Exploring the Critical in Literacy: A Multi-Case Study

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Executive Summary: This case study explores how identity, cultural capital, social relationships, and power dynamics shape student engagement and motivation in critical literacy classrooms. Using Bourdieu's theories of habitus, cultural and social capital, and frameworks from critical literacy scholars such as Allan Luke and Hilary Janks, the study examines three students: Daniella (private bilingual school), Sara (rural public school), and Isabella (homeschooled). Findings reveal that prescribed school texts often fail to engage students like Sara and Daniella due to a mismatch with their cultural backgrounds. In contrast, Isabella's personalized curriculum supports deep engagement, showing the value of aligning instruction with students' lived experiences.

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The Critical: Questioning of the world — don't canonise the critical. Foundationally, it is, redefining political, critique of political economy, critique of propaganda and ideology, focus on human psychologies of struggle and oppresion — culture of silence, marginalized, violence and human response to them. – *Scott A. Nichols*

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1 Introduction

The elementary classroom offers a social space, a field, for children to create knowledge through language (Vasquez, 2001). Children learn various forms of literacies through language (Freire, 1973; Lewison et al., 2002). Children bring with them to the classroom a perspective of the world (Vasquez, 2001). These perspectives are made up of economic, cultural, and social capital students have acquired through upbringing, prior knowledge, and life experiences (Luke, 2003). Thus, children are limited by the tools, resources, and discourses they bring with them to the classroom (Vasquez, 2014).

Studies have revealed that classroom talk and discourses across content areas are limited to one perspective, typically that of the dominant speaker, the holder of the greatest amount of capital (Applebee et al., 2003; Grenfell, 2009). While it may appear this would only hinder the learning experience from those with little capital or limited prior knowledge and experiences, it actually harms the learning experiences of all in the form of limiting of information and understanding by closing the exploration of ideas and questions that foster and enrich learning (Dewey, 1998; Freire, 1973).

One of the most misunderstood beliefs about learning is the idea that reading is about surface level comprehension (Fairclough, 2001; Freire, 1973; Janks, 2001; Ladson□Billings, 1995; Luke, 2003; Street, 1995). Students read a passage and are expected to answer basic question such as “what is the author trying to say?” or questions that seek to resolve explicit details from the text (Shanahan, 2002). Critical literacy seeks to disrupt this notion of surface-level comprehension and move towards a notion that students have the power when reading. It is not a matter of basic comprehension abilities of the text but rather allowing students to have access to literacies and position them to intervene in the text by asking questions, reflecting, thinking, creating dialogue which listens to those opinions of others, and developing perspectives that may ever change based on the continuous transformation of one’s identity and dispositions (habitus) (Freire, 1973; Grenfell, 2009; Luke, 2014). Lewison et al. (2008) explain that under critical literacy pedagogy students develop a language of critique allowing them to interrogate text in an effort to create change and free themselves from the powers that seek to position and reproduce their education and life trajectory (Freire, 1973; Vasquez, 2001). Teaching or allowing students to become critical with texts allows them to use literature to not merely comprehend it, but to redefine it (Lewison et al., 2002). Redefining literacy starts with a field that allows the critical to take place while being facilitated by a teacher who understands the necessity to look beyond and question the meaning of literacy.

There are copious amounts of research in the area of critical literacy pedagogy and the benefits of such pedagogy, not only to learning, but to outcomes of student success (Fairclough, 2001; Janks, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Vasquez, 2001). There is also much work on cultural capital as it relates to various aspects of learning and education (Janks, 2001). There is much less, if any, attention to the interconnectedness of habitus, capital, and field to critical literacy enactment in and outside of the classroom. This study revealed the lives of three students as they work their way through a language arts classroom while highlighting their habitus, capital, and field in which they negotiate their multi-literacy development. The aim of this study was to identify areas of a student’s critical capital that are present but are not made to count in a language arts classroom. This study attempted to capture moments of students using critique in the classroom and what it means in relation to other instructional methods. This study shed light on what building a more complete understanding of child literacy learners entails and what such an understanding can reveal. The findings informed the enactment of critical literacy pedagogies aimed at fostering liberatory dialogue and creating new, profound learning experiences—experiences that honor individual identity while sustaining democratic and hopeful ideologies.

Purpose of the Study

Literacy basics which today we might define as the process of learning spelling, vocabulary, locating the main idea, and writing one's own name, is affiliated with the traditional schooling method that elicits a respect for authority and discipline. Literacy is not a stagnant construct, literacy evolves socially and dynamically.

There are dominant forces in literacy and language that remain not neutral and unnatural that are working to position human subjects (Freire, 1973; Janks, 2001; Lewison et al., 2002). Standards and practices of literacy are developed through power relations in various institutions such as communities and cultures. As a result, social practices define humanity through our language in the classroom, at home, at work, and any other site or event (Luke, 2014). In turn, these sites and events define the identities of the participants. Beliefs, values and customs of members of a community may develop programs based upon the assumption of said program or approach to learning worked for their own learning or by having gained a long-term amount of experience. In an elementary classroom, literacy, especially a basic literacy as defined earlier, is part of a student's tool kit for developing their reading and writing skills and is constructive of each student's culture encompassing values, beliefs, and customs. Literacy education, then, is about power relationships and apportionment of knowledge, learning, and understanding in today's world (Bruner, 1983; Freire, 1973). The questions that arise should include, what types of text can we access, who determines what text we receive, how do we access texts, who may criticize these texts and how much criticizing is permitted and by whom, and why (Vasquez, 2001). Answering these questions is important not only for students learning, but for their economic placement, and access to equal distributions of knowledge, power, and cultural capital. Society changes, cultures change, as a result, literacy and language change. Reproduction of teaching practices by adopting, consciously or unconsciously, romanticized ideologies is detrimental to the education and development of children (Luke, 2003).

It is important to develop an understanding of the Bourdieusian approach to student education through the lenses of critical theory and sociological theories of field, reproduction, and social control. In short, the purpose of this study was to examine the social structures in an elementary classroom and look closely at the language and power involved in this setting. Furthermore, this study utilized a comparative case study approach which involved the academic lives of three purposefully selected students on the basis of gender, socioeconomic status, race, and religion. The focus of the study was an examination of the text and language that the students use, see, hear, and touch. Literacy involves more than just a twenty-minute block of reading aloud. It involves a complete understanding of how language and power influence and control a student's literacy and learning experience in the classroom. Comparative methods were chosen to explore the similarities and differences from students within the same learning environment using the vocabulary from sociological and critical theories.

Research Questions

This study looks at the phenomena and social structures as it relates to literacy in an elementary classroom. This was accomplished through case work among three individual students, in particular, the institutional and cultural factors that could affect the patterns of student learning through reading and discussion work, by exploring the following questions:

- How do students and teachers use texts and discourses to construct and negotiate identity, power and capital?
  - What kinds of exchanges of, and conversions of capital occur in the critical literacy classroom?

  - What is made to count as the 'critical' (e.g., what do teachers, students and the school learn to valorize, value as 'the critical')?
- How do literacy practices affect students' learning experiences?
- How does literacy control students' power and place in the institution?
- How does a third-grade student experience critical literacy in a language arts classroom?

The Bourdieusian approach allowed me to explore a wide range of phenomena that surrounded the student and her environment. Each case presented new incidents, themes, and topics. Within each case we explored questions as they arose and analyzed these questions on a case-by-case basis. The following section continues the introduction by defining key terms used throughout the remainder of the paper, outlining the significance of the study, and presenting an overview of the paper's structure.

Definition of Terms

This study incorporates vocabulary developed by Pierre Bourdieu in the field of sociology. We use this vocabulary frequently throughout the study, therefore, it is important that we provide a definition of terms both for understanding and reference purposes as the reader proceeds to the chapters ahead.

Pierre Bourdieu defined terms using dense and complex language (Grenfell, 2009). Luke (2016) explains, "Many teachers and educational researchers complain about the impenetrability of the language of critical educational theory, with good reason. No doubt some readers of this chapter also will consider discourse analysis an esoteric activity, couched in an elusive and arcane terminology" (p.10). Terms such as subjectivity, objectivity, discourse, text, habitus, field, linguistic market, and so forth do not appear to have much say about everyday interactions, phenomena, life, in classrooms. "There is an inevitability to this, because one of the main purposes of critical language studies is to denaturalize everyday language, that is, to make sensible and available for analysis everyday patterns of talk, writing and symbolic exchange that are often invisible to participants" (Luke, 2014). Fairclough (2001) explains that in order to critically analyze language, whether it be language, text, or many other forms of literacy, requires a specialized language for talking about and analysis of language, text, and the many forms of literacy. For this reason, we include a glossary of keywords, terms, for analysis and discussion about literacy and language.

Capital: González (2001) helps us define Bourdieu's use of capital by stating that there are "four different types of negotiable, valuable, legitimate resources attributable to people, institutions, and things which people struggle to obtain for themselves" (p. 4). He also describes capital as being transformative and likened the concept to alchemy. González (2001) thinks of capital in the sense of "leveraging resources and adding value" (p. 2). There are four essential types of capital: economic, social, cultural, and symbolic. It is important to always keep in mind that Bourdieu's concepts and terms are interconnected thus the absence of one would cause chaos in analysis.

Economic capital: Economic capital may be the most familiar form of capital. Economic capital is money, inheritance, property, credit, and other means for "acquiring and controlling people, goods and services" (González, 2001, p. 3).

Social capital: Social capital includes "friends, social class of family, social connections to people with money, power, or both; social capital is associated or linked with economic power; enhanced in those judged to have a minimum degree of separation from others in power positions" (Bourdieu, 1996; González, 2001, p. 5).

Cultural capital: Grenfell (2014) describes these as social assets which include cultural inheritance, education, upbringing, intellect, style of speech, legitimate knowledge, academic qualifications, style of dress, and so forth. The idea is that these assets then are used to increase capital that result in various positions, power, and class especially in terms of a capitalist society. In the words of Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), cultural capital is the "cultural goods transmitted by the different family pedagogic actions" (p.30).

Symbolic capital: Symbolic capital refers to the amount or level of distinction, honors, prestige which is represented through workplace recognitions, degrees awarded by universities, and varying tastes between individuals on material goods and services.

Dispositions: Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) in describing dispositions states, "It expresses first the result of an organizing action, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and, in particular, a predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination" (p. 214). It is easy to connect habitus and dispositions together, yet they are separate and connected simultaneously. Dispositions are tendencies, propensities, or inclinations of things, institutions, or people. González (2001) states, "Bourdieu uses the examples of timidity and arrogance, with which we associate body postures, stereotyped actions, and even internal states of person" (p. 2).

Distinction: Each social field contains a quality or "distinction" - for example, Bourdieu refers to the simple distinctions between hard and soft sciences, avant-garde and populist forms in literature, between art in a formal art gallery and the photographs of our family, and between architect designed homes and project-kits (Bourdieu, 1996, 2005, 2011; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Grenfell, 2009). He refers to these distinctions as expressions of the volumes and types of capital at stake in the field (Grenfell, 2009).

Doxa: For Bourdieu, this was simply defined as a way of doing things (Grenfell, 2014). This is the unwritten rules of the game of the field. When you walk into an unfamiliar field your habitus and capital and working together to establish a form of protocol. Forming acceptable ways of doing, being, and saying without disrupting the field. Perhaps, always working to establish power or capital.

Field: One of Bourdieu's main concepts surrounding his theory is that in order to understand meaning one must consider the interconnectedness of the concepts as a whole. For example, Bourdieu was clear to point out that in order to understand the interactions between people it was merely not enough to only examine the interactions themselves but examine the interactions in relation to the social space in which the interaction is occurring. Bourdieu defines this social space as a field. In French (Bourdieu's native language), the word field has two translations: "le pré" and "le champ". Le pré is defined as a meadow, whereas "le champ", is used to describe a battlefield, area of land, or a field of knowledge (Grenfell, 2014). Bourdieu frequently uses the analogy of a soccer field (football) to illustrate his point.

Habitus: Bourdieu borrowed the word habitus from antiquity and is used to refer to a person's combination of dispositions which are embodied (expressed and internalized throughout the body in various and often particular ways) and permanent. González (2001) states that these "preferences are classifying and self-classifying schemes, with which people generate and organize everyday practices and representations" (p. 3). Regardless of the amount of definitions available from scholarly works and Bourdieu himself, habitus remains to be one of the most misunderstood and misused ideas. The term itself and the concept behind habitus are both powerful and mystical.

Grenfell (2009) expresses habitus as "a concept that orients our ways of constructing objects of study, highlighting issues of significance and providing a means of thinking relationally about those issues" (p. 49). We feel that we, as humans, are free to make our own decisions with the

tools and resources that we have at our disposal, yet we base these decisions, every decision, on “assumptions about the predictable character, behavior and attitudes of others” (Grenfell, 2009). González (2001) adds to this definition by stating, “the notion of habitus encompasses a combination of personal ethos, habitual postures, and inculcated cultural mores only modified to fit the adaptive strategies which are supported by everyday cultural milieux (provided that they are recognized by the individual)” (p. 5). To overcome the ultimate awkwardness of encountered in the field, especially during first encounters, the habitus works to overcome ineffective behaviors and seeks to trial new strategies and learns to initiate new habits that appear successful.

Bourdieu (1996) defines habitus as a property of actors (which can be individuals, groups, or institutions) that comprises a “structured and structuring structure” (p. 170). Where structured are the circumstance of an individuals, groups, or institutions past such as upbringing, historical moments, or educational experiences. The structuring refers to the habitus affecting and transforming the present and future practices. And the structure contains the system of dispositions which affect perceptions, appreciations, and practices (Grenfell, 2009), (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 53). Bourdieu provided us an equation to summarize his thinking: (habitus)(capital) + field = practice (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 101). Grenfell (2009) explains that the relation between the three our crucial to understanding Bourdieu’s approach that practices are merely the result of an individual’s dispositions but an interplay between dispositions (habitus), agents position on the social sphere (capital), and the “current state of play of that social arena (field)” (Grenfell, 2009, p. 50).

People act the way they do not just because of who they are internally, but because of where they are socially, what resources they hold, and the conditions of the situation they are in. Understanding behavior means looking at all three together—not just personal traits.

Hysteresis: Hysteresis is the idea that things are out of touch or they are not working in-sync or harmony. For Bourdieu, hysteresis is a scientific view of the relationship between society and the individual and between the objective and subjective. Bourdieu uses the word hysteresis to describe the “disruption in the relationship between habitus and the field structures to which they no longer correspond” (Grenfell, 2009, p. 128). In other words, social change occurs because “actors, individuals, groups, or institutions pursue strategies that are maladapted to the current state of the field in which they are acting” (Riley, 2017, p. 4).

Social change occurs when people do things that “don’t quite fit” with how the system currently works. Their actions may not align with what’s expected or rewarded in the field, either because they misunderstand the field, are resisting it, or are pushing for something new. This mismatch can disrupt the system, challenge existing norms, and eventually lead to changes in the structure of the field itself.

Interest: Individuals, groups, or institutions have an interest which is defined by their circumstances and which “allows them to act in a particular way within the context in which they find themselves in order to define and improve their position” (Grenfell, 2009, p. 152). Bourdieu (1996) states, “The notion of interest - I always speak of specific interest - was conceived as an instrument of rupture intended to bring the materialist mode of questioning to bear on realms from which it was absent and into the sphere of cultural production in particular... On this score, I feel very close to Max Weber who utilized the economic model to extend material critique into the realm of religion and to uncover the specific interests of the great protagonists of the religious game” (p. 106). In other words, Bourdieu uses the word interest as a concept to draw attention to social practices as a kind of game, a game in which the players are working to position themselves with more economic gains and ultimately more power. Although, these interests moves are not simply calculated decisions, rather the interplay between the habitus, capital, and field work to affect decisions.

Misrecognition: The constant presentation of cultural consumption options as natural or self-evident reinforces the illusion that these choices are neutral or inevitable, rather than socially constructed and shaped by underlying power dynamics (**Bourdieu1986**). This naturalization process is part of what Bourdieu calls symbolic violence—the subtle, often invisible imposition of the dominant culture's values and norms on subordinate groups.

Janks (2001) elaborates that misrecognition—the acceptance of social inequality as legitimate or deserved—functions as a key mechanism in maintaining these hierarchies. It leads those in subordinate positions to internalize their marginal status, thereby reproducing social structures and "reducing their sense of their own self-worth" (p. 228). In this way, symbolic violence operates not through physical coercion, but through cultural and ideological means that disguise domination as legitimacy.

Practice: Practice refers to the actions individuals take in response to the demands of a social field, drawing from internalized habits and learned behaviors. As González (2001) explains, these performances are often purposeful but not entirely conscious, shaped by a mix of past experiences, situational constraints, personal traits, and available resources. Rather than being fully planned or rational, practice emerges from a repertoire of responses that an individual has learned or internalized over time. Competence in practice depends on a combination of skills, interests, and one's ability to navigate both social expectations and the history of relationships within a given context. Crucially, decision-making is not entirely free or random—it is limited to the set of actions that are perceivable and available to the actor within a specific social field (p. 4).

Position: Position refers to the conceptual location that is relative to other positions with status, powers, dominance, subordination or equality on a social field. Soltero-González (2009) writes, "For instance, in the field of academia there are positions of relative sub-ordination along the continuum of lecturer, adjunct, assistant, associate, and full professor below the deans, administrators; with all superordinate to the position of student" (p. 2).

Reproduction: Bourdieu defines reproduction as the duplication of dominant practices, positions, and values on a field "through the reproduction of expected and repeated production of field-appropriate and competent actions" (Soltero-González, 2009, p. 3). Luke (2003), concerning literacy and schooling reproduction, states, "Schools and other educational institutions construct differing kinds of literates, parceling out and credentialing differing kinds of cultural capital. To return to my initial point, all texts, genres, and practices are not equal, either in terms of the cultural capital they yield in an occupational and social marketplace, or in terms of the kinds of knowledge about the world they enable and encourage. The official, educational production of unequal outcomes is not something which is solely a concern of secondary school examinations, streaming and credentialing. It begins in the primary school Anyon (1981), where children's varying cultural, linguistic and background knowledge and competences are picked up by teachers, tests and systems and transformed into differential patterns of success and failure" (p. 3). Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) explains that the social world is not in a state of perpetual change, the transmission of capital creates inequality. For example, the elite and upper class have economic capital that allow for children to fail at everything and still reproduce themselves into the elite and upper middle class based on the availability of economic capital within the family system.

Symbolic violence: In the words of Bourdieu (2005), symbolic violence is "the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power" (p.5). Symbolic violence refers to the "habituated, systematic negation or dismissal of the values, norms, and worldview of the dominated by the dominant, who because of their social positions and power, however temporal, can impose arbitrary values and cause them to be misrecognized as superior, normal, and right" (González (2001), p.5).

Significance of the Study

This study offers a novel contribution to the application of Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory to literacy research by introducing and exploring the concept of critical capital. While previous work by scholars such as Albright, Compton-Lilly, Grenfell, and Luke has examined literacy through a Bourdieusian lens, the specifically critical dimension—how students develop and exercise critical awareness about texts and institutional structures—has received less sustained attention.

Critical capital is defined here as a form of cultural capital that reflects an individual's capacity for critical literacy: the ability to recognize, question, and understand how texts, curricular decisions, and classroom practices are shaped by broader social, political, and institutional forces. This includes, for example, a student's awareness of why a particular book was selected, whether by a teacher or a school district, and how that book relates to issues of identity, power, or representation.

The study seeks to fill this conceptual and empirical gap by drawing on qualitative methods—specifically, thick description, biographical interviews, and in-school observations in the tradition of Geertz (Geertz, 1973). Through this approach, the research will identify the forms of capital that are recognized, valued, or excluded in the classroom, with a particular focus on how critical capital manifests and is shaped by students' social positioning and lived experiences.

By theorizing critical capital within Bourdieu's broader framework of habitus, field, and capital, this study aims to clarify how critical literacy functions as a social resource, and how its development may influence educational outcomes. The findings have implications for curriculum design, equity in education, and the reproduction or transformation of social hierarchies within formal schooling.

Assumptions of the Study

While developing this comparative case study the following assumptions were anticipated:

- Each selected student will provide accurate information during each of the data collection procedures (e.g. semi-structured interviews, discussions surrounding photographs and social media, participant observations, fieldnotes, audio/video recordings, documents).
- The students will be able to identify that their voice is important within the study.
- The student will understand that the intention of the study is create desire-centered research rather than damaged-centered research (e.g. research is based on showcasing students attributes and characteristics in a positive tone using appropriate linguistics).
- That schools are the producers of the "conditions that allow for misrecognition of the symbolic violence they exert, which in turn produces recognition of the school as a legitimate institution of education" (Natsiopoulou, 2011, p. 35).

Summary

Bourdieu laid the groundwork for modern social theory. Bourdieu has created a vocabulary that can be seen in much of the social and critical work. This includes the concepts of habitus, capital, and power. Habitus is essentially a system of dispositions in which people perceive their world. The field is a setting, a space, such as a school or this room. Capital can be categorized broadly as social, cultural, and economic. According to Luke (2003) capital can be embodied, institutional, and/or material. The habitus is a culmination of the amount and type of

capital an individual has. An automatic process of the habitus and its capital is called symbolic capital. Each field has its own rules, its doxa, the social group of the field will evaluate the individual and describe his or her legitimate position in the field. This is the foundation of studying various social dynamics. For example, Albright and Compton-Lilly study and conceptualize literacy using these spaces and have found that certain curriculums are dumbed down for certain student groups or individuals containing various amounts of social, cultural, and economic capital. Miller (2003) explains that texts must be analyzed and understood within its cultural context, taking into account the social conditions of its production and reception. In simple terms, Bourdieu argues that linguistic relations equal social relations equal power relations, and they occur within particular contexts or social fields. Research does not provide much in the way of solutions to this phenomenon, it simply attempts to explain it and analyze it.

2 Theoretical Framework

This study has two central theoretical stances that support and guide this research. In an effort to better understand these two separate ideas that share many of the same stances from a theoretical perspective, we will divide this framework into two sections: a historical perspective and a conceptual framework. The historical perspective will examine previous research that has shaped foundational understandings of current approaches to critical literacy, particularly within the context of elementary education. This will be done by looking at the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas, and Theodor W. Adorno. These authors helped to establish an understanding of how teachers and students deal with critical literacy in the classroom today. The second part of the framework will be the conceptual framework. In this section we explore what the literature says about the areas of reproduction, Bourdieu's sociological perspective on learning through his interconnected concepts of habitus, capital, and field, and lastly at the practical application to critical literacy in the classroom.

Restatement of the Research Problem, Purpose and Central Questions

There are dominant forces in literacy and language that remain not neutral and unnatural that are working to position human subjects (Freire, 1973; Janks, 2001; Lewison et al., 2002). Standards and practices of literacy are developed through power relations in various institutions such as communities and cultures. Literacy education, then, is about power relationships and apportionment of knowledge, learning, and understanding in today's world.

Answering the questions by this study is important not only for students learning, but for their economic placement, and access to equal distributions of knowledge, power, and cultural capital. Society changes, cultures change, as a result, literacy and language change. Reproduction of teaching practices by adopting, consciously or unconsciously, romanticized ideologies is detrimental to the education and development of children (Grenfell, 2009; Luke, 2008a).

This research explored the following questions:

- How do students and teachers use texts and discourses to construct and negotiate identity, power and capital?
- What kinds of exchanges of, and conversions of capital occur in the critical literacy classroom? What is made to count as the 'critical' (e.g., what do teachers, students and the school learn to valorize, value as 'the critical')?
- How does literacy practices affect students' learning experiences?
- How does literacy control students' power and place in the institution?

The use of case study strategies allows for the detailed examination of a single subject using semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and document analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Peshkin (1993) describes the case study journey as the "infinite path...that dwells on complexity, and that brings us very close to the phenomenon we seek to illuminate" (p. 28).

Historical Perspectives

Understanding the concept of critical requires navigating a wide array of perspectives. The term has been theorized by numerous scholars across disciplines, producing a range of meanings that, while varied, share a common goal: to help individuals better understand and navigate the

world. Without this critical dimension, everyday actions risk becoming unexamined and vulnerable to the influence of external powers. As Grenfell (2009) notes, the hierarchical structures in which we live often work to shape what may seem like personal decisions (p. 17).

This chapter aims to situate the term critical within the broader tradition of critical theory, drawing specifically on the work of Bourdieu, Habermas, Foucault, and Adorno. These thinkers provide overlapping but distinct frameworks for interrogating power, knowledge, and agency. While their paradigms range from positivist to poststructuralist, they collectively offer a foundation for understanding critical literacy in educational contexts.

Their contributions are not isolated; each builds upon a lineage of thought stretching back through Kant and Descartes, and ultimately to Socratic inquiry. By examining their ideas as presented in the literature, this chapter will provide a historical and theoretical foundation for the study. The discussion will culminate in a conceptual framework that synthesizes elements from positivism, poststructuralism, and critical theory and considers how these can be applied to classroom practice.

Bourdieu

“I would simply ask why so many critics, so many writers, so many philosophers take such satisfaction in professing that the experience of a work of art is ineffable, that it escapes by definition all rational understanding; why are they so eager to concede without a struggle the defeat of knowledge; and where does their irrepressible need to belittle rational understanding come from, this rage to affirm the irreducibility of the work of art, or, to use a more suitable word, its transcendence” (Bourdieu, 1996).

Symbolic power is essential to Bourdieu’s theory of reproduction. Symbolic power is the concept of discriminatory actions (Luke, 2008b). It includes a dominant position in power and there must be both a dominator and dominated within the social construct for symbolic power to exist (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Symbolic power is a form of discipline that works to maintain dominant forces against the dominated (Compton-Lilly & Lilly, 2004).

The habitus is a set of dispositions that are conscious or unconscious in nature that work to influence tastes, mannerisms, skills, and a sense of self. The habitus is formed primarily in the home environment although, major influence of habitus is formed in school and particularly during the adolescent years where peer influence is much greater on the self than family influence. The habitus influences behavior which in turn effects the social space inhabitants at any given time. This behavior can be seen in patterns which are played out in various social spaces (Miller, 2003).

The field and habitus work together and are not typically thought of as two separate entities, although they are. The fields are spaces where the habitus lives at any given moment. The field is where power, prestige, and profit are argued (Luke, 2008b). There are many types of fields such as cultural, political, and economic where the rules inherently shift, or change based upon the habitus that occupy these spaces.

Lastly, capital is the existence of any type of resource. Three main variations of capital include cultural, social, and economic. Cultural would include resources such as education, style of speech and dress, and many other types of cultural resources. Social capital would include the depth and value of social networks which may include family, friends, co-works, and members of elite status in society (corporate executives, politicians). Lastly, economic capital refers to the amount of economic resources such as income and property. Thus, capital is distributed among social agents in varying ways (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). For example, someone might have an extensive amount of social capital but a smaller portion of economic capital. Furthermore, the reasons for varying capital among individuals can be due to many reasons

both environmental and biological in nature. Bourdieu often used broad terms such as high and low total capital to compare people. Capital may be considered to be one of Bourdieu's most important contributions to the field of sociology.

When thinking about how these terms work as a whole we might say that a person's resources, their capital, produce or perhaps reproduce a social structure, their habitus, which creates various patterns of behaviors within spaces, particularly social spaces, the field (Luke, 2003; Miller, 2003). Symbolic power works to create a reproduction of these processes. Within Bourdieu's various theories he uses these concepts to develop an understanding in which he hoped to build upon the ideas and work of members of the Frankfurt School.

Class Theory. Another aspect of Bourdieu's work is class position, a product of the habitus. The habitus is developed on the basis of the amount of capital it has acquired through multiple means of which this work does not elaborate. The habitus operates through conscious and unconscious conditions and states of development that are always changing thus effecting ever-changing behaviors. The habitus changes the physical characteristics and temperament of a person. Bourdieu (1984) states, "Habitus produces individual and collective practices, thus history, that conforms to the schemas engendered by history." Thus, saying that habitus creates a culture of reproduction in society. The influences that mold the habitus effect it from birth (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). A certain amount of time devoted to understanding human development will reveal the complexities involved in the effects on the individual personality and temperament. Typically beginning in the family home environment and changing as environmental and social influences take effect shifting, changing, and molding a person's habitus (Miller, 2003). This powerful concept thus demonstrates the concept of reproduction due to cycles of maintaining like environments from generation to generation.

Bourdieu wrote a book about taste, specifically, this book was about the taste of people. Bourdieu looked at taste from both a qualitative and quantitative approaches. He explained that taste is physical through the study of dispositions (Bourdieu, 1984). Therefore, class and habitus could be studied simultaneously to understand the connections between class and taste.

Bourdieu found that people in the dominant class have different tastes than people in the lower middle class, the petite bourgeoisie (Bourdieu, 1984). The dominant class typically consist of people with higher amounts of capital, specifically in the areas of economic and culture. Bourdieu describes the dominant class as having a taste for freedom while the dominated class tends to have a taste for things that are necessary or rather objects that are tangible. In his book "Distinction", Bourdieu explains that the dominant class tends to enjoy diverse kinds of music and has an appreciation for art (Bourdieu, 1984; Miller, 2003).

Bourdieu attempts to unite structure and agency by using dispositions (Bourdieu, 2005). The structure in sociology are the laws society has placed as being the norm. Similarly, agency reflects the idea that individuals have the ability to create or harm cognitive processes that allow for emotions and social interactions. Bourdieu aims to bridge this gap between agency and structure through dispositions. Dispositions are seen, they are a physical representation and a declaration by an individual. Stating that we know a person's dispositions because they have made the declaration. This is quite different than merely a preference. Preferences are internal and do not make the leap to disposition until the habitus has declared the preference public (Bourdieu, 1984; Luke, 2014).

The process of forever being shown what your options are when it comes to cultural consumption means they are presented as inherently thus, simply the way things must be is known as misrecognition (Miller, 2003). Moving back to symbolic power, the ability to make power seem natural and apolitical, has widely been seen as a formula for reproduction (Luke, 2003). Bourdieu (1984) believed that misrecognition and symbolic power worked together to as the main

mechanism in the education system, especially in western education. Thus, insisting that the school was key in maintaining a culture of reproduction (Luke, 2003).

Another mechanism of power, as discussed by Bourdieu, is language. Language is used while on the field and is considered relational to one's position on the field (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu often compared the field to a game with players as the habitus. Language helps identify the position or power one carries while on the field. Variations in language use determine who may hold the dominant power compared to those who are being dominated. Miller (2003) calls these linguistic variations as audible differences.

Foucault

"What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialized or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life" (Foucault et al., 1997, p. 384)?

Power is the main theme that remains constant throughout critical theory and social theory. When we review the work of Michel Foucault the relationship of power and knowledge is a notable component in his writing. Foucault liked to view himself as a critical or philosophical historian (Wandel, 2001). He enjoyed analyzing text from the past and pointing out significant discrepancies from what was written to what was reality (Chomsky & Foucault, 2006).

In the book The Birth of the Clinic, Foucault analyzes the words written by an 18th century doctor describing his patients diseases and steps he had taken to treat them (Foucault et al., 2011). The doctor goes into what many might consider horrifying and graphic details of the nature of the patient disease progression and treatment strategies. After reading these notes from the doctor the average reader might want to turn away from reading any further analysis provided by this doctor. Foucault asks us not to look away but to question what happened and to analyze the language used by the doctor. Foucault et al. (2011) states, "How can we be sure that an eighteenth century doctor did not see what he saw, but that it needed several decades before the fantastic figures were dissipated to reveal, in the space they vacated, the shapes of things as they really are" (p. 88)?

"How can we be sure" is language that characterizes the work of Foucault throughout his lifetime (Foucault, 1982, 1983, 1988, 2002; Foucault & Carrette, 1999; Foucault et al., 2007, 2014). These five words are the foundational categories of truth, justice, reason, and freedom. These categories were labeled by Foucault as eventalization. Eventalization was the attempt to challenge the power of institutions. An explanation of the language used by doctors was termed the medical gaze which Foucault refers to often in his work (Foucault et al., 1997). The medical gaze is essentially a way to separate the identity away from a person. This gave the doctor power over the patient and further dehumanized the patient. The term medical gaze, today is used in medical books in an attempt to educate future medical professionals from the perils of dehumanizing patients, both in personal communication but also in language used in medical journals, notes, and medical discourse (Wandel, 2001).

Foucault looked at how convicts were treated during the 18th century. Convicts were brought to justice before the people in public squares for anyone to see. While often times the execution may have been violent or graphic, the point to be seen here is that the people were free to examine and question the events taking place. There are accounts of crowds sympathizing with convicts when disagreements were seen between the punishment and alleged crime. The executioner was often viewed as the villain or carried the shame. Power was still predominately left to the state or the ruling government members, the people were part of the historical events (Foucault, 1988; Foucault et al., 1997). More power was afforded to the people, perhaps not

much, but they had a voice, they could see, they were not left wondering what events were unfolding.

Foucault describes discipline as various and strategic techniques used to control the body. Controlling the movements of the body meant interrupting a person's space and time ultimately taking power and overwhelmingly altering behaviors. Those in power had the authority to control a person's body through exercise and military drills. The instruments of power include observation, judgement, and examination. Observation and the gaze normalized this type of controlled power over the body (Foucault et al., 1997).

The idea of the prison was born from the instruments of power. The notion that within the four walls of the prison, each instrument of power could be used with maximum efficiency and ultimately privacy from the public eye. At this point freedom could easily be stripped from an individual and replaced with reformation. According to Foucault, the prison system is not designed primarily to eliminate crime, but to produce and manage delinquency – a form of criminality that can be structured, controlled, and made useful within the broader mechanisms of social discipline. In modern times, this aim has clearly be proven effective and has been normalized. The real function of prison remains to be understood. From the public perspective, all the power remains behind the four walls. No one can see therefore resisting power become ineffective (Foucault, 1982, 1988; Wandel, 2001).

The Renaissance saw the mad as enlightened. Society saw them as unique, perhaps carrying some sort of wisdom unknown to others since their thinking was much different (Foucault, 1988). Today, society seeks to identify the underlying issues to initiate a treatment or a correction to the identified problem, we treat them in a humane way by giving them a label. They are removed from society and are seen as unproductive and ultimately less successful economically (Foucault et al., 2015).

In modern society, we are told through media and various institutions our world is rising and constantly improving for the better. Our own conscious relying on external input continuously remind us of this plea (Wandel, 2001). History is also seen as chaotic, scary, and reminds us to be thankful of our modern social and environmental structures. Examining historical books showcases the wrong way of doing things, such as, the education system (Foucault, 2002).

Foucault's work encourages us to break away from an opportunistic egotism about our society today and to reexamine the historical text, perhaps using strong intertextualization, to reveal ways that history might have been doing many things the right way or the best way. In today's society, we hesitate to decide without first querying google to offer the best experience. Foucault suggests that we can use history to improve or change how we live now. Using Foucault as an inspiration to examine the dominant ideas and institutions of modern society. We simply ask, "how can we be sure" (Foucault, 1982, 1988, 2002; Foucault & Carrette, 1999; Foucault et al., 2011)?

Habermas

"The critical consciousness with which the theory of knowledge begins its examination is obtained as the results of phenomenological observation as soon as the latter becomes transparently aware of the genesis of its own standpoint by appropriating the self-formative process of the human species" (Habermas, 1972, p. 32).

Jürgen Habermas was one of the elite members of the Frankfurt School. His notable theories include work on communicative rationality, discourse, and the public sphere. Within these theories he stresses the importance of dialogue, aesthetics, epistemology, language, and pragmatism. In many circles, he is regarded as one of the most influential philosophers in the world (Bronner, 2013).

Habermas is probably best known for his work on communicative action. His contribution to the Frankfurt School of thought was the structural transformation of public sphere. Speaking on historical accounts, public affairs were organized and maintained at the court of a monarch. The only members of the king's court included the church, the monarch, and the wealthy or the elite. Bourdieu would refer to the wealthy as the Bourgeois (Assaf & Delaney, 2013; Bronner, 2013). The Bourgeois attended the meetings at the King's Court but at first was not able to participate. Over a certain period of time the Bourgeois were given time to speak and later receive voting rights, certain freedoms, rights for their land purchases. During this transition, this elite class of society was further given powers such as free speech and was covered by journalistic publications and in turn gave them a voice within the public sphere at the court of a monarch (Bronner, 2013).

This public sphere, according to Habermas, was considered a bourgeois public sphere because it only included the elite members of society, the petite bourgeois, uneducated, and those lacking capital were not invited to be part of the public sphere in which decision about them were occurring on a regular basis (Deitelhoff & Miller, 2005). Their voices were silenced. The discourse within the newly developed bourgeois public sphere included debates about capitalism and liberalism which were characterized as egalitarian and rationale in nature. As capitalism developed, trade began to occur at great distances in other parts of the world, a need to understand cultures and language of these unfamiliar places to trade emerged. Up until this moment, dialogue, debate, and discourse were considered horizontal, meaning, communication between members of the public sphere had the same communicative dynamic in that each member of the sphere had the same levels of capital (Habermas, 2007). In contrast, a vertical relationship is one that contains all members of society with varying capital, for example, a dialogue between the poor and the bourgeois (Habermas, 2008).

The public sphere, before the expansion of trade, would have been considered desirable by Habermas. It was a positive place to exchange ideas, philosophies, debate, and rationale thought. Around 1830, a major shift guided by the industrial revolution began to unfold known as the rise of consumerism (Pfau, 2012).

In Hegelian dialectics a thesis is presented, and anti-thesis is then presented, then the solution is given utilizing a synthesis of the theses presented. Habermas associated with the Hegelian view of dialectics (Pfau, 2012). Further, he believed that a welfare state emerged from the contradictions eliciting from liberalism beliefs which highlighted the overtaking of capitalistic forces (Habermas, 2008). In turn, Habermas believed the welfare state in society would serve to protect the petite bourgeois or serve as a place for vertical dialogue. A division between the public sphere and private sphere became blurred as corporations grew and mass media began to dominate. Once where horizontal dialogue was mainstream and local authentic print was absorbed was slowly fading away (Deitelhoff & Miller, 2005; Habermas, 1972). Habermas continues to explain the initial fading of literary journal and writings became unprofitable due to the growing power of the publishing industry (Pfau, 2012).

During the French Revolution, politically minded members of the bourgeoisie founded numerous journals and societies. By 1789, it is estimated that approximately 200 journals and 400 societies had been established (Pfau, 2012). This development of this academic dialogue was short lived with the rise of an authoritarian state. Advertising caused editors to seek profits through selling of content that was read by the masses. Profit was of most importance as publishing corporations began to focus on capitalism rather than the people (Habermas, 2008).

Habermas argues that these changes had slow building harmful and devastating effects on the public spheres ability to accommodate rationale debate (Habermas, 2008). Dialogue was influenced by economic capital which further effected morality and politics. The welfare state was then intervened by the government, as well as the intervention and oversight of business

with the ever-increasing acquisitions and merges and the creation of monopolies (Deitelhoff & Miller, 2005; Habermas, 2007).

According to Habermas this had a significant effect on vertical dialogic relationships (Habermas, 2008). Debates by the people were heavily facilitated with governmental influence. The ability for social groups to be heard by the monarch was impossible. Advertising turned to psychological theories to elicit an emotional relationship with the consumer rather than create a democratic thinking society. As a result, the public sphere was less horizontal, meaning, rationale and critical dialectic spaces were accompanied by a hierarchical system (Pfau, 2012).

Looking at Habermas in today's perspective highlights the one way vertical direction of mass media. Editors control the stories and interaction from the public is lacking any form of authenticity. The readers read, and the editors write. Habermas believes in the public sphere and explains throughout his work as a fundamental mechanism of a democratic society, a place of equality and rationale coexist with the members of the bourgeois, corporations, and government officials (Bronner, 2013). The public sphere would encourage citizens from all over the world to unite and engage in a society where they may safely and organically express their views and create meaningful solutions (Assaf & Delaney, 2013).

Habermas is reluctant that the internet or the Information Age will successfully create a meaningful public sphere (Bronner, 2013). He argues that even with the presence of social media and free speech, the speech is directed by the traditional forms of capitalistic media (Habermas, 2007). In other words, the discussions that occur are centered on the central narratives created by publication houses. Another thought is the over emphasized use on imagery in media to convey carefully controlled narratives. The imagery itself is prone to limit rational discussion. Even though the internet appears to have fewer constraints, for example, agendas, nodes, advertising, the public sphere emerged out of feudalism and was transformed into capitalism (Bronner, 2013). Habermas states, "From the structure of language comes the explanation of why the human spirit is condemned to an odyssey – why it first finds its way to itself only on a detour via a complete externalization in other things and in other humans. Only at the greatest distance from itself does it become conscious of itself in its irreplaceable singularity as an individuated being" (Han et al., 2015, p. 34). Habermas asserts that individualization occurs through socialization and that subjectivity is developed through community (Habermas, 2008).

Adorno

"He who stands aloof runs the risk of believing himself better than others and misusing his critique of society as an ideology for his private interest. While he gropingly forms his own life in the frail image of a true existence, he should never forget its frailty, nor how little the image is a substitute for true life. Against such awareness, however, pulls the momentum of the bourgeois within him" (Adorno, 1997, p. 26). Adorno critiques ideologies of capitalism with an emphasis on Marxists ideologies such as fetishism of commodities. According to Marx, the bourgeois focus on production of goods and services and pay little attention to the effects on the lower or working class society (Bronner, 2013). Marx claims the bourgeois see commodity as a fetish, a neutral object operating under conditions governed only for itself. As a result, the interaction between the object of commodity and humans does not existent, they are independent which in turn sustains commodities and ultimately capitalism (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2001).

Adorno agreed with Marx's analysis of the commodity but argued that Marx's framework required further development and deeper philosophical grounding (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2001). The organization and structure of capitalism changed from Marx's time and therefore fails to recognize certain topics. Adorno calls for a complete transformation on society by refocusing on issues first raised by Marx. Several topics of concern include the dialectic between the forces and relations of production, the relationship between modern art and sociology, which attempts

to criticize capitalism, and the relationship between state and economy (Adorno, 1997; Adorno & Simpson, 1941).

Adorno writes about a proposed change to capitalism naming it the “principle of exchange.” There are three levels to the exchange: politico-economic, social-psychological, and cultural (Bronner, 2013). We attempt to synthesize these issues and explain how Adorno believes these exchanges are causing corruption to past and present capitalism.

Adorno believed the primary focus of philosophers wishing to progress society should be the study of the cognitive processes of the working-class society. He was also concerned with how the working class spent their free time, how they relaxed. Adorno seemed to be against the ideas of extended periods of time at leisure. Instead, he believed instead of relaxing we should be spending the time in thought, reading books, acquiring tools that helped transform society (Adorno, 1997). Adorno (1997) even suggests that leisure time could be spent watching movies and reading books followed by a reflection period that sought ways to understand societal influences. He thought this could be achieved through discourse around a particular topic. Suggesting that books would provide these topics and allow the mind to think and create (Bronner, 2013).

Adorno believes that in our modern society leisure and relaxing time, specifically of the working class, has fallen victim to what he calls the culture industry. He refers to the culture industry as “a change in the commodity character of art, such that art’s commodity character is deliberately acknowledged and art ”abjures its autonomy“ (Adorno, 1997, p. 3). Further suggesting that modern films, television, mass publications, and social media cause a disconnect to oneself through distractions and manipulations that alter reality or ones real internal desires and conflicts.

Adorno (1997) reflects on the culture of music describing pop music as feeding the ideas of romantic love suggesting that happiness can only be found in finding that one true love. He argues, as a collective whole are not using music to awaken our minds and creating pleasures around community which creates a more broadly defined sense of human sympathy (Adorno, 1997). He applies this same reality to other areas such as art. He suggests that one might aimlessly wander into a museum filled with art mindlessly not understanding the meaning of the works to the self or the world rather being a bit confused about the world of art or holding a position of worthlessness. The culture industry, thus, is succeeding at keeping, particularly, the working class distracted and confused, and perhaps intimidated (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2001; Horkheimer et al., 2002).

According to Adorno (1997), capitalism does not provide people with what they need. An exorbitant amount of goods and services are available in our modern capitalistic society. Goods and services that provide no meaning to life or to the development of society. Adorno argues that despite the fact that individuals cannot afford to purchase, we have developed systems of faux purchasing power (Assaf & Delaney, 2013). Adorno explains that what we truly want is hidden from us by the capitalist industry in an attempt to make us forget what we need and instead use what economic capital we may have to purchase the goods and service that have been instrumentally situated in front of us with precision and skill that manipulates our thinking through psychological warfare without the concern for human welfare (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2001).

Advertisers skillfully sell us things that we do not want and connect this to something that we need. The things we need are community and connection (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2001). Horkheimer and Adorno (2001) advocate that by connecting the things we do not need to thing we need we are manipulated into buying things we do not want and as a major consequence are left still craving a need for the things we truly want in life, community and connection. As a

result of this scheme we are left lonely and consuming.

Jarvis (1998) writes, ”His American studies of anti-Semitism“ and the ”authoritarian personality“ argue that these pathologically extend ”the logic of late capitalism itself, with its associated dialectic of enlightenment.“ People who embrace anti-Semitism and fascism tend to project their fear of abstract domination onto the supposed mediators of capitalism, while rejecting as elitist ”all claims to a qualitative difference transcending exchange“ (p. 3). Adorno was writing at a time when surveys began entering the academic field as a way to collect data. Specifically, a rise in the use of the psychological questionnaire. It was most widely used in the United States as a way to measure consumer attitudes, behaviors, values, and beliefs. Adorno writes about his fascination and the concept of the psychological questionnaire to obtain potentially usable information (Benzer, 2011).

Adorno developed a set of questionnaires used to identify fascists living in Germany (Adorno, 1997). The questionnaire asked questions that identified agreements with statements such as ”obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn“, ”If people would talk less and work more, everybody would be better off“, and ”when a person has a problem or worry, it is best for him not to think about it, but to keep busy with more cheerful things“ (Benzer, 2011, p. 134).

Summary

The term critical derives from the Greek word krinó (Strong, 1910). Strong (1910) explains that the Greek word krinó means to judge, decide, and to separate or distringuish. It was originally found in the Iliad, a poem by Homer, which read, ”Ceres is separating both the grade and the chaff, as the winds rush along“. Separating here is the English translation for krinó. Essentially, Ceres was judging the grains to pick the best, to distinguish, and to create an opinion of what constituted to be grain and what was chaff.

Freire (1973) points out the banking model in education. In this view it is explained that students are mere objects in the process of learning. What Freire teaches us from his views on education is that a dialogical approach to learning afforded both the teacher and the student successful outcomes in the model of education. Luke (2008a) writes, ”Cultural circles would begin with dialogue on learners’ problems, struggles, and aspirations“ (p. 5). Thus, the students’ world becomes the focus of the teacher who facilities this same culture in their classroom. In this way, students become learners of their world through language.

We take what has been first expressed by Socrates and slowly added to over thousands of years to help us navigate our worlds in an attempt to make rationalized choices, to become aware of the forces that seem to be natural, yet, are actually manipulating our true needs. Students deserve to have the ability to rationalize and critique their world even insofar as to see their world in a single classroom where a curriculum attempts to engage and enlighten their developing understanding and ultimate knowledge through the critical lens.

Luke (2008a) states, ”Critical literacy approaches view language, texts, and their discourse structures as principal means for representing and reshaping possible worlds“ (p. 9). The goal here is to learn how to critique texts and form relationships within a public sphere to form dialectic partnerships with the result of not merely rote style learning, but a deep and meaningful understanding. This is further enhanced by a student’s capacity to navigate texts resulting in an understanding of how to manipulate the text and discourses around the text to effect their world. Although, when a student appears to have command of the text evidenced though dialogue, reasoning, and critiquing, this in itself does not constitute a change in ideologies or social transformations.

Halliday and Kellner (2009) explain that with the rise of new media has created new fields that

contain new identities to navigate including cultures and politics. New definitions of literacy include engaging with multi-forms of text including, print, visual, audio, media, multimedia, musical, giving much agency to choose and engage. This teaches students how to shape and make meaning, to anticipate, to reject. A student without a critical capacity would place them in a vulnerable position in society. Parents, teachers, and educators may want to recognize critical literacy as a human right, an educational right for students and for themselves.

Luke (2003) explains that we want to teach children how to be constructive skeptics. Constructive skeptics embrace a child-centered approach that remains true to the term's core meaning: centering the child's voice and agency. In this model, children write their own stories and learn to critically engage with the world around them. Children learn to construct things. This does not mean we ignore direct-instruction or that we shame other teaching pedagogies or theories, it means we engage with them, reason with them, and ultimately work with them to create a space for a child that promotes legitimate learning. Children possess the capacity for critical thought from an early age. Even young learners can engage in meaningful discourse, offering reasoned interpretations and articulating the intentions behind texts. As Chand (2007) notes, children are often keenly aware of how language can be used persuasively—both to fulfill their own needs and to influence social situations to their advantage or disadvantage. This inherent ability presents educators with an opportunity to nurture critical literacy skills. However, it is often overlooked until critical expression emerges in disruptive or harmful ways, underscoring the need for earlier and more deliberate engagement with critical pedagogy.

Freebody and Freiberg (2011) writes that the notion that children cannot understand the critical is nonsense. He explains how that a child can watch an advertisement on television on explain that the company is attempting to make money by asking you to purchase their product. He further explains that without critical literacy you may end up with things that are harmful in versions of economic capital. For example, not being critical would imply that walking into a bank you have done business with for years will offer you the best mortgage, so it would be pointless to search around or even read the fine print.

Luke (2008a) eloquently explains, "Critical literacies are, by definition, historical works in progress. There is no correct or universal model. Critical literacy entails a process of naming and renaming the world, seeing its patterns, designs, and complexities, and developing the capacity to redesign and reshape it (NewLondonGroup, 1996). How educators shape and deploy the tools, attitudes, and philosophies of critical literacy is utterly contingent: It depends upon students' and teachers' everyday relations of power, their lived problems and struggles, and, as the articles here demonstrate, on educators' professional ingenuity in navigating the enabling and disenabling local contexts of policy" (p. 9).

To enable critical literacy to enter the mainstream curricula an education about the relationships between society and people needs to occur. Perhaps the first step in achieving this understanding is through an enhancement of teacher preparation and knowledge in fields such as economics, history, and geography, among others. The way we look at instruction would ultimately need to change from traditional forms to an embracing on non status-quo mindsets.

This study takes us through the foundations of critical theory through the minds of theorists Bourdieu, Foucault, Habermas, and Adorno. We also looked at real world examples from Luke, Freebody, and Comber. This study is meant to be a foundational view of critical theory with the idea of taking what we have examined here to all areas of our worlds. This study applies Bourdieu's theoretical framework to the domain of literacy in elementary education, with a particular focus on critical literacy. Through qualitative inquiry, the research examines how critical engagement is expressed, recognized, and valued within classroom settings. Central to this analysis is the investigation of a potential concept termed "critical capital" — the degree to which students possess and exercise critical literacy in ways that interact with and transform

other forms of capital. The study explores what is considered critical, how such practices are legitimized, and what forms of capital are exchanged, valued, or marginalized in the educational field. Furthermore, the findings provide insight into the linguistic markets established by critical literacy curricula and the forms of language and symbolic power that circulate within them. The study concludes with a discussion of the broader implications for educational policy and practice, as well as for civic development in a global context.

3 Conceptual Framework

This section provides an overview of the major concepts underpinning the study. It begins with an examination of the culture of reproduction, drawing on the works of Bourdieu, Nash, Collins, Janks, and Luke. The concept of reproduction is understood from a capitalist and class theory perspective to explain persistent inequalities within the classroom environment.

Next, the framework explores key components of Bourdieu's sociological theory—habitus, capital, and field—supported by the contributions of Grenfell, Passeron, Gee, Habermas, and Foley. These concepts facilitate a nuanced understanding of human interactions, learning processes, social reproduction, and inequality.

Finally, to ground the theoretical framework in practical terms, the study focuses on critical literacy within the classroom context. Allan Luke's work is central to framing this focus, as he draws upon Gee, Halliday, Freire, Foucault, Lewison, Leland, Harste, Janks, and Lankshear to develop a comprehensive definition of critical literacy. This approach enables a detailed exploration of how Bourdieusian concepts manifest within the specific setting of an elementary classroom.

Culture of Reproduction

A year before Pierre Bourdieu's premature death he was involved in a documentary that aimed to capture and understand his work as a sociologist. In an on-air interview for a radio station in Paris, France he described briefly his thoughts about social reproduction. The question from the interview asked, "could you explain to our audience what social inequality means" (Carles, 2015). Bourdieu's reaction could be defined as distinctively professional. As he was answering, he meticulously removed his watch and explained that his question had many moving parts but said he would begin by addressing his first, somewhat tautological, question about the meaning of sociology. Following is a short excerpt from the interviewer (paraphrased):

- Interviewer: Could you please explain to our audience your definition of sociology and social reproduction (Carles, 2015)?
- Bourdieu: First, I would like to explain that you have incorrectly asked the question. You have used a form of tautology, which is what many dictionaries are known for. Anyway, sociology tries to establish law, to grasp regularities, recurrent ways of being and to define their principle. For example, why do people do the things they do? Why do the children of teachers tend to do better at school than working-class children and by why, I mean, how is it that this happens (Carles, 2015)?
- Bourdieu continues: On the matter of social reproduction I would like to suggest that the social world is not in a state of perpetual change. Among one of the factors that explains the permanence of inequality is the transmission of capital, and specifically economic capital. For example, a father gives his son money to start a business. Regardless of whether or not the son succeeds or fails, or even more, if he does fail and fails at maintaining a career or finishing school the ultimate result is that he will still reproduce himself. He will continue to have economic capital which ultimately results in power and control as a result of reproduction. You can imagine another scenario for working-class families (Carles, 2015).

Collins (2009) echoes much of what Bourdieu references in his interview piece explaining that social reproduction within institutions are not equal opportunistic in that there are driving mechanisms that sustain social inequalities. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argue, in their framework of social reproduction, that there are systems of miscommunication in the classrooms due to

differences in socioeconomic status, personality, dispositions, tastes, and the forms of pedagogic discourse. This determinism viewpoint was argued by critics such as Giroux, Levinson, and Holland because ”it argued that class-based differences in material resources were ultimate causes in the reproduction of cultural and educational inequality“ (Collins, 2009, p. 35). Although, Bourdieu would simply argue that desire or powers to change agency and change in itself was to blame.

There are several examples in the literature that discuss class conflict in society (Buford, 1991; Carnoy & Levin, 1985; Lareau, 1989; McRobbie, 1978; Willis, 1977). The common thread among these works include disruption between those with power (teachers, administrators, supervisors) and the students or workers. For example, in a classroom you might find aggression and humor replacing the procedures and practices thereby breaking the social contract which seeks to maintain order through an exchange of knowledge and grades (Collins, 2009). Another example includes the influence that parents have on the view of education. Simply stating, that if parents do not respect their own place of work or use language that demeans teachers or the education of students this has a direct impact and influence on their children's view and experience with the school environment. Lareau (1989) discusses the idea of home advantage or disadvantage stating that ”Middle class parents, especially mothers, are avid and effective school minders“ (p. 36). In essence, when parents set the stage the influence set will be reproduced in a child's setting. Freeman (2004) found that teachers often see the neglected influence that working-class parents have on their students.

Natsiopoulou (2011) organizes and explains social reproduction using a model of capitalism and culture, explaining:

> reproduction theorists recognize Education as being connected with the institution of Capitalism; the schools, they argue, are agents of the capitalist system, and may produce student non-conformity by the way they: (a) train individuals to serve the hierarchies of the capitalist division of labor; and (b) set their own culture to be experienced by and articulated with that of the working-class student. For this perspective, working class students are breaking school rules due to the unjust education they are offered, which targets the working class in order to reproduce them (as a class) for the benefit of the ruling classes. They also develop an oppositional stance toward the school because of the way they interpret the values and culture promoted by the school through their working-class lenses. Initially, major thinkers in this field (Bourdieu, 1996; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1976), who did not focus on student discipline per se, put forth a theory to explain the role and function of schooling in a capitalist society. Others later appropriated their work to better explain particular aspects of education, student nonconformity being one of them (p. 33).

Langston-DeMott (2016) explains that education is maintained by class inequality in society. Generally speaking, social theory states that students start school in a social hierarchy, coming from a particular socioeconomic status, and leave the institution of school in the same social hierarchy. In other words, school has little, if any, effect on the change in a class system. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) believes this is because of a hidden curriculum and the effects of cultural capital. Luke (1987) explains that home talk is what shapes a hidden curriculum. Meaning, that the literacies brought to the school marketplace results in different consequences for students. In simple terms, students who come to school with little exposure to text (e.g. reading in the home, parent talk) are automatically at a disadvantage. Further, Bourdieu (1993) would argue that these disadvantages remain with the child throughout their time in school and beyond. Using the principal of habitus, capital, and field to describe how teachers inherently value discourse with students with similar backgrounds. Collins (2009) explains that schools

do not group students according to their skills, knowledge, and abilities, rather, schools reproduce the social inequality between children from the moment they enter the schooling system. Langston-DeMott (2016) states, ”the role of schools is to reproduce the social inequality between kids when they start school and give it an academic seal of approval so that now the differences between students looks as though it reflects differences in ability, not differences in social class (which is what it actually does reflect to an extent).“ Bourdieu offers in his interview several examples of what this might look like in the real world. For example, if three students from three different socioeconomic backgrounds enter the school system and have the exact same curriculum taught to them and the three ends up with the same diploma but may enter the real world with very different resources and general economic outcomes (economic capital). Bourdieu would explicitly state that each of the students will enter and leave the school in the same class relations, therefore, social inequality is reproduced.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) introduce how symbolic violence, habitus, capital, and field, play a role in the education of students by what they term the ”power of institutions.“ Natsiopoulou (2011) writes, ”the power of institutions“ is exerted on students and the schools are actually fulfilling their reproductive role. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) view education as a practice of symbolic violence, directed by an authority with the aim of coercing students into a cultural consensus. The students come to school with cultural capital and a primary habitus, taught to them by the family, and have to receive a durable training that will make certain ways of behaving, which reflect and also serve the material and symbolic interests of the dominant groups or classes, automatic. The effectiveness of the pedagogic work of schools, measured by how much schools can inculcate the dominant habitus, is defined by the extent to which education must impose the dominant culture (re-culturation) (p. 34)

Habitus, Capital, and Field

Swartz (2008) explains that as a reviewer of journal manuscripts he is often asked to review work that has some aspect of Bourdieu’s sociology, particularly, the concepts of habitus, capital, and field. Swartz continues by stating, ”it is rare to find all three of Bourdieu’s master concepts - habitus, capital, and field - incorporated into a single study“ (p. 45). Before applying the concepts of habitus, capital, and field to an elementary language arts class we must first make clear the meaning of these concepts.

Habitus: Karl Maton explains habitus concisely when referring to the concept as an enigmatic concept (Grenfell, 2014). It could be argued that all of his concepts and ideologies are enigmatic. Bourdieu seems to take very complex ideas and put them into a single word. Understandably, then, it is easy to sow how his concepts are misunderstood, misused, and quite frequently used out of context all together.

Everyday decisions are based on ”assumptions about the predictable character, behavior and attitudes of others“ (Grenfell, 2009, p. 49). For example, we could add any number of additional categories such as linguistic, scientific, artistic, musical, technological, and so forth. What counts as capital will depend on the social sphere the field. There are certainly forms of capital that may be valued by one but not another. Therefore, it is very important to understand the concepts of habitus and field in relation to capital (Beames & Telford, 2013; Bourdieu, 1993; Grenfell, 2009). Bourdieu (1993) states, ”capital is effective in relation to a particular field social sphere“ (p. 73). For example, a middle school student may be a figure skating athlete and routinely receive very high technical element scores and program component scores while in the field of a figure skating competition. However, this capital, more than likely, is not transferable to the language arts classroom. While in the field of the language arts classroom this person still holds this capital, it does not give them much power. The students in the language arts classroom may not value their capital or even may refuse to, consciously or unconsciously,

recognize or value that capital. This capital may not count towards language arts instruction. If another student routinely competes in the national spelling bee and writes an entry for the annual Committee for Integrity Enhancement this student may acquire higher amounts of linguistic capital which may be converted into power. This power then can be used to achieve status with the teacher, peers, and school.

Beames and Telford (2013) conclude, ”Although the concepts of habitus, field and capital are understandable and useful in and of themselves, we argue that, when used together, they become a particularly useful set of tools for analyzing the various social situations in which we find ourselves“ (p. 77). The conflicts include what is counted as capital on the field and how to use that capital to increase power or advantage on the field. In the example of the language arts classroom this might be as simple as an increase and recognition of knowledge by the teacher and the student. Grenfell (2009) explains that where this becomes interesting is the idea that the rules of the field can be dominated and manipulated by those who have elevated levels of capital.

Bourdieu (1996) argues that ”individuals and groups struggle within fields to improve their standing in relation to the capital that defines the field“ (p.84). The written and unwritten rules and the cultural norms of the field are the results of conflicts that are generated within it. How does this play out in an elementary language arts classroom? What forms of capital are counted? In what ways does this capital give an advantage to the student? How are other students negatively or positively impacted by this? Do students with low capital experience hardships in the classroom? What are those hardships?

Field: The field is the social space, the sphere, the place, or the structure in which the habitus and capital live and interweave, it is the arena – for the purposes of this study, it is the elementary classroom. Beames and Telford (2013) interpret Bourdieu (1984) by stating, ”the term field is used to describe structured, social contexts that comprise rules and practices that engender particular ways of being and thinking“ (p. 82). Other examples of fields include education, reading, art, and religion. Bourdieu likes to refer to a soccer field as the primary concept and model of what the field looks like. For example, Bourdieu would explain that the field (a soccer field) has several players (agents/habitus) who each possess certain skills (capital) for playing the game. This model has always been his go to method for demonstrating through text and interviews his concepts of habitus, capital, and field. Each field is different, and the habitus develops ”as a product of what is accepted as logical, appropriate and relevant“ (Grenfell, 2014, p. 82). Fields are very specific to their inhabitants, the agents that occupy them, the habitus of the agents and the capital the agents have acquired that count towards the social context of the field (Bourdieu, 1993; Grenfell, 2009). In other words, there are never two fields that are alike, similar, yes, but never identical. For example, an experienced third grade teacher will have taught countless hours of language arts instruction over the past 20 years and while each classroom may be setup similarly the differences will be evident in the specific logic, traditions of necessary behavior and network of relations that are created and maintained by both individuals and institutions (Grenfell, 2009), (Beames & Telford, 2013, p. 82).

Positioning Critical Theory

Philosophy has long had the undertones of a subversive nature (Luke, 2003). Socrates was accused of teaching children to doubt the gods and to question the morals taught to them by their families and others in society. Socrates himself questioned wisdom and knowledge. He argued traditional beliefs through dialogue and rationale trying to find reason and most probably tried to get people to think rather than to accept. Critical theory as we understand it today was formed from dialogue and scrutiny that Socrates left behind (Strong, 1910; Tzanakis, 2011).

Critical theory aims to separate itself from any type of institutional thought or a fixed ideology on

any topic (Luke, 2014; Shor & Freire, 1987). The topics that generally arise out of critical theory deal with principles and ideologies of freedom, power, and capitalism. A term, guide, principle that reveals itself in all of critical theory is to question hidden assumptions, current practices, and the purpose of existing theories. Critical theory cares much less about the long-term existence of a philosophy. Simply because a philosophy or theory has stood the test of time does not imply soundness, merit, or reason. Critical theory stands alone and questions these things of even the most structural sound arguments. Bronner (2013) states, ”Critical theory insists that thought must respond to the new problems and the new possibilities for liberation that arise from changing historical circumstance“ (p. 3). Critical theory, some suggest, are not overtly concerned with historical perspectives, although Foucault focused on the historical devoutly, but critical theory suggests there should be a focus on how things could, should, ought to be (Luke, 2003; Miller, 2003). Foucault realized exemplified this in his writings as well, the idea of seeking how things should be, although he connected the present, the future, by looking at how things were and changed in the past (Chomsky & Foucault, 2006). This is just one of the many themes that came out of the Frankfurt School.

There exist many avenues of critical theory with each avenue expressing insight into the frame of questioning (Benzer, 2011). Immanuel Kant valued the morality and considered it a supreme characteristic of an individual. Although Kant was raised in a Christian environment he explains that his relationship with Christianity was removed from his work (Tzanakis, 2011). Others in critical theory have also expressed this position and can seemingly reveal itself as an internal conflict of which only Kant gives slight attention whereas others such as Bruner gave it a one sentence acknowledging the condition as bothersome. Hegel valued the internal or ”immanent examination of the various sources of deception, illusion, and distortion that the mind undergoes in its journey to Absolute Knowledge“ (Assaf & Delaney, 2013, p. 155).

Kant and Hegel relied upon reason to navigate ideologies that harmed human life in some way whether that was through manipulation, political, or economic means (Assaf & Delaney, 2013). They were also interested in aesthetics. Many other critical theorists share these same interests, namely, Bourdieu, Plato, Nietzsche, Hume, Osborne, Sircello, Williams, and Birkhoff. The idea of aesthetics is that human aspirations are revealed in aesthetics such as art, revealing new ways of thinking that create a bridge between desire, theory, and practice (Tzanakis, 2011).

The Frankfurt School include notable members Theodor Adorno (studied music relationships), Jürgen Habermas (leading philosopher of the group), Max Horkheimer (director of the Frankfurt school), Herbert Marcuse, Friedrich Pollock, Leo Löwenthal, Walter Benjamin (a highly creative thinker), Erich Fromm (psychologist), Axel Honneth, Otto Kirchheimer, Siegfried Kracauer, and Alfred Schmidt. The school was formed using the framework of Karl Marx, Immanuel Kant, Georg Hegel, Sigmund Freud, Max Weber, Georg Simmel, and George Lukás. With perhaps Marx and Lukás creating the core ideas of the critical project. The school was first named the Institute for Social Research but was later renamed to the Frankfurt School (Bronner, 2013).

The Frankfurt School at first believed that its work would inspire the working class to start a revolution. Although, during the 1930s the war had begun to fade so the idea of starting a revolution seemed unnecessary and counterproductive (Bronner, 2013). Although the work quickly shifted to two complex categories: alienation and reification. Alienation can be defined as the effects of psychological exploits and a division of labor. Reification could then be defined as merely objects or things. Thus, the study and relationship of how these two complex systems worked in society and the impact on individuals (Assaf & Delaney, 2013).

Bronner (2013) explains that ”they investigated the ways in which thinking was being reduced to mechanical notions of what is operative and profitable, ethical reflection was tending to vanish, and aesthetic enjoyment was becoming more standardized“ (p. 2). Alienation and reification (the relationship between traded objects) were mechanisms of turning individuals into objects

and using them for capital while stripping them of meaning, purpose, and value. After being witness to the images of war the members of the Frankfurt School came to agreement for the need in education with the aim to ”counteract authoritarian trends“ (Bronner, 2013, p. 3).

Summary

Understanding these concepts (habitus, capital, field) give us a language to deeply understand, analyze, and discuss the world. Utilizing the language of Bourdieu ”we are more able to have a sophisticated debate about how we are able to influence, and be influenced by, the social circumstance that characterize life“ in the home, at a community event, at work, during a teacher facilitated read-aloud session or in a language arts classroom. Bourdieu (1993) argues that the habitus influences the lives of all humans which is shaped by socio-economic and socio-cultural experiences. People have acquired various amounts of capital which can be categorized in many ways (symbolic, cultural, economic). What counts on one field or for an individual or group habitus varies from field to field. What is determined to count as capital on a given social field may be used to access resources and power which provide advantageous to the bearer of capital and maybe disadvantages to those without capital or those holding particular type of a habitus. For example, a student that is quiet may tend to be ignored and not receive the same instructional benefits as a student who always seems to be involved in teacher facilitated discussions.

Webb et al. (2008) explain that capital is not fixed and may continuously change and between the habitus. Meaning, that what counts as capital at this moment may not count tomorrow or may be worth more on the field in which it is situated. What is valued is constantly shifting, being defined and re-defined. As each field has its own set of rules these rules are at constant influence on how we follow the rules, bend them, or completely try to change them. When we talk about changing a rule on a field this speaks to the value the rule has in relation to the players on the field, it is also a form of being critical of the rules that exists or perhaps have existed for sustained periods of time and seemingly exist more as tradition rather than reason. How can we use these concepts, this Bourdieusian language, to understand reading and writing in the elementary classroom? What do we find that is good? What do we find that is bad? In other words, what works, why does it work, and how can we use what works to better the reading and writing position of future students? Is it possible to replicate a field that supports, facilitates, and mentors learning?

Capital and Critical Literacy: How Does Literacy Count?

Luke (2008a) writes, ”the term critical has a distinctive etymology. It is derived from the Greek adjective kriticos, the ability to argue and judge. Working in marginalized indigenous and peasant communities in Brazil, Freire et al. (1985)’s approach was grounded in Marxist and phenomenological philosophies. He argued that schooling was based on a ’banking mode’ of education, where learners’ lives and cultures were taken as irrelevant“ (p. 5). Freire was an advocate for dialogical approaches to literacy where exchanges where equal among the participants. True critical literacy in this sense, then, is about learning about the members within a dialectic circle and solving real world problems based on the information that was introduced. Luke (2008a) explains that reading and writing should be about understanding the lives and lived realities of others. Drawing on Freire, critical literacy involves not only reading the word but a ”reading of the world“ (NewLondonGroup, 1996). This involves a process of naming and renaming the world, finding the complex patterns, and ”developing the capacity to rewrite, redesign, and reshape it in communities’ interests“ (Newman, 1996).

Lewison et al. (2008) explain, ”from our perspective, critical literacy practices encourage stu-

dents to use language to question the everyday world, to interrogate the relationship between language and power, to analyze popular culture and media, to understand how power relationships are socially constructed, and to consider actions that can be taken to promote social justice“ (p. 3). This study adopted this precise definition for the term 'critical literacy.' Luke (2008a)'s definition of critical literacy is similar, "the term critical literacy refers to use of the technologies of print and other media of communication to analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of everyday life“ (p. 5). Lastly, while literacy has been and can be applied to many fields including content areas, technology, identity, power, language, human expression, work, self-expression, economic exchange, cultural engagement, religious experience, civic life, commerce, industry, leisure, visual, aural, digital, and multimodal, thus, for the purposes of this study, literacy is defined as reading and writing from an instructional practices perspective. This means, simply, that we recognize that many forms of literacy exist in and outside of the classroom, however, in terms of complexity and simplicity, it is best in this instance to refer to literacy as instructional practices that occur in the language arts school block, specifically, reading (discussions, vocabulary, comprehension, cognitive) and writing (spelling, construction, semantics, syntax, communication, grammar).

The unique aspect of studying a Bourdieusian approach to reading and writing in a classroom setting is that many phenomena can take place and be studied. The purpose of this study is to focus our attention to critical capital by utilizing the Bourdieusian concepts of habitus, capital, and field to structure the phenomenon. In other words, examine the interaction of students during their language arts class and find what kinds of exchanges and conversion of critical literacies are occurring. For example, perhaps a student decides to question a certain topic, but the teacher dismisses the interest. In this case, the critical was not counted and therefore may not have added critical capital to that student's understanding. Freire et al. (1985) explains that reading is a sociocultural construct that enables a person to read the world in order to understand the word. Therefore, when instances of critical is not valued or counted it prevents students from acquiring this type of capital.

Street (1995) explains that there is more than one literacy, there are multiple literacies. Multimodal learning means that students constructs meaning across diverse cultural and social contexts. Luke (2013) writes, "the power of literacy education to make lived and material difference in the experiences, lives and pathways of students strikes every teach as self-evident when they read students' writing, talk to them about their lives and their own 'readings' of the world“ (p. 2). How literacy is taught in the classroom has significant effects on students' lives in the form of intellect, social, and cognitive (Albright, 2002). A Bourdieusian approach to understand literacy education says that a view of literacy education would not just be concerned about the pedagogic practices, but, "which differences make a difference in social field use“ (Luke, 2013; Vasquez, 2014, p. 3). Simply put, enabling conditions are so that teaching practices recognize and use the tools, resources, identities, and dispositions (habitus and capital) that students bring to the classroom (field). Janks (2001) explains that students need to be agents of text and not victims. From a Bourdieusian perspective, teachers need to facilitate this agency by enabling and enacting on student's habitus and capital.

Luke (2013) writes, "the power of literacy – in all of its variable forms – is contingent upon the availability and mobilization of other forms of capital for and by students, and their passage into equitable, transparent rules of exchange in civic society, workplaces, government, corporation and other forms of life“ (p. 5). The main focus here, concerning critical literacy, is to provide student-centered discourse surrounding reading and writing in the classroom to enable students to be better equipped to obtain equitable forms of marketable capital, capital for conversion. Purposefully counting multiple and plentiful conversions and exchanges of critical capital in the elementary language arts classroom may be a giant leap in students' reading of the world.

New forms of media enable new ways of understanding the world, cultures, social movements, and politics (Halliday & Kellner, 2009). Multiliteracy forms include visual, aural, and digital forms of text (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Leu et al., 2008). Luke (2008a) explains that critical literacies are, ”by definition, historical works in progress...entails a process of naming and re-naming the world, seeing its patterns, designs, and complexities, and developing capacity to redesign and reshape it“ (p. 9). Currently, it is up to teachers and administrators, perhaps governments, to enact the tools and attitudes of critical literacy in the classroom. Critical literacy depends upon students' and teachers' relationships and the power between these relationships and understanding the lived experiences.

Summary

Street (1995) guides our thinking by questioning several ideas of the critical: ”If, as we argue, there are multiple literacies, how is it that one particular variety has come to be taken as the only literacy? Among all the different literacies practiced ... how is it that the variety associated with schooling has come to be the defining type?“ (p. 106). When Street talked about the ”pedagogization of literacy“ he was referring to the idea that institutions create the best way of practicing and learning literacy which can be found in the state standards of education, school and teacher curriculum, classroom practice and standardized tests. When talking about the idea of what is made to count as the critical we are asking what do these institutions authorize to be practiced? In the next chapter, we will describe the design of this research project by using the lens that was described in Chapters I and II. The interconnectedness between sociology and critical literacy supports the current work of this proposed study. The literature points to an understanding that literacy is based on the constructs of one's habitus, capital, and field. In other words, literacy is about the background beliefs, values, dispositions, economic, social, and cultural capital, and power in a particular social sphere, namely, for elementary students, the classroom. In this project, the concern is receiving a glimpse on what this looks like in our present day in the lives of three students working their way through a literacy program.

The result is an attempt at creating classrooms and environments of what is possible. How might we create a classroom that is filled with hope and possibilities that lead a child to discover internal resources of power, political action, and identity. This project built three separate case studies that help analyze this phenomenon to understand the possibilities of what could be counted as critical and turn these counts of critical into a desire to learn, understand, and so forth.

4 Methodology

This qualitative study has been designed with the intention of understanding the central question: what is made to count as the critical and how, or if, this critical can be, or allowed to be converted into capital. This will be explored by using classical thick description and rich biographical data (Comber, 2015). This chapter will focus and detail the design of the study through an explanation of the instruments used and provide a rationale for school and participant selections. The limitations of the study will also be explored by focusing on both internal and external validities.

Research Design, and Instruments

The purpose of this research has many broad components for study. At the surface level of this study we investigated how talk and text combined with participants habitus and capital are counted. What is made to count, or not count, may determine what types of capital are able to be converted. From a broader perspective, this conversion may ultimately lead to future academic and personal achievement, the conversion into perhaps economic capital. Bourdieu (2005) discussed the implications of an individual's capital converting into a state of power. Power which ultimately results in acquiring the tools and resources needed to effectively question and read the world (Freire, 1998; Grenfell, 2009).

A qualitative paradigm is essential to this design in that it allows us to focus on the context (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007) the five features of qualitative study include naturalistic, descriptive data, concern with process, inductive, and meaning. They continue to point out that good qualitative research includes the collection of fieldnotes through observations, interviews, informal talk, document analysis, and memos of artifacts and space (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

This project has met these criteria as outlined below:

Naturalistic: Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explain that the term naturalistic comes from the ecological approaches to research in the field of biology. The idea here is that the research environment is part of the ecological system or nature itself. Research was conducted inside classrooms and living spaces. The majority of data for this study were collected through a qualitative research interview approach. Brinkmann (2018) explains that interviewing a participant in person allows for an embodied presence, "which enables interpersonal contact, context sensitivity, and conversational flexibility to the fullest extent" (p. 578). Within the interview careful structures were used to create the embodied experience. It is important to keep in mind that while this study employed characteristics normally described under structured, unstructured, and semisstructured, there are according to Brinkmann (2018) no such thing as a true unstructured interview. The interviewer essentially goes into the interview with some form of understanding about what the topic should be and what the interview is aiming to achieve whether at a conscious or unconscious level. The location and site of the study is therefore deemed naturalistic as we attempted to understand and study the participants within this specified context. We approached this research from a sociocultural understanding of people, environment, language, and literacy. Qualitative research "has actual settings as the direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 4).

Descriptive Data: Qualitative research is generally descriptive. Meaning, that data collected is in the form of words rather than numbers. Much of the data came from direct quotations through interviews and observation of talk. The data we analyzed was through forms of an interview with the goal of uncovering truths and knowledge. The main form we used for this study was the semistructured interview. This allowed us to make "better use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogue by allowing much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are

deemed important... giving us a greater chance of becoming visible as a knowledge-producing participants in the process itself, rather than hiding behind a preset interview guide" (Brinkmann, 2018, p. 579).

Concern with Process: Primarily, qualitative research questions are formed using "how" and "what" questions (Merriam, 2009; Saldaña, 2016). These types of questions lead the researcher to work through a process to analyze collected data. Rather than focusing quantitative data our research collects data such as peer interaction through talk and text and attempts to analyze the meaning surrounding these interactions.

Inductive: Often we hear the term common sense in qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Grenfell, 2014). This simply means that qualitative researchers tend to analyze data using an inductive approach rather than deductive. As a result, the insights and understandings of the study emerged from the bottom up. Data was analyzed through a process of coding that was rigorous in nature by continuous reviews of transcriptions until no further codes, categories, or themes can be derived or were exhausted. We began with small chunks of data that formed into extensive ideas and conclusions.

Meaning: Qualitative researchers are interested in the participant perspective. This is what drew us to this research approach. We are interested in understanding how the participants in this study make meaning in their environment with the toolkit, resources, knowledge, and experiences. Psathas (1973) explains that qualitative researchers in education can learn from the experiences of their participants by asking "what they are experiencing, how they interpret their experiences, and how they themselves structure the social world in which they live" (Psathas, 1973, p. 4).

Research Questions

Our research is interested in the interconnections of the participant, school environment, home life, peers, teacher, colleagues, language, and text. Specifically, we are interested in the interconnections between these instances to understand how a persons world is recognized, valued, and represented to influence aspects of social reproduction. From a much broader view, we are interested in how reproduction may occur within these interconnections. To best explore these interests, we have created four core questions to guide the research:

- How are texts and discourses used to construct and negotiate identity, power and capital?
  - What kinds of exchanges of, and conversions of capital are evident?
  - What is made to count as the 'critical' and what is and is not valorized?
- How have literacy practices affected learning experiences?
- How does literacy control power and place in the institution?

Case Study Methodology

This proposed study focuses on the lives of three individuals. Each carefully selected based upon pre-determined criteria that will be outlined in the next section. Merriam (2009) explains that cross-case studies involve collecting and analyzing data from two or more cases will provide a more compelling interpretation. Each case will offer unique viewpoints of negotiating identity, power, and capital. This is why the selection of cases was vital to the purpose of this study. Using a cross-case method is "particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic" (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). Every case study contains these attributes which allows us, as the researchers, to help bring to light the phenomenon that is occurring in the spaces uncovered during the study and

provide implications for students, teachers, schools, families, institutions of business, governments and policy decision making. Merriam (2009) continues to explain that cross-case studies draw from anthropological, historical, psychological, and sociological fields. Each of our cases will provide insights from these various fields through the use of thick description, rich biographical, and observation work with participants reflecting on their past remembered experiences in school, at home, with friends, at work, with colleagues, and so forth.

Our research objective was to develop a complete and detailed understanding of the phenomena surrounding the work of capital to the critical in the lives of the participants with the end result of having their stories heard by scholars and policy makers. Another characteristic of using a case study is the ability to share stories from those who have been marginalized or whose voice is either not heard or remains silent for fear often labeled as vulnerable (Schwandt & Gates, 2018). Each of the cases will aim to be very unique with both large and small contrasts. The largest of these contrasts will be how those with access to large amounts of social and economic capital may have an advantage in transforming their capital into voices that are recognized ultimately affording them even greater amounts of capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Grenfell, 2009). A case study, according to Schwandt and Gates (2018) allow the researcher to work with a specific case to understand the "experiences, perspectives, and worldviews of people in a particular set of circumstances" (p. 346). Each story shares the perspectives of enacting with the critical and answer why and how questions. Each case is the case and therefore is not interested in the generalizability of the cases. The cases are just that, the case. Whether or not naturalization generalization occurs is out of our hands. As Stake (1995) explained, "conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life's affairs of by vicarious experience so well constructed that the person feels as if it has happened to themselves" (p. 85).

Schwandt and Gates (2018) explain that "while using a single case to both develop and test theory may seem problematic to some, qualitative researchers conduct many observations within a single case and use different observations to develop and test their theories" (p. 349). To heighten these effects researchers may employ the use of multiple cases that are comparable in some way or another allowing such characteristics to be explored using theoretical framework. Drawing upon the work of Bourdieu we have created two hypotheses for this case study. The first is that an individual with low amounts or access to the various forms of capital (economic, social, cultural) will have had little exposure to critical literacy. The second is that an individual with low amounts or access to the various forms of capital will have a challenging time having a voice that is recognized.

The Selection of Cases

In selecting the three cases we took the following into account: (a) socioeconomic status (SES), (b) ethnic and racial diversity, (c) gender, (d) social capital, (e) economic capital, (f) cultural capital, (g) personality, (h) reading engagement, (i) reading motivation, (j) reading activity, and (k) average grades and test scores. We found that it was important to make contrasting starting points between the participants. Therefore, we purposefully chose students that met criteria that are greatly distinct. The criteria of cases were categorized based on priority. The results of the case were assigned based on a numeric system. The variation between the numbers allowed us to determine the amount of diversity between the cases. Based on this data the participants were selected. Above all, a willingness to participate in the study. The selection criteria and figures are presented in table 1.

Selection of participants was based on the results of a take home packet or completion of an online survey. Both the online and packet contained identical surveys. Participation in the surveys was optional and included several surveys which were used to choose the participants for the study. The answers from the surveys were used to construct biographical data of the

participants. The survey stated explicitly that all questions are optional, and parents may provide only the details, if any, they wish. Based on the results of this survey packet we made the selection of participants for the study. We limited the study to three participants based on the assumption that very few participants would be willing to complete the survey.

Research Instruments

Data collection included (a) interviews with the three participants, (b) observations, and (c) document and artifact analysis. The selection data served two purposes in that it allowed us to decide which participants were appropriate for this study and that the data received served as important data for document analysis. In table 3, we have listed the instruments used in the data collection process along with information that was gathered and the research questions that the instrument focused on:

Interviews

For the interviews we only interviewed the participants involved in the case study. In other words, interviews were not be conducted of teachers, administrators, staff, peers, parents, relatives, and so forth. The case focused on the viewpoint of the participant. This was decided as a way to remain focused and centered on the worldview of the participant. While the habitus and capital of others who are interconnected are important in relation to the field, the habitus and capital of the participant in relation to the research questions remains the focus point of the study. More importantly, we decided that the habitus and capital of anyone outside of the participant is outside the scope of this study.

For the interviews we used various data collected from interviews with the semi-structured interview containing the most formally prepared protocol. The interviewees were free to elaborate and talk freely about the questions from the interview protocol. During our pilot study the participant was hesitant about talking freely and was more prone to giving short answers. Although, motivated to open up about likes and dislikes rather than questions pertaining to “how or why something occurs.” While the semi-structured interview was created to last about 40 minutes, in the pilot study it was best to jump into very specific questions that relate to the central questions of the study than to begin with formalities and rapport style questions. Formalities and rapport were established before the interviews utilizing unstructured interviews with the sole aim to collect data through informal conversation with the aim to continue collecting information about past and present experiences, in essence, the interviews were a formal extension of discussions that were previously held during informal talks. Drawing on Brinkmann (2018) the interviews were used as research instruments and as social practices implementing the following characteristics:

- What people say is seen primarily as reports, as a resource for studying the subject matter
- Analytic focus on lived experience – the “what”
- Validity of interviewee reports becomes a main challenge
- Paradigmatic examples include phenomenology and grounded theory
- What people say is seen primarily as accounts, as a topic or subject matter in its own right
- Analytic focus on situated interaction – the “how”
- Relevance of interviewee accounts becomes a main challenge
- Paradigmatic examples include discourse and conversation analysis

The questions of the interview focused on critical theory that include understanding of the relation of power in texts and talk in the classroom (within texts and during oral discussions); reading engagement questions that seek to clarify involvement with reading, texts, books, and discussions; and lastly questions that seek to understand how the participant feels about reading in general (in school, at home, within groups, and privately). To connect this to what Bourdieu (1984) writes, “Those who suppose they are producing a materialist theory of knowledge when they make knowledge a passive recording and abandon the ”active aspect“ of knowledge to idealism, as Marx complains in the theses on Feuerbach, forget that all knowledge, and in particular all knowledge of the social world, is an act of construction implementing schemes of thought and expression, and that between conditions of existence and practices or representations there intervenes the structuring activity of the agents, who, far from reacting mechanically to mechanical stimulations, respond to the invitations or threats of a world whose meaning they have helped to produce,” will require a deeper understanding through discussion that evoke those structures that enacted or continue to enact on the participants life (p. 469). This was constructed through the use of coding and development of themes.

Documents and artifacts

This category includes personal and official documents including business, organizational or school hard-copy letters and emails, digital modes of communication (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, blogs, text messages), journals, memos, and newsletters (see table 3). Documents gathered were used to help tell the story and will be essential to understanding how critical literacy was enacted. According to Saldaña and Omasta (2018) “documents are social products that reflect the interests and perspectives of their authors and carry values and ideologies, either intended or not” (p. 69). It also illuminated how the participant’s habitus, capital and field interact and connect to tell the story on what is made to count as the critical and how this has affected their lives and to what extent. The two categories in document analysis included personal and official documents. The personal documents we gathered included journals, student related materials (worksheets, homework, assignments, projects), narratives, and family photos. The analysis of these documents and artifacts lead to patterns that revealed answers to the research questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

Observations

The focus of this study was the habitus and capital of the participants as observed or experienced in a field (the participants social space). The field for this study ultimately relied in the participants interview experiences with the aim to focus on elementary school year experiences in the reading and writing processes. Fields of analysis included the school, home, work, the community, and so forth. Analysis included exploring the field that are most in common between the participants with the semistructured interview aiming to focus the attention to school and home experiences. One area of focus within the observations included talk, discussions, and reading.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explain that “after returning from each observation, interview, or other research session, the researcher typically writes out, preferably on a computer, what happened” (p.118). These writings came from our fieldnotes that were taken during each observation with my participants. We recorded what we saw, heard, experienced, and attempted to capture our thoughts and reflections at the site. Drawing on the methods of Bogdan and Biklen (2007) our fieldnotes were descriptive and reflective.

5 Case Analysis

Two approaches to the analysis of data were used in this study including a coding system drawing on the suggestion by Marshall and Rossman (2011) and Hatch (2002).

Marshall and Rossman (2014) suggest that thematic analytic data can be divided into six phases:

- Organize the data
- Generate categories or themes
- Code the data
- Test emergent understandings of the data
- Search for alternative explanations of the data
- Write-up the data analysis report

In addition to the six phases originally outlined, we incorporated a seventh phase: offering interpretations through analytic memos, as recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (2007). Furthermore, drawing on Hatch (2002), we elaborated on the transition between the third and fourth phases of data analysis proposed by Marshall and Rossman (2014)—namely, from coding the data to testing emergent understandings—by completing the following intermediate steps:

- Read all data and open code
- Reread data as a whole and adjust codes
- Create the codebook
- Develop categories for the codes
- Semantic relationships
- Refine domains and corresponding codes
- Reread and code data taking note of specific places in data where each domain was found
- Examine data for domains
- Note counterexamples
- Look across domains
- Data selection

We organized the data into electronically stored folders which were stored on Amazon Web Services Simple Storage Service (S3). AWS has heavily secured and armed data centers and content is stored on enterprise-grade servers that undergo regular audits and are monitored around the clock. Concerning redundancy, files are backed up daily to additional facilities. All files uploaded to AWS are encrypted at rest using 256-bit AES encryption. Files in transit (upload and download) are encrypted using RC4-128 encryption.

Data is meticulously organized with each case receiving a separate file. In total there are three case files (Case A, Case B, and Case C). Within each case file exists additional folders that organize all confidential data (interviews, transcriptions, fieldnotes, documents, and artifacts).

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explain that fieldnotes should be written up as soon as possible after the initial notes were taken. We followed this advice and drafted fieldnotes the same day after

each observation in order to remember and capture the sights, sounds, and feelings of the site. The fieldnotes meet Bogdan and Biklen (2007) description for descriptive and reflective fieldnotes (see table 5).

Repeated readings of the data were conducted to initiate an initial coding system. As categories emerged, the system evolved accordingly. Following the approach suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2014), peers were invited to review the data to help uncover and validate key findings.

This phase of analysis enabled us to begin interpreting the data. In line with Hatch (2002), we continued to identify patterns and representations that contributed to a deeper understanding of the issues studied. These interpretations are presented in the following sections.

Limitations

For any study there will be unavoidable limitations to be disclosed to the reader (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). One limitation to this study is the limit to the amount of data that can be obtained and the limitation of acquiring some essential documents. The data collected varied across participants. For example, some provided personal materials such as journals, while others did not share this type of information. As a result, access to textual data differed from one participant to another.

One limitation of the study was the potential for researcher bias. To mitigate this, reflective practices were employed throughout the research process, including maintaining a researcher journal to document personal reactions, thoughts, and emotions. This reflexive approach aimed to surface and minimize the influence of the researcher's own beliefs, attitudes, and worldview on the analysis. The researcher's prior experience working with culturally diverse populations, particularly in Colombia, provided a foundation for engaging respectfully and thoughtfully with perspectives different from their own.

Another significant limitation was the complexity of analyzing constructs such as critical literacy, habitus, and capital. These concepts manifest differently across individuals and contexts, making direct comparisons between participants inherently challenging. While efforts were made to identify commonalities, it was not possible to align all participants across identical fields, forms of habitus, or types of capital. As such, the findings focus on understanding these phenomena within individual cases, while the cross-case analysis highlights themes that offer insight into learning processes and value systems across varied contexts.

A further limitation relates to the reliance on participants' memories as a primary data source. Memory-based narratives are subject to individual perception, selective recall, and possible distortion over time. For instance, participants' recollections of classroom experiences may differ significantly, even among those who shared the same educational setting. It was not feasible to interview every relevant subject or triangulate all events historically. Nevertheless, these narratives—accurate or not—provided valuable insight into participants' lived experiences. Where available, documentary evidence and observational data supported and contextualized these accounts, particularly in relation to participants' access to different forms of capital.

Finally, the use of case study methodology imposed limitations on the generalizability of the findings due to the small sample size. However, the study prioritized depth over breadth, and the results may be considered transferable. Readers are encouraged to assess the applicability of the findings to their own educational settings and related contexts.

Internal Validity

Sousanis (2011) explains that “our approach is not limited only to where we situate ourselves, but how and what we attend to” (p.126). As participant observers working three cases it would be impossible to see, hear, and explore every phenomenon that exists. While 20-weeks allowed us to collect a variety of rich data it is important to realize that missing significant elements have occurred.

External Validity

Maxwell (2005) states, “the generalizability of qualitative studies is usually based not on explicit sampling of some defined population to which the results can be extended, but on the development of a *theory* that can be extended to other cases” (p.116). This study was bound on the memories of childhood experiences. Boundaries consisted of classroom environments as either observed or memories. As a result, the findings of this study may only apply to persons, school, and environments that are similar and certainly are not meant to define persons outside the scope of this study. Each case will be unique to that regard.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) bring up the idea of researcher reactivity which could be another limitation to this study. It was our intention to immerse ourselves into the field and to become caring and compassionate researchers within the lives of our participants, however, our mere presence would have been enough to affect the behavior, attitudes, thoughts, and feelings of every individual in the classroom.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in the study was completely and strictly voluntarily. Students and adult participants could withdrawal from the study at any moment before beginning or during the study without any explanation. We received consent from all participants after detailing to them the purpose of the study and the role of the participants in the study (Yin, 2014). We provided a safe and open environment with all participants and students within the study environment. Participation in the study required participants to reveal detailed personal information about themselves and their families. Pseudonyms were used for every single participant, named individual, and places identified.

Case 1 - Sara

Sara, a white female freshman enrolled in an honors program in a rural Indiana public school, presents an interesting contradiction between academic success and disengagement from classroom reading. She maintains an "A" average and is classified as having moderate economic capital and high cultural capital (as she reads avidly outside school). Despite these indicators of educational advantage (Bourdieu), Sara demonstrates disengagement during class reading activities.

In the observed English honors course, the choice of canonical literature like Of Mice and Men appears to represent "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu), where curricular texts misalign with Sara's interests and cultural tastes. Her statement—"it feels like torture"—highlights a resistance to the dominant literary canon that defines legitimate school literacy. This reflects Janks's model, particularly the "domination" and "access" axes: Sara has technical access to school literacy but rejects its cultural forms.

Her affinity for books outside the curriculum suggests a mismatch between school-sanctioned cultural capital and the literacies she values—indicating the limits of institutionalized cultural capital. Although she benefits from social capital in the form of group discussions (peer scaffolding), her engagement is performative rather than authentic. This aligns with Luke's idea that literacy is an identity-forming process embedded in cultural practice. Sara's identity as a reader is formed outside the school, making school literacy feel alienating.

Sara's resistance to the assigned texts reflects a clash between her own cultural capital and the dominant school habitus that values canonical literature, as theorized by Bourdieu (1986). Her engagement with reading outside school but rejection of school texts exemplifies the tension in literacy identities described by Luke (2000), where literacy can feel alienating if disconnected from students' lived experiences. Moreover, the lack of student-centered reading design and imposed meanings relate to Janks' (2010) notions of domination and limited access in literacy practices.

Implications: Sara's case urges educators to consider diversifying literary texts to foster "design" (Janks) and value student-generated literacy practices as legitimate. Her case exposes the tensions between assessment-oriented schooling and personal literacy identities.

Case 2 - Isabella

Isabella, a Hispanic female homeschool student, is immersed in an educational environment shaped heavily by her parents' professional expertise in pedagogy and research. With high economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu), her environment offers one-on-one instruction, dialogic pedagogy, and meaningful connections to her lived experience—e.g., linking science content to movies she watched.

This instructional design embodies Luke's sociocultural literacy theory where literacy is dialogic, personal, and situated. Her father's questioning mimics the Socratic method, drawing from Freire's critical pedagogy by positioning Isabella as a co-constructor of knowledge. She is not just consuming texts but actively interpreting and relating them to her world—a process of "design" and "access" in Janks's framework.

However, Isabella's sense of social deprivation—"I want to attend a school to make friends"—points to the social dimension of literacy. Despite high cognitive engagement, she lacks the social capital that comes from peer interactions, which are integral to shaping literacy practices (Luke). Her comment underscores the role of literacy in identity formation and social positioning.

Isabella's learning environment at home provides rich cultural and economic capital and supports dialogic literacy practices consistent with Bourdieu's (1986) notion of habitus that aligns with academic success. Janks' (2010) framework highlights the maximized access and design in her homeschool, but her lack of social peer engagement points to gaps in diversity within literacy experiences. Luke (2000) would emphasize how her literate identity is nurtured at home but socially constrained by isolation from traditional schooling peers.

Implications: Isabella's case highlights the strength of dialogic, personalized pedagogy, but also signals the need for peer-mediated literacy development. In terms of critical literacy, fostering diversity (Janks) means providing access to broader social interactions and discourses.

Case 3 - Daniella

Daniella, a white female student attending a bilingual elite school near Barranquilla, Colombia, displays high economic and social capital. Her transnational lifestyle (homes in Colombia and the UK) reflects global elite status, yet her academic behaviors reveal superficial engagement with reading tasks.

During the English lesson, Daniella does not focus during individual reading but dominates group discussions without a clear grasp of the material. She displays charisma and influence—indicators of social capital—which enable her to compensate for her lack of academic preparation. This dynamic reflects Bourdieu's concept of "misrecognition," where embodied dispositions (habitus) mask the absence of school-valued forms of capital.

In her case, the bilingual English curriculum represents an imposed cultural form that does not necessarily engage her. Although she claims to like the book, her actions suggest otherwise. This mismatch illustrates the "domination" axis in Janks's model, where curriculum fails to account for student agency and critical interaction with texts. Daniella is not engaging in "critical literacy" but rather performing social roles that reinforce existing hierarchies within the classroom.

From a Luke perspective, Daniella's literacy practices reflect identity negotiation in a context where English is both a tool of privilege and a site of disengagement. Her performative participation raises questions about how elite schooling might reproduce social stratification while undermining genuine intellectual engagement.

Daniella's high social and economic capital contrasts with her low academic engagement, illustrating Bourdieu's (1986) concept that capital forms do not guarantee academic habitus or success. Her classroom participation, dominated by social performance rather than reading engagement, reflects literacy as a social practice influenced by power dynamics, consistent with Luke (2000). Janks (2010) would critique the literacy design and access, highlighting how domination and exclusion manifest in her case.

Implications: Daniella's case calls for pedagogical strategies that interrupt social hierarchies and encourage authentic critical engagement. Teachers should provide opportunities for students like Daniella to connect texts to their lived realities and critically examine power relations embedded in those texts.

6 Results

The findings from this case study provide a nuanced understanding of how literacy practices intersect with cultural, social, and personal factors to shape student engagement, identity, and motivation in educational settings. By applying Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, cultural capital, and social capital alongside critical literacy frameworks, the study reveals the complex ways in which students negotiate power, learning, and achievement.

Disengagement from Institutionalized Texts

The disengagement observed in Sara and Daniella, particularly regarding school-assigned texts, underscores the gap between institutional expectations and students' lived experiences. Bourdieu's (1986) concept of habitus is crucial here: students bring their own cultural capital and personal histories into the classroom, which can conflict with the standardized curriculum. For instance, Sara's resistance to prescribed texts and her preference for self-selected reading reflect a lack of alignment between the school's content and her interests, which are shaped by her individual cultural capital (e.g., her preference for novels outside the school's literary canon). This highlights the need for curricula that recognize and incorporate students' diverse cultural resources. The tension between institutionalized knowledge and personal agency aligns with critical theory (Luke, 2012), which critiques the ways in which education can marginalize students who do not fit the predefined mold.

The Role of Social Capital and Group Learning

Social capital emerges as a vital factor in students' motivation and learning experiences, particularly in collaborative settings. Sara's increased engagement in group work suggests that peer interactions provide a critical support system, enabling her to access knowledge in ways that fit her social and learning style. This reflects Bourdieu's (1986) idea that social networks can function as valuable sources of capital, enhancing learning opportunities. Group work also allows students to navigate power dynamics, as seen with Daniella's attempt to take charge in her group despite not fully understanding the material. This dynamic aligns with the concept of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991), where students exert influence over peers despite gaps in knowledge.

In contrast, Isabella's homeschooling environment highlights the absence of social capital, reflecting the isolation that can occur in individualized learning contexts. Her desire for more social interaction demonstrates the importance of peer engagement in learning, a factor that homeschooling models must consider to avoid limiting social capital development. Social interaction is essential for cognitive and emotional growth, reinforcing Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on the social nature of learning.

Negotiating Power Dynamics

Power dynamics in literacy practices are central to understanding how students experience and resist educational structures. Sara's recognition of her teacher's authority, even in collaborative settings, demonstrates how institutional power remains pervasive even when students are given more autonomy in group activities. This is in line with Foucault's (1977) theory of power, which suggests that power operates at multiple levels in educational environments, including within the classroom's micro-interactions. Even when students engage in discussions or collaborative work, the teacher remains the ultimate authority figure, shaping the learning environment through their control of resources, topics, and assessment criteria.

Similarly, Daniella's role in her group, despite uncertainties regarding the assignment, reveals

how symbolic power operates within peer interactions. This reinforces Bourdieu's (1986) assertion that power is not only imposed from above (e.g., by teachers) but also negotiated within peer groups. The fact that Daniella, despite her limited academic engagement, can influence her peers shows how power, though not always linked to academic achievement, still plays a crucial role in classroom dynamics.

Intrinsic Motivation and Achievement

The study also highlights the role of intrinsic motivation in learning, particularly in environments that align with students' interests and learning styles. Isabella's intrinsic motivation to engage in discussion-based learning supports the notion that students are more likely to be motivated when they feel their learning is relevant and meaningful to their own lives. This finding aligns with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which posits that intrinsic motivation flourishes in environments where students have autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Isabella's motivation, therefore, was not externally imposed but stemmed from her genuine interest in the material, showing that when students are given the space to connect their learning to their own experiences, their motivation is likely to increase.

On the other hand, Daniella's lack of intrinsic motivation, despite her outward claim of liking the book, suggests that external factors—such as teacher prompts or peer influence—were necessary for her engagement. This finding suggests that motivation in educational contexts is not purely intrinsic but can also be shaped by external factors, including teacher expectations and social dynamics within the classroom.

Implications for Critical Literacy and Educational Practices

The findings of this case study have important implications for critical literacy and educational practices. First, critical literacy classrooms must go beyond the simple inclusion of texts; they must consider the cultural and social capital that students bring with them. Texts and learning environments should be tailored to reflect students' lived experiences and interests to foster genuine engagement. Moreover, as social capital plays a critical role in learning, fostering collaborative environments where students can exchange knowledge and ideas is essential for motivation and achievement.

Furthermore, this study emphasizes the importance of recognizing the power dynamics inherent in educational settings. Teachers, as authority figures, must be aware of how they shape the classroom environment, not only through content delivery but also through their interaction with students. A more equitable power distribution, where students have more agency and control over their learning, is key to fostering a critical and empowering literacy environment.

Conclusion

This analysis of how literacy practices intersect with cultural capital, social capital, and power dynamics reveals the multifaceted nature of student engagement and achievement. By examining the individual cases of Daniella, Sara, and Isabella, the study highlights the importance of considering students' backgrounds, motivations, and social interactions in educational design. These findings contribute to ongoing debates about how to create more inclusive, student-centered literacy practices that recognize and validate diverse cultural experiences.

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Appendix: Tables and Data

Table 1: Participant Selection Criteria

Criteria	**Participant 1**	**Participant 2**	**Participant 3**
SES	Free	Reduced	non-eligible
Ethnicity	Hispanic	Caucasian	Black
Gender	Female	Female	Female
Social Capital	5	5	5
Economic Capital	5	5	5
Cultural Capital	5	5	5
Personality	INTJ	ISFJ	ESFJ
Reading Engagement (REI)	32	32	32
Reading Motivation (MRQ)	212	212	212
Reading Activity (RAI)	24	24	24
Average Grades (Reading & Language Arts)	A's	A's	A's

Table 2: Summary of Participant Characteristics by Case

Category	**Case 1 - Sara**	**Case 2 - Isabella**	**Case 3 - Daniella**
SES	2	2	1
Ethnicity	white	hispanic	white
Gender	female	female	female
Social Capital	3	3	3
Economic Capital	2	3	4
Cultural Capital	3	3	2
Personality	ISTJ	INTJ	ESFP
Reading Engagement	2	3	1
Reading Motivation	2	3	1
Reading Activity	2	2	2
Average Grade/Test Score/GPA	A	A	B

Table 3: Research Design Overview

Research Questions	**Instruments used for the collection of data**
1. How do students, teachers, peers, schools, family members, colleagues, and supervisors of work institutions use texts and discourses to construct and negotiate identity, power, and capital? a. What kinds of exchanges of, and conversions of capital occur in the critical literacy space? b. What is made to count as the 'critical' (e.g., what do students, teachers, schools, peers, family members, colleagues, and supervisors of work institutions learn to valorize, value as 'the critical')?	a. Document Analysis; b. Interviews; c. Observations
2. How do literacy practices affect students' learning experiences?	a. Document Analysis; b. Interviews; c. Observations
3. How does literacy control students' power and place in the institution?	a. Document Analysis; b. Interviews; c. Observations
4. How does a third-grade student experience critical literacy in a language arts classroom?	a. Document Analysis; b. Interviews; c. Observations

Table 4: Document Analysis

Category	**Consists of**
Personal documents	1. Journal, diary; 2. Student worksheets/homework/assignments; 3. Narratives; 4. Family photo(s); 5. Social media accounts
Official documents	1. School/work memos; 2. School/work newsletters; 3. Student files (grades, tests); 4. School/Classroom rules/policies; 5. Indiana Standards

Table 5: Fieldnote Analysis

	Areas of Focus	**Practices in Study**
Descriptive Fieldnotes	Portraits of the subjects; reconstruction of dialogue; accounts of particular events; description of physical setting; depiction of activities; observer's behavior	Physical appearance, dress, mannerisms, style of talk and acting; paraphrases of conversations, attempt to quote; who was involved, what manner, nature of the action; draw/map the physical setting, furniture arrangement, contents of the blackboard, bulletin board, desk, floor, walls. how does it feel?; Note the behavior observed, reproduce the sequence; Note my own behavior, feelings, and assumptions
Reflective Fieldnotes	Reflections on analysis, method, ethical dilemmas and conflicts, observer's frame of mind; points of clarification	A focus on themes and patterns; Recordings of rapport building, noting both positive and negative outcomes; Relational concerns between research values and responsibilities; Note assumptions about religious beliefs, political ideology, cultural background, positions in society, race, or gender; Clarifying confusing remarks.

Table 6: Codes and sample data

Code	Frequency	Sample data
Lack of social interaction	12	She said she learns a lot but misses social interaction
boring school texts	7	I get that they have things about morality and justice and relationships and they want us to think critically about it but they are so boring
disengagement from class texts	2	i skimmed it and it is really boring
dislike for school	6	doesn't like school and that she didn't like home school and she wanted to attend a school to make friends
engaged learning at home	11	remembered well the things they talked about. seemed engaged
father as teacher	1	The father read a section and then isabella read a section. After each section the father would ask isabella about what they learned about
group interaction	4	influential discussion despite not reading anything
group work as support	7	happy that the teacher allows them to work together and talk about the book in class
high academic achiever	2	earns high grades, mostly A's
influence and social capital	8	influence over the other students. It appeared to me that everyone wanted to be recognized by her
interest in learning	6	She seemed engaged
interest in outside reading	10	loves reading and reads all the time
lack of intrinsic motivation	4	she likes the book
motivation through group work	6	discuss it together in the classroom
outside reading	7	loves reading and reads all the time
parental educational background	7	Her father has a college degree. Her mother was also a teacher in high school
relating learning to personal experience	4	She would then talk about what they read about often relating what she was saying to personal experiences.
resistance to assigned reading	8	it feels like torture to read those assignments
structured lesson flow	11	After about 30 minutes of reading and discussing the material isabella was released for a snack and a break
taking charge in group work	2	when in group projects she tries to take charge but isn't sure about the requirements
teachers authority	9	the teacher allows them to work together and talk about the book in class

Table 7: Themes and descriptions

Theme	Frequency	Description
bourdieu	3	References to Bourdieu's frameworks
critical theory	4	Student reflections on systemic issues
cultural capital	4	Value of non-school knowledge
habitus	3	Family/home influence on learning
motivation	4	Internal/external learning drive
social capital	4	Peer and teacher relationship effects

Table 8: Key Theoretical Insights

Case	Bourdieu – Capital & Habitus	Janks – Critical Literacy	Luke – Literacy & Identity
Sara	High cultural capital outside school; schooling imposes dominant habitus	Domination (canonical texts); limited Access; lacks student-centered Design	Literacy identity formed outside of school; school reading alienates
Isabella	High cultural & economic capital; dialogic habitus at home	Access and Design maximized; lacks Diversity (peer engagement)	Literate identity supported at home but socially isolated from peers
Daniella	High economic and social capital; low academic engagement masked by charisma	Domination and Access misaligned; lacks critical Design elements	Literacy as social performance; classroom power dynamics shape participation

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