and economics determine not only academic ability, but also worthiness. According to this perspective, in order for students of color, of homelessness, or of blue-collar working families to do well, the school work that is required of them must in some tangible ways be different from, and also “less than,” what might be required of students like those at Oakwood. It is this perspective that is at least part of what determines the kind of texts Ruth and Jerry identify in this talk as appropriate to use with their specific students. Simultaneously, Ruth’s talk is building a socially recognized identity for herself as a particular kind of teacher, one that counters that which Karen ascribed to her earlier. By asserting that picture documents will “work better” with her students, and further by describing her perception of how students respond to pages of texts, she is constructing an identity for herself as a concerned, sympathetic, and responsive educator. Left unsaid, but also likely unrecognized, is that despite the identity Ruth is constructing, the
perspective of Rockville students that it suggests imposes limits their literacy learning opportunities. By both agreeing to help seek out other texts (“We can do that if you want”), and insisting that she “probably won’t use them,” Ruth further reinforces the view that Rockville students are different in unspoken ways. She also refines that identity as a teacher who is collegial and willing to collaborate but is nonetheless unwilling to compromise her view of her particular students’ needs, and her authority over the kinds of texts and literacy processes to which they will be exposed.

Throughout this segment of talk, literacy is framed as a set of neutral skills that exist outside of the context and of the individual. To whom does this literacy belong? Framed in this way, literacy actively produces, rather than passively results in, an environment in which students are able or unable, willing or unwilling, to read. Thus, despite the group’s apparent consensus in this talk over a general lack of student motivation and work ethic, at its core, the tension derives from the mostly racial, but also social and economic issues, that distinguish the student populations between the two middle schools. What is left unexamined, but is also powerfully present, is how these issues intersect with the way literacy, and the meaning-making to which it is attached, is being understood, represented, and might be enacted by these teachers.

I selected this next segment of talk because it illustrates how these teachers talked, thought about, and represented literacy in social studies (Research Question 1) shifted over the course of the inquiry meetings. A shift in some of the discourses on which teachers draw (Research Question 1a) also become evident in this talk, as do the tensions and conflicts those discourses produce. At one level, the talk addresses the question of how to appropriately balance history content with history process, but at another these
teachers are grappling with the question of what it means to teach social studies specifically in the context of how literacy is represented and enacted in the subject. This narrower focus on literacy in social studies, as compared to the talk during session #3 discussed earlier around how to define reading, illustrates one way in which the talk in the group evolved over time. Tensions are revealed in the talk around what these teachers see as the often-competing demands of teaching social studies and teaching literacy. Revealed within these tensions however, is evidence of the generative potential of conflict in collaboration. The talk segment makes evident the interactive intellectual struggles in which these teachers engage. It also illustrates how teachers’ professional development, defined by their own theorizing about teaching and learning, is both enhanced by these struggles, and embedded in their individual lived experiences.

What sets this talk segment apart is not only its focus on the bias reflected in a particular picture document, but also its reflection of the level of awareness or acknowledgment of bias these teachers have, and their perspectives on whether it should be highlighted with students. There is, in fact, an ongoing push and pull over both the purpose of the picture document under consideration, and the purpose of the inquiry itself. Concurrently, an overarching tension over the meaning of teaching social studies is also present. As the talk proceeds, the discourses on which these teachers draw in their understandings of literacy in social studies (Research Question 1a) become evident, as do some of the tensions and conflicts those discourses, as well as ones around discourses of student ability, produce.

In this second segment of talk from the third session that took place on May 17, 2017, teachers continue discussing the selection and possible modification of documents to use in a 7th grade student inquiry. Here, they focus on a particular picture text to discuss how students might use it to answer the first two inquiry questions, What was the early contact like between the Pilgrims and the Wampanoags? and How did the Pilgrims and the Wampanoags cooperate in the early years after first contact? Initiated by the
task of answering these two particular questions, the talk in this segment moves through several other areas of focus within each of which these teachers grapple with both the theory and practice of teaching social studies. For example, should the picture source document itself be interrogated for potential bias, rather than simply function as a means to an end of getting the “right” answer? What kinds of literacy do students “need,” and on whose authority are literacy learning opportunities afforded to which students and when? An in-depth analysis of the talk follows this excerpt.

1) Meg: … What about the painting? Could they get something from this?

2) Carly: Sharing food?

3) Jerry: Yeah, that’s definitely there. They should see that right away. Pretty straight-forward.


5) Paula: This one’s offering the plate of food, serving it to the Indians, natives, whatever.

6) Jerry: Yeah and back here. This one looks like she’s leading someone to the food, pointing to it, to the area.

7) Marty: But you know it’s pretty one-sided.

8) Ruth: What? What do you mean?

9) Marty: Misleading.

10) Jerry: Yeah, really. Wow. The Pilgrims are definitely the good guys here, uh?

11) Marty: Right, but besides that, look at how they’re showing the Wampanoag. Sitting on the ground, eating with their hands --

12) Ruth: Well that’s probably what they did, I would think.

13) Marty: Sure, maybe, but it kind of sends a message that the Pilgrims are … well, look, the Pilgrims are all standing, no not all of them actually, but they’re set up so they’re kind of towering over the natives. Do you see what I mean?

14) Ruth: Okay, yeah, but what –
15) Jerry: Oh, I see what you’re getting at. Even the little girl. She’s maybe only a little taller than-

16) Ruth: Wait. What do you mean?

17) Jerry: It’s showing cooperation, yeah, but maybe also – like she’s the only one eating with her hands, the girl I mean, besides the natives, so maybe it’s almost equating them with little children?

18) Marty: Considering when it was painted –

19) Paula: Digging a little deep here, aren’t we?

20) Ruth: Okay, sure, I get it. You’re talking point of view, but that’s more like an English question. It doesn’t have anything to do with this. I mean, the kids don’t need to know that, or see it that way, to answer the question.

21) Rachel: That’s a good point I think. As long as they get the basic idea of cooperation from this, that’s all they need. That’s the question.

22) Jerry: Uhhh… I don’t know now. I thought so at first, but I’m starting to think maybe there’s --

23) Karen: Of course. Geez. Is that all we’re doing here? Answering questions?

24) Paula: Okay though, wait. This whole thing is supposed to be about literacy, right? That’s what we’re talking about. You want them to be able to answer the question.


26) Karen: Exactly what?

27) Paula: What does it show about how they cooperated? They shared food. Done.

28) Marty: They’ll need more than that in 10th grade, that’s for sure.

29) Jerry: And maybe, shouldn’t we --

30) Ruth: There’s plenty of time for that though. They need the basics first.

31) Karen: Geez.

32) Meg: So, okay. Ruth, what exactly do you mean by that, the basics?

33) Ruth: Getting the answer.
34) Paula: Just being able to answer questions. It’s pretty obvious in this picture, document, whatever. Most of them would get that. Sharing food, that’s cooperation.

35) Debbie: And then all they have to do is be able to put it in writing.

36) Paula: That’s a whole other issue.

37) Sarah: So you wouldn’t start to help 7th graders see the bias here? In the way the artist is showing the Wampanoag?

38) Ruth: Bias? Not really, I don’t think so, no. Not for the first inquiry. Too much. I’m just hoping they can get the -

39) Carly: For this one, actually, I think it’s enough.

40) Ruth: It’s just not necessary, a waste really.

41) Marty: Well, you can’t exactly call it --

42) Jerry: You’re probably right. All this other stuff’ll just confuse them.

43) Paula: And they’re not asking about bias. The question’s about cooperation, so why –

44) Sarah: But couldn’t it, because it’s a picture, and I never taught 7th so I’m not pretending to know, but couldn’t this be an easy, well not easy, but a good way to teach bias? I mean, explaining, showing or teaching about it with a picture instead of in writing? I’m thinking that would be more difficult for them. This, it’s all visual.

45) Marty: Good point.

46) Paula: Maybe, sure, a picture would be good for that, but not when it’s not the task they’re being asked to do. You get them onto that, looking for bias, and that’s what they’ll do --

47) Ruth: They’ll look for it in everything, even when it isn’t there.

48) Paula: ---yeah, instead of answering the question.

49) Sarah: Okay, I was just –

50) Marty: Seems like a good opportunity though, to dig deeper. Maybe answering the question shouldn’t always be the focus.
Answering Questions, Questioning Sources

This talk segment begins with Meg focusing the group’s attention on a picture document and asking them whether it could help with the first two supporting questions of the student inquiry they are considering. The next five turns of talk involve Carly, Jerry, Ruth, and Paula who reinforce one another’s interpretations of the picture as representing “sharing food,” “welcoming,” and “kindness.” These words/phrases could be used to describe the early contact between the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag (Supporting question #1), and how they cooperated (Supporting question #2). Thus, this talk segment begins with a focus on the potential of the picture to provide students with access to answers for these particular questions. Jerry suggests that this is the goal when he says at turn 3, “They should see that right away. Pretty straight-forward.”

Using Both Gee’s (2011) Deixis and Situated Meaning Tools allow me to interpret the pronoun “they,” used both by Meg at turn 1, and Jerry again at turn 3, as referring to students. In this instance, however, it is teachers who are working through attempting answer the supporting questions by using the picture document. Gee’s (2011) Making Strange Tool raises questions about how and why this shift, or indeed merger, of subjects occurs. As an insider to the context of the talk, I take it for granted that when teachers evaluate planned instruction they will often test it out on themselves, simultaneously positioning themselves as students and using their knowledge of them to assess the appropriateness or potential pitfalls of an approach. It is this “natural” kind of exchange that Marty interrupts at turn 7. Initially, his statement that “it’s pretty one-sided” seems ambiguous. What is the “it” that is one-sided? Is it the previous speakers’ responses and analysis, or the picture itself? Using Gee’s (2011) Topics and Themes Tool focuses attention on the opening clause, “But you know.” This establishes the framework in
which the rest of the utterance must be interpreted. That “you [these teachers] know” places the topic of one-sidedness in the context of a theme of what he presumes to be teacher knowledge about the inherent potential bias (e.g., one-sidedness) of sources. Thus, Marty attempts to move the talk away from using the picture simply as a tool to answer questions and towards critically evaluating the image on its own merits. His statement challenges the “natural” order of teacher talk about planned instruction and creates a tension that is immediately evident in Ruth’s apparently confused response at turn 8, “What? What do you mean?”

At turns 14 and 16, Ruth’s words again seem to express confusion over Marty’s bid to shift the talk in this way. During the first segment of talk during this session, Ruth presses for the inclusion of images, or picture documents (segment #1, turn 6: “I would just give them the pictures;” and turn 6: “For my kids anyway, it’ll work better”). Her talk in this segment reinforces what is only implied in the first: that Ruth views picture documents as vehicles by which students might arrive at meaning by achieving the goal of answering questions. This contrasts with what Marty begins to propose, that this document, and those like them, might be viewed and used as themselves sources of meaning. Rather than taking Ruth’s questioning, “What? What do you mean?” as an interrogation of his bid to shift the talk, Marty understands it as a literal question about the meaning of “one-sided;” he responds, therefore, by providing a further one-word explanation, “Misleading,” at turn 9. Jerry immediately follows the line of talk that Marty has opened. His recognition that the Pilgrims are represented as “the good guys” (turn 10) acknowledges an aspect of the “one-sidedness” of the representation of the relationship between the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag. The way Jerry frames his talk at this turn, shifting what begins as a statement (“The Pilgrims are definitely the good guys here..”) into a question with, “uh?” is not without significance. Gee’s (2011) tool, Why This Way and Not That Way, prompts me to ask what impact this framing has on the talk and on the interrelationships between the participants.
Throughout the eight sessions, Jerry proved himself to be something of a conciliator, attempting to smooth out tensions and find common ground. For example, in segment #1 of this session, tension begins to build around talk turn 21 when Karen pushes for “substantial” (e.g., longer) reading that’s “Not just a bland description of a picture.” Although up to this point, Jerry supports the idea that blurbs provided sufficient reading of text, he softens the argument at turn 22 with “…we can add to them if we think they’re too short,” and then more directly counters Karen with an implied compromise at turn 24 saying, “Well, it [the picture description/blurb] doesn’t have to be bland.” Similarly, in this segment #2, ending his utterance about Pilgrims being represented as “the good guys” with a question-intoned “uh?” is “populated by intentions” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293). It has the effect of mitigating Ruth’s apparent confusion that might be interpreted as a more generalized lack of awareness or understanding of implicit bias; simultaneously, it can be seen as functioning as an invitation to Ruth, and other participants as well, to engage in the perspective Marty has proposed. Thus, although Ruth’s insistent questioning of Marty’s push to consider the picture document on its own merits (turns 14 and 16) ultimately reveals more than a simple lack of awareness of the representational bias that Marty wants to emphasize, Jerry’s framing of his turn 10 utterance not only accomplishes a reinforcement of Marty’s bid to move the talk in a different direction, but also suggests an informal social language pattern that establishes solidarity with Ruth.

Ruth’s questioning of Marty’s move to shift the talk to a critical analysis of the picture document may be rooted in more than confusion about the critical analysis itself. At turn 12, after Marty specifies one way in which the representation of the Wampanoag may be “misleading” (e.g. the Wampanoag sitting on the ground and eating with their hands), Ruth rejects this as bias by defending it as a likely representation of truth (turn 12: “Well, that’s probably what they did, I would think”). Even as Marty proceeds to try to explain his point more clearly at turn 13, Ruth discards it with “Okay, yeah, but
what -.” Both in light of how the talk has gone thus far, and with the help of Gee’s (2011) Fill-in Tool, Ruth’s interrupted utterance would likely have been completed as something like, “Okay, yeah, but what does that have to do with anything?” Jerry’s talk at turn 15, however, fails to acknowledge Ruth’s rebuff, and reveals his focus on working to understand Marty’s point. At turn 16, Ruth again expresses possible confusion when she says, “Wait. What do you mean?” Because she initiates this utterance with a signal to slow down, it is unclear whether her “What do you mean?” is meant to question the content of Jerry’s turn 15 talk (providing another possible example of bias), or to question the fact that Jerry is engaging in the line of talk Marty initiated. Ruth’s position that Marty’s focus on the “one-sided” or “misleading” aspects of the picture is irrelevant becomes clear at turn 20. After characterizing Marty’s arguments as referencing point of view, and then dismissing those arguments as amounting to “an English question,” Ruth states bluntly her perspective that, “It doesn’t have anything to do with this.”

**What Students “Need to Know” for Social Studies Literacy**

It is at this point that the underlying tension over what literacy means in social studies becomes more pronounced. It seems more than a little ironic that Ruth frames Marty’s bid to discuss the possibility of implicit bias, an inherent feature of historical literacy, as “an English question” while simultaneously subsuming the historical focus of the student inquiry being considered under a process of correctly answering a series of what are intended as supporting questions. Paula’s talk at turn 19, “Digging a little deep here, aren’t we?” alludes to the tension at play. On the one hand, there is the push to focus on answering questions that Ruth specifically references at turn 20 when she says, “…the kids don’t need to know that, or see it that way, to answer the question.” On the other, is the critical thinking suggested by the “digging deeper” that Paula derides at turn 19, but Marty later echoes, and advances as an opportunity at turn 50. Literacy as defined by questions and answers dominates this segment of talk, however, reflected both
implicitly by the frequency with which these two words appear (nine times for the former, and eight times for the latter), and most explicitly by Ruth, Rachel, and Paula. At turn 21, Rachel concludes that as long as students get the idea of cooperation from the picture, “…that’s all they need. That’s the question.”

Jerry attempts a weak rebuttal of this framing of the problem, but he is interrupted at line 23 by Karen who expresses clear frustration over the way the talk has been moving. Her utterance, “Geez. Is that all we’re doing here? Answering questions?” positions the activity, and by associated this definition of literacy, as insufficient. Paula, however, at line 24, seems not to have understood (or chooses to ignore) Karen’s critique. She responds by reinforcing the idea that literacy is, in fact, precisely about the ability to answer questions: “This whole thing is supposed to be about literacy…You want them to be able to answer the question.” Here, Bakhtin’s (1986) notion of the listener becoming the speaker is evident in Karen’s clear “active responsive attitude” (p. 68) to previous turns of talk. Specifically, Karen challenges Paula’s assertion about literacy by appropriating the word “exactly” at line 26 that Rachel uses to affirm it at line 25 by populating it with her own intentions (Bakhtin, 1986). Ruth and Paula continue to uphold the importance of answering questions as “basic” to the goals of teaching the 7th grade inquiry under consideration. Even 10th grade teacher Sarah’s attempt to respectfully (turn 24: “I never taught 7th, so I’m not pretending to know”) defend the idea of teaching bias through the use of a picture document is rebuffed as counter-productive because “They’ll [students] look for it in everything, even when it isn’t there” (Ruth: turn 47) and “not the task they’re being asked to do” (Paula: turn 46).

**Literacy Learning Opportunities: When, How, and on Whose Authority?**

Beyond the competing discourses of literacy in social studies that surface in this talk segment are, as in segment #1, teacher perspectives on student ability. In this case, however, discourses of student ability are framed by talk about what learning
opportunities students “need,” as well as who determines those needs, themes that surface repeatedly in this segment. For example, rebuffing Marty’s bid to look critically at the picture document, at turn 20 Ruth says, “the kids don’t need to know that;” following up, Rachel concurs with, “that’s all they need” at turn 21. Marty echoes and repurposes the theme of need at turn 28 by attempting to undermine the argument with, “They’ll need more than that in 10th grade, that’s for sure,” but Ruth persists at turn 30 with, “They need the basics first.” Here, the normative definition of “need” becomes contentious, and belies the meaning that is produced. Whereas student “need” in school might be viewed in one sense as learning and achievement, words which are themselves problematic, in this context it is both delimited and governed by teacher perceptions of what students are able to do. What is thereby established builds on the figured world communicated in the earlier segment in which a deficit discourse of student ability is promulgated, particularly as applied to Rockville students who are assumed to be unable to handle particular kinds of learning experiences. However, what also happens is that this figured world expands to include an assumption of teacher authority over the determination of what learning opportunities are in fact necessary, an assumption that remains unexamined.

As in the first segment from this inquiry group meeting, in this excerpt, it is Rockville teachers Ruth, Rachel, and Paula, who most consistently forward a discourse of literacy as answering questions and do so based on this figured world of student deficit and teacher authority they communicate. When at turn 20 Ruth asserts that students don’t need to recognize the implicit bias of the picture under consideration, she supports her appraisal by implying that this is irrelevant to the task of answering the question. Rachel echoes this sentiment at turn 21 with, “That’s all they need. That’s the question.” When Paula, at turn 24, explicitly equates literacy with answering questions, she says, “That’s what we’re talking about.” Using the pronoun “we” has the effect of inviting the group into what she assumes is a shared understanding of what constitutes literacy. Continuing to speak, however, she shifts pronouns stating, “You want them to be able to answer the
question.” Using the pronoun “you” allows Paula to assert the presumed authority of the other participants over what students need to be able to do (“You want them to…”). Simultaneously, however, by using this pronoun Paula also builds a socially-recognized identity as a teacher who has authority not only over determining what students need, but also over what her listeners should perceive as student need.

At turn 30, Ruth expands on this authority over student need to include not only its content, but its timing. Interrupting Jerry’s presumed attempt at turn 29 to reinvigorate the talk about bias, Ruth says, “There’s plenty of time for that;” and later, at turn 38, with reference to the timing of teaching about bias, she says, “Not for the first inquiry.” Carly, an Oakwood teacher, voices agreement at turn 39 that is suggestive of authority over both timing (“For this one…), and content (“…it’s enough”), a sentiment on which Ruth doubles-down with, “It’s just not necessary, a waste really,” at turn 40. Marty, Oakwood teacher, Karen, and even Rockville teacher Jerry, make various attempts (turns 22, 23, 26, 28, and 29) to resist the discourses of literacy and student ability being advanced, but though Marty and Karen seem to remain unconvinced, Jerry relents by line 42. His utterance, “You’re probably right. All this other stuff’ll just confuse them,” reinforces the representation of Rockville students as predisposed to confusion, less able, and therefore subject to different learning needs. This representation masks talk about the racial and socio-economic issues that distinguish the two middle schools. Thus, teacher perceptions of student ability are used to justify teacher authority over the kinds of learning opportunities afforded to particular students, and teachers are positioned as looking out for how students are best able to be deemed “successful.” To what degree this focus on student success, as evaluated by assessments like the student inquiries under consideration, is motivated by teachers’ concerns over how their own effectiveness (e.g. “success”) will be determined, remains unclear. What is clear is that Karen, a teacher at Oakwood, is the only one, other than the two high school teachers, Marty and Sarah, who resists the view of literacy that holds sway in this segment of talk.
Inquiry Group Meeting 4: Conflicts over the How and What of Social Studies Pedagogy, Administrative Authority, and ICT Students

I selected this segment of talk because of the emotional intensity that is expressed and the knowledge that is generated, interrogated, or transformed as a result (Research Question #2). Some of this intensity derives from the complexities of how these teachers perceive their responsibilities to their students, and to themselves as educators. In other instances, tensions surface over perceived discrepancies between the theoretical realm of educational mandates and the practical realm of day-to-day classroom teaching experiences. While on the surface the talk often seems to focus on a deficit discourse of student ability, it also reflects teachers’ contentious considerations of how their own expertise and perceived professional responsibilities square with curricular mandates and student needs. Thus, this segment also represents another shift in the kind of talk in which the inquiry group engaged.

This fourth of eight meetings took place on May, 24, 2017. The thirteen teachers present included three 7th grade teachers, Karen, Meg, and Carly, and two 8th grade teachers, Pam and Ron, from Oakwood. Also present were five Rockville teachers including Ruth and Jerry, both teachers of 7th grade, and Rachel, Paula, and Ray, 8th grade teachers. Debbie and Sarah, who taught 9th grade, and Marty, a 10th grade teacher, were also there.

At the end of the previous week’s meeting (Inquiry Group Meeting 3), Meg suggested that participants bring in some of their own classroom materials to share with the group. Some participants had expressed some frustration with the process of trying to work with the inquiries on the C3 website, but agreed to try to address them again at a later meeting. Carly, who was the only one to bring something to share, made and distributed copies of a student packet she created entitled Hamilton vs. Jefferson. Initially, she says she would like feedback on it, explaining that she always wants “to keep improving things for kids.” Within a few turns of talk, however, it becomes clear
that her motivation is also rooted concern over whether this particular instructional packet would be appropriate to use in “inclusion” (i.e., ICT, or Integrated Co-Teaching), sections that include a mix of general and special education students. As per NYS guidelines, both a general education and special education teacher are assigned full-time to co-teach these sections; this school district also assigns one teacher assistant but is not required to do so.

This talk segment moves through and revisits several layers of issues explored in previous talk sessions but does so with a particular focus on students with special needs who are assigned to ICT social studies sections, the way teachers are assigned to teach those sections, and the perceived pedagogical challenges presented by ICT. The talk segment from this session begins just after Carly distributes copies of a packet she created and uses with students. The packet includes several quotes by Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton (see Appendix E) that explain their views on how the Constitution should be interpreted and applied. Carly introduces the packet to the group by explaining that although she has used it several times, she makes a habit of constantly trying to improve her teaching materials and approaches. There is a pause (about 1.5 minutes) during which the participants look through the packet. Pam, a colleague at Oakwood who teaches 8th grade remarks that she thinks Carly showed her this packet once before. It is at this point that the discussion picks up.

1) Paula: Geez. A lot of reading.

2) Carly: Yeah. I know. I do most of it together, as a class, so that helps.

3) Ruth: So, what, you use this to show the different perspectives?


5) Ruth: Wow. You are ambitious.

6) Carly: No, I know. It’s hard, so I thought maybe if you guys had any suggestions?
7) Ruth: How long does this take?
8) Carly: Uhhh, honestly, at least a couple of periods.
9) Paula: You have time for it?
10) Carly: No, not really, not always. That’s kind of why I brought it.
11) Ruth: I like this part, the party scenario.
12) Ray: Yeah, I do too. You do it at the end, though, after the reading?
13) Carly: Yeah, to get them to look back at the quotes, see the connection.
14) Ray: I like it. It’s great. But, I’d do this first. Get them thinking about strict and loose before they read.
15) Carly: I guess I didn’t – I don’t know, it seemed like too much of a hint.
16) Debbie: This is tough.
18) Carly: I was worried about it being too hard.
19) Pam: But you’ve done it before.
20) Carly: Yeah…but not with inclusion.
21) Meg: Oh, right. There might be another section next year.
22) Pam: You’re not getting it?
23) Jerry: You only have one? Nice. I’ve had two for a while.
24) Meg: No. Yeah, so far it’s been only one, for 8th grade too –
25) Pam: So she’s giving the second section to someone else?
26) Meg: That’s what I was told.
27) Debbie: Why would they do that? It doesn’t make sense.
28) Karen: Spread the wealth, right?
29) Pam: There’s that many? For another section?
30) Debbie: Well if more kids qualify…

31) Ron: Whatever that means –

32) Meg: Oh, that’s an issue, for sure. They’re getting weaker and weaker, especially with writing. It makes it hard keeping them all in the same place.

33) Jerry: Tell me about it.

34) Meg: I have a hard enough time keeping one up to speed. How do you do it with two?

35) Jerry: Not easy. Sometimes, when I have to, you know, I’ll just decide, honestly, the inclusion periods, you guys get a copy of notes. Catch them up.

36) Ron: You gotta do what you gotta do. No choice when you’re spending twice as much time trying to get them to do the higher level stuff.

37) Karen: Even for the gen ed kids it’s hard.

38) Ron: Well, I said I try. Doesn’t mean they get it.

39) Debbie: Listen, I have to put my two cents in. You know ICT does not mean changing the curriculum. It’s about appropriate modifications.

40) Jerry: Well, I print out notes. That’s my modification I guess.

41) Debbie: If they’re not getting the same learning experiences, then it defeats the whole purpose.

42) Ron: Yeah, well, the whole purpose isn’t supposed to be to throw everything at the wall and see what sticks.

43) Debbie: What does that mean?
44) Ron: Listen, the last few years, they put a lot of kids in inclusion, a lot more than they used to, and they don’t belong there.

45) Debbie: Really?

46) Ron: Yeah, really. I’ve been doing it, what? 4, 5 years? I used to get three, maybe four kids. This year, I’ve got nine. Most of them can’t do the work. Not without all kinds of help, so what’s the point?

47) Jerry: I have to say, it’s really kind of a problem.

48) Debbie: A problem for who? For you?

49) Jerry: Well, honestly, yeah. Everything turns into three or four different versions of every worksheet.

50) Debbie: Well, that’s the job. We have to meet the kids where they are.

51) Karen: Oh, please.

52) Pam: Like when they read at a third-grade level?

53) Ron: Sure. Let’s just modify the crap out of it.

54) Carly: That’s what I’m worried about. Maybe I shouldn’t do this packet at all, for any of them.

The How and What of Social Studies and Literacy Pedagogy

Paula’s opening remark at turn 1 immediately echoes back to the extended discussion over printed word versus picture texts that occurred during the third meeting session. Although during that session, Paula was mostly silent on the topic, her talk at this early juncture suggests meaning beyond the observation that the packet contains, “A lot of reading.” Using Gee’s (2011) Activities Building Tool, I understand Paula’s talk as a bid to continue to debate how much and what types of text are of educational value to students. Carly, however, closes down that bid by acknowledging Paula’s utterance as descriptive rather than judgmental, and then switching the topic from the amount of reading to how she handles the reading with students. In doing so, Carly draws on a deficit discourse of student ability, indicating that she does “most of it together as a class,
so that helps.” Here, using Gee’s (2011) Fill-In Tool, Carly assumes that these listeners can bring to bear a specific pedagogical understanding of teacher-led, guided instruction; although she does not say it overtly, she further expects the listeners to infer that taking this approach “helps” because it provides reading and comprehension support that would not be afforded to students if they were to complete the packet independently. Ruth’s question at turn 3 about the purpose of the packet indicates that Carly’s move to shift the talk away from the amount or type of reading to the objective and approach of the material may be successful. Ruth’s response talk at turn 5, however, focuses once again on the topic of judging the suitability of the instructional content. Her utterance, “Wow. You are ambitious,” by opening with an interjection of surprise, creates the perspective that the ambition reflected in the content of the packet Carly shares may be overreaching what she can reasonably expect students to be able to achieve. Ruth draws on a deficit discourse of student ability, but it is unclear whether the ambition to which she refers manifests in the length or the content of the assignment. This utterance echoes in both structure and meaning Paula’s, “Geez. A lot of reading” at turn 1, a grammatical choice that similarly foregrounds surprise, but specifically contextualizes the amount of reading, rather than the content of the assignment or the goals of the teacher, as a negative characteristic of the packet.

**Time Constraints and the Content and Process of Social Studies Literacy**

Carly perseveres in her seemingly sincere attempt to obtain feedback about the pedagogy reflected in the packet. Using Gee’s (2011) Fill-In and Relationships Building Tools, at turn 6, Carly acknowledges the implicit criticisms of her colleagues (“No, I know it’s hard”), but nonetheless requests feedback. The familiar tone of the phase “you guys” to refer to the listeners works to counteract the tension created by Ruth’s and Paula’s earlier utterances at turns 1 and 5 that challenged the activity Carly is working to build in this talk segment. Ruth’s further challenge at turn 7 shifts the focus of
the talk to the time constraints these teachers perceive. As an insider to this talk using Gee’s (2011) Social Languages Tool I understand these constraints to be related to pressures to cover a certain amount of curricular content each school year. Asking how long “this” takes, Ruth establishes the topic of time constrains and is understood by Carly to refer to completing the packet with students. Carly’s response at turn 8, introduced with “Uhhh, honestly,” however, subsumes the topic of time constraints relating to curricular pressures under a theme of hesitation and doubt; she further leaves the specific amount of time open and unspecified, characterizing it as “at least a couple of periods,” suggesting that she too recognizes the potential hazard of spending this much time on a single curricular element.

The topic of time constraints and curricular pressure continues to be explored in talk turn 9 when Paula says, “You have time for this?” Intoning the utterance as a question, and yet grammatically structuring it as a statement suggests a layer of incredulity over inquiry. Carly’s utterance at turn 10 responds directly both to the question and to the statement of surprise as she admits that, in fact, she does not always have enough time, but again pressing to move the talk towards critical collaboration of the material: “That’s kind of why I brought it.”

Carly’s bid to move the talk this way finally gains some traction at turn 11 when Ruth refers to a specific aspect of the packet in which students are asked to evaluate the effects of different parenting styles. Affirming Ruth’s approval of this part of the student activity, Ray engages in a critique by questioning its placement at the end of the packet (turn 12). When Carly explains her rationale at turn 13 as giving students a way of grasping the ideas of loose and strict, Ray pushes back on it by suggesting that this hook for students might be better placed before rather than after the readings. At turn 15, rather than drawing on a deficit discourse of student ability, Carly seems to advocate for more rigor, stating that “it seemed like too much of a hint.”
When Hard is Good, but for Which Students?

It is at this point that Debbie, the only Special Education teacher in the group, enters the discussion. Her entry sets in motion a shift in both the tone and the topic of the talk. Apparently reacting to Carly’s suggestion that she doesn’t want to provide too strong a “hint” about how to interpret the quotes in the packet, Debbie states at turn 16, “This is tough.” Using Gee’s (2011) Deixis Tool allows me to understand “this” as referring to the packet under question. Ray defends the content of the packet at turn 17 by agreeing with Debbie’s assessment, but rather than echoing Debbie’s use of the word “tough,” he instead says it’s “not easy.” Structuring his utterance in this way moves the theme from the negative connotation of Debbie’s “tough,” and resets it in the more positive frame of “not easy, no;” he further reinforces the positive framing by adding, “But good.” Whereas at the onset of this talk segment Carly requests feedback ostensibly in order to further her own reflections on her teaching practice, an underlying concern and a fuller view of Carly’s motivation begin to be revealed at turns 18 and 20. After expressing that she is “worried about it [the packet] being too hard,” Pam, with whom Carly had previously shared the packet, counters her concern with an utterance that seems directed towards reminding both Carly and the rest of the participants that she has “done it before.” Although Pam’s talk is structured as a statement, it implies a question about why Carly is now sensing worry. When Carly responds at turn 20 with, “Yeah…but not with inclusion,” the affirmation is intoned and drawn out in such a way as to suggest doubt. Further, by prefacing the reference to ICT with a preposition that indicates contrast, she positions this educational setting on one level as something about which she is uncomfortable, and on another as differently less-able than the more common fully general education setting.

Administrative Control over Teacher Scheduling for ICT

This implied deficit discourse of ICT student ability does not immediately and fully surface, however; instead, it becomes subsumed by talk about how ICT sections are
assigned to teachers. It is through this talk that these teachers’ negative attitudes about such assignments become apparent. At turn 21, Meg’s talk suggests that she has just been reminded that in the coming school year there will be a section of ICT in addition to her own. Gee’s (2011) Making Strange Tool allows me to question why Pam seems surprised that Meg wouldn’t be assigned to the additional section. An answer is suggested at turn 23 when Jerry reveals that he has “had two for a while.” Seen in conjunction with one another, and with the help of Gee’s (2011) Fill-In Tool, these two turns of talk, Pam’s at turn 22 and Jerry’s at turn 23, suggest that a single teacher would be expected to be assigned to all ICT sections for that subject and grade level. In fact, as an insider to this context, I am aware that such a precedent has been in place in both middle schools for some time, although in my own twelve-year tenure at Oakwood I have never known more than one section of social studies ICT to be created.

At this point, the topic of the talk shifts from a focus on Carly’s instructional material to a focus on ICT assignments. Jerry elaborates on the topic of ICT assignments at turn 23, but he frames it within a suggested theme of inequity between the two middle school buildings generated by the difference in student populations. This theme is established by his question at turn 23, “You only have one?” that is immediately followed by his own answer, “That’s nice,” an utterance that is delivered in a tone of mild sarcasm. As a Rockville teacher, Jerry continues at turn 23 to state that he has “had two [sections] for a while.” Interesting at this juncture is that two questions have been asked in sequence, first from Pam, and then from Jerry, both of which are answered by Meg at turn 24. Her “No. Yeah…” responds to these questions in the order that they were asked, communicating the meaning that, no she was not getting the additional section of ICT, and yes, thus far there has been only one section of ICT. Pam further pursues her inquiry at turn 25 with, “So she’s giving the second section to someone else?” The socially situated meaning of the pronoun “she” is the principal, since assigning classes is one of that administrator’s functions, and the principal of Oakwood is a woman. Why, however,
does Pam express some surprise that the second section is not being assigned to Meg, who has already been teaching a section of ICT for two successive years? And why, both at turns 22 and 25, does Pam ask questions that essentially communicate the same meaning? In each case, the tone in which these lines of talk are delivered conveys some element of surprise; the reiteration of the inquiry further suggests disbelief but also points to apprehension. Although Pam’s concern may not be immediately apparent to an outsider, as an insider to the context of the talk, I recognize its likely source. Since Pam is an 8th grade teacher at Oakwood whose 8th grade colleague Ron has been teaching ICT, news that a second section of 7th grade ICT may be assigned to a second teacher means that if an additional section opens up for her grade level she, rather than Ron, might be assigned to teach it. Although Pam’s individual lines of talk do not overtly communicate a negative view of teaching ICT, taken as a whole using Gee’s (2011) Topic Flow Tool, it can be interpreted in that way. In addition, Pam’s turns of talk, as well as Meg’s talk at turn 26, “That’s what I was told,” point to the control that administrators wield over the professional lives of teachers, as well as the corresponding lack of control teachers have over their schedules. The assignments are “given” by administrators who “tell” teachers what these assignments will be, events that are perceived by these participants as natural, but might be questioned by an outsider.

Debbie’s turn 27 talk challenges the “naturalness” of these events. Asking “Why would they do that?” the pronoun is understood by the group as referring to administration. Her use of the third person plural, however, rather than the more specific singular “she” used earlier, suggests a referential meaning that may include authority beyond that of the principal. Although contractually it is the building principal who has ultimate control over teacher placements, other administrators, particularly the special education director, do weigh in especially with regard to the placement of special education teachers. As the only special education teacher participant, Debbie speaks from a context in which her assignments are more strongly influenced by an administrator
other than the principal. Thus, her understanding of the talk around teaching assignments is influenced by experience and context that are somewhat different from the other teachers in the group. Although the meaning of her second clause in turn 27, “It doesn’t make sense,” is ambiguous on its own, the position from which Debbie speaks creates additional ambiguity. Gee’s (2011) Making Strange Tool prompts questions of whether it doesn’t make sense that Meg was told she wasn’t getting the second section, that the second section was being assigned to someone else, or that Debbie doubts Meg’s account? In what way do any of these possibilities fail to “make sense?”

Debbie’s talk turn 27 is significant in another way as well. Beginning at turn 22, a relational dynamic is created and sustained that mainly involves Pam and Meg who engage in clarifying class assignment projections for the following year without questioning the rationale either for the decisions themselves, or for the decision-making process. Debbie undercuts that dynamic by disrupting the assumptions on which Pam and Meg have been operating. Simultaneously, Debbie’s talk moves to shift the talk from the practical level of specific assignments, to the more theoretical level of the rationale behind teacher placements. Karen’s talk at turn 28, “Spread the wealth, right?” is also pivotal in this segment of talk. First, using Gee’s Making Strange Tool prompts questions about Karen’s meaning. What is the “wealth” to which she refers? Using Gee’s Fill-In and Situated Meaning Tools I can ascribe to “wealth” the metaphorical meaning as the assignment of ICT classes. Her utterance occurs in response both to the previous chain of talk around teacher assignments (in which Karen did not herself engage), and in response to Debbie’s likely rhetorical “Why would they do that?” at turn 27 to which Karen chooses to offer an answer. The meaning of “wealth” as ICT is reinforced by the derision that is suggested both by the tone in which this utterance is delivered, and the way this turn of talk is structured. By structuring her utterance as a question through the use of the word, “right?” Karen’s talk suggests an assumption of consensus among the participants that ICT assignments are not desirable. Furthermore, Karen’s informal tone and language
ICT Students: Who They Are and Why They’re There

Thus, Pam’s turn 29 seems to ignore Debbie’s utterance and picks up on this shift as she returns to questions about the assignment of an additional ICT section. When she says, “There’s that many? For another section?” the situated meaning is “that many students,” but it is understood more specifically as special education students. This situated meaning becomes clear with Debbie’s response at turn 30, “Well, if more kids qualify…,” since students classified as requiring special education must meet certain criteria to be placed in an ICT, rather than a so-called “self-contained,” or all-special-education, section. Again, Debbie’s utterance moves to steer the talk away from the specifics Pam’s queries pursue while Ron’s talk pushes it back towards the practical. Ron’s immediate response challenges either the substance of the criteria used to place students, or the students who are determined to have met them, when he says, “Whatever that means…..” Meg picks up on these possible meanings. When she says, “Oh, that’s an issue, for sure” (turn 32), the deictic “that” assumes that the listeners know she is referring to the “more kids [who] qualify.” Further, by naming that increase as “an issue,” she both affirms and intensifies Ron’s implied problematizing of both the process and the product of student selection. Meg defines this “issue” at turn 32 in several different ways. First, she says that “They’re getting weaker and weaker.” The pronoun “they” points to students, but whether she means students in general or ICT special education students in particular, is unclear. She further says that “It makes it hard keeping them all in the same place.” The perceived weakness is what makes it hard, but using Gee’s Making Strange Tool proposes the questions, who are those who are difficult to keep in the “same place?” and further, how is that “place” defined? Jerry affirms Meg’s utterance, thereby indicating that its situated meaning is in no way ambiguous: it is difficult to keep students
in the ICT sections moving forward in the curriculum at the same pace as students in other sections. This meaning is confirmed at turn 34 when Meg says, “I have a hard enough time keeping one up to speed.” It is at this point that the matter of pressure to cover the curriculum comes to the fore, specifically as it applies to class sections that include special education students. The phrase, “up to speed,” suggests curricula in linear movement at an expected pace which teachers must work to maintain. Simultaneously, however, it also attaches an unspoken negative connotation to not being up to speed, or “slow,” a pejorative often used to refer to special education students.

**Time Constraints, Curricular Pressures, and ICT**

Jerry’s talk at turn 35 demonstrates his clear understanding of Meg’s meaning. It also, however, reveals hesitation over answering Meg’s inquiry about how he “does it,” that is, keep up the required pace with no less than two ICT sections. In fact, after Jerry admits that it’s, “Not easy,” it takes him a total of five clauses that suggest hesitancy, conditionality, resignation, and even shame - “Sometimes, when I have to, you know, I’ll just decide, honestly…” - before he actually offers his solution. Even as he does so, Jerry continues to postpone getting to the crux of his answer, momentarily shifting from addressing his talk to Meg and the group, to positioning himself as if he were talking to students, and then back again: “…the inclusion periods, you guys get a copy of notes. Catch them up.” The structure of Jerry’s talk at this turn speaks to tensions that exist between external expectations and the lived reality of teaching ICT, tensions that it is clear Jerry and other participants in this group experience if they are directly involved and recognize even if they are not. Ron’s response to Jerry at turn 36 illustrates this. Not only does Ron affirm Jerry’s method of handling the problem of keeping sections “up to speed,” but he also provides some details about why it might be necessary to “Catch them up.” Again taking up notions of time, curricular pressures, and pacing Ron says there is, “No choice when you’re spending twice as much time trying to get them to do the higher
level stuff.” As an ICT teacher himself, Ron has first-hand experience with what this teaching assignment entails, but left unsaid is exactly who “them” refers to, what “higher level stuff” it is that it takes time, and what precisely it means to “do” this material. By saying at turn 37 that “Even for the gen ed [general education] kids it’s hard” Karen clarifies that the students to which Ron is referring are those classified as special education. In its socially situated meaning, which all of these participants understand, the “higher level stuff” is social studies material that goes beyond rote memorization of historical facts to include interpretation and analysis; most of this kind of practice at both the middle and high school levels is demonstrated through writing, a process that Meg at turn 32 earlier characterizes as something with which students seem “weaker and weaker.” Thus, it can be inferred that social studies content that is “higher level” is more difficult, and the “doing” of it most likely involves student writing, a skill that students in general, but special education students in particular, find challenging. Thus, both Ron’s talk turn 36 and Karen’s turn 37 work to reduce some of the tension generated as Jerry struggles to describe how he manages the curricular time pressures that are often a by-product of teaching ICT.

**Literacy Learning Opportunities: The Meaning of Modifications**

Tensions increase again at Debbie’s turn 39 where her talk powerfully does more than it says. Indicating that she feels compelled to “put my two cents in,” Debbie cites authoritative institutional, state- and school-defined special education regulations about how ICT classes are meant to work. Introducing it with the clause, “You know,” she positions herself as an authority who is reminding listeners of something they should already be aware. Her utterance that, “ICT does not mean changing the curriculum. It’s about appropriate modifications,” evokes Bakhtin’s description of authoritative discourse. According to Bakhtin (1981), authoritative text, “demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us…we encounter it with its authority fused to it”
demanding “our unconditional allegiance” (p. 342). Debbie’s utterance uses the words “change” and “modification” in such a way as to imply a definitional difference that does not exist in everyday language. She objects to Jerry’s handing out notes as an act of “changing the curriculum,” but endorses “appropriate modifications.” To appreciate the distinction Debbie makes requires an understanding of the specialized and specific social language meaning of “modifications.” In this educational context, modifications are understood as the supports put in place on the Individual Education Plan (IEP) document that is created for students classified as special education. With few exceptions, teachers are required to formally apply these modifications for students with IEPs, but further also to informally apply any “appropriate modifications” for students who do not have IEPs, or do not have particular modifications, but who do demonstrate a need. Debbie interprets Jerry’s pedagogical decision of handing out notes as a violation of the authoritative texts of educational regulations that mandate teacher adherence to special education and IEP provisions. This strict adherence is prescribed because, according to Bakhtin (1981), authoritative text, “binds us…we encounter it with its authority fused to it” (p. 227), demanding “our unconditional allegiance” (p. 344).

Jerry’s response at turn 40, however, challenges the authoritative discourse on which Debbie draws, an example of the univocal and the dialogic generating a productive tension (Bakhtin, 1981). First, his utterance that, “Well, I print out notes. That’s my modification I guess,” reflects a distinct shift from his hesitant posture at turn 35 to a more audacious one. Having received the support and affirmation offered by Ron and Karen at turns 36-38, Jerry’s talk echoes Debbie’s word “modifications” and repurposes it in such a way as to produce an implicit mockery of the authoritative discourse on which she draws. Specifically, his talk works to undermine the distinction between “change” and “modification” that Debbie endorses at turn 39. Debbie responds to Jerry’s challenge by further elaborating on what a “change” to the curriculum would be at turn 41. When she says, “If they’re not getting the same learning experiences, then it defeats the whole
purpose,” she equates handing out notes with changing the curriculum and with getting a different learning experience. Using Gee’s Making Strange Tool prompts questions about what exactly constitutes a “learning experience,” by what criteria are such experiences determined and defined? Further, in what way does handing out notes “defeat the purpose,” and most significantly what is “the purpose” to which Debbie refers? If it can be assumed that in this context the “purpose” would be to educate students, in what way is this similar to or different from providing “the same learning experiences?”

Students Who Can, Students Who Can’t: The “Problems” of ICT

Like Jerry does at turn 40, Ron at turn 42 again echoes but repurposes Debbie’s words, continuing to challenge the authoritative discourse she cites. This time, however, the challenge takes the form of countering the inherently formal language on which Debbie has been drawing. His utterance, “Yeah, well, the whole purpose isn’t supposed to be to throw everything at the wall and see what sticks,” shifts the talk to the vernacular. This move draws the talk away from the theoretical and authoritative realm of formalized educational regulations that Debbie pursues, to the practical realm of everyday classroom teaching. Although the tension between these dominates much of this talk segment, it is at this point that the talk turns fully to addressing some of what these teachers view as the “problems” of ICT.

Having been challenged by Debbie to defend his claim that “…they put a lot of kids in inclusion, a lot more than they used to, and they don’t belong there” (turn 44), Ron first asserts that he has “been doing it, what? 4? 5? years?” Using Gee’s (2011) Significance Building tool highlights that by using this statement of his experience as a preface to substantiating his claim, Ron foregrounds that as the most important information. In doing so, Ron builds an identity as an authority. Next, it also invites the listeners into a figured world (Gee, 2011) in which teaching experience has the capacity to impart such authority. This figured world suggests a discourse of teacher expertise and
agency derived from the practice of teaching that stands in contrast to the institutionally-sourced mandates and regulations Debbie cites. Over the next eight turns of talk, Ron, Jerry, Karen, Pam, and Carly engage in and elaborate on this discourse of experience-based pedagogical authority and agency. While doing so, they build significance around what they see as a set of teacher- student- and school-related “problems” that connect specifically to ICT, but also to their views of teaching in general.

First, Ron references an increase in the number of students with special needs who have been assigned to ICT sections, but his concern becomes fused with an idea that, “most of them can’t do the work.” The Fill-In and Deixis tools allow me to interpret “them” as referring specifically to those students classified as requiring special education. Next, Gee’s (2011) Making Strange tool raises a question of what exactly constitutes “the work.” Using Gee’s (2011) Situated Meaning tool, and based on earlier talk in this segment, listeners likely understand this as student actions relating to reading, writing, or “higher level stuff,” all of which have been mentioned in this and other segments. Ron’s talk continues and he qualifies his assertion of special education student deficits and inability to “do the work” by adding, “Not without all kinds of help, so what’s the point?” This statement seems to broaden the focus of the “problem” from students and their lack of ability to the institutional authorities who mandate what Ron views as a surplus of compensatory assistance. His rhetorical question, “So what’s the point?” echoes back to talk around “the whole purpose” at turns 41 and 42. In none of these instances is the meaning of “point” or “purpose” explicitly communicated, but throughout, the situated meaning is student learning, the idea of which is complicated by questions of student ability and administrative mandates.

Jerry adds to this complexity at turns 47 and 49. When Jerry assents to Ron’s suggestion that accomplishing tasks with “all kinds of help” is “a problem” (turn 47), Debbie challenges him to specify to whom the problem attaches (turn 48). Jerry refers to an added work load when he says (turn 49), “Everything turns into three or four different
versions of every worksheet.” As an insider to this talk, I understand the situated meaning of this utterance as a reference to modifications to student assignments that provide varying levels of supports appropriate to student needs. Jerry’s utterance is not explicit about how these “different versions” constitute a “problem,” but it is understood by the listeners as requiring additional time to create, use with students, and possibly even grade. When Debbie responds at turn 50 with “Well, that’s our job. We have to meet the kids where they are,” she repeats a phrase that, because it is frequently used by administrators to rebuff teacher complaints about extra help or accommodation requirements, is seen by teachers as an empty platitude, appealing as theory, but unrealistic in practice. Applying Gee’s (2011) Theme and Topic tool helps me to further interpret Debbie’s talk. Choosing to begin her utterance with, “Well, that’s our job,” establishes teacher responsibility as the theme; this has the effect of casting the additional work that Jerry cites at turn 49 as a petty grievance. At the same time, it creates the perspective from which the topic of meeting “kids where they are” must be understood: Although not all students are at the same point in what is assumed in this utterance to be a path of linear learning, teachers are professionally obligated to do whatever is required to ensure that students progress.

**Teacher Responsibility to Meet Student Needs**

Using Gee’s (2011) Politics Building tool helps to further unpack this sequence of utterances. By citing a specific obligation of teachers to students, Debbie’s talk builds that as a “social good” (p. 118), or something she feels that teachers, as a social group, should consider worthwhile. Because her utterance comes as a response to Jerry’s, however, it suggests that this social good is one that he, and perhaps other listeners, do not value as highly as she does. Furthermore, when Jerry alludes to the additional workload of creating “three or four different versions of every worksheet,” he is evoking the social good of solidarity with listeners who he assumes understand and sympathize
with his meaning. Thus, the social good of teacher solidarity that Jerry proffers comes into conflict with the social good of teacher obligation and responsibility that Debbie simultaneously submits. These utterances also represent a tension between theory and practice that recurs throughout this talk segment.

Understood in the context of these conflicts and tensions, Karen’s reaction at turn 51, “Oh, please,” can be viewed as an expression of frustration. It is unclear, however, whether her frustration derives from Debbie’s citing of a phrase often used by administrators to close off talk, from the implication that the social good of teacher responsibility is not as highly valued by the other participants as it is by Debbie, from the reemergent tension between Debbie and Jerry, as well as other participants, or perhaps from all of these. Having remained silent since turn 29, Pam’s entry into the talk at this point is significant. Her comment at turn 52, “Like when they read at a third-grade level?” works to upend Debbie’s assertion of teacher obligation and responsibility as a categorical and unquestioned social good. It does so by highlighting the gap between the theoretical finesse of teachers’ responsibility “to meet kids where they are,” and the practical limitations of reasonable expectations to do so.

Ron’s response at turn 53 builds solidarity around the latter. His, “Sure. Let’s just modify the crap out of it” is delivered heavily intoned with sarcasm, but it also speaks to a question of teachers’ responsibilities to the curriculum. Like the talk in turns 32-38 around keeping sections “up to speed” (Meg, turn 34), Ron’s utterance works to build a social good of curriculum coverage. While the focus earlier in this talk segment is on how time constraints effect curriculum, here the focus is on the effect of modifications. Using Gee’s (2011) Fill-in tool, Ron’s suggestion is that to “modify the crap out of it” is to change the curriculum to such an extent that it is no longer the same. Spoken in direct response to Pam’s rhetorical challenge about below-grade reading levels, Ron’s utterance sharpens the conflict between theoretical expectations of teachers and realistically achievable ones. The talk moves further into the realm of teachers’ lived experiences in
the final turn of talk in this segment. Carly, whose material and question initiates the segment of talk, concludes that perhaps the best course of action is to entirely abandon use of the student packet she created. Saying, “That’s what I’m worried about,” Carly not only understands, but also shares Ron’s concerns about maintaining the integrity of the curriculum. Going on to say, “So maybe I shouldn’t do this packet at all, for any of them.” Carly seems to echo as well, the expressed concerns of others about the effects of time on curriculum coverage. By not doing the packet “at all, for any of them,” Carly suggests a way to resolve some of the tensions and conflicts addressed and illustrated in this segment of talk. It also suggests, however, an element of frustration with a set of circumstances – social, curricular, and institutional - that fall mostly outside of teachers’ control but within which teachers must nonetheless fulfill their responsibilities to student learning.

Inquiry Group Meeting 7: Theorizing
Social Studies Teaching – Content vs. Analysis

I selected this segment of talk because of its focus on several aspects of how these teachers conceptualize the school subject of social studies as it relates to teaching history. While struggles over the definition of reading rooted in pedagogical concerns continue to surface, they are mostly eclipsed by competing theoretical claims. Some turns of talk reflect a theorizing of social studies teaching and learning as rooted in historical content, while others reflect an understanding of history as an analytical stance that implies particular processes. Embedded in these are also revealed tensions around teacher and administrative pedagogical authority.

This was the seventh of eight scheduled inquiry group meetings and took place on June 14, 2017. There were fourteen participants in attendance on that day, including 7th grade Rockville teachers Ruth and Jerry, and 8th grade teachers Rachel, Ray, and Donna.
Carly, Meg and Karen, 7th grade teachers from Oakwood, attended, as did 8th grade teachers Ron and Pam. June, Sarah, and Debbie (9th grade), and Marty (10th grade) were in attendance from the high school.

The planned focus of the meeting was to examine and discuss a particular 10th grade inquiry from the teacher-resource website that focuses on the end of apartheid in South Africa. Because Marty was the only participant representing the 10th grade, the other members deferred to his choice without much discussion. Talk about how the inquiry should be structured for students was much less extensive than that which had developed around the inquiries for grades 7-9; it focused instead on overarching and somewhat competing themes of literacy in social studies as expressed by mastery of historical content and by analytical processes of historical thinking.

The conversation that follows occurred about midway through the meeting. When Ray asked about the 10th grade textbook coverage of South African history, Marty responded that because the textbook coverage of the topic was limited, he was planning to use the inquiry to teach the topic. The talk segment below picks up after Donna, who had experience teaching 10th grade, expressed skepticism about this approach.

1) Donna: So, basically, you’re expecting them to learn the topic by doing the inquiry?

2) Marty: Well, really, it’s mostly about the enduring issue question. Unequal treatment, oppression, slavery, those are good ones to work on.

3) Donna: Sure, but apartheid, that itself an important topic. They need that history, the background, just the facts of that history.

4) Ruth: You know, in my opinion, the facts don’t really matter so much. They don’t remember them anyway, most of them.

5) Jerry: No, you’re right. It's more like a vehicle, for us anyway, in 7th, 8th grade especially I mean. Get them ready.

6) Ron: Wait. A vehicle you said? For what?

7) Jerry: Learning skills, give them larger themes, “enduring issues” or whatever they want to call it now. It used to be essential questions, remember? We were
supposed to write them on the board every day. But whatever. Teach them to think, and to hopefully instill skills with them.

8) Ron: Sure, how to think about history, that’s great, but what skills? What do you mean?

9) Jerry: Reading skills, how to read all these documents, not just skim them or memorize things.

10) Ray: That’s the way it always used to be though, when we were in school, right? Memorize a bunch of dates and battles? Now it’s more about using different sources, or it’s supposed to be.

11) Marty: That’s the whole point of the inquiries. Readings or what have you about a topic, and then digging deeper into the sources, what they’re really saying about what happened.

12) Ruth: But, you know, and maybe it’s because I have a 7th grade mindset so I feel like I keep bringing this up, but they need basic reading skills to do that, to understand what they’re reading in the first place.

13) Debbie: But also so they start to move from short to long term memory.

14) Ron: Move what to long term memory? The skills or the content?

15) Marty: Actually, it should be both.

16) Karen: Definitely both. What’s the point otherwise? Might as well just give them another period of English.

17) Carly: That’s what they want it to turn into though. That’s all we keep hearing: literacy in every subject.

18) Ray: Yeah, but they have a point, you know, just maybe not the way they put it. It’s more like trying to figure out how to put the two together, but in a way that makes sense for us, you know, for social studies. They want to call it literacy, okay, but really it’s more about having a head for history. The facts about the past, plus how to figure out what they mean, you know?

19) Ron: I can buy that. If you’re calling that literacy, fine. I don’t know if that’s what they’re pushing though.

20) Meg: So, maybe it seems like there's two conversations going on here. There's one about looking at the page, decoding, reading strategies, which is maybe something more for the struggling readers, or younger grades, but also talking about the history itself, what happened, and then the inferential thinking too, the analysis, which is –

21) Pam: Bigger picture.
22) Meg: Well, three conversations, actually, I guess.

23) Karen: Yes, definitely, bigger picture, but you need the content for that, the facts.

24) Ron: Exactly. An enduring issue is something that comes out of what happened, out of the details. You can’t say the content doesn’t matter. It does.

25) Marty: That, and then interpreting the details. The history part is seeing the different angles.

26) Karen: And of course they need to be able to just plain read the stuff in the first place, that’s obvious. It’s like a puzzle with a million pieces, but the biggest piece for us has to be the history.

**What it Means to Learn History**

Since Marty had already stated just prior to the beginning of this segment of talk that he chose this inquiry because the textbook offered limited coverage of the history of apartheid in South Africa, the question Donna poses to Marty at the onset of this talk segment appears to be merely rhetorical. In fact, however, the situated meaning of her query is taken up by the group not as a challenge to Marty’s pedagogical judgment, but as a theoretical question of what it means to “learn the topic.” Taken up in this way, the talk proceeds to work towards constructing a definition of literacy teaching and learning in social studies. Several threads of talk that propose sometimes seemingly irreconcilable views of such a definition run through the talk. As Karen puts it at the end of this segment, “It’s like a puzzle with a million pieces.”

Because it is introduced with the phrase, “Well, really, it’s mostly about,” Marty’s initial response to Donna’s question appears to sidestep the topic of what it means to “learn the topic.” The situated meaning of “the enduring issue question” is understood by the group to be the focus of the written assessment included on the new NYS Regents exam. This assessment is based on students’ ability to identify and elaborate on an enduring issue suggested by a set of documents. Using Gee’s Making Strange tool raised the question of why a social studies teacher would prioritize a particular test question, rather than a topic in history, in his teaching. Of course, what remains unsaid, yet is
implicitly understood by every teacher in the group, is that the pedagogical decisions teachers make are inevitably, albeit to varying degrees, influenced by the demands of assessments. Rather than pursuing this implicit issue, however, Marty’s talk continues to extend and engage in constructing the meaning of teaching and learning literacy in social studies. When Marty defends his choice of inquiry in terms of the larger issue of oppression that the inquiry around apartheid frames, he is proposing the idea that asking students to work with an enduring issue is not merely an exercise test preparation, but also a significant aspect of what it means to teach and learn history. Donna’s response that “the history, the background, just the facts of that history” are also significant suggests a dichotomy between historical content and process. Thus, although this presumed dichotomy is not explicitly addressed, Donna’s talk serves to initiate a debate over the place and value of both historical content and process in the teaching and learning of social studies.

Ruth and Jerry seem to be in agreement that “facts don’t really matter so much,” but the reasoning they use to come to this conclusion seems to differ. When Ruth, referring to historical facts, states that most students “don’t remember them anyway,” she suggests a deficit discourse of student ability. Using Gee’s Fill-In tool, however, allows me to dig deeper into her talk. Her use of the word “anyway” suggests that she may recognize other unstated additional reasons to deemphasize the learning of historical facts. In fact, during the first interview when I asked Ruth the question, “How do you define literacy as it applies to Social Studies?” her response indicated as much:

…when you really get down to it, it’s not so much about facts, right? I mean, you need that, sure, but more as maybe building blocks I’ll say. It’s more, literacy I mean, for social studies, more what you do with the facts. What you make of them. The conclusions you come to, and trying to teach kids how to do that. How to work with information, like, make something of it, but logically, not just because, well, I say so.
What is Social Studies Learning and Literacy? Who Gets to Decide?

Jerry’s remark that, “it’s just a vehicle” picks up these unspoken, but embedded meanings and understandings, but it’s unclear whether his comment refers to historical facts or to social studies as a class. Either way, Ron challenges Jerry’s use of “vehicle” as a metaphor. Throughout the inquiry group meetings, Ron proved himself to be capable of forcefully defending his own perspectives and pushing back on perspectives with which he disagreed. Although his sometimes brusque and dismissive stance could engender tension, it also could be a catalyst that set meaning-making in motion. Such is the case at this point in this excerpt of talk. On one level, Ron’s challenge presses for more clarification of Jerry’s particular meaning, but it simultaneously has the effect of moving the talk towards sharpening the definition of social studies the group has begun to forge. Jerry’s response answers the challenge by contributing multiple layers of meaning to the group’s talk about literacy, and expanding the talk to issues of teacher autonomy:

Learning skills, give them larger themes, “enduring issues” or whatever they want to call it now. It used to be essential questions, remember? We were supposed to write them on the board every day. But whatever. Teach them to think, and to hopefully instill skills with them.

Here, Jerry refers to an unidentified but authorized “they” who can determine what is taught in social studies, and the naming of it as well. This segment of talk accomplishes several things at once: First, by juxtaposing the words “enduring” and “now,” it diminishes the authority to which Jerry initially refers by suggesting that the demands of both the naming and the substance are ephemeral. Second, it diffuses the tension generated between group members by Ron’s challenge by turning an earlier social studies mandate into a touchstone of shared experience; doing so creates a case of identity building as Jerry positions himself and invites others to view themselves, as authorities on how things “used to be” when teachers were “supposed to” make a particular pedagogical move. Third, the phrase, “but whatever,” followed by a declaration of his view of what teaching social studies entails, both minimizes and shifts the authority away
from the unseen but presumably administrative “they” who say what’s “supposed” to happen, to teachers themselves. Jerry moves past the jargon of “enduring issues” vs. “essential questions” to declare what he sees as the essence of his job. Thus, in the context of this segment of talk during this inquiry group meeting, Jerry’s words are less about what they say than about what they do in the context of this inquiry group.

**Literacy in Social Studies: Generic and Discipline-Specific Approaches**

The talk continues to refine and build upon the definition of literacy in social studies that the group is attempting to construct. Jerry, once again challenged by Ron, distinguishes between reading that involves “skimming” and social studies that depends on “memorizing” from what is specifically required by “all those documents.” When both Ray and Marty add clarification to this point by bringing up the idea of using and interpreting a variety of sources, the conflict over generic as opposed to discipline-specific reading approaches re-emerges, as it did repeatedly over the course of the eight weeks of meetings. Ruth’s comment that “they need basic reading skills... to understand what they’re reading in the first place,” reflects her lived experience as a teacher of 7th graders for whom such skills cannot be assumed. This experience pushes up against the implied experiences of Karen and Carly whose remarks, “Might as well just give them another period of English,” and “That’s what they want to turn it into,” suggest a perception that their discipline is under threat. In fact, the Social Studies chair had mentioned during several department meetings that one of his goals was to work with the English department to develop more interdisciplinary activities, and to bring the reading and writing requirements of the two subjects into “closer alignment.” This effort received a mostly lukewarm response from Social Studies teachers, who were concerned about how this would impact their curricular load, but several from Oakwood, including Karen, Carly, and Ron, were openly critical of it. Several turns of talk later, Ron’s hedged response to Ray’s offering of a discipline-based definition of literacy is suggestive of this
attitude. When Ron says, “I don’t know if that’s what they’re pushing though,” he accepts Ray’s proposed construction of literacy, but doubts that the authoritative “they” to whom he refers holds by that definition as well. It is this perspective, and its accompanying sense of doubt and mistrust of administrative demands, that underpin some of the tension that emerged across the inquiry group meetings around how literacy in social studies is defined.

This excerpt of talk represents teachers working across both theory and practice to untangle the multiple threads of how they perceive literacy in their subject. The content of historical facts, generic reading skills, and discipline-based reading approaches, and the processes of interpretation, analysis and critical thinking that constitute what Ray calls, “having a head for history,” all become crystallized in this talk.

**Summary of Findings Around Discourses of Literacy in Social Studies**

The data from these talk segments make visible the typical discourse patterns of the inquiry group around literacy. As the data show, these patterns were strongly shaped by curricular and institutional expectations that the inquiry group interpreted as focused on cognitive text-processing strategies. Although the group chose to work with and talk about discipline-specific texts, their talk often centered on generic literacy strategies in relation to those texts. Thus, drawing heavily on a dominant Discourse of literacy defined generically, their talk often produced normalized notions of what counts as reading and texts in social studies classrooms.

The inquiry group talk around literacy was also heavily shaped by discourses of student ability. These most often connected to disparate student populations between the two middle schools, touching on unspoken issues of race, social status as reflected by housing and employment, and economics. Discourses of student ability on which the inquiry group drew also sometimes suggested developmental links in which older
students were viewed as more “ready” to handle literacy tasks that the group sometimes identified as more advanced. Furthermore, there were instances in which student ability was connected to class sections that did or did not include students with special needs. Each of these cases influenced how teachers understood literacy in social studies and how it might be taught. Deficit discourses of student ability, whether as associated with race, social status, economics, special education labelling or inclusion, or developmental level, were mostly connected to literacy as defined generically. In contrast, disciplinary literacy, and the historical thinking to which it is linked, tended to be construed as more “advanced”; as such it was more likely to be emphasized in the context of talk about students from the more affluent Oakwood, students in exclusively general education sections of social studies, and older students.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the data from these segments illustrate the potential for knowledge interrogation and growth that necessarily adheres to conflict. Because these inquiry group meetings occurred in the context of a group of teachers who knew each other more or less well, and in the context of two earlier pilot inquiry groups in which several of the teachers had participated, much of the formality that might otherwise have permeated the talk was stripped away. This circumstance allowed for talk that was more raw, and likely also more honest, than it might have been otherwise. Furthermore, most of the participants had no previous experience with, or knowledge of, teacher inquiry groups, so there were few preconceptions about how the group would work. Despite a lack of any recognition or sanctioning by administration, and the often palpable tensions that emerged, with only one exception, the teachers who initially volunteered to participate continued to attend meetings. This result points to the “strong pull,” as Sarah put it during her second interview, of working collaboratively with other teachers. It also points to an innate understanding on the part of these teachers of the value of the exchange of ideas, even when that exchange becomes heated. During her second interview, Meg put it this way: “If we don’t talk about it, it just sits there and
festers. Maybe someone will change their minds, or maybe get an idea. If not, if we argue, so what? We’re all in the same boat, everyone knows that.”
Chapter V

PRODUCTIVE POSSIBILITIES OF CONFLICT IN KNOWLEDGE WORK

In this chapter I revisit the talk segments I previously analyzed individually in depth, but this time across meeting sessions and with a more specific focus on my second research question. Because that question involves the way teacher inquiry talk might interrogate, transform, and generate knowledge about literacy in social studies, it makes sense to attend to how this occurs, not only within, but also across, segments of talk. Exploring these intertextual relations highlights what Bakhtin (1981) refers to as their dialogical linkage. From this perspective, the talk segments are both “answerable” to earlier session segments of talk (as well as previous talk in the same session segment) and inclined towards “addressees” in future session segments (as well as later talk in the same session segment) (Bakhtin, 1981).

The interrogation, transformation, and generation of knowledge – what I will call “knowledge work” – takes place throughout the eight sessions, albeit in varying degrees. It occurs on multiple, intersecting, and shifting levels that principally involve talk about defining literacy in social studies, and talk about literacy in social studies as it relates to student ability, often with a subtext of race. Other issues, such as curricular time management and the teacher’s role in, and responsibility for, addressing student needs, just to name two, further complicate the knowledge work in which these teachers engage. These intricate and intersecting issues reflect the “organized complexity” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 160) of the teaching context from which these teachers speak, enriching
the knowledge work they do at the same time as informing it. Karen’s remark at the end of the talk segment from Inquiry Group Meeting #7 that “It’s like a puzzle with a million pieces” reflects awareness of this complexity. It is complexity defined not only in terms of the specific issues of teaching and learning literacy and social studies that are explicitly being deliberated, but also in terms of the multifaceted, and often thorny, concerns that comprise classroom teaching. As these teachers generate knowledge of practice from practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 160), they engage in talk that represents their own shifting and complicated perspectives and understandings of both teaching and learning.

Although it is impossible to segregate unambiguously the knowledge work the inquiry group engaged in around the two main areas I have identified, I will attend to each, defining literacy in social studies and literacy in social studies as it relates to student ability, in individual sections. While doing so, I will also highlight the interrelatedness of these two principal areas of meaning and concern with other issues raised by these teachers during the inquiry group talk.

**Knowledge Work Around Defining Literacy in Social Studies**

The question posed by Sarah in Session 2, “How can we teach both literacy and social studies?” in a broad sense establishes the foundation on which the knowledge work around literacy in social studies is built across the eight inquiry group meetings. It is essentially this question with which the group continuously grapples. In the earliest sessions of talk, attempts to answer this question mostly default to literacy as defined by generic reading, and focus on teasing out the place and function of that definition of literacy in the social studies classroom. As the inquiry group meetings progress, however, the picture becomes more complex. Issues around the meaning and place of social studies “content” emerge. The values of different literacy practices are weighed. Practices
associated with historical literacy are enacted, and their function and worth in social studies classrooms is interrogated. Hints of this complexity emerge immediately in Session 2, expressing itself in moments of emotional intensity and demonstrated conflict.

**Literacy and Social Studies: Connections and Disconnections**

During the second meeting, several participants worked to construct knowledge around literacy in social studies in which each is thought of as a separate and distinct area of study. Sarah’s assertion in Session 2 that she “majored in American history, not reading or writing or literacy” not only segregates social studies from literacy in a general way, but also distinguishes her particular area of expertise in the school subject of social studies (American history) from other areas; similarly, she parses reading, writing, and literacy as discrete specialties. This perspective belies the notion that discourses constitute disciplines and that as a result, literacy is intrinsic, rather than supplementary, to disciplinary practices (Moje, 2008). Ron’s talk supports the knowledge being generated around social studies as separate and distinct from literacy as defined by reading, but in some ways expands on it. His assertion that it is not his job to teach “basic reading” reinforces the line being drawn between social studies and literacy as it defined by the group at this point in time. Simultaneously, however, the qualifier, “basic,” references a particular kind of reading that while it remains ambiguous, sets it apart from a presumed kind of reading that is not basic. More important, it creates an opening for a kind of reading that Ron might, in fact, consider part of his job to teach. When Ray says that students, “can’t learn much history if they can’t read...if they can’t understand what they’re reading,” he adds a link to this chain of speech communication (Bakhtin, 1981). Presupposing an understanding of “basic reading” as decoding and comprehending text, his talk simultaneously broadens the meaning of social studies as something other than, but nonetheless dependent upon reading and writing. Thus, rather than reinforcing the
wall between social studies and literacy that has so far been established, Ray’s talk proposes a conditional relationship between the two.

Segment 1 of Session 3 echoes back to and continues this line of talk around the relationship of literacy to social studies. As the group talk proceeds, motivated by the elusive goal of reaching consensus about which documents to use for a student inquiry, it reinforces the conditional relationship between literacy and social studies that was proposed in the earlier meeting. The group’s primary indicator of literacy at this point in time is reading, but tensions and conflicts emerge out of the various views of how reading is defined, and what kinds of texts require reading. Through this interplay between talk about reading and texts, knowledge around literacy in social studies is interrogated and provisionally generated. The talk reverberates with the notion of “basic” reading, and around the connections between reading, comprehending, and learning history that were raised during Session 2. Here, these notions are supplemented by the generation of provisional knowledge around “real reading.” The socially situated and contextualized meaning of “real reading” and “basic reading” are in opposition, and thus, the use of the words “real” and “basic” represent a binary understanding of what reading entails. It is from the oppositional relationship of these binaries that some of the tension in this segment of talk is derived. As compared to the talk in Session 2, in Session 3 the participants grapple more openly with conflicting discourses of literacy. These conflicting discourses are rooted in questions both about how different understandings of literacy apply to different students, and about how they correspond to different discourses of social studies teaching and learning. At the same time, while the talk continues to engage with literacy and social studies as separate entities, it works towards a strengthening of the connections the two.
“Basic” versus “Real” Reading: Texts and Processes

During Session 3 teachers struggle with the kinds of texts that provide students with opportunities for “real” reading in the context of social studies foreground the process of collaborative knowledge construction understood as “interrogating, elaborating, critiquing conceptual frameworks that link action and problem-posing to immediate contexts” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This talk around texts and the processes involved in reading such texts works to tie the notions of literacy and social studies more closely together. In its juxtapositioning of “basic” and “real” reading, it also represents a struggle around autonomous and ideological models of literacy (Street, 2005).

In the course of examining a student inquiry found on the C3 website, Ruth challenges the number and type of documents that are included. Because social studies teachers had been directed to use the inquiries on this website, Ruth’s challenge constitutes an interrogation of knowledge produced by an authoritative discourse of literacy in social studies. This authoritative discourse is represented both directly by the website, and indirectly by the administrative mandate to use the resources on that website. Karen’s utterance, “Wait. No real reading?” gestures and gives voice to this authoritative discourse of literacy that defines reading in particular ways; in doing so, it presupposes a superaddressee (Bakhtin, 1981) from whom an understanding of “real” reading is presumed. This presupposed superaddressee also raises the question of who is actually doing the talking here; although it is Karen’s voice that produces the utterance, it is that same discourse of school literacy that imbues what she says with meaning and gives it its force. Framed autonomously, this discourse ignores the ideological underpinnings of literacy, views literacy as neutral and generic, and assumes that mastery carries social as well as cognitive value (Street, 2005). Karen’s insistence on “real reading” reflects this view, and the dominance and force of the discourse on which Karen draws is demonstrated by the fact that although Ruth attempts to rebut Karen’s question,
at this point there is no challenge to either the existence or the value of “real reading.” Instead, the talk moves towards an interrogation of what “real reading” might look like as it takes up notions of different kinds of texts. This becomes apparent when Debbie inserts the idea of images as a kind of “text” to be in some way “read.”

At this point, the provisional understanding of reading and texts that Debbie proposes is positioned by other participants as “basic,” but she directly challenges this positioning when she says that “...they do have to look at the pictures carefully.” This utterance elaborates not only on the rigor suggested by picture texts, but also on the meaning of literacy as represented by reading. While thus far in the talk reading has been defined by the length of printed word text, Debbie submits a definition that moves beyond the characteristics of texts, to the characteristics of reading, and thus literacy, as a process. Her suggestion that “to look...carefully” might also constitute a kind of reading is supported and elaborated on by Jerry. His utterances that “they have to pay attention, think” and “connect it to the question,” continue to add dimensions to the meaning of literacy as reading that the group is attempting to craft. In that Jerry’s talk supports picture documents as “real reading,” Jerry’s utterances are thus directly and immediately answerable to Ruth’s. It is an articulated response that suggests positively evaluative understanding. More significantly, the cognition suggested by “looking carefully,” “paying attention” and “thinking” renders engagement with these processes as essential to both literacy and social studies in ways that work to disassemble the partition established between the two in Session 2.

At this point in time, however, the apparent acceptance of pictures as texts that require reading constitutes provisional knowledge. Karen takes issue with the notion that “reading” images can or should be substituted for reading written word texts when she says, “There are diary entries here for a reason. There’s a personal perspective.” Here, Karen is proposing knowledge and meaning around a particular kind of reading that she is positioning as “real,” reading that includes first person, primary source interpretation.
At the same time that Karen’s talk reinforces the connection between literacy (as reading) and social studies, her mention of “personal perspective” also reverberates with Ron’s talk in Session 2 when he describes “using” history content as, “How to look for bias, holes in people’s version of what happened, for their agenda, what’s at stake, all that.” Both Ron’s and Karen’s utterances take place in the context of dialogical struggles between competing notions of literacy and their place in social studies as a school subject based in history as a discipline. Here, however, Ron’s talk is an expression of an authoritative discourse of social studies teaching and learning, the source of which, as a result of Ron’s involvement in professional development on historical thinking, is outside of the context of the inquiry group talk. As an expression of authoritative discourse, it is talk that “demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342). Although the talk in Session 2 does not go so far as to take up the discursive literate endeavors of history that Ron thus brings to the table, Karen’s talk makes evident the dialogic interanimation across sessions that has the potential to interrogate or transform meanings. Its echo of Ron’s earlier utterance is infiltrated with Karen’s voice and is thus transformed into words that are “half someone else’s,” and yet populated with Karen’s own intentions (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293). Although Karen’s actual intentions cannot be known, her talk may represent the assimilation and internal persuasiveness of the authoritative discourse expressed by Ron (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342).

As the participants in this talk segment mainly assume stances that represent an autonomous model of literacy, the struggle in which they engage over how to define and enact literacy simultaneously demonstrates how contested the nature of literacy practices and meanings can become. Thus, in their sometimes fierce defenses of their views of the processes and texts that constitute literacy, the participants reflect at a deeper level, at the same time that their talk on the surface works to undermine, the ideological model of literacy in action. When Ruth and Debbie press for acceptance of pictures as texts that require reading, and Karen advocates for printed word texts that provide personal
perspective, each is reflecting some of the rich and complex aspects of literacy as it exists in the real world. That some participants view picture texts as “basic” belies the significant and complicated role images play, particularly in modern communication, but also in history as a discipline.

By Session 7, a more diversified definition of text seems to have been assimilated by the group. This diversification has the effect of more closely connecting the notions of literacy and social studies. Marty describes student inquiries as dependent on the use of, “Readings or what have you about a topic.” This utterance echoes back to talk about the kinds of texts that qualify as ones that require reading. Marty’s use of the word “readings” renders here as printed word texts, but by adding, “or what have you” he leaves open the possibility of using a variety of sources. While the Session 3, segment #1 talk is dominated by a debate around reading in the context of printed word versus other kinds of texts, this aspect of Marty’s utterance passes without further comment. This, in combination with his off-handed use of the phrase, “what have you,” may indicate a level of acceptance on the part of the participants that sources of historical information can extend beyond printed word texts.

**Literacy in Social Studies as Reading to Answer Questions**

In another thread of talk from the first segment of Session 3, the talk centers on whether answering questions is a legitimate way of defining literacy. This notion of literacy as reading, specifically as connected to answering questions emerges in the context of both written and picture texts. This connection works to define comprehension, and by extension literacy, in terms of an authoritative discourse that stipulates both the identification and interpretation of what is significant in a text, in whatever way text might be defined. Defending the use of picture texts, Jerry says that students have to “connect it to the question.” Karen counters this with her assertion that analyzing a picture is “not the same as reading words, figuring out point of view, or just plain reading
for the facts, to answer questions.” Karen’s talk clearly positions the reading of printed word texts as different from, and more advanced than, the reading of pictures. Although her reference to point of view points to an aspect of the discursive literate practices of history, this utterance seems to focus on a discourse of social studies as the transmission of historical facts, and a discourse of literacy as correctly answering questions posed by an outside authority.

Later, in segment 2 of the same session, the group discusses a student inquiry that includes a picture document. While doing so, Ruth indirectly equates literacy as reading with answering questions when she refutes the need for students to recognize potential bias because, “kids don’t need to know that...to answer the question;” Rachel endorses this perspective by saying that a superficial understanding of the picture is all that is required because, “That’s the question;” and Paula directly equates literacy as reading with answering questions when she says, “This whole thing is supposed to be about literacy...You want them to be able to answer the question.” While the roles of Ruth, Rachel, Karen, and Paula are, on one level, that of speakers, they are simultaneously acting as respondents, both to Jerry’s earlier assertion, and to the superaddressee of institutional understandings of school reading, specifically in social studies. Through their turns of talk that either directly or indirectly equate literacy with answering questions, they articulate the centripetal force that is an authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) around school reading. This is a discourse that is reinforced by the very presence of questions on the student inquiries that these teachers are examining.

Furthermore, Paula’s assertion that “You want them to be able to answer the questions” suggests a particular ideology around teaching and learning which is made available to the group through their membership as educators. Particular ways of thinking and behaving as teachers and as students are comprised by this ideology which makes answering questions appear to be a “natural” aspect of literacy learning in social studies (Bakhtin, 1986). It is this naturalness that begins to be interrogated, however, as Jerry
expresses doubt when he says, “I thought so at first, but now I’m starting to think maybe...,” hinting at an in-process transformation of his own understanding of literacy. Karen directly interrogates the ideology of literacy as reading defined by answering questions when she says, “Is that all we’re doing here? Answering questions?” Her suggestion that there is something more or different is an articulation of a centrifugal force, one that works to diversify the status quo of literacy that up to this point dominates these exchanges.

This push-back on the idea of reading in social studies as a process enacted solely in the service of answering questions begs a reconsideration of her utterance in the earlier segment that analyzing a picture is “not the same as ... just plain reading for the facts, to answer questions.” Understood intertextually, rather than in isolation, her words may suggest the use of historical facts in the service of answering the kinds of overarching questions raised by historians, or perhaps even students themselves, rather than by an outside authority. Thus, the phrase “answering questions” may carry meaning that establishes a subtle, yet essential, link to the way literacy is defined and enacted in history as a discipline.

Defining the “Content” of Social Studies

When Jerry says in Session 2, “Now it’s not just about the content, but also teaching kids how to read,” he reinforces the knowledge about social studies as separate and distinct from literacy that initially Sarah puts forth, but he transforms it as well. His use of the word “content” in this social context carries a meaning both of the curricular substance of the school subject of social studies, and of the historical facts associated with those curricula. This constructs social studies less as connected to a particular scholarly historical domain, as Sarah’s talk does, and more as dependent on broader educational agendas; these agendas encompass notions of history teaching and learning.
as derived from institutional and state authorities, and as traditionally enacted through the transmission of historical “facts.”

Ron elaborates on Jerry’s reference to “the content” of social studies when he says, “I teach content. Content and how to use it. That’s it.” Because Ron’s utterance occurs in the context of talk about the place of literacy in social studies, his use of the phrase “That’s it” works to close off a connection to literacy and reinforces the notion that social studies and literacy are separate and distinct. However, while the “content” to which Ron refers may attach to the defined curricula and historical facts encompassed by Jerry’s earlier comment, that meaning is further transformed when Ron adds, “how to use it.” The elaboration he provides is significant: “How to look for bias, holes in people’s version of what happened, for their agenda, what’s at stake, all that.” Here, Ron proposes knowledge and meaning about the intention and purpose of social studies as a school subject and the historical elements that comprise its content. This knowledge suggests a definition of literacy not constrained by the generic reading practices the group has thus far developed. Instead, it points directly to the kinds of literate discursive practices that pertain to history as a discipline. Rather than distinguishing social studies from literacy, Ron’s talk thus positions them as intimately connected. Even as Rachel, Jerry, and Debbie press Ron on his unwillingness to accept responsibility for teaching literacy as defined by reading and writing, something which at this point he adamantly refuses to do, he also acknowledges, and in fact endorses, the responsibility he has for teaching literacy as defined by history as a discipline. Although this apparent lack of clarity around the term “literacy” remains unexamined during this session, the effect of Ron’s utterance can be traced through later sessions during which the scope of how these teachers talk about literacy in social studies expands.

For example, during the first segment of Session 3, Karen disagrees with the proposal that picture blurbs provide sufficient reading in a student inquiry. When she says, “There are diary entries here for a reason. There’s a personal perspective. How’s a
blurb going to do that?” knowledge and meaning around the “content” of social studies is again being proposed. Although Karen does not identify it as such, the content she describes is framed as a literacy practice dependent on the consideration of personal perspective, and particular to the discipline of history. This meaning echoes Ron’s reference to “people’s version of what happened” and “their agenda, what’s at stake.” It suggests that social studies “content” encompasses more than a canon of historical facts, and includes a discursive literate practice that requires recognizing, and even evaluating, the effect of perspective on the version of history being communicated. This idea of engaging with personal perspectives as an essential aspect of teaching and learning history in a social studies classroom animates the talk in the second segment of Session 3.

As the group deliberates how to use a picture document that is included in a 7th grade student inquiry on the Wampanoag, the talk works to interrogate and generate meaning and knowledge around the picture. The tension centers on whether the image portrayed in the document should be used by students solely in the service of answering the question posed: What was the first contact like between the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag? Or, whether students should be led to recognize and critically analyze the bias reflected in the image. The talk suggests a notion that different kinds of texts, such as this picture document, represent different modes of communication, each of which contain varying potentials to illuminate different aspects of the world (Wilson & Chavez, 2014). Bakhtin (1981) sees the relationship between utterances as inseparable both from the speakers, and from the object of those utterances. In this case, the object of the utterances is meaning and knowledge that draws on the aspect of literacy in social studies that involves both using multimodal texts, and inquiring into the possible bias of those texts. During this segment of talk, the utterances of Marty and Jerry work in clearly productive ways towards this end, as do Ruth’s, even as her talk seems to work to resist this momentum. Thus, this generation of knowledge is “born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with others’ thought” (Bakhtin, 1981 p. 92). Knowledge around
the “content” of social studies, and about how that content is accessed, continues to be interrogated.

When Marty suggests that the picture is “pretty one-sided,” and adds, “Misleading,” Jerry expresses his understanding through a process of layering-on additional meaning in his utterance, “Yeah, really. Wow. The Pilgrims are definitely the good guys here, uh?” These utterances are thus framed by a dialogical context of meaning-making that continues to expand as Marty’s and Jerry’s voices interanimate one another through their elaboration of the knowledge they are jointly constructing. Ruth’s talk also contributes to this interanimation as the “content” of social studies and its connection to literacy continue to be interrogated and generated. As Marty and Jerry engage in this meaning-making, Ruth twice uses the phrase, “What do you mean?” This request for clarification may indicate her inadequate understanding of the knowledge being generated, but also represents her recognition that such a process is underway.

Each of Ruth’s turns, while identical in verbal content, differ slightly in function, thereby serving in different ways the process of knowledge generation. First, her talk provokes Marty to more fully explain his meaning of “one-sided;” his assessment of the picture under consideration is then expanded to include not merely the omission of other perspectives, but also distortion (“misleading”). This elaboration reverberates with Ron’s and Karen’s earlier talk that highlighted perspectives on history. Ruth’s second utterance of “What do you mean?” is shaped by a different set of dialogic aspects, and thus produces a somewhat different effect. After resisting Marty’s move to bring the bias of the picture into focus, Ruth’s “new” utterance functions as reinforcement of Jerry’s nascent understanding of, and engagement in, the interpretive act Marty initiated. In both instances, her utterances serve as a sort of “thinking device” for both Jerry and Marty whose subsequent talk generates further meaning around the image with which they are working.
Similarly, Jerry’s and Marty’s talk also serve as thinking devices for Ruth as she resists, but simultaneously struggles to grasp, the knowledge that is being constructed. The effect of this interanimation on Ruth’s thinking extends beyond this talk segment into Session 4 when the perspective and bias of texts again becomes part of the conversation. Responding to a packet that includes a series of quotes from Jefferson and Hamilton that present opposing views of the Constitution, Ruth says, “So, what, you use this to show the different perspectives?” The doubt reflected in Ruth’s talk in Session 3, segment #2 is altered and reflects what seems to have become her own nascent understanding of the process and significance of critically evaluating perspectives when dealing with historical sources. Thus, the talk of Ruth, Marty, and Jerry interanimate one another, both during and across sessions. In doing so, their talk generates and enacts meanings around literacy in social studies of which they are also constituents (Bahktin, 1981).

By session #7, talk around the content social studies becomes more specifically focused on what literacy looks like in the context of history. When Jerry talks about reading, he defines it as an activity that involves “how to read all these documents, not just skim or memorize things.” This utterance suggests the significance of exposing students of history in the context of school social studies to multiple sources of information. It also suggests a particular approach to the process of reading such documents that involves more than a quick scan (“not just skim”) or a search for facts (“memorize things”). Marty builds on this generation of knowledge when he elaborates on the “how” of reading historical documents, saying that “the whole point” of the inquiries is about “digging deeper into the sources, what they’re really saying about what happened.” This reverberates strongly with Ron’s utterance during Session 2 when he describes his view of the focus of history learning in social studies as, “How to look for bias, holes in people’s version of what happened, for their agenda, what’s at stake, all that;” and he later adds, “I teach content. Content and how to use it.” Although during
that earlier session, Ron’s perspective was met with resistance that created tension within the group, Marty’s utterance that communicates similar meaning does not have the same effect. The difference may be rooted in the kind of knowledge and meaning the group has generated around literacy and social studies during the course of the inquiry group sessions. Ron expressed his perspective during Session 2 in the context of a struggle over the meaning and role of literacy in social studies teaching and learning, and the relationship between the two; the core question at that point was how or whether to address the needs of students who had difficulty reading as defined both by decoding and comprehending. In contrast, Marty’s perspective is expressed in the context of talk that reveals increased reflection and broadened understandings about the meaning of literacy in social studies. As illustrated by Marty’s reference to “digging deeper,” the group has expanded its knowledge of the content of social studies to include the thinking and reasoning that characterize historical literacy. As such, it simultaneously represents literacy as a social language rooted in particular Discourses that include ways of talking, thinking, believing, and acting (Gee, 1991).

Ray contributes to this process of knowledge generation by distinguishing the way school social studies looked in the past (“memorize a bunch of dates”) with the way it looks today. Although he acknowledges the possibility that it might not always be so different (“...or it’s supposed to be”), the premise of his assertion goes unchallenged: that social studies is “more about using different sources.” This use of different sources is fundamental to how history is read and part of how historical reasoning is defined. This echoes Jerry’s earlier utterance that social studies is about “how to read all these documents.” At this point in the inquiry group sessions, the participants have grappled with picture and text documents that include primary and secondary sources, and materials created by outside authorities as well as teacher-created ones. During earlier sessions, much of the talk focused on questions over different types and number of sources, talk that often created tension. Although those questions are not likely settled, or
the issues resolved, the talk at this point in the series of meetings reflects a shift in what the participants consider significant enough to discuss.

Ruth’s utterance that students “need basic reading skills...to understand what they’re reading in the first place” is taken up by the group as part of what social studies encompasses in addition to historical “facts.” This is made clear as the group concurs that both “skills” and “content” should be part of what social studies students need to be successful. Because the reference to “content” occurs after Jerry, Ray, and Marty elaborate on discursive literate activities pertinent to social studies (e.g., “digging deeper into the sources, what they’re really saying about what happened”), the word seems to be functioning as a shorthand that communicates meaning more complex than the “bunch of dates and battles” that Ray recalls needing to memorize when he was in school. Thus, both generic reading skills and discipline-specific practices are treated as necessary to the teaching and learning of social studies as a school subject. Omitting the “content,” defined simultaneously as historical fact and historical thinking, would render it, according to Karen, as “just another period of English.”

Ray’s response suggesting that social studies teaching and learning is about figuring out “how to put the two together,” gets to the core of what the group grapples with throughout the eight weeks of sessions. The “two” to which he refers are the same “skills and content” to which Ron refers earlier, and which carries the socially situated meaning of generic reading and discipline-specific reading and reasoning underpinned by historical “facts.” Ray’s proposal to set aside the fact that “they want to call it literacy” by understanding it instead as “having a head for history” suggests that the source of some of the tension around this topic has more to do with language than with substance; Carly’s utterance, “That’s all we keep hearing: literacy in every subject,” and Ron’s response, “if you’re calling that literacy, fine,” are evidence of this. As teachers of social studies, the group demonstrates a clear ability to generate and interrogate knowledge around the discursive practices of negotiating texts in their subject area, but a strong
reluctance to name those practices as “literacy.” It is this reluctance that often hampered the group’s talk. It may point to at least one source of the unwillingness teachers express about teaching literacy in their content-area classrooms.

**Knowledge Work Around Literacy in Social Studies and Student Ability**

The issue of how to define literacy in social studies repeatedly comes to the forefront across these talk sessions. At the same time, the conflicting discourses of literacy and their place in social studies learning are framed by views of student ability. Although they remain mostly unspoken, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and labeling for special education all influence how student ability is perceived. As the participants grapple with these notions, they interrogate and generate knowledge around the kinds of literacy in social studies that teachers should teach, and the kinds of students who can and should engage in them. These activities highlight how teacher perceptions of student ability intersect with their collaboratively developing understandings of literacy, of social studies as a school subject, and of their role as social studies teachers.

These multiple and simultaneous layers of inquiry create potentially productive tensions. The talk that was produced by the inquiry group represents teachers raising questions that are grounded in issues of their own practice, and which I therefore see as being of value to them (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). In keeping with my inquiry as stance perspective, I view this value that the participants ascribe to questions around literacy and student ability as comprising potential to interrogate, transform, and generate knowledge.

**“Struggling” Readers and Texts**

During Session 2, the issue of student ability emerges framed as “students who struggle,” and “the ones who you know can’t read the way they should.” Ray elaborates
on the meaning of student ability by connecting it to social studies learning when he says, “...they can’t learn much history if they can’t read, right? Or, better, if they can’t understand what they’re reading?” Here, student ability is defined at least in part as loosely connected to reading skills. Ray stresses the significant role printed word text plays in history learning and suggests that student deficits exist both in decoding (“they can’t read”) and in comprehending (“can’t understand what they’re reading”). By extension, Ray’s talk also has the effect of suggesting that social studies cannot be taught without sufficient student ability in reading, here defined as decoding and generic comprehension. Left unexamined at this point, however, are the nature of the tasks being assigned and the pedagogical choices made prior to and while those tasks are being undertaken by students. Rachel supports the deficit perspective Ray describes, but focuses the talk more directly on the local context in which she teaches. Referring to what she calls “students who struggle, she asserts that “every year there’s at least a few;” Jerry reinforces this localization with, “Oh yeah, and more than there used to be for sure.”

The fact that the talk of Ray, Rachel, and Jerry, all Rockville teachers, focuses on the effect of student literacy deficits on social studies teaching and learning is significant. Rockville is the middle school situated in the less affluent and more racially and ethnically diverse part of the district; as such, Rockville students are presumed by teachers at both middle schools to be less able, and therefore in need of more educational supports as compared to Oakwood students. As a consequence, Rockville teachers tend to emphasize student deficits, while Oakwood teachers tend to deflect concerns around student ability. The connection of these tendencies to issues of race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status is rarely if ever directly confronted, however. Standing in as proxies are words like “struggling,” and phrases like, “can’t read,” and “can’t understand.” Thus, while the source of the “problem” of student ability specifically among Rockville students is often framed as deficits in reading skills, it is also seen as residing with the students themselves as a direct consequence of their birth and circumstances.
Oakwood teachers, on the other hand, tend to talk about the impact of curricular time constraints, rather than student ability, on their capacity to teach literacy and social studies. For example, Oakwood teacher Ron asserts that he doesn’t have time to address the student literacy deficits Rockville teachers raise because, “I don’t have time. 42 minutes a day. That’s all I’ve got. Can’t do it all.” The situated meaning of the otherwise unspecified “all” that he lacks the time to do suggests both the official social studies curriculum as outlined in and mandated by the district and state, and the “unofficial” curricula that Ron describes as “basic reading, how to study, how to get organized.” Ron positions these elements of “unofficial” curricula as less important and less rigorous than the curricula he does have time to address. In doing so, Ron’s talk positions Rockville students who require instruction in these areas as less able. Ron also positions himself as powerless over and unanswerable to student deficits in reading, deficits cited by Rockville teachers as roadblocks to social studies teaching and learning; at the same time, however, he also denies responsibility for student deficits in study and organizational skills, issues often raised by Rockville teachers although not specifically in this segment of talk. The situated meaning communicated by Ron’s articulation of these additional areas of typical Rockville teacher concern, further emphasizes that as an Oakwood teacher, Ron sees both his teaching situation and his students as different from, and by extension, more able than, those at Rockville.

During Session 3, segment #1 the issue of student ability comes into sharper focus as teachers continue to generate knowledge around its meaning as attached to perceived student reading deficits. Student ability framed in terms of student deficits is addressed through talk about the quantity of printed word text that students can read and work with independently. Thus, student ability is equated with the ability to read printed word texts, and the process of reading is defined generically with its relative accessibility to students evaluated by volume. When Ruth says, referring to a student inquiry that the group is examining, “There’s a ton here. More excerpts it looks like. More to read,” she suggests
that the number of documents to which reading must be applied is burdensome. Ruth reinforces this suggestion of a burdensome quantity when she says, “... But you know, it’s a lot.” Here, Ruth speaks within a speech genre of student needs and capacities both produced by the broad context of pedagogical discourse and constrained by the individualized context of her experience as a teacher, both of which inform the teaching choices she makes. For example, Ruth says, “you give them a page to read, they just blank it out, turn off,” and Jerry adds that certain (longer) texts “would definitely be over their heads, not all of them, but a lot. Kind of overwhelming...”

The talk in this session settles on two approaches to addressing the needs of students for whom longer texts are “overwhelming.” The approach that dominates the talk involves privileging picture documents over those that are text-based. Ruth says, “I would just give them the pictures, the maps or whatever;” and “The images are good. The maps and all”. Using the words “just give them the pictures” draws on a deficit discourse of student ability by positioning students as minimally capable; the word “just” frames picture documents with blurbs as more basic than other documents, possibly ones that are exclusively printed word text, or ones that contain more printed words. Also present in the talk is the idea of shortening the printed work text as a way to address the needs of students who “just blank out” pages of text. When Karen suggests mitigating the perceived problem of the quantity of documents by eliminating some, Ruth clarifies that the burden is not the number, but the kind of document. With respect to Bakhtin (1981), this is a communicative event in which what the speaker (Ruth) said has been heard, but how it is interpreted is not exclusively tied to her original meaning. This dialogic tension is connected to the sociocultural context of the inquiry group talk in which understandings of literacy in social studies and student ability are being tested and contested. Ruth defends the picture captions (“blurbs”) as reading, and Jerry corroborates her position with, “The blurbs could be good though. we could add to them if we think they’re too short.”
Thus, teachers identify a “problem” of student ability that they equate with a lack of skill reading printed word texts. They then seek and grapple with their own solutions, relying on experience and expertise derived from their particular teaching contexts. It is again significant to note that the teaching context of both Ruth and Jerry, whose talk dominates this segment, is Rockville. The emphasis of their talk on perceived deficits in student reading skills suggests these teachers’ perception of both the degree and extent of these deficits, and their impact on social studies teaching and learning. Their provisional solution is to minimize the need for students to read printed-word text by instead using images with blurbs, but it simultaneously limits students’ opportunities to engage with, and improve their ability to negotiate, longer printed-word texts. Debbie, a special education teacher at the high school, pushes the deficit discourse of student ability further by calling into question the capacity of students to comprehend even the blurbs; Ruth agrees with this assertion but concludes that “it’s better than these diary entries. Wow.” By drawing this evaluative comparison between the exclusively printed word text of diary entries and the primarily image-based “text” of picture documents, Ruth makes clear her view of picture documents as less difficult, and her view of students as less able. Jerry takes this evaluative stance on students further with his assertion that “Half of them won’t read it anyway.” It is unclear whether his meaning suggests unwillingness on the part of students, or the presumed inability previously stated.

This solution does not go unchallenged. Karen, an Oakwood teacher, voices her objection to the idea of exclusively using image-based documents when she says, “but we have to include something, like, really written. They have to, I mean, really read. Maybe not all of this. Maybe just one or two of them.” While at this point Karen’s talk does not make clear what “really written” or “really read” mean, she is interrogating the meaning Ruth attaches to reading as it applies to pictures and blurbs. By positioning them as something other than “really written,” Karen also attaches value to them that is less than something that is “really written.” At the same time, she is also interrogating how Ruth
evaluates student ability, and how Ruth conceives of teaching and learning in response to that evaluation. This can be interpreted through the several possible meanings embedded in Karen’s utterance that students “have to” read. First, there is the sense of “have to” as mandated requirement. This is conveyed both by the C3 website from which these student inquiries originate, and by the departmental directive to use them: Students “have to” read because they are required to do so. Also, however, there is the sense of “have to” as personal need. This sense of need can be viewed not as a consequence of an external, authoritative requirement, but as a consequence of individual responsibility: Students “have to” read because reading is fundamental and presupposed. It this through this double layer of interpretation that Karen communicates not only the value she places on committing students to read, but also the conviction that students can and should be reading. Karen thus challenges Ruth’s and Jerry’s proposed solution to the “problem” of student ability not by minimizing the reading to which students are exposed, but rather by affording them greater opportunities to hone their skills. She recognizes the difficulty a large amount of written text might create for some students but seeks a way to balance this potential with opportunity for growth: “Maybe not all of this. Maybe just one or two of them.”

The talk in this segment around blurbs on the one hand, and diary entries on the other suggests a binary perspective on reading that is closely linked to a binary understanding of student ability. The terms “blurbs” and “diary entries” work as proxies for “basic” and “real” reading and are suggestive of corresponding student ability. The labelling of the student inquiry being discussed as intended for 7th graders constitutes an authoritative discourse about 7th grade student ability. It does this by producing an assumption that the type and length of the documents, as well as the assignments associated with those documents, constitute an inquiry that 7th grade students should be able to negotiate; students who do so meet standards established by the authority of the state as represented by the website. Because the reading that is required by the inquiry
includes diary entries, these are construed as “real reading” in social studies for this grade level. This is the authoritative discourse that reverberates in Karen’s talk during this session. Ruth’s talk, however, works to subvert this authoritative discourse, as do the talk turns of Jerry and Debbie. Their utterances work to transform and generate knowledge about the meaning of “real reading” in social studies for 7th grade that grows out of their own teaching context. This provisionally generated knowledge positions short pieces of text like blurbs as more accessible to 7th grade students than longer ones; it also upholds picture documents as “better than these diary entries.” Thus, where Karen interprets blurbs and picture documents as “basic,” Ruth endorses them as “real.” It is at the border of these divergent understandings that the dialogic struggle occurs and which in turn makes the knowledge work of this session possible. It is also at this border that divergent perspectives on the ability of students at the two middle schools also becomes evident.

**Valuing Literacy Behaviors: “Readiness” and What Students “Need to Know”**

During the first segment of this session, the tension and ensuing knowledge work around literacy in social studies took the form of a struggle over the length and type of printed word text. By the second segment of the same session, the struggle shifts to issues of student “readiness” and “need” for learning and practicing various literacy behaviors. Also contested is which of these literacy behaviors are valued as productive. These interplays of talk illustrate a network of differences and controversies that are significant to these teachers. This network is shaped not only by contextualized discourses about literacy in social studies, but also by discourses around rules for acting as a teacher and a learner in the world of schooling (Bakhtin, 1981; Gee, 1990), discourses that often, as in this case, are in and create tension. What remains unspoken, but also contributes to this tension, are the issues of race suggested by the talk around literacy behaviors.

In segment #2 of Session 3 the talk focuses on a particular picture document that is part of a student inquiry. As the talk shifts from overarching talk about texts to talk about
a particular text, so does the framing of the issue of student ability. Alongside Marty’s, and to some extent Jerry’s, talk that move to critically analyze the perspective and biases represented by the picture under consideration, are Paula’s, Ruth’s, and Rachel’s contention that such critical analysis may not be necessary for students. Paula suggests that the group may be, “Digging a little deep here;” Ruth supports her perspective with the dismissive utterance, “the kids don’t need to know that, or see it that way, to answer the question;” and Rachel agrees with, “that’s all they need. That’s the question.”

Although these exchanges do not appear on their face to address student ability, a closer analysis reveals how it does. In its framing of student “need” as support towards correctly answering questions as opposed to engaging in critical analysis, the talk assigns student success solely to a routinized activity that ties student thinking to particular questions. Doing so establishes lowered expectations and suggests that some students are less than able to engage in the “higher” thinking of critical analysis. It is mostly Rockville teachers like Paula, Ruth, and Rachel, who pursue this line of talk, but Jerry, also from Rockville, speaks most directly to this point. Referring to seeking out the bias implied by the picture under consideration, he says, “All this other stuff’ll just confuse them.” In his foreclosure of opportunities for students to learn to recognize and explore possible bias, Jerry precludes them from engaging in a significant aspect of historical literacy. Teachers at both middle schools are well-aware that Rockville houses a larger percentage of students of color than does Oakwood. Here issues of student need and student ability act as proxies for issues of race and represent a discourse of color-blindness that fails to recognize the consequences for student learning that such a framing creates.

Simultaneously, the talk in this segment also draws connections between student ability and student readiness to tackle the challenges of critical analysis. Utterances such as, “There’s plenty of time for that though. They need the basics first” (Ruth, turn 20), “Not for the first inquiry. Too much” (Ruth, turn 38), and “For this one, actually, I think it’s enough” (Carly, turn 39) frame the process of seeking out bias in historical sources as
developmentally inappropriate. The talk also suggests that student readiness to learn is uniform across particular grade levels, and that learning itself is a linear process. Thus, the provisional knowledge generated in this segment around the “problem” of student ability and how to best address student needs is focused not simply on limiting to picture documents the historical sources with which students engage, but also on constraining the ways in which students are expected to engage with those images. Those are expectations that reflect a generic rather than a discipline-based definition of literacy, at least in the context of the grade 7 material that is under consideration. They also suggest that different literacy behaviors, such as answering direct questions, or analyzing documents with a critical eye, are valued differently. The tension between these valuations of literacy behaviors also produces knowledge around literacy in social studies.

Although this tension is expressed through talk, it is the actions of the participants that most clearly represent interrogation and generation of knowledge and meaning around student ability and expectations for, as well as valuations of, literacy behaviors. This becomes clear when literacy as critical analysis to identify bias is enacted by members of the group in the second segment. These enactments reveal additional discourses on which these teachers begin to draw, illustrating Gee’s (1991) definition of discourses as including ways of talking, thinking, believing, and acting. At the same time, Bakhtin (1981) sees the relationship between utterances as inseparable both from the speakers, and from the object of those utterances. These ideas are crystallized as the teachers work to interpret a picture of the Wampanoag that is supplied with a 7th grade student inquiry. As they deliberate over the interpretation of a picture document, they actively engage in acts of looking carefully, paying attention, thinking, and making connections that comprise a particular way of “reading” it that includes critical analysis. In doing so, meaning and knowledge is generated that draws on the aspect of literacy in social studies that involves inquiring into the possible bias of texts. At the same time, however, because they question the “need” for certain students to engage in this kind of
literacy, they make evaluative statements about student readiness and student ability with regard to particular literacy behaviors. Seen as more the more “advanced” behavior, critical analysis to identify bias is also more valued, while answering questions is viewed as more accessible or appropriate, but less valued.

Rather than simply selecting documents for a student exercise or persisting in a binary argument over too much or too little printed word text, these teachers begin themselves to participate in activities that work towards constructing a view of literacy that is transformed from what was earlier taken for granted. This is a transformation that, in the actions of the participants, embraces a variety of documents, both printed-word and image-based, and acknowledges the processes of reading that apply to this variety. These behaviors on the part of the participants reflect their own engagement in a kind of literacy that is pertinent to the field of history. How and whether these teacher behaviors translate into teaching approaches cannot be definitively determined by this study. However, it seems likely that teachers who cannot or do not themselves participate in the literacy behaviors associated with the field of history will be unlikely to do so with students.

**Valuing Literacy Behaviors: ICT and Special Education Students**

In Session 4, talk around the intersecting issues student ability, definitions of literacy in social studies, and the pedagogical reflections of those definitions shifts once again, but also circles back to talk in earlier sessions. Session 4 involves the examination of a student packet about which Carly requests feedback from the group. This segment of talk is especially significant because the packet that the group is considering is submitted by a teacher at Oakwood, and the talk around student ability involves teachers from both middle schools as well as the high school. Unlike some earlier talk sessions during which teacher perceptions of student ability appeared to be tied to the racial and socio-economic features of the school community they serve, here the participants’ talk across buildings coalesces more strongly around a deficit discourse of the ability of special education
students assigned to ICT, or integrated co-teaching, classroom settings. These teachers refer to these classes as “inclusion.” Students assigned to ICT sections are a mix of those with and without special education classification. When Carly expresses worry that the packet she contributes is “too hard,” she explains that her concern is that students who are specifically assigned to ICT sections might not be able to complete the task.

The segment of talk opens with Paula’s utterance, “Geez. A lot of reading.” This reverberates with Session 2 talk that involved a struggle over the appropriate length of printed word text for a 7th grade inquiry. In the segment from Session 4, however, Carly offers a different solution to the issue of printed-word text reading quantity. Conceding Paula’s point that it’s “a lot of reading,” Carly adds, “I do most of it together, as a class, so that helps.” The notion that interactively negotiating printed word texts alleviates the difficulty of quantity goes unchallenged here, suggesting that the group recognizes and accepts this pedagogical approach as effective for middle school students in this way. It references a particular ideology around learning as developmentally linked, which makes doing “most of it together, as a class” appear to be a “natural” aspect of middle school literacy learning in social studies (Bakhtin, 1986). This naturalness attaches to 7th grade students a lack of readiness in skills or perhaps stamina to work independently through the texts Carly includes in her packet.

This perspective is reinforced by Ruth’s suggestion that Carly is “ambitious” for working with students on loose and strict construction of the Constitution, the topic of the student packet Carly has submitted for the group to consider. Ruth’s talk does not explicitly address if she considers Carly ambitious because she thinks the topic is difficult, the material is difficult, students are unable to handle it, or all or some of these; Ruth’s talk may also reflect her view of her own Rockville students’ ability to successfully complete the assignment. Because the topic is included as part of the state-mandated curriculum, however, and Carly is an experienced teacher, any of these interpretations ultimately attaches to students. The generation of knowledge about student
ability continues to build as the talk segment progresses. Carly herself describes the material “hard,” and admits to worrying “about it being too hard.” Debbie refers to the material as “tough;” and Ray agrees that, “It’s not easy, no.” Although these utterances directly attach to the packet’s texts, they also indirectly speak to the students for whom they are intended. Ruth’s question about how long it takes to complete, and Carly’s response, “Uhhh, honestly, at least a couple of periods,” suggests something about the length of the packet, but also signifies its perceived difficulty for students; when Ray expresses approval of a party scenario that the packet includes, but suggests that this part of the assignment be moved to the beginning in order to “get them thinking” before they read, he signals a view that students may struggle with the assignment otherwise. Any of these meanings, although they may on the surface reference the material itself, are ultimately suggestive of student ability that is insufficient to meet the demands being made.

The accumulated effect of this talk segment is to position particular students as less-able. It becomes clear that the specific students who cause Carly’s worry that the packet is “too hard” are those who are assigned to ICT. When Carly confirms that she has used this material before with students, she qualifies it with, “but not with inclusion.” The socially situated reference is specifically to ICT students classified as needing special education, and to the general education students who are also assigned to the ICT sections. As the talk of this segment proceeds, it evokes and develops meaning around a deficit discourse of student ability that becomes directed at these particular students.

For example, a question arises about the number of special education students who qualify for ICT section assignment. Ron expresses doubt about the selection process itself, and Meg reinforces his concern when, referring to the ability of students classified as requiring special education she says, “They’re getting weaker and weaker.” The effect of this perceived weakness, according to Meg, is to create time pressure. When she says, “It’s hard keeping them all in the same place,” Jerry concurs and offers his solution to
what is established as a shared problem: “I’ll just decide, honestly, the inclusion periods, you guys get a copy of notes. Catch them up.” The socially situated meaning of this is that notes for the content is supplied to students in lieu of some other pedagogical approach to engaging students with the material. The connection to perceived deficits in student ability is made clear by Ron who supports Jerry’s solution by saying, “No choice when you’re spending twice as much time trying to get them to do the higher level stuff.” The socially situated meaning of the “higher level stuff” are the discursive literate practices connected to history as a discipline such as those that are included in the packet Carly has contributed to the group. Thus, these kinds of literacy behaviors are positioned as different from, and also more advanced than getting a copy of class notes. Because Ron characterizes these “higher level” behaviors as more time consuming to teach in the particular context of the ICT sections being discussed, he simultaneously implies that at least some students in these sections are less able to handle the critical thinking demands made by those literacy behaviors. This perspective is reinforced when Ron later says, “Most of them can’t do the work. Not without all kinds of help.” Here, Ron’s talk also further connects the notion of “higher level” literacy behaviors with “the work” of social studies, and positions students who cannot handle such work “without all kinds of help” as less than capable.

Debbie, the only special educator in the inquiry group, pushes back on the idea of using notes as a substitute for having students engage in more “advanced” literacy behaviors. She equates doing so as “changing the curriculum,” rather than providing “modifications” to it. Her talk suggests that the words “change” and “modify” carry different localized meanings. Because students who are classified as requiring special education often receive “modifications” based on their individual needs, Debbie is drawing on a shared discourse of what special education means and how it works in the context of this school district. She clarifies the distinction between “change” and “modify” when she says, “If they’re not getting the same learning experience, then it
defeats the whole purpose.” In this way, Debbie privileges the notion of “learning experience” and connects it both to “modifications” and to the “whole purpose” of what can be interpreted as ICT in particular, or social studies as a school subject more generally. Both Jerry and Ron reject this framing. As teachers of ICT sections, Jerry and Ron, as well as Meg, draw on discourses of student ability based at least in part on their lived experiences of ICT classrooms. Their positioning is thus different from Debbie who speaks from the perspective of someone who exclusively teaches special education students outside of an ICT setting. Facing what they perceive as the challenges of keeping their various sections of social studies “in the same place,” and the ICT sections “up to speed,” these teachers generate knowledge about what it means to teach and learn social studies. This knowledge, while contested, construes certain literacy behaviors, like distinguishing strict from loose interpretations of the Constitution, as more advanced, and therefore too difficult and possibly out of reach for the particular students in their classrooms who are classified as special education. Thus, student ability becomes determined by special education labeling which, by extension, is tied to whether a generic literacy practice like receiving and reading a copy of class notes, or a disciplinary practice like analyzing quotes to determine perspective on an issue, is an appropriate pedagogical approach.

The Social Studies Teacher’s Role and Responsibilities

As the talk progressed during the inquiry group sessions, talk about student ability often intersected with talk about the role and responsibilities of the social studies teacher to meet the learning needs of students. Perspectives on this issue were sometimes contentious, and shifted depending both on how student ability was being evaluated and how literacy in social studies was being defined.

During Session 2, for example, Ron states his understanding of his responsibility as a social studies teacher. According to Ron, it is “How to look for bias, holes in people’s
version of what happened, for their agenda, what’s at stake, all that;” He emphasizes the connection between the disciplinary literacy behaviors he describes, and his view of his role as a social studies teacher when, a few turns later, he adds, “That’s our job, history. Not teaching kids to read.” The teaching of social studies is thus construed not as a process of transmission of historical facts, but as the transmission of a set of teaching and learning behaviors that Ron views as essential to his discipline. From a Bakhtinian perspective, Ron’s utterance is defined not only by its relationship to the object of the talk, and its speaker, but also by its relationship to other utterances that include “voices that are sometimes infinitely distant, unnamed, almost impersonal...almost undetectable” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 124). As an insider to the context of this study, I am aware of the fact that Ron was asked by the department chair to attend an off-site professional development day on historical thinking. Ron’s talk, particularly in its reference to identifying bias and corroborating sources (“holes in people’s version of what happened”) resounds with voices of that outside expertise. His talk reflects an authoritative view that the approaches and skills warranted by that expertise are exclusive of, and distinct from, other pedagogical acts like “teaching kids to read,” acts that at least some teachers in this context feel are part of their responsibility. Ro goes so far as to insist that teachers, “Stick to what you were hired to do. Teach social studies.”

In contrast, although with varying degrees of emphasis, Ray, Rachel, and Debbie challenge Ron’s view. Ray brings up the need for students to be able to “read,” understood at this point as decoding and generic comprehension, in order for them to learn history. In doing so, he expresses an understanding of his responsibility as a teacher of social studies that, in contrast to Ron’s, must sometimes include teaching generic literacy skills. Rachel echoes this perspective when she says, “obviously, we all have students who struggle, every year there’s at least a few.” The “struggle” to which Rachel refers is understood by the group to mean difficulties in generic literacy skills, and her characterization of this as an “obvious,” widespread, and ongoing condition suggests that
she sees these perceived deficits as part of the social studies teacher’s responsibility to address. Debbie directly challenges Ron’s refusal to accept this responsibility when she says, “So what do you do? Ignore them? The ones who you know can’t read the way they should in what? 8th grade, or whatever? You just move on like everything is fine?” Debbie’s utterance powerfully expresses a perspective that a teacher’s responsibility, in addition to meeting disciplinary or curricular requirements, is to meeting student needs, even when those needs fall outside of what might strictly be considered part of the subject being taught. Thus, this segment of talk reflects inquiry as stance as teachers interrogate the knowledge, practice, and theory that Ron’s talk suggests, and as they generate knowledge about the social studies teacher’s role and responsibilities. At this point these are positioned as dependent upon responsiveness to local student needs, needs that are simultaneously construed as deficits in student ability.

The notion of responsiveness to student needs as an aspect of teacher responsibility surfaces again in Session 4. When Carly submits her student packet to the group for discussion, her verbalized intent is to get “suggestions” because of her concern that the packet is “hard.” Although the talk eventually reveals that the perceived difficulty of the tasks is tied to Carly’s perception of the ability of students labeled as needing special education, the talk also uncovers further generation of knowledge around the role of the teacher. In its very motivation of seeking help from her colleagues, Carly’s willingness to share student material she created and open it up for critique points to a view of the teacher as responsible for assigning tasks that meet student needs. In this case, those needs are defined by tasks that are challenging enough to provide room for student growth without being too difficult for students to accomplish. Establishing this balance is part of what the talk explores as part of the teacher’s responsibility. When Ray suggests that Carly move the party scenario segment of the packet from the end to the beginning so that it can be used to, “Get them thinking about strict and loose before they read,” Carly expresses concern that this change would provide, “too much of a hint.” Thus, at
the same time that Carly worries that the material she is expecting students too complete
might be “too hard,” she is also troubled by the possibility of making it too easy. Ray
expresses the significance of finding this “sweet spot” of pedagogy when he says, “It’s
not easy, no. But good.”

Complicating the notion of assignments balanced to meet the needs of students, is
also a concern about the timing structure of teaching and learning. Meg mentions the
importance of keeping all students “in the same place,” and “up to speed,” and Ron talks
about, “spending twice as much time trying to get them to do the higher level stuff.”
These utterances continue to generate knowledge about the teacher’s responsibility to
students. For Meg, this responsibility includes moving the curriculum at a particular pace.
This notion of responsibility assumes learning to be a linear process that is expected to
occur at a consistent rate. For Ron, “higher level stuff” is worth the extra time it may take
to teach, even if this means that in certain cases, a transmission model of teaching and
learning prevails in the form of a copy of class notes. Debbie’s challenge of this approach
frames the teacher’s role as one of providing “the same learning experiences” to all
students. Failing to do so, in Debbie’s words, “defeats the whole purpose.” Although the
“purpose” to which Debbie refers is specifically the ICT setting, it can also be understood
as referring more generally to education. Rather than consistency in pace, Debbie
suggests that consistent experiences for learning, are crucial.

By Session 7, the talk around defining the role of the social studies teacher is
contextualized not by talk about student ability, about the relative difficulty of student
tasks, or about how classroom time is best used, but by talk more broadly about the
meaning and purpose of social studies as a school subject. Thus, unlike earlier sessions,
the Session 7 talk does not focus on the length or type of texts that are most appropriate
to use with students, but instead grapples with defining an ideology of social studies
teaching and learning. When Donna challenges Marty’s approach of using an inquiry to
teach about apartheid without first providing “the background, just the facts of that
history,” Ruth says, “...in my opinion, the facts don’t really matter so much. They don’t remember them anyway, most of them.” Although her statement that most students don’t remember facts implies a deficit discourse of student ability, it is softened by her perspective that facts are not terribly significant. By prefacing her view of students as less able with her view of facts as less important, the depth of the student deficit to which she refers is reduced. Ruth’s dismissal of the place of historical facts in the middle school classroom prompts Jerry to provide clarification. His utterance that 7th and 8th grade social studies is “more like a vehicle” to “Get them ready” suggests a particular view of the role of the middle school social studies teacher as different from that of teachers in subsequent grades. To get students “ready,” especially in terms of “Teach[ing] them to think,” suggests a felt responsibility to students, but to their later teachers as well, that certain skills, including ways of thinking, are in place.

This becomes clear after Ron questions what Jerry means by “vehicle,” and Jerry elaborates that it is showing students “larger themes,” with a focus on teaching them to “think and to hopefully instill skills with them.” This suggests a perspective on student ability that belies the deficits that talk during earlier sessions emphasized. Jerry’s utterance, in fact, stands in contrast to his own talk during Session 3 when he says that longer readings “would definitely be over their heads, not all of them, but a lot.” This time, although Jerry mentions reading, he does so without referencing possible student deficits. In fact, when he describes the skills students need to learn as “how to read all these documents, not just skim them or memorize things,” he suggests a kind of reading that encompasses aspects of historical thinking and literacy. Reading has become less a matter of how much, and more a matter of how it’s done; in this case, it includes multiple sources (“all these documents”), deeply considered (“not just skim them”) and moving beyond historical fact (not simply memorizing). In the process of this provisional generation, interrogation, and transformation of knowledge around the social studies teacher’s role and responsibilities, the talk shifts away from contextualizing these as
defined by student ability. Instead, when Jerry frames the middle school subject of social studies as a “vehicle,” he minimizes his role in the transmission of historical content and emphasizes his role as a facilitator of historical literacy processes and practices.

Thus, the role and responsibility of teachers extends beyond “covering” the curriculum to include meeting students where they are in their individual learning development; assigning student tasks that are balanced as both appropriately challenging and achievable; keeping students on a similar time table for learning; devoting additional instructional time to tasks that require critical thinking; and providing consistent learning experiences to all students. These ways of defining the roles and responsibility of teachers as interrogated and generated by this inquiry group reflect some of the complexities of teaching and learning literacy in the social studies classroom.

**Summary of Findings Around Knowledge Work in Social Studies**

What these segments demonstrate is that as teachers actively engage in inquiry group talk, they also find themselves engaging in inquiry as stance, inventing and negotiating ideology, pedagogies, and strategies with colleagues (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) around what it means to teach history in the context of the secondary level social studies classroom. Their talk works to counter the idea of teaching “simply as ‘carriers’ of others’ discourses, but as interrogators and interpreters of them, as agents, activists, and authors of their own practices” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 289). In doing so, they challenge the authoritative view of how students “should” learn and how teachers “should” teach. Perceived deficits in student ability are positioned as problematic as a result of their impact on the teacher’s perceived responsibility to address both generic and disciplinary literacy practices, at least at the middle school level. These are positioned as significant and worthy of pedagogical time and effort, even as perceived
student deficits, time constraints, and a goal of consistent and balanced learning experiences complicate teachers’ ability to do so.

Although the knowledge and meaning that is generated, transformed, and interrogated during these talk sessions is provisional, it is knowledge work to which these teachers attach value. As such, although the inquiry group talk may not be defended as productive in tangibly sustainable ways, its pursuit is consequential in the collaborative understandings these teachers explore and develop around literacy in social studies.
Chapter VI
DISCUSSION AND POSSIBILITIES

This is a reconstruction. It’s impossible to say a thing exactly the way it was because what you say can never be exact ... there are too many parts, sides, crosscurrents, nuances; too many gestures which could mean this or that, too many shapes ... too many flavors, in the air or on the tongue, half-colors, too many. (Atwood, Handmaid’s Tale, p. 373)

Introduction

I began this dissertation research in the hope of describing some of what the landscape of literacy and literacy expectations in social studies classrooms looks like from the perspective of teachers. In doing so, I also hoped to shed light on how teachers navigate the complexity and contention that is often part of this landscape. Although I accomplished some of what I set out to do, there was much more complexity embedded in the data than any one analysis or analytical framework could possibly express. Thus, although consistent with my theoretical framework, I focused my attention on the productive and generative potential of the teacher talk around literacy teaching and learning in social studies, I necessarily had to avert my gaze from all but the most obvious of aspects of this potential.

What surprised me most about these segments of talk were their depth and breadth, but also the candor with which these teachers seemed willing to express themselves despite the tensions that were created. Where on the one hand, professional development is often criticized by teachers for being too theoretical, this talk clearly reveals a
willingness, and even an eagerness, to take on questions about what reading, literacy, and teaching social studies mean. In doing so, there is also an implied crossing of the border between the presumably theoretical and analytical realm of research, and the active and experiential realm of practice. Thus, the tensions that became evident are characteristic of the productive and generative tensions that exist when inquiry and practice are considered in relation to one another (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). In some sense, then, since I am taking an inquiry stance, I should have expected the tension that was generated. The experience of my pilot study inquiry groups, however, belied that expectation. For the most part, those meetings demonstrated the establishment of a pseudocommunity in which conflict was suppressed and the appearance of consensus was maintained (Grossman, Wineburg & Woolworth, 2001). Six of the fifteen participants in the inquiry group that is the focus of this study had already participated in at least one of the pilot study groups. Thus, the social norms of the pseudo-community may have been weakened not by longer or more frequent meetings, but by the cumulative effect of earlier sessions. Furthermore, many of these teachers, particularly those from the two middle schools who comprised eleven of the fifteen participants, had known and worked together to varying degrees over a number of years; in fact, only Ruth and Rachel from Rockville had fewer than ten years of experience working in the district. As a result, by the time of the study’s first inquiry group meeting, there was an already-developing group dynamic in which most members were less invested in performing the identity of the competent and committed teacher, and more willing to engage openly in conflict.

Thus, I found myself grappling with a range of tensions and conflicts that emerged within the inquiry group as moments of intensity. These episodes somewhat unexpectedly opened a window into the role of conflict in the collaborative efforts of teacher inquiry. The most prominent of these included conflict over what literacy means, what it means to teach literacy in the context of social studies and in the context of (perceived) student ability, particularly in connection to race, and over teacher agency to propose and enact
pedagogical and curricular changes. It was during those episodes that I attended to the
ways these teachers’ talk reflected and produced local and situated understandings of
literacy in the context of social studies. These local understandings of social studies
literacy were shaped by dominant Discourses of reading, literacy, social studies learning,
standards, accountability, and student ability. At the same time, these teachers often
reflected and produced situated meanings that interrogated and transformed these
dominant Discourses. These findings around the generation of knowledge in the context
of a collaborative teacher inquiry group are in line with research that shows that group
discussions have the potential to build on individual contributions in ways that would be
less likely or impossible on an individual level (Thomas et al., 1998). Less promising is
the finding that talk about student ability often masked talk about race; even in the
context of a group of teachers who were familiar and comfortable enough to engage in
some open disagreement about issues around literacy and social studies, the subject of
race remained taboo.

Literacy is often framed in research and also by teachers as a generic ability to read
and write with understanding. In particular, reading is understood as a fixed process of
decoding and comprehending printed word text with comprehension evaluated by
answering questions. This content-area literacy approach to adolescent literacy considers
these components so key to literacy as to be synonymous with it. It emphasizes and is
dependent upon instruction in generic cognitive reading strategies and is the dominant
approach to subject area literacy both in schools and in literacy research. Alongside this
view is the disciplinary literacy approach which recognizes the important role of reading
in literacy, but broadens the scope to include a wider range of discursive literate practices
that are discipline-specific. It also recognizes literacy as inherent to disciplines, rather
than ancillary to them (Moje, 2008). These disciplinary literacy practices include close
reading of multiple sources of historical information, corroboration of information
expressed in those sources, evaluation of possible bias, and contextualization of the sources.

The two approaches of content-area literacy and disciplinary literacy are most often represented as theoretical binaries and research frequently makes claims about the advantages of one approach over another. What is rarely explored is how teachers themselves talk about, understand, interpret, and navigate literacy teaching and learning in the context of the school subject of social studies. Thus, in this chapter, I discuss my principal claims about teachers’ perspectives on these issues in relation to the literature on literacy in content areas. These claims highlight how my study contributes to the landscape of education research on the subject. I also consider the implications of this research for social studies literacy pedagogy, teacher development, and future research. Finally, I conclude with a critique of this study and propose pathways for schools and teachers interested in building student literacy in social studies.

**Principal Claims**

In this section I integrate the data and my analyses from Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 to generate a principal set of claims about the teacher talk that was produced around literacy in social studies in the context of a collaborative teacher inquiry group. The claims, which I will explore and discuss in the context of my literature review, derive from my research questions. First, I will list the claims, and then I will examine them in more detail, considering their implications for social studies literacy pedagogy.

1) The typical discourse patterns of the inquiry group talk around literacy was shaped by curricular and institutional expectations and produced normalized notions of what counts as reading and texts in social studies classrooms; thus, the talk around literacy drew heavily on a dominant Discourse of literacy defined generically.
2) While the talk of middle and secondary level social studies teachers around literacy drew heavily on a dominant Discourse of literacy defined generically, disciplinary discourses were also present in their understandings and practices.

3) The inquiry group talk around literacy was shaped by discourses of student ability that sometimes connected to disparate student populations between the two middle schools that masked talk about race. It also sometimes suggested developmental links, and at other times connected to class sections that did or did not include students with special needs.

4) Moments of intensity that arose out of tensions or conflict resulted in the interrogation, transformation, and generation of knowledge around literacy in social studies; it broadened to include discipline-specific practices while continuing to encompass generic ones.

Curricular and Institutional Constraints Produced Normalized Notions of Reading and Texts

A knowledge-of-practice perspective positions teachers as competent professionals who pose and answer questions of educational theory and instructional practice from their own knowledge and teaching experience (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Viewed from this perspective, the way teachers talk about literacy reflects aspects of how they understand it and thus, how they may approach teaching it. This research shows that the inquiry group talk about literacy in social studies was heavily shaped by curricular and institutional expectations. These expectations were interpreted by the inquiry group to focus on cognitive text-processing strategies as applied to discipline specific texts. Implicit in the inquiry group talk was an assumption of “reading to learn,” the process of which may require a repertoire of reading skills for middle and high school students that differs from those used in the lower grades (Brozo et al., 2013; Moje, 2007). The talk framed this kind of reading as important in the service of answering questions and optimizing the acquisition of content area knowledge, and thus often expressed a
transmission model of learning. As a result, the group talk around literacy produced normalized notions of reading and texts. Understandings of literacy were often expressed as synonymous with generic reading and to some extent also writing, and were thereby both guided and constrained by the discourse structures required by a content-area literacy approach. This way of thinking about literacy emphasizes cognitive reading strategies which, as was true in this inquiry group talk, is the dominant discourse about literacy in schools (Mraz et al., 2009; Ratekin et al., 1985). The construct of literacy as cognitive reading translates into the way literacy is most often taught in secondary level content area classrooms (Bean, 2000; Levstik, 2008). Based on the talk produced during this inquiry group, the findings of my literature review in this regard were corroborated, particularly for the teachers of middle school.

Another finding of this research is that teachers’ perceptions of literacy expectations are shaped by their understandings of the word “literacy” itself. Because a dominant Discourse of literacy was prevalent in the talk, and because the thinking and behaviors proscribed by this Discourse are generically articulated, they were viewed as more applicable to the school subject of English as opposed to social studies. While the inquiry group talk around literacy mostly focused on reinforcing cognitive text processing strategies such as answering questions and learning vocabulary as geared toward non-fiction texts, the term “literacy” itself was most often interpreted as equivalent to reading comprehension, a topic that teachers tended to identify as part of the English curriculum. Even when the talk of this inquiry group included aspects of thinking about and negotiating texts as defined by the discipline of social studies and history, teachers were reluctant to identify these practices as “literacy.” For example, when the inquiry group engaged in discussions about multiple sources of information, using a variety of types of “texts,” and recognizing bias, these activities were addressed as “having a head for social studies” or “learning to think.” In fact, at one point when Ray suggested that these might be ways social studies teachers could interpret and work
with literacy, Ron responded with skepticism about the acceptability of such a definition. Even when Ron himself specifically articulated aspects of the discursive literate practices of social studies, such as corroborating sources and evaluating bias, he did not frame these as “literacy,” and it was not taken up by the group as such. Instead, the term “literacy” was connoted by the group to refer to generic reading. Thus, in addition to other factors, teachers’ reluctance to teach what is called “literacy” stemmed from the prevalence of the dominant Discourse of literacy, the practices and behaviors associated with which teachers viewed as more properly within the purview of the English, rather than social studies department. As some studies have suggested (e.g., Cantrell et al., 2009; Curwen et al., 2010; Fisher et al., 2011), teacher beliefs and attitudes about “literacy” may itself operate as a barrier for content-area teachers who think about and negotiate texts from the perspective of their discipline, but who do not consider these approaches and behaviors as “literacy.”

Nonetheless, although the group struggled with the role literacy instruction (in the form of reading) should have in the social studies classroom, the construct of literacy as generically defined remained mostly unchallenged and unexamined. For example, while the type, number, and length of texts students should be responsible for reading was debated, the premise of connecting these texts to specific questions for students to answer in order to demonstrate comprehension was not. Paula’s talk during Session 3 summed it up as, “This whole thing is supposed to be about literacy, right? That’s what we’re talking about. You want them to be able to answer the question” (turn 24). This is in line with research that suggests that secondary level content area teachers have a singular view of literacy as generic reading comprehension (Gillespie & Rasinski, 1989).

As a result of this finding I wonder if the talk and work around literacy in the disciplines might be more productively addressed with teachers not as “literacy” but as historical (or scientific, mathematical, artistic and so on) “thinking.” Doing so honors the distinctive reading (and writing) practices of the discipline by focusing attention on its
inherent analytical processes and approaches. It also avoids the apparent pitfalls of a “literacy of everything” in which all reading is collapsed into a singular set of practices, and all comprehension is construed as the successful acquisition of one kind of meaning. Since, as this research shows, teachers tend to default to a definition of literacy as generically defined, and since these generic skills and capacities are deeply embedded in the consciousness of teachers as intimately connected to the school subject of English, a different way of referring to “literacy” in the disciplines is required. By shifting the focus on to the “thinking” of the field, rather that the “literacy,” teachers may be able to more easily get beyond the binary battles of content area versus disciplinary literacy, and escape their own doubt and insecurity around a topic they may see as foreign both to their training and responsibility.

Also consistent with the findings of my literature review, tension was revealed in the inquiry group talk between the curricular pressure to “cover content” of grade-level social studies, and the responsibility to teach or reinforce generic reading strategies (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009; Ness, 2009; Vaughn et.al., 2013; Wilson, 2011). When the teachers in the inquiry group talked about literacy, they most often did so in a way that reflected the integration of a repertoire of cognitive reading comprehension strategies with content area learning (Snow, 2002). This integration, however, was perceived as challenging both because of curricular pressures, and because of time constraints imposed by the structure of secondary level schooling. Some of this tension was also connected to negative attitudes teachers expressed about reading instruction, a finding that is in line with research on the topic (Gillespie & Rasinski, 1989). The responsibility to teach or reinforce reading strategies was perceived by some participants as imposed by outside authorities such as the department chair or the state, but for others it was discerned as a responsibility derived out of student need. Their perception was that students struggled with comprehending texts, a finding that is consistent with research that identified text complexity as the main area to affect comprehension (National Center for Educational
Statistics, 2011). The teachers’ perceptions of student’s ability to navigate complex texts provoked talk about the length and type of texts that were appropriate for particular grade levels. Thus, some teachers in this inquiry group interpreted the responsibility to teach literacy as a personal mandate, even when it was not explicitly institutionally framed as such. This is not a finding that was corroborated by the literature in my review and seemed to be prevalent more among the middle school, rather than the high school teachers. This may be in part because middle school teachers also tended to interpret their responsibility to students in terms of ensuring their preparedness for the rigor of later grades. Middle school, as the name suggests, is also viewed as transitionary for students. Inherent in this transition is a notion of moving learning from a more teacher-centered or student-dependent focus, to a more student-centered, or student-independent focus. Thus, the balance of instruction, assessment, and responsibility in grades seven and eight tend to be in flux with teachers of 7th grade sensing a greater need to provide their students with guidance and support for learning than teachers of 8th grade or high school do.

Although some of these teachers said they felt obligated, as a result of perceived student need, to include reading instruction as part of their curricula, they nonetheless often expressed reluctance to do so. Part of this reluctance was expressed in terms of their feeling ill-prepared or ill-suited to the task. In addition to curricular pressures and connotations of the word “literacy” as discussed above, the prevalence of a dominant Discourse of literacy with its generically articulated behaviors and activities also contributed to this sense. This is consistent with research reporting that content-area teachers are often unwilling to teach literacy, at least in part because they are skeptical about their own ability and preparedness to do so (Gillespie & Rasinski, 1989; Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009; Moje et al., 2000; Ness, 2009; Vaughn et. al., 2013; Wilson, 2011).

Another finding that is in line with that of my literature review is that teachers in general interpreted literacy teaching as a mandate when literacy expectations were evaluated by means of standardized student assessments (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009;
Ness, 2009; Vaughn et al., 2013; Wilson, 2011). One difference, however, is that this seemed to be the case whether or not such assessments were associated specifically with social studies. This may be because, for the district in which this study was conducted, there is no state or local standardized testing in social studies. As a result, social studies teacher evaluations are based in part on how students do on the state ELA assessment, or in the case of upper grades, the NYS English Regents. This linking of the appraisal of the so-called “effectiveness” of social studies teachers to a content area other than their own may increase pressure to include instruction that might otherwise be viewed as immaterial.

**A Dominant Discourse of Literacy was Prevalent in the Talk Alongside Evidence of Disciplinary Understandings**

Another overarching finding of this study was that while social studies teachers’ talk about literacy in social studies drew heavily on a dominant Discourse of literacy, it also reflected awareness of and engagement in disciplinary practices. Over the course of the eight weeks of inquiry group meetings, the talk, but more often, the actions of the participants focused on behaviors and practices that were consistent with a disciplinary view, even when they were not framed as such. Furthermore, although according to the findings of my literature review, textbook reading continues to dominate instructional time in middle and secondary social studies classrooms (Alvermann & Moore, 1991; Bain, 2006; Levstik, 2008), this was not substantiated by the talk produced in this inquiry group. Although textbooks were briefly mentioned during several of the inquiry group meetings, it was either in the context of concern about incomplete coverage of topics (e.g., Marty, Session 7), or with regard to their helpfulness as outlines of curricula, and as sources of maps, graphs, illustrations, quiz and test questions, and project ideas. None of the talk indicated that these teachers relied exclusively or predominantly on textbooks; however, it is beyond the scope of this study to determine whether or not this is consistent with their classroom enacted pedagogy.
Ron, Marty, Ray, and Jerry were participants whose talk included some explicitly expressed understandings of issues in history as provisional, and historical texts as value- and purpose-laden accounts of the past (Moje et al., 2011; Wineburg, 1993). While Ron’s talk about history as represented in the school subject of social studies was most specific (e.g., “how to look for bias,” “people’s version of what happened,” and “what’s at stake,” Session 2, turn 17), it was also most absolute; although he was clearly aware of a generically defined sense of literacy, he was unwilling to acknowledge any place for it in his classroom. It is also important to note that earlier in the school year, Ron had been selected by the department chair to attend a one-day teacher professional development workshop on historical thinking. It was unclear why or how the department chair asked Ron in particular to attend. The purported intention, however, was that Ron would turn-key what he learned for the rest of the department. Other than mentioning this experience at a department meeting, this never occurred in any systematic way. What was clear during the inquiry group is that Ron successfully took up some of the language of historical literacy in his talk; whether he also took up some of the classroom practices to support historical thinking was not explored in this study.

Likewise, although he did not directly contest a dominant Discourse of literacy as Ron did, some of the talk Marty produced also explicitly referenced disciplinary-based behaviors and practices (e.g., “digging deeper into the sources, what they’re really saying about what happened,” Session 7, turn 11; “interpreting the details...seeing the different angles,” turn 25). Ray’s talk also sometimes explicitly referenced disciplinary practices (“the facts about the past, plus how to figure out what they mean,” Session 7, turn 18), as did Jerry’s, albeit more obliquely (“give them larger themes” and “teach them to think,” Session 7, turn 7). Jerry’s talk, while less specific, is consistent with the perspective of some scholars that a disciplinary literacy approach is crucial to adolescent literacy development (International Reading Association, 2012; Rainey & Moje, 2012). It echoes Moje’s (1996) perspective that literacy in content-area classrooms might be viewed as
means by which students’ independent thinking can be developed as it adapts both to the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge, and to engagement in domain-specific literacy practices.

Although the discursive literate practices of social studies were only occasionally addressed directly, participants’ engagement in these practices reflected awareness and understanding. For example, during the first segment of Session 3, the participants considered different types of texts to use with students. Despite research that shows that textbooks continue to dominate the way history is taught in secondary level social studies classrooms (Alvermann & Moore, 1991; Bain, 2006; Levstik, 2008), there was no mention of textbooks during this talk. The fact that these deliberations were motivated by a goal of modifying sources from a website-developed historical inquiry for student use may have precluded a discussion of textbooks, however. The talk nonetheless demonstrated an understanding of a broad range of text types that may be useful in the study of history. These included printed-word texts, but also maps, charts, graphs, and images. Similarly, much of the talk during the second segment of Session 3 revolved around teachers analyzing the meanings represented by a picture document. It may be significant to note that Marty, a 10th grade teacher, initiated the talk around bias, and was often the sole voice in promoting its importance. Indeed, throughout the inquiry group sessions, it was generally the high school teachers, like Marty and Sarah most notably, who took the lead in promoting talk around literacy specifically as it pertains to history. It is unclear whether this was a product of their own backgrounds, their pedagogical style, or the fact that teaching older adolescents made them more willing to pursue the analytical aspect of historical thinking with students; some combination of these factors is also possible. Although the middle school teachers who were in attendance that day struggled over whether the analysis of possible bias was necessary or even relevant for their students, they demonstrated their own ability to engage in this aspect of disciplinary thinking.
The focus of the student material Carly contributed during Session 4 on strict and loose construction of the Constitution was to “show the different perspectives” (Ruth, turn 3). This packet reflects and attempts to teach some of the discursive literate practices of the discipline through a kind of historical inquiry. The approach represented by Carly’s material brings to bear some of the same approaches used by Reisman (2012a, 2012b) in the “Reading Like a Historian” curriculum (cite Wineburg and Reisman). This curriculum uses documents that present contradictory views of historical events to help students develop skills relevant to historical literacy. Carly’s talk about how she used the material also reflects a “cognitive apprenticeship” approach to instruction which aims to help students learn and adopt reading strategies and routines used by proficient readers (see Greenleaf et al., 2001, 2010; Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009). For example, at turn 2 Carly said she does “most of it together, as a class, so that helps,” suggesting that she values student-teacher interactions during which the teacher makes explicit and models particular reading strategies. This kind of modelling is also an aspect of cognitive apprenticeship, particularly as described by Greenleaf and others (2001, 2009, 2010). Although Carly’s approach is not made entirely clear during the talk, and there is no way of knowing whether her talk reflects her actual classroom activity, her description of doing “most” of the packet interactively may suggest a gradual increase of student responsibility for the use of the strategies Carly models.

There is no evidence that Carly had any awareness of Reisman, Greenleaf, or any of the other scholars referenced here, but Carly’s purposeful selection of documents for students to read and evaluate with respect to the central question of how the Constitution should be interpreted mirrors Reisman’s historical thinking pedagogy, and her approach to doing so reflects Greenleaf’s notion of cognitive apprenticeship. While unlike Reisman, Carly augments classroom discussion about the central question in relation to the documents with written responses, the end result is essentially the same: disrupting facile historical narratives, and providing a path for students to understand history as a
reconstruction of the past based on interpreted evidence. Not only are these consistent with disciplinary literacy goals, the talk reveals that even if teachers disagreed over the place of these goals in their pedagogy, these goals were consistent with what the participants acknowledged through their unspoken acceptance as part of the practices of their field. Although in general scholars have ignored or failed to recognize the capacity of teachers to engage in the disciplinary thinking and literacy practices of their fields, this study demonstrates that even when they do not identify it as such, teachers can and do. As a result of their primary role as educators, rather than as strictly disciplinary experts, however, teachers may default to their pedagogical rather than disciplinary perspectives when talking about literacy in their subject area. In other words, the way teachers talk about literacy in their field is filtered first through their understandings of, and responsibilities to, the students they teach. As a result, their disciplinary thinking and expertise may be subsumed by the pedagogical.

Finally, during Session 7, Marty explicitly stated that he rejected the textbook’s coverage of apartheid in favor of using primary source documents in the context of a student inquiry to teach “the enduring issue ... unequal treatment, oppression, slavery” (Marty, Session 7, turn 2). Although some participants expressed concern over how students would acquire sufficient background knowledge to successfully and meaningfully complete the inquiry, no one challenged Marty’s decision to eschew the textbook. Although Levstik (2000) cites teacher reports of lack of experience with historical inquiry and the discursive, disciplinary thinking and practices that define that process, the teachers in this inquiry group, albeit to varying degrees, seemed to have some familiarity and even direct knowledge of the process. More so than a lack of personal experience and understanding standing as a barrier to implementing disciplinary approaches to literacy, these teachers more often represented concern over the ability of their students to engage successfully in them. Specifically, this concern was often rooted in a deficit discourse of student ability, particularly with regard to generic reading
comprehension. This was the case more for teachers of middle school than for the high school teachers, however, and may point to a view of disciplinary literacy practices as linked to developmental readiness.

Thus, in contradiction to some of the literature that finds that only rarely are teachers “well versed in what a reader needs to know to understand content area texts” (Lee & Spratley, 2006, p. 9), this study demonstrates that social studies teachers do, in fact, possess that knowledge, although to varying degrees. In line with the findings of my literature review, however, even when teachers possess knowledge of the discursive literate practices of their discipline, and demonstrate that knowledge through their own behaviors, they may not possess sufficient awareness to articulate them as such (Rainey & Moje, 2012).

Inasmuch as the inquiry group demonstrated a grasp of the discursive literate practices of the discipline of social studies, it also represented them as a “more advanced” literacy. This was especially true for the middle school teachers in the group. During the second segment of Session 3, for example, during the talk about bias represented in a picture document, Ruth, a 7th grade teacher says, “...it’s too much” (turn 38), and “There’s plenty of time for that...they need the basics first” (turn 30), which she defines as “Getting the answer” (turn 33). During the same session, Paula, an 8th grade teacher also defines literacy at her level as being “able to answer the question” (turn 24). Even Carly, a 7th grade teacher whose student material on loose and strict interpretation of the Constitution reflected a disciplinary literacy view in Session 4, said during this talk session that “it’s enough” for students to simply answer questions about the image rather than delve into possible bias. Although Karen, and to some extent, Jerry, both 7th grade teachers, push back on the idea that teaching bias is “too much” for middle school students to handle, it is mostly Marty and Sarah, both high school teachers (grades 10 and 9, respectively) who press during this session to include disciplinary practices at the middle school level. During the discussion of Carly’s student material in Session 4, Ruth
describes her work as “ambitious,” Paula expresses skepticism about there being enough time to complete the assignment, and Debbie, a 9th grade social studies special educator calls the material “tough.”

Discourses of Student Ability as a Proxy for Race Shaped How the Inquiry Group Framed Literacy

During these inquiry group sessions, discourses of literacy often intersected with discourses of student ability in ways that disrupted both. Perceptions of student ability were drawn along racial and socio-economic lines as described by the populations of the two middle schools, along lines of perceived developmental readiness, and along lines of perceived deficits associated with special education classification and labeling. Another overarching finding of this study was that Discourses of literacy evident in the talk shifted as issues of student ability emerged; this shift produced a binary view in which generic literacy thinking and practices were most often seen as appropriate for students designated as less able or less ready, and disciplinary literacy thinking and practices were seen as appropriate for the more abled, ready, or advanced students. This was most prominent in the talk of Rockville teachers whose student populations tend to be poorer and more heavily black and Hispanic, a condition about which the district administration, faculty, staff, and community mostly remain silent, but are fully aware. As I found in Chapter V, participants from Rockville, the middle school with the less affluent and more transient population, pressed to include shorter printed-word texts and other genres of text, while teachers from the high school, and from the more affluent Oakwood middle school, advocated for the inclusion of longer printed-word texts. At the same time, Rockville teachers tended to emphasize generic and superficial comprehension of texts while Oakwood teachers pressed to expose students to a more critical level of comprehension that might include a recognition of bias, for example. This talk occurred in the context of my own insider knowledge of long-standing and ongoing tensions between the middle school teachers in all of the major subject areas over standards and
expectations. Although none of the talk ever explicitly went to issues of race, class or economic status, the undercurrent was clear as teachers in the district are well-aware of the differences.

The fact that the talk never specifically referenced race is significant. It suggests a color-blind discourse that uses notions of student ability to suspend issues of race. By positioning generic and disciplinary literacy practices as sequential, rather than co-existing on a continuum, and as appropriate for some students with particular abilities, but not for others, a dichotomy was established that limited teacher talk around the topic of race. More importantly, however, it suggested a limited set of possibilities about what counts as student success in social studies literacy by necessarily placing disciplinary practices out of reach of many students, and particularly Rockville students of color. Seen as a priori “too difficult” for them, such students would never be exposed to disciplinary literacy, and therefore never have opportunities to engage with it. Failing to provide access to disciplinary literacy practices makes it unlikely that students will have access to the processes of how knowledge in history is constructed, warranted, and interrogated. This precludes their potential to challenge, redesign, or elaborate on what is known (Janks, 2009, 2012; Moje, 2007).

Thus, the differences in student populations between the two middle schools produced talk that reflected, albeit mostly silently, the connections teachers made between race, socio-economic status, student ability, and literacy. It was Rockville teachers who made these connections most clearly, while teachers from Oakwood did so mostly through their resistance to them. Ruth and Jerry from Rockville, for example, often articulated these connections at times when Oakwood teachers, like Ron and Karen, pushed back on what they perceived as a lowering of expectations. Although they never specifically mentioned race, Rockwood teachers used language that constructed a view that students from their school were differently-abled from those at Oakwood. Since the racial differences between the student populations of the two schools are broadly
understood, but rarely openly discussed, or even mentioned, talk about differences in ability stood in as a proxy for differences in race. In one instance, for example, Ruth said that a picture, as opposed to a printed-word text document “for my kids anyway [would] work better,” and she also often used the phrases “it’s enough” and “too much” as her talk worked to include and exclude for student use documents of particular types and lengths; she set aside reading with the particular focus of discerning bias by calling it a “waste” for her students, and both Ruth and Jerry characterized Rockville students as responding to long texts by failing to read them at all, or “blanking” them out. This talk produced a view of Rockville students as not only less willing and able, but also as less worthy of opportunities to engage in the more critical thinking required, for example, by considering elements of bias in texts.

Further, teachers from Rockville often represented the skills their students did require as “basic,” and saw part of their role as teaching “reading skills” and “how to read all these documents.” The implied perception of Rockville teachers about what literacy means and how it should be approached with students is in line with some research that shows that subject-area teachers view generic reading comprehension skills as requisite for student success in their content area (Cantrell et al., 2009). This suggests an autonomous model of literacy (Street, 2005) in which literacy itself is seen not only as neutral and universal, but also as the key to notions of academic and social success the ideological ties to which go unacknowledged or unrecognized. Thus, Rockville teachers evaluated texts and approaches to texts on the basis of what they thought their students did or did not “need” to know. Jerry said that for many of his students, certain documents would be “over their heads,” and “overwhelming.” By framing particular documents and particular approaches to documents in this way with respect to students in Rockville, the talk suggested that these students had lower ability with less capacity to handle complex texts in meaningfully rich ways that go beyond superficial comprehension. Not only are these findings consistent with some of the literature that found that across grade levels
text complexity affects student comprehension (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011), but they also demonstrate that teachers are aware of this connection. What this research finds, however, is that how teachers respond to their awareness may differ depending on factors like race, and how race plays into teacher perceptions of the ability of the students they teach.

This finding is underscored by, in contrast to Rockville teachers, how teachers from Oakwood tended to view literacy. Oakwood teachers like Karen, pressed to include longer and more complex texts for students and expressed dissatisfaction with limiting student interactions with texts to simply answering questions to demonstrate understanding. Others, like Ron, rejected addressing generic comprehension both because he assumed students had already mastered those skills, and because he viewed his job as a social studies teacher as invested in the more disciplinary-based focus of noticing bias and recognizing gaps in historical records. These notions of how literacy in social studies should be enacted produced views about the almost exclusively white Oakwood students as not only more willing and able, but also more worthy of opportunities to engage in disciplinary literacy practices than the more racially and socio-economically diverse Rockville students. Again, although Oakwood teachers never mentioned students’ race or socio-economics as factors in their decision making about the kinds of texts and literacy processes to use in their classrooms, their often vehement resistance to practices characterized as “basic,” and simultaneous advocacy of those they considered “real” points to unspoken notions of students as worthy and unworthy of particular kinds of learning opportunities.

Discourses of student ability framed as student developmental readiness also affected how the inquiry group framed literacy in social studies. In general, it was the middle school teachers who viewed the more disciplinary-based approaches to reading as applicable to students in upper grades, but it was Rockville teachers who most often did so explicitly. The use of phrases like having “plenty of time” and “not for the first
inquiry” when the talk centered on teaching students to recognize bias suggested this. The self-described characterization of the role of middle school teachers as getting students “ready,” and providing the “basic reading skills” they need also suggested that exposure to generic and disciplinary literacy was viewed by some teachers as sequential. It was in fact true that it more often was high school teachers Marty and Sarah who introduced and pursued talk that drew on a discourse of disciplinary literacy, although Ron from Oakwood, and notably Ray from Rockville sometimes did so well. This is in line with research that suggests that teachers who do not routinely engage in the discursive literate practices of their discipline may become less fully aware of them (Rainey & Moje, 2012). What was also true, however, was that when these teachers themselves became engaged in talk that involved some of the disciplinary literacy practices associated with history they proved themselves fully able to do so, regardless of the grade level they taught. Thus, this research indicates that while social studies teachers have an awareness of the discursive literate practices of their discipline, their perceptions of the different views of literacy as developmentally appropriate to different grade levels may influence the discourses of literacy on which they draw in particular contexts. This is consistent with some literacy scholars who define disciplinary literacy as “more advanced” (Lee & Spratley, 2006), but simultaneously contradicts some of the same research that suggests that content area teachers who are familiar with the disciplinary literacy practices of their field are the exception rather than the rule (Lee & Spratley, 2006). As I argued in my literature review, because few studies examine the engagement of teachers in the disciplinary literacy of history, there exists an unfounded devaluation of teachers as agentive and expert knowers.

Classification and labeling of students as requiring special education also shaped how literacy was framed in the inquiry group talk. The appropriateness of a student assignment that had been used successfully with general education students and drew on the disciplinary practice of discerning differing viewpoints on the same issue, was
marked by the talk in the group as questionable for social studies sections that included students who were labelled for special education. The talk suggested that these students lacked the ability to negotiate the complexities of the task in the assignment in question because it was possibly “too hard” and some “read at a third-grade level.” Sections of social studies that included students with special education needs were characterized as difficult to keep “up to speed,” and as requiring “twice as much time...to get them to do the higher level stuff.” Further, much of the talk during this session centered on whether and to what degree this and other assignments should be modified for students labeled in this way. Some of the modifications the group discussed involved providing notes on the topic, or using paraphrases of the direct historical quotes and then asking literal comprehension rather than interpretive questions. These suggested changes shift the literacy practices inherent in the assignment from ones that draw on a discourse of disciplinary literacy to ones that draw on a discourse of generic literacy. They point to a perspective on the part of some of these teachers that disciplinary literacy is beyond the reach of students labeled as special education. It also suggests a question of how much of the talk about students labeled as requiring special education masked talk about race. Furthermore, modifications themselves create a binary in which some students required modified assignments and others do not; this binary positions some students as less able to handle grade-level disciplinary literacy work.

As I argued in my literature review, facilitating student ability to think like members of the discourse community of historians suggests a view of literacy as necessarily defined by and connected to the discipline; it suggests building student capacity in, among others, the close reading and knowledge interrogation in which historians engage, and which this teacher-created assignment reflected. Not all the teachers in the inquiry group agreed with the idea of creating a modified assignment for some students. While Ron didn’t object to sometimes providing notes to sections that included special education students because teaching the same topics to those sections
might have required more time, he also didn’t foreclose doing “higher level stuff” with them. Suggesting that something essential might be lost in the process of creating modified assignments, particularly ones that might reach students who “read at a third-grade level,” Ron sarcastically remarked, “Sure. Let’s just modify the crap out of it.”

Moments of Intensity, Sometimes as Evidenced in Conflict, Initiated Knowledge Interrogation, Transformation, and Generation

The way I chose the data to analyze for this study was on the basis of tensions or emotional intensities that I felt emerging during the talk. Although it is not possible to see inside people’s heads or feel their anxiety or frustration, my relationships with these participants made me privy to some of their longstanding differences. Some of the tensions that emerged were directly related to those differences, but others were rooted in conflicts about literacy, teaching, and learning to name a few, that are bigger than these particular individuals or their relationships to each other. Feeling compelled to be present in the analysis of my data, I focused on the segments of talk that were most uncomfortable for me, and seemed to express tensions. These segments proved productive in unexpected ways.

As I argued in Chapter IV, it was by using a Bakhtinian perspective that I could consider the productive possibilities of tensions and conflict that emerged in the talk. These productive possibilities resulted from my understanding of individual talk and thought as inevitably and dialogically linked to the talk and thoughts of others, and as “born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 92). Seen in this way, conflict does not merely result from, or express itself through language, but rather is embedded in it. As an integral part of language, conflict is also intimately connected to the process of knowledge interrogation, transformation, and generation. Examining moments of emotional intensity, tension, and conflict from this perspective allowed me to make visible their productive possibilities. It also allowed some of the complexities of teaching as viewed by teachers themselves to rise to the surface.
Some of the greatest emotional intensity was expressed during talk initiated by particular participants, or around particular topics. Ron’s talk during Session #2, for example, worked to reject literacy as part of school social studies. His perspective on the issue, as well as his strong, and sometimes brusque defense of his position was provocative; this provocation, while uncomfortable, had the effect of prompting several other participants, such as Rachel and Debbie, to defend literacy’s place in social studies. As I argued in Chapter IV, this segment of talk represented a struggle over the authoritative discourse of literacy as intimately connected to social studies, defined by an inquiry group established under that premise, and a divergent one (Maybin, 2005), derived from a rejection of the framing. This struggle and the tension that derived from it surfaced repeatedly throughout the inquiry group sessions, albeit in different guises. The tension that developed during these interactions produced talk that pressed to interrogate not only the place, value, and qualities of literacy in social studies, but also the meaning of teaching history itself. During Session #2, Ray in fact asked the question directly at his turn 12 which then quickly shifted the talk to constructing a definition. Through this initial interrogation, provisional knowledge around the purpose and meaning of the school subject of social studies began to be constructed. Although some of the discursive literate practices that are encompassed by historical thinking, such as noticing bias (sourcing), and figuring out “how things fit together” (corroborating sources), surfaced during this talk session, none were specifically recognized as aspects of historical literacy as described by Wineburg (1991a, 1991b), Reisman (2012a, 2012b), and other scholars.

Likewise, Session #3 contained moments of emotional intensity that resulted in the interrogation and transformation of knowledge around literacy in social studies. In this case the knowledge work was accomplished through talk about how the process of reading might be defined. Ron, the participant whose talk proved to be the catalyst for knowledge work in the earlier session, was not in attendance that day. Because of his reputation for being outspoken, and sometimes arrogant, I did not anticipate that tensions
would develop to the extent that they did. However, Ruth’s talk that day provoked a struggle over the kind and length of texts that were appropriate for 7th graders to independently negotiate. As an insider to the context of the talk, the struggle that ensued seemed rooted in longstanding differences between the two middle schools over student standards and accountability. As she did several times during these inquiry group meetings, Ruth often positioned herself as an advocate for the academic supports she perceived her students to need. In this case, Ruth strongly advocated for the inclusion of picture documents in the student inquiry the group was discussing. Her emphasis on historical sources other than printed-word texts, while rooted in her stated, albeit questionable, belief that these would be easier for her students to understand, nonetheless reflects her recognition of the range of sources historians use (Wilson & Chavez, 2014). It was as a result of Ruth’s persistent support of sources other than printed-word texts that the group the group began to interrogate what it means to “read.” Although “picture texts” were positioned at this point as easier and more accessible to students, there was brief consideration of the need for students to examine images “carefully” and “pay attention, think” in order to evaluate them. This thread of knowledge work connected to segment 2 of the same session when, in fact, the group engaged in extensive talk around the meanings and messages contained in an illustration of the Wampanoag with early settlers. While the participants disagreed about the appropriateness of practicing this type of analysis with 7th graders, this disagreement generated tension within the group that resulted in a demonstration of these teachers’ engagement in historical thinking. Their engagement generated knowledge about the meaning of literacy in social studies and about what it means to teach social studies. As they worked together to tease out the significance of the image under consideration, the talk began to reflect their own understandings of historical text as value- and purpose-laden accounts of history (Moje et al., 2011; Wineburg, 1993). Thus, although the literature indicates that subject area teachers generally hold a singular, generic view of literacy (Gillespie & Rasinski, 1989),
when presented with opportunities to enact the “literacy” of their discipline, this study found that they are able to do so, even though they may not identify it as such.

**Implications of the Study for Future Research and Teaching Practice**

As I thought about and developed the analysis of some of the data that was produced during the eight weeks of meetings that I organized for this study, I also reflected on the possibilities for teacher-development, knowledge-building, and pedagogy that emerge from a collaborative teacher inquiry group model. Although little is known about how teachers construct knowledge about teaching (Wilson & Berne, 1999), this study has shown that teacher inquiry offers possibilities to do so. Because teachers are often positioned as technicians obligated to implement “expert” practices as defined by outsiders (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2008; Mills et al., 2001), their potential to co-construct knowledge about teaching and learning, specifically about literacy in social studies, but more generally as well, remains untapped.

In the remaining part of the chapter, I will explore implications from this research for teacher professional development, classroom practice, theory, and future research.

**Creating Time and Space for Teacher Talk (Around Literacy in Social Studies)**

My personal experience tells me that teachers themselves often informally lament the lack of time that exists for collaboration. In fact, many of the teachers who participated in this study mentioned a desire for collaboration as a motivating factor in their decision to join the inquiry group. This seems to be true in many public schools across grade levels and disciplines. Despite calls from researchers to establish more collaborative structures for teacher professional development, evaluations of teacher effectiveness most often continue to be based on faithful implementation of particular pedagogical practices and standardized assessments of student achievement linked to
those practices. As a result, districts, and to some extent teachers themselves, sometimes fall back on this perspective, making the assumptions it suggests about teacher knowledge and agency difficult to disrupt (Clausen et al., 2009). Even when the potential of collaborative efforts is recognized on an institutional level, it can be short-circuited in practice. In the district in which this study was conducted, for example, the two middle schools have an official schedule that designates one period each day for a “Team Meeting” during which collaboration supposedly occurs. In practice, the period is mainly used for assigned conferences with administrators, parents, or student-support personnel, or for teacher training in new procedures or computer software. By their very nature, these “training meetings,” as they are called, position teachers as recipients, rather than generators, of knowledge. Furthermore, teachers generally have no voice in what kind of training they should receive, or how or when it might happen. These conditions inevitably stir up resentment, particularly when teachers view the training as too late, too little, or irrelevant, as often happens. Even when seen as valuable, however, these experiences do not substitute for the kind of sustained and collaborative talk around teaching and learning that, as this study and others show, have the potential to be meaningful and productive. After the eight weeks of inquiry group meetings ended, several teachers asked me if I planned to run other sessions; their comments indicated that they had found them useful and that they looked forward to continuing the conversations.

One aspect of the collaboration that occurred during the eight weeks of meetings that the participants reported as especially meaningful was the sharing of teaching materials and approaches. After Carly brought her student packet to a meeting, several teachers asked for copies, and Meg asked if she could visit Carly’s classroom the following school year to watch how she worked with the material before she tried it herself. Both Meg’s request, and Carly’s agreement, signaled the degree to which the inquiry group had been a “success.” More than the knowledge around literacy and social
studies that had been generated, the participants demonstrated that they valued the opportunities the inquiry group meetings presented to exchange the knowledge they possessed, and solicit the knowledge they needed. This kind of collaboration seems to me to have the strongest potential for improving both teaching and learning. Unfortunately, as happened during the following school year, scheduling and a lack of administrative support often foreclose these kinds of opportunities. Meg’s and Carly’s schedules did not allow for Meg to visit Carly during one of her teaching periods, and the principal would not provide Meg with coverage so she could do so.

In part because of the positive response, I discussed the possibility of obtaining a district sanction for the meetings so that teachers could count the time towards the fifteen hours required contractually each year for professional development. Although I obtained the verbal support of the department chair, the principal, and even the Superintendent for Curriculum and Teaching, the district never gave official approval for teacher inquiry group participation to count towards the annual “PD” hours. One reason might have been that during the school year following the one in which this inquiry group met, the district hired an outside contractor to share “best practices” for incorporating literacy across the disciplines, arrangements for which were likely already underway when I sought approval for the inquiry group sessions. Attendance was mandatory for the contracted professional development, so all subject area teachers in both middle schools and the high school had to be present, including me. The full-day workshop emphasized pedagogical approaches for comprehension, vocabulary development, and note-taking. What was presented supported the finding that many of the same strategies Herber outlined in 1970 continued to shape the practice of content-area literacy today (Brozo et al., 2013). Unsurprising to me, the response to the training was overwhelmingly negative: teachers felt ill-equipped to teach literacy, felt they lacked sufficient time as it was to cover their respective curricula, and felt disrespected as professionals. As one teacher put it, “I resent being talked at for six hours when I could be teaching.”
As a result of this research, I imagine schools treating as a priority the need to
devote time and space for teachers, within and across both content areas and grade levels,
to engage in ongoing, critical conversations around the intersecting topics of teaching and
learning. These conversations might well begin with teachers’ views of how those topics
interact with the particulars of the content area and the literacy to which it is attached. In
keeping with the spirit of teacher inquiry, as described by Cochran-Smith and Lytle,
however, these conversations might move in the productive directions in which teachers
themselves point them.

**Implications for Practice: Drawing on Generic and Disciplinary Literacy**

As the talk of this inquiry group demonstrates, social studies teachers draw on
discourses of generic as well as disciplinary literacy. The talk also demonstrates that
teachers not only recognize different aspects and kinds of literacy, but also acknowledge
the value for teaching and learning both practice and mastery in each. Literacy, both
generic and disciplinary, existed side by side in the inquiry group talk as teachers like
Ruth, Rachel, and Debbie sometimes emphasized the importance of what they often
referred to as “basic reading” comprehension, and other teachers, like Ray, Ron, Marty,
and Karen moved forward aspects of literacy as it is more specifically defined by the
discipline of history. Although they rarely identified them as practices of “literacy,” to
varying degrees all of the participants engaged in talking about and enacting sourcing,
contextualizing, and corroborating historical documents. This finding counters the
tendency of research to handle generic literacy and disciplinary literacy approaches as
diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive (Brozo et al., 2013).

Connected to this finding that the inquiry group assigned value to generic and
disciplinary practices is also the finding that the word “literacy” itself proved to be
charged with underlying meaning to which participants sometimes responded negatively.
Although the participants recognized and engaged in the kind of historical thinking that
constitutes aspects of the literacy of the discipline, when the word “literacy” was used, it tended to be associated with generic reading comprehension skills and approaches. In turn, this association sometimes engendered expressions of resentment over what was viewed as mandates to teach content outside of the purview of the school subject of social studies. It was only during Inquiry Group Meeting 7, the next to the last inquiry group meeting, that these charged denotations and connotations began to be identified and negotiated. During this session, Carly’s lament of the prevalence of the phrase “literacy in every subject,” prompted Ray to surface the perspective that, “They want to call it literacy, okay, but really it’s more about having a head for history.” That Ron’s expressed skepticism about the intentions of the authorities who promote “literacy” across the disciplines was shared by other participants points to a gap in communication. As I discussed earlier, I believe this gap in communication can to some extent be remedied by a change in the language that is used to refer specifically to disciplinary discursive practices. Not only does the term “literacy” tend to connote in subject-area teachers a topic about which they are ill-trained and ill-suited to address, it is a term that seems firmly tied to generic practices most closely associated with the school subject of English. Rather than attempting to bridge this gap in communication by adhering to a construct of “literacy across the disciplines,” one that while it has gained traction among scholars, clearly has not been well-received by teachers, it may be more productive to frame the talk in terms of “thinking in the disciplines.”

This is also a gap that frequent and sustained teacher talk in an inquiry group setting has the potential to begin to resolve. What is required, however, is that authority for theorizing and developing teaching practice is shifted to include teachers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). In the case of literacy in social studies, the way literacy is defined, and indeed named, must include teacher voices and be made transparent and explicit. I see teachers’ engagement in this social generation of knowledge as crucially connected to their engagement in improving student outcomes as readers and thinkers in the various
disciplines. I envision improved student thinking (e.g., “literacy”) learning emerging from collaboration among teachers that is autonomous and sustained, but also supported and valued locally by administrators, and generally by education as an institution.

**Productive Possibilities for Future Research**

This research raised several productive questions that future research might explore. Some are directly connected to the data that was produced in this study but represent different strands of interpretation and analysis around how teacher inquiry works and produces knowledge. Others correspond to broader questions this research stimulates around curricula’s connections to power and politics, around the nature of teacher and student knowledge and expertise, and around the nexus of affect, conflict and learning.

First, I am interested in taking a new look at the data through a lens of the production of difference, particularly with regard to students of color and students with special needs. What are the interrelationships between how difference is produced and a crisis discourse of whiteness-under-threat? What is the impact of these on how students are constructed? In addition, while from one perspective it was the established social cohesion of the inquiry group that made room for perhaps more outspokenness than what otherwise might have been possible, what are some other results? For example, how does social cohesion in the form of bonding between teachers around “difficult” students come at the expense of students?

In a broader sense, I am also interested in learning what the social work of a teacher inquiry group might accomplish beyond knowledge production. What are the spoken and unspoken politics that operate in how social studies as a school subject is construed and in what kinds of history are taught? What are the sedimented ideas around social studies curricula that make educational change difficult? In addition, because the data that was produced in this study must be understood against the backdrop of
participants who had long-standing relationships and more than ten years of classroom
experience, I am interested in working with a similar inquiry group comprised of early-
career teachers. In this context, what kind of talk around literacy and social studies, but
also around students and learning, would teachers engage? Finally, moving forward with
teacher inquiry, I plan to bring more of myself into the process. I wonder about the
effects of my taking a more active role as a participant. Because I was able to enlist my
colleague Meg to take on the primary role as facilitator, and because I wanted to avoid
dominating the talk that was produced for this research, I made a point of limiting how
much I spoke during the meetings I analyzed in this research. Engaging more actively in
the inquiry group talk will allow me to uncover and examine my own understandings and
responses, particularly in relation to the social work of the group. At the same time, it
will allow me to take more complete advantage of the productive possibilities of an emic
perspective.

Critique of the Study

This research was the product of countless decisions. I made overarching choices
including ones about methodology, theory, design, and implementation, but also
particularized ones about data production and selection, my own positioning in the
inquiry group, and the paths and structures I used to generate my writing.

Initially, my main objective was to shed light on how social studies teachers talk
about literacy in social studies. I wondered about the discourses on which they drew in
their talk, about the way their interactions in a teacher inquiry group might influence
those discourses, and about how their talk might interrogate, transform, and generate
knowledge about literacy in social studies. These goals meant that the data I chose to
analyze would be data that I viewed as pertinent to my questions. After experiencing the
inquiry group along with the participants, however, my attention became focused on the
segments of talk during which tensions developed. I noticed that it was during these moments that the most sustained and meaningful theorizing and knowledge generation occurred. As a result, I decided to choose the data I would analyze most closely based on moments of emotional intensity.

To be clear, these repeated instances of tensions would not have been likely to surface had it not been for two unique and limiting aspects of how this study was designed. First, six of the fourteen participants in the eight weeks of inquiry group sessions for this study had also participated in at least one of my two pilot studies. Second, all of the participants, by virtue of their employment in the same district most for ten years or more, had established relationships with one another, albeit to varying degrees. These factors created a level of comfort among the participants, but simultaneously presupposed existing tensions between them. The talk they thus produced was inevitably influenced by these unique factors, rendering my findings heavily localized.

Further, because the group met for only eight weeks, and because I focused only on the inquiry group talk, my dissertation presents a narrow range of data. My goal was to honor teacher agency and knowledge by providing broader understandings of teachers’ talk through discourse analysis. Although I worked to contextualize from a Bakhtinian perspective, a great deal of my analysis was produced line-by-line using Gee’s (2011b) discourse analysis tools. These factors limited the study, as did my decision to break the talk up into segments in ways that segregated them from other discursive events that were happening simultaneously (Gee, 1999).

By limiting my analysis to the talk that was produced, I also lost most of what might have been communicated through gestures, facial expressions, body language, or other multimodal expressions. While I believe that the D/discourses that circulated in the inquiry group were mainly made visible through talk, and that focusing on the participants’ utterances provided a productive lens through which to better understand
teachers’ views of and engagement in literacy in social studies, I recognized that there are other ways these views and engagement were expressed. Although I occasionally touched on these, they were not a focus of my analysis despite their potential to further illuminate answers to my research questions.

**Concluding Thoughts**

When I first embarked on the journey that this study entailed, my vision of where it would lead was in some ways quite different from, but in other ways much the same as, how it turned out. As a practicing teacher, I knew first-hand of the underappreciated and underrecognized abundance of knowledge and expertise possessed by educators at all levels. I also knew the frustration teachers like me often feel when the complexities of classroom teaching are ignored or minimized; facile, band-aid “solutions” in education do not, and indeed cannot, alter what is fundamentally a human, and therefore complex, endeavor. As a result, my first instinct was to use this study to demonstrate how much teachers do, in fact, “know,” specifically about the disciplinary literacy of history. This focus came as a direct outcome of my own experience and background as a teacher both of English and social studies. I was personally and professionally engaged in both the theory and practice of the intersection of literacy as it is defined generically, and literacy as it is defined by historians. Thus, I initially planned this research as a way to fill the gap left in Wineburg’s studies by having teachers “think aloud” some of the same texts he used.

This approach quickly proved to be a dead-end, but not because teachers weren’t substantiating my initial claim. The few who were willing to try this for me mostly did. The problem was that when asked to think their thoughts aloud as they read disciplinary texts, teachers could not separate the “reading like a historian” from the “reading like a teacher.” The approach didn’t work because, as I realized, it failed to account for the
unique position of educators as both disciplinary teachers and experts, roles that are intricately related, and in many ways impossible to disentangle. As a result, the approach failed to reflect and illuminate the very complexities of classroom life, of teaching and learning, and of how literacy is framed and enacted in schools, that I so passionately felt and wanted to work to disclose.

The task of organizing a teacher inquiry group to accomplish this goal was at first overwhelming. I couldn’t imagine that teachers would be any more willing to participate after school hours in a group like this than they were to attend mandatory professional development days during time for which they were being paid. It was, in fact, difficult to get people to participate in my first pilot study group. Only a handful of people showed up, only one of which was from Rockville, and none of which taught at the high school. As word spread, and I continued to mention, that the inquiry group was part of my dissertation work, colleagues, particularly at the two middle schools began to express interest. Enthusiasm was also generated due to the efforts of Meg, my good friend and colleague, who had participated in the pilot groups. It was to a great extent that it was because of her that I was able to get the inquiry group, and this study, off the ground.

Meg and I have worked together across our grade levels for the past 13 years. We have developed and implemented projects and assignments that scaffold between the 6th and 7th grades, we have used each other as sounding boards teaching ideas, and we wrote an article together about our collaborative efforts that was published by a New York State United Teachers publication. Despite the work I do, as a 6th grade teacher I was concerned that, as is common, secondary level teachers, particularly those at the high school, would not take me seriously as a social studies educator. Because, however, Meg was so highly regarded by her peers, my acceptance by at least some of them who did not know me well was streamlined by my close association with her.

A veteran of now 20 years, Meg began her career teaching at a private school whose mission was interdisciplinary learning. As the social studies teacher, Meg’s job as
team leader was to facilitate collaboration among the other subject area teachers on her team to create year-long themed and cross-disciplinary experiences for their students. To this day, Meg cites this experience as seminal to her own professional development, as well as to her view of how social studies should be taught. The experience also perfectly positioned her to take on the role of facilitator for the inquiry group that became the subject of this study. Her involvement allowed me to mitigate at least to some extent the complications of functioning as both a researcher and a teacher-participant in the inquiry group. Although I had planned to make a concerted effort to participate as little as possible in the actual talk in which the group engaged, it was only because Meg had the combined assets of the respect of our colleagues, experience as a facilitator, and participation in the pilot studies that I was able mostly to take a backseat to inquiry group talk itself, and focus my attention on what that talk was saying and doing.

The fact of how contentious and brutally honest the talk sometimes became surprised and often shocked me. At one point I felt it had gotten so bad, that I began to doubt over whether any of the talk that was being produced would be of any use to the analysis I was planning to do, and the dissertation I was hoping to finally write. Again, it was Meg who encouraged me to see it through, assuring me that the meetings must be going well since no one seemed to be complaining and, in fact, people kept coming. Given the way teachers usually respond to professional development “opportunities,” this was, I realized, quite promising.

Despite how contentious the talk often became, however, and how honest it appeared to be, it was during the process of analyzing the talk, that I realized how carefully the talk obscured the topic of race. All the stakeholders in the district from administrators to parents, and likely students themselves, are well aware of the racial and socio-economic disparities between the two middle schools. Yet whenever issues of academic standards, grading, student achievement, or discipline are discussed, and disagreements emerge between teachers and administrators at the respective buildings,
these differences, and the effect they may have on how and what policies should be established are never acknowledged. Engaging in this research helped me to recognize the damaging effect of this kind of color blindness, and my own unconscious participation in it. In the two years since the inquiry group met, two black students have enrolled in Oakwood, the middle school in which I teach. One of them is a 6th grade student of mine whose parents are from Senegal and who behaves and achieves in ways that still tempt me into thinking that race doesn’t matter. The other is an 8th grade boy who moved to the district from the Bronx a year ago who reminds me how much it does. Although I realize that it is impossible for me to know the source of the “disruptive behaviors” for which he has developed a reputation, or to determine to what degree his behaviors may be related to issues of race, I recognize the possibility that they may represent a response to the almost exclusively white environment in which he finds himself; or that naming his behaviors “disruptive” allows school authorities to ignore ways to perform the role of student other than that which is established by white, middle-class, suburban standards.

The last inquiry group meeting was held just as the school year was about to end. Although the that session ended with thanks and appreciation on all sides, and a great sense of relief on mine, no one asked about continuing the collaboration. I was encouraged, however, by how some of the teachers responded to a question in the second semi-structured interview about how their expectations of teaching literacy might have changed as a result of their participation in the group. Ruth, who had often been a strong voice for the generic literacy perspective, said, “Obviously, it hasn’t changed anything yet, school’s over, but it might. Not that I’ll do anything different, but there’s some ideas in my head now, you know just knocking around, and they weren’t there before, so I’ll get back to you on that.” At the end of Ray’s interview, he wanted to add that, “I really enjoyed doing this. I think everyone did. We got some meaningful stuff done.
Not just the inquiries, the discussions too. We don’t ever really talk like that. As far as I’m concerned it was a lot better than all the junk the district makes us do, so thanks.”

Since that time, not only have several social studies teachers asked me to organize another inquiry group, but also two English teachers at Oakwood, one of whom who teaches 6th grade, have done so as well. The thought was that there could be a lot to gain by having English teachers collaborate with teachers of social studies, and by having 6th grade teachers participate as well. Thus far, my response to these requests has been to defer my own organizing of any new groups until my dissertation was complete. But I have also encouraged anyone who asked to go ahead and form a group without me. This has not happened yet, but the fact that the idea of collaborative teacher inquiry resonated at least with some of the teachers I know is encouraging. It speaks more powerfully to the potential of teacher collaboration than any dissertation ever could.
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Appendix A

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION AND PERMISSION:

INFORMED CONSENT

Protocol Title: Navigating the Landscape of Literacy In Social Studies: Teachers Generating Knowledge And Making Meaning In An Inquiry Group

Principal Investigator: Carmela Gustafson, Teachers College
631-275-1068, cbg2120@tc.columbia.edu

INTRODUCTION
You are being invited to participate in this research study called “Navigating the Landscape of Literacy In Social Studies: Teachers Generating Knowledge And Making Meaning In An Inquiry Group.” You may qualify to take part in this research study because you are a middle or high school social studies teacher and have elected to participate in a teacher inquiry group focused on literacy in social studies. Approximately fifteen people will participate in this study and it will take 16-18 hours of your time to complete.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?
This study is being done to determine the ways social studies teachers define, think about, and enact literacy in their content area. It is also being done to determine whether a collaborative teacher inquiry group focused on this topic can help teachers problem-solve about teaching literacy in social studies.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?
If you decide to participate, you will attend weekly inquiry group meetings during which issues pertaining to literacy in social studies and teaching literacy in social studies will be discussed. These meetings will be audio-recorded. After the audio-recording is written down (transcribed) the audio-recording will be deleted. If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, you will not be able to participate. During the inquiry group meetings, you will also be asked, but not required, to contribute sample classroom materials and student work samples that can be used as the basis for group discussion.
You will also be interviewed by the principal investigator once after the second or third inquiry group meeting, and again after the last inquiry group meeting. During the interviews, you will be asked to discuss your views of literacy in social studies and your experiences teaching literacy in social studies. The interviews will each take approximately forty-five to sixty minutes. You will be given a pseudonym or false name/de-identified code in order to keep your identity confidential.
WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
The risks in this study are minimal, but present. You are being asked to share your experiences as a part of the inquiry group on literacy in social studies and teaching literacy in social studies. By consenting you are giving me permission to share your experiences and the ideas that you express during inquiry group meetings and interviews. Because this is a minimal risk study, the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter while taking part in professional development. However, there are some risks to consider. You might feel embarrassed to discuss problems that you experience while teaching literacy in social studies. However, you do not have to answer any questions or divulge anything you don’t want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty. You might feel concerned that things you say might get back to your principal. The principal investigator is taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study except in terms of personal professional growth and development, the value of which only you can judge. Participation may benefit the field of teaching to better understand how teachers view literacy in social studies and the teaching of literacy in social studies.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?
You will not be paid to participate. There are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?
The study is over when you have completed the eight weeks of inquiry group meeting, and the two interviews. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you haven’t finished.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY
The investigator will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the audio-recording will be written down and the audio-recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your real name with your pseudonym. Regulations require that research data be kept for at least three years.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?
The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your name or any identifying information about you will not be published. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator.
CONSENT FOR AUDIO AND VIDEO RECORDING
Audio recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don’t wish to be recorded, you will not be able to participate in this research study.

____I give my consent to be audio and video recorded ____________________________

Signature

____I do not consent to be audio and video recorded _____________________________

Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

___I consent to allow written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College Columbia University

________________________________________

Signature

___I do not consent to allow written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed outside of Teachers College Columbia University

____________________________________________

Signature

OPTIONAL CONSENT FOR FUTURE CONTACT

The investigator may wish to contact you in the future. Please initial the appropriate statements to indicate whether or not you give permission for future contact.

I give permission to be contacted in the future for research purposes:

Yes ________________________   No_______________________

Initial                                                  Initial

I give permission to be contacted in the future for information relating to this study:

Yes ________________________   No_______________________

Initial                                                  Initial
WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?
If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Camela Gustafson at 631-275-0168, or at cbg2120@tc.columbia.edu. You can also contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Marjorie Siegel at 212-678-3401, or at ms399@columbia.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu. Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 1002. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT’S RIGHTS

- I have read and discussed the informed consent with the researcher. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his or her professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study

Print name: ___________________________________________ Date: __________

Signature: ________________________________________________
Appendix B

INVITATION TO THE PROPOSED STUDY

Dear _______________________________,

As you know, I’m working on my dissertation in the department of Curriculum and Teaching at Teachers College, Columbia University. I would like to invite you to participate in my study.

What:
- My study is about teachers who participate in the collaborative teacher inquiry group that focuses on literacy in social studies and is offered through the Teacher Center. The central goals of the study are to: describe social studies teachers’ perspectives on, and practices of, literacy in social studies; and document collaborative teacher knowledge-generating and meaning-making around the teaching of literacy in social studies that might be achieved by this teacher inquiry group.

Who:
- The participants are middle and high school social studies teachers who have elected to register for the Teacher Center offering called Disciplinary Literacy and Learning in Social Studies – A Teacher Inquiry Group.

When:
- This portion of the study involves approximately 16 hours of participation in teacher inquiry group meetings. During this time, activities will include discussion that will focus on how literacy is defined and enacted in the discipline of social studies and in social studies classrooms. Activities might also include “thinking aloud” primary, secondary and tertiary historical sources selected by participants. Additionally, I will arrange mutually convenient times for two interviews. One of these will take place in March, 2017, within the first two weeks of the inquiry group meetings, and the other will take place in late April or May, 2017, after or near the end of the eight-week cycle. Each interview will take 45-60 minutes of your time during which I will ask you to talk about your experiences teaching literacy in social studies, and your experience in the teacher inquiry group.

How:
- Inquiry group meetings will take place weekly in a school library. I will meet you at a mutually convenient time and location for the interviews during which I will ask you open-ended questions about your experiences with literacy in social studies and the teaching of literacy in social studies.
As part of the nature of academic research, the contents of my interviews and observations will be transcribed and recorded for research purposes and may be used in academic papers, publications, and presentations at conferences. Please note, however, that your name and personal information will only be used with your consent and anyone that you happen to mention would never be disclosed or would be assigned a pseudonym. Thank you very much for your consideration—I hope you will participate in this study. If you have any questions or would like more information, please feel free to contact me by telephone or email, as indicated below.

Carmela Gustafson  
Doctoral Student, Dept. of Curriculum and Teaching  
Teachers College, Columbia University  
Ph.: (631) 275-0168   Email: cbg2120@tc.columbia.edu
Thank you again for your interest in my study and for agreeing to be interviewed.

This interview will contribute to research that I am conducting for my dissertation (to earn my doctoral degree). My research is centered on literacy in social studies and the teaching of social studies in middle and high school. The purpose of the research is to describe participants’ understandings and enactments of literacy in social studies, problems they encounter in teaching literacy in social studies, and problem-solving that might occur in the context of a teacher inquiry group focused on these issues.

The interview will last about 30-45 minutes. It will involve my asking questions about your participation in the group, your understanding of literacy in social studies, and how you make decisions about teaching literacy in your social studies classroom. You can decline without explanation to answer any questions. You may also choose not to participate in the study at any time. If you say something that you consider especially sensitive that you would not want to appear in any report, please let me know. As indicated in the letter of consent, I will treat your interviews as strictly confidential. For example, I will not use your name in any written report unless you have given me permission. I will use pseudonyms or codes to replace the names of any persons you should mention. In addition, it is important for you to understand that the purpose of this interview is not evaluative in any way.

With your permission, I would like to record this interview in order to have a complete record of our conversation. If at any time you are uncomfortable with being recorded, you can ask me to stop. Please indicate if these conditions are acceptable to you:

__________ yes ____________ no

Before we get started, is there anything more I can tell you about the purpose of this research?

I’d like to start by getting some background information about you as a teacher.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question</th>
<th>Related Research Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Tell me about your educational experience. Undergraduate, graduate major?</td>
<td>BG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Tell me about your teaching experience. Years teaching? Grades and courses taught?</td>
<td>BG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Have you ever taken classes or professional development that focused on or included literacy in history/social studies? If so, please describe those experiences.</td>
<td>BG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Tell me about your recollection of how you were taught history/social studies when you were in middle school, high school, college.</td>
<td>BG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What kinds of texts (primary, secondary, tertiary) are most readily available to you to use with students in your classroom?</td>
<td>BG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a. Of those mentioned, which do you regularly use with students?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5b. What is your view of the appropriateness and usefulness of those texts for student learning?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What kinds of texts are less available for use in your classroom?</td>
<td>BG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a. Which of those would you wish to be more available? In what ways do you think these might improve student learning?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How do you define literacy as it applies to history/social studies?</td>
<td>1, 1a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. What do you think about when you are reading a primary source text? A secondary source text? A tertiary source text?</td>
<td>1, 1a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Research Question(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Do you try to teach students these approaches?</td>
<td>1, 1a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9a. If so, how do you do this? What tensions, if any, do you encounter when doing this? How do you address those tensions?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9b. If not, why not?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Describe your view of school, district, state, or other expectations for teaching literacy in your classroom.</td>
<td>1, 1a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10a. What do you do to meet or otherwise manage those expectations?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Why did you decide to join this teacher inquiry group on literacy in social studies?</td>
<td>1, 1a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. What, if anything, have you learned so far in the inquiry group?</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12a. Has anything we’ve done so far changed your views on literacy in social studies? On teaching literacy in social studies?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12b. Has any of the above influenced your teaching? If so, describe how. If not, explain why not.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Is there anything you would like to see changed about how the inquiry group is structured, or what it is doing, that would make it more meaningful and/or useful to you?</td>
<td>1a, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. What have you learned (so far) in the inquiry-to-action group? If at all, how has your learning influenced your teaching?</td>
<td>1a, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Is there anything you would like to add?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Numbers Correspond to Research Question Numbers

1. How do middle and secondary level social studies teachers talk, think about, and represent literacy as it applies to their social studies classrooms?
   a. On what discourses do teachers draw as they talk about literacy in social studies?
2. What knowledge and meaning is interrogated, transformed, and generated in a teacher inquiry group focused on literacy in social studies?
BG= Background Question
Appendix D

SECOND SEMI-STRUCTURED TEACHER INTERVIEW

Thank you again for your interest in my study and for agreeing to be interviewed for a second time.

This interview will contribute to research that I am conducting for my dissertation (to earn my doctoral degree). My research is centered on literacy in social studies and the teaching of social studies in middle and high school. The purpose of the research is to describe participants’ understandings and enactments of literacy in social studies, problems they encounter in teaching literacy in social studies, and problem-solving that might occur in the context of a teacher inquiry group focused on these issues.

The interview will last about 30-45 minutes. It will involve my asking follow-up questions about your participation and experience in the group, your understanding of literacy in social studies, and how you make decisions about teaching literacy in your social studies classroom. You can decline without explanation to answer any questions. You may also choose not to participate in the study at any time. If you say something that you consider especially sensitive that you would not want to appear in any report, please let me know. As indicated in the letter of consent, I will treat your interviews as strictly confidential. For example, I will not use your name in any written report unless you have given me permission. I will use pseudonyms or codes to replace the names of any persons you should mention. In addition, it is important for you to understand that the purpose of this interview is not evaluative in any way.

With your permission, I would like to record this interview in order to have a complete record of our conversation. If at any time you are uncomfortable with being recorded, you can ask me to stop. Please indicate if these conditions are acceptable to you:

__________ yes ____________ no

Before we get started, is there anything more I can tell you about the purpose of this research?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question</th>
<th>Related Research Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Tell me about your overall experience in the teacher inquiry group.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Can you describe a particular activity, discussion, or experience in the group that you thought was especially helpful or engaging? Have there been any other positive experiences?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Can you describe a particular activity, discussion, or experience in the group that you didn’t think was particularly helpful or worthwhile? Have there been any other experiences in the group that you didn’t see as helpful or worthwhile?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. During our last interview, you talked about your definition of literacy in social studies as ___________. Has your definition changed in any way since then?</td>
<td>1, 1a, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a. Has anything changed about your view on teaching literacy in social studies?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. During our last interview, you talked about ____________ as being a tension you sense when you try to teach literacy in your social studies classroom. Has your perspective on this tension changed in any way since then? Or, is there anything you’d like to add about this tension?</td>
<td>1, 1a, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. During our last interview, you mentioned using _________kind(s) of texts in your classroom. Has this changed in any way since then, or do you expect it to?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Has your experience in the inquiry group influenced your teaching? If so, describe how. If not, please tell me why not.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. During our last interview, you described ____________ expectation for teaching literacy in your classroom. You also said that you do ______________ to try to meet or otherwise manage that expectation. Has anything changed about what you do, or how you think about that expectation? Is there anything you want to add about this topic?</td>
<td>1, 1a, 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. Is there anything you would like to add?

Note: Numbers Correspond to Research Question Numbers

1. How do middle and secondary level social studies teachers talk, think about, and represent literacy as it applies to their social studies classrooms?
   a. On what discourses do teachers draw as they talk about literacy in social studies?
2. What knowledge and meaning is interrogated, transformed, and generated in a teacher inquiry group focused on literacy in social studies?
Appendix E

DOCUMENTS USED/CONTRIBUTED DURING PILOTED INQUIRY GROUP MEETINGS

**SOURCING**

Before reading the document ask yourself:

- Who wrote this?
- What is the author’s perspective?
- Why was it written?
- When was it written?
- Where was it written?
- Is it reliable? Why? Why not?
CONTEXTUALIZATION

• When and where was the document created?

• What was different then? What was the same?

• How might the circumstances in which the document was created affect its content?

CLOSE READING

• What claims does the author make?

• What evidence does the author use?

• What language (words, phrases, images, symbols) does the author use to persuade the document’s audience?

• How does the document’s language indicate the author’s perspective?
CORROBORATION

- What do other documents say?
- Do the documents agree? If not, why?
- What are other possible documents?
- What documents are most reliable?
Argument Transitions

for example
for instance
obviously
of course
likewise
additionally
furthermore
not to mention
for this reason
another key piece of evidence
most compelling evidence
to summarize
all in all
without a doubt
as has been noted

use AFTER your first example/evidence
Evaluating Sources
Directions: For each historical question below, circle the source you think is more believable. Explain your choice in at least one complete sentence.

1. **Historical Question**: Who was present at the signing of the Declaration of Independence?

   **Source 1**: A Hollywood movie from 2001 about the American Revolution.

   **Source 2**: A book written in 1999 by a famous historian who is an expert on the American Revolution.

   I think Source ____ is more believable because_____________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________

2. **Historical Question**: What was it like to be a slave in South Caroline before the Civil War?

   **Source 1**: An interview with a former slave in 1936 (the Emancipation Proclamation abolished slavery in the U.S. in 1865).

   **Source 2**: A textbook chapter on slavery.

   **Source 3**: A diary written by a slave.

   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
3. **Historical Question:** What did the city of Pompeii look like before it was destroyed by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in AD 79?

   **Source 1:** A map of the city drawn by archaeologists who excavated (dug up) the site of the ancient city.
   **Source 2:** A painting of Pompeii found by archaeologists at the site.
   **Source 3:** A description of Pompeii written by a historian from Rome in AD 1452.

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4. **Historical Question:** What happened at the Battle of Lexington?

   **Source 1:** A middle school textbook written in 1985.

   **Source 2:** A newspaper story from the day after the battle in April, 1775.

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5. **Historical Question:** Why were Japanese Americans put in internment camps during World War II?

   **Source 1:** A film made by the US government during WWII explaining to other Americans why this was happening.

   **Source 2:** A classified (secret) government report on Japanese internment written during World War II that was later released to the public (no longer secret).
Gettysburg Address – Abraham Lincoln, November 19, 1863

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate – we can not consecrate – we can not hallow – this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us – that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion – that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain – that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.
Hamilton vs. Jefferson

Aim: How much power should the federal government have?

How should the Constitution be interpreted?

Directions: We will read a series of primary quotes from Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson, to understand their conflicting beliefs on the two questions stated above. Then based on our interpretations, we will complete the five categories on the chart titled “Comparing the Ideals of Hamilton and Jefferson Chart.” The five categories are: Nature of human beings, Government Power (of the federal government), The Constitution, The Elastic Clause of the Constitution, and The Economy.

Hamilton Quotes

Quote #1 “It is an unquestionable truth, that the body of the people in every way desire its prosperity…To deny that they are frequently led into the grossest of errors, by misinformation and passion, would be a flattery which their own good sense must despise.” (AH, Speech to the Ratifying Convention of N.Y., June, 1788)

Quote #2 “Why has government been instituted at all? Because the passions of men will not conform to the dictates of reason and justice without constraint.” (AH “The Federalist Papers” #15)

Quote #3 “…Instances might be cited in which a conduct of this kind has saved the people from very fateful consequences of their own mistakes, and has procured lasting monuments of their gratitude to the men who had courage and magnanimity enough to serve them at the peril of their displeasure.”(AH The Federalist Papers)

Quote #4 The prosperity of commerce is now perceived and acknowledged by all enlightened statesmen to be the most useful, as well as the most productive source of national wealth, and has accordingly become a primary object of its political cares.” (AH “The Federalist Papers” #12 Nov. 27, 1787)
Jefferson Quotes

Quote #1  “I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education. This is the true corrective of constitutional power.” (TJ “Letters of Thomas Jefferson”)

Quote #2  “The legitimate powers of government extend to those acts only as are injurious to others…” (TJ)

Quote #3  “I hold it that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical. Unsuccessful rebellions indeed generally establish the encroachments on the rights of the people which have produced them. An observation of this truth should render honest republican governors so mild in their punishments of rebellions, as not to discourage them too much. It is medicine necessary for the sound health of government.” (TJ “Letters of Thomas Jefferson”)

Quote #4  “Cultivators of the Earth are the most valuable citizens, they are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country and wedded to its liberty and interests by the most lasting bonds.” (“Extract from Thomas Jefferson to John Jay, 23 August, 1785)

The “Elastic Clause” of the Constitution (AKA “Necessary and Proper Clause”)

Directions: Read the following clause from the United States Constitution. Then annotate its meaning on the lines below. Make sure you consider the amount of power it gives to the Congress to carry out its job to make laws. Do you think Hamilton or Jefferson took advantage of this quote, to implement his belief in the size and power of the federal government?

“The Congress shall have Power to make all laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into Execution the foregoing Powers, and all other powers vested by this
Constitution in the Government of the United States,...” (Article 1, Section 8 Clause of the U.S. Constitution.)

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Strict Construction of the Constitution vs. Loose Construction

Directions: Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton had conflicting beliefs on how to interpret the words in the Constitution. Thomas Jefferson held a strict construction of the Constitution, while Hamilton had a loose construction. Let’s play a little word game with the following party scenario, so you can understand the difference.

Pretend your parents are going away for the weekend, and they have left you in charge with the following rules:
You can only have 2 friends over
The friends must be female
You may only serve soda and pizza

If you were Thomas Jefferson, a strict constructionist, you would follow the rules (or stick to the words of the Constitution— or only do what the Constitution says you can do.) However, if you were Alexander Hamilton, a loose constructionist, you would do anything you wanted to, as long as the Constitution doesn’t forbid it.

Again, pretend your parents are going away for the weekend, and they have left you in charge with the following rules:
Rule                                                                                           Hamilton’s Interpretation
(How he gets around the rules)
Don’t have a party in our house

No boys in the house

Don’t drink our liquor

Don’t drive our car

Now let’s go to page 13 in the Constitution packet, and read the instructions.
TEACHER INQUIRY GROUP ANNOUNCEMENT (PILOT STUDY)

Connetquot Teacher Center

Disciplinary Literacy and Learning in Social Studies

Instructor: Carmela Gustafson
Max Class Size: 20

Dates: Wednesdays 2/8/16 – 4/6/16
Time: 4:00pm-6:00pm
Location: *********** Middle School Library

In-Service Hours: 16 hrs (CTLE)

Description: This collaborative teacher inquiry group for beginning and experienced middle and high school social studies teachers will focus on literacy in social studies. We will explore how literacy is defined and enacted in the subject area, and consider the implications those definitions might have on pedagogy. Activities will include discussion, shared resources and materials, and group problem-solving, guided by the needs and interest of the group.

SUITABLE FOR SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS GRADES 7 – 12
(NO REGISTRATION FEE)

Disciplinary Literacy and Learning in Social Studies - Registration Information:

Online - Click Here Mail - Return this slip to Debbie Galante, Director – Long Oak TC, LOHS

Email – Complete bottom in a reply to this Email (Please include all relevant information)

Phone - (Tel: 631-699-0228 ext. 3625) CSD# - Is the # you use for extra pay forms

1. Name: __________________ School: _________ Position: __________
2. Cell #: (_____)_________ Email: ________________________________
3. Majority of Grade Level you teach: ______ Do you need CTLE Credit? (Y / N)
4. Birthdate: ____/____/____ Last 4 SS# or CSD ID#: SS#____________ CSD#_____

** Must complete line 4 if you would like CTLE Credit (need this information for the NYSED)**

No enrollment confirmation will be sent; Registrants will only receive notification if there is a cancellation, a waiting list, or modification of the schedule.
TEACHER INQUIRY GROUP ANNOUNCEMENT

Connetquot Teacher Center

Disciplinary Literacy and Learning in Social Studies

Instructor: Carmela Gustafson          Max Class Size: 20
Dates: Wednesdays, 5/3-6/21
Time: 2:45 pm - 4:45pm
Location: ******** Middle School Library
In-Service Hours: 16 hrs (CTLE)

Description:
This collaborative teacher inquiry group for beginning and experienced middle and high school social studies teachers will focus on literacy in social studies. We will explore how literacy is defined and enacted in the subject area, and consider the implications those definitions might have on pedagogy. Activities will include discussion, shared resources and materials, and group problem-solving, guided by the needs and interest of the group.

SUITABLE FOR SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS GRADES 7 – 12
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Name: _____________ School: __________ Position: __________
Cell #: (___)_________ Email: __________
Majority of Grade Level you teach: ___ Do you need CTLE Credit? ( Y / N )
Birthday: __/__/____ Last 4 SS# or CSD ID#: SS# __________ CSD#

**Must complete line 4 if you would like CTLE Credit (need this information for the NYSED)**

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