The Language and Literacy Spectrum

Volume 30 | Issue 1 Article 6

May 2020

Exploring the Discourses and Identities of One Aspiring Literacy Specialist

Elizabeth Y. Stevens
Roberts Wesleyan College, stevens_elizabeth@roberts.edu

Kathleen Hinchman
Syracuse University, kahinchm@syr.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.buffalostate.edu/lls

Part of the Language and Literacy Education Commons

Recommended Citation

Stevens, Elizabeth Y. and Hinchman, Kathleen (2020) "Exploring the Discourses and Identities of One Aspiring Literacy Specialist," *The Language and Literacy Spectrum*: Vol. 30 : Iss. 1 , Article 6.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.buffalostate.edu/lls/vol30/iss1/6

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Elementary Education and Reading at Digital Commons at Buffalo State. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Language and Literacy Spectrum by an authorized editor of Digital Commons at Buffalo State. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@buffalostate.edu.

Exploring the Discourses and Identities of One Aspiring Literacy Specialist

Hm:::[1] um despite working with a diverse group of students for the last five years, I'm still pretty white bread middle class, and sometimes I'll even joke about that with my students ((laughs)) that um but I think I have learned, even though that's how I am, that's my background, um I think I have really assimilated, maybe not assimilated, um but I don't think it's a part of me, but I definitely have changed the way I con=perceive others and um (.). I'm able to understand other cultures, other backgrounds, the other=whatever the other is. I think I'm much more able to do that.

We begin this paper with a quotation from Angela, which is our pseudonym for the 13-year English teacher veteran who shared the preceding insight with us and whose insights are the focus of this paper. She was finishing graduate studies to be a literacy specialist and relocating to another state, a set of transitions that would make most of us feel vulnerable. We share her story because we admired and aspired to her self-awareness, including her awareness of herself as a privileged, white, middle class, female and her openness in weighing how these affiliations shaped her teaching. Yet when we parsed her language-in-use (Gee, 2014a), we realized that what we first saw as humble explanation was threaded with discourses of difference, discourses that could be read negatively by others (Olson & Worsham, 1999).

Angela's reflections were revelatory for us as literacy specialists and literacy teacher educators whose backgrounds are similar to hers. We share her case study

---

[1] See Appendix A for transcription coding system adapted from Tannen (1984/2005). This system of recording used some special symbols to capture "ums" and "likes" and other incomplete or repeated words as an indication of how people see themselves and their ideas.

(Stake, 1995) here to illustrate the kinds of discourses and identities that a single individual can bring to interactions. We explored Angela's language about becoming a literacy specialist using critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Gee, 2014a, 2014b) to address the questions: What did Angela's language about becoming a literacy specialist reveal about her perspectives toward herself and her literacy teaching? What did critical discourse analysis reveal about her discourses and identities brought to these explanations? The rest of the paper explains the background that led us to these questions, as well as research methods, findings, and implications for literacy teaching and research.

Background Information

Literacy specialists are situated in U.S. schools to support classroom teachers' literacy instructional efforts, sometimes by teaching students, coaching teachers, or designing curriculum (Bean, et al., 2015). Schools often charge literacy specialists with accelerating the progress of students who have difficulty with reading and writing. This pressure can be so great that schools develop deficit discourses about these students that position them and their families are somehow at fault for their lack of literacy progress (Brooks, 2015; Frankel, 2016; Frankel & Brooks, 2018; Frankel, Jaeger, Brooks, & Randel, 2015).

This means that becoming an effective literacy specialist involves developing tools that support all students' development of reading and writing without delimiting their aspirations. Much literacy specialist preparation, including Angela's, was intended to help them to be open-minded, reflexive, and supportive, with high expectations and strategies to help all students toward successful literacy acquisition

and development (e.g., Comber & Kamler, 2004; Hall, Johnson, Juzwik, Wortham, and Mosley, 2010; Hyland, 2009).

However, research has also highlighted some of the complexities involved in preparing individuals to teach and support others' literacy teaching, illustrating how teachers' discourses and identities evolve (Alsup, 2006; Assaf, 2005; Haddix, 2010; Parsons, 2018). Developing teacher identities are said to blend discourses of self, studies, and teaching experiences to forge ways to do their jobs. This blending often leaves beginning literacy teachers uncertain about how to bring their backgrounds to their teaching with students who do not share their backgrounds.

Several studies have also examined the discourses of more experienced literacy specialists. These literacy specialists have been shown to enact multiple and sometimes conflicting identities (e.g., co-learner, colleague, outsider) that are socially, culturally, and historically constructed (McKinney & Giorgis, 2009; MacPhee & Jewitt, 2017; Rainville & Jones, 2008). Literacy specialists in practice often feel pressured to prove themselves to teachers and administrators. They experience emotions like frustration and defeat that leave them feeling vulnerable as they enact their varied, competing roles (Hunt, 2018; Hunt & Handsfield, 2013).

Much previous research has explored how literacy specialists make sense of their lives and work. What we do not know is how literacy specialists' language situates their identities to interact with others, that is, we don't know how their language identifies each of them as a certain "kind of person" (Gee, 2000, p. 99). Gee is one of several scholars who have explained how identities are reflected in individuals' language, and that analyses of language-in-use can provide us with access

to how identities are multi-layered, ever changing, shaping and shaped by contexts and varying by contexts (Assaf, 2005; Gee, 2014a, 2014b).

Our multiple discourses reflect our multiple identities, drawing on our experiences with our families, peers, and members of various community groups in and out of schools, for example. There are conflicts among our discourses and identities because they do not always represent consistent and compatible communities or values (Gee, 2012). Indeed, Gee (2012) described how some discourses used by teachers in schools treat certain children as "other" (p. 4) according to ethnicity, race, class, gender identification, or ability. Who we aspire to be as literacy educators become sites of struggle and resistance when our aspirations mingle with less inclusive discourses from our backgrounds or day-to-day language. Drawing on this less inclusive language can send mixed or negative messages to the individuals with whom we work, including students, undercutting our intent.

Method

Critical discourse analysis begins with qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), adding details of various aspects of the word choices, sentence structures, and other aspects of language (Fairclough, 1989). What makes a discourse analysis "critical" is the added effort to connect descriptions of language's surface features to what the language reveals about how individuals' identities situate them in the power struggles of the social world (Rogers, 2011; Rogers et al., 2005). Critical discourse analysis allowed us to look at Angela's oral and written texts to see how her language situated her and her identities in society and how she made sense of her world.

Setting and Participant

This study took place in the northeast U.S. during a six-week graduate M.S. practicum that served as the culminating experience for a master's degree program in literacy education. The practicum was taught by Kathy who did not participate in analysis until the practicum was completed and data were collected and deidentified. Elizabeth was a participant observer throughout the six weeks. The study was part of a larger study of beginning literacy specialists' discourses and identities involving 10 of 15 students enrolled in the class, including Angela. As we noted, we selected Angela to write about in this paper because she presented us with especially rich insights about her perspectives.

Angela had been an English education major and then teacher prior to her enrollment in the literacy specialist program. We selected Angela to write about in this paper because she presented us with especially rich insights about her perspectives. She brought the self-critical sensibilities of someone who had studied literary analysis as an undergraduate English major, a major that since the 1980s has been driven by varying theories of how power and privilege play out in various texts (Scholes, 1985). We note that, while her graduate literacy specialist program included classwork exploring issues of diversity in literacy education, it did not include significant discussion about how individuals' discourses can include or exclude literacy students in the manner we recommend at the end of this paper.

Data Collection

Elizabeth gathered various examples of the focal participant's oral and written language (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999), including field notes of class seminars, and written lesson plans, reflections, and reports to gain a general sense of Angela's

interactions with and beliefs about others; comments written on her lesson plans contained little criticism of her teaching of a 16-year-old using a learner's permit manual, pronouncing her throughout as doing "good work."

The main focus of this analysis was the language she used in three audiotaped semi-structured interviews discussing her teaching and becoming a literacy specialist (see Appendix B) (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). These were audiotaped and transcribed using Tannen's (2005/1984) transcription coding system. The first interview, completed early in the practicum, was a life history interview to learn about Angela's background, beliefs, values, and assumptions. The second interview occurred at the end of the course and focused on her views of teaching and literacy instruction. The third interview took place six months after the semester ended to refine our understandings of her perspectives.

Data Analysis

Data analysis included several steps. First, we independently reviewed the corpus of Angela's data, including every utterance, for explicit themes and ideologies, each keeping a running list of possible codes, references to institutional and social contexts, and memoranda containing our interpretations of these ideas. We identified recurring codes (race, class, cohort, teaching experience, visions of teacher self, self-perception, motherhood, religion). We discussed our notes together and organized them into a semantic map to identify three themes, teaching, motherhood, and religion, that seemed to be the superordinate central ideas of Angela's narrative, driving almost everything she said.

We pasted all snippets of data representing these three codes into a single document for fine-grained critical discourse analysis that focused on how she used her language to talk about these themes. We note that almost all of what Angela said during the interviews was connected to these three codes and so was included. We excluded a small amount of her talk about classmates' concerns that she did not share, such as out-of-class conflicts between classmates that, in her view, inordinately preoccupied the other students.

We used Fairclough's (1989) recommendation to consider Angela's description, interpretation, and explanation of situations, institutions, and societal influences on her perspectives. We also used five of Gee's (2014b) discourse analysis tools to draw inferences about how her understanding of herself as a teacher and aspiring literacy specialist was connected to the three main themes. The deixis tool allowed us to focus on how her use of pointing words (e.g., I/me, he/him, she/her, we/us, they/them, here/there, this/that, now/then, yesterday/today) situated her in various contexts. We used the subject tool to examine how Angela used subjects and predicates to position herself and others. The intonation tool helped us consider how Angela's words emphasized more and less salient ideas. Gee's identity building tool helped us explore how Angela described her identities. We used Gee's big "D" Discourse tool to consider specifics ways Angela situated herself in the social world, including her references to gender, race, social class, and religion.

Researchers' Roles

Critical discourse analysis is like other forms of qualitative research in that much of what happens is driven by researchers' subjective decision-making, resulting

in descriptions of others' perspectives that can only be judged for whether they are reported with enough detail and nuance to appear trustworthy. We acknowledge that even researchers with the same concerns would likely create different interview questions, follow-up probes, codes, and application and explanation of codes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Findings can be judged plausible, in part, if they "make sense" to those who know the context or in light of other research, judgements that clearly have limits.

We made several efforts to control our biases. This was especially important because we both had significant experience in supervising or teaching this course and did not want to impose our preconceived ideas about beginning literacy specialists on Angela's insights. Elizabeth made every effort to be unobtrusive during practicum observations, writing observer's comments and reflective memoranda during interviews and observations to provide "time to reflect on issues raised in the setting and how they relate to larger theoretical, methodological, and substantive issues" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 165). In addition, we both read data independently and noted interpretations before meeting to come to agreement about superordinate themes and tool application. We drafted charts together to organize emergent assertions about how Angela's language positioned her identities in relation to family, students, and colleagues and to judge the most salient utterances to share below. We note that Angela did not read or respond to our analysis, which we acknowledge as a possible weakness in the study. However, we believe she would agree with our interpretations since they were derived almost directly from her explanations.

Findings

Angela's discourses suggested that her experiences and life choices had shaped her in important ways, leaving her sympathetic to others in all spheres of her life. She identified confidently as a wife, mother, church member, teacher, and aspiring literacy specialist. However, her discourses were threaded with tensions about women teachers and about working in urban educational settings.

How Angela Positioned Herself and Others

Angela's use of deictic words. Her frequent use of personal pronouns, such as the first-person singular "I," suggested that Angela put the onus of responsibility for her life choices on herself. Evidence of this can be found in this quotation, in which she talked about the thinking that had brought her to graduate studies and her current teaching position:

> But um, but I know I wrestled with that, uh, when we moved here and it looked more and more like I wasn't /gonna/ be teaching. Um, I really wrestled with who I was if I, um, if I wasn't /gonna/ be a teacher because, um, I didn't know, I wasn't a stay-at-home mom really and I didn't know who else I was.

She used the first-person plural, "we," to position herself as a member of several collectives: her family, teachers, women, and society at large in this language snippet:

> There's that nurturing sense to education that, uh, we have, you know, females are more nurturing right? ((Laughs)) We're the mothers, we take care. So I think there are a lot of really, um, old ingrained things from our culture that although we=we *say* we've moved past and we *think* we're more progressive, I think there's a lot of that really old stuff that is still holding on.

Angela's discourse highlighted her awareness of how some cultural groups positioned teachers, historically and culturally, as nurturing mothers even as she implied that she fit this stereotype and critiqued this view with a laugh and reference to "old," historically rooted perspectives.

"We" was also often the collective subject of sentences tying Angela's motivations to larger social issues, such as racism: "As much as we all want to just ((laughs)) *wish* differently, in especially some parts of the country, but probably in all if we're honest, there's still disadvantages for people of other race, there are prejudices and, um, and judgments." In this case, Angela's use of "we" acknowledged that she was a member of a racist society.

Angela's subjects. Angela used the third-person singular pronoun, "it," and the second-person plural pronoun, "you," to explain how she learned about society's racism and classism as she reached adulthood:

> Um, you'll find that there's a difference even though you may make the same amount of money as somebody else and qualify as the same, uh, at the same SES level, there still can be a world of difference in, um, in your understanding of the world and the way you talk about it.

Angela also used "it" as a subject to refer explicitly to the ways race and class had newly influenced her teaching after her move from suburban to urban teaching: "Um, hmm. (.) Uh again I guess it=it didn't *really* impact me, it di=I=because I wasn't cognizant of it until we moved… and I was, um, teaching and working with the *other* basically." Angela's language was unique because she confessed an awareness of the conflict between who she had been and who she had become as a result of her life

choices. The contours of her discourse highlighted "the *other*," suggesting an awareness of her use of discourses separating herself from people who did not share her background.

Angela's use of subjects and objects explained how she helped her students, but with language that sometimes separated herself from them with a collective "they" or "them" that also positioned them as unaware, at a disadvantage, as in this example:

> And=and I always tried to encourage students that *because* of those things there are *also*, um, scholarships and, um, and a number of things that have been put into place that would help them *because* they're of a different race. But they need to know what those are and they need to have the grades to take advantage of them. They can't get a scholarship for an African American, even if you don't have the ((laughs)) the grades to get it.

Angela encouraged her students' pursuit of higher education by helping them pursue scholarships. However, her language choices suggested that, even as she made an effort to help her students, she sometimes positioned them as other, as also noted in the opening quotation.

Angela's intonation contours. At one point, Angela explained how she had once felt about joining an urban church: "It didn't appeal. And um so I could=I could help people and I could be involved in people's lives in a *safer* place was my thinking." Later, other text explained her current view of life and work in an urban community with language that was more empathetic but that still set urban youth apart from her experiences:

> I live in the city and um and we're really involved in our church where we work with youth *who are in the city* and are um hard kids. And so I guess, it really isn't *just* school for me, but there are all these spheres that have come together that have impacted me where I'm working with kids in all these different areas that um (.) are have needs, *a number of needs*, not just academic so.... It's um it's their way of seeing the world and the things that they're saying to me that cause me to look at the world differently.

Tensions in Angela's identities are suggested in the contours of her intonation in this quotation, which also included critique of her own limited view and hinted of her efforts to change her attitude toward difference.

Angela's discourse emphasized appreciation for all of her teaching experiences, in both suburban and urban contexts, in middle school and high school, and she shared a love for teaching English and reading. This made her unsure about how to limit her upcoming job search. She explained,

> And=and in leaving here and going to a new job, whatever it may be whenever it may be, um I really don't know what I want to do (.) any longer. I don't know if I would like to return to teaching kids like me or if I would like to be in the city. I don't know if I want to teach high school, which I taught, or stay at middle school. I don't know if I want to do reading or English ((laughs)). I just have so many more options (.) um and things that I really *do* love. Like I don't know where I fit best anymore.

This quotation also shows how she weighed whether she wanted to teach "kids like me," a reference to her white, middle class, suburban upbringing, or teach in an urban

context, where she was most recently an English teacher. Her use of "in the city" conflated geography with race and class even as she reported that urban teaching fulfilled her desire to "help" those "disadvantaged" by socioeconomics, race, and language, language with which she positioned herself as a helper from the dominant white middle class who was positioned to come to the aid of others (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Discourses Informing Angela's Language

Graduate student. Angela drew on her life experiences to give advice to peers. For example, she recalled offering counsel about what to wear to an interview for a teaching position. She described her role in her cohort as "Mama," explaining that her peers turned to her to help them think through their learning about literacy instruction.

Wife and mother. Angela explained how her role in the student cohort and her teaching responsibilities were compatible with other aspects of her life, including being a wife and mother, which were central in her discourses and identities. She described herself as "old school" in the ways that she supported her husband. She explained, "I want him to be happy," and, as an example, noted that they moved seven times in 13 years to support her husband's academic and career aspirations:

> I um, especially the last few years while Kevin's been working on his Ph.D. and I've been (.) the um the one to try to hold it all together ((laughs)) as best as I can. So um I'm the one who checks Sophia's backpack to see what's her homework, what's coming up for the week, what's=what field trips are going

> on. I'm the um go to person with daycare for Ella, as far as communicating anything that's happening there.

Angela decided to pursue teaching because of the parameters associated with the job to make her family a priority. She admitted, "I would never really have a family life if I went through the track of attorney like I thought I would. ((Laughs)) So I decided education might be a little friendlier for my=my life goals too." In Angela's view, a career in teaching allowed her to balance her personal and work lives in a way that matched her life goals. Her description of these choices suggested a heteronormative worldview.

After her oldest daughter entered school, Angela felt the demands of helping what she saw as a "capable" child with schoolwork. This helped her see "what it might be like a little bit for other parents whose students were not quite as capable. And they themselves, as parents, might not have felt capable." Angela noted that parenting made her have more "realistic" expectations about the workload she assigned while improving her interactions with families, but drawing on deficit language to position her insights:

> I know what I'm doing is right by them and um and, you know, they may come around, someday. ((Laughs)) And they may not, but this is still what's best. And I think being a mother has helped with that too. And ya know, there are days that your kids don't like you moments, your kids really don't like what you're doing for them, you know it's right. And I think that's true with the kids in my classroom, that they know I love /em/. And=and I try to tell them

> that frequently, that I care about them and I wouldn't push /em/ so hard if I didn't care.

Angela described motherhood as contributing to her confidence about building relationships with her students and knowing what's best for them.

Religious person. Like her identity as a mother, she described her identity as a religious person as aligned with her teacher identity, describing this as "the most important part of who I am." She explained that she grew up with a really strong faith as a member of the Church of the Nazarene. This Protestant denomination, Angela shared, "was always looking to others and how we could help others, what we could do for others." This was similar to her ideas about teaching.

Angela saw a connection between her religious values and teaching:

> That I think that not only it (.) is part of my faith that I think it's=faith is something that ought to be impacting others and lived out but as a teacher it appeals to me because I am interested in helping people and changing lives and all that kinds of stuff so.

Angela saw herself living out her religious values as a teacher, helping people and changing lives (Subedi, 2006).

Experienced teacher. Angela understood her teacher self as being part of her identity. To describe the way her identity evolved she shared the conflicted ways of being between having interactive relationships with peers and being an authority figure. She thought her experience positioned her as a mother figure to her colleagues during her graduate studies.

She explained, “I see myself=I don’t see myself in a disjointed way where I’m a professional and this other, they intermingle for me, that what I do in the classroom affects who I am.” Her talk included much reference to teaching experience. She recalled her first year of teaching:

> I was a *mess*. Um ((laughs)) trying to take on that theory and idealism of what teaching *should* look like and=and put it into practice. In fact I, /ya/ know, so many like all the new teachers went home crying in tears so many nights and telling myself, ‘This is the *wrong job* because teachers aren’t supposed to feel this way. They aren’t supposed to *hate* what they do. They aren’t supposed to *hate* their children.’

She noted that she had been trying during the first year to establish herself as an authority. “I *am* your teacher,” and the relationship building that she valued was “muddled” in the mix:

> Because I=I was afraid of too much, I didn't want to cross that line^, I was trying to *be* the *adult*. And um and so I think since then, I’ve had enough security in being the adult, being the teacher (.) that=that those relationships are *really important*.

Angela had understood authority and relationship building to be dichotomous, but with experience she came to value balancing the two.

Angela thought her experience led to her being read as “Mama” by her peers during her graduate studies when she was called on to counsel others on dealing with professors and what to wear and say when on job interviews:

> Um, where again life experiences would help, um, and I guess my nature too after being in, well it's my nature, but the experience of being in the classroom for several years and being, um, in a bargaining ((laughs)) unit as well as being, um, a=an English department chair is you learn to be a diplomat and you learn what you should say, what you shouldn't say, when to hold your tongue. So it helped me to be able to pass some of that stuff on.

Aspiring literacy specialist. Angela's purpose for graduate study changed as she found herself identifying ways to help her students. She suggested she was good at teaching metaphors and themes but struggled to "help them understand at the most basic level," explaining:

> Um, [I] wanted to be able to instruct them [students] better and, and *now* I've=I've changed, like I said before, to really wanting to be able to work with, in the role of a literacy specialist, work with, um, faculty and administration *beyond* students.

As was evidenced in her talk about working with teachers, Angela drew from her teaching to construct the role of the literacy specialist as collaborative and collegial:

> And I=I'm not an administrative kind of person um, ya know, a teacher. And so that would be my=I think my style is to work with somebody and um co-planning and co-teaching. Um being somebody they could bounce ideas off of.

For Angela, being a literacy specialist or coach was constructed as sharing teaching strategies and engaging in problem-solving related to teaching literacy.

Angela grounded her desire to be a literacy specialist in her "passion for students." She said,

> I would like to um I would like to somehow^ at some point^ work in the role of a literacy specialist, to work with teachers. Um and I think it's um because of my passion for students that I want to do that because I know that um students will benefit if I can work with teachers and ^teachers benefit too but ultimately it's about the kids.

Angela's words highlighted that a literacy specialist worked collaboratively, "with" teachers and how the work with teachers filters to students.

Angela also described the role of the literacy specialist as one of a position of leadership or power. She leaned on her experiences as an English Department Chair to describe herself as able to assume leadership. Angela asserted:

> Um, ((laughs)) I said before it's, um, but I have learned to be a diplomat and I guess that's really key with coaching. Um, because everyone wants to think that what=that they do things well, including me. And uh, and coaching people you want to encourage what they're doing well and, um, and then find a way to help with what they can do better without making them feel like they're messing up and they're no good at what they're doing and they need to change. And um, /ya/ know people's feelings get hurt an=as well as their, um, professional morale.

Angela also understood leadership skills to include maintaining morale by serving as a diplomat while encouraging and helping teachers to improve literacy instruction. In some ways her discourses tied to managerial discourses or dominant ideologies about

leadership that focus on "forward progression" or "growth," discourses that are common in a time of school reform (Sinclair, 2004, p. 12).

At the same time, again, Angela understood her desire to help as within the capacity of the literacy specialist. She said,

> I still want to be with students, that's still my heart but, um, but I guess I've seen there=that there's great power outside of the single classroom, where I have my students, to empower other people to be doing the same kinds of things in their classrooms and administrators to value that and, um, spread things system wide.

Angela set herself apart from her less experienced graduate school peers by identifying her teaching, work, and human experiences as a source of strength they didn't have:

> I guess it goes back again to experience with a lot of different people, working with a lot of different kinds of teachers over the years. Um, I=knowing different teaching styles, different personalities, um, as well as the students. Um, kind of being able to read different student types and classroom dynamics and, um, and what's working between a teacher and a student and what's not. Uh, I guess I'm /gonna/ fall back on a lot of experience. ((Laughs)) So, I'm hoping. That and=and people skills. I *genuinely like people.*

White and middle class. Angela called herself "white bread Caucasian," confessing that her awareness of the implications of this background had grown with her teaching experiences:

> I'm *aware* of that [whiteness]. Whereas I don't think I was prior to teaching in an urban setting. I *know* I wasn't. Um, I mean I knew I was white but I wasn't ((laughs)) aware of what all that carried with it and, um, how being white might be different from another race. Um, an=and now I'm very aware of the advantages, mostly ((laughs)).

Angela explained that she had changed since her early teaching to a position of "going beyond preconceived notions and prejudices," which she understood as important. She shared anecdotes about how her students helped her see the world differently: "…and it made me realize, um, how I=I used to judge people…And um, and it gave I guess, um having a real person, a face, knowing her [a student] personally, um, made me think differently…" She explained that she had come to "understand other cultures, other backgrounds, the *other*=whatever the other is. I think I'm much more able to do that." Yet she continued to use a language of that situated her in a superior position to her students, suggesting that she understood racism as individual action rather than at the structural level reflected in her reference to social hierarchy:

> But also made me, I think I said before, really want to fight for the, um, the disadvantages that a lot of the students had. And either not being native of English speakers or not having the socioeconomic means to do things, or um, or the race. Um, but it made me really want to empower them. And I quite often, um, would be pretty explicit about letting them know, not in a mean way, but letting them know that there were odds that they were /gonna/ have to overcome and that's why they really needed to take hold of their education.

> And=and they were /gonna/ have to fight and compete against kids who were far more advantaged. And so, /ya/ know, they really needed every advantage they could get to get that leg up.

In this quotation, Angela positioned herself as in a "fight" for students to be able to compete in a larger context, outside of her classroom. She described her former suburban, middle class students as "advantaged" as they had "experiences that help them to interpret their world as well as what they're studying about their world," with examples that included traveling. Even as she drew on deficit and helping discourses that positioned her as able to assist "the underprivileged," her discourses also reflected a sense of economic challenge in light of global competition with words like "compete" and "get a leg up," words that can be traced to U.S. government rhetoric about needing to be competitive in the world economy (Pennington, 2007).

Discussion

Angela's use of deixis, subjects, and intonation positioned her as mostly confident, a knower, sure of her place in her family, church, and classroom. She tied this to experiences from childhood through an adulthood of increasing diversity. She was aware of her privilege and was explicitly working against what she saw as an earlier colorblindness (Thompson, 1998). She was also aware and critical of how she was situated as a white, nurturing female teacher. She wanted to help her students to develop needed literacy skills to make them successful. This makes us think that her word choices were likely unconscious when they reflected discourses of exclusion that belied her principles (Gee, 2012).

Despite her confidence in identifying as a future literacy specialist, Angela's discourses reflected conflicting ways of being. Angela was knowledgeable about the conflicts in her discourses and was working to address them. She reflected on and critiqued such discourses when she realized them, as in the opening quotation. We acknowledge that we cannot know if she drew on discourses of difference in interactions with students, although we know she was judged by Kathy and by others as being a "good teacher," which suggests that perhaps our interview questions elicited usages that are not present in her day-to-day interactions.

Our excavation of Angela's discourses contains lessons about the need to similarly excavate our own discourses, although we realize it is easier to dissect others' language than it is to look at one's own honestly. The good news is that researchers have begun to develop methods for doing this (Vetter, Schieble, & Meacham, 2012). For instance, we can write literacy autobiographies and reflect on how we are shaped by political, cultural, racial, economical, and historical times. We can also record interactions to critique enactments of identities, discourses, and learning environment that we implicitly and explicitly construct for students and colleagues (Rogers & Wetzel, 2014).

Angela provided a mirror for us to look at ourselves more critically. She reminds us all that we bring the prejudices of our life histories and experiences to our work each day, and that we need to dismantle those that may exclude or hurt others. Deconstructing our deficit-oriented language is complicated and hard, as Angela demonstrated with her use of vestigial discourses despite her active efforts to eliminate them. But we are confident that she is persisting just as we need to persist: such

efforts are key to our development of literacy pedagogies and school cultures that are more inclusive and effective for all students.

References

Alsup, J. (2006). *Teacher identity discourses: Negotiating personal and professional spaces*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Assaf, L. C. (2005). Exploring identities in a reading specialization program. *Journal of Literacy Research, 37*, 201-236.

Bean, R. M., Kern, D., Goatley, V., Ortlieb, E., Shettel, J., Calo, K., Marinak, B., Sturtevant, E., Elish-Piper, L., L'Allier, S., Cox, S., Frost, S., Mason, P., Quatroche, D., & Cassidy, J. (2015). Specialized literacy professionals as literacy leaders: Results of a national survey. *Literacy Research and Instruction, 54,* 83-114.

Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Pearson.

Brooks, M. D. (2015). "It's like a script": Long-term English learners' experiences with and ideas about academic reading. *Research in the Teaching of English, 49*(4), 383-406.

Chouliaraki, L., & Fairclough, N. (1999). *Discourse in late modernity: Rethinking critical discourse analysis*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.

Comber, B., & Kamler, B. (2004). Getting out of deficit: Pedagogies of reconnection. *Teaching Education, 15*(3), 293-310.

Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power.* New York, NY: Longman.

Frankel, K. K., & Brooks, M. D. (2018). Why the "struggling reader" label is harmful (and what educators can do about it). *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 62*(1), 111-114.

Frankel, K. K. (2016). The intersection of reading and identity in high school literacy intervention classes. *Research in the Teaching of English, 51*(1), 37-59.

Frankel, K. K., Jaeger, E., Brooks, M. D., & Randel, M. (2015). Struggling readers?: Using theory to complicate understandings of what it means to be literate in school. *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice, 64*, 307-322.

Gee, J. P. (2000). Identity as an analytical lens for research in education. *Review of Research in Education, 25*, 99-125.

Gee, J.P. (2012). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Gee, J. P. (2014a). *An introduction to discourse analysis theory and method* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Gee, J. P. (2014b). *How to do discourse analysis: A toolkit* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Haddix, M. (2010). No longer on the margins: Researching the hybrid literate identities of Black and Latina preservice teachers. *Research in the Teaching of English*, *45*, 97-123.

Hall, L. A., Johnson, A. S., Juzwik, M. M., Wortham, S. E. F., & Mosley, M. (2010). Teacher identity in the context of literacy teaching: Three explorations of classroom positioning and interaction in secondary schools. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 26*, 234-243.

Hunt, C. S. (2018). Getting to the heart of the matter: Discursive negotiations of emotions within literacy coaching interactions. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 60*, 331-343.

Hunt, C. S., & Handsfield, L. J. (2013). The emotional landscapes of literacy coaching: Issues of identity, power, and positioning. *Journal of Literacy Research, 45*(1), 47-86.

Hyland, N. E. (2009). One White teacher's struggle for culturally relevant pedagogy: The problem of the community. *The New Educator, 5*, 95-112.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Qualitative inquiry. *Thousand Oaks, CA*.

MacPhee, D., & Jewitt, P. (2017). Conflicting discourses: Navigating tensions of becoming a literacy coach. *The New Educator, 13*(4), 1-24.

McKinney, M., & Giorgis, C. (2009). Narrating and performing identity: Reading specialists' writing identities. *Journal of Literacy Research, 41*, 104-149.

Olson, G. A., & Worsham, L. (1999). Staging the politics of difference: Homi Bhabha's critical literacy. In G. Olson & L. Worsham (Eds.), *Race, rhetoric, and the postcolonial* (pp. 3–39). New York: State University of New York Press.

Parsons, A. W. (2018). Becoming a literacy specialist: Developing identities. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 57(4), 387-407.

Pennington, J. L. (2007). Silence in the classroom/whispers in the halls: Autoethnography as pedagogy in White pre-service teacher education. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 10*(1), 93-113.

Rainville, K. N., & Jones, S. (2008). Situated identities: Power and positioning in the work of a literacy coach. *The Reading Teacher, 61*, 440-448.

Rogers, R. (Ed.). (2011). *An introduction to critical discourse analysis in education* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ.

Rogers, R., Malancharuvil-Berkes, E., Mosley, M., Hui, D., & Joseph, G. O. G. (2005). Critical discourse analysis in education: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research, 75*, 365-416.

Rogers, R., & Wetzel, M.M. (2014). *Designing critical literacy education through critical discourse analysis: Pedagogical and research tools for teacher researchers*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Scholes, R. E. (1985). *Textual power: Literary theory and the teaching of English.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Sinclair, A. (2004). Journey around leadership. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 25*(1), 7-19.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Subedi, B. (2006). Preservice teachers' beliefs and practices: Religion and religious diversity. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 39*, 227-238.

Tannen, D. (1984/2005). *Conversational style: Analyzing talk among friends.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press. (1984 edition, Norwood, NJ: Ablex.)

Thompson, A. (1998). Not the color purple: Black feminist lessons for educational caring. *Harvard Educational Review*, *68*(4), 522-555.

Vetter, A., Schieble, M., & Meacham, M. (2012). *A critical framework for engaging preservice teachers' identity work through video analysis*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.